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Dharma is about our spiritual duty to find teachings in all aspects of daily life. Today, our souls are incarnated in bodies that swim in a sea of information. Our media are not outside our life, but are intimate extensions of our being. As extensions, they mirror and amplify both our soul's hunger for meaning and all of the obstacles we create on our path of consciousness evolution.

An electronic web now surrounds our planet. Our ideas travel instantaneously to all points of the globe on electromagnetic waves and pulses of light. In the last decade, communications networks have advanced from wires to fiber optics, from interconnected radio and television grids to a world of billions of wirelessly communicating sensory devices, each with its own address in cyberspace. These collective systems for sharing thought have become the foundation of a new realm—the “Infosphere.” Emerging from what French philosopher-priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called the shared “noosphere” of collective human thought, invention, and spiritual seeking, the Infosphere is now a field that engulfs our physical, mental, and etheric bodies and affects our dreaming and our cultural life.¹ In the

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mid-1960s, media sage Marshall McLuhan wrote that our nervous systems have been “extended” (via the “electric technologies” of sound and sight) beyond our physical bodies, drawing us all into a “global embrace”:²

Whereas all previous technologies (save speech itself) had, in effect, extended parts of our bodies, electricity may be said to have outered the central nervous system itself, including the brain. . . . The simultaneity of electric communication, also characteristic of our nervous system, makes each of us present and accessible to every other person in the world.³

Each new technology, he claimed, amplifies and extends the reach of different sense organs, changing our perceptions of our selves and of the world.

Think of how much information, in the form of radio energy, there is flying through the air, all around us, all over the world, right now and all the time. AM, FM, UHF, VHF, shortwave radio, television, CB radio, walkie-talkies, cellphones, cordless phones, telephone satellites, microwave relays, faxes, pagers, taxi calls, police, sheriff, hospitals, fire departments, telemetry, navigation, radar, the military, government, financial, legal, medical, the media, etc., etc., etc. Trillions and trillions and trillions of separate little bits of electronic information flying around the world through the air at all times. Think of that. Think of how busy the air is. Now realize this: A hundred years ago there was none. Nothing. Silence.

—George Carlin, *Brain Droppings*⁴

With each new sensory extension have come bursts of idealism and creativity as well as clouds of despair. The introduction of new technology has always been associated with profound changes in our views of reality and in global consciousness.⁵ Socrates was unhappy about the transition from face-to-face speech to writing, and ever since the advent of the telegraph, modern critics have complained about the dangers of too-rapid telecommunications. As Erik Davis has pointed out in *TechGnosis*, we imbue each new communications technology with our highest spiritual aspirations and our deepest fears.⁶ Electrical communication, with its ability to instantaneously move human intelligence beyond the confines of the physical body, has been the focus both of utopian dreams of deep social and spiritual connection and of profound terrors of “spiritual disassociation.”⁷

Today, many see the global Internet as the beginnings of a true “global brain”: a virtual community where people of different cultures find a worldcentric common language and develop new mental abilities and spiritual energies. To others, our communications technologies seem to hold only the basest elements of human nature. These critics claim that television and, more recently, video games and Web surfing have cut us off from each other, instilled false beliefs, and taught us to worship material goods. They point to teenagers with thumbs callused from sending text messages who cannot hold a face-to-face conversation. They see only gratuitous violence, demons, and dark ghosts inhabiting the virtual world of video games. They fear that wireless connectivity has forever breached the boundary between work and home, destroying what little rest we have eked out for the inner self. In the dire view of philosopher William Irwin Thompson, our bodies are cooking “in a global mulligan stew of electromagnetic noise,” while according to one Buddhist scholar our minds are being “colonized” by the idea fragments—dubbed “memes” by Richard Dawkins—of commercial media.⁸

Yes, much of this critique may be true. As many “media ecologists” argue, our outer media have changed the balance of our senses and thus changed our lives, our culture, and our politics,

maybe not as radically as techno-utopians and techno-naysayers have dreamed, but changed it nonetheless.⁹ The electronic media amplify, distort, and attenuate our senses; change our awareness; and “mediate” our experiences. But we must also consider that these technologies are not just outside forces that appear out of nowhere to affect our consciousness and determine our future. They are also the products and the amplified reflections of our consciousness.

