



ISSN: 2456-4419

Impact Factor: (RJIF): 5.18

Yoga 2019; 4(1): 1382-1384

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www.theyogicjournal.com

Received: 26-11-2018

Accepted: 29-12-2018

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Panchakosha

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Abstract

Yoga is a comprehensive holistic approach to health, happiness, and wellbeing. Rather than just addressing the physical body, yoga ascertains that there are indeed five bodies, five layers of self or being, that must be addressed for overall healing to take place.

A Koshas, usually rendered "sheath", is a covering of the Atman, or Self according to Vedantic philosophy. There are five *Koshas*, and they are often visualised as the layers of an onion in the subtle body.

Panchakoshas, are the layers of body that seemingly cover the Atman. The Tvam padartha of the Mahavakya Tat Tvam Asi is determined by the analysis of Panchakoshas that are not the atman.

The Taittiriya Upanishad speaks of the human existence as being akin to the layers of an onion, which range from the large, rough layers to the fine, tender layers. As understood by Vedanta philosophy, our 'Atma' or soul is covered by these Koshas or sheaths; the Anna may Kosh (Food Sheath), Pranamay Kosh (Vital Air Sheath), Manomay Kosh (Mind Sheath), Vijnanamaya Kosh (Intellect Sheath) and Anandmay Kosha (Bliss Sheath).

According to the yoga tradition, every one of us has five bodies, each made of increasingly finer grades of energy. And if we intend to live a fully balanced, healthy life, it tells us, all our bodies need to be kept in good condition.

Keywords: Yoga, health, happiness, and wellbeing, Panchakosha, *Koshas*, *Vedanta philosophy*

Introduction

Yoga is an ancient Indian science and way of life which brings about relaxation and also induces a balanced mental state. Yoga practices intended to act at physical, emotional, intellectual and even at spiritual levels. This yoga program is derived from principles in should promote health at all levels.

Panchakoshas, are the layers of body that seemingly cover the Atman (Self or Consciousness). The Tvam Padartha of the Mahavakya Tat Tvam Asi is determined by the analysis of *Panchakoshas* that are not the atman. Panchakoshas are discussed in the Brahmananda Valli Chapter of Taittiriya Upanishad which is a part of the Taittiriya Samhita of the Krishna Yajur Veda and in which particular chapter is discussed ways and means to achieve Brahman It gives a detailed description of the dimensions of human personality or the dimensions of the Self.

Atman, The Sruti declares that human birth, by divine grace, is meant to strive to know and understand the *atman*. The knowledge and understanding of the *atman* invariably results in Jiwanmukti i.e. Moksha or "Spiritual liberation". Spiritual Liberation is of the nature of bliss in which there is complete negation of all sorrow, it does not arise by mere study of Sastras, sacrifice to gods, performance of *karmas* and meditation on the divinities, these acts do not result in the knowledge of the unity of *atman*. *Atman* is Brahman who is of the nature of Satyam, Jnanam and Anantam, and the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman. Knowledge is gained after renouncing attachment to all sense-objects and all actions, for one's body, that Harbours the mind that makes for bondage and is not the *atman*. The Atman is the substratum of the consciousness of "I".

Anantam, means not-self or non-self. Anatman is everything that is not Atman. All objects of consciousness are called Anatman, including the mind and the ego. The samsara is the vast turbulent ocean which is the embodiment of avidya and its effects that cannot be crossed without the aid of perfect wisdom; the *samsara* is the anatman. By non-realisation of the true

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nature of the atman, the atman is mistaken as the Karana Sarira ("causal body"), Suksma Sarira ("subtle body") and Sthula Sarira ("gross body") which bodies constitute the anatman. For a person who is unaware of the *atman* there is no other go except to do *karmas* intended for purification of the mind.

Three types of Shariras

According to Sarira Traya, the Doctrine of the three bodies in Hinduism, the human being is composed of three Sariras or "bodies" emanating from Brahman by avidya, "ignorance" or "nescience". They are often equated with the five Koshas (sheaths), which cover the atman. The Three Bodies Doctrine is an essential doctrine in Indian philosophy and religion, especially Yoga, Advaita Vedanta and Tantra.

- Panchakoshas are divided in three Shariras-
- **Sthula Sarira, the gross body:** Made up of physical matter. This body consists of Annamaya Kosha and Pranamaya Kosha.
- **Sukshma Sarira, the subtle body:** This body consists of Manomaya Kosha and Vijnanamaya Kosha.
- **Karana Sarira, the causal body:** This body consists of Anandamaya Kosha.

The five Koshas

Kosha is referred to as "sheath", one of five coverings of the Atma or Self according to Vedantic philosophy. According to the Kosha system in Yogic philosophy, the nature of being human-encompasses physical and psychological aspects that function-as one holistic system. The Kosha system refers to these different aspects as layers of subjective experience.

Layers range from the dense physical body to the more subtle levels of emotions, mind and spirit. Atma is wrapped inside Panchakosha.

The five interconnecting Koshas are

1. Annamaya Kosha
2. Pranamaya Kosha
3. Manomaya Kosha
4. Vijnanamaya Kosha
5. Anandamaya Kosha

Annamaya Kosha - the food sheath

Anna means matter, Annam literally means food; Taittiriya Upanishad calls food the medicament of all. The gross body which is matter-born and matter sustained and transient and subject to perception is the Annamaya Kosha whose origin is food eaten by parents. It is visible, dependent and impure. It is not the atman because it did not exist before its origination and ceases to exist once it is destroyed. It is subject to origination and destruction every moment. It is the anatman because it is not in the beginning and at the end, is non-existent also in the present. It does not know itself. The deluded mind that does not inquire considers his atman to be this body or Kosha. Such a person cannot enjoy bliss.

Pranamaya Kosha - The vital energy or breath sheath

Pranamaya Kosha, separate from and subtler than Annamaya Kosha, pertains to the Sukshma Sarira, it is the sheath of the vital airs completely enclosing and filling the Annamaya Kosha. The Prana in combination with the five organs of action constitutes the Pranamaya Kosha. The Annamaya Kosha is an effect of the Pranamaya Kosha. The Annamaya Kosha gets life by the Prana entering into it and engages in all kinds of action. Prana is the life of beings and the Universal life. Whatever happens in the Annamaya Kosha is wrongly

identified as belonging to the atman by reason of its being pervaded by the Pranamaya Kosha which is effect of Vayu, and totally unaware and dependent.

Manomaya Kosha-The mind Sheath

Manomaya Kosha belongs to the Suksma Sarira. It is the "self" having Pranamaya Kosha as its body. The organs of knowledge and the mind form this Kosha which is the cause of the sense of the "I" and of the "mine" and of the varying conceptions. It creates difference of names etc., because organs of knowledge are dependent on and determined by the mind which is of the nature of determination and doubt. It is powerful because bondage and liberation depend on the mind which producing attachment binds a person and which by creating aversion for them liberates them from that self-made bondage. It pervades the Pranamaya Kosha. It is the sacrificial fire, the five organs are the priests who pour into this fire the oblations of sense-objects, which fire fuelled by various vasanas burns out the world created and expanded by the mind that when fouled by rajas ("projection") and tamas ("concealment") superimposes the samsara but when free of rajas and tamas can bring about the state of being established in Brahman.

Vijnanamaya Kosha-The intellect sheath

The word Vijnana means Knowledge. This layer is made of the intellect and knowledge. This is the part of mind that makes decisions, and takes ownership of action and becomes an ego.

Vijnanamaya Kosha also belongs to the Suksma Sarira and pervades the Manomaya Kosha that pervades the Pranamaya Kosha which pervades the Annamaya Kosha. Buddhi with its organs of knowledge and its actions having the characteristics of an agent is the Vigyana Kosha, the cause of samsara. It has the power of reflection of the chaitanya which it accompanies as a modification of Prakrti (Avidya) and characterised by knowledge and action and always identified with the body, organs etc. This Kosha is endowed with Jnana and to it belong the waking and dream states and the experiences of joy and sorrow. Being very luminous in close proximity of the Paramatman deluded by which upadhi it is subject to samsara, this atman which is compacted of vighyanana and shining in the heart near the Pranas being immutable becomes a doer and enjoyer in the midst of the upadhis. Its "jivabhava-existential-character" i.e. Jivahood, persists as long as there is delusion as it is born of mithyajnana. Though avidya is beginningless it is not eternal.

Anandamaya Kosha-The bliss sheath

Ananda means bliss. This is the bliss of the Atman. This bliss is experienced when we fall into deep sleep.

Anandamaya Kosha is the last layer and it is the closest layer to the Atman. It is a modification of avidya and appears as a reflection of the atman compacted of absolute bliss. It is fully manifested in the dreamless deep sleep. It is not the atman because it is connected with upadhis ("limitations") and a modification of Prakrti as an effect of good deeds.

Conclusion

Ultimate goal of human life is to move away from the Annamaya Kosha and remain in the Vighyanamaya Kosha most of the times and progressively move into the Anandamaya Kosha. All five Koshas of self are interconnected and dependent on one another. If the body is tense, the breath is shallow, the mind is irritated, and wisdom

and joy are absent. If there's disconnect from spirit, indicating a weak bliss body, there's disharmony on all layers. On the other hand, when you're perfectly in tune with your bliss body, joy and peace permeate all aspects of who you are.

The practice and philosophical application of yoga into our everyday life help bring all the Koshas-body, breath, mind, wisdom, and spirit-into harmony, promoting overall health and bringing you closer to self-realization and an absolute fullness of being. Development of all the five Koshas is necessary for man's complete spiritual evolution and ultimate union with the Divine.

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