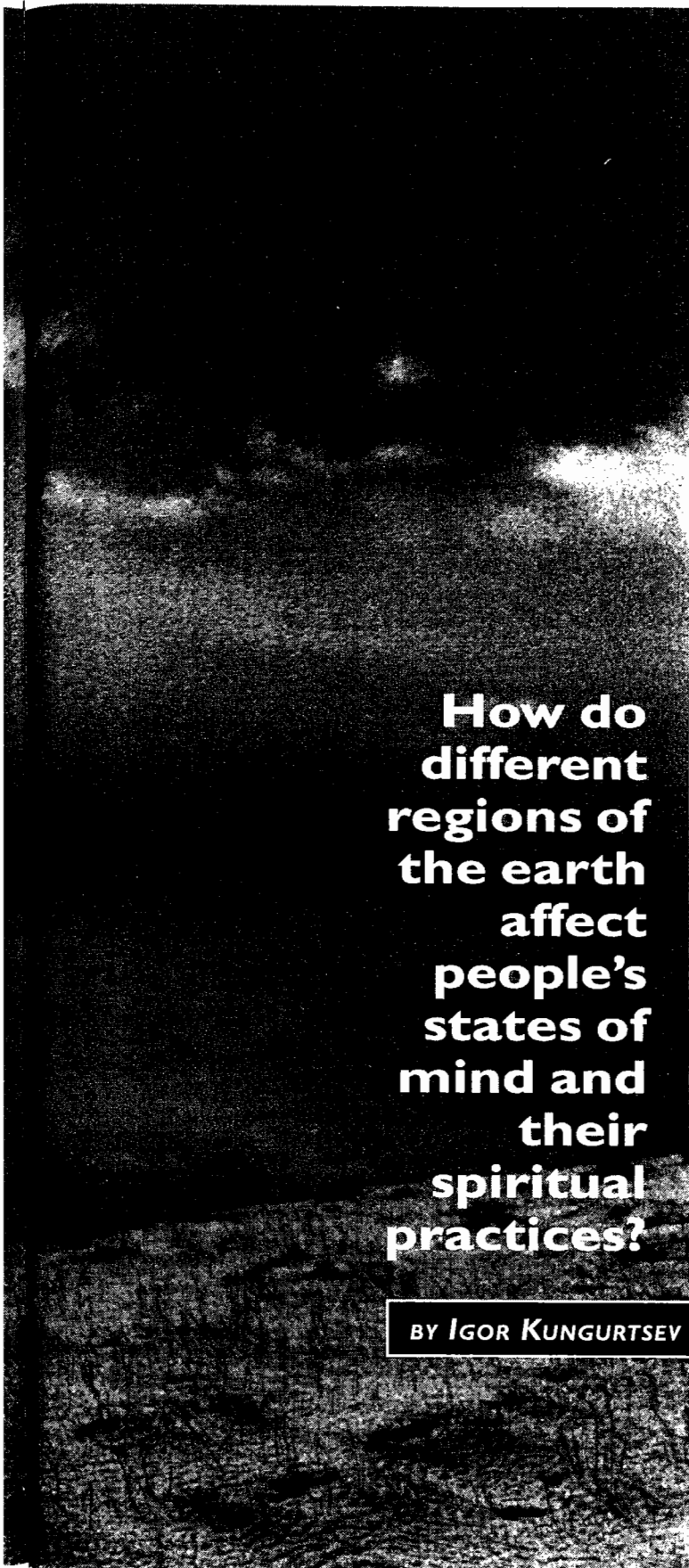




Earth
and Spirit

PHOTO BY JANE ENGLISH



**How do
different
regions of
the earth
affect
people's
states of
mind and
their
spiritual
practices?**

BY IGOR KUNGURTSEV AND OLGA LUCHAKOVA

People throughout the world have reflected their intuitive knowledge of the earth's influence on humans in tales, legends, and even practical sciences such as geomancy. This influence has often been felt to be more subtle than can be explained by mere climate and landscape. In the last few decades a number of articles have been published discussing both harmful and beneficial effects of the so-called electromagnetic lines of the earth. Meanwhile in the Far East, professional geomancers are still widely used to advise on the layout of houses and the best situations for commercial premises.¹

