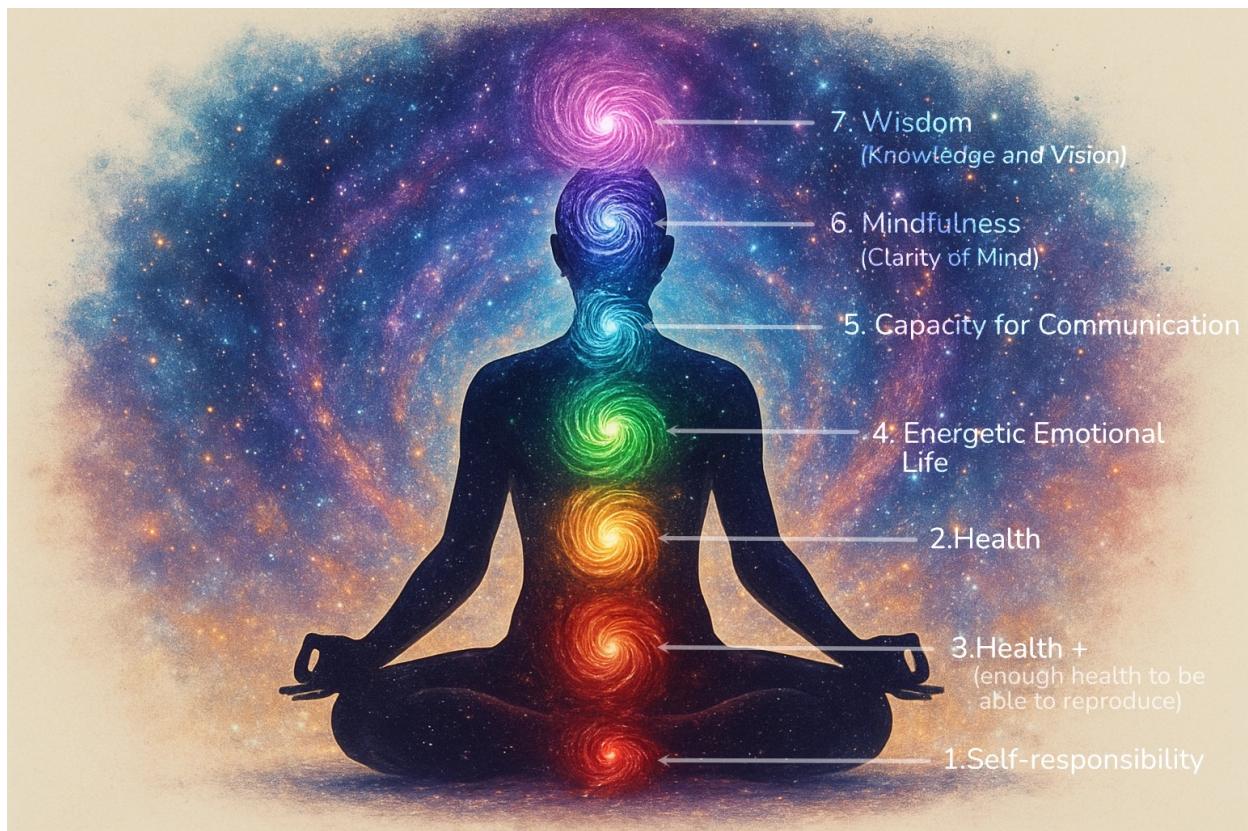


Hierarchy of Values Within: Using the Chakras as a Meditative Framework

(By Bhikkhu Dhammadānanda)



The practice of relating spiritual teachings to the body — of locating spiritual ideas within the body — is exceedingly old. It has been practiced in mystical traditions throughout the world: from Egypt to China, from Kabbalah to Tantra, and many places and traditions in between.

Although not part of traditional Theravāda, I have found that reflecting on the chakras has been exceedingly helpful in my own practice.

Below, I want to show just one of the manifold ways in which we can gain insights that are profoundly useful for our spiritual life and practice.

The image above illustrates how a meditator may realize a hierarchy of qualities within himself, for the cultivation of which he may consider individual and dynamic practices.

In my reflections, I see what are usually considered the second and third chakras in an inverted order: I see the solar plexus chakra — strongly linked to digestion and overall health — as more foundational than the sexual chakra.

1. Mastering the Sleep-Wake Cycle

The first step is attuning the mind to the whole body — a process that, in a healthy human being, is naturally trained during infancy. Sitting meditation can support the movement of energy into the spinal cord, although adequate sleep often achieves the same effect.

2. Health

Good health **naturally encourages the desire to move and exercise.**
This movement:

- helps gain control over blood flow (improves blood circulation)
- aids in controlling the heart and muscles
- helps prevent unclear or toxic blood from reaching the brain, thereby reducing the establishment of unwholesome or self-weakening thoughts in consciousness

Walking meditation and regular exercise are particularly effective in activating this chakra and fostering a strong foundation for the rest of the hierarchy.

3. Sexuality

Certain processes, including those related to sex and reproduction, arise naturally from a state of overflowing health. However, there is no need to become a slave to this energy. Even for non-cebites, learning to channel it upwards at least some of the time can be profoundly beneficial for spiritual growth.

4. Energetic Emotional Life

As health increases, so often does the richness of our emotional life. Initially, this can also lead to stronger passions — anger, desire, and other emotions that reinforce the sense of self.

By becoming aware of the heart as a chakra, we can gradually refine our emotions, transforming them into states that expand consciousness rather than constrict it.

This skill culturally is initiated through initiation rites which are meant to initiate an adolescent into adulthood. And hence it is (in a natural scheme of things) developmentally related to the condition of a maturing adult.

5. Capacity for Communication

With a foundation of good health and balanced emotions, one can develop the ability to speak convincingly, passionately, and eloquently — a skill that is invaluable for sharing insights, guiding others, or simply expressing oneself with clarity.

6. Visualization and the Capacity to Direct Attention

From this base, the mind can cultivate the capacity to focus attention intentionally and visualize plans, ideas, or spiritual concepts. This is a natural extension of the clarity fostered by health and emotional balance.

7. Hearing the Voice of Wisdom; Receiving Spiritual Guidance; Knowledge and Visions Pertaining to the Spiritual Life

Finally, building upon these foundations — good health, balanced emotions, and the ability to direct attention — the meditator can cultivate wisdom. Over time, this may intensify into profound visions, revealing the nature of reality and offering guidance for the spiritual journey.

This approach shows how our physical, emotional, and mental life are interconnected, and how cultivating one area can naturally support growth in others. While the framework of chakras is not strictly canonical in Theravāda, it provides a practical map for understanding and harmonizing our internal hierarchy of values, guiding us toward a fuller, more conscious life.

Just as the chakras suggest a rising movement of energy, our practice can move us from the foundations of health and balance toward the heights of wisdom and vision. Wherever we begin on this inner map, each step taken with awareness brings us closer to realizing the full harmony of body, mind, and consciousness.