

On Becoming a Yogi Coach—Part I

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Abstract

This article proposes a conceptual understanding on becoming a Yogi coach. Yogic perspective is presented to help coaches become better coaches by being able to resonate with their coachees. This resonance is achieved by the coach developing *Sakhi* (friend) and *SAkshi* (witness/meditative) *bhAva* (state of mind) as their inner anchorage. The current article examines the nature of conversations through the lens of Patanjali Yoga sutras and details out developing *Sakhi bhAva* and *SAkshi bhAva* using the Chakra principles. Discussion is done on the nature of conversations, the inner drama, and its consequences. The article brings out the seven types of conversation and the potential transformation a Yogi Coach can offer. Yogic view is proposed to enhance coaching conversations to facilitate deeper inquiry, explore possibilities and aid inner transformation by the coachee. This article is the first article of the two-part series on becoming a Yogi coach.

Keywords

Yoga, *Antaranga* Yoga, *chakra*, coaching, conversations, listening, neuroscience, transformation

The translation of key Sanskrit words/concepts into English suffers from the possibility of inadequately communicating the depth of the ideas. The reader is advised to keep this in mind while reading the article.

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Introduction

Coaching today has become a critical part of leadership and managerial development. According to International Coach Federation, Coaching essentially is ‘Partnering with coachees in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential’. The conversations a coach has with the coachee are fundamental to the coaching process. This article presents a yogic perspective for the coaches to become better coaches by being able to resonate with their coachees and introduces the idea of ‘Yogi Coach’. Developing *Sakhi bhAva* and *SAkshi bhAva*, that is, a friend who is anchored in a deeply meditative mind using the *chakra* (energy centre) principles based in yoga helps the coach bring about an inner anchorage and potentially transform the coaching conversation. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are explored around the subtle aspects of *Antaranga* Yoga (the yoga of the inner faculties).

Specifically, this article

1. examines the nature of conversations, the inner drama and its consequences, through the lens of *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*,
2. advances the notion of seven types of conversation that become possible,
3. explicates the *chakra* framework in yoga and applies this to the discussion on seven types of conversation, and
4. connects the conversation types with contemporary research on the Human Brain.

Nature of Conversations

The Story and Our Sense of Self

The stories we tell ourselves are a powerful determinant of our identity and create a lens through which we actively engage with the world. We construct these inner narratives as responses to the three existential questions:

Who am I?

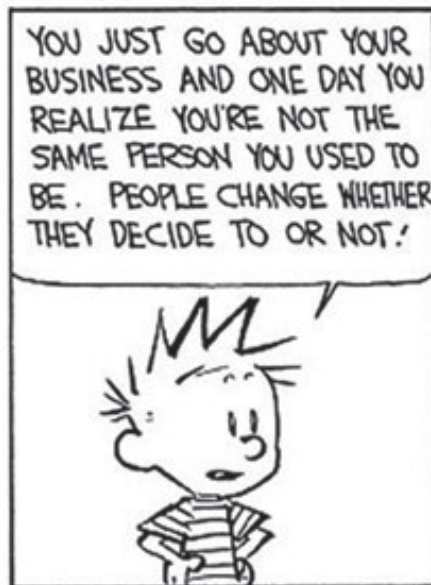
Where am I?

Why am I here?

We weave these stories vigorously and implicitly as we live life. These stories have no single origin. Some are swallowed from our familial context, some are modelled on prevalent social conditions and some threads are rendered from our experiences. We swim in this pond of our own making and we convince ourselves that these are true and factual about ourselves, families, societies, nations and the world. These stories crystallise as assumptions, beliefs and conclusions that are particular to us. So comforting indeed. This is a common, human condition. Our birth is fitted in as another narration in the larger storyline of our family. We are seen as a continuation of a culture or a nation. Belonging to the family and society or nation means inheriting and assuming these external stories as part of our identity and integrating them into our personality.

We can evolve and blossom to our full potential when we discover a way to step out of this little pond of ours. It is when we acknowledge the narratives that we spin about ourselves and the world as mere constructs, then we traverse the path of becoming what we are meant to be

How do we build our own story? We 'Individuate' when we start authoring and narrating our own stories. Often while building our original story, we run into challenges, collisions and self-doubts. We can muster the courage to master our own stories by questioning the long-held or taken-for-granted—assumptions, beliefs and conclusions about ourselves. When we discover the transitory nature of stories themselves, we develop the ability to perceive the world and ourselves in new and creative ways. At this juncture, we replace the old stories with new stories that come from within ourselves. Thus, the beginner's mind emerges, undergoes transformation and we indulge in an ecstatic engagement with an ever-evolving world.



Inner Work—The Key to Transformation

This inner work gives us the skill to rewrite old stories and we can joyfully declare that 'My story' is not static, it is ex-static. We realise that we have made our stories static because like King Canute, we wish

to control the ebb and flow of Nature. We wish to ensure that the past that was beautiful and joyous remains forever the same, and that which was ugly and painful never returns. This attempt at control has no impact whatsoever on the emergent reality. It only reinforces the inner fortress we have crafted through our invariant story.

The world around us is not chaotic, it is ever-changing as that is its very nature. It is only when we dismantle the walls that imprison us that we engage with a sense of flow. Our story is changing with every genuine encounter. We can hear the story of others and value it for what it is, empathise with its pathos and celebrate its joys. ‘Our stories’ emerge and nurture our hearts and a whole ‘creative story’ unfolds with every lived moment.