This article is *not*, however, about geomancy or the influence of geomagnetic fields on human health. Our sole interest here is to discuss the possible subtle impact of different parts of the earth on the predominant types of mental states and spiritual practices in those areas. The easiest way to understand the direction of our thought is to ponder the following questions: Why has India, despite changes in kingdoms and governments for the last 25 centuries, kept on producing more sages, saints, and teachers than any other country in the world? Why have so many of the world's great religions originated in the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Himalayas? Why has California — and more recently Colorado and New Mexico — become a home for a large number of broad-minded spiritual seekers? Many similar questions can be posed, and we cannot answer them all in this article, but they point to some possible subtle influence of the earth on human consciousness.

This notion has existed in various forms since ancient times. Cultures around the globe have regarded certain places, mostly mountains, as sacred. Well-known sacred mountains include Sinai and Zion in the Middle East, Olympus and Athos in Greece, Ararat in Turkey, Everest and Kailas in the Himalayas, Fuji in Japan.² Indeed the Hindus believe that God can incarnate not only in human form but as a mountain. Such mountains as Kailas and Arunachala are considered to be incarnations of Shiva, while Nanda Devi and Annapurna are abodes of Parvati, Shiva's wife, the goddess of bliss.

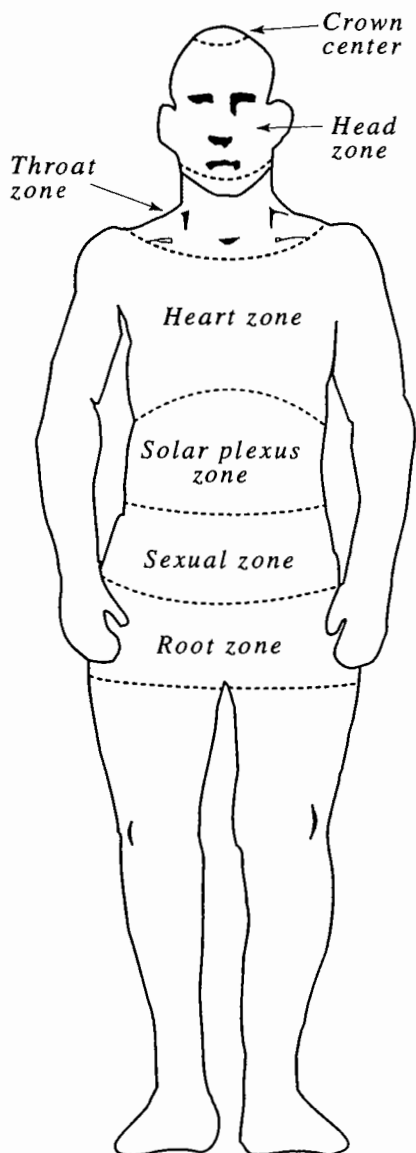
Sometimes in the West this notion of certain mountains as incarnations of God is understood as being symbolic or metaphoric, but for Hindus it is quite literal and even experiential. What matters is the special kind of feeling or energy that people sense on a particular mountain. The holy hill Arunachala, an embodiment of Shiva, can serve as a good example here, as it is connected with one of the greatest sages of our century: Sri Ramana Maharshi. After his spontaneous

Realization at age sixteen, Ramana Maharshi was drawn irresistibly to Arunachala and never left it for the rest of his life. In fact he could never be persuaded to go more than two miles away from Arunachala's base.³

What is notable here is that Ramana Maharshi was an exponent of the purest form of the Advaita Vedanta, which is directed towards realization of the Self as formless unmanifest consciousness, yet he wrote several poems in

praise of the hill Arunachala as an incarnation of God or the Self, the spiritual heart of creation.⁴ One of his disciples once pointed out that Ramana himself didn't have a guru. The sage answered, "It all depends on what you call a guru. He need not necessarily be in a human form. . . . And didn't I sing hymns to Arunachala?"⁵ Maybe we should pay a little more attention to these words of this great spiritual teacher.

