



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

June 2017 Contemplation:

Exploring Yoga's Multidimensionality #6

## Physical, Prana, Mind & More...

By Swami Nirmalananda & Vidyadevi Stillman

“Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain,” says the Wizard to Dorothy. Shiva is like the wizard behind the curtain. He’s having a great time being the universe and being you, but is hiding what He’s doing. Actually, you are Shiva, but you don’t know it due to the maayaa-koshas, another of the sages’ cosmic maps shedding light on the multidimensionality of your own being. Described in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the Taittiriya Upanishad, an ancient yoga text, the maayaa-koshas are your “five bodies,” the levels that Consciousness takes on to become you.

Maayaa is the energy that becomes the universe and you, also called Shakti. We use the name Maayaa to highlight that Shakti is veiling its true source and substance — which is Shiva. Maayaa makes you not know your own Shivaness. Contracting through five increasing levels of density, Maayaa creates five koshas, your five bodies or levels of being. Kosha means sheath or covering. You can think of each level as being like a sheer window curtain, veiling your own Shivaness. You can see through a sheer curtain, but if five are layered there, you cannot see through at all.

### **Anna-maayaa-kosha: your physical body**

You are most familiar with the outermost level of the multiple dimensions of your own individuality. Your physical body is shaped, nurtured and sustained by food (anna) and will ultimately become food that nourishes the earth. As important as your body is, it is a kosha (covering), which means there is more to you than merely your physical body. Anna-maayaa-kosha, your own physical form, arises from and is permeated by a subtler dimension of your own being.

### **Prana-maayaa-kosha: your energy, life force or aliveness**

When you are full of prana (life force), you exude vim and vigor; when you are low on prana, you drag yourself around, looking and feeling drained and exhausted. Prana-maayaa-kosha is your own body of aliveness, vitality, life force. It brings your physical body into existence and keeps it alive, pervading through your whole physical form. It is even a little larger than your physical form, sometimes seen by others as your aura. Yet, there is more to you, the subtler dimension from which your prana comes.

### **Mano-maayaa-kosha: the body of your mind**

The body of your mind pervades your whole physical form, yet is a little bigger. When you experience a movement at this level, you call it a “thought” when it moves in the area of your head, but you call it an “emotion” when it moves in the rest of your body. Both thoughts and emotions are simply energy movements through mano-maayaa-kosha, your mind’s body. Most people get more entwined in this level than with their physical body or energy level, identifying with their thoughts and feelings. Yet mano-maayaa-kosha is not who you are. It is a covering over something deeper. Mano-maayaa-kosha is pervaded by and arises from a subtler dimension within.

### **Vij~nana-maayaa-kosha: your “Truth” body, the knowingness beyond thought**

You are made of Truth and can live in the constant Knowingness of that Truth. This inner level is beyond thought, a knowing beyond concept, theory or belief system. When someone looks straight into your eyes and says, “I am telling you the truth,” you know if that is so. You can tell because of your own Truth body. Yet there is more to you than even this profound level. Vij~nana-maayaa-kosha arises from a deeper and subtler dimension of your own being.

### **Aananda-maayaa-kosha – your bliss body**

This is the subtlest of all, the source of the others. Made of bliss, it pervades through all your other bodies and extends beyond the edges of it. Anytime you experience happiness, it is arising from aananda-maayaa-kosha. Even a tiny little giggle is like bubbles arising from this deepest dimension of your own individuality. When you feel separate from this level, you will do anything to get back to it. Yet, your own bliss body is still a kosha. Aananda-maayaa-kosha arises from a deeper and more profound

level of your own being, which is the focus of all yoga practices. Called by many names in many traditions and religions, it is your own Self, which yogis also call “THAT.”

### **Tat Tvam Asi: Thou art THAT**

THAT has ever-existed and has become all that exists. THAT extends through and beyond all that exists. THAT is your own essence and beingness. One of the great statements echoing from the ancient sages is “Tat tvam asi,” You are THAT. That One Reality has chosen to be you, becoming an individualized expression of Consciousness by taking on coverings:

First THAT covers it-Self with bliss —>

then coalescing into your Truth body —>

which gives rise to the body of your mind —>

then condenses into the prana of your own aliveness —>

and becoming your own food body, your physical form.

The problem is you get enamored with your bodies. You can get caught up in working on your physical body (anna-maayaa-kosha), to keep it healthy and beautiful, or get enamored with your energies, even thinking that sharing energies with others is the point of life (prana-maayaa-kosha). You know how to ride the roller coaster of your thoughts and emotions — mano-maayaa-kosha.

But then you become a yogi, so you think it is all about the teachings and finding the Truth within (vij~nana-maayaa-kosha), but you never look deeper. You want to “Know,” but you don’t want to “Be.” Plus the bliss is so seductive (aananda-maayaa-kosha) that you never look for the source. There are so many levels to get stuck in.

Swami Nirmalananda says, “The reason the ancient sage described this is so you would know there is more to you than your sensations and thoughts. Even bliss and Truth are not enough. Your goal is greater; tat tvam asi. Most styles of yoga focus on the body, anna-maayaa-kosha, but *Svaroopa*® yoga focuses on the Self, while working on all your bodies simultaneously.”

Your maayaa-koshas are not like Russian nesting dolls, wooden dolls of decreasing sizes, one inside the other. The deepest and subtlest level is the most expanded, permeating and giving rise to your other bodies. Each affects the others.

You have already experienced that, as your body heals, your mind clears, and as your mind clears, your body heals. You probably have felt new life (prana) rushing into an area that needs healing, feeling energy or new sensations moving through. It is coming more alive!

You can be lying quietly in JP (Jathara Parivrttanāsana, Rotated Stomach Pose), but have strong emotions churning or compelling thoughts that are unrelated to the moment. This pose is particularly good at clearing the gunk out of mano-maayaa-kosha, your mind. You experience sudden inner knowings, profound understandings, breakthroughs, insights and even visions, experiences of your own Truth body. You relax into the bliss, which is why the advanced level of *Svaroopa*® yoga practice is named “Bliss Yoga.”

Vidyadevi says, “During a meditation I experienced my Self and my bliss body. I felt ecstatic! When I opened my eyes the feeling was not diminished. It was amazing to make breakfast and interact with others from this profound level of my being.”

Yoga opens you up to the multidimensionality of your individuality, leading to you experiencing the fullness of your own Self while you are breathing, walking, talking, etc. You cannot get there by looking from the outside in; it’s like being outside a home, so you can’t see through the sheer curtains to what is inside. You can only see through them when you are inside. Deepen into the core of your being and allow your radiance shine from the inside out. Do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON “EXPLORING YOGA’S MULTIDIMENSIONALITY,” OUR THEME FOR 2017, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI, VIDYADEVI STILLMAN & RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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