

Visualise
the thousand-
petalled
Lotus.

Breathe, Relax, Feel, Watch

&
Allow

The Kripalu Approach to the Chakras

The New Year is a season for rejuvenation and reflection. What better way than to honour yourself in the practice of yoga and chakra balancing? It is so easy to hear everyone but ourselves, to pay attention to the external world and never journey within. Working to release blockages through the chakras is helpful to the mind, body and spirit. In this practice, with the use of asanas and Biju chanting, I will teach you the ancient way of releasing the chakras, which can so often become blocked with modern-day problems and anxieties. This is also an excellent relaxation technique for all levels and is extremely effective as a way to increase personal awareness and consciousness. By wilfully choosing to enter into this practice, we can give ourselves the gift of totally revitalising and renewing our energy.

In yoga, seven Master Chakras are considered to be the most fundamental; these are the seven I will be focusing on in this article. Before I begin to guide you in this work, I would like to thank Jo Presley, my student, for her generosity in modelling and Nicholas Down for the gift of his photography. As you enter into this practice, remember that each chakra has its own level of consciousness and Biju chant. If you follow this practice you will find it has a profound affect on the body and the spirit as the energy of each chakra is released.

Create a quiet place to reflect and meditate. Scan your body and see if there is a region that is calling for your attention. Prepare yourself to listen rather than think. Give your body permission to lead the way. Let it speak to you, rather than you entering into the practice with a preconception or an assumption of what it may have to say. Remember that the wisdom contained within you is beyond your wildest imaginings.

Dirgha Pranayama

In each asana I have suggested the use of Dirgha breath, also known as three-part breath or the yogic breath. For those new to yoga, the Dirgha breathing technique is done with long, slow, deep breaths while focusing on the three chambers of the lungs. The first chamber is in the abdominal region, or the bottom chamber. You can tell you're breathing into this chamber when your belly inflates like a balloon on the inhalation and relaxes or contracts on the exhalation. The second chamber is the thoracic region of the ribs and middle chest. When you breathe into this chamber, your ribcage and the intercostal muscles (the muscles between the ribs) expand and contract like an accordion. The third chamber is known as the clavicular region (named after the clavicle bones or collarbones) and is located in the upper chest and shoulders. This breath fills the upper region of the lungs. If you were to place your fingers on the soft tissue directly above your collarbones, you will feel your breath pressing up into that area. As you inhale, fill the three chambers of the lungs beginning with the abdominal region, then the thoracic region, then the clavicular region. Feel each chamber expanding as much as possible. As you exhale, allow the breath to flow out of the lungs in the most relaxed and natural way. Just before the end of the exhalation, contract the abdominal muscles, squeezing the residual air out of the lungs so that they empty completely.

The following are some suggestions or questions you might like to ask yourself to balance the chakras:

What I need you to free is:	There is not enough:
It would help to bring balance if you would:	Please stop doing:
I want more:	Please start doing:
There is too much:	I love you
	Thank you

