

HONOURING THE ANCIENTS

RE-MEMBERING OUR FIRST ANCESTORS

There a people now forgotten discovered while others were yet Barbarians, the elements of the Arts and Sciences. A race of men now rejected for their black skin and woolly hair, founded on the laws of nature, those civil and religious systems which still govern the universe ... This race of blacks ... is the very one to which we owe our arts, our sciences, and even the use of the spoken word.

Count Volney (French academic), 1789

OUR AFRICAN ANCESTORS

THERE IS ONE ETERNAL SPIRIT, ONE TRUTH, ONE COSMOLOGY AND, IN essence, only one religion. Truth existed before the human race took its first breath in Africa two million years ago. This truth gave rise to the spiritual and religious systems we see in the world today. The natural laws and sacred teachings of our first Ancestors have travelled around the globe. Numerous religions,

spiritual traditions, mythology and healing arts are founded on this original knowledge. Through this knowledge we see the unity of all people.

Since the beginning of time Mother Africa has been in service to the Divine. She birthed our planet's first people and blessed them with an everlasting love of the Eternal Spirit. Mother Africa taught her children to respect the earth and all that dwell on her. She taught them the laws of nature and helped them understand the cosmic rhythms. The celestial realms and elements were known to her people, who created rituals to communicate with these forces, which they then deified and praised. Her rich oral traditions form the foundation of world mythology and religion.

Africa is a large continent with many different people and languages, yet in the ancient spiritual systems we can find unity. Belief in the Eternal Spirit and respect for our Ancestors is probably the world's oldest spiritual practice. Ancient Africans believed in the continuation of Spirit. For this reason they returned the dead to the womb of the earth, ensuring a long lineage and unbroken cycle of life.

To the Dogon of Mali, conception and death are closely related. The bed in which conception takes place is symbolic of a grave in the earth where the seeds of new life are sown. Amma, the creator, transforms the spirit of the dead into a child who will continue the lineage and care for the land. The spirits of all those who went before us, ancient and recent, do not die. We carry their genes, we embody their life-force, they imbue our children, our environment and the air we breathe. We still appreciate the temples and sacred sites of the Ancients. We continue to live in the buildings our not-so-distant Ancestors lovingly built, we read the books they painstakingly wrote and we listen to music they created. We hold their memories and we live their dreams. We exist today because of our Ancestors; they gave us life. Their love continues to nurture us, yet often we deny their very existence. In allowing our First Ancestors to be forgotten we dismiss the Eternal Spirit and abandon the powerful forces of the circle of life. The relationship between the Ancestors and modern people is in desperate need of healing. We must learn again to acknowledge our Ancestors, for they walk with us and can light our path.

In this chapter I highlight the influence of ancient Africans on spirituality and religion. I summarize the history that is relevant to spirituality as a whole, and to the chakras in particular. The importance of the chakras in ancient times, the number seven, the third eye and the serpent are each explored. I acknowledge the relationship between Egypt and India. They both had powerful spiritual systems. Through ancient mythology we can see how Egypt influenced Christianity.

Ancient Africans lived closely with nature and they realized that internal energies are also governed by the elements. Knowledge of the elements forms the basis of religio-spiritual practice in many parts of the world. This inner science is still of

relevance today. With all our so-called sophistication and scientific advancement, perhaps more than ever we need the love and inner wisdom of our ancient Ancestors.

OUT OF AFRICA

Magic and spiritual practices appear to go back as far as the human race itself. DNA² tests indicate that all humans alive today are descended from a single female Ancestor who lived in Africa 140,000 – 280,000 years ago. She is known as the first Eve. According to the work of Dr Albert Churchward, physician, anthropologist and archaeologist, writing in 1921, people originated in the Great Lakes region of Tanzania. From here they spread over the continent of Africa and eventually migrated in waves all over the globe.³ Two-million-year-old tools, building sites and bones found in 1959–60 by Louis and Mary Leakey in the Olduvai valley in northern Tanzania support the theory that humans originated in Africa around the lakes and mountains of Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya.

The ancient Egyptians always gave priority to their birthplace in the south; in the Hunefer Papyrus it is said:

We come from the beginning of the Nile where the God Hapi dwells, at the foothills of the moon.⁴

Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, and the Ruwenzari mountain range seem to be the Mountains of the Moon and the source of the Nile remembered by the ancient Egyptians as their place of origin. Close to Kilimanjaro among the lakes and mountains we find Mount Meru. Interestingly, Mount Meru is a sacred place in Indian mythology. This mountain is not merely mythological, as is often assumed, but is an existing mountain in Tanzania, the birthplace of humanity. Mount Meru is referred to as the dwelling place of the Gods by Egyptians and Indians. It seems the ancient Indians also identified Mount Meru/Tanzania as their place of origin. As the cradle of humanity, this sacred mountain has remained in Indian Spirituality until today. To the ancient Egyptians, Meru means 'all things surrounding love'. In Sanskrit it means 'the centre of the universe'. This sacred mountain is love, the Divine love of our creator. I opened this book with a quote that begins, 'In your body is Mount Meru'. Meru is the heart of all things, including the radiant centre of love within. To ancient Indians, Mount Meru also relates to the spine – known as 'Merudanda' – and the chakras. The base of the mountain represents the root chakra, and its peak

the crown. Through the breath, chromatic sensation and intense meditation, tantra yogis are able to experience embodiment – full awareness of being in an earthly body. They can also reduce earthly consciousness and travel to other levels of reality. These planes of reality are inaccessible to ordinary consciousness. This spiritual practice is known as 'moving consciousness as far as Mount Meru'.⁵ Mount Meru is of the earth but reaches high up to the stars and communes with the Gods.⁶

Identifying Mount Meru as an actual mountain in Africa and detailing its relationship to the chakras is one of the most important connections I make in this book between Africa, India and the chakras. The existence of Mount Meru and the mythology and sacred practices surrounding it suggest that knowledge of the chakras dates back to the beginning of the human race in east Africa.