This state of flow and harmony with the world as it manifests is Ananda. This is the goal of all yogic practices.

How Does This Transformation Happen?

When we contemplate our own inner chatter (stories), it becomes clear to us that a drama is being enacted within. The most prominent dramatis personae are the Victim, the Judge (and his able assistants namely, the Prosecutor and the Defendant), and the Guardian. Occasionally, in order to escape the cacophony of this chatter, we listen to the seductive fantasies of the Beckoner. This inner drama/chatter is our story.

The ‘script’ that these archetypal figures play out is very repetitive, like any soap opera. If we distil the lines that each of these figures voice, they sound something like this:

The Victim: poor me! ... I am always misunderstood! ... watch out, I will be hurt again...!

The Judge: I should not have...! I must...! I deserve to be punished...!

Prosecutor: I am guilty because...;

Defendant: I am not guilty because....

The Guardian: I am ready and vigilant...; the world is full of potential danger....

The Beckoner: let me just run away, just have fun....

Merry-go-round it is. They chase each other and slowly but surely forge a nice groove around us. These voices create insecurity, defensiveness and suspicion within us.

Once the groove is tightened our inner cacophony sounds like a broken record, and the groove becomes a prison. Our story is now a concrete reality.

Until, like Winnie the Pooh, we wake up one morning and say, ‘I have discovered the enemy, the enemy is us’. Till then, we are rooted in the prison of our own story. It is a familiar narrative that breaks out with sincere regularity—We ‘know’ who we are (‘a person with great potential...’), we ‘know’ what the world is like (‘dangerous, untrustworthy...’), and so on.

The more we listen to this story, the lonelier and more helpless we become. A clear ramification of being imprisoned in our own story is that we are insensitive to the subtle changes going on in the world and in people around us. We see what we want to see, we hear what we tell ourselves. Our engagement and conversations with others mirror the very tune that the broken record within is singing. We are

cloistered in this enclosure of our own making. We seek the help of others when we recognise that we are stuck. This is when the conversation with the one we seek help from becomes a coaching conversation.

Conversation 1

Seeker: I can't figure out the right project to work on. Every time I choose a path I start second-guessing myself. I get excited but then start seeing the problems with my choice. I get stuck in a cycle of the grass always feeling greener.

Enabler: Tell me more about this feeling.

Seeker: I feel that I have so much to offer the world but I'll never be good enough. I then get caught with a feeling of hesitancy and unsureness. One part of me pushes me to act, I begin with gusto, but at the first sign of a problem I become diffident and pull back. The self-doubt sometimes becomes very high and I feel blocked. And then I begin to criticise myself for not being decisive, for not being assertive and so on. I seem to be stuck with this pattern and it is making me dysfunctional.

Dear reader, can you map the key players of this inner drama? Let's try to understand it through the yogic lens.

Types of Engagement from the Yogic Lens

When we look at this phenomenon through the yogic lens, we see how the process of getting imprisoned in the inner drama relates to the notion of a distorted psyche. Yogic thought speaks about four kinds of orientations or attitudes of the psyche:

- *ati yogam*: Where the psyche over-engages (*ati*) with the external world and over invests in some evocations that it craves for, or becomes vigilant to provocations it holds in aversion.
- *hlna yogam*: Where the psyche withdraws (*hlna*) from the external world and engages minimally because it clings to the old patterns and suppresses the intensity of the evocations and provocations it experiences.
- *viyogam*: Where the psyche disengages (*vi*) fully from the outer world, and completely represses inner evocation.
- *yogam*: where the psyche encounters the world with the same level of intensity and quality as the evocation/provocation, and returns to an undisturbed state the moment the invitation/ challenge has ended. Its responses are accurate, appropriate and leave the context nourished, while experiencing wholeness within.

Obviously, a conversation that reflects a psyche in the state of *yogam* is what one aspires for and needs for coaching. However, to access the *yogam state*, a practice that enables one to embody *Sakhi (friend)-Sakshi (witness)* state of mind is necessary.



The Sakhi and the SAKshi

We don't have to be resigned to looking at ourselves as broken cases or damaged goods. The hope lies in letting the other voices within be revealed and appreciated—the voices of the secure self, the friend and the witness, namely *Sakhi* and the *SAKshi*.

In the Indic traditions, the *Sakhi* is a person who with great integrity and care will remove the veil that covers our eyes and will peel away the mask that we believe is our face. When one learns to listen to the *Sakhi* one awakens to one's deepest potentials, dreams and the call of adventure waiting just outside the prison walls. When we let the voice of the *Sakhi* speak to us, we carve out windows and doors from the walls of the imprisoning box and a fresh breeze blows in. New energies that we have not nurtured because of our fears or excessive criticality enter our space with the promise of expansion. They bring new stories of lands unknown to us. We are intrigued, we become curious about the unexplored and the unaccustomed, we dare to enter new arenas. We begin to recognise new possibilities within us and nurture them. This awareness and transformation may be subtle but has a profound inner and outer imprint.