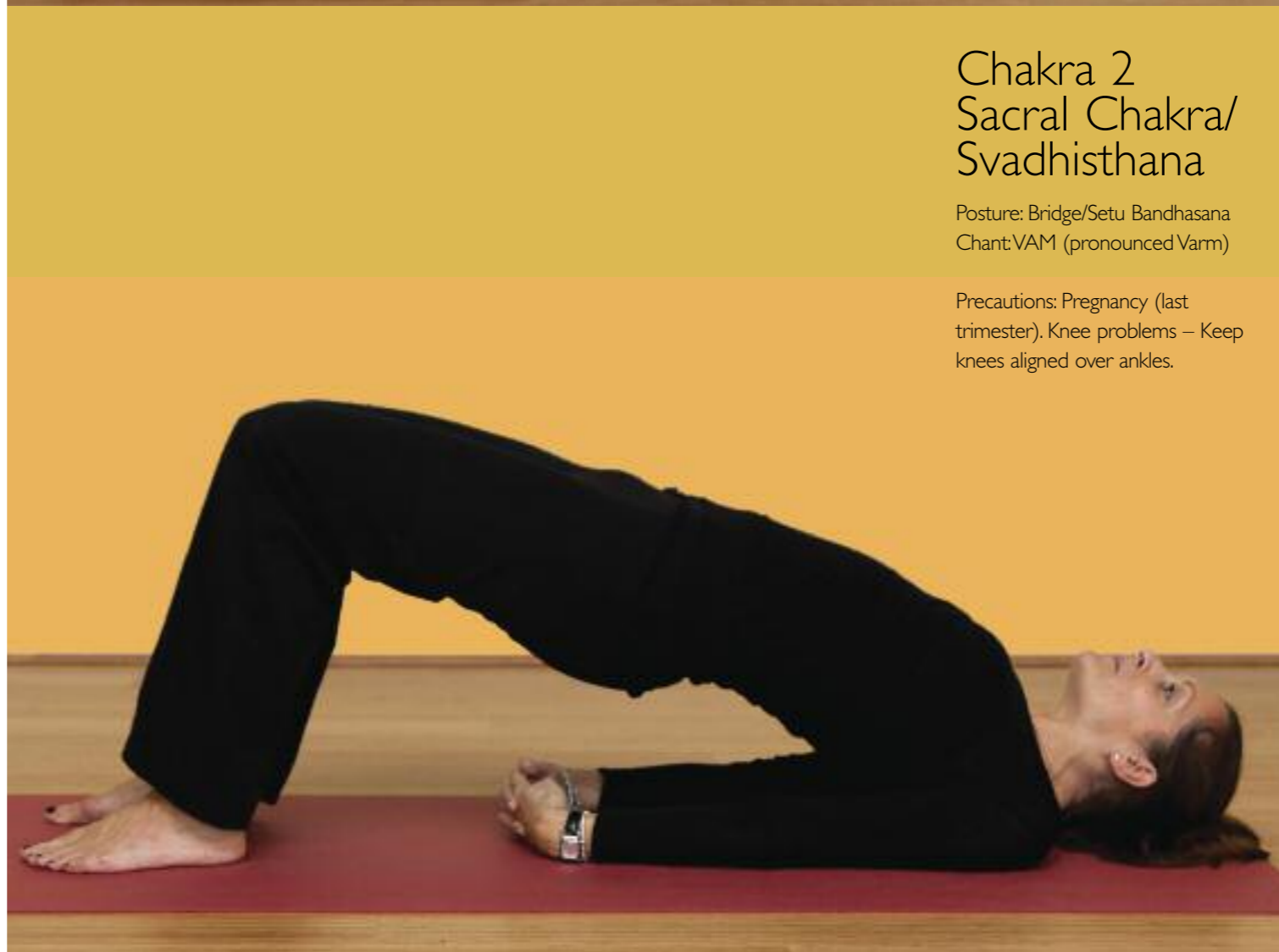
Each chakra is represented here with an asana and a Biju chant for you to chant out loud or silently as you breathe. Repeat the chant as often as you wish whilst holding the asana. Please listen to your body and release whenever your body feels complete. Do not strain your body.



Chakra 1 The Root Chakra / Muladhara

Posture: Great Seal/Maha Mudra
Chant: LAM (Pronounced Larm)

Precautions: Weak or stiff back muscles. Sciatica – practise carefully. Pregnancy – use a tie and avoid constricting belly.



Chakra 2 Sacral Chakra/ Svadhithana

Posture: Bridge/Setu Bandhasana
Chant: VAM (pronounced Varm)

Precautions: Pregnancy (last trimester). Knee problems – Keep knees aligned over ankles.

This chakra lets go of fear – brings strength and confidence.

- Bring your awareness to the base of your spine, coccyx and perineum.
- From a seated position, extend your right leg in front of you; bend your left knee, bringing the sole of the left foot to inside edge of the right thigh.
- Keep facing the extended foot. Inhale, raise arms overhead, shoulder-width apart, inhale, lift abdominal muscles in and up core lift, exhale, hinge forward at the hips keeping your back straight.
- Bring your hands down to hold ball of foot.
- Breathe deeply, centre your torso over extended leg and drop left shoulder down in alignment with right shoulder.
- Breathe 5-7 Dirgha breaths and chant LAM .
- To release, continue to lift abdominals in and up, slowly raise the arms up overhead keeping your spine straight. Relax for 2-3 breaths.
- Switch legs and repeat on the other side.
- Visualise the colour red, the primordial fire. Feel the connection to mother earth, feel a sense of release.
- Breathe into the base of your spine, feel your spine, release healing prana into this area.

This chakra focuses on the lower abdomen; up to navel and lower back, genitals, womb, sacrum, pubic bone, ovaries, prostate and pelvis.

