

# ILY Elemental

E-book

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[ISABELLANKESTERYOGA.COM](http://ISABELLANKESTERYOGA.COM)

with Isabel Lankester

# Let's Begin!

If you've been practicing yoga for a little while, you may be slightly perplexed as to why so much of our Westernised world celebrates and exaggerates the physical aspects of yoga... is there any more to it? Even though we recognise the importance of keeping the body in good shape, what about the more subtle realms within? How can we exercise the body but also exercise our more subtle self? In this E-book I shall reveal how a web of inner work can light up many facets of yoga philosophy, fine tuning what we see as our 'true health', from the Kosha systems, to chakras and finally into our main core elements which we know so well.

According to the Taittiriya Upanishad, there are 5 layers, sheaths or Koshas to our existence. Every one of us has x 5 bodies, each made of increasingly finer grades of energy. Moving from the physical to the more subtle range of the self into our inner most core - the soul.

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Although presented in linear fashion, these koshas / layers are interwoven, one affecting and integrating with the others. The more we study and sit with these layers, the more we can get to know ourselves and begin to peel back why we behave in the way we do.

(Don't be surprised if it takes you a lifetime to learn. The body is in a constant state of flux (prakriti) - and so here is our paradox. The hard graft of a yogi is to see ourselves in the present moment within an every changing light of awareness which makes us.....well US!)

Before we get into the nitty gritty of each layer here is a breakdown our elements into their energetic body/kosha.

# The Koshas

**EARTH** - Food body - **Annamaya**

**WATER** - Vital body - **Pranamaya**

**FIRE** - Mental Body - **Manomaya**

**AIR** - Intelligence - **Vijnanamaya**

**SPACE** - Bliss/Soul - **Anandamaya**



Earth

### **Anna-maya Kosha (food sheath)**

This is a layer we know best, the gross body which goes through the process of birth, growth, change, decay and death. It is tangible and can be felt through all the senses. Also known as the food body, it represents what we consume. Therefore it's not surprising that a balanced diet plays an important role in enjoying this layer of the self.

### **Contemplate:**

Notice how much your mind likes to fixate on the physical body i.e. do you focus a lot of your attention on exercise or eating a very balanced diet? Injury / accidents or even eating addictions and other compulsions often come from a tendency to move without noticing the body's true reactions. In a way the abuse of exercise or **food** can be an indication that you are not connecting with your **body**, the first layer. Once you dilate your head into the body and embrace this lovely layer you will intuitively move into postures and protect yourself from injury. Encouraging an innate pull to the kinds of foods which are nourishing therefore making you feel more grounded and enriched.



# Earth

## Tips to connect:

- Move slower in your practice to feel into the body first
- Notice when the mind is in a state of punishment and take a step back
- Only eat when relaxed & calm
  - \*Start daily meditations to ground the breath into your body
- Cultivate a sense of curiosity on your mat, feel into your feet and lower limbs
  - Draw attention to your Earth chakra, Muladhara (this is at the base of your spine between the perineum and the coccyx or the pelvic bone).

\*FREE meditation guide available with this e-book.



# Water

## **Prana-maya Kosha (vital sheath)**

This is the energetic field that holds the material body together and helps it function correctly. All the biological processes such as digestion, breathing and blood circulation are governed by this layer. It's called prana in yoga or chi in Chinese medicine. Without our primary energy, prana, we would cease to function at all! It's no wonder that without sunlight and fresh air our vitality would disintegrate and eventually fail.

(Connected with the water element as prana can flow and move, it is fluid in nature.)

## **Contemplate:**

Sit for a moment and study your breath. Can you watch the coming and going of this force without overly controlling it with your mind? Can you study the ever expanding vibration of your head and heart in this moment? When waves of heat pour through your body during asana practice we can a-tune into this sheath. Feeling happy, calm, restless, energized, sleepy are all signals from this layer.

Just as we have physical look we also have a vibrational signature. Once you attune to your own prana you will begin to become super sensitive to those around you and therefore to the world you live in.



# Water

Tips to connect:

- Move with the sensitivity of breath flowing through the body
- Take a walk outside to enjoy fresh air, take in the movements of nature around you
- Notice the electric charge through the body, 'getting the shivers' or 'gut feelings'
- \*Start a Prāṇāyāma (breath) practice, like Nadi Shodhana
- Cultivate a sense of curiosity towards internal vibrations, e.g. between the ears during meditation
- Draw attention to your Water chakra, Svadhisthana (located just below the belly button)

\*FREE pranayama exercise available with this e-book



# Fire

## **Mano-maya Kosha (mental sheath)**

Translated as the 'body made of thought process'. Prana-maya kosha operates for the moment we take our first breath to the moment of death but the mano-maya kosha shuts down temporarily on a daily basis. We can step into auto-pilot regularly throughout the day, getting lost in thought patterns. Even more subtle than the first two koshas, this layer consists of the thinking mind, emotions and permeates the food and vital sheath.