This is not a swift flip, as the prison keepers of insecurity do not let go easily. The Victim becomes shrill, the Judge becomes strident and the Guardian becomes hyper-protective. By persisting, the inner noise subsides, and the inner conviction grows, thus we outgrow the loop of the broken record and our new world diversifies and flourishes. We can glimpse the possibilities of new conversations, new ways of engagement and healthy relationships. These are not the fantasies and unreal daydreams of the Beckoner. And we begin to search for ways to make the voices of the prison keepers quiet, to rewrite their script and reassure our insecure self.

It is here that we need to take a big step; we need to listen to, and value, the silence of the meditator, the *SAKshi*. The *SAKshi* is the energy of Consciousness, the awareness that is the light of the transcendent self. The *SAKshi* is quiet, still and aware of every nuance of the self. But this very silence and stillness of the *SAKshi* make it difficult for us to become aware of and value its presence. It is only in times of despair when all our strivings have come to a nought that we give up and almost by accident the inner cacophony ends and the silence of the meditator, the *SAKshi*, resonates within the psyche.

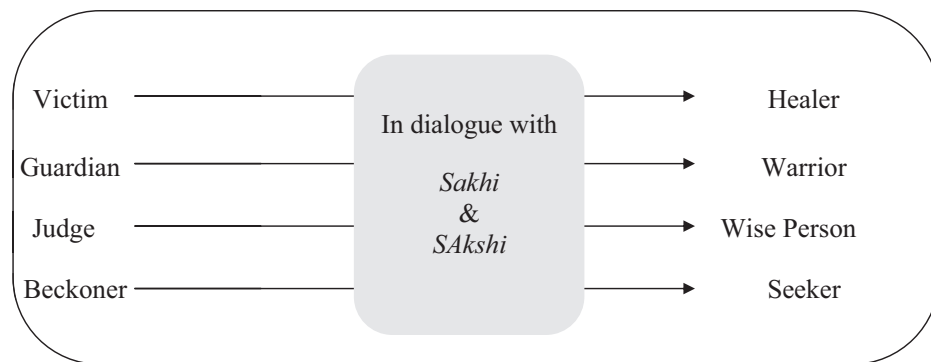


Figure 1. Schematic Representation of Potential Transformation a Yogi Coach Can Offer.

Source: The authors.

Guided by the *Sakhi* we discover that these archetypal figures, these prison guards, are not broken parts of us to discard. If only they could be free of the tiring drama, they act out inside us, they crave to play important, life-giving roles. The Victim possesses the capacity to heal the pain and sorrow of oneself and others. The Guardian yearns to stand up for justice. The Judge sees her ability to discern rules from the wisdom and provide guidance. The Beckoner, no longer needing to escape, can seek out creative options. Anchored in the *Sakhi* and *SAkshi*, the very parts of us we once felt constrained by now manifest our dreams (Figure 1).

Let us now re-look at the prior conversation and see how it transforms in dialogue with *Sakhi-SAkshi*.

Conversation #2

Enabler: This voice in you that's always looking for greener pastures—What does this voice in you feel is at stake?

Seeker: These are dreams I have always had but I have found it difficult to bring to fruition. When I listen to them I experience a lot of energy and enthusiasm to act. However, the voice of caution also comes up and I hesitate. Then I become anxious and the energy and enthusiasm get dampened. The inner blame game starts!

Enabler: Could you look at the voice of caution as a friend trying to help you?

Seeker: The lines 'it is better to be safe than to be sorry' and 'don't try to be a hero you will get overwhelmed' have been repeated to me so many times that I feel disheartened when the voice of caution comes up.

Enabler: Let's slow down and see if we can stay with the dream, the potential that has an opportunity to manifest. What capacities will enable its fruition from within you and what help can you seek from the outside? Can we examine this first and set aside the doubts for now? We can then listen to the voice of caution as a friend helping you to be grounded in reality and at the same time retaining your enthusiasm for action.

Seeker: But I become anxious the moment this voice comes up.

Enabler: Yes, I understand. That happens to me too. I have learnt to slow down when I hear the voice warning me of dangers and reminding me of past failures. I listen to what it is saying and just note them down as I hear them. Then I have a conversation with this voice. I ask 'Are these memories of the past or are these real possibilities facing me?' I then thank this voice and say 'Yes I will listen to you, but, if I have been through this before, what are the lessons I can take forward?' and as I have this conversation and I give space to this voice, I see that keeping this voice beside me to consult every now and again is very helpful. I am able to plan much better, and with more reality appraisal. It is only when I fight this voice, put on a brave front and so on that it starts becoming shrill. Would you like to try this out for yourself?

Anchored in the *SAkshi*, we listen differently and without filters. Conversations that were avoided because they might reinforce a hurt, or reignite domination and exploitation are heard clearly. We say 'yes!' and 'no!' with gentle firmness. We make choices of 'What to say?', 'When?', and 'to whom?' standing on a ground of wisdom. We engage in contemplative conversations and dialogues, we enter healing spaces, and we become creative.

The Seven Types of Conversation

Let us revisit the inner drama that gets played out before looking at the kinds of conversations that ensue when our inner space is dominated by each of the archetypal figures:

- When the Victim dominates the inner stage, the story of being misunderstood or being let down by people we trusted gets voiced.
- If the Guardian holds the stage, we brace ourselves and become trigger happy.
- When the Judge takes over, we hear the endless debate between the Prosecutor and the Defendant while we sit anxiously in the accused box waiting to be condemned!
- Unable to cope with this cacophony, the Beckoner indulges in fantasy or escape.

