

## HIGHER ENERGIES AND INFLUENCES

*'To gain 'Baraka' (blessing, benediction), you must give unstintingly of what you have before you can receive. If you have already given – give again, and in this spirit.'*  
*Sheikh Shamsudin Siwasi*

### Magnetism and Hypnosis

A number of theories have postulated a relationship between hypnosis, magnetism and electricity which may explain certain aspects of healing and unusual psychic phenomena. According to this perspective the human body is capable of producing and storing a negative electrical charge which may account for many instances of hypnosis, altered states of consciousness and healing by touch: "Natural healers seem to be those who have abnormally dry skins, which encourage the accumulation of subcutaneous electricity, a negative charge. In normal persons, this charge is constantly being given off; surplus electricity not needed for running the nervous system simply 'leaks' away."

A related concept of a primal 'life-force' is found in many spiritual and esoteric teachings. In Yoga this energy is called *akasha*, a Sanskrit word referring to "the all-encompassing and unifying spirit and energy of all living things" which can be stored up in the body and mind and then discharged into an object or person in order to exert a favourable influence or effect. A parallel concept is the Hawaiian and Polynesian idea of *mana* – a form of spiritual energy and healing power which exists in certain places, objects and persons.

In many esoteric systems the concept of magnetism is related to the transformation of finer substances and the presence on an 'atmosphere' that surrounds every human being:

Q: What is magnetism?

A: Man has two substances in him, the substance of active elements of the physical body, and the substance made up of the active elements of astral matter. These two form a third substance by mixing. This mixed substance gathers in certain parts of man and also forms an atmosphere around him, like the atmosphere surrounding a planet . . . In ancient times priests were able to cure disease by blessing. Some priests had to lay their hands on the sick person. Some could cure at a short distance, some at a great distance. A 'priest' was a man who had mixed substances and could cure others. A priest was a magnetizer. Sick persons have not enough mixed substances, not enough magnetism, not enough "life." This "mixed substance" can be seen if it is concentrated. An aura or halo was a real thing and can sometimes be seen at holy places such as churches. Mesmer re-

discovered the use of this substance. To be able to use this substance, you must first acquire it. It is the same with attention. It is gained only through conscious labour and intentional suffering, through doing small things voluntarily. Make small things your God, and you will be going toward acquiring magnetism. Like electricity, magnetism can be concentrated and made to flow. (1)

According to Gurdjieff hypnosis works with higher or finer energies, as yet undiscovered by modern science, which produce altered states of consciousness and perception:

Gurdjieff spoke about levels of experience in relation to hypnosis. He began by defining various substances or energies, the existence of which, he said, could be demonstrated, but which natural science has not yet discovered. There were yet other substances so fine as to be beyond detection by any physical means. Every possible action depended upon these substances. For example, if we are to think, we must use the substance of thought. If we are to have any kind of supra-normal experiences, this will be possible only in so far as the appropriate substance is available. There are ways of separating and controlling the finer substances. One of these ways is what we call hypnosis. There are many varieties of hypnosis, differing according to the substances that are brought into action . . . Each substance has a definite psychic property. As a subject is brought into a state of deep hypnotic trance, the different substances begin to separate -- like iron and brass filings under the action of a magnet. In this condition, the subject can respond to the influences of substances to which he is usually insensitive. (2)

In order to maximize the effectiveness of hypnosis the practitioner requires extra capacities in addition to the techniques which are utilized to induce hypnotic trance. Certain Eastern hypnotic methods use concentration and preparation beforehand to develop, amplify and project spiritual force or *baraka*:

"If you hypnotize a person, as you can surely do, without being in contact with the real experience of hypnosis, you are adversely affecting the balance of the power. It is like a man using fire to heat his kettle, and then not noticing that it can also burn the carpet, or his hand." Did the Sheikh mean that straightforward use of hypnosis was dangerous? "Absolutely. Not in the way that people think it is, you see. If you merely hypnotize someone in order to cure something, and you do not also exert your conscious *baraka* upon that person, all sorts of things might happen. You have removed, say, the stammer that your patient was suffering from. But you get other symptoms instead. This much is understood by some hypnotists, so they get around that -- and it is quite possible. What they do not know is that unless they obtain a complete *baraka* relationship with their patient, they will influence his evolutionary powers adversely." (3)

## Sounds and Vibrations

Certain sounds have a special vibratory effect on the human body and mind which can enhance and elevate consciousness. The power of sounds and words is said to be "based on the universe's hidden currents of meaning." Language in particular has functions other than the overt meaning of the words. In many spiritual traditions mystical words, phrases and formulae are chanted in order to produce ecstatic states.

When certain words and sounds are combined with a precise intention and focus, it may be possible to project a power which is capable of influencing people and events:

Both Arab cabbalists and Sufis believe that every sound contains power: the repetition of certain sounds with certain intentions causes a focus to be attained. The result of that focus is to cause the human mind to project power, in accordance with the meaning of the sound. This is not thought of as a form of magic, because the relationship between the thing desired and the word is believed to be a cause-and-effect one. If you believe in anything strongly enough, in other words, it will happen. (4)

For words and sounds to be effective as a force or influence in the world, a number of factors and conditions must be taken into account. The magic power of words is described by the 9<sup>th</sup> century Arab writer Alkindi:

The imagination can form ideas and then emit rays which will affect outside objects, just as would the thing itself whose image the mind has conceived. If words are uttered in exact accordance with imagination and intention, and with faith, they are capable of exceeding potency, and this effect is heightened if they are uttered under favorable astrological conditions. Some magical utterances are most potent when uttered under the influence of certain planets. Some voices affect fire, some especially stir trees, some are even capable of making images to appear in mirrors or to produce flames and lightning. (5)

The vibrational quality of music can influence human beings physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Many legends throughout the world testify to the powerful effect of certain types of music on plants, animals, and people. Gurdjieff believed that this kind of music was a form of "objective art."

