

First Chakra / Muladhara Chakra / Root Chakra



Questions Answered Here

1. What is another name for this chakra?
2. What are the Sanskrit roots in the name of this chakra?
3. What physical areas, tanmatra, basic issues, kosha, state of consciousness, bija mantra, yantra, planet and devata are associated with this chakra?
4. What element is associated with this chakra? What does this element relate to?
5. Describe some of the primary characteristics and associations of this chakra.
6. What are some potential talking points related to this chakra?
7. What practices might help to balance this chakra?

Overview

The Root Chakra

- Sanskrit - mula: root or foundation
- Location - base of spine, tailbone
- Physical Areas - organs of elimination, legs, feet, joints, skeletal system
- Tanmatra - smell
- Basic Issues - groundedness, stability, will to live, self-preservation, sense of trust and security
- Color - red
- Petals - 4
- Goals - stability, grounding, physical health, trust, feeling of safety
- Problems - fear
- Right - to be here
- Element - earth
- Kosha - annamayakosha
- State of Consciousness - jagrat (waking)
- Bija Mantra - lam
- Yantra - golden square
- Planet - Mercury
- Devata - Indra

Earth Element & Foundation

- The first chakra is associated with the earth element.
- It is typically called the Root Chakra and relates to stability, grounding, security, and safety.

Security, Safety and Stability

The earth element and first chakra are associated with security, safety, and stability. When the earth element is balanced, you feel confident, grounded, flexible, safe, resilient, and strong. An imbalanced earth element can cause anxiety, paranoia, fragility, moodiness, and forgetfulness. – Melissa Eisler

Careful Foundational Planning Necessary

It is like building the foundation for a house. If the plans have not been well drawn, if the groundwork is sloppy and careless, the foundation will not support the structure. Similarly, our lives must have a good foundation. Careful planning is necessary. During each phase, a certain type and amount of work have to be done before the next phase can begin. – Swami Radha

The Earthiest and Most Basic Chakra

Muladhara is at the root of the chakra system and its influences are at the root of our whole existence. The impulses of life rise through the body and flower as the widest expansion of our awareness in the area known as sahasrara. It seems a great paradox that this earthiest and most basic of the chakras guides us to the highest consciousness. – Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Characteristics

- The first chakra is also called The Earth Chakra. It relates to our solid constitution, foundation and relationship with the material world.
- Physically, the first chakra relates to our feet, legs, tailbone and pelvic floor.
- It is associated with a person's sense of "roots, grounding, nourishment, trust, health, home, family, prosperity and appropriate boundaries." (Anodea Judith, Eastern Body, Western Mind)
- When this aspect is in balance, we are in "good health, well grounded, comfortable in our body, have a sense of trust in the world, feel safe & secure, can relax & be still, have stability, prosperity & right livelihood." (Anodea Judith, Eastern Body, Western Mind)
- In Tantra, muladhara is the seat of kundalini shakti, "the basis from which the possibility of higher realization arises. The awakening of muladhara is considered to be of great importance in kundalini yoga firstly, because it is the seat of kundalini and secondly, because it is the seat of great tamas. All of the passions are stored in muladhara, all the guilt, every complex and every agony has its root here." (Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Kundalini Tantra)
- Signs of being out of balance in this area are "disconnection from body, underweight or obesity, fearful, anxious, restless, can't settle, hoarding, greed, sluggish, lazy, tired, poor focus & discipline, financial difficulty, poor boundaries, chronic disorganization, rigid boundaries." (Anodea Judith, Eastern Body, Western Mind pg 52)

- Common related images are the roots of a tree and stable ground for building. Without such a foundation, nothing atop will survive.

Traditional Symbology

These are the attributes of muladhara: "a great dormant power, resting in a completely stable, solid place." Swami Satyananda Saraswati

- Deep Crimson Lotus Flower with 4 Petals - each petal has a letter written in gold: vam, sham, sham, sam
- Yellow Square - symbol of earth element, surrounded by 8 golden spears
- Elephant - square is supported by an elephant, representing great strength and solidity, with 7 trunks
- Red Inverted Triangle - on elephant's back, in center of square is a deep red inverted triangle, "symbol of shakti or creative energy, responsible for the productivity and multiplicity of all things"
- Dhumra Linga - within triangle is dhumra linga, smoky grey around which is kundalini coiled 3-1/2 times.
- Bija Mantra Lam - resting atop the inverted triangle is the bija mantra lam
- Ganesha & Devi Dakini - inside the bindu, over the mantra are Ganesha and devi Dakini who has 4 arms and red eyes; "she is the carrier of ever pure intelligence"

