

# *The Life Force in Nature*

*Charles Shahar*

According to Eastern philosophies, prana or ch'i is the vital force that permeates all of nature. Prana is described as being everywhere: in our bodies, within our homes, in the food we eat. Pranic energy is considered the animating principal behind all sentient manifestation. It is what powers the cells of the body, initiates movements in the limbs, makes plants grow and nurtures and sustains life in all its varieties.

This concept of the life force appears not only in the scriptures of the East but in numerous indigenous spiritual cultures as well. There are various terms analogous to prana found in the vocabularies of almost all native societies throughout the world.

In North America, the Pueblo Indians call it *powaha*, the sacred breath that flows through all the world's manifestations, both animate and inanimate.<sup>1</sup> The Iroquois call it *orenda*, the Sioux refer to it as *skan* and it is known as *maxpe* by the Crow and *manitou* by the Ojibway.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it is a central principle in the spirituality of almost all native American peoples, including the Lakota (*wakonda*), Shoshone (*pokunt*), and Haida (*sgana*).<sup>3</sup>

This primal energy or power is also a fundamental concept of numerous other indigenous peoples worldwide. For instance, the Australian Aboriginals refer to it as *kurunba* or *djang*, a spiritual force associated with sacred places.<sup>4</sup> Among the Bushmen of the Kalahari *num* is the energy that is awakened in healers through ecstatic dance, which triggers altered states of consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Among the Polynesians it is known as *mana*, which refers to a supernatural force that dwells in people, objects and places.<sup>6</sup>

In Hawaiian culture, it is believed that one can accumulate or deplete mana through certain thoughts or actions.<sup>7</sup> It is also believed that special places, such as the crater of Haleakala volcano on the island of Maui, have a strong concentration of mana. Ancient battles were fought for the island of Molokai because it was believed to possess strong mana; this island became a centre of sorcery and Molokai sorcery was considered to have more mana than any other form of magic.<sup>8</sup>

All these terms used by native peoples describe a sacred yet impersonal force that is behind all phenomena, seen and unseen. The fact that indigenous peoples almost universally acknowledge this energy suggests that the concept has been a central tenet of spiritual and religious life among the varied cultures of the earth, likely since before recorded history.

In this article, I would like to describe the ways that the vital force manifests in nature from an experiential point of view. I will be using the term 'prana' to describe it but, as noted above, this same life energy is recognized by native cultures throughout the globe.

## **Most Pranaful Locations in Nature**

Particularly pranaful locations are found almost everywhere in nature, if they haven't been spoiled by human activity. There is usually an abundance of prana surrounding moving water. The area around an

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1 Lekson, Stephen H., and Swentzell, Rina. *Ancient Land Ancestral Places: Paul Logsdon in the Pueblo Southwest*. Museum of New Mexico Press, 1993, p. 141.

2 Devereux, Paul. *Earth Mysteries*. Judy Piatkus Ltd., London, 1999, pp. 59-60.

3 Swan, James A. *Sacred Places: How the Living Earth Seeks Our Friendship*. Bear and Company Publishing, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1990, p. 70.

4 Cowan, James. *Letters from a Wild State: Rediscovering Our True Relationship to Nature*. Bell Tower, New York, 1991, p. 8.

5 Herman, Louis G. *Future Primal: How Our Wilderness Origins Show Us the Way Forward*. New World Library, Novato, California, 2013.

6 Fikentscher, Wolfgang. *Modes of Thought: A Study in the Anthropology of Law and Religion*. Mohr Siebeck, 2005, p. 228.

7 Berney, Charlotte. *Fundamentals of Hawaiian Mysticism*. Crossing Press, Berkeley, 2000, p. 54.

8 Warren-Beckwith, Martha. *Hawaiian Mythology*. University of Hawaii Press, 1977.

ocean or sea is full of prana and you can smell this refreshing quality in the salty air. A mountainous place often contains much vital energy and certain types of desert environments will as well. All of these places have a remarkable effect on the pranic fields of people and hence are popular with vacationers and others who simply want to recharge or rejuvenate themselves and get a charge from the vibrant air.

After a gentle rain shower, on a dewy early morning or on a clear and frosty day, prana is particularly noticeable as a freshness and sparkle in the air. I like to walk in the forest during a light drizzle in the early autumn. As I walk, I watch the energy fields of my companions expand with each breath they inhale. The atmosphere is so full of prana that the etheric fields of my fellow hikers simply radiate. By the time our hike is finished, there seems to be a sheen that envelops them. The forest itself is literally lit up with prana. The trees are scintillating in the subtle field.

Mountains are especially pranaful places. I have spent time living in the Himalayas, most parts of which are still fairly pristine. The energy is quite remarkable on the mountainsides and valleys below — there seems to be an effervescent quality in the air. The sky at night is exceptionally clear and transparent and the stars appear so close that you almost feel you can touch them. I found that I would experience a slight giddiness while walking in these valleys, which is a sure sign of a pranaful, high-energy environment — particularly for someone like me who had lived in a large city most of his life and who therefore had to acclimate to the rarified air.

The lifespan of people living in mountainous areas is generally longer than those residing in other types of environments. Aside from being more physically fit, having better diets and experiencing less stress, they also breathe differently, to absorb prana more efficiently from the atmosphere. Their vital bodies shine in the subtle field and radiate an intense bluish glow. The pranic fields of mountain people are among the most luminous of any humans on the planet. I find that, generally, indigenous populations who live in traditional ways that emphasize a connection to the natural environment have prominent etheric auras around them.