Objective music is all based on 'inner octaves.' It can obtain not only definite psychological results but definite physical results. There can be such music as would freeze water. There can be such music as would kill a man instantaneously. The biblical legend of the destruction of the walls of Jericho by music is precisely a legend of objective music. Plain music, no matter of what kind, will not destroy walls, but objective music indeed can do so. And not only can it destroy but it can

also build up. In the legend of Orpheus there are hints of objective music, for Orpheus used to impart knowledge through music. (6)

### 'Baraka'

The term *baraka* has its root and derivation in Arabic, which provides the following associated meanings: "to stand firm or dwell," "to be exalted," "to bode well" and "abundance." In English, *baraka* is often rendered as "special grace," "virtue," "blessing" or "benediction."

*Baraka* is often described as an intangible emanation or elusive impact which adheres to certain people, objects, holy places, spiritual rituals and exercises, and positively-intentioned deeds. There are also suggestions that it is associated with creativity, inner transformation and healing. "*Baraka* has many 'magical' qualities – although it is essentially a unity and the fuel as well as the substance of objective reality. One of these qualities is that anyone who is endowed with it, or any object with which it is associated, retains a quota of it, no matter how much it may be altered by contact with other people."

Unlike some forms of refined spiritual energy, *baraka* does not decay over time. It is given to worthy individuals who can use it wisely to benefit themselves and others:

The Baraka is a factor, an impalpable force. It is also translated by the word "blessing" or "presence" and also "joy" or "happiness." A person who receives the baraka keeps it within themselves for a matter of years. We say that it is 'typed' for that person. That person receives it, takes it in, and it benefits, improves and aids them over a term of years. There isn't a decay factor, it doesn't become less and less beneficial or powerful: it remains at a constant level . . . If, in the estimation of the person who has given it out, it is being used well for the benefit of that person and for their development, it is not then removed, but increased in quality and quantity. (7)

The psychological and spiritual condition of potential recipients of *baraka* has a large effect upon their ability to properly use its spiritual force and power. *Baraka* has an elusive quality that prevents its reception and assimilation by those who are unprepared or lack virtue. It does not operate in the presence of greed, desire or self-preoccupation. "*Baraka* is an impalpable quality or force that one receives or absorbs when one is worthy, responsible and ready. It is related to grace and is a gift or bestowal."

Like luck, *baraka* is very elusive. People who could receive *baraka* or even have received it, can put themselves out of its range by their attitude – usually by wanting things which are unnecessary. When this happens, *baraka* simply ceases to operate. *Baraka* may be thought of as similar to the force which has been reported in primitive cultures and which anthropologists have called *Mana*. But it has extra

dimensions. It is lent to people who feel the need to align themselves with truth – not all such people, but some. If they are engaged in material pursuits, they acquire prosperity. If not, the gift increases their moral stature and force. But this spiritual energy is like fairy gold and its reliability continues only so long as they are faithful to the truth. If they become personally greedy beyond a certain point (known technically as ‘the point of tolerance’) the *baraka* leaks away. Many undertakings have floundered because of this. (8)

In Sufism the *baraka* of all the teachers and masters extends throughout the whole dervish community, including the founders of the major Sufi Orders. Sufis claim that it is possible to contact the *baraka* of previous saints and masters through visits to the tombs and shrines.

The spiritual power of *baraka* is passed from teacher to disciple and from one generation of Sufis to another. Contemporary Sufis claim that they are the recipients of the *baraka* accumulated by previous generations of teachers, who are their spiritual ancestors. According to Sufi tradition, certain individuals, called ‘intermediaries,’ who are chosen to prepare the ground for the introduction of advanced spiritual ideas and practices, are temporarily or permanently endowed with a certain amount of *baraka* in order to complete their mission:

*Baraka* is the name given to a special energy from within Sufism. The word is sometimes translated as “blessing” or “impalpable grace.” The Jewish tradition involves a very similar concept, that of *Baruch* or “blessing.” The Sufi conception differs from many others, in that *Baraka* is held to be transmitted from individual to individual, generally from teacher to student, if the student is sufficiently advanced in his practice to receive it. On this concept is based the medieval tradition, still current in the Middle East, of the master and his apprentices, who learn from the master in the ordinary way and are also said to pick up “something else” from his presence. (9)

It is widely believed that the spiritual power of *baraka* confers certain supernatural abilities. *Baraka* is a vehicle for healing and the laying on of hands and can also be projected across any distance to aid those in need. The actions of someone endowed with *baraka* are often based on intuition rather than formal reasoning: “The sixth sense also gives the possessor of *baraka* the means to create certain happenings in the world which benefit the whole of humanity.”