In tantra, the serpent is known as mahakala, meaning great or endless time. Here kundalini is lying in the womb of the unconscious, beyond time and space. When kundalini begins to manifest, it enters the dimensions of personality and

individuality, and becomes subject to time and space. This is the awakening of the great serpent power within the individual form, frame and consciousness of man. However, in most people it is dormant. In its awakened state kundalini shakti represents our spiritual potential, but in its dormant state it represents that instinctive level of life which supports our basic existence. Both possibilities lie in muladhara. Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Talking Points - Chakra Weakness, Imbalance or Blockage

Issues related to the first chakra exhibit as:

- Not being well-grounded
- Basic lack of trust
- Suspicion; keeping guard up
- Indecisiveness
- Easily overwhelmed by difficulties
- Going from one crisis to the next
- Phobias
- Becoming overly dependent on others

Use these questions to point to imbalances related to the first chakra:

- Does my life feel out of control?
- Do I find it difficult to make decisions?
- Do I suffer from financial insecurity?

- Do I feel poor even though I have a solid bank account?
- Do I suffer from food-related disorders?
- Do I find it difficult to nourish my body properly?
- Do I have ongoing problems with parents, children or other family members?

What Can Help

- Deepen connection to natural world
- Become aware of one's physicality
- Avoid premature development of higher energy centers
- Reconnection with body
- Physical activity
- Touch, massage
- Hatha yoga
- Analysis of earliest childhood relationship to mother
- Reclaiming the right to be here
- One aspect associated with the first chakra relates to connecting with – or “being in” – our body. We can talk to this point according to our own understanding and encourage the practice in class.

Disconnection from the body is a cultural epidemic. We are taught to control the body by way of the mind, which is considered far superior. But the body has an intelligence whose mysteries the mind has yet to fathom. We read in books how to eat, how to make love, how much sleep to get, and impose these practices on the body rather than listening from

within. Without the body as a unifying figure of existence, we become fragmented. We repress our aliveness and become machinelike, easily manipulated. We lose our testing ground for truth. – Anodea Judith

Yoga that is taught as a process of internal observation and growing awareness is a perfect tool to address the imbalances that Judith highlights.

Class Intention & Focus

Mark Stephens describes how you might view your intention when creating a class focused on the first chakra:

Cultivate muladhara chakra balance by establishing a sense of grounding, particularly through the feet, legs, and pelvis, as well as a sense of moving into stillness through grounded forward bends that evoke a feeling of surrendering to the earth. Amid these grounding actions and sensations, one can deepen their sense of physical, emotional, and mental stability through visualization practices that help embody these qualities of awareness. – Mark Stephens

Hatha Practice

Practicing a (no-flow or slow-flow) Hatha class focused on building strength and stability.

Focus on Foundation

If you wish to devote an exercise to educating students on basic alignment principles, simply standing with a block between the thighs is a common technique. Here are some of the many possible teaching points.

Especially with new students to yoga you may wish to have them first observe their habitual standing patterns without “fixing” anything. In this case, without yet using the block, instruct them to not change anything but simply look down at their feet and then note:

- Are they pointing inward or outward?
- How does this affect your legs?
- Are the knees pointing inward or outward?
- Is your pelvis tilting forward or backward?
- Are both hip points pointing forward?
- Is your torso centered over your pelvis?

Next, place a block between the inner thighs and bring the feet to be parallel. Squeeze the block.

- Note that the inner and outer muscles of the legs are now working together to bring ankles, knees and hips in line.

Next, push the block back toward wall behind you.

- Note how thighs rotate inward.
- Feel how tailbone and pubic bone move back.
- Note how inner arches of feet drop down and outer arches lift up.
- Next, push the the block forward.
- Note how thighs rotate outward.
- Feel how pubic bone moves up & tailbone tucks under.
- Feel the inner arches of feet lift and outer arches drop.
- Continue to push the block back and forward several times, feeling the effects, eventually finding the balance between inner and outer thigh rotation.

- Feel connection between all the aspects of the lower body that form a strong foundation.

You may then wish to introduce other aspects of Tadasana (Mountain Pose) alignment, such as:

- Engage quadriceps to lift knees up.
- Feel the pelvis in a neutral position.
- Lift low belly.
- Lengthen the spine.
- Feel chest lifting but draw low ribs in.
- Broaden collarbones.
- Relax shoulders away from ears.
- Draw shoulder blades down the back.
- Draw back of head up.
- Let the head float comfortably atop the spine.
- Allow the chin to be parallel to the floor.
- Relax jaw.
- Relax tongue.
- Soften forehead.
- Feel both your softness and your strength.