The relationship between consciousness and media works in both directions. In Howard Rheingold’s words, “just as nature is not out there, beyond our skin, but the matrix from which consciousness emerges, technology is not out there, outside of what it means to be human.”¹⁰ All of our communications technologies—from the first telegraph signals traveling by wire to today’s intelligent network routers, radio-frequency identification microchips, and global positioning satellites—have emerged from the creative collective mind. And that global mind is constantly growing and changing. In Jennifer Cobb’s words, “we co-evolve with cyberspace as both we and it seek the next steps along the evolutionary path.”¹¹

Looking out into the Infosphere we find neither a dark, desolate, ghost-filled trap; nor a place of “cybergrace.”¹² What we do see is a multilayered reflection of our own energetic communications systems in all of their emerging complexity, in all of their light and shadow. And behind these communications networks we find, as always, our equally multilayered and equally evolving communal consciousness. Our telecommunications engineers have brought forth electromagnetic and electro-optical devices of decreasing size, increasing complexity, increasing interactivity, and increasing self-awareness. I believe they have also given us a new way to describe the path of spiritual development that ancient esoteric teachings masked in arcane language, obscure references, and secret practices.¹³ If the universe itself, as many philosophers tell us, is a field, not just of matter, but also of information, then the Infosphere must hold in its microcosm all of the levels of human experience, all our knowledge, all of our dramas of politics and power, and all of our dreams. This knowledge is encoded in our ubiquitous systems of

telecommunications, and, yet, exactly because it is so omnipresent, to most of us it is still invisible.

This book is a guide to the layers of the Infosphere: It describes at each level of our outer technology a guiding metaphor that contains a wisdom lesson about the inner quality of human communications. Mapping the Infosphere will not replace mapping our souls. Yet in mapping it, we just might discover that we've been led away from chips and routers into the domain of the soul, finding in the technological structure and the social impacts of a specific telecommunications invention a guidepost for our own journey into greater consciousness. This is what I mean by "digital dharma": Seeing in everything—including the "teachings" of our web of electronic connectivity—an opportunity for conscious reflection on the deeper truth of our being.¹⁴ Expanding "teleconsciousness" allows one to see what part of the energy body is engaged when one uses different communications forms. By turning our focus inward, this work suggests that a true healing of our cyber-addictions will come not from media reform protests or increased regulation, but from looking at our own shadow.

Every good map requires a legend, an organizing principle. For me, the evolution of the Infosphere appears to follow the "perennial wisdom" path—the universal truths and the values hierarchy that underlie all mystical religions. Integral philosopher Ken Wilber, in his elegant and groundbreaking book *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, describes this path as an overlapping (or nested) hierarchy of mental, moral/ethical, and spiritual development stages starting from the reptilian brain's focus on the self (safety, security and power), through the limbic system's more sociocentric outlook (with its attention to family, tribe, and community rules), to the neocortex's worldcentric view based on abstract ideals, to the transpersonal realms of the esoteric brain's spiritual connection to the Higher Self, Soul, or Godhead.¹⁵ This evolutionary model forms the basis of contemporary Western consciousness studies, including the works of ecologist Duane Elgin, the aforementioned systems philosopher Ken Wilber, Creation theologian Matthew Fox, and transpersonal psychologists Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, and Michael Murphy.¹⁶

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I too, have followed the same road. I too, stop at the same development stages. However, as an energy healer I bring an additional reference frame to our exploration: the hierarchy of the body's seven esoteric communications centers. In the healing tradition from which my practice is drawn, a subtle energy field is believed to surround the human body. The transponders (transmitter-responders) that connect this field inward to the physical body and outward to the greater field of consciousness are the *chakras*

