



Kosas: The Sheaths of Being

The yogic journey guides us from our periphery – the body, to the center of our being – the soul. The aim is to integrate the various layers so that the inner divinity shines out as through clear glass. Yoga identifies five of these different levels or sheaths of being (*kosas*), which must be integrated and in harmony with each other in order for us to achieve wholeness.

1. **Annamaya kosa** the physical body - stability
2. **Pranamaya kosa** the energy body (*Prana*) - vitality
3. **Manamaya kosa** the mental body (*Manas*)- clarity
4. **Vijnanamaya kosa** the intellectual/intuitive body (*Vijnana*) - wisdom
5. **Anandamaya kosa** the Divine body (*Ananda*) - bliss

When these subtle sheaths are in disharmony, they become clouded like a mirror reflecting the tarnished images of the sensory and sensual world. The mirror reflects what is in the world around us rather than letting the clear light of the soul within shine out. It is then that we experience disease and despair. True health requires not only the effective functioning of the physical exterior of our being, but also the vitality, strength, and sensitivity of the subtle levels within.

Most of us think of our "body" as simply our physical form - our skin, bones, muscles, and internal organs. For yoga, however, this is only the outermost layer of our body, the annamaya kosa. It is this anatomical body that encompasses the other four subtle bodies, or *kosas*. The kosas are like the layers of an onion or the Russian dolls where one is nested within the other. When these bodies or sheaths are misaligned or clash with one another, we inevitably encounter the alienation and fragmentation that so trouble our world. When, on the other hand, we are able to bring the various sheaths of our body into alignment and harmony with one another, the fragmentation disappears, integration is achieved, and unity is established. - Adapted from *Light on Life: The Yoga Journey to Wholeness, Inner Peace, and Ultimate Freedom*, by B.K.S. Iyengar

“The five sheaths enumerated above may also be classified under three different headings: gross body, subtle body and causal body. The physical sheath and the gross portion of the energy sheath together constitute the gross body. The subtle portion of energy sheath combined with mental and intellectual sheaths form the subtle body. While the gross body is made up of gross matter, the subtle body is constituted of passions, desires, emotions, feelings and thoughts. The bliss sheath is the causal body. Your causal body is the storehouse of all your impressions and latent energies. Let the causal body be instilled with the suggestion of health, the subtle body will entertain thoughts of health, and the gross body is bound to be healthy. The substratum of your causal, subtle, and gross bodies is your real Self.” - Adapted from *Vedanta Treatise* by Sri A. Parthasarthy.

“According to Vedanta/Vajrayana, there are three major states of consciousness, correlated with three major bodies (or mass-energy realms), and five major levels/structures of consciousness. The 3 states are waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The 3 bodies are gross, subtle, and causal. The 5 levels/sheaths are the 5 kosas (gross material, pranic, mental, higher mental, overmental).”
- Ken Wilber