### **Contemplate:**

Do you ever feel mentally exhausted or fried from work or play? The 'mental' body feeds on the stimulus we give it. So if we digest too much we may experience a form of mental indigestion, leaving our nervous system tied in knots. Finding balance in our every day lives, within relationships and harmonising our yin and yang energies at work can offer an ideal diet for this sheath. Often the practice of pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) can provide an inner respite for this subtle layer.

When we think clearly we slow our sensory responses. Instead of reacting to our surroundings we can sit back with a little more awareness of the situation.





# Fire

## Tips to connect:

- Move with sensitivity to your environment, the stimulus coming in will affect the energy flow of your physical and mental health.
- Take time to become aware of repeated thought patterns
- Notice times when you're 'on auto pilot' i.e. getting the train. Check in with your nervous system and remain present.
- \*Practice pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) and dharana (one-pointed concentration)
- Draw attention to your Fire chakra, Manipura (located at your solar plexus)



Air

### Vijnana-maya Kosha (wisdom sheath)

More subtle than mano-maya, this layer 'vijnana' means 'the power of judgement / discernment' or 'intellect'. For someone who finds it hard to think for themselves, lacking in creativity or perhaps has little will power may have a very underdeveloped Vijnana-maya. This is where we make moral choices.

### Contemplate:

Notice your ability to decipher between right and wrong, to find balance digesting thoughts running through your mind. The sages considered Vijnanamaya kosha so important they placed exercises for it at the beginning of the yoga system, know as the Yamas and Niyamas. Commitments yoga teachers make to not harm, lie, steal, overindulge or desire more than they need. Instead ask yourself to find contentment, devotion, and inner love.

Through practice the mind can become calm, we can start to listen to the hidden messages coming up in between the thoughts, the words and actions of others. We can start to see the world clearly and objectively.



# Air

## Tips to connect:

- Trust in your ability to make firm decisions and act creatively towards challenging circumstances.
- Take time to understand when your ego (ahamkara) takes over your intuition
- If you become engrossed in a project like writing, painting, math, or even problem solving, you're accessing the wisdom body
- As you embody awareness, notice if you are able to contain all the other levels of experience—without getting attached to their meaning or outcome.
- Draw attention to your Air chakra, Anahata (located at your heart center)



# Space

## Ananda-maya Kosha (bliss sheath)

Also known as bliss and the samadhi state. This final and most subtle state of the self tends to be underdeveloped in most humans. In the tantric tradition, spirit is often symbolised as Shiva, the transcendent lord who is ever immersed in divine consciousness. Whereas matter /energy is called Shakti, the supreme Goddess whose divine body is this entire universe.

### **Contemplate:**

Take yourself back to when you may have experienced a flash of bliss, joy and calmness. This sheath is not unattainable but in order to reach this state we must transcend all 5 sheaths and embrace them all.

This is why the yoga practice breaks down each layer of the self, from the hatha postures that create stability and strength, to breathing techniques which balance and invigorate the life force (prana), from meditation practices which quiet and clear your mind to the self-study and inner work that opens your inner world of knowledge thereby creating unity with the world around you.

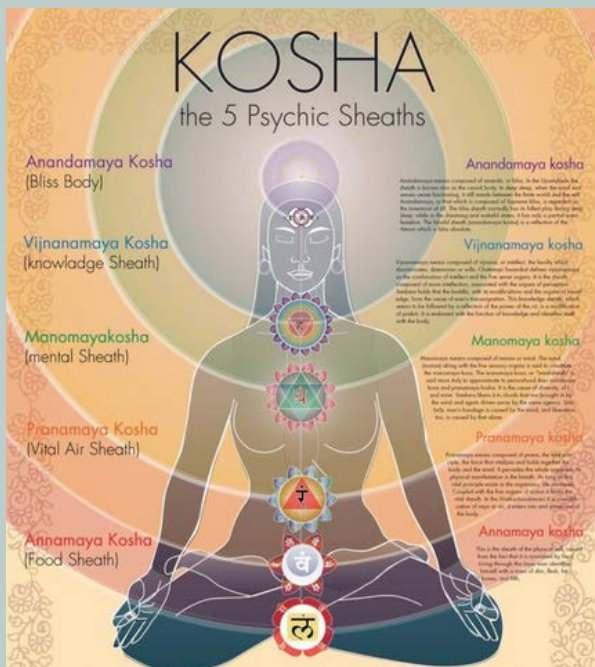


# Space

## Tips to connect:

- Work hard to explore the previous 4 states of the self, these are all stepping stones to Ananda
- When you are in touch with your bliss body, you know that your nature is joyful and free
- Ask yourself, "Where is bliss?" it is your true nature
- To be aware and present in all of the koshas, to awaken and integrate all parts of yourself
- Practice patience, it can take many years of dedicated practice to reveal this layer. Rest assured your bliss state is already within.

# Summary



A diagram to show the kosha's with there linkages to the chakra system.

As you can tell by now the kosha system is just a map, a way of seeing the self as many many parts integrating into the whole. Don't forget you can now practice a few guided meditations on these sheaths to embody this reading into feeling.

With Love, Isabel

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