

# PANCHAKOSHA, the five sheaths

Swami Maheshwarananda Puri explains to **R.C. Ganjoo** some of the finest and sensitive facets of *yoga* which help individuals to explore the path of "Light" within and beyond.

**O**ur body does not just consist of the visible physical form. We also possess four other subtle sheaths. Altogether each person consists of five "bodies" or *KOSHAS*.

These five *Koshas* are:

*ANNAMAYAKOSHA* - the Body of Nourishment - Physical Body

*PRANAMAYA KOSH* - the Energy Body

*MANOMAYA KOSHA*- the mental Body - Astral Body

*VIGYANAMA KOSHA* - the Intellectual Body

*ANANDAMAYA KOSHA* - the Body of Joy - Casual Body

Our *KARMAS* (actions) and *SAMSKARAS* (memories and experiences) are stored in the *Koshas*. They form the partitions between the individual soul and the universal Self. Liberation - *MOKSHA*-therefore means to release the *Atma* from the limitations of the *Koshas*.

In order to become one with something we must develop the same qualities as that with which we wish to unite. Until we have released ourselves from the *Koshas*, while we still hang onto our personal ego and continue to identify with the little "I", we cannot become one with the infinite.



On the other hand, however, all five *Koshas* are indispensable for our existence on the earthly plane. Without them we cannot exist here. To surmount and detach from the *Koshas* is primarily an extensive process of mental purification and development. When there are no more impurities, no more "shadows" remaining, then at the end of our life the astral body also dissolves and our soul's spark unities with the infinite, divine light.

*ANNAAMAYA KOSHA* is the physical body. It is influenced by the food we eat as well as by our environment and society. Therefore, the Yoga teachings emphasise how important are positive and beneficial human interactions as well as a healthy, *sattvic* (harmonious, balanced, pure) nourishment. *Sathvic* nourishment is wholesome vegetarian food which includes fresh milk and milk products) diet, for our physical and mental

development. The consumption of meat, alcohol and drugs weakens our vitality and fills us with negative vibrations. A wholesome, lacto-vegetarian diet, however, provides nourishment for the body in an optimal way.

*PRANAMAYA KOSHA* is the subtle sheath of cosmic energy that penetrates and surrounds the physical body. It forms our "aura", the radiance that emanates from us. *PRANA* is the subtle "nourishment" that is as necessary to life as food and drink. With each breath we not only absorb oxygen, but also *Prana*.

All food not only supplies us with nutrients, but also with *Prana*. The quality of our own *Prana* is divisively affected by external influences as well as by our own thoughts and emotions, and impacts upon the other *Koshas*.

*MANOMAYA KOSHA*, the mental energy sheath, is even

more extensive and powerful than the *Pranamaya Kosha*. Its scope is infinite. The mind and thoughts can reach anywhere without any loss of time. Therefore, it is very difficult to control the thoughts.

positively or negatively orientated. This depends on the society we keep, together with the sensory impressions that we absorb from our environment. It is formed by the experiences, upbringing and education in this



**In a country with only 2.000.000 citizens, more than 1.000 Yoga practitioners gathered to celebrate IDY and practice Yoga. Unique natural environment in botanical garden in Slovenia.**

Vadanta philosophy coined the saying:

*MANOMATRAJAGAT*- "The whole world exists in your mind"

Innumerable levels and worlds exist in the mind of each individual. Every thought, every idea and every feeling forms a separate world for itself. Only through controlling the mind we can gain control over our destiny.

The best method of mastering the mind is to foster good thoughts and qualities by following the rules of *YAMA* and *NIYAMA* (Yama and Niyama are ten ethical principles of Raja Yoga. non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, non-accumulation, purity, contentment, discipline, studying holy scriptures and devotion to God. Understanding, giving, praying and plasticising *mantra* purify our *karmic* phenomenon.

*VIGYANAMAYA KOSHA* is the intellectual body. It can also be

lifetime, and represents the sum total of all of these.

The intellect, though, is not always our best adviser. All too often it is deaf to the truth and judges egoistically in line with our desires. The intellect can be a very useful tool, but it can also be a great hindrance. That is why we should always employ both *BUDDHI* (reason) *VIKEKA* (correct discrimination)

*ANANDAMAYA KOSHA* is the "body of bliss". It is the subtlest of the five sheaths and the most difficult to overcome. This is because the aspiration for the fulfilment of our desires and for comfort and pleasure is a powerful motivator and decisive power within us.

There are two types of joy:

the transitory, limited elation and the eternal, unlimited feeling of supreme joy.

The first depends on certain conditions, the fulfilment of our

desires and favourable circumstances, whereas the latter is unconditional and is totally independent of external conditions.

Lasting contentment and *MAHA ANANDA* (infinite bliss) are bestowed upon us only in union with the Self, all other joys are limited and transitory.