MIGRATION

Migration out of Africa is said to have taken place in two stages. First the movement of shorter people, known as the Twa (Pygmies), and secondly the passage of the Nilotic Blacks (Nile) who spread across the earth. To quote John G. Jackson:

As these early Africans wandered over the world, they differentiated into the various human subspecies that now inhabit our planet. The men who remained in the tropical and equatorial regions retained their dark complexions, whereas those that settled in the temperate zones lost a portion of their dusky pigmentation and developed a fairer skin.

Godfrey Higgins wrote the following in 1836 (at this time racism was an inevitable part of academic work):

Now I suppose, that man was originally a Negro, and that he improved as years advanced and he travelled westwards, gradually changing from the jet black of India, through the shades of Syria, Italy, France, to the fair white and red maid of Holland and Britain. On the burning sands and under the scorching sun of Africa, he would probably stand still, if not retrograde. But the latter is most likely to have happened; and accordingly we find him an unimproved Negro, mean in understanding, black in colour.

Higgins tells us of the migration of Africans around the globe. He tells of the change in skin colour. This is due to climatic shifts such as the Ice Ages. These changes have produced two additional races, thus the three major races are the Ethiopian,⁷ the Mongolian and the Caucasian.

Unfortunately some people maintain the negative views that have been passed down through the years by racist historians and anthropologists. Far from standing still, early Africans created the foundations for many civilizations both in and out of Africa. The religio-spiritual themes, symbols and practices of ancient African, Indian and Mexican civilizations appear to be influenced by the same race of people. Ethiopians migrated from East Africa and populated Egypt, Canaan, Sumer and Babylon (later known as Mesopotamia) before inhabiting the rest of the globe. They took with them knowledge of the sacred earth, fertility rites, the rhythms of nature and rituals for the burial of the dead and resurrection of the spirit. This explains similarities between spiritual traditions worldwide. Much of the value and importance afforded the Ancestors and the sacred have been lost in modern societies. This loss has cost us heavily. As the wheel of life continues to turn, the increased feelings of alienation, discontent and longing for more purpose in life are directing us towards the ways of the Ancients.

EARLY HISTORY OF YOGA

Yoga, which helps many people deal with the problems of modern living, is one of the oldest systems of spiritual development. The roots of yoga can be traced back thousands of years in India. During my study of yoga I recognized almost immediately a discrepancy in the teachings I received. Vedanta yoga, and one of my main teachers, Swami Vishnudevananda, advocated celibacy as a means to enhance spiritual progress. I also received teachings from the tantric texts – which, as many people know, view sexuality as Divine and sacred. Why should the art of unity and creation be negated in some schools and honoured in others? An obvious contradiction existed between the Tantric and Vedic schools of yoga.

Tantric yoga dates back to pre-Aryan India (3000 – 2500 BC). The words ‘tanoti’ – to expand, and ‘trayati’ – to liberate – gave rise to the term Tantra, which means ‘to extend knowledge and to liberate’.⁸ Tantra includes among its teachings the chakras, astronomy and astrology, Kundalini,⁹ hatha yoga, and the worship of Goddesses (Shakti and Durga) and Gods (Shiva and Vishnu). Tantric yoga was one of many spiritual paths practised by the Dravidians and other early people of India.¹⁰ Dravidians are descended from Ethiopia.¹¹ There are similarities among pre-dynastic Egyptian spiritual practices¹² and tantra of ancient India. Dravidians founded the Indus valley civilizations.¹³ They built the large cities of Mohenjo Dara, Chanhu Dara and Harrappa, which flourished between 3000 – 2500 BC.¹⁴ Their descendants

still live in the middle and south of India. Ancient Dravidian teachings are practised today by Sadhus, who are the wandering holy men of India.

Vedanta philosophy, on the other hand, was written down in the Upanishads – around 800 BC. The word Vedanta means '*the end of the Vedas*' and is a combination of 'anta' meaning 'end' and 'Veda', the name of four sacred texts from around 1500 BC.¹⁵ The Upanishads are the conclusion of the Vedas. These sacred texts are studied by Hindus, seers and philosophers. Vedantic philosophy has adopted some Dravidian teachings. Tantric practices are included, such as hatha yoga, meditation, chanting and the worship of deities. Vedanta, however, also has a strong Aryan influence and is a part of Hinduism. According to Radhakrishnan Sarvepalli, Vedanta has a strong influence on Hindu religion:

Of all the Hindu systems of thought, the Vedantic philosophy is the most closely connected to Indian religion, and in one way or another form, it influences the world view of every Hindu thinker of the present time.

Since Vedanta includes Dravidian practices and also underpins mainstream Hinduism, we can get an idea of how the early Ethiopians in India influenced India's main religion. The religion of Aryan invaders to India was superimposed on Dravidian and other original spiritual practices. Following numerous battles and the destruction of the Indus Valley civilization (approximately 1700 BC), matriarchy fell to patriarchy and many traditional Goddesses and Gods were misrepresented as demons. Eventually some of the original Gods were accepted into the Hindu pantheon, adding to its richness. Shiva and Vishnu were promoted to the highest roles in the Hindu trinity alongside Brahma – the Aryan supreme God.¹⁶

Not only Gods but a rigid caste system was imposed on the Indian people. Of India's current 950 million inhabitants, 70 per cent are black, and 40 per cent of these blacks are Dravidian,¹⁷ the people who gave us the tantric spiritual tradition. As we study the chakra system today it is important to acknowledge this history.

India's black population is much more than the entire population of Europe. It is also the world's largest black population living outside of Africa.

V T Rajshekar¹⁸

Still today Aryans/Brahmans enjoy the highest three positions in Indian society, with the Sudras and Dalits¹⁹ creating the country's undercaste. These Blacks provide a physical and spiritual foundation from which much has grown, including yoga.

Wayne Chandler writes:

Given the fact that the black race is by far the oldest, the presence of black culture at the dawn of Indian history should not be surprising.