- Lie on your back with knees bent, feet close to your butt and your palms close down to your sides, feet and knees hip-width apart.
- Inhale and lift abdominal muscles in and up (core lift), lengthen from crown of head, elongate back of the neck and tuck the tailbone under; press down through the soles of your feet, exhale and press pelvis, waist and butt upward, press down through soles of feet, feel your weight shifting toward your shoulders as you press down through the feet and up through your pelvis.
- Interlace your fingers and press out through your knuckles, straightening your arms.
- Walk your shoulders together and open your chest. Breathe 5-7 Dirgha breaths and chant VAM. To release: release your hands, open the space between your shoulders and with an exhalation roll down maintaining core lift to control your descent. Relax for 2-3 breaths.

This chakra energises procreation, passion, change, creativity, desire, sensuality, a sense of balanced emotional feelings and responsibility. See a beautiful orange colour flowing in this area, bringing the gifts of creativity. Imagination and personal power. Breathe into the sacrum – feel healing prana in this area.

Chakra 3 Solar Plexus Chakra/ Manipura

Posture: Sphinx
Chant: RAM (Pronounced Ram)

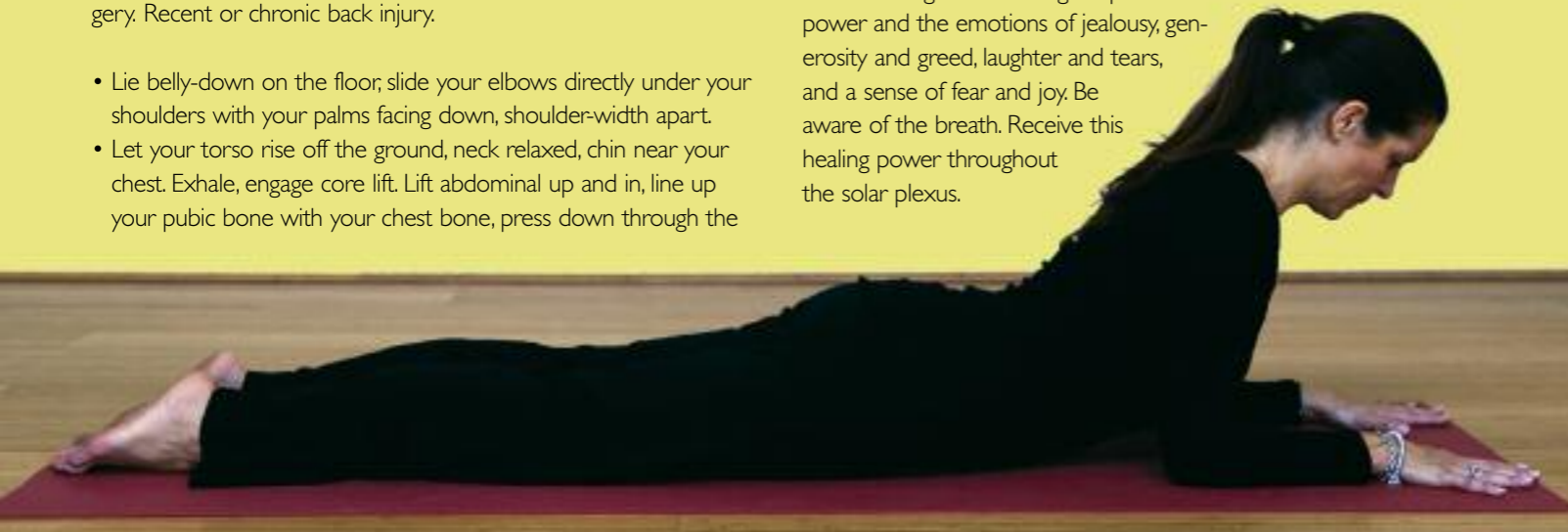
Precautions: Pregnancy (after third month). Recent abdominal surgery. Recent or chronic back injury.

- Lie belly-down on the floor; slide your elbows directly under your shoulders with your palms facing down, shoulder-width apart.
- Let your torso rise off the ground, neck relaxed, chin near your chest. Exhale, engage core lift. Lift abdominal up and in, line up your pubic bone with your chest bone, press down through the

pubic bone, pelvis and lower abdominals, roll your shoulders back and down; gaze down between your hands.

- Breathe 5-7 Dirgha breaths and chant the sound of RAM. Hold in this simple sphinx position. To release, slide your elbows out to the sides and release down slowly. Relax for 2-3 breaths.