Whereas all human beings might want to perform good actions, it was often impossible to foresee whether an action carried out in good faith would produce a good result. What was the way out of this dilemma? Through the *baraka* (spiritual force) of the Sufi Order its members acquired a power known as *yakina*, which was the inner certainty that this or that action was for the real and ultimate good of mankind. (10)

A further application of *baraka* is generally unknown and unsuspected by the majority of humankind. There are a number of Eastern legends pointing to the possibility that the special endowments and abilities of some historical figures were due to the *baraka* that was imparted to them shortly after they were born:

The presence shortly after their birth, at the bedside of certain important people, in the form of "fairies," "fairy-godmothers," "Kings" and "wise-men," has long been considered a pleasant myth. The fact, however, is that this is the sentimental way of describing a factual truth. When certain individuals came into this world, they were given spiritual support shortly after the mother's confinement. The *baraka* thus imparted usually lasts for life. This legend is at the root of all the widespread appearances of mysterious or other-worldly figures at the cradle of people marked out for special functions. (11)

## Sacred Objects and Artefacts

Throughout history human beings have fashioned objects and artefacts and imbued them with special meaning. Many spiritual traditions hold that specially constructed objects may be infused with 'magical power' by individuals possessing higher knowledge and abilities. When a sacred object is properly crafted it is permeated with the energy, love and rapport with the medium employed by the artisan:

There is evidence that the use of amulets and talismans in some form is as old as humanity itself. Stone-age 'amulets' have been found carved on bone. They are naturalistic representations of specific animals, sometimes pierced, as though they were worn. Since it seems unlikely that experienced hunters would need 'reminding' of what their prey looked like, the carvings appear to be linked to magical beliefs aimed at improving the hunt. The stone-age 'amulets' are uncannily similar to this description of the Tungu people of Siberia: "The Tungus used to carve a figure of the animal they wished to kill and take it with them on hunting trips, on the principle that if the pictorial soul is in the hunter's possession, the animal itself will soon follow." From these humble beginnings, virtually everybody has or understands some form of amulet: from the Muslim 'Hand of Fatima' to the Christian 'St. Christopher' to the 'lucky shirt' of the football player. So powerful is the faith that certain types of object can ward off harm or promote good, that overtly religious symbols – such as the crucifix – have been co-opted into the fray and used as talismans. (12)

Many objects and artefacts produced by skilled craftsmen of the East and West are very beautiful because of their harmonious shape, geometry and proportion. "In the steel-making guilds of Spain, when an exceptionally good piece of steel was made, it was held to have 'Kaif': the real content of a thing, which made it perfect. No steel could effectively be made without

*Baraka*: 'blessing,' a certain virtue which resided in the object as long as it lasted, and each guild had the *Baraka* of the founder of the mystical order whose secrets of workmanship they practised."

According to both the Jewish and Arabian cabbalistic traditions, letters, words and numbers are charged with magical power. These are often used to decorate certain objects and artefacts in order to enhance their function: "Magical boxes are made of metal, usually three metals – brass, silver and copper – and generally engraved with numbers or words. As with other metal objects collected by magicians (like Aladdin's lamp), the box or other object (sometimes they are trays, sometimes metal pendants) has to be charged with *baraka*, by 'blessing' it with magical or higher power."

One common property of objects and artefacts employed for spiritual purposes is that they are constructed from natural substances such as wood, stone, metal or ivory. Omar Ali-Shah discusses this usage in the context of the Sufi tradition:

Whether they be the tasbee, kashkul, sticks or cloaks as well as things like candlesticks, bowls and boxes, all the objects which are made have one thing in common. Their common denominator is not only due to their antiquity, since it also applies to objects made by craftsmen in this century who were either in or associated with the Tradition. The one thing they all have in common is that the materials they are made from are all natural. If you look at the function of these objects, you can immediately see why natural materials are used. Be it stone, wood, or other materials like horn, ivory, teeth or what have you, a natural material has the capacity to hold, absorb and give out energy which is used in human contexts. Since most human beings are themselves natural, it is therefore logical to suppose that they relate to natural materials, not only in a tactile or visual sense, but also in other senses. (13)

The particular design and construction of sacred objects is based on a higher knowledge or 'technology' relating matter and spirit. In his travels through Afghanistan, spiritual seeker and explorer Louis Palmer learned about the inner quality of some of these artefacts:

Not all kinds of carpets and rugs were made here: only those whose size, shape, colour and design served an unspecified but allegedly highly important and recognized spiritual cause. The same went for works of art and artefacts. Each one was planned, had a special use, and could cause an effect unsuspected by anyone who was not sensitive to it . . . After a great deal of questioning, I found that these people were convinced of the existence and active operation of what I can only call a series of underlying cosmic patterns, influencing both life and inanimate objects. Something, they believed, exists for our perceptions only as a local manifestation of an outside force which has called it into being. Things, therefore, as well as thoughts, exist only because they have, somewhere, transcendental archetypes. (14)

Consciously constructed objects, artefacts, even exercises and ideas, may be tested and evaluated for effectiveness of functioning before being introduced into the world on a large scale:

One of the most intriguing concepts I found at Abshar is that of the 'testing' of artefacts, of ideas, of almost anything, as undertaken by the Sufis. This derives from the idea that things introduced into 'the world' from a higher dimensional level are immediately exposed to hostile influences. So every object, idea, ritual, exercise, even a group of people or a relationship, must go through a testing period to see whether it is, so to speak, watertight. This explains the Sufi practice in which ideas are picked up and put down and then left alone, to be reclaimed later. Why buildings may be left unused for years (the same applies to rooms and containers) before they are deemed fit to be used. The assertion is that adverse influences have, in the interval, dissipated themselves. (15)