Quoting from the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (Institute of Indian Culture), Chandler goes on to write:

We have to begin with the Negroid or Negrito people of prehistoric India who were its first inhabitants. Originally they would appear to have come from Africa through Arabia and the coastlands of Iran and Baluchistan.

Consequently, when we look far enough back into yoga and Indian spirituality, we meet our African Ancestors.

ANCIENT FOUNDERS OF RELIGION

The Greeks, often credited with the birth of civilization, were greatly influenced by the ancient Egyptians. They refer to Egypt as a parent. The ancient Egyptians had colonies in Greece around 1500 BC, and greatly influenced Greek culture.²⁰ Many of the Greek Gods, and the planets that share their names, derive from Egyptian deities. Early Egyptian civilization is African. The oldest Egyptian Gods and Goddesses are African, as are many of the Pharaohs. Cheikh Anta Diop states:

...the typically negroid features of the pharaohs (Narmer, 1st Dynasty, the actual founder of the pharaonic line; Zoser, 3rd Dynasty, by whose time all the technological elements of the Egyptian civilization were already in evidence; Cheops, the builder of the great pyramid, a Cameroon type; Mentuhotep, founder of the 11th dynasty, very black; Sesostris I; Queen Ahmosis Nefatari; and Amenhophis I) show that all classes of Egyptian society belong to the same black race.

Bernal, in *Black Athena* states:

...Egyptian Civilization was fundamentally African and the African element was stronger in the Old and Middle kingdoms, before the Hyksos invasion, than it later became. Furthermore I am convinced that many of the most powerful Egyptian

Dynasties, which were based in Upper Egypt – 1st, 11th, 12th and 18th – were made up of Pharaohs whom one can usefully call black.

Throughout this book I draw on the wisdom of the ancient Egyptians. These Africans²¹ are responsible for creating a rich civilization and spiritual tradition that relates to the chakras. Egyptian spirituality, with its broad array of deities, provides a gateway into understanding the chakras.

Egyptian spirituality has also influenced Christianity. Anyone knowing the myth of Isis, Osiris and their son Horus²² will immediately recognize this trinity. Mary's Immaculate Conception was not the first. Isis also immaculately delivered a boy child around the winter solstice (December 21st). She is of course the original Black Madonna. Both Horus and Jesus received initiation at the age of 30. Gerald Massey, the English scholar, suggested (in 1907) that the entire Christian Bible, Old and New Testaments, is traceable to the religious records of ancient Egypt.

Egyptian themes in Christianity were familiar to other Africans. Enslaved Nigerians taken to the Americas and forced to convert to Christianity maintained their Yorùbá religion by disguising it with Christianity. Africans survived because they quickly related the Christian God and his angels to the Supreme God Olódùmarè and the Òrìshà. Communication with the Òrìshà was carried on 'under the skirts of Mary', as Yorùbá Priestess Lusiah Teish puts it.²³ The Yorùbá religion was maintained and synchronized with Catholicism. This is known as Santería.²⁴ Ifá, the original Yorùbá religion, is one of the fastest growing religions in America and Latin America today. In later chapters I relate the Yorùbá deities to the chakras.

Numerous well-known deities of the Hindu pantheon, such as Hanuman, Kali and Krishna, originated in India's black civilizations, which explains why they are often depicted as black. The unbearable plight of Sudras and Dalits caused many to convert to Buddhism, which is a religion free of caste. Jainism, with its central precept of 'ahimsa' (non-violence), also arose in black India as a reaction to injustice. Bodhidharma, who is said to have been Dravidian,²⁵ travelled from India to China, where he introduced a new approach to Buddhism. His approach was primarily meditative, devoid of ritual and intellectual analysis. It was not immediately popular, but it later in all its simplicity became known as Zen Buddhism, which is widely practised today.

People have always made statues and sculptures in their own image. We see from early images of the Buddha that he has African features, complete with a broad nose, full lips and tightly curled hair. African features can also be seen on one of the oldest stone carvings of a meditating yogi.