The colour yellow represents the solar plexus chakra just behind the naval up to the solar plexus, the sunshine chakra. It affects the stomach, mid back, small intestine, liver, gall bladder, pancreas, spleen and adrenal glands. It energises personal power and the emotions of jealousy, generosity and greed, laughter and tears, and a sense of fear and joy. Be aware of the breath. Receive this healing power throughout the solar plexus.



Chakra 4 The Heart Chakra/Anahata

Posture: Fish/ Matsyasana
Chant: YAM (Pronounced Yam)

Precautions: Weak back/neck muscles: Practise carefully using rolled blanket from tailbone to base of head and cushions under head.

- Lie on your back with your legs straight and your feet together; slide your arms underneath each side of your body, palms down and thumbs touching.
- Press out through your heels, as you exhale engage core lift lifting the abdominals up and in, lift onto your elbows and the top or

the back of your head – your weight is supported by your elbows and your sit-bones (in your butt).

- Breathe 5-7 Dirgha breaths and chant the sound of YAM.
- To release: Exhale, maintain core lift to sustain the release, slide your chin to your chest and let your arms down slowly. Relax for 2-3 breaths.

The heart chakra is centre to all the chakras. The physical chakra is the cardiovascular system. It is the balance between higher and lower chakras. The heart chakra is represented with the colour green. It is located in the mid chest behind the physical heart. It is associated with feelings and expressions of love, unconditional love, compassion and a capacity to forgive. Love, happiness and choices that are planted here, grow. Just Be. Witness the breath. Bring balance to the emotional body.



Chakra 5 The Throat Chakra/ Visshudha

Posture: Half Shoulder Stand/Ardha Sarvangasana
Chant: HAM (Pronounced harm)

Precautions: Un-medicated high/low blood pressure, chronic nasal, sinus or thyroid disorders. Any eye or ear problems including detached retina. Cervical or shoulder strain. Pregnancy: press soles of feet against a wall. Menstruation: Do not raise your pelvis higher than your head.

- Lie on your back with knees bent, your feet close to your butt and palms down close to sides.
- Exhale, press palms down, swing knees up toward forehead and support hips in hands, thumbs toward back of the rib-cage and baby fingers towards the spine.
- Exhale, extend legs up overhead and engage core lift lifting the abdominals up and in.

Breathe 5-7 Dirgha breaths and chant HAM.

- To release: Exhale: Release your hands and press your palms down as you bend your knees and come out of the asana and back to the starting position. Relax for 2-3 breaths.
- There are many variations to this asana. Our model is using a blanket under her shoulders to protect the cervical spine and her arms are down. She is holding the posture at her edge. There is no perfect posture in yoga – only what feels good for you.

The throat chakra is represented by the colour blue.