The more we listen to this inner drama, the more lonely and helpless we become.

One consequence of being imprisoned in our own narrative is that we are insensitive to the subtle changes going on in the world and in people around us. Our conversation with others reflects the tune that the broken record within is singing.

- When the Victim dominates the inner space, we engage in what can be termed as the ‘cactus conversation’. One part of us anticipates being hurt, we listen from a hypersensitive place. We keep the door of our inner cave open so that we can quickly shut out the source of potential hurt.
- When the Guardian dominates the inner space, we engage in ‘competitive conversations’. We listen so that we can quickly detect an opportunity to attack, or for danger to defend from. The meaning-making central concern is to come out the Victor. Truth, trust and meaning are the casualties.
- When the Judge imposes its presence, we engage in a ‘coercive conversation’. The rules and norms legitimised by the group we belong to become the lens through which the interactions are filtered. Staying true to the ‘commandments’ of the group is the primary concern.
- When the Beckoner takes centre stage, at best we engage in a ‘cognitive conversation’. Great care is taken to remain uninvolved and emotionally distant. The issue is quickly converted into a problem to be solved, and solutions are proffered. But the whole exercise lacks conviction and the solutions offered do not resolve the root causes.

These conversations keep us locked in a single story, our own! Each of the archetypal energies represents a particular set of assumptions and conclusions about ourselves and our world. To illustrate, the Guardian energy reflects the idea that the world is a dangerous place and that one must be braced up to fight. The assumptions and conclusions we implicitly base our meaning making process remain hidden. As long as we remain blind to our meaning-making process, every engagement with others subtly reinforces the story we tell ourselves. The deeper the groove around this story, the more fixed our patterns of feeling, thought and action.

Transforming Conversations—*Sakhi* and *Sakshi*

The *Sakhi* helps us to awaken to the voice of the Dreamer—our *divya rUpa* (divine form), the inner genius that yearns to unfold. The Dreamer hears the call of adventure waiting just outside the prison walls of egocentric living. When we let the voice of the *Sakhi* speak to us, we cut out windows and doors from the walls of the imprisoning box and a fresh breeze blows through them. Strangers enter our space and we recognise new possibilities in us. They bring new stories of lands unknown to us and our world expands. Our conversations change, we become curious, we enter new spaces, the inner noise subsides and we discover a new world brimming with exciting possibilities.

Compassionate Conversations begin. We start listening to ourselves and others with curiosity and compassion. When we listen to others, the victim within them, we hear the pain and stay with the pathos evoked in the conversation without giving into pity, or to our inner judge, or to the inner beconer.

When we learn to listen from the inner space of the *Sakhi*, the inner drama takes a surprising turn. The broken record repairs itself, and the voice of the Dreamer is heard clearly; it has a nice lilt to it and a natural rhythm. We appreciate poetry and music; and we tap our feet, ready to dance. When the prison keepers do speak up, they are muted, relevant and balanced.

Then, the heroic self-waiting to emerge starts unfolding. The Victim becomes the Healer, the Guardian becomes the Warrior, the Judge becomes the Wise person, the Beckoner becomes the Seeker. Beauty and love blossom within and shine through.

Creative Conversations begin. The inner genius is nurtured, and one begins to inspire others to listen to the dreamer within them. One experiences the blossoming of a new context.

‘My narrative’ is not static, it is ex-static, it is changing with every genuine encounter. One can hear ‘the story of the other’ and value it for what it is, empathise with its pathos and celebrate its joys. ‘Our stories’ emerge and nurture our hearts and a whole ‘creative narrative’ unfolds with every lived moment.

As we trust the silence of the Meditator our greatest potentials reveal themselves, heroic action becomes possible. We approach the realms of *Contemplative Conversations*. These conversations have a very high degree of resonance and because both the speaker and the listener are open to the awakening of deeper intelligence. A profound insight that is self-transforming characterises the exchange.

As this process deepens, silent communion where the two lose all sense of separateness and distinction comes to be.

Coaching Conversations

Coaching conversations are a deliberate attempt to enter into a dialogue that will enable the coachee to change the inner patterns that come in the way of becoming the best one can be. This does not ensure that the space

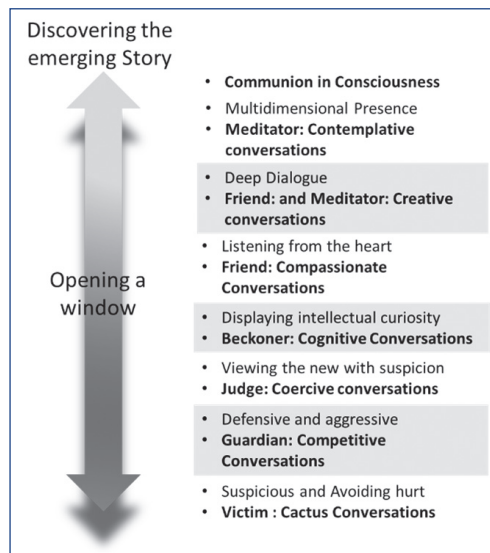


Figure 2. Schematic Representation of the Seven Types of Conversations (The Outer Conversations Reflect the Inner Anchors of the Self).