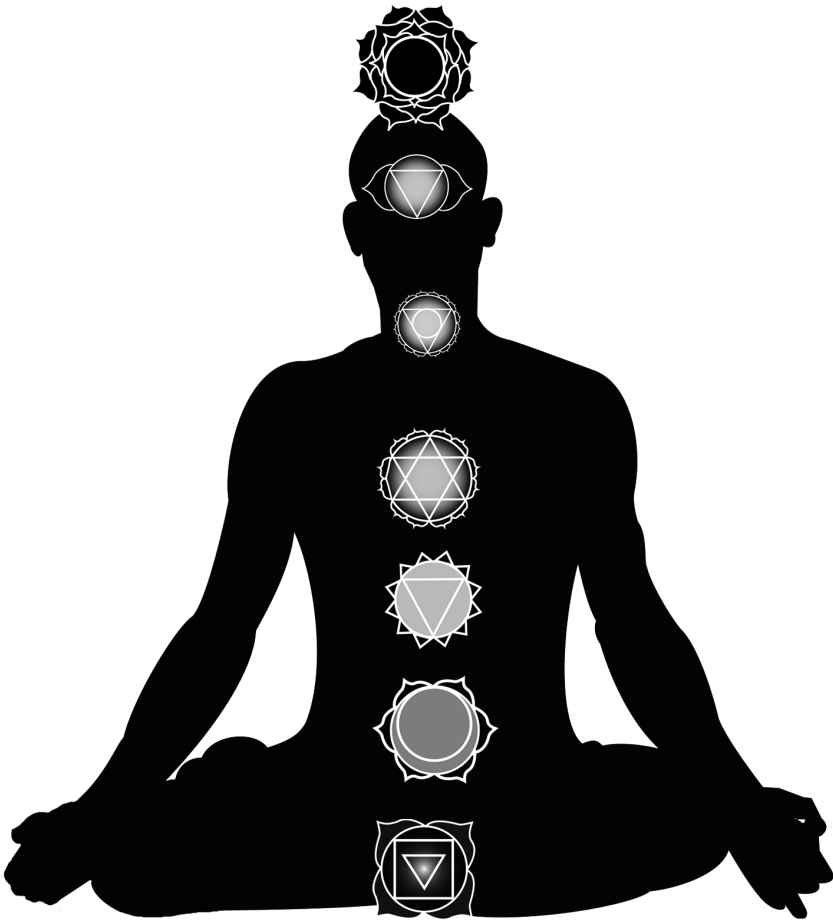


Figure 0.1. Traditional chakra locations and symbols

(Sanskrit for “wheels”). Each chakra aligns with a specific set of nerve clusters along the spinal column, each is associated with a different set of organs, and each has its own emotional-developmental resonance corresponding to the perennial wisdom.¹⁷ A traditional depiction of the chakras is shown in figure 0.1.

Satprem, a disciple of the Indian sage Sri Aurobindo, writes that a chakra is “somewhat like a radio receiver tuned into particular wavelengths.” He continues,

[Each chakra] is linked with various planes of consciousness from which we constantly receive, most often unknowingly, all sorts of vibrations—subtle or physical, vital or mental, high or low—which account for our way of thinking, feeling and living, with the individual consciousness picking up certain vibrations rather than others, in accordance with its social background, traditions, education, etc.¹⁸














I have expanded on Satprem’s description by directly associating each chakra with its corresponding communications theme and technology. Different media stimulate different energy centers, and, at the same time, as creations of human consciousness, they mirror the spiritual-emotional challenges associated with each center. By connecting the technologies of the Infosphere to their corresponding chakras, we discover that much of the debate over “media impacts” is really about the shadow side of our interior communications. We see in each of our external telecommunications networks not only a reflection of the state of our socio-cultural development, but also the core inner challenge each of us must overcome to move up the ladder of conscious communications. From this perspective, our media become our guides to advancement: our virtual ankle weights, barbells, and yoga stretches in our electronic ashram. One need not believe in the energy body and the chakras to follow the digital dharma path. Whatever system one follows—the mystical traditions mentioned above; the levels of ego, or *nafs*, of Sufi spiritual practice; the more down-to-earth “spiral dynamics” model developed by Clare Graves, Don Beck, and Christopher Cowan;

or even the “circuits of consciousness” theory of psychedelics pioneer Dr. Timothy Leary—the underlying spiral is the same.¹⁹

