

Coverings of the Self:
The Yogic Koshas as a Model of Integrated Physical,
Psychological, and Spiritual Well-Being

Yoga developed as a discipline that sought to better understand human nature and to explicate the trajectory of human growth to its full spiritual potential. Yoga, specifically the koshas (meaning sheaths or bodies), outlines an integrative approach for reaching this potential that comprises the full spectrum of human nature including the physical body, the breath/energy body, the psycho-emotional body, the wisdom or insight body, and the bliss or spiritual body. Yoga's approach to the study of human nature has been so systematic that it is believed to be "one of the oldest continuous disciplines studying" (Rama, Ballentine, & Ajaya, 1998, p. xx) human psychology and physiology.

Calling on this ancient wisdom, this paper proposes that the koshic model is relevant to the discussion of spirituality, health, and human flourishing because it is based on an integrative and holistic view of the human being. Though the model describes the "coverings of the self" in five layers or bodies (listed above), it is understood that it is not really possible nor is it desirable to segregate the layers from one another. This means that the physical cannot be separated from the psycho-emotional or spiritual aspects of life. Fundamentally, yoga approaches the human organism as a whole comprised of many interwoven and ever evolving aspects that continuously interact and inform one another. Based on this understanding, this paper suggests that the koshic model expands the current understanding of the interdependence of the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions that underlie human flourishing.

References

Rama, S., Ballentine, R., & Ajaya, S. (1998). *Yoga and psychotherapy: The evolution of consciousness*. Honesdale, PA: The Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy.