

## From Tadasana to Samadhi: How Yoga Works

### *What are the benefits of yoga?*

- Physical health
- sense of well-being
- Awareness, consciousness, higher consciousness
- Relationship, community

### *How does asana practice deliver these?*

- Movement
- Breath
- Relaxation
- Organs of perception
- Structure of poses
  - Foundation
  - Direction
  - Extension
- Dynamic tension creates edge, point of concentration
- Lines of energy
- Antagonist muscles
- Organs of action

### *Layers*

- Gross body, full participation
- Breath
- Circulation, nervous system
- Mental
- Spiritual

## Koshas: The 5 Sheaths As A Model for Practice and Teaching

### *Annamaya kosha*

This is the sheath of the physical self, named from the fact that it is nourished by food. Living through this layer man identifies himself with a mass of skin, flesh, fat, bones, and filth, while the man of discrimination knows his own self, the only reality that there is, as distinct from the body.

### *Pranamaya kosha*

Pranamaya means composed of prana, the vital principle, the force that vitalizes and holds together the body and the mind. It pervades the whole organism, its one physical manifestation is the breath. As long as this vital principle exists in the organisms, life continues. Coupled with the five organs of action it forms the vital sheath. In the Vivekachudamani it is a modification of vayu or air, it enters into and comes out of the body.

### *Manomaya kosha*

Manomaya means composed of manas or mind. The mind (manas) along with the five sensory organs is said to constitute the manomaya kosha. The manomaya kosha, or “mind-sheath” is said more truly to

approximate to personhood than annamaya kosa and pranamaya kosha. It is the cause of diversity, of I and mine. Sankara likens it to clouds that are brought in by the wind and again driven away by the same agency. Similarly, man's bondage is caused by the mind, and liberation, too, is caused by that alone.

### *Vijnanamaya kosha*

Vijnanamaya means composed of vijnana, or intellect, the faculty which discriminates, determines or wills. This knowledge sheath, which seems to be followed by a reflection of the power of the cit, is a modification of prakrti. It is endowed with the function of knowledge and identifies itself with the body, organs etc.

This knowledge sheath cannot be the supreme self for the following reasons;

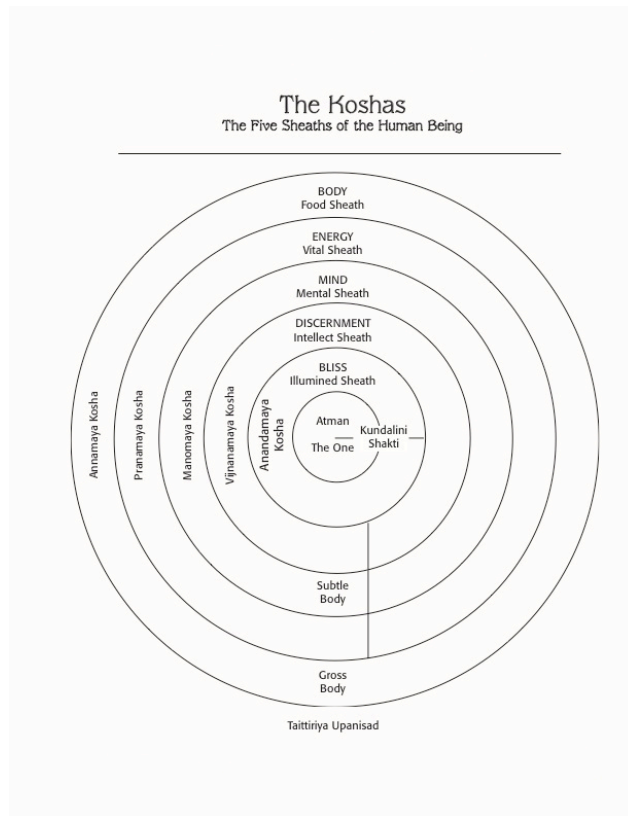
- It is subject to change.
- It is insentient.
- It is a limited thing.
- It is not constantly present.

### *Anandamaya kosha*

Anandamaya means composed of ananda, or bliss. In the Upanishads the sheath is known also as the causal body. In deep sleep, when the mind and senses cease functioning, it still stands between the finite world and the self. Anandamaya, or that which is composed of Supreme bliss, is regarded as the innermost of all. The bliss sheath normally has its fullest play during deep sleep: while in the dreaming and wakeful states, it has only a partial manifestation. The blissful sheath (anandamaya kosha) is a reflection of the Atman which is bliss absolute.

### *In Practice*

- Asana dwells in annamaya kosha and moves us into pranamaya kosha. We employ our limbs and affect our tissues and skeleton, organs and organic systems (body) and feel the benefits in health.
- Asana and pranayama sensitize us to and cultivate pranamaya kosha. We feel vitality and ebb and flow with our efforts. The long-term effect of our practice can be felt in our energy towards life.



- Sensitivity of our life force and the effects of our actions is cultivated by our practice. This capacity for sensitivity expands to other areas of our life and allows us to see the connections and relationships of our existence. Mind, sense organs and our surrounding world are a system of information flowing to and from mind. This is manomaya kosha.
- Discrimination of action is born in asana and pranayama and can move us towards more contemplative practice. Discernment, intelligent choice, and deferred gratification are elements of vijnanamaya kosha.
- By cultivating our capacity for awareness, our ability to see relationship in all things (and all things as one) and our ability to penetrate the nature of maya, we begin to realize our oneness with that which has always been and which shall always be, that force which unfolds and refolds the cosmos.