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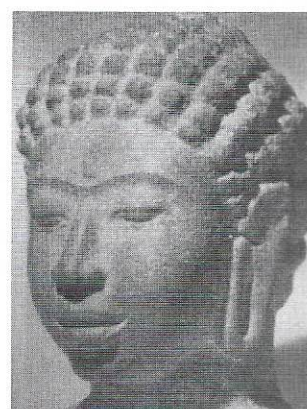
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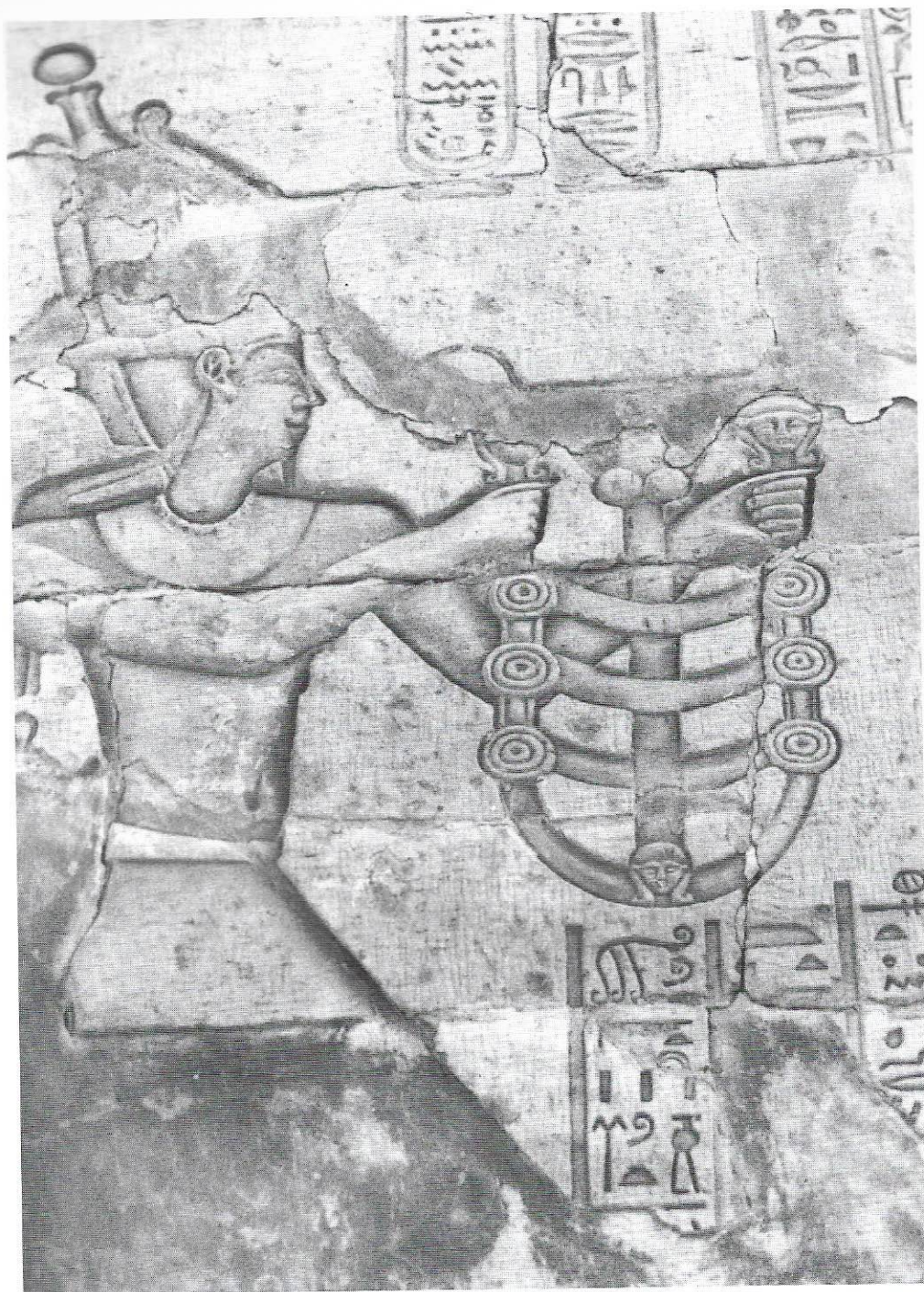


Five-thousand-year-old meditating yogi. This stone carving has a broad nose and full lips.



These images of the Buddha show characteristically African features such as full lips and tightly curled hair. This way of styling the hair and piercing the ears is typically African.

Mystic traditions associated with, and in some cases predating, the main religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam) also appear to share characteristics that suggest a common ancestry. The Judaic Kaballah, for example, depicts the tree of life with seven levels of evolving consciousness. They are situated along three vertical pillars. Tantra cites seven chakras and three vertical main nadis.²⁶ An early wall carving resembling the Kabalistic tree of life can still be seen at the temple of Komombo in Egypt.



An early wall-carving resembling the 'Kabalistic Tree of Life' as seen on the Temple of Komombo, Egypt.



Inner knowledge of the Kaballah works on the chakras and takes the aspirant on a journey of Self-discovery leading from Earth to Heaven. Initiations, gateways and journeying into the underworld all suggest spiritual and psychological development that lead a person to enlightenment.

The Essenes were a religio-spiritual community existing in Palestine between the 2nd century BC and 2nd century AD. They observed similar ascetic practices to those of the early Indians and the Sadhus of modern-day India.

Sufism, the esoteric tradition associated with Islam, also appears to have been influenced by the ancient Africans. Doctor of religion Muata Ashby says:

Historical evidence and Sufi mystic literature clearly show that Sufi followers had relationships (cultural, ethnic and social ties) with Egypt, the Essenes (Jewish tribe of Jesus) and the Hindus and Buddhists of the Far East. Thus it is not surprising that the energy centre system (chakras) of Sufism is closely related to the Tantric systems of Egypt and India concentrated on four energy centres instead of seven.²⁷

Today's major religions and mystical traditions are built on spiritual foundations laid by ancient Africans, particularly the Egyptians. Chakras, found in most spiritual traditions, connect us with our first Ancestors.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUALITY AND THE CHAKRAS IN ANCIENT TIMES

When exploring the chakra system it is easy to see the unity of diverse cultures. We begin to see the importance of the number seven in creation, nature, religion and spiritual development. It is also possible to see the connections between the ancient lands of Egypt and India. Ashby lists 55 such connections in his book *Egyptian Yoga*. Professor Albert Smith in *The Ancient Egyptians*²⁸ lists at least 20 similarities between the Egyptian and Indian philosophies. Much harmony exists between these two ancient spiritual systems. I list 12 themes (see pages 58-9) that are common to Egypt and India and which are relevant to the understanding of the chakras and the cultures from which this spiritual wisdom grew.

The acclaimed Greek historian Herodotus travelled to ancient Egypt:

mombo,

And on his return to Greece they gathered around and asked 'tell us about the great land of the Blacks called Ethiopia.' And Herodotus said, 'There are two Great Ethiopian nations, one in Sind (India) and the other in Egypt.'