Other traditions that have something to contribute to our discussion are shamanism and Paganism. In American Indian shamanism certain spots on the earth, called "power spots," are used as places for rituals, healing, and spiritual revelations. As we are not experts in American Indian



One Russian mystical system describes the energy centers of the body in terms of zones rather than the more familiar chakras. Certain emotions and moods may be related to the functioning of these zones. A healthy solar plexus, for example, is associated with dynamism and initiative, while blockages in this area can result in suppressed anger, fear, and inertia.

shamanism, we will draw upon similar practices that exist in Slavic Paganism and which we know experientially.⁶

In Slavic Pagan sorcery, the whole body was used as a refined instrument for perceiving the energy of the earth, trees, rocks, and streams. Through training, all of us can develop this acute bodily sensitivity, which allows one to notice subtle changes in the energy of the environment.

Places of power (in Russian, *svyato mesto*, "sacred spot") were intentionally sought and widely used in Slavic Paganism for rituals, healing, and spiritual illumination. Interestingly, after the introduction of Byzantine Christianity into Russia, many churches and monasteries were built on the sites of former Pagan sanctuaries, which were always located on power spots. Power places can occupy a large area or just a few square feet. They vary widely in their types of influence.

The rest of this essay is based on observations from personal experience, the results of "field work." We are aware that any experience is subjective and can be disputed, especially if it involves a reality that is not shared by a large number of people. But what inspired us to write this article is that when we were sharing our observations with different people, many of them said that we only confirmed or gave a framework to what they had always intuitively felt.

The Method

Our hypothesis is as follows: all people are subject to the earth's influence on their mood and state of consciousness, only they are not aware of it or do not attribute their state to the energy of that particular area. Consequently the natural method for attuning yourself to earth energy is simply to become aware of how you feel in a given place. As simple as it may sound, in practice it's not that easy. Only those who have tried to develop mindfulness in everyday life know how much daydreaming and "mind chatter" is usually going on in each of us. For serious practitioners of *vipassana* (insight meditation), Zen, Dzogchen, or the Gurdjieff Work, it will be easier. The only additional hint is to be more aware of bodily sensations and emotions than thoughts, and then to notice your predominant body feeling and mood when you are in a particular area or place.

Before we can describe different types of local energy influences, we need to introduce a system of practical knowledge involving the energy sections of the body and their corresponding emotions and personality traits. This system was developed in a contemporary Russian mystical school as a peculiar blend of Slavic Pagan sorcery, with its emphasis on the whole body, and a knowledge of the chakras from Hindu kundalini yoga.

Unlike the usual New Age representation of chakras as abstract colored balls of energy, this system describes seven energy zones as occupying whole sections of the physical body (see chart at left). For example, the root energy zone includes the whole pelvis. The solar plexus zone occupies the whole section of the abdomen above the navel, including the diaphragm and the corresponding segment of the back. The heart zone corresponds to

In Slavic Pagan sorcery, the whole body was used as a refined instrument for perceiving the energy of the earth, trees, rocks, and streams.

the whole chest, including the upper part of the back, and so on.

This system also associates these energy zones with specific emotions and personality traits. Someone born with a particular zone that is either developed or weak will consistently display certain personality features and moods. Although these characteristics are usually stable, over the course of a lifetime one's energy zones can be temporarily more open or blocked depending on the situation. Those who embark upon a spiritual path can intentionally develop their energy zones using special techniques, which may include work with power spots.

Here it's necessary to give a brief description of zone-related emotions, upon which many of our observations are based.

A developed or open *root energy zone* (in the pelvis) gives a feeling of stability, security, and groundedness. Someone developed in this way would give an impression of serene and unshakable power, like a big rock. A blocked root zone, on the other hand, will result in emotional instability, insecurity, and a feeling of being constantly pushed around by people and circumstances.