Only through *GYANA* (wisdom) can we free ourselves from the *Anandamaya Kosha*. *BHAKTI* (devotion to God) takes us close to goal, but the final step can only be mastered through the knowledge of the truth. Only then can we finally attain *MOKSHA* (liberation).

The five bodies that encase the *Jivatma* can be compared with the skin of an onion - the "essence" of the onion being neither chemically nor physically derived from its skin.

It is the same with our identity. When we observe our body we say: This is my body, this is my arm and my leg, my head....."when we go a little deeper within ourselves, we recognise our thoughts and feelings. And we still say: "These are my thoughts, experiences...."and so forth. This actually means that everything belongs to us, but not identical to us.

The "Self" is apparently something else. The body, thoughts, emotions and intellectual knowledge are merely skins that cover the nucleus of our existence. We can only experience this when we go deeply within ourselves and penetrate the numerous layers that cover it.

*ANTAHKARANA*- The Inner Psychic Functions

Four constant companions that are necessary to investigate and guide our path of development will now be introduced: the

**ANTAHAKARANAS.** They are also known as the "inner senses"-**ANTARA INDRIYAS.** They enable and guide our psychic and mental processes, and through them we can feel, think, understand and differentiate.

The *Antahkaranas* consists of:

**MANAS-** Mind

**BUDDHI-** Intellect

**CHITTA-** Consciousness

**AHAMKARA-** Ego

**MANAS**, mind, is the realm of desires, feelings and thoughts. It is the connecting link between subconscious and conscious. It files away the impressions and perceptions from the external world in the "storehouse of memories" and brings them out again for the appropriate reason.

The mind does not judge or make a choice. It indiscriminately records all impression just like a video camera or a tape recorder.

**BUDDHI** (intellect) carries out the assessment and filtering of what reaches consciousness and what goes back into the subconscious. On the basis of the impulse received from the intellect, the appropriate action is carried out by the mind.

The mind is constantly active in the waking state, and also when dreaming. We cannot stop the mind, but we are capable of guiding it. As we purify the mind by consciously thinking positively and repeating mantra, therefore ridding it of baser tendencies, the divine Self can then radiate through it.

**BUDDHI**, the intellect, processes, co-ordinates and filters the sensory impressions. It decides which of them we accept and pursue further. *Buddhi* has two aspects, one egoistic and one

selfless. The egoistic part is controlled by the ego and our weaknesses, whereas the selfless and non-personal principle judges and decides on the basis of ethical or ethical maxims-this is known as **VIKEKA**.

*Vikeka* is like the "butter" which is extracted from the "cream" of *Buddhi*. Through *Viveka* we are able to differentiate between truth and untruth, right and wrong, good and bad. *Vikeka* leads us to the knowledge that the material reality is relative, and guides our endeavours towards the Absolute, the Eternal.

Our intellect develops in two different ways. Firstly, through everything we have learnt from childhood up to the present time. This logical knowledge helps us to cope with the tasks of daily life.

Secondly, it is formed through analysis, reflection, concentration (**DHARANA**) and meditation (**DHAYANA**). Wisdom and discrimination (**VIVEKA**) ultimately develop from these.

In relation to this, an interesting question is often asked: "Who or what causes our mental condition?" Is it produced by the intellect or, conversely, is our way of thinking influenced by our inner state?

The first is correct. The intellect creates our mental condition. But occasionally a situation arises that it is unable to master. Then we lose control of our thoughts and emotions, as, for example, in a fit of rage. How often have we said or done something when we were unable to control our emotions which we greatly regretted later on! That is why the cultivation of *Vikeka* is so tremendously important, not only for our worldly existence but also for our spiritual life.

**CHITTA**, consciousness, forms the basis of our perceptions and knowledge. Like

*Buddhi*, it is shaped by the experiences of life, previous experiences, upbringing, culture and education mould the way in which we perceive, judge and value. *Chitta* determines the basic tendencies and colouring of our psyche.

**AHAMKARA**, the ego, literally means "I am the doer". All our feelings, perceptions, ideas and desires are inextricably linked to

*Ahamkara*. The ego is that psychic authority that creates the illusion that we are autonomous to all the other independently existing individuals. From that we naturally derive the idea that the external world that confronts us is also an independent, separate reality.

However, Vedanta philosophy, which is also the philosophy of Yoga, teaches us to see the unity - God - behind the variety of appearances.

Only when we accept this reality, not just rationally but realise it within our consciousness, are we able to overcome the barrier of the ego and find unity in the *Atma*. The following mantra, in which we place all our actions into God's hands, helps us to attain this way of thinking.

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**His Holiness Vishwaguru  
Mahamandaleshwar  
Paramhans Sri Swami  
Maheshwarananda Puri of  
Panchayati Maha Nirvani  
Akhara is the disciple and  
successor of Hindu  
Dharmasamrat Paramhans Sri  
Swami Madhavananda.  
Since 1970 he has been living  
and working in Europe.  
Through his long lasting  
activities in the West,  
Swamiji has become familiar  
with the way of life and the  
problems people face in the  
modern world.**