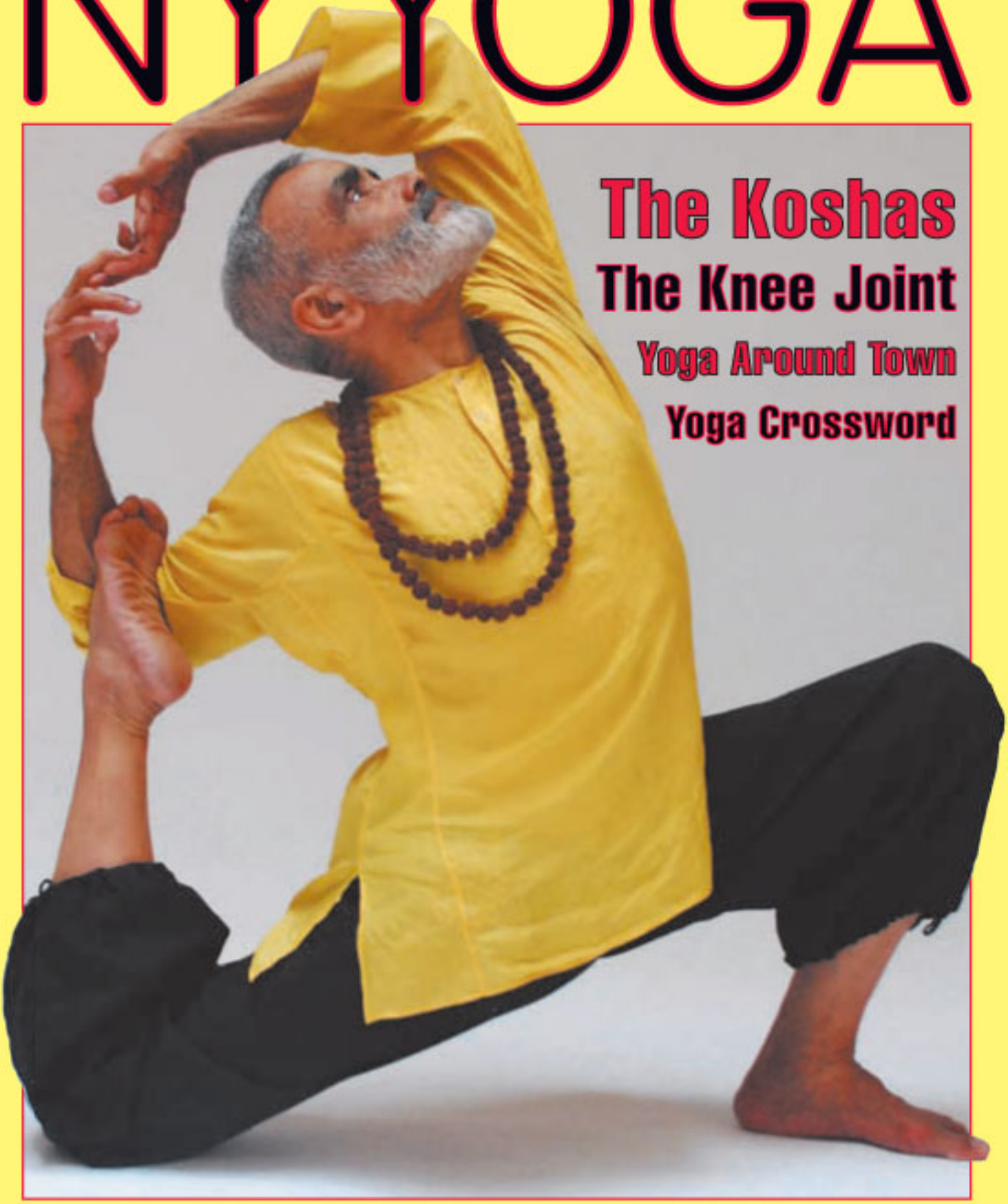
NEW YORK'S GUIDE TO YOGA AWARENESS

NY YOGA



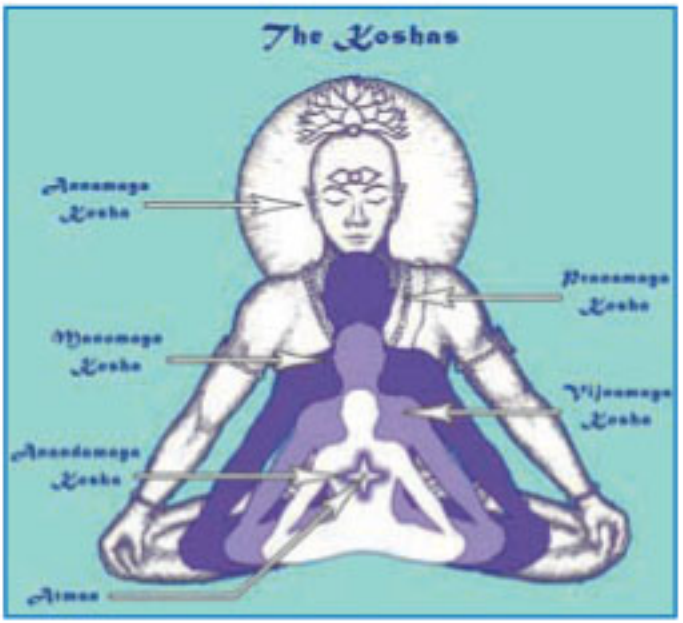
The Koshas

The Knee Joint

Yoga Around Town

Yoga Crossword

The Koshas



DEEP WITHIN THE HEART OF EVERY BEING dwells a portion of Atman: the Luminous Divine Self. Through the practice and techniques of the Classical Yogic system, the Yogi is quickly and easily able to realize this divine nature dwelling within. One such practice is the study of the Koshas, or the fivefold sheath. The Koshas are the metaphysical theory that defines the individual as divided into five selves. Cited in one of the earliest known Vedic texts: the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the Five Koshas are known as the five sheaths because they cover over the Self much like a sheath covers over a sword. These sheaths are successively finer, starting from the periphery of the body and move towards the core of the self, each layer filling the preceding one. Starting from the outermost, grossest layer and moving to the innermost, subtlest layer, the five Koshas are:

Annamaya Kosha
the physical sheath

Pranamaya Kosha
the vital, life-force sheath

Manomaya Kosha
the mental sheath

Vijnanamaya Kosha
the intelligence sheath

Anandamaya Kosha
the bliss sheath

mystical fivefold sheath

By Sri Yogi Dharma Mittra

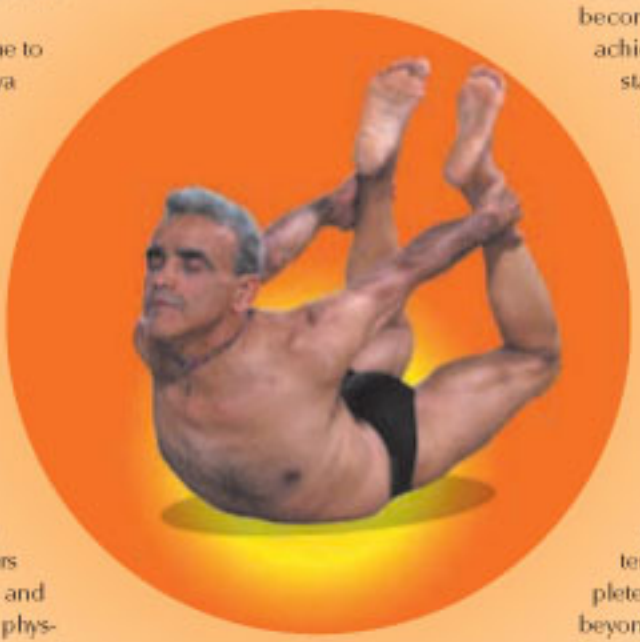
By studying the different sheaths, the Yogi can begin to discriminate between the different layers and learn to draw himself into the Subtle and Causal Bodies, which reside closer to Atman and mirror a more accurate reflection of the Self.

To begin we start with the grossest, outermost layer known as the *Annamaya Kosha*. The *Annamaya Kosha* is the first is the Koshas and primarily consists of the physical body. This includes blood, flesh, bones, skin, and hair: all physical parts of the body that require food and oxygen for survival. A Yogi who resides predominantly in the Annamaya Kosha believes that he is only the physical body. He is attached and consumed solely by the physical form. It is through the knowledge and realization of the subsequently finer sheaths that the Yogi can realize that the body is not the self.