So please join me as we follow the chakras up the spine of the Infosphere and across cyberspace into greater complexity, and greater awareness. The first chapters focus on telegraphy and telephony: These communications technologies embody the foundation stage of our emotional-spiritual development, namely, our concerns for safety and connection. We then explore our relationships to others: our power to act, our feelings of love and compassion, and our ability to speak and discern the truth. We will see how these human issues are reflected back to us in our mass media of radio, television, and the Internet. Finally, we consider two transpersonal realms of consciousness. The first is the “eternal now” of the mystical third eye, our connection to intuition and powers of deep knowing; the second is the open, radiant crown, where we live fully connected to our spiritual selves as both creation and the Creator. The communications reflections of these higher levels of evolution are only now emerging: the “third eye” in the digital signal coding that makes possible high-definition television, video games, digital videodiscs (DVDs), and MP3 players; the “crown chakra” in the world of smart appliances, peer-to-peer networks, and the always-on intelligence of “pervasive computing.” Table 0.1 points the way to the parallels that will be explored in depth in the following chapters.

It is my hope that having an expanded awareness of the lessons of the Infosphere—the work of our digital dharma—will speed up our individual and collective journey towards transformation. On the personal plane, by seeing how the light and shadow aspects of our emotional development issues play out in our use of communications media, we may find new goals for creating “clean” connections with those around us. As creators of our global network, we can practice an expanded “media ecology,” understanding the “cultural memes” that are in play at each level of the Infosphere. We can insist that each technology be put to its highest use, remaining conscious of the “default application” that, without our vigilance, each media form will be enlisted to serve. Finally, as spiritual beings, we already know that the work is not about “fixing the Infosphere,”

Table 0.1. Chakra functions and telecommunications parallels

Dharma Level, Chakra Location, & Inner Work			Communications Technology and Related Dharma		
	1 Root	Security, “being safe,” food/money, a connection to the earth		Radio-telegraphy, signal beacons, binary coding, radio-frequency identification, short message service	“Being Here,” good ground connec- tion
	2 Pelvis	Relationships, “I and Thou,” the inner child, emo- tional memory and shadow		Telephony, analog waves, resonance, cell phones	Untangling cords of connec- tion, inti- macy call- ing, inner voicemail
	3 Solar Plexus	Personal power, autonomy, responsibility, shame issues		Broadcast Radio, one-to-many communica- tions, podcasting	Sending a clear signal of self, who is the mas- ter’s voice?
	4 Heart	Compassion, connection, love; also emotional addictions, grief		Television, the electronic hearth, inter- laced scanning	Seeing the Other as oneself, stuffing the broken heart
	5 Throat	Communica- tions, finding one’s voice, listening with discernment		Peer-to-peer networks, connections across the grid	Filtering truth from lies, honesty and self-protec- tion
	6 Third Eye	Deep seeing, going beyond the veil, reveal- ing the codes of life		Digital com- pression, high- definition TV, MP3, virtual re- ality, signal cod- ing, spread-spectrum	Breaking free from habitual decoding, living in the matrix
	7 Crown	Divine connection to Source; tap- ping the cosmic memory bank		Pervasive computing, Wi-Fi, global positioning satellites, Grid intelligence	Full- spec- trum living, download- ing from abundance

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but about changing ourselves. Full “teleconsciousness” is just another tool to find in our outside world the lessons—the dharma—of inner transformation. Going on the Internet or playing a simulation game does not bring enlightenment, but these technologies do provide a new way of looking at our place in the fabric of being. In each interaction with the Infosphere, we have a choice whether to embrace the big picture and take in the full spectrum of data or to follow the path of limited input, and thus limited possibility.

For those open to exploring all aspects of the yoga metaphor, each chapter ends with a set of suggested exercises that use the metaphors of the Infosphere to “retune” our interior communications transponders. These exercises can be effective whether we envision chakras as whirling energy orbs or simply as symbols that remind us to be fully present to ourselves and to others at every level of our being. It is my intention in offering these exercises that as we open and heal these internal channels, not only will our personal communications become more whole and our spiritual flow more open, but also the Infosphere we have created to surround us will also mature and manifest its true spiritual potential.