

YOGA AS A THERAPY-2: THE YOGIC STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS

In order to understand the nature and mechanism of Yoga Chikitsa (Yoga as a therapy), it is important to understand the Yogic view of the human existence. Yoga and other Indian systems of medicine consider that we are not just the body but are of multifold nature. Concepts of Pancha Kosha (the five sheaths / layers / coverings) and Tri Sharira (the three bodies) help us understand our real nature that is of many dimensions.

The Pancha Koshas may be understood as follows:

- Annamaya Kosha is the physical sheath or anatomical level of our existence. This is created and sustained by food (Annam) and in turn nourishes microbes that live off us in our bowels and on our skin and mucosal lining.
- Pranamaya Kosha is the vital energy sheath that creates our physiological existence. It is the aspect that gives our very cells life and enables us to live in a healthy manner with all our physiological mechanisms working to perfection.
- Manomaya Kosha is the mind sheath or psychological aspect of our existence that is the function of mind. We live in mind and our brain is but the best piece of equipment to receive and transmit the signals of mind.
- Vignanamaya Kosha, the sheath of the intellect is the level of higher mind existence where we are truly humane. It is the link with inner wisdom where mere knowledge of the mind transforms into wisdom.
- Anandamaya Kosha is the sheath of eternal bliss and is our link with universal existence where we are 'all-one'. We can attune to this level by performing actions without ego in Karma Yoga.

The other aspect that is found in yoga in common with Indian philosophy and medicine is that of the three bodies or Tri Sharira. The gross body (Sthula Sharira) may be correlated with the Annamaya Kosha while the subtle body (Sukshma Sharira) can be correlated with the Pranamaya, Manomaya and Vignanamaya Koshas. The causal body (Karana Sharira), the cause of our existence may be correlated with Anandamaya Kosha.

At the level of the gross body, yoga and ayurveda consider that the human body is made up of seven substances. These Sapta Dhatus are Rasa (Chyle), Rakta (Blood), Maamsa (Flesh), Medas (Fat), Asthi (Bone), Majjaa (Marrow) and Sukra (Semen). Both these ancient health sciences also understand the importance of the Tri Doshas (the three humors) whose balance is vital for good health. Vata Dosha is the energy of the body that moves like the wind and causes flow in the body. It may be related to the nervous system as well as joints that enable us to move. The Pitta Dosha is related to the bilious secretion and is the cause of heat in the body. It is the energy of catabolism that is essential for digestion. Kapha Dosha is the glue that holds everything together in the body and is the energy of anabolism helping the process of generation and regeneration.

Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj has described Nava Dhushyas or nine factors that are physical structural systems of the human body. He has also described the Dwadasha Kramas or the twelve systems of man that also takes into account non physical aspects of human functioning.

The Nava Dhushyas (nine physical structural systems) are: Asthi (bone tissue), Maamsa (muscle tissue), Nadi (channels of nerve energy), Rasa-Rakta (circulation and blood components), Indriya (vital organs), Granthi (endocrine glands), Meda (adipose tissue), Majja (bone marrow) and Soma (hormones including Sukra and the higher Ojas and Tejas).

The Dwadasha Kramas (twelve systems of man) include in addition to the Nava Dhushyas, the non-physical components of

- Prana, the cosmic catalyst associated with emotions. This includes the sub units of Prana Vayus (nerve currents), Prana Nadis (channels of Pranic flow), Prana Vahaka (nerve impulses), and Prana Vahana (nerve fluids), Prana Vana (psychic vortexes associated with the Chakras), Prana Granthis (nodes of Prana) and Prana Bindus (foci of higher mental energy).
- Manas, the mind that includes subconscious, conscious and superconscious mind including Buddhi (intellect), Bindu (foci of consciousness), Loka (planes of consciousness), Mandala (etheric mental and energy patterns and fields)

- Chakra, the etheric energy nature associated with nerves and glands of the physical body. It is also related to the psyche and Ahamkara and includes the psychic nature associated with the higher self or Atman

Without an understanding of these structural aspects of our existence it is not possible to really assess the patient and promote Yoga as a therapy. Yoga doesn't just work on the physical body but works at all these levels. Yoga therapy is not just about stretching the pectoral or gluteal muscles but is about working at all levels of existence. If we don't understand the patient fully and deal with all levels of their existence, we are again practicing Yogopathy and not Yoga Chikitsa!