**Abstract:** 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, 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, it is proposed 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, 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 poster demonstrates that the koshic model expands the current understanding of the interdependence of the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions that underlie human flourishing.

**Introduction:** The koshas are an ancient concept that first appeared in the *Taittiriya-Upanishad* (c. 2500-1500 BCE). The *Taittiriya-Upanishad* described five dimensions of the human being that is a physio-psycho-spiritual model of human nature. The word *koshka*, which means layer or body, is used when describing the model. In concert with the idea of layers, concentric circles or the analogy of an onion are often used when explaining the koshas. Layers imply that each dimension exists separately from the others. Desikachar (2005) suggests using the word *pancamaya* instead of koshka to describe the model. He feels that the word *pancamaya* (*panca* means five and *maya* means something that is all-pervading) better describes the multidimensional reality of the human system (*i.e.*, we are not simply a physical body). Pancamaya suggests that the “human system is comprised of interconnected and interpenetrating dimensions...that are all present, all the time, in each part of the human system, even in each cell of the body” (p. 18). The koshic model, which is embedded in yoga, describes the interdependence of all the dimensions of the human being and suggests that a key factor in physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being is the conscious integration of all these aspects of being into daily life. Yoga addresses the “roots of negative conditioning [and provides a] multidimensional practice for positive transformation” (Blossom, 2004, p. 23).

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### The Koshas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kosha</th>
<th>Characteristics*</th>
<th>Practices**</th>
<th>Signs of Health</th>
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</table>
| **Annamayakosha** Physical Body | • Anatomical systems  
• All psychological, emotional, and spiritual expression rooted in the body (Corrington, 2007)  
• Expresses subtle energies - “physical state is an ‘embodiment’ of ... mental state[s]” (Rama et al., 1998, p. 3) | • Asana (hatha yoga, postures)  
• Healthy diet  
• Body work, massage  
• Somatic therapies  
• Rest, relaxation | • Physical fitness  
• Agility  
• Flexibility  
• Stamina, endurance  
• Healthy body awareness |
| **Pranamayakosha** Breath/Energy Body | • Circulatory, respiratory systems  
• Link between physical body and more subtle aspects of mind  
• Prana: life force which exists in all things, animate and inanimate - energy of all physical and mental activities  
• Breath: links humans to larger ecological system  
• Interpenetrates and integrates all aspects of the human organism as well as the rest of creation while supporting the interconnectedness of all dimensions of existence | • Pranayama: (prana means life force and ayama means extension or expansion), breath work  
• Working with the energy systems of the body: nadis and chakras | • Deep, relaxed breath  
• Reduced anxiety  
• Reduced muscle tension  
• Mental and emotional balance  
• Tranquility in body and mind, viewed as a prelude to spiritual practices (Saraswati, 1999) |
| **Manomayakosha** Mental/Emotional Body | • Nervous system and sensory organs  
• Everyday mind: Manas - lower mind;  
• Manonasa - ego, sense of I-ness  
• Level of busy mind with its litany of likes, dislikes, wants, aversions, impulses, emotions  
• Does not evaluate or discriminate, reacts through habit or instinct | • Yoga is dedicated to training this level of mind: asana (postures), pranayama (breath work), meditation  
• Pratyahara: control sensory input  
• Develop positive/loving mental/emotional states  
• Psychotherapy  
• Develop insight into thoughts/attitudes/emotions; Insight style meditation techniques  
• Read holy texts | • Disciplined and trained mind necessary for spiritual growth (Rama et al., 1998)  
• Greater capacity for discernment  
• Begins to escape preoccupation with sensory data and entanglements in the material world |
| **Vijnanamayakosha** Wisdom/Intuition Body | • Higher aspect of mind called buddhi  
• Power to discriminate and evaluate  
• Ability to step out of cause and effect  
• Only aspect of mind that can select a course of action that leads to growth  
• Nonjudgmental witnessing  
• Opens the way to transpersonal (beyond the personal) awareness  
• Differentiates between relative reality (everyday mind and ordinary consciousness) and larger, spiritual reality  
• Intricate and already present aspect of human beings | • Setting intention to live with integrity  
• Meditation to help develop the discriminative power of buddhi: Dharana - focused concentration; Dhyana - contemplation | • Insight into self and world  
• Ability to focus and direct the mind  
• Less tendency to get caught in anxiety and “busy mind”  
• Pure buddhi: energy beyond the body and mind  
• Equanimity |
| **Anandamayakosha** Bliss Body | • Dimension of human exist that recognizes its true nature as part of the Divine or Absolute reality (Feuerstein, 2001)  
• Transcendent, boundless, ultimate (Pargament, 2007)  
•“State of bliss is the natural innate state of the conscious being” (Srivatsan, 2004, p. 6) | • Prayer  
• Meditation: Samadhi - absorption  
• Service for the greater good | • Compassion, joy, love, peace  
• Harmony between internal and external environment while engaged in action necessary to live in the world (Srivatsan, 2004)  
• Living full potential |

* Information from Rama et al. (1998) unless otherwise noted  
** Information from Blossom (2004) unless otherwise noted

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**References**