Source: The authors.

created reflects a deep presence from the coach and that compassionate, contemplative and conscious conversations take place. However, the intent is to come as close as possible to conscious conversations (Figure 2).

Coaching is all about the quality of the conversations that happen between the coach and the coachee. While skills are an important component of the way the coach approaches the conversation, the inner location from which the coach operates is the key. A subtle container is created in the meeting of two people and this subtle energy impacts the nature of the conversation. It either constricts it by evoking each other's defence mechanisms or it inspires and expands each other to discover new horizons.

The inner location of the coach has a large part to play in creating this ambience. The greater the depth and multidimensionality of the coach's presence, the greater the scope for the conversation to be meaningful to the coachee. It is therefore very important for the coach to be sensitive to their own inner processes. Subliminal triggers awaken one's archetypal figures. It is only when one is able to pick up the origination of thought from its most subtle movement that one can exercise control over its expression. The early signals of what is getting triggered can be felt in one's body and in one's breath long before one becomes conscious of it. At this point, one can at best suppress the evocation. The coach is then in a state of inner conflict with one part of the self-becoming vigilant of another, the manifesting part of the self. The situation is then ripe for habitual patterns of feelings, thoughts and actions to take over. The Victim, the Guardian, the Judge and the Beckoner are the masters of this situation. Mindfulness is compromised and the ability to attentively listen to the coachee is in question.

Learning how to be established in the *Sakhi* and *SAkshi* within is then the most critical determinant of the quality of presence, the nature of the container and the flow of energy between the coach and the coachee. If the coaching conversation must leave the coachee feeling heard, healed, empowered and inspired, the coach must be in a state of meditation yoga.

How then does the coach transform themselves so that they can sustain a yogic state while engaging in a coaching conversation?

To understand the correlations between the inner states of mind and modern research, we look at what the yoga and mind sciences say about sustaining meditative attention.

Yoga and Mind Sciences

The yogic wisdom has looked at the person in a holistic manner and devised a psycho-somatic, psychosocial and psychospiritual lens through which to comprehend and work with the inner processes of a person engaged in an encounter with the world. This not only enables one to understand and therefore develop a measure of inner control, but it also enables one to alter habitual patterns of engagement through various practices. It is very important for coaches to undertake these practices so that their psychosomatic, psychosocial and psychospiritual systems are cleansed of old dysfunctional patterns. This inner cleansing leads to multidimensional presence, an awakening of compassion and deep intelligence.

Overview of the Chakra Framework

The chakra theory is the basic framework for psychology in Indian thought. It links the microcosm of the human being with the macrocosm of the universe through an expanding set of concentric worlds. One of

the ways of understanding the chakras is through the relationship with the ‘other’ that comprises the world of each chakra. The other is personified as a woman, but this is metaphorical. Self and other are two parts of one whole and can be seen as a system. The relationship with the other also gives one an idea of the extent to which the mind perceives the world. The chakras have also been described in terms of the growth of a person. The more poetic and evocative descriptors are found in dance and music. Here we restrict ourselves to a simple but fairly accurate idea of the chakras and attempt to understand the dynamics created by the propensities of the chakra. The lens of the chakras allows us to bridge the language of psychic energy and the pragmatics of everyday engagement.

The world and worldview that each chakra creates propel a person to build a set of relationships that protect and enhance one’s potential (within the limitations of that level of understanding). Since each one of us experiences comfort and flow when the world corresponds to one’s own inner patterns and propensities, we consciously and unconsciously shape our worlds to conform to our own idea. This results in the tensions and toxicity that are created in relationships. This shows up in the psychosomatic system as muscular tension, disturbances in breath patterns and the triggering of defence mechanisms.

Chakras are envelopes of thought, feeling and action, they are nurtured by assumptions and conclusions about the nature of man and the nature of the world (Figure 3). We will first advance a simple but fairly accurate idea of the chakras and how they form an enveloped world around the person-centred in a particular chakra. Why the chakra—as a measure and as a self-reference as well as the basis of the practice of yoga. The formulation we will examine explains the chakras in the body in a unique way using the analogy of a man–woman union.

The *mUIAdhAra* (at the base of the spine) is seen as the space where the man and woman are in total merger and the *Agna* (mid-brow) is the space where they are separate, alone, loving and acutely aware of themselves and of each other. At the next higher level lies the *sahasrAra*, the abode of the Thou. There are six steps that lead from the *mUIAdhAra* to the *sahasrAra* at each step, the man and the woman (self and the other) discover progressive degrees of separation, awareness of one’s self and appreciation of the other.

In order to understand the dynamics of human systems that each of these chakra energies represent we do a thought experiment. We imagine that the person’s context and other people in the system are operating from the same energy centre. What relationships will this create? What will complement the person? What kind of authority would be accepted?

The *mUIAdhAra chakra* anchors a sense of belonging and seeking of safety. A mind located here works with an entrenched idea of ‘us’ that is sourced in identity. The ‘other’ is a source of mystery, and potentially demonic. When the person’s consciousness resides in the *mUIAdhAra* chakra, the person is like a child who cannot differentiate between himself and his surroundings. This space seeks a solid, earth-like and substantive experience of the world, to feel alive. The man and the woman are in a tight embrace and totally immersed in the physical union. The identity of the individual is completely merged with the context of his life.

The *svAdhistAna chakra* anchors vitality. The ‘other’ is either a challenge to be overcome or an ally in one’s journey which is essentially a lonely path. The next evolution of consciousness takes one to the *svAdhistAna* chakra, approximately at the level of the navel. The pair in total embrace and merger begins to realise that the man and woman are different but in each other’s hold. The person is ruled by a need to possess the other. This is also the energy of self-expression and dynamism. This is the space of vitality and *prANic* movement.

The *maNipUraka chakra* anchors discipline and role boundedness. Higher truth is revealed through divine agents and one lives essentially to earn merit and easy passage to the world beyond. The ‘other’ is bound by rules and a set of injunctions that define its functions. The *maNipUraka* chakra is the next

level of evolution of one's consciousness and is situated approximately at the solar plexus. The man and the woman have drawn away from each other but are still holding each other's hands. The awakening of thought and planning characterise this world. The other can be shaped and made to conform. This is the space of the planning, thinking, worrying, defining mind.

The *anAhata chakra* anchors curiosity and discovery. The 'other' is an object of enquiry and evokes affection and empathy. Consciousness then evolves into the *anAhata* chakra, situated in the chest. The man and the woman are now separate and can see each other clearly. The ego as the defining envelope of being is transcended, but not lost. Freedom is valued and observation and learning are practised. This offering of shared space and goals could also be motivated by the emptiness within, the other is free to move but is held softly within the boundary of the interaction. This is the space of the appreciative, discovering and discriminating mind.

The *vishuddhi chakra* anchors creativity and self-expression. The 'other' is a reflection of oneself and a source of beauty and inspiration. The *vishuddhi* chakra is situated at one's throat and is the space where the man and the woman stand alone, aware of the separateness of each other, completely calm and self-contained. They deeply appreciate each other; they understand and celebrate the beauty and uniqueness of each other. In this space one can be joyous spontaneously, the thought is transcended and the ground of insight emerges. This is also the space where the person experiences great creativity and artistry. This creativity is then offered to the other sometimes in love and sometimes from a deep thirst/ hunger to be affirmed.

The *Agna chakra* anchors transcendence. The 'self' and the 'other' are expressions of a primordial intelligence. *Agna* chakra is situated between the eyebrows. Here there is only the self in its pristine uniqueness and a realisation that the 'other' is 'Thou'. There is an immense experience of the power of divinity and the person who sees this extraordinary creativity as originating within the self (i.e., where the residues of the earlier psyches are not fully dissolved) can get caught in feelings of grandiosity and megalomania. A mind that is open to the energies of this chakra impact all the earlier centres in a way that balances and integrates their energies. One experiences compassion and joy; one sees the world 'as it is'. This mind is illuminated by visions and systems influenced by it are inspired to act for a 'higher purpose'.

The consciousness beyond this is situated in the *sahasrAra*, at the crown of the head. Self is transcended and the divine play is experienced in a space that is luminous and forever nascent. This is the space of the merger of one's individual consciousness with the universal consciousness. One is in touch with and is perhaps part of the cosmic system.

If one applies the 'chakra' lens to the discussion on the seven types of conversation it will become clear that the cactus, the competitive, the conservative and the cognitive conversations reflect a stuckness in the dictates of the lower chakras. A quick look at the dynamics that get triggered at each of the chakras:

- The root chakra: *mUlAdhAra* is the centre that orients the person towards belonging and protection. The person seeks trust and safety in the interactions with one's world.
- The sacral chakra: *svAdhishtAna* orients the person towards self-expression and assertion. The person gets caught in the search for dominance and expressing strength.
- The solar plexus chakra: *maNipUraka* orients the person to become bound by rules and roles. The social structures and norms dominate the persons thought, feeling and action. Issues of control and status dominate the interactions.
- The movement away from these three chakras is not easy, the sense of imprisonment that is experienced at a subconscious level generates an urge to escape. The person disengages from an embodied experience of the world and becomes caught in the head. There is an intellectual understanding that lacks empathy.

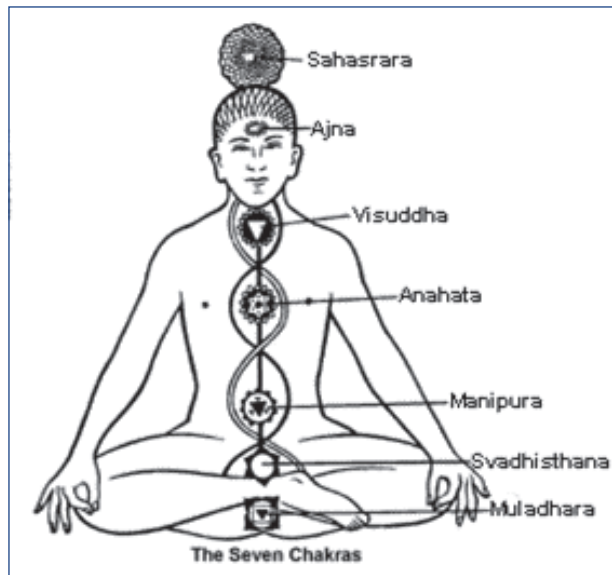


Figure 3. Schematic Representation of The Seven Chakras.