Godfrey Higgins²⁹

CORRESPONDENCES BETWEEN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND INDIAN SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHIES

	<i>Egypt</i>	<i>India</i>
1 Sacred River	Nile	Ganges
2 Sacred Mountain	Mount Meru (centre of 7 continents) ³⁰	Mount Meru (centre of 7 continents)
3 Mother Goddess	Isis, Hathor	Amma, Durga
4 Divine Couple	Osiris & Isis	Shiva & Shakti
5 Ithyphallic God	Amoun, Ra	Shiva, Vishnu
Sun God	Ra	Rama ³¹
6 Divine Animals	Cow/Hathor	Cow/Nandi
	Bull/Apis	
	Monkey/Thoth	Monkey/Hanuman
	Snake – Uraeus	Snake – Kundalini
7 Caduceus	Staff of Tehuti	Caduceus
	(Thoth/Hermes/Mercury)	Ida and Pingala
8 Levels of Consciousness	Scale of Maat	7 Chakras
	9 parts of the Spirit	Aura
	Esoteric gateways	Transition points
9 Symbols of the Chakras	The lotus	The lotus
	Third eye – Udjat	Third eye – Ajna chakra
	Eye of Horus/Maat	Eye of Krishna/Buddha
		Shiva
10 Symbol of Life and Transcendence	Ankh	Aum
	♀	ॐ
11 Spiritual Practice and Rituals	Gods/Goddesses of the elements air, fire, water & earth	Gods/Goddesses of the elements air, fire, water & earth
	Meditation	Meditation
	Hekau (words of power)	Mantra (words of power)

12 Sacred Writings

Hathor: union of sun & moon	Hatha: union of sun & moon ³²
Martial Arts	Hatha Yoga
Dance/movement	Dance/movement
Trance	Trance
Divination/oracle	Divination/oracle
Sacred sexual act	Sacred sexual act
Crowns – head covering	Head wraps – turbans
Burning oils and incense	Burning oils and incense
Pouring libations	Pouring libations
<i>Coming Forth by Day</i>	Tantras
Temple art	Temple art
Pyramid texts	Vedas
Coffin texts	Upanishads

The above 12 correspondences show the commonality of two ancient spiritual traditions. This legacy is between 6,000 and 12,000 years old. They have influenced many diverse paths of personal and spiritual development all over the world, including Ifá (Yorùbá religion), Original American Shamanism, and Jungian psychology.

We will draw on this great legacy in Part Two, when we work with the chakras. Meanwhile let us explore the widespread use of the number seven, snake symbolism and the elements, all of which relate directly to the chakras.

THE UNIVERSAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPORTANCE OF THE NUMBER SEVEN

SEVEN PLANETS

The seven planets known to the Ancients were seen to revolve around the earth, guiding people through their earthly existence and then on into the afterlife.

SEVEN DAYS OF THE WEEK

These are still named after the planets:

Sunday	Day of the Sun
Monday	Day of the Moon
Tuesday	Day of Mars
Wednesday	Day of Mercury
Thursday	Day of Jupiter
Friday	Day of Venus ³³
Saturday	Day of Saturn

PLEIADES/THE SEVEN STARS

In Egypt these stars were called the '**Seven Hathors**', Judges of men. They were also known as 'the Seven Priestesses who guarded the seven gates of Thebes.' The dead had to be judged and were expected to utter the names of the Pleiades/seven Goddesses in order to pass from this world into the next.

(The seven Goddesses may symbolize the energies of the seven chakras. Knowledge of the chakras/Goddesses brings eternal life.)

'Seven mothers or midwives of the world' is the Indian term for the Pleiades; they are also called Krittikas, which means cutters. The Greek word 'Krittos' means both judge and critically wound by cutting.

The archaic mysteries of the seven sisters have permeated numerous cultures. They are or were known to the Dogon of Mali, Original Australians, Greeks, Jews, Olmecs, Aztecs and Mexicans.

SEVEN COLOURS OF THE RAINBOW

Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet are the dominant colours of the chakras. According to Dogon cosmology, people make their descent from heaven to earth along the rainbow.

THE SEVENTH ANCESTOR

Numerology is highly developed in the Dogon spiritual system. The people are descended from eight Ancestors; the seventh Ancestor is 'the master of speech'. To the Dogon, words are capable of creation.

SEVEN AFRICAN POWERS (ÒRÌSHÀ)

Òrìshà are natural forces of the Yorùbá traditional religion. Each of the Òrìshà has specific characteristics and is consulted before all actions if one is desirous of peace, harmony and success. Although hundreds of Òrìshà exist, seven are prominent. These relate to the different levels of consciousness which can be experienced at each chakra.

SEVEN GATEWAYS

Many Egyptian temples have seven gateways leading towards the sacred altar. Entering the temple encourages consciousness to travel from the outside world of distractions, towards the sacred stillness of the innermost sanctuary, which is situated furthest from the entrance. This is akin to a meditative journey through the chakras. Gateways also refer to journeys into the underworld, where Shamans guide initiates on a descent through the gateways of consciousness.

MUSICAL SCALE

Seven notes are found in both the European and Asian systems:

Do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti Sa-re-ga-ma-pa-da-ni
Each of these vibrational sounds relates to a particular chakra.

KWANZA

Kwanza is the African American holiday celebrated by Africans throughout the diaspora over seven days from the 26th December to 1st January. It advocates seven principles to be practised all year round:

- 1 Umoja — Unity
- 2 Kujichagulia — Self-determination
- 3 Ujima — Collective work and responsibility
- 4 Ujaama — Co-operative economics
- 5 Nia — Purpose
- 6 Kuumba — Creativity
- 7 Imani — Faith³⁴

One candle is lit daily for each principle, until all seven are alight.

SEVEN DAYS OF CREATION

This is part of the Judeo-Christian creation myth, in which God takes six days to make the world and rests on the seventh. The world exists in duality – the first six chakras. The seventh day represents the crown chakra – oneness, timelessness and the state of perfect rest (peace).

SEVEN IN THE BIBLE

(Mainly found in the book of Revelations [or Visions].)

- Mystery of the 7 stars
- 7 churches of Asia
- 7 angels of the 7 churches
- 7 spirits of God residing on the earth
- 7 seals (describes visions likely to be associated with the development of the chakras)
- 7 deadly sins (temptations and imbalances of the chakras in relation to the soul's descent from heaven to earth)
- 7 golden candlesticks

MENORAH

The Menorah is a seven-branched candlestick originally symbolizing the moon priestess (Menos) and her seven powers (chakras). The Menorah was decorated with lilies and almonds, which are well-known female symbols. It was eventually seen to relate to the Hebrew Archangels.