Objects and artefacts of spiritual importance produce effects which act upon the inner consciousness of sensitive human beings. In a sense they are precise technical devices, calibrated and tuned to perform specific functions:

People often talk about magical objects, in fairy tales and folklore. These are not magical, but they belong to *another* realm of human action and thought. If you use a certain colour, and certain textures, to decorate your room, your living space, they may have a certain effect upon you. This is well known to modern psychology. Again, if you have a certain kind of temperament, you will tend to surround yourself with certain objects which correspond to it. But there is another *range* of environmental effects. The ancients knew them. This tapestry is not only the product of a certain kind of thought, but it is a *pattern* of it. It could communicate with the equivalent in your mind. The same holds with the other objects. (16)

Objects and artefacts have many different qualities, functions and purposes:

- Although charged with spiritual energy, they may appear perfectly ordinary or disguised as something functional. In this way they may be given, lent or carried by people on their inner journey of development without attracting any attention.
- Properly designed and constructed objects receive, hold and transmit refined energy. In some cases stones or gems are 'charged' by spiritual masters and subsequently act as a storehouse of energy, much like a battery.
- They may function at different times and on different levels simultaneously. "You don't necessarily have to possess an object or even see it for the energy it contains to be transmitted to you."
- Sacred objects may be widely shared and distributed. They may be designed to release energy at a given time in the future – days, months, years or centuries later.

- Certain designs, patterns, emblems and symbols imbued with mystical meaning may be attached to or associated with particular objects and artefacts.
- The environmental impact of a room, structure or space may be modified by removing or adding specific objects, colours or designs, thus creating a certain harmony, ambience and influence.
- Certain objects are designed and constructed in such a fashion as to enhance the transfer of spiritual energy from one person to another. "The technique used in transferring and receiving energy can take many forms and can be usefully implemented in almost any circumstance, relationship or social structure."
- The area or extent of influence – a particular place or segment of the community – will vary from object to object, depending on their design, construction and intention.
- Some objects have a time-release function. The time-frame for the release of energy from an artefact may be immediate, short-term or long-term. "There may be a date or particular time at which it will start giving off energy in its immediate surroundings, or in a more cosmic sense, over a larger area. It can then 'broadcast' for a particular period, and then switch off or on again, according to the way it is programmed."
- The energy of certain objects and artefacts can become exhausted but then charged up and reconstituted again at a later date.

One of the more unusual functional uses of objects is their employment to establish a metaphysical link between people by using certain personal objects as an intermediary or bridge. Gurdjieff discussed this belief in talks with his students:

People who have an 'astral body' can communicate with one another at a distance without having recourse to ordinary physical means. But for such communication to be possible they must establish some 'connection' between them. For this purpose, when going to different places or different countries people sometimes take with them something belonging to another, especially things that have been in contact with the body and are permeated with his emanations. In the same way, in order to maintain a connection with a dead person, his friends used to keep objects which had belonged to him. These things leave, as it were, a *trace* behind them, something like invisible wires or threads which remain stretched out through space. These threads connect a given object with the person, living or in certain cases dead, to whom the object belonged. Men have known this from the remotest antiquity and have made various uses of this knowledge. (17)

According to traditional sources, certain precautions must be observed in the possession and use of certain objects and artefacts of a spiritual nature.

Some of the metalwork, especially that made with three metals (usually silver, copper and tin), was employed to 'imprison' what we in the West would call psychic powers. These abilities could confer seemingly magical powers upon people who knew how to use them. But if the 'magical boxes,' for instance, fell into the hands of the wrong people, or those who had certain defects of character, they would be seriously harmed by the forces which the artefacts contained. It was even believed that such objects should never be in the hands of disciples or learners, beginners on the Way. If they were, the minimum effect that could be caused would be lack of success, and perhaps illness. (18)

## Places and Structures of Spiritual Power

According to esoteric tradition certain places on earth, both natural and those constructed by human beings, have a special spiritual quality that can enrich the process of inner development. Such places have often been 'energized' by the accumulated activities of past spiritual masters and their students, and this energy can be transmitted to and acquired by suitably prepared individuals who visit these sites: "It is possible to collect and store the spiritual force which resides in certain centres, deposited there by the saints and teachers who had lived and taught and often died there."

In many cases shrines, temples, churches and other buildings have been constructed at these 'power spots' in order to communicate a subtle energy to the inner being of a person. The Gothic cathedrals of Europe have an indelible presence that touches those who enter their interior spaces surrounded by magnificent stained glass windows. The Rustem Pasa Mosque in Turkey is said to transmit spiritual energy through the 'waves' from the decorative tiles and their arrangement inside the sanctuary. And in Northern China there is a temple which deeply affects the consciousness of visitors: "As I approached, the various roofs of differently coloured tiles changed places, formed designs, melted into one another. The effect of the perspective, the changing shapes, made an extraordinary impression on me – it was as if they, not I, were moving; they conveyed an impression of light and colour, of emotional and mental freedom, a harmonious whole, a sense of perfection that something in me longed for."

Great care is taken when buildings are constructed at specific sites where spiritual energy is especially concentrated: "It is a highly scientific process. Such places are constructed with a definite intent, along with a sensitivity to the magnetic and other fluxes which occur there when certain types of material are put together to cause this energy to flow and increase the value of the ambience of the place." There is an invisible atmosphere or quality surrounding these places and the positive, subtle energy connects with the inner being of a person and acts as a harmonizing force which purifies and heals.