Source: <http://www.india2australia.com/ajna-chakra-2/>

These are seen as the ‘lower chakras’. Most people lead lives that are centred in these domains. This is because of fixation in a self-centred inner location where feeding the ego becomes a subconscious but powerful motivator. Though the orientations of all the chakras are available to the individual, without a deep self-transformative practice, the pull of these energies underpins the person’s deployment of their talents and gifts. The narrative that gets built then runs along the lines of ‘I have battled my way to achievement in the face of dangerous forces’; or ‘I could have achieved greatness but for the betrayals that I have had to encounter’; or ‘I have lived a good life and those who have succeeded beyond me have not been ethical’. It is only when the sense of self held captive to egocentricity is dissolved and the captivity is ended that the shadow energies lose their power and the individual acts in ways that enhance oneself and others.

Compassionate Conversations begin when one starts to experience the *anAhata* chakra (the heart chakra) as one’s inner location.

Creative Conversations begin when one starts to experience the *vishuddhi* chakra (the throat chakra) as one’s inner location.

We approach the realms of *Contemplative Conversations*, the realms that are energised by the *Ajna* chakra (the midbrow chakra).

The practice of yoga is aimed at shifting the centre of gravity of a person from the ‘lower’ chakras to the ‘higher’ chakras and ultimately transcend the microcosm of the individual and ascend to the macrocosmic consciousness in the *sahasrAra*. Our concern is the movement of the centre of gravity primarily from the *maNipUraka* to the *anAhata* since this movement enables the awakening of the *Sakhi*. The maturation of a person from the *anAhat* upwards happens through the momentum of the practice that is now free of self-centred motivations.

We now offer a perspective on how the seven types of conversations can be correlated with the findings of brain science research. This reinforces what yogic wisdom has been saying for the last few thousand years.

Brain Science and the Chakras

Brain science affirms what is known to yoga, namely that subtle signals picked up subliminally by the body trigger a whole range of actions and reactions that severely affect the ability of the person to be the best one can be, use one's capabilities freely and fully.

The reader who is familiar with current research in brain science that links emotions, behaviour and brain processes will be familiar with the connection between these forms of inner dialogue and the process of the triune brain: the reptilian brain, which handles basic functioning; the limbic system, which controls emotions and allows us to navigate social networks; and the neocortex, or 'rational' brain, which handles higher executive functions.

The cactus conversation and the competitive conversations are the inner flight-fight mechanisms triggered by the amygdala. As the threat perception increases, the psyche gets hijacked by the reptilian brain. Not only does this shrink the area of attention to one of vigilance it also reduces the person's response to old habits by making the person get into an autopilot mode. Emotional intensity becomes overwhelming and self-criticality increases. When one is able to bring some measure of balance within, the prefrontal cortex comes into play. However, with part of the psychic energy caught with managing the inner disturbances, attention to the outside is not focused and sharp.

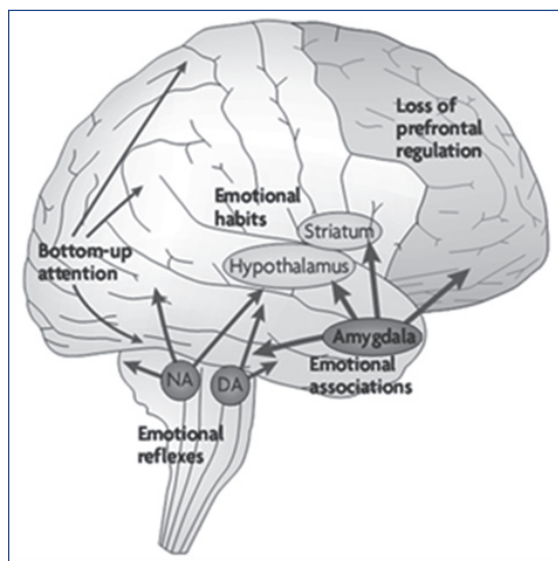


Figure 4. Amygdala Control during Stress Conditions.

Source: Arnsten (2009).

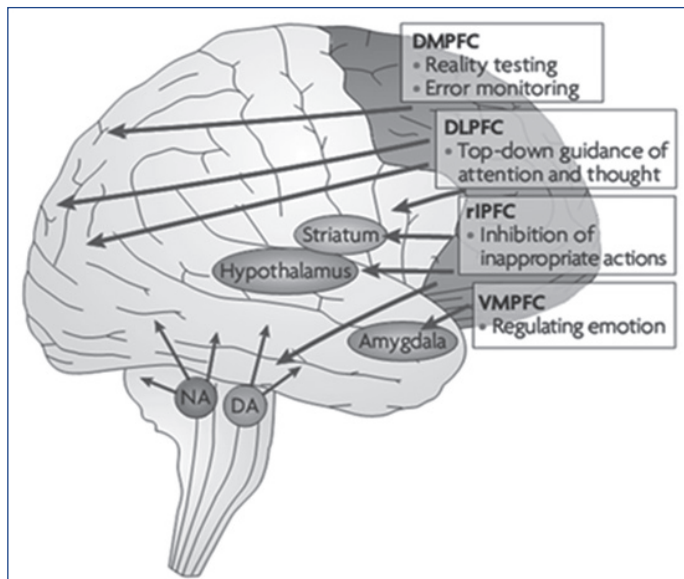


Figure 5. Prefrontal Regulation during Alert, Non-Stress Condition.

