

Yogic Concept Of Human Body

Dr. Girdhar Gopal¹

Dr. Amandeep Mehta²

Department of Computer Science & Application, S. D. College, Ambala Cantt. (Haryana)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) the state of health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well being and not merely an absence of diseases or infirmity. As per the yogic tradition and Taittiriya Upanishadic principle, there are five sheaths of existence of man. The sheaths are called 'Kosha' which means layers of existence. The five layers are called 'Pancha Kosha'-they are:

1. Annamaya Kosha (Physical Body)
2. Pranamaya Kosha (Pranic Body)
3. Manomaya Kosha (Mind Body)
4. Vijñanamaya Kosha (Intellect Body)
5. Anandamaya Kosha (Bliss Body)



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Annamaya Kosha (Physical Body)

The first and the grossest kosha is the physical frame, which we all are familiar is called Annamaya Kosha. It is the physical body with its biological function and predominantly material needs and wants. This physical body is made of solid matter consisting of Pancha Bhutas, the five elements i.e earth, water, fire, air and space. These five elements are then further organized to form the seven basic tissues of the human body called as the saptadhatus. They include rasa (lymph), rakta (blood), mamsa (flesh/muscle), majja (bone marrow), medas (fat), asthi (bone) and sukra (semen).

Pranamaya Kosha (Pranic Body)

The second subtle sheath (kosha) is the 'pranamaya kosha' featured by the predominance of prana, the life force. In this kosha, the flows through the invisible channels called 'Nadis'. The vital energy (prana) flows continuously in each and every cell. The balanced flow of prana in right proportion keeps the cell healthy. The prana that flows through these nadis is of five types based on its functions (udana, prana, samana, apana, vyana), and they are further sub-classified into five upa-pranas (naga, koorma, krikara, devadatta, dhananjaya).

Manomaya Kosha (Mind Body)

It pertains to mind and its thought process. These are the actions and reactions of the physical body which are maintained and fed by thoughts, feelings and emotions. It works through our five senses and leads to our likes and dislikes. Every fluctuation in the mental body has a chemical reaction in the physical body and vice-versa. Emotions create chemical altercations in the brain and affect hormonal secretion. Scientific research has proved that the state of our mind changes the state of our body by working through the central nervous system, the endocrine system and the immune system. A positive mind favorably stimulates the immune system and a negative attitude depresses it. Positive emotional attitude like love, happiness, peace and spiritual experiences improve the process of healing. Whereas negative thoughts and emotions like anger, hatred, jealousy, greed and violence, reduce body's immunity and enhance the chance of damage to health.

Every cell in the body responds to each thought you think. Many of us have an overactive Manomayakosha. Being emotionally hyperactive, stresses our

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nervous system. If we learn to control our mind, we can do wonderful things with our body. We can retard or reverse our aging process. It is not only the toxins in the physical body that can harm us, but toxins in the mind (the negative thoughts) can be more dangerous. Those who establish their awareness in the Manomaya body free themselves of unhealthy thoughts and actions and develop self-control. Practice of yoga can help us to control and calm our mind. Practice such as pranayama, pratyahara (mental withdrawing of the senses) are very efficient. Patanjali tells us in Yog sutra, “Yogaschittavrittinirodha”- yoga helps in controlling the manifestations of the mind. Yoganidra also helps in penetrating through the Manomayakosha and gives it a direction.

Vijnanamaya Kosha (Intellect Body)

It is the Wisdom layer, the sheath/kosha of the INTELLECT. 'Vijnana' means Wisdom or subtle knowledge. It is higher intelligence that contains in itself, knowledge, power of discernment, intuition, conscience and will. One who understands the functioning of this kosha or body, modulates his thoughts and actions accordingly, faces the reality of life, keeps himself away from illusions, worldly temptations and attachments, gives up all negative qualities, sheds ego. Such a person achieves the highest state of wisdom. Once our mind is calm and stable, we start on an inward journey, senses are drawn inwards, outer world does not affect us much. As Lord Krishna said in Bhagwad Gita 'Samatavamyoga Uchayate'-Through yoga we achieve equanimity of mind. We accept Sorrow, joy, heat, cold, pleasure, and pain with composure. We start understanding the meaning of life. We develop more clarity and intuition that helps us to act wise and not to give in to the temptations of the material world. We are guided by your morals and ethics. We expect less. We start becoming comfortable with who we are and what we have. We experience peace within. It leads to happiness.

A person with under developed Vijnanamaya Kosha has poor judgment of right and wrong, has no will power, no control over his life. This wisdom layer is inherent in all of us but most of us remain ignorant about it. Once we are able to create balance and harmony in our physical body, energy body and mental body, we can easily connect to our next layer, the wisdom body. 'Ashtanga' yoga practice such as 'Dharana' (mental focus on an object) and 'Dhyana' (meditation on the divine) are steps that help us to gradually move

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towards this higher level of consciousness. 'Jnana' yoga, study of spiritual texts also nourishes the intellect and helps in developing this kosha. This knowledge helps us in finding our true nature and in our understanding of the world around us.

Anandamaya Kosha (Bliss Body)

'Ananda' is a sanskrit word which means Joy , Bliss. This is the most subtle layer beyond any explanation. It is the core of our being. It is Spiritual. This energy layer is closest to the Cosmic light and Truth. Once this kosha is awakened we feel Blissful. We experience pure delight, ecstasy, joy. We forget the existence of our gross body, mind and we are transported to the highest level of our being. We become one with the divine, and we experience nothing but Happiness and bliss. This kosha is our true nature, which is nothing but goodness, contentment, peace and love that expands beyond any mental constraints. Most of us are not even aware that this higher level of consciousness resides within us and we can connect to it. Very few manage to experience this Kosha. Sometimes we experience this state of bliss, when we are so much engrossed in creating something that we almost forget our existence. Artists, painters, writers. Performing artists have experienced it in brief flashes. Meditation helps us to achieve a state of bliss. Once we experience the beauty of this higher conscience we try to achieve it again and again. It becomes our nature and we can be in a state of bliss most of the time. It is the most beautiful experience of our being. Step by step practice of Patanjali's eight fold yoga and meditation help in connecting us to this layer and in achieving the state of 'Ananda'. The 'sadhaka' becomes free from the shackles of physical life and always enjoys a blissful condition. Awakening our blissful self is the greatest gift of yoga to mankind.

Bhakti yoga – devotion to God also leads us on the path of a blissful experience. Another way to awaken this sheath is through selfless service - Karma yoga. A combination of Raja yoga, Bhakti yoga, Karma yoga and Jnana yoga enhances our experience of Blissful self.

In conclusion for holistic health all these five sheaths of our body are to be kept in good condition. Disturbance in one affects the other because these five sheaths function in coordination with each other to form an integral whole. It is important to awaken and strengthen these koshas as they provide the road map to lead us smoothly from our physiological; to psychological to

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spiritual self and thus help us live a healthy, happy and peaceful life.

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