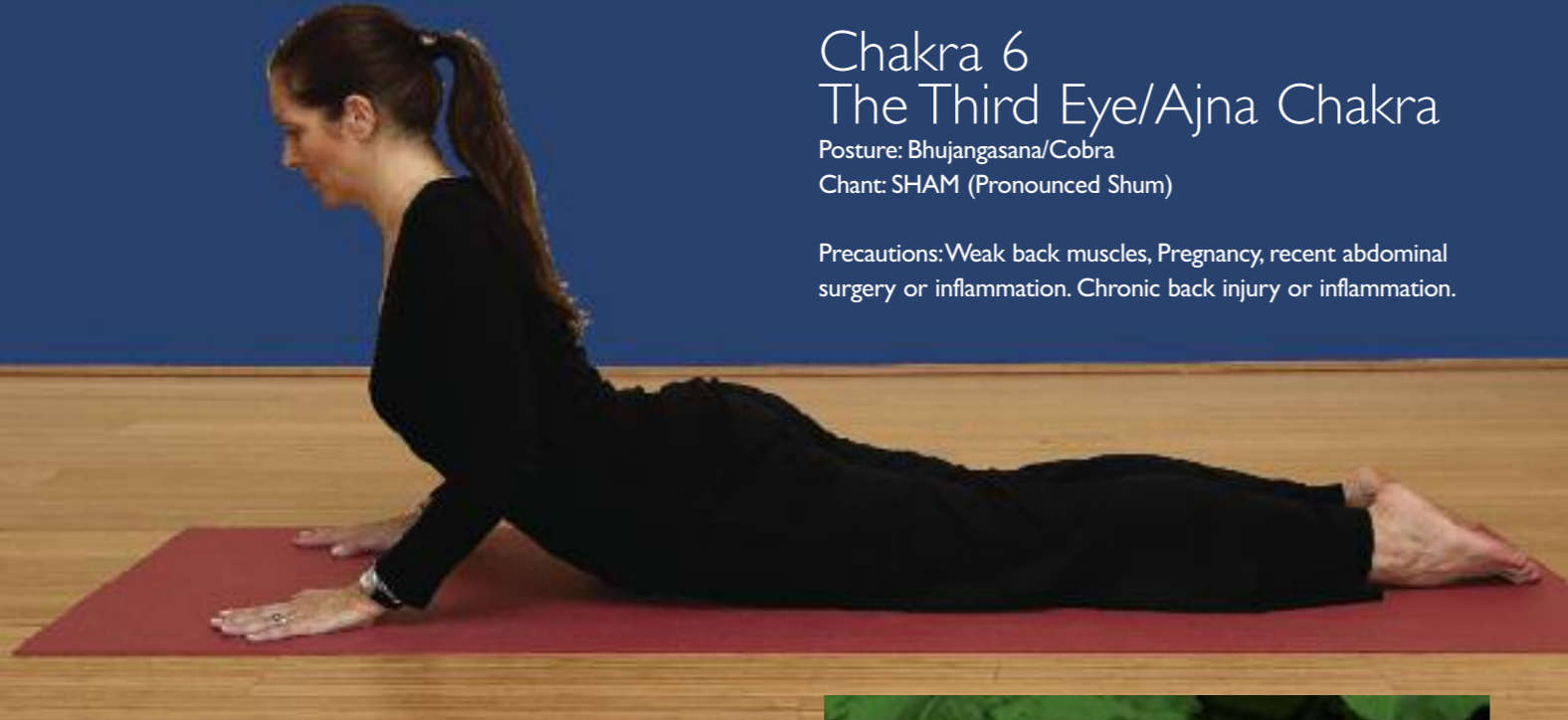
The physical chakra is the throat and thyroid, the tonsils and the voice. It influences the ability to communicate, to speak the truth, to let go of unspoken words, to bring communication and to follow your dreams. Expressions of sadness and higher willpower are found here. Be aware of the gentle and quiet breath. Contract the back of your throat or tongue and hear the sound of Ujjai breath – the sound of the ocean. The deep blue ocean.



Chakra 6 The Third Eye/Ajna Chakra

Posture: Bhujangasana/Cobra
Chant: SHAM (Pronounced Shum)

Precautions: Weak back muscles, Pregnancy, recent abdominal surgery or inflammation. Chronic back injury or inflammation.



- Lie face-down with your legs in a position of ease, no more than hip-width apart, palms on the floor at chest level, elbows pointing upward close to your body.
- Inhale: press out through toes, exhale lift abdominals up and in core lift press down through pubic bone, pelvis and lower abdominals, press down through the palms, begin to raise your forehead, nose and chin, and raise your upper body off the floor.
- Press out through the crown of your head and neck and follow the curve of your spine. Keep the pubic bone on the floor.
- Drop your shoulders down, away from your ears, keep your elbows in close to your body and slightly bent.
- Breathe deeply, rolling your shoulders down, press your chest forward. Breathe 5-7 Dirgha breaths and chant SHAM.
- To release: Exhale, maintain core lift as you extend your torso forward and down to the floor. Release core lift. Relax for 2-3 breaths.

The physical chakra is the brain, mental processes, and thoughts. It affects the pineal and pituitary glands and the eyes. The colour is indigo – a deep blue. The ability to perceive truth, vision and insight, to recognise delusion. See the unseen and know the unknown. To meditate on this area, breathe softly and rhythmically – let your breath Just Be.

Chakra 7 Crown of The Head/ Sahasrara Chakra

Posture: Sitting in Lotus

Chant: OM

- Sit with your legs crossed, your spine lengthened. You might like to sit on the edge of a cushion, blanket or block.
- If you are not comfortable in traditional Lotus find an alternative where your spine is still lengthened. Sit as though you mean it. Inhale, exhale, drop your shoulders and smile. Chant OM.



Integration of the whole self: body/mind/spirit. Bliss – a union with the cosmos.

Connection to spirituality. Cerebral cortex, beyond time. Visualise here the thousand-petalled Lotus. When you feel ready, lie down in Shavasana/Corpse pose and allow your body to relax. Breathe. Relax. Feel. Watch. And Allow.

Suzie Jennings is Director of Kripalu (UK)