Source: Arnsten (2009).

When one is under the influence of lower chakras, the emotional centres of the brain, amygdala, etc., are highly activated and the person is more in the state of self-preservation, that is, in survival mode. When amygdala is excited, it not only impacts the functioning of pre-frontal cortex as shown in the picture but also gives rise to un-wanted, un-necessary and fictitious associations between various past and present events, making the person even more anxious (Figure 4). In this state, the top-down control of the brain is fully compromised. During this period, sympathetic nervous system gets activated and corresponding physical signals of a stressed state manifest. Any conversations in this state are adversarial and reactive as the person is stressed and neural real-estate needed for appropriate decision-making goes offline, as seen in the illustration (Arnsten, 2009).

As the conversations move from cactus conversations to contemplative and finally compassionate conversations, the emotional centres of the brain calm-down, parasympathetic nervous system gets activated, which also produces relaxation response in the body and mind with corresponding physical changes like muscle relaxation, slowing heart-rate (a result of the activation of Vagus Nerve) manifesting (Figure 5). (Center for Compassion and Altruism Research at Stanford, 2022).

Conversations in this space are no longer reactive but they move to a state of reflective conversations. In this state, the other person is no longer seen as an adversary but more as an associate. So you start responding instead of reacting. It is in this state, that a calm and reflective mind also gives rise to an empathic heart filled with compassion where each person can feel what the other person is communicating, not just through words but also through their feelings. This is the highest form of conversation we can have with the other person.

Conclusion

Coaching has become a critical part of leadership development. The quality of the conversations that happen between the coach and the coachee has a significant influence on the coaching outcomes. While skills are an important component of the way the coach approaches the conversation, the inner location from which the coach operates is the key. Developing *Sakhi* and *SAkshi bhAva* using the chakra principles based on yoga helps the coach bring about an inner anchorage and potentially transform the coaching conversation. Yoga offers a profound and powerful practice to develop deep listening. If the coaching conversation must leave the coachee feeling heard, healed, empowered and inspired, the coach must be in a state of meditation yoga. This is critical for every professional in the field of coaching and facilitation to internalise the philosophy and practice of yoga. This will enable the emergence of presence. The greater the depth and multidimensionality of the coach's presence, the greater the scope for the conversation to be meaningful to the coachee. The next article in the series gives an overview of the yogic practices that help to develop a multidimensional presence for the coach.

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Bio Sketch

Raghu Ananthanarayanan is a post-Graduate in Engineering from IIT Madras, Raghu has delved deeply into Yoga and Behavioural Sciences to develop a unique approach to personal unfolding and organizational transformation. He has devoted almost four decades to transforming organizational cultures across the spectrum from grassroots developmental organizations to modern industrial organizations. He has developed a unique methodology called “Totally Aligned Organization” and a model called the “Tensegrity Mandala” that brings together his understanding of Yoga, Human Processes and Manufacturing Systems. He has pioneered the use of insights from the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, traditional theatre and the Mahabharata in experiential learning, Leadership Development and Coaching.

He is a direct disciple of Yogacharya Krishnamacharya & TKV Desikachar. Raghu has also benefitted from a long association with J. Krishnamurti and Prof. Pulin K. Garg (IIM Ahmedabad).

Manikantan Somayaji runs a boutique coaching firm Clarity Cocreated and is associated with a few coaching networks serving primarily US corporate clients. Mani is an executive coach and startup mentor with over 25 years of technology and business experience. Mani holds an MBA (Innovation and Managing Technology), bachelor’s in computer science. He is a credentialed ICF Individual coach and an EMCC team coach. His Yogic sadhana include Kriya Yoga, Asanas. With his family, currently lives in Ashburn, Virginia.

Bala Kishore worked with computers for 20+ years, starting with India’s first Super Computer PARAM. He currently works with people as a Coach, Counselor, People-Skills Trainer. Bala has done his M.Tech in Computer Science and Certificate in Business Administration from Manchester Business School (UK) as British Chevening Scholar. He is also a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) accredited by the International Coach Federation. He is currently pursuing his PhD in Ayurveda from School of Vedic Sciences, MIT-ADT University, Pune.

Kartik Shastri is an entrepreneur and artist. After his own experience with chronic pain, he founded Menda Health to help people reverse their chronic pain. He previously co-founded FillMyFork, a nutrition platform that was acquired by FoodSmart in 2016. He holds M. Eng., B.S. and B.A. degrees from Cornell University and aspires towards Sri Krishnamacharya’s statement that a mature human is one who is able to fully experience the appropriate rasa and return without residue.

Sreekumar is Associate Professor with Vivekananda Yoga University (VaYU), USA. He has 24 years of experience spread across technology consulting, project management, corporate training, leadership development, and academics. He has played leadership roles in Infosys and Deloitte and worked with Fortune 500 clients in North America, Europe, and Asia. Sreekumar has a PhD in Yoga from SVYASA, Bengaluru. An Engineer by education, he has done continuous education programs at UCLA, MIT and Stanford. He has delivered numerous leadership development, yoga and mindfulness interventions for corporate multinationals and management institutes. He is deeply passionate about coaching and believes in an inside-out approach to transformation.