The *sexual zone* (in the lower belly) is responsible not only for a healthy sexuality, but also for qualities of playfulness, tenderness, lightness, and humor. Consequently, when this zone is blocked, it results in a certain emotional rigidity, aridity, and boredom.

A developed *solar plexus zone* gives dynamism, initiative, and healthy assertiveness. When blocked, it corresponds with suppressed anger and fear, difficulties in setting personal boundaries, and inertia.

Common intuition unmistakably ascribes to an open *heart* the qualities of love, compassion, emotional aliveness, and connectedness to people. What is not so well known is that a blocked heart corresponds not only with emotional isolation and "deadness," but also with depression. Depression and emotional withdrawal from people usually coincide.

The *throat energy zone* is responsible for free verbal expression, a sense of exaltation, and the ability to appreciate the arts, especially music.

And again it's a commonplace that the *head* is the center of reason, rationality, logic, pragmatic thinking, and the solving of mundane problems.

This system views the *crown energy center* (at the top of the head and above) in a different way from classic kundalini yoga. The latter says that this center is opened only as a result of yogic training, when kundalini energy is brought up to the top of the head, leading to *samadhi*. But practitioners of the above-mentioned Russian school say this center is responsible for self-awareness and an

ability to detach from and observe yourself. A person can also be born with a developed crown energy center and not have much interest in spirituality. In this case he or she will possess a capacity for taking a broad, objective, largely impersonal view, and for strategic thinking and planning far ahead. Examples include political and social leaders. Good rulers of countries usually have well-developed root energy zones (giving stability and power) and crown centers (giving the ability to take a broad view). A blocked or undeveloped crown energy center corresponds with an inability to rise above mundane personal concerns and with difficulties in looking at one's life from a broader perspective.

The energy of different areas of the earth influences people's mental and emotional spheres by activating particular energy zones of the body. Practitioners of the aforementioned Russian mystical school intentionally seek and use power spots that have the characteristic energy desired. For example, if someone needs to develop qualities of stability, firmness, and grounded power, then an energy spot activating the root zone is located and the practitioner meditates there regularly. Power spots are classified not only by what centers of the body they activate, but also by the subtlety or "holiness" of their energy. The subtler the energy, the higher the meditation that is possible there.

Observations in the Former U.S.S.R.

Generally, the energy of the earth in the European territory of Russia is beneficial for the functioning of the heart, throat, and lower belly centers. Russians are known for having a deep emotional life which is not necessarily outwardly expressive but which is internally rich and full of nuances of feeling. This is a result of the functioning of the heart center, which also provides a dense atmosphere of mutual interconnectedness, an emotional field rather like that of a big family.

It is also well-known that Russians are sensitive to beauty and are great lovers of the arts, music, and ballet. In the tenth century they converted to the Byzantine form of Christianity mainly because they were fascinated by the beauty of the services. This love of beauty is a function of the throat center.

The manifestations of a well-functioning lower belly (sexual) center in Russian life are not well-known to Westerners, maybe because of a prevalent image of uptight communists. The fact is that Russians are quite romantic and sexually active. Strangers of the opposite sex look at each other openly on the streets without fear or embarrassment, and there is an atmosphere of light-hearted

The fact is that Russians are quite romantic and sexually active. There is an atmosphere of light-hearted flirtation almost everywhere.

flirtation almost everywhere. Young men often try to make acquaintances on the street, at bus stops, or anywhere in public. The girls can say no or continue the conversation, but they almost never feel scared, harassed, or insulted in such a situation. This is not because they lack self-respect but because such encounters are viewed as giving spice and joy to life.

On the other hand, the solar plexus zone is suppressed on Russian soil. This leads to fear, blocked anger, difficulties in feeling and setting personal boundaries, lack of individuation, and an inability to sense and respect others' personal space. Other manifestations of a weak solar plexus zone include a lack of personal responsibility and initiative as well as inertia and passivity.