Revelations 1:12-20 tells how St John saw a bright aura and received wisdom from that light:

His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of red; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters, and he had in his right hand seven stars ... write the things which thou hast seen, and things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Christmas tree lights traditionally had seven lights, each one higher than the last. Today the spiritual significance and the fact that these lights symbolized the seven chakras is all but forgotten.³⁵

In Egyptian mythology, the God Horus wears the serpent Goddess Uatchet on his head. She is the all-seeing eye. Osiris, the father of Horus, was killed by his

This symbol is known as the caduceus and has a history going back over 5,000 years. around a staff as a symbol of the orthodox medical and pharmaceutical professions. long place in healing traditions. To this very day, two snakes can be seen entwined snakes symbolized the Goddess. These qualities together have earned the snake a life-cycle of renewal resembles that of the female menstrual cycle – in early traditions, and develop a new one highlights their creative and regenerative qualities. This stretched snake represents the penis. The ability of snakes to shed their entire skin carrying its tail in its mouth, is seen to resemble the female yoni, while the out-sites. Snakes are symbolic of fertility and creation. Quorborous, the encircled snake to signify both good and evil. It is also seen to depict the balance of these two oppo-Serpents are another common mythological and spiritual symbol. The snake is used

THE MYSTERIOUS POWER OF SNAKES

SEVEN AGES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The chronological maturation pattern of people appears to mature in cycles of seven years. Each cycle ascends a chakra, beginning at the root chakra (0 years) and rising to the crown chakra (at 42 years). The maturation process involves spiritual, psycho-logical and physical development. I feel that in order to honour and encourage this progress, major initiations could be celebrated in seven-year cycles. To some degree this already happens, with birth celebrations, puberty (becoming a teenager), 21st birthday festivities, marriage, etc. Significance could also be attached to other turning points in life. (See *Kite of Pass-Age* in Chapter 6 and the individual chapters on each chakra.)

The number seven exists in nature and is used by various cultures as an organizing principle. Many of these sevens relate directly to the chakras; others relate indirectly. The seven chakras have acted as a focus of initiation for thousands of years. Seven is found in many spiritual traditions. This number relates to levels of consciousness, as do the chakras.

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brother Set. As Horus grew up he determined to avenge the death of his father. During the battles that followed Horus eventually killed his father's brother Set. Wounded in battle, Horus was left blind in one eye. His lost eye was given as an offering to his dead father Osiris, while Horus himself took to wearing a serpent on his head as a second eye. The Gods honoured Horus and made him King of Egypt. Thereafter rulers of Egypt wore a serpent on their crowns as a symbol of second sight and royal wisdom.

In the Mayan myths of Central America, the moon Goddess Ixchel wears a snake as a crown on her head. Her close companion and colleague is the sky serpent. Ixchel is capable of causing complete havoc on earth by whipping up the winds and sending destructive storms. Despite her fiery temper she is also the cosmic midwife and looks over women during pregnancy and childbirth. We see here her use of serpent power in both its destructive and creative aspects.

The creative powers of the serpent are recognized in many parts of Africa. The Fon people from Dahomey view the creator as both Mawu – female – and Lisa – male. Mawu-Lisa is dependent on Da, the cosmic serpent, who is responsible for manifesting the desires of Mawu-Lisa. Without Da there would be no creation; the united twins Mawu-Lisa would exist alone.³⁶ Here the serpent, symbolizing the creative energy of the spine and the chakras, brings forth all creation.

In the spiritual traditions of Original Australians (Ngukurr people), Wawalu is the rainbow serpent. The rainbow serpent is the carrier of the life force, who connects heaven to earth. Wawalu relates to the seven chakras and their rainbow colours.

Understanding the nature of the snake and honouring the snake can bestow great gifts. This is the message of a Nigerian folk tale which I would like to share with you:

Jaliya was a young girl who lived by the river. One day Jaliya was out collecting water with friends. They began to tease her and she accidentally fell into the river and disappeared. Jaliya felt herself being pulled deeper and deeper into the belly of the river. She allowed herself to fall and landed on the soft river bed. In front of her stood a magnificent palace. She entered the palace and found a crowned serpent sitting majestically upon a throne. The serpent asked her to sit and sing to him. Jaliya knew many songs from her village and joyfully sang for several hours. Meanwhile, sailing along the river was the King of Gongola. He hushed his entourage and listened carefully to the beautiful voice he could hear coming up from the river bed. Immediately he ordered his followers to divert the flow of the water and create a shallow path on which he could approach the singing. As he approached the voice, a serpent's head arose from the shallow waters. The serpent hissed into the sky and caused rain to fall. The serpent then flapped two giant

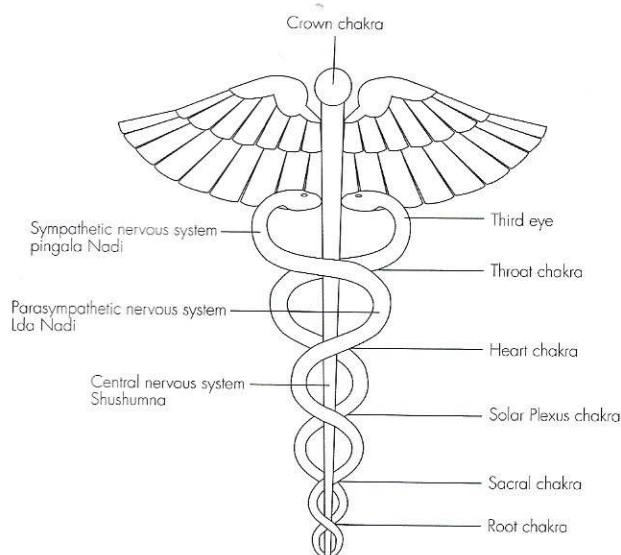
wings and flew off to a deeper part of the river. The singing continued, and soon the face of a beautiful woman became clear in front of the king. The woman sat on a throne wearing a golden crown. Jaliya – for it was she – announced to the king that the serpent had made her queen of the river and had bestowed upon her gifts of great beauty. The wise serpent knew that Jaliya and the king would fall in love. For this reason he had told Jaliya that, for her to remain crowned queen of the waters and to live an earthly life, she would need to honour the serpent by making an annual sacrifice.