Working with the Feet

Standing with balanced alignment is a fundamental activity associated with areas related to the first chakra. The positioning of feet affects the joints above, including ankles, knees & hips as well as all the associated muscles.

- Guiding students to set a proper foundation is often done through teaching Tadasana (Mountain Pose) and otherwise highlighting proper foot positioning in all standing poses.
- Students may be guided to feel the extreme positions of the feet.
 - Supinate: Lift inner (medial) sides of feet while making outer (lateral) sides heavy.
 - Pronate: Drop inner arches, letting outer edges lift
- And, then, find balance between supination and pronation.
 - Ensure kneecaps are aligned over center of feet.
 - Keep big toes and heels grounded.
 - Keep arches lifted.

To read more in-depth about the anatomy of the feet and how to work with this information on standing poses, see Julie Gudmestad's Yoga Journal article, [Ground Control](#).

Pelvic Floor Awareness

Another potential focus for foundation is awareness of the pelvic floor—a collection of muscles below the pelvis, between anus and genitals. The pelvic floor supports internal organs and is connected to other muscles of the core as well as to adductors and other leg muscles. The pelvic floor is as clearly and intricately linked to the rest of our bodies as are all of the muscles and connective tissue throughout the body. But since it is not as often thought of, it can require much more education and awareness.



The pelvic floor is influenced by muscles of the legs. Squeezing a block between the legs is a common tactic for awakening these muscles.

Asana & Sequences

Of all aspects related to chakra teachings, there appears to be the least consistency among sources in terms of recommended asana. Often, we find no overlap whatsoever among asana recommended by different sources. We might assume that as with so many other aspects of yoga teaching, it's less about a particular asana and more about emphasis, adaptation and the focus for an entire sequence. As with all teaching, it's best to teach what you know from your own experience and we offer the following compilation for your consideration.

Asana

- Balasana (Child's Pose)
- Crescent Lunge
- Garudasana (Eagle Pose)
- Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Pose)
- Seated Twists
- Standing Poses
- Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclined Bound Angle Pose)
- Tadasana (Mountain)
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
- Viparita Karani (Inverted Action / Legs Up Wall)
- Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1)
- Virabhadrasana II (Warrior 2)
- Virabhadrasana III (Warrior 3)

- Virasana (Hero's Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

Standing Poses

Standing poses are very important for balancing muladhara, because they safely develop the strength of the legs and promote a strong foundation. When standing poses are done correctly, they balance and support the entire body.

Mudras & Mantras



Earth Mudra

Touch thumb and ring finger on each hand. Keep other fingers straight but relaxed

Grounding Mudra

Try this highly effective practice with your students, often utilized by master teacher Saul David Raye. In a comfortable seated position, place your left hand on your heart and your right hand flat on the earth, palm facing down. In this mudra, offer your gratitude to Mother Earth for all she gives us.

Mantras

Abundance

“The Ganesha Mantra will help remove obstacles to abundance.”

Om Ganapataye Namaha

Om Lahk-shmee Gun-nuh-puh-tuh-yeh Nah-mah-hah

Fear

“One of the great enemies of peace is fear. This mantra asks that the energy pattern of fear be released back into universal mind and energy so that the energy may be returned to the chanter in a way that it can be used productively.”

Shante Prashante Sarva Bhaya Upashamani Swaha

Shahn-teh Prah-shahn-the Sahr-vah Bhah-ya Oo-pah-shah-mah-nee
Swah-hah

Meditation & Visualization

The Earth Element

When I’m teaching this practice I encourage students to notice first of all those aspects of the body that they can directly experience: the physical presence and weight of the body, the feeling of the sitting bones pressing into the cushion or bench, the hands resting on the lap, the knees on the floor, the teeth. We simply notice these experiences of solidness.

More Practices

Affirmations

Giving students words or affirmations during guided meditation or to use during mudras or asana can help support the messages and energy of first chakra teachings:

- I am here, now. I am real.
- I am safe.
- I am always safe at the center of my being.
- I am divinely protected.
- It is safe for me to be here.
- I have a right to be here.
- I have a right to be me.
- The earth supports me.
- Life supports me.
- I love my body and trust its wisdom.
- I accept myself.
- I am worthy.
- I am special.
- My legs support me.
- I have a strong foundation.
- I am abundant.
- My abundance enhances all.

Music

If you use music in your classes, one idea might be the earthy tones of Christopher of the Wolves including:

- Eclipse
- Into the Blue
- Rising Sun

- Surrender
- Tranquility
- Zenith