All these characteristics are clearly seen in Russian history and social and economic life. For the past ten centuries Russians had no experience of real democracy with respect to human rights and personal freedom. The tsarist regime was quite oppressive, and when the communists took over, state leaders continued to dominate and control the population. It is ironic that the beautiful qualities of emotional interconnectedness and a sense of community (resulting from a developed heart center), when combined with a lack of individuation and inertia (from a weak solar plexus), resulted in Russia's being the site of a 70-year communist experiment, where the individual counted for nothing and inert masses of people were controlled by dictators and their cohorts.

The contemporary economic difficulties in Russia can be explained not only by the collapse of the ineffective Soviet industrial system but by the same inertia and lack of individual initiative. When you are trying to start something new in Russia and you need the cooperation of others, you often feel as if you are moving through some thick, resistant mass. Several Western businessmen have noted that after enthusiastically signing initial joint venture agreements with Russians, they find that their projects seem to be sinking as if into a swamp. They have had difficulty understanding why their Russian partners do not follow through, do not answer letters, and do not take any responsibility! This is not, of course, universal, but the tendency is too apparent to be denied.

Other body centers function moderately well in the former Soviet Union, and the energy of the earth varies slightly in different areas. Comparing the two largest and most important cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, we can note that the earth gives more energy to the solar plexus and root zones in Moscow than it does in other places. Many Russians outside Moscow consider Muscovites to be pushy, snobbish, materialistic, and pragmatic. It is also interesting to note that these

qualities of an active solar plexus are generally disapproved of by the masses.

In St. Petersburg, the earth significantly activates the throat center, and as a result this city has been a home for generations of artists, writers, composers, and connoisseurs of the arts. The city has an atmosphere of a refined, romantic, northern beauty. The earth here also activates the upper part of the head, which gives St. Petersburg a very mental, cerebral energy. Thus there are plenty of philosophers and mystics in St. Petersburg.

To the south, in Ukraine and especially in the Caucasus, the earth gives more energy to the solar plexus and lower belly. Ukrainians and especially Georgians are known in Russia to be assertive, passionate, and active in sales and business.

Moving to the east to Siberia, the influence on the throat and heart centers becomes weaker, while the root zone receives more energy. As a result Siberian Russians tend to be steady, strong, tough, harsh, and austere.

The earth in the Asian republics activates the lower belly, the root zone, and the heart, but in a different manner than in European Russia. Turkmenians, Uzbeks, and Kirghiz usually look detached and careless (from a strong root zone), but if you get to know them better, they also appear passionate, fun-loving, and playfully childlike (from active sexual and heart centers).

The earth's predominantly beneficial influence on the heart zone in European Russia is reflected in Russian mysticism. Hesychasm or "Christian yoga" is not just "a path with heart," it is the path *through* the heart, where concentration is steadily maintained in the center of the chest until the adept reaches illumination. The earth also activates the lower belly center, and this energy is necessary for the different Pagan and magical practices that are very popular in Russia.

On the other hand, the practices of mindfulness and self-awareness, which are functions of the crown center, do poorly in Russia. Western teachers of *vipassana* have had difficulty explaining the difference between awareness and absorption to Russians. Russians are likely to get into a trance and mistake it for meditation. This tendency to fall into trance is manifested in ways that may seem unbelievable to Westerners: literally thousands of people have been hypnotized through TV by famous hypnotists such as Anatoly Kashpirovsky.

Various forms of pure awareness meditation are not popular in Russia, because people have a hard time getting an experiential taste of what is meant by being totally present, spacious, vigilant, yet relaxed. It is especially difficult for them to detach from and observe the emotions, because Russian life revolves around the emotional center. Emotional connectedness to *others* is very strong, but

it is exactly this cultural deficit of *self-awareness* that led masses of Russians to be hypnotized and brainwashed by the communists for 70 years. The painful change that Russia is undergoing now is first of all a change in mentality; for this change to be successful, it is absolutely crucial for Russians to develop the qualities of self-awareness and personal responsibility.

Observations in the U.S.