This tale indicates the descent into the underworld, the deep watery unconscious. Jaliya allows herself to fall deeply into the abyss; in so doing she gains the power and wisdom of the snake. As long as she continues to honour serpent energy, she will remain blessed with the knowledge of both heavenly (crowned) and earthly bliss. She now has the ability to unite opposites.

It is written in the Bible, *'Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.'*³⁷ The snake appears several times in the Bible and is associated with feminine energy, personified by Eve, as well as being associated with wisdom and the tree of knowledge. In the Garden of Eden the snake again portrays the dual aspect of good and evil.

On a physical level, the human spine resembles a serpent. Therefore it should come as no surprise to find that the mysterious power of the snake is considered to reside, coiled up three and a half times, in the sacral region of the spine. The sacrum houses the body's physical centre of gravity and is a spiritual power centre. The sacrum is literally a 'sacred' centre waiting to be awakened. In yoga this serpent power is known as the Goddess Kundalini. Kundalini is our potential energy source, waiting to be released and actualized.

From this exploration we see the significant role of the snake in mythology and spirituality. Snakes are symbolic of numerous aspects of duality: creation-destruction, female-male, underworld-sky, etc. Various levels of experience are expressed through the wisdom of the snake. This multiplicity and the relationship between snakes and chakras is summarized in the caduceus symbol, which is widely used to signify the chakras.



The Egyptian caduceus symbolizes the three main nadis – Ida, Pingala and Shushumna. It also symbolizes three aspects of the nervous system – the central nervous system, and two antagonistic divisions of the autonomic nervous system: the sympathetic division, which relates to Pingala nadi, and the parasympathetic division, which relates to Ida nadi.

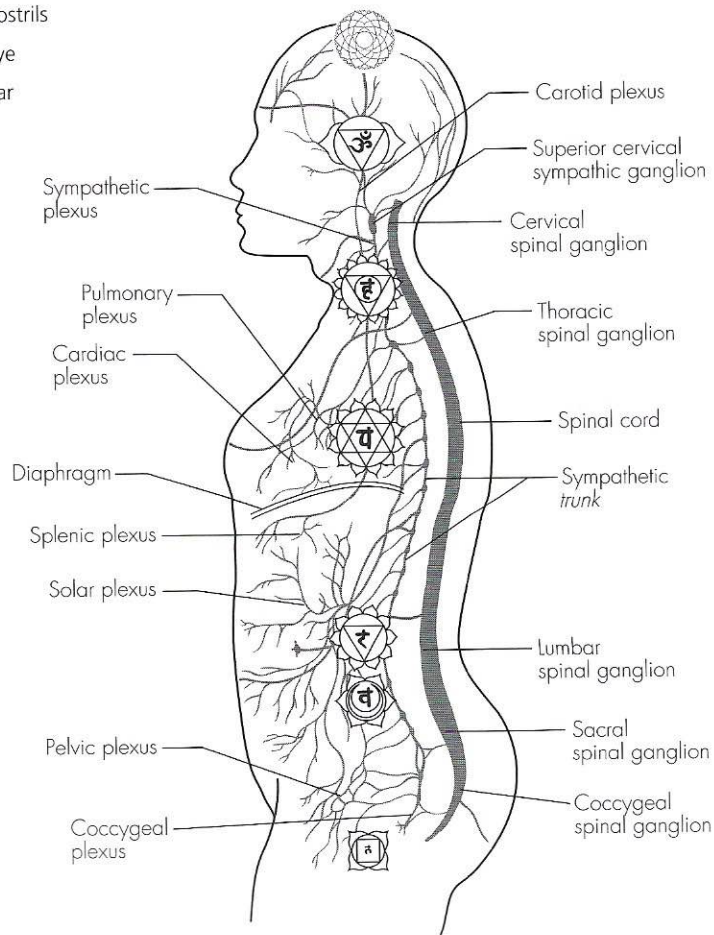
CADUCEUS AND THE CHAKRAS

The caduceus shows one or two snakes wound around a central staff. The snakes represent the polarity of opposing forces, and the wings illustrate transformation and freedom. Snakes live on the ground, while wings transport birds high above the earth. For me the caduceus symbolizes limitation and liberation. Our physical existence has many limitations, yet as we develop spiritually we can be reborn into a light body and experience liberation. The caduceus encapsulates the soul's journey along the chakras. The symbol, first depicted in ancient Egypt, is associated with Tehuti³⁸ (Thoth) the God-scribe. With Maat, he measures the hearts/souls of the dead and passes judgement. Good deeds in this life maketh the heart light and the soul free to enter the after-life. The caduceus features again in Greek myths, attributed to Hermes, the Greek version of Tehuti. The Greek God of healing, Asclepius, also carries a caduceus. Mercury, the Roman equivalent of Hermes, embodies another aspect of Tehuti and the caduceus, which is communication.

The twin snakes Ida and Pingala found in yogic philosophy are often depicted using the symbol of the caduceus. Ida and Pingala wind around a central column

known as the Shushumna. The point where the snakes cross corresponds to the chakras. Ida, Pingala and Shushumna are three main *nadis*.³⁹ Nadi means stream or energy pathway; it is the channel through which energy travels. According to yoga and Ayurveda,⁴⁰ there are 72,000 nadis in the human body. Chakras arise where many nadis meet. This is mirrored in the nervous system: a plexus is a place where many nerves meet. The main nerve plexuses in the body are situated at the same locations as the seven major chakras. There are 14 principal nadis, of which the aforementioned three are the most important. Ida represents negative energy, Pingala positive energy, and Shushumna neutral energy. Ten primary nadis correspond to the ten gates of the body:

- 1 Anterior fontanel, which is the soft spot on a baby's head
- 2,3 right and left nostrils
- 4,5 right and left eye
- 6,7 right and left ear
- 8 the mouth
- 9 genitals
- 10 anus.