Many sacred buildings of the past were intricate works of inspired artistic creation, containing a depth within depth of meaning. "The symbols and decorative art were designed to main-

tain, in visible form, certain eternal truths believed to summarize the human soul in search of, and in progress toward, final harmony and integration with all of creation.”

The mathematical and geometric principles underlying the design and construction of sacred structures were known and practised by esoteric initiates of many traditions. For instance, the Gothic cathedrals of Europe, the Buddhist temples of Asia, the pyramids of Central America and the mosques of the Middle East were all based on precise mathematical design. “The architectural measurements chosen for the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, as for the Kaaba in Mecca, were numerical equivalents of certain Arabic roots conveying holy messages, every part of the building being related to every other in definite proportion.”

Real art is based on mathematics. It is a kind of script with an inner and outer meaning. In early times, conscious men – who understood the principles of mathematics – composed music, designed statues and images, painted pictures and constructed buildings – all of which were such that they had a definite effect on people who came in contact with them: on their feelings and senses. There is a room in a monastery in Persia, for example, the proportion and volumes of which are such that everyone who goes into that room begins to weep. The early Gothic cathedrals were designed by men who understood the principles of mathematics, and how these principles could be applied. The proportions, the volume of the interior, the air pressure, the acoustics, the effect of light filtering through the stained glass, the music – the effect of these on people were mathematically calculated so that, unconsciously, people were raised to a higher plane. In such a state some could receive high ideas. (19)

The particular design and architectural structure of buildings can influence human consciousness on many levels. These places reflect the esoteric knowledge of the builders on how to create specific effects on those who enter their sacred space: “With these architectural combinations, the mathematically calculated vibrations in the building could not produce any other effect. We are under certain laws and cannot withstand external influences. Because the architect of this building had a different understanding and built mathematically, the result was always the same.”

The employment of spatial form, the special province of the right hemisphere, plays a large role in esoteric psychology. Often a room or an entire structure will be built in order to affect the mode of consciousness directly in a certain manner. One surviving example is the Alhambra, the famous Moorish temple, in Spain. It is intended to have an effect that is spatial, experiential, and difficult to encompass linearly. More familiarly, we can note the perceptual effects of Gothic cathedrals and churches, and of certain rooms whose structural patterns produce an effect on us. (20)

Throughout the world there are examples of works of ‘objective architecture’ which are the products of esoteric schools:

The cathedrals of Notre Dame de Paris and Chartres are products of a Christian esoteric school, the Taj Mahal of a Sufi esoteric school. Dukes and counts and even kings, as well as trades-people and peasants, considered it a privilege to be allowed to help in the building of the early cathedrals, hauling the stone and mixing the mortar. In England too – Ely, St. Albans, York Cathedrals are also, perhaps, objective works of art. It can be said that all great works of art proceed from esoteric schools. In China, too, there are examples. The Temple of Heaven has three circular tiers or platforms; that nearest the ground is the largest, the middle one is smaller; the top one is the smallest, and on this the Emperor worshipped alone. (21)

Ancient monuments, temples and sacred buildings had multiple functions and were designed on the basis of an exact esoteric knowledge of the developmental needs of humanity and our place in the universe. Most people do not suspect this higher inner level and perceive only the external form or else invent imaginative theories regarding their origin and purpose:

Temples and monuments – of China, Greece, Egypt, South America – had many functions. The least of these was to impress, to create ‘atmosphere,’ to play upon the emotions. Because these places were used for certain purposes, they acquired a quality which in some cases still remains with them. Only those who understand the Work can make use of this substance, which is sometimes called *Baraka* . . . The dimensions and siting of certain buildings is another matter. A building is sited in a certain way for many reasons, of which the aesthetic effect may be considered to be the least important for our viewpoint. Again, the dynamic function in our sense of a building may have been discharged, as in the case of most Greek buildings, many centuries ago. It has been superseded by something else, elsewhere, suited to another time. What remains is the shell, which provides the emotional, intellectual, mathematical or other stimuli which misled the refined barbarian into thinking of it as a wonder. It may, however, now have no meaningful function for the Work and as far as Wisdom is concerned. (22)

In certain spiritual traditions there are precise requirements for the design and construction of chambers and meeting-rooms for group activities in order to concentrate and maximize the effect of the subtle energy of *baraka*. In Sufism these ‘places of assembly and power’ are called *Tekkias*: “A building which is designed and built to extremely precise measurements with specific materials is the best and classically correct form of *tekkia*. A *tekkia* receives, stores and uses energy. It influences a person on several different levels.”

The configuration of a room or other place is designed to attract and to concentrate a certain subtle force (*baraka*) which is collected and disseminated among those who attend meetings . . . As might be expected with such an ‘instrument,’ the size, shape and siting of the place, together with the materials employed, are thought to be most important. The dimensions, siting, interior décor and appurtenancies are all subject to the most careful arrangement and calculation. As an instance, brass and wood join ceramics and wool (sheepskins) as important in the

collecting and reflecting of the *baraka*. How they are placed and when and where and even by whom is given the most careful consideration. (23)

Gardens have been constructed and utilized for spiritual purposes by adepts from many traditions throughout the world. They symbolize, often in disguised form, certain spiritual laws and esoteric truths. They also influence the inner consciousness of human beings in subtle ways through the multiple interlocking patterns and colours of their design. "Certain kinds of flowers correspond with environmental factors. People generally think about the aesthetic value of flowers or their curative effect. Yet these are secondary: a flower is also a factory, like any herb, with a spiritual content and effect."