The pranic field surrounding waterfalls is intense. I once visited a large waterfall and had a giddy feeling standing at the edge of the observation area. I was at a considerable distance from the falls but experienced feelings of buoyancy and lightheadedness. My vital body was getting so charged I could literally feel a tingling in my auric skin. Even from a great distance the area around the falls appeared to be shimmering in the vital field. One can speak about the negative ions that permeate such sites but these are simply physical manifestations of a much subtler energy. One gets the same charge around breaking waves, pine forests and during electrical storms.<sup>9</sup>

The waters around coral reefs are among the most pranaful on the planet. I have seen strong vital fields enveloping such colonies. For instance, while snorkeling among the coral reefs off eastern Cuba, I was struck by how ethereal-looking these colonies seemed. I could see tendrils of prana literally shoot out of their midst and the fish absorbing the prana were positively incandescent. The colours of the coral and fish are so vivid because they reflect wavelengths of vibrations that the human eye rarely sees. The hues themselves shine in a pranic light.

It is a very delicate balance for the coral. While snorkeling in Cuba, I noticed tourist boats leaking diesel fuel into the water, which in the subtle field looked like dark clouds that enveloped the coral and made their environment appear dimmer. Human introduction of water-borne pollutants has choked the prana from these reefs, killing marine life and leaving desolation in its wake. It is heartbreaking to watch the last of the corals struggle to eke out whatever little prana is left in their midst, finally ending up as dead bits washing up on the beach.

### **Least Pranaful Locations in Nature**

It is difficult to find places where there is a deficiency of prana due to natural conditions. I have sensed much thinner prana around stagnant pools or lakes where the forces of decay are at work, as well as around swampy or boggy areas. Places that have seen significant soil erosion, where dust or sand is creeping into grassy or previously fertile areas, are also pranically deficient. Prana is less evident in areas of the ocean that suffer from oxygen depletion, where small organisms siphon off prana and leave vast areas where fish life is starving for vital energy.

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<sup>9</sup> Linn, Denise. *Sacred Space: Clearing and Enhancing the Energy of Your Home*. Ballantine Books, New York, 1995, p. 63.

There is also much less prana in the deeper recesses of the ocean, where sunlight does not reach and the environment is barren and desolate. The strange creatures that lurk in the darkest parts of the ocean have adapted themselves to their pranically deficient environments. Some of these wonderfully luminescent creatures generate such a powerful vital field it can be seen even with conventional cameras aboard submersibles. These glowing life-forms have found ways to compensate for conditions that are meagre in vital energy.

Less prana is also evident in the atmosphere immediately after devastating forest fires; after volcanic eruptions in which dust and ash have spewed across the surrounding countryside and just after a tornado has struck. There is also less prana above large ocean whirlpools, around receding ocean tides, and in areas where mudslides or devastating floods have taken place. People who have entered a landscape immediately after events such as forest fires or tornadoes have often remarked on feelings of emptiness. Not only have the life-forms fled or perished in these areas but to some extent the life force has withdrawn as well.

The pranic plane is closely tied to the physical environment. Wherever there is intense dissolution, decay or displacement, a void is created in the ether and prana thins out. Normally the pranic field will appear as a shimmering bluish glow to the subtle vision. Where it is depleted, it will appear washed out, pale and often grayish, mixed with only a hint of bluish tinge. We may sense a gloominess or dreariness pervading the air, as if the very fabric of the pranic field has become frayed or worn.

In the summer, whenever the air is thick and humid, prana is less evident and the atmosphere gets heavy and even oppressive. I have noticed that people's vital fields will look pale and weak and they may seem listless. It depends on one's etheric constitution. I am very comfortable in humid conditions and my vital field tends to expand and strengthen. I will walk around as happy as can be while most people around me sag and drag their feet. On the other hand, my vital aura will contract in cold conditions. I not only get physically cold more readily but even my aura tenses up.

Finally, prana is less evident the higher up in the atmosphere one goes. As I mentioned above, people who live on the slopes of the higher Andes or Himalayan Mountains have acclimated to the low pranic content of their environment. Higher still, mountain climbers are able to surmount the effects of low pranic levels through specialized breathing — similar to exercises developed by Indian yogis, such as diaphragmatic breathing and what is known as pressure breathing, forcefully blowing out through the lips during exhalation.

Altitude sickness is a consequence of thinning pranic levels and can become particularly noticeable at about 10,000 feet above sea level. Symptoms include fatigue, headaches, nausea, rapid pulse, laboured breathing, dizziness and disorientation. At some point at higher elevations, the prana becomes so thin that it can scarcely support human life. This is the 'death zone' that mountain climbers talk about; usually above 26,000 feet.<sup>10</sup> There are only a few climbers who have ascended mountains such as Everest without supplemental oxygen canisters. It is only by managing the pranic intake most efficiently that climbers mitigate some of the effects of such pranically deficient environments.

You may ask - is it not the thinning oxygen so high above sea level that is responsible for such symptoms? Air is simply a carrier of prana on the physical plane but is a much grosser element. That is why mountain climbers who practice specific techniques similar to yogic breathing (or pranayama) can transcend the merely physical aspects of thinning air and siphon the elements that give air its vital qualities. It is also interesting that the indigenous mountain peoples who are often used as guides and porters in climbing expeditions are very much in touch with the air elementals (nature spirits) and through their prayers and invocations gain assistance from them.

### **Biography**

Charles Shahar is a clinical psychologist by training, and social researcher by vocation. He has lived and studied Vedanta philosophy in India, and has been teaching yoga and meditation to diverse populations for over 17 years. Website: [www.lightfigures.com](http://www.lightfigures.com)



<sup>10</sup> Hamill, Mike. *Climbing the Seven Summits: A Comprehensive Guide to the Continents' Highest Peaks*. The Mountaineers Books, Seattle, Washington, 2012, p. 82.