In the first hours after arriving on American soil in New York, we felt the energy of the body being pushed toward and concentrated in the head and solar plexus zones, leaving the heart and lower belly almost empty. In the beginning it was even somewhat unpleasant because the feeling was unfamiliar and had an empty, mechanical quality. Usually it is the active heart and sexual zones that provide a feeling of aliveness and warmth, and here these two centers seemed to be turned off.

Later travels confirmed this observation: the energy of the earth in the territory of the U.S. powerfully activates the solar plexus and head zones but does not favor the heart, lower belly, root, or throat zones. There are, of course, local variations in energy, which we will describe further, but the strong head-solar plexus combination remains predominant.

The manifestations of this combination are seen in American life. Material abundance is connected with such well-known positive features of the American character as individual initiative, dynamism, healthy aggressiveness, and personal responsibility (solar plexus) as well as rationality and pragmatism (head). The tradition of political democracy is based on healthy individuation, personal freedom, self-motivation, and respect for personal boundaries, which are qualities of the same centers.

The deprivation of certain energy zones also take its toll. We have already mentioned that a starved heart center manifests not only as emotional isolation and loneliness but as depression. Today even popular magazines are discussing the problem of depression in the U.S. In no other country in the world are so many people being prescribed antidepressants. Almost everybody here knows what Prozac is, because either a friend or a colleague is taking it. However, individual freedom in America also leads to a natural friendliness and acceptance of others, which balances the earth's influence.

If the problems resulting from a blocked heart center are recognized by Americans (much of American psychotherapy is about "getting in touch with feelings"), the energy deprivation of the sexual center is noticed mainly by visiting foreigners. It is not sexuality itself that is repressed, however, but rather a certain lush, hedonic quality, the closest word for which in English is "sensuality." The deficiency of this lavish flavor is subtle but is reflected in the atmosphere and nuances of relationships

between the sexes in America. Those who have traveled to Europe, South America, or the Pacific Islands will probably understand what we mean.

Of course the stifling of sensuality can be partially explained by the historically strong Puritan influence. But a certain austere, harsh quality of the energy of the earth still plays an essential role. We discussed this topic with three or four visiting foreigners who are practicing self-awareness techniques. They confirmed that, compared to their country of origin, here they feel more "austere," "formal," "serious," "controlled," and "modest" in regard to sexuality.

But everything has its positive side. In a work-oriented culture, the repressed sexual energy moves upwards to the solar plexus. The person becomes more aggressive and dynamic and is able to work harder and longer, which brings fruits in the material aspects of life.

The root zone is also supplied in an unsatisfactory way on American earth. This is manifested in hidden feelings of insecurity and shame, which we observe quite often in our individual work with people. Of course insecurity, uncertainty, and anxiety about the future are natural human feelings all over the world. But it is especially striking to see such fears in people whose real financial situation



PHOTO OF MT. SHASTA BY JANE ENGLISH

is quite far from hardship. This suggests that a feeling of security is a state of mind and does not depend so much on one's bank account. In Asian countries it's often possible to observe quite carefree, unconcerned expressions on the faces of very poor people.

The throat zone also does not receive a full energy supply on American earth. This is reflected in a lack of subtlety present in both the arts and everyday life, as well as in the relatively small percentage of people that consider themselves connoisseurs of the arts.

There are also peculiar characteristics of the energy of American earth which have to do, not with the zones of

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the body, but with the main energy artery — the spine. For some reason, in the U.S. this very important energy channel is often blocked, and energy does not flow through it freely. If something is not functioning smoothly on the energy level, sooner or later this will manifest in the gross physical body as disease or dysfunction. The spine energy channel corresponds to the backbone, and energy blocks in the spine channel lead to degeneration in this area. When the spine becomes stiff and inflexible, it is more vulnerable to injury. Back surgery is a widely performed operation in the U.S., back pain is a common complaint among Americans, and the number of chiropractors here speaks for itself.