I was building a garden and in that way scattering what knowledge was necessary for the needs of that time and circumstance. Do not think that the sole language of flowers is the accepted one of visual impact or the heady wine of their perfume. Flowers change their meaning and their effect depending on their position relative to each other, in what quantity they are planted, which colours are used: all of these are part of the true language of flowers . . . Their function is on several levels. Some, that you can appreciate, are patterns of differing blooms, entertaining the senses. Other effects are to produce a micro-climate in a particular place for Travelers of the Path to rest, refresh themselves, or use in any of a hundred different ways. The flowers tell him who is in the area and what is his degree of initiation. The effect that they have is not restricted to those who are conscious of their meaning – some of the effect "spills over" into their consciousness and produces in them certain ideas and thoughts that are useless unless they view them in a certain context under the guidance of a teacher. (24)

In many spiritual traditions, such as Taoism, Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism and indigenous teachings, certain mountains are considered 'holy' and auspicious sites for rituals, initiations, and healing ceremonies:

Mountains that come to be known as holy are centers of cosmic energies, forces with the power to evoke awe and reverence. More than that, the energy of these mountains turns one inward and activates the subtlest vibrations within oneself. To respond fully to this high energy requires openness and a purified body-mind. Spiritually oriented persons come to a holy or sacred mountain with what might be called a measure of grace – that is, purity – and are uplifted by the invisible forces of the mountain and their own reverence and awe. Through religious rites and ceremonies the self is transcended and the gap between the devotee and the mountain disappears. Then the mountain is no longer a mountain, it is a two-legged individual looking remarkably like oneself yet so much grander! One holy mountain I have experienced is in Mexico. At first encounter this mountain seemed to be a city of temples built into rock. That sight was so moving that I found myself crying in a kind of dazed joy. Unlike the Alps and the Rockies, which are towering and remote in their majesty, this mountain is more man-sized, drawing

one toward it with its very accessibility and intimacy. One has the same feeling about Arunachala, Sri Ramana Maharshi's holy mountain in India. With two of my senior students I did zazen in a large cave in the bowels of this Mexican holy mountain. It was obvious that extensive religious ceremonies had been held there, for the vibrations of such rites could still be felt. Later we learned that in ancient times Mayans, Toltecs, and Aztecs had come long distances to participate in these rites. (25)

## Human Centres of Perception

The concept of subtle energy centres or *chakras* is an integral component of the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism. They are described as an ascending series of centres of spiritual energy localized at certain sites in the human body, each representing a different function and level of consciousness:

These 'organs,' which collect, transform, and distribute the forces flowing through them, are called *chakras*, or centers of force. From them radiate secondary streams of psychic forces, comparable to the spokes of a wheel, the ribs of an umbrella, or the petals of a lotus. In other words, these *chakras* are the points in which psychic forces and bodily functions merge into each other or penetrate each other. They are the focal points in which cosmic and psychic energies crystallize into bodily qualities, and in which bodily qualities are dissolved or transmuted again into psychic forces. (26)

The *chakras* are subtle in nature, beyond normal perception and the product of three integrated streams of spiritual energy. *Ida* and *pingala* are ascending and descending channels of energy while *susumna* is the central channel of energy through the spinal cord:

The human body is a miniature universe in itself. The solar and lunar energy is said to flow through the two main *nadis*, *Pingala* and *Ida*, which start from the right and the left nostrils respectively and move down to the base of the spine. *Pingala* is the *nadi* of the sun, while the *Ida* is the *nadi* of the moon. In between them is the *Susumna*, the *nadi* of fire. This is the main channel for the flow of nervous energy, and it is situated inside the spinal column. *Pingala* and *Ida* intersect each other and also *Susumna* at various places. These junctions are called *chakras* or wheels and regulate the body mechanism as fly-wheels regulate an engine. (27)

Traditionally seven *chakras* have been identified. In Yoga each is assigned a name and a bodily location:

1. *Mûlâdhâra* - located at the base of the spine between the anus and the genitals. It is associated with instinct and survival and is said to be the seat of *kundalini* energy.
2. *Svâdhîsthâna* - located in the lumbar region above the sexual organs. It is associated with sexual energy and reproduction.
3. *Manipûraka* - located at the solar plexus and associated with action and mastery.
4. *Anâhata* - located in the heart region and associated with love and compassion.
5. *Visuddha* - located in the throat and associated with language and creativity.
6. *Ajnâ* - located between the eyebrows (the 'third eye') in the midbrain and represented by the thalamus, the centre of individual consciousness. It is associated with deep intuition.
7. *Sahasrâra* - located in the cerebral cortex and sometimes called "the thousand petalled lotus." When completely opened it is associated with full enlightenment.

The *chakras* also play an important role in the awakening of *kundalini* energy (divine cosmic force), which is symbolized by a coiled and sleeping serpent lying dormant at the base of the spinal column. Through yogic practices this latent energy can be awakened so that it rises up the spine to the brain through the *Susumna nadi*. In this journey the *kundalini* energy passes through all the lower chakras until it reaches the *Sahasrâra* (thousand petalled lotus) in the head and unites with the 'Supreme Soul.'