Chakras and corresponding nerve plexi

The two snakes spiral along the Shushumna, transporting us through the chakras on an ascending and descending journey of psycho-spiritual development. This is explored in the chapters on the individual chakras.

Physically, the caduceus relates to the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which has two main branches (represented by the snakes). The sympathetic branch activates the body (causing stress if overworked). The parasympathetic branch has a cleansing and calming effect. Working on the chakras helps balance the ANS. Energy flows alternately through positive poles (sympathetic – Pingala) and negative poles (parasympathetic – Ida). In order to maintain health and reach a higher level of consciousness, we can direct energy up the central column (Staff of Tehuti, or Shushumna). This ends duality and we experience wholeness.

Jung tells us that *'The snake's role is as a mediator between Heaven and Earth.'*⁴¹ Not surprisingly, this is the role of the chakras.

THE ELEMENTS

Each chakra is associated with an element. The elements have always profoundly influenced human thought. Ancient Africans lived at the mercy of the elements and were very familiar with the overwhelming force they had on their existence. Our early Ancestors had to learn to understand the elements in order to survive. Energy has the power to both construct and destruct; this they saw in nature. Storms destroy, while the sun creates. This duality was also observed in animals, and in human nature. The elemental rhythms of nature bring creation, growth and destruction. For this reason, Africans saw the elements as Gods and Goddesses. The earth, sun, wind, water and even the space in which we all reside were worthy of honour to our Ancestors. They devised ways of appeasing the elements to ward off disaster, maintain food supplies and support healthy living. They felt the Gods and Goddesses respond to their rituals and sacrifices; in return they created more ceremonies to give thanks for the blessings they received.

A close relationship with the elements and nature made people aware of the forces within the body as well as the forces outside it. Winds remove water and have a drying effect; they scatter seeds, playing a part in all creation; they shift with great speed; an illusive nature also belongs to the winds. The Ancients began to liken the mind to the character of the wind – forever changing, creative and illusive. Over thousands of years, a complex system developed which relates the elements to human experience. Part of this legacy remains in commonplace metaphors.

Referring to someone as 'full of hot air', a 'bit wet' or 'too fiery' are expressions we all understand today which have their origin in humans' early relationships with the forces of nature.

What is often considered primitive is in fact ancient physics. The Ancients understood good and evil spirits and the spirits of animals and trees. They acknowledged that energy unites all things and affects us in positive and negative ways. The 20th-century scientific world is just beginning to accept that all things are connected. Einstein's famous equation $E = MC^2$ informs us that what we think of as matter, is actually energy in a constant state of change and motion. Studies, such as wave and particle theories in physics, demonstrate that all things are connected. The Ancients appear to have known this. Additionally they realized that, because of their own energetic nature shared with all creation, they could affect people and the environment. Rain could be made to fall and people could be healed, if the Gods willed it to be so. As we study the chakra system we will gain a deeper knowledge of our essence and begin to recognize ourselves as microcosms within the macrocosm.

THE LEGACY OF OUR ANCESTORS

The spiralling nature of evolution is returning us to the ways of our Ancestors. Inner science is taking on increasing importance in modern societies. As we search for ways to rescue ourselves and our planet from destruction, we begin to see, as our Ancestors did before us, that the forces of nature are overwhelming. If we are to survive, then we also need to appease and give thanks to the Gods, Goddesses and our Ancestors. They are ready to help us as soon as we recognize our earthly limitation, humble ourselves and seek guidance. Many say that the Ancestors are unhappy because they are not honoured in the modern world. It is on the fruits of their labour that we live today. If they had not learned to survive physically, emotionally and spiritually, we would not be here today. And we would not carry the genetic survival mechanisms that we now carry. The chakras are our spiritual survival mechanism. The first Africans are Ancestors to us all. If peace and unity are to preside, both within each one of us and on the planet we inhabit, then we need to remember our Ancestors and honour the circle of eternal life through prayer, celebration, meditation and ritual.

James George Frazer wrote in *The Golden Bough* that human evolution has passed through three stages. He called them *the age of magic, the age of religion and the age of science*.⁴² It seems to me that we are moving towards a fourth stage, the age of

unity, where it is essential that we bring together the wisdom of old with that of the new. Synergy will be created when all three ages are respected. Science, religion and magic need to sit side by side as the new trinity.

The place of the Africans in ancient spirituality is clearly evident. Since the beginning of time Africans have worshipped Gods, they have used touch to heal, they have studied the elements and collected healing plants. This rich legacy has been greatly developed by many cultures in numerous places around the globe. Diverse yet common mythological and religio-spiritual themes can be found the world over. These themes have also found their way into modern science in the works of people like Carl Jung.

There is an argument that these coincidences, similarities and identical beliefs grew up independently in far corners of the globe. Several thousand years from now, people may think that Buddhism grew up independently in different parts of Asia, Europe and wherever it may be practised by then. At present, we know that 2,600 years ago, Buddhism had its beginnings in India and spread from a 'specific origin'. It is my understanding that thousands of years ago, Africa was a 'specific origin' and from her people came the common spiritual themes and rituals that underpin many religious and spiritual traditions of today. These practices have grown and been developed by different cultures the world over.

I also think that recognition should be given where it is due and that our First Ancestors and all the Ancients should be honoured with love and respect. In this way we keep alight the flame of Eternal Spirit. As the Ancestors rest, harmony will prevail, individually and globally.

The Black role in Asia, as elsewhere in the world, has been submerged and distorted for centuries. But it has not been totally eclipsed and it rises now like a star which was hidden by a cloud but never faded into oblivion of the night.

Ivan Van Sertima