Of course a stiffening of the spine can be always explained by such factors as stress, preservatives in the food, the composition of minerals in the water, sitting tensely in the car, etc. But the subtle cause, which is blockage in the root zone and the lower part of the spine energy channel, can be experientially discovered by using a certain type of awareness of energy processes. To deal with such blockages, regular stretching and loosening of the spine, as well as breathing energy through the backbone channel, are advisable.

The energy of the earth varies locally in the U.S. just as it does in Russia, and different kinds of cities grow up on different kinds of local energy. In New York, for example, the typical American combination of solar plexus and head centers is quite manifest, with the solar plexus dominating. In Boston the dominant energy is that of the head; it is a very mental, cerebral city.

The next point in our travels was Santa Fe, New Mexico, which was quite a dramatic contrast to Boston. The energy of the earth in New Mexico is very powerful; it is almost dense. It brings you down to the body by predominantly activating the root and solar plexus zones. This kind of energy is very beneficial for various shamanic and magical practices. But it also has a raw, harsh, severe quality, which makes it more difficult to practice subtle meditation. The land in New Mexico definitely has a particular charm, but its enchantment is far from transcendent states. This is probably due to the fact that the earth pushes the energy quite intensely down into the body, cutting off the crown center, which is responsible for witnessing and pure awareness.

The next point in our journey was Los Angeles. Southern California is probably the only area in the U.S. where the influence of the earth on the sexual center is quite strong. (Arizona has something of the same flavor, but it is weaker.) Lower belly energy is particularly intense in West Los Angeles, Hollywood, Santa Monica, and Malibu. Los Angeles in general has a dominant solar plexus energy

of the same feverish intensity as New York's, but it differs in that the lower belly center is the next most dominant, while in New York it is the head. Because the overall level of earth energy is high in Los Angeles, it overflows upwards from the abdominal centers to the heart and higher. As a result, people who do not focus all their energy on career and sex are able to use this extra fuel for spiritual practice. This explains why Los Angeles, while being a city of business and entertainment, also has quite a number of serious spiritual centers. However, the overbearing, aggressive, feverish solar plexus energy sometimes makes it difficult to practice tranquil meditation devoid of thoughts.

Down in San Diego, the solar plexus becomes weaker and the energy of the lower belly subtler, which gives this city a more serene and youthful atmosphere.

Driving up from Los Angeles to San Francisco is like moving from the belly to the head. And somewhere halfway lies the area where the heart center is activated. This heart-focused earth influence can be felt, for example, in Fresno and especially in the area south of Hollister down Highway 25.

In this region lies a very interesting mountain formation: Pinnacles National Monument. Surrounded by soft, dome-shaped hills with a predominant heart influence, it erupts into the air with red vertical peaks which resemble motionless flames of fire, swords, or Shiva lingams. The energy of these fiery rocks evenly activates the three lower energy zones (root, sex, and solar plexus), integrating them into one dynamic bloc. This results in general invigoration and sometimes euphoria. In this context it's interesting to note that some mystical traditions describe, not three lower energy centers, but one. For example, in Sufism it's called the *kath* or moving center; in Japan, it's known as *hara* or the belly. Classic descriptions of developed *hara* seem to integrate the characteristics of the three lower energy zones discussed above.⁷

The high Sierras, including Yosemite, purify and energize all centers evenly. As is common in high mountains, the crown center is activated, with resultant states of clarity and expansion.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, the predominant earth influence is on the head. The energy for the lower centers is quite weak. This gives San Francisco and Berkeley a very cerebral atmosphere much like Boston's. The difference between Boston and San Francisco is that in the latter, the throat center is more active than is usual in the U.S., which gives this city a subtler, more refined flavor resembling that of St. Petersburg in Russia. Both San Francisco and St. Petersburg are visually beautiful cities, with a certain phantasmal, miragelike quality.

San Francisco's combination of dominant head and

throat centers is beneficial for intellectual work, writing, reading, and the arts, particularly arts that appeal to the refined intellect. All of these are found in Bay Area. On the other hand, the deprivation of energy to the two lower centers takes its toll as low vitality, fatigue, emotional instability, and mood swings.