Certain spiritual traditions place more emphasis on certain of the centres. In Zen Buddhism the *hara* refers to both the physical centre of the body and to the locus of spiritual power in the lower abdomen. On the physical plane the *hara* denotes the functions of digestion, absorption and elimination connected with the stomach and abdomen. On the spiritual level it embraces the second and third *chakras* and is a wellspring of vital psychic energies:

The Zen novice is instructed to focus his mind constantly at the bottom of his *hara* (specifically, between the navel and pelvis) and to radiate all mental and bodily activities from that region. With the body-mind's equilibrium centered on the *hara*, gradually a seat of consciousness, a focus of vital energy, is established there which influences the entire organism . . . An enhanced vitality and new sense of freedom are experienced throughout the body and mind, which are felt more and more to be a unity . . . The figure of the Buddha seated on his lotus throne – serene, stable, all-knowing and all-encompassing, radiating boundless light and compassion – is the foremost example of *hara* expressed through perfect enlightenment. (28)

The heart centre is given great importance in the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. It is the middle *chakra* and acts as a bridge and harmonizing influence between the lower three *chakras* and

the upper three. It is believed that from the heart centre vitality and light radiate to the brain, enabling it to function optimally. Ramana Maharshi: "The spiritual heart-centre is quite different from the blood-propelling, muscular organ known by the same name. The spiritual heart centre is not an organ of the body. All that you can say of the heart is that it is the core of your being." And, "The entire universe is contained in the body, and the entire body in the Heart. Thus the Heart is the nucleus of the whole Universe."

In Sufism, the *Qalb* refers to "the heart or subtle organ of knowledge synonymous with the inner spirit." The purification of this centre through spiritual practice leads to the removal of 'veiling' or 'forgetfulness' which characterizes the lower conditioned self:

The word *qalb* (heart) may be considered an anatomical localization of the organ which has to be awakened. Its position is where the pulsation of the physical heart is normally to be determined on the left breast. In Sufi belief and action, this organ is considered to be the seat of the main, initial inner perceptiveness involved in the 'search' or 'work.' The total illumination of this and certain other organs precedes major saintship, which is the goal of the Sufi and which corresponds, in other systems, with illumination. (29)

According to Ramana Maharshi, the heart centre is the final destination of the spiritual journey: "*Samadhi* energy starts from the solar plexus, rises through the spinal cord to the brain, and from there bends down and ends in the heart. When the *yogi* has reached the heart, the *Samadhi* becomes permanent."

Q: When Bhagavan says that the Heart is the supreme centre of the Spirit or the Self, does that imply that it is not one of the yogic centres (*chakras*)?

A: The yogic centres, counting from the bottom upward, are a series of centres in the nervous system. They represent various stages, each having its own kind of power or knowledge, leading to the *Sahasrâra*, the thousand-petalled lotus in the brain, where is seated the Supreme *Shakti* (power). But the Self that supports the whole movement of the *Shakti* is not located there but supports it from the heart-centre.

Q: Then is it different from the manifestations of *Shakti*?

A: Really there is no manifestation of *Shakti* apart from the Self. The Self became all these *shaktis*. When the yogi attains the highest state of spiritual awareness (*Samadhi*) it is the Self in the Heart that supports him in that state whether he is aware of it or not. But if his awareness is centred in the heart, he realizes that, whatever centres or states he may be in, he is always the same truth, the same heart, the one Self, the spirit that is present throughout, eternal and immutable. (30)

When the Self is realized through the spiritual opening of the Heart, the true nature of existence is revealed. In the words of Ramana Maharshi: "Truly speaking, pure Consciousness is indivisible; it is without parts. It has no form or shape, no within or without. There is no right or left. Pure Consciousness – which is the Heart – includes all; and nothing is outside or apart from it. That is the ultimate truth."

Pure consciousness wholly unrelated to the physical body and transcending the mind is a matter of direct experience. Sages know their bodiless, eternal existence, just as an unrealized man knows his bodily existence. But the experience of Consciousness can be with bodily awareness as well as without it. In the bodiless experience of Pure Consciousness the Sage is beyond time and space, and no question about the position of the Heart can arise at all. Since, however, the physical body cannot subsist (with life) apart from consciousness, bodily awareness has to be sustained by Pure Consciousness. The former, by nature, is limited and can never be co-existent with the latter which is Infinite and Eternal. Body-consciousness is merely a miniature reflection of the Pure consciousness with which the Sage has realized his identity. For him, therefore, body-consciousness is only a reflected ray, as it were, of the Self-effulgent, infinite consciousness which is himself. It is in this sense alone that the Sage is aware of his bodily existence. (31)

In Sufism *Lataif* (singular: *Latifa*) is the technical term referring to certain centres of perception in the human body. The activation of these inner spiritual centres is the basis of higher development and evolution, capable of producing the completed or perfect human being. The *Lataif* are sometimes called the 'five points of illumination,' the 'five subtleties' or the 'five purity spots' and represent certain points in the human body which are especially sensitive to the influence of *baraka*. Although they are conceived as having physical locations in the human body, the *Lataif* do not necessarily exist literally: "They are located in the body because the posture of extending attention to these areas are held to orientate the mind towards higher understanding and illumination."