### *In Teaching*

- The student appears before the teacher because they have responded to an impulse, need, or desire for personal transformation.
- The teacher must meet the student where they are and guide them, as they are ready, towards their fullest (fuller) potential.
- Yoga teachers begin with the most fundamental human experience, the body, annamaya kosha. Just as a human spirit must first learn how to occupy the human body from the moment of conception, the student's path to spiritual realization must start with the full presence of the human experience, the body.
- Expanding the complexity of asana and adding breath awareness and breath control broadens students' awareness from the singular annamaya kosha to pranamaya and manomaya koshas. Each practice and long-term teacher-student relationship leads down this path.
- Complexity in asana demands discernment in action, cultivating vijnanamaya kosha. The nature of *hatha* requires balance. The teacher presents the problem.

- When the search for truth is stripped of action and all that is left is consciousness, we are anandamaya, *satchitananda* . The teacher shows the portal to this experience, but the student crosses alone.

Discussion: Can you give examples of the manifestations of these gunas:

- in the forces of nature? say the weather? or geology?
- in your diet?
- in your nature or personality?
- in your practice?

## Gunās: Essence of the Cosmos

In Samkhya philosophy, a *guṇa* is one of three "tendencies": *tamas*, *sattva*, and *rajas*. These categories have become a common means of categorizing behavior and natural phenomena in Hindu philosophy, and also in Ayurvedic medicine, as a system to assess conditions and diets. For this reason *triguṇa* and *tridoṣha* are considered to be related in the traditions of Ayurveda. *Guṇa* is the tendency not action itself. For instance, *sattva guṇa* is the tendency towards purity but is not purity itself. Similarly *rajas guṇa* is that force which tends to create action but is not action itself. Each of the three *gunas* is ever present simultaneously in every particle of creation but the variations in equilibrium manifest all the variety in creation including matter, mind, body and spirit.

All creation is made up by a balance composed of all three forces. For creation to progress, each new stage "needs a force to maintain it and another force to develop it into a new stage. The force that develops the process in a new stage is *rajo guṇa*, while *tamo guṇa* is that which checks or retards the process in order to maintain the state already produced, so that it may form the basis for the next stage".

- *Sattva* (originally "being, existence, entity") has been translated to mean balance, order, or purity. Indologist Georg Feuerstein translates *sattva* as "lucidity".
- *Rajas* (originally "atmosphere, air, firmament") is also translated to mean change, movement or dynamism.
- *Tamas* (originally "darkness", "obscurity") has been translated to mean "too inactive" or "inertia", negative, lethargic, dull, or slow. Usually it is associated with darkness, delusion, or ignorance. A *tamas* quality also can refer to anything destructive or entropic. In his Translation and Commentary on the Bhagavad-Gita, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi explains "The nature of *tamo guṇa* is to check or retard, though it should not be thought that if the movement is upward *tamo guṇa* is absent".

## Bandhas

There are three common muscular contractions in yoga practice called *bandhas* (or locks). It is believed that each lock has the function of changing blood circulation, nerve pressure, the flow of cerebral spinal fluid, and moving the internal abdominal and pelvic organs.

*Mulabandha: Root lock.*

- Learn Mula Bandha in Virasana:
- Begin in Virasana (hero pose), seated on a block. Contact the "tripod" at the base of the pelvis which consists of three bones: the tail bone (coccyx) and the two heads of the thigh (femur) bones. Lengthen your coccyx into the floor. Sink the heads of the femur into the floor. You can facilitate this action with a sandbag placed across each thigh. Establish your seat then with your hands, press your hip points together, narrowing them toward each other.
- The combined action of the bones will firm the lower belly without hardening it, and spontaneously dome your perineum up into your torso without conscious action on your part. Let the spine lift your torso from coccyx to crown.

- Apply Mula Bandha (contract the muscles that stop the flow of urine), then hold it during kumbhaka (exhale retention. Slowly release Mula Bandha as you exhale. Repeat!

*Jalandhara Bandha (cloud-catching lock): Neck lock*

- “The lion that conquers the elephant death!”
- Sit in a comfortable pose.
- Firm your shoulder blades against your back torso to lift your sternum. Be careful not to push your front ribs forward.
- Full Jalandhara requires the chin to rest comfortably on the sternum (neck flexion). Many beginners make the mistake of only lowering the chin; in fact your chin should be met half-way by the elevated sternum.
- The focus of these complementary movements is the "crook" of the throat, where the underside of the chin meets the front of the neck. Draw this crook diagonally up and into your skull (toward the top of your spine). Your head should pivot and your chin should descend over this action, which simultaneously draws the top of the sternum upward.
- Work on lengthening the back of your neck, releasing your shoulders, and opening your chest in poses like Sarvangasana and Setu Bandha Sarvangasana. Never force your chin to your sternum.
- If you're a beginner, don't hold this bandha continuously throughout your practice. Begin your inhalation with your head upright. Apply Jalandhara as you near the end of the *inhale*, hold during the retention and the exhale, then raise your head to a neutral position for the next inhale.
- Jalandhara Banda creates a hollowness in the clavicular chest, which gives the heart room when applying uddiyana bandha.

*Uddiyana Bandha (flying up lock): Diaphragm or stomach lock.*

- Stand with knees bent, hands on thighs.
- *Exhale* fully and apply Jalandhara Bandha. Failure to do so can cause strain on the heart.
- While retaining the *exhalation*, draw the lower, middle, and upper abdominal muscles back to the spine, then upward toward the heart. These muscles will lift the diaphragm and abdominal organs into the thorax.
- This gives a vigorous squeeze or massage to the abdominal muscles and compresses the region on the heart and possibly stimulates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis in the brain.
- Release the locks to inhale.

*Maha Mudhra:*

Great Lock. Sit with legs in *janusirsasana*, with chest lifted (not extended forward), grasping toe. Apply and hold in order, *mulabandha*, *uddiyanabandha* and *jalandharabandha* together on an *inhalation* retention. This is taught in the final sessions of the program.