In terms of spiritual practice, what makes the Bay Area so unique is that the earth here activates the crown center and the higher functions of the head. This is beneficial for the practice of self-awareness and for spiritual teachings that emphasize pure consciousness. Thus the Bay Area has become a home for a large number of Americans practicing Buddhism and the Advaita Vedanta. A development of the higher aspect of the head center is necessary for comprehending the philosophy of these teachings, while a well-functioning crown center is needed for the successful practice of *vipassana*, Dzogchen, Zen, or Advaitic self-inquiry. If on the psychological level the Bay Area's specific combination of three active higher centers and weak lower centers may be responsible for neurosis, low vitality, and mood swings, on the spiritual level, the same combination makes the mundane reality of the Bay Area less thick, more transparent, and easier to transcend.

The power place that most remarkably represents and magnifies the best qualities of Bay Area energy is Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County. Especially on the higher slopes, which open towards the ocean, the head center is purified of mundane thoughts and concerns, and the crown center opens, resulting in a state of tranquil clarity.

In northern California, about five hours from San Francisco, another power place is the magnificent Mt. Shasta, which is revered by many contemporary spiritual groups. Being an extremely powerful magnet on the astral plane, Mt. Shasta continuously spouts different energy formations that are beneficial for the inner alchemy of developing the "rainbow body" (also known as the subtle body, body of light, or the body of Ascended Masters). It is no surprise, then, that the mountain attracts so-called "ascension groups" and since the 1930s has been a home for the I AM Foundation, whose founder, Guy W. Ballard, had a series of mysterious encounters with Ascended Masters while wandering up Mt. Shasta in 1930.

What is often overlooked by modern ascension practitioners, however, is that historical evidence describes successful adepts as advanced yogis or ascetics who attained the rainbow body after spending a lifetime in concentration. Such a goal is hardly realistic for someone who cannot dedicate all of his or her time and energy to the rigorous discipline of inner transformation.

Our impression overall is that Mt. Shasta's energy does not foster the transcendental quality of pure consciousness and does not favor total ego death in the formless realm. But its aliveness and influence in the realm of subtle energy forms is quite interesting.

Hypothesis

The final conclusion of almost all mystics is that the Godhead, the Self, the Absolute Reality, is beyond attributes and description. All manifestations, subtle or gross,

arise from this transcendent Source. On a more ordinary level, each different religion or spiritual teaching seems to be inclined toward a particular attribute of this One Reality. This attribute functions simultaneously as: (1) a simple description of Absolute Reality or God; (2) the highest virtue or state to be attained; and (3) the way to realize it.

In many of the Western inner traditions - mystical Christianity, Sufism, Hasidism - as well as in *bhakti marga*, the devotional path of Hinduism, this attribute is Love. God is seen as Love, and the path to communion is through unconditional love for God and all creation. Buddhism, Dzogchen, Zen, and Vedanta, on the other hand, are focused on the aspect of pure formless consciousness. The path consists of detachment from all phenomena, leading to an awareness devoid of objects. In Tantra, Kashmiri Shaivism, the Taoist yoga of immortality, and probably in shamanism and Paganism, the aspect of God that is stressed is energy, *shakti*, power. The path thus consists of the sublimation and transformation of energy.

What if the earth, being itself a phenomenon arising in the One Reality, manifests different aspects or attributes of this Reality in different geographical areas? Mediated through the local influence of the earth, these aspects are disclosed in the consciousness of the people living in those areas. On the psychological level, these aspects manifest as predominant emotional states or personality traits. On the spiritual level, the attributes of the One are revealed, either spontaneously or through meditation, in ways specific to these areas. Possibly the theology and philosophy of a particular religion come later as reflections of these mystical experiences.

We are aware that many of our observations are disputable and some might seem controversial. We hope they will provoke interesting discussions. And if the next time you are traveling you notice how you feel in a particular area, this essay will have fulfilled at least one of its purposes. ■

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