In approaching the cultivation of deeper awareness, the Sufis have postulated and employed sequences of experiences based on the ever-deeper and successively superseded ranges of understanding . . . There are said to be five centres of spiritual perception, corresponding to these ranges of experience. The secondary or 'Commanding Self' – which rules the personality most of the time and which provides the barrier against extra-dimensional perception – is not one of these Subtle organs, but has a 'location,' in the area of the navel. Concentration on this spot may be said to be connected with the attempt to transform this Self. The higher faculties are named as follows:

1. MIND, on the left side, whose 'field' is approximately where the heart is. Called *QALB* = the Heart centre;
2. SPIRIT, on the right side opposite MIND. This is known as *ROUH*, sometimes translated as the Soul centre;

3. SECRET, the first stage of higher consciousness, located between the first two, in the solar plexus. The original term is *SIRR*, which has been called 'inner consciousness';
4. MYSTERIOUS, in the forehead between the eyes, but just above them. Its name is *KHAFI*, which carries the connotation of deep secrecy;
5. THE DEEPLY HIDDEN, which is resident in the brain and whose 'field of operation' may move between the brain and the centre of the chest. Its technical name is *AKHFA*, which stands for the 'most hidden.'

The organ of stimulation of the Five Centres is the transformed consciousness, the personality originally found in the form of the Commanding Self, when it has been through its refining process. The concentration upon certain colours helps to awaken them: MIND is equated with yellow, SPIRIT with red, SECRET with white, MYSTERIOUS with black and DEEPLY HIDDEN with green. (32)

The concept of the activation of higher centres of perception occurs in a number of esoteric teachings, although there are differences in emphasis and formulation:

The activation of the special Organs of Perception (*lataif*) is part of Sufi methodology analogous to, and often confused with, the *chakra* system of the Yogis. There are some important differences. In yoga, the *chakras* or *padmas* are conceived as physically located centres in the body, linked by invisible nerves or channels. Yogis generally do not know that these centres are merely concentration points, convenient formulations whose activation is part of a theoretical working hypothesis. Both Sufism and Christianity of an esoteric sort preserve a similar theory, combining it with certain exercises. The succession of colours seen by the alchemists in the Western literature can be seen as referring to concentration upon certain physical locations if we compare it with the Sufi literature on exercises . . . Among the Christian alchemists the succession black-white-yellow-red is very common. It will at once be noted that this succession transposed into physical equivalents, forms the sign of the Cross. The alchemical exercises therefore aim at activating colours (location = *lataif*) in the form of crossing oneself. (33)

The development of higher states of consciousness proceeds through an ordered sequence in which successively more subtle centres of perception are awakened. Within the Sufi system there is a precise process and methodology for activating the 'five subtleties.'

When the disciple has been accepted for a training course under a master, he has to be prepared for the experiences which his unaltered mind is incapable of perceiving. The process, which follows the dissipating of conditioning or automatic thinking, is termed the "activation of the subtleties." In order to activate this element it is assigned a theoretical physical situation in the body, generally considered to be the centre where its force or *baraka* is most strongly evidenced. The *latifa* is theoretically considered to be "an incipient organ of spiritual perception" . . .

The disciple has to awaken five *lataif*, receive illumination through five of the seven subtle centres of communication. The method, presided over by the instructor (Sheikh), is to concentrate the consciousness upon certain areas of the body and head, each area being linked with the *latifa* faculties. As each *latifa* is activated through exercises, the consciousness of the disciple changes to accommodate the greater potentialities of his mind. He is breaking through the blindness which makes the ordinary man captive to life and being as it ordinarily seems to be. In more than one sense, therefore, the activation of the centres is producing a new man . . . We must note that the activation of the *lataif* is only a part of a very comprehensive development, and cannot be carried out as an individual study . . . The actual meanings of these locations is something which comes as a special realization of the Sufi when the *latifa* in question is being activated. It is only at the outset of the study that they are given these locations. (34)

Following the activation and awakening of the *lataif* there is an array of experiences involving the inner senses:

The five inner senses begin to function as the inner life of the individual is awakened. The impalpable food starts to exercise a nutritious effect. The inner senses resemble in a way the physical ones, but "they are to them as copper to gold." As individuals all vary in their capacities, the Sufis at this stage are developed in some ways and not in others. It is usual for a number of inner faculties and special abilities to develop concurrently and harmoniously. Changes in mood may occur, but they are not at all like the changes in mood which undeveloped people feel. Mood becomes a part of real personality, and the crudeness of ordinary moods is replaced by the alternation and interaction of higher moods, of which the lower ones are considered to be reflections. The Sufi's conception of wisdom and ignorance undergoes a change. Rumi puts it like this: "If a man were entirely wise, and had no ignorance, he would be destroyed by it. Therefore ignorance is laudable, because it means continued existence. Ignorance is the collaborator of wisdom, in the sense of alternation, as night and day complement one another." (35)

There are significant dangers in opening subtle centres of perception without proper preparation or guidance by an experienced teacher. Random experimentation can cause irreparable harm both physically, psychologically and spiritually:

The illumination or activation of one or more of the centers may take place partially or accidentally. When this happens, the individual may gain for a time a deepening in intuitive knowledge corresponding with the *latifa* involved. But if this is not a part of comprehensive development, the mind will try, vainly, to equilibrate itself around this hypertrophy, an impossible task. The consequences can be very dangerous, and include, like all one-sided mental phenomena, exaggerated ideas of self-importance, the surfacing of undesirable qualities, or a deterioration

of consciousness following an access of ability . . . The non-balanced development produces people who may have the illusion that they are seers or sages. Due to the inherent power of the *latifa*, such an individual may appear to the world at large to be worthy of following. In Sufi diagnosis, this type of personality accounts for a great number of false metaphysical teachers. They may, of course, themselves be convinced that they are genuine. This is because the habit of self-deception or of deceiving others has not been transmuted. Rather it has been supported and magnified by the awakening but still undirected new organ, the *latifa*. (36)

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