Moving inward a layer, we next come to the *Pranamaya Kosha*. The Pranamaya Kosha is the second Kosha and consists of the vital life-force, otherwise known as Prana. This Kosha is what animates the Annamaya Kosha (the physical sheath) to move. This sheath contains all the five forms of Prana (Prana, Apana, Vyana, Samana and Udana) and the organs of action. This sheath is associated with the feelings of hunger and thirst, evacuation and regeneration. This sheath is more important and subtler than the first sheath. Without Prana, the body would not able to function. Prana enters the body at the time of conception and leaves it at the time of the death of the physical body. By experiencing this aspect of existence, the yogi may believe for a time that he is this finer energy animating the physical form, but by delving deeper into the core of the self, he will soon discover that this sheath is merely an illusion covering over the eternal self.

The next and third Kosha is known as the *Manomaya Kosha*. The Manomaya Kosha is defined as the mind or mental sheath. There are two aspects of the mind however, and this Kosha is part of the lower aspect of the mind. It consists of the volitional, emotional aspect of the mind which is governed by the five sense organs of touch, taste, smell, sound and sight. The Yogi residing in this layer has thoughts and desires which identify with form and name, position, and qualities. He experiences pain, pleasure, longing, doubt, fear and the many tides of emotion. This portion of the mind lacks the cognitive abilities of reasoning, void of any discrimination. For example, perhaps you see your wife on the street hugging another man. The Yogi residing in the Manomaya Kosha will become very angry and run over to them and start screaming and fighting. However the Yogi established in next sheath, the Vijnanamaya Kosha, he will quickly be able to discern that your wife is in actuality hugging her brother.

The *Vijnanamaya Kosha*, or fourth sheath, is defined as the intelligence sheath. Vijnana means knowing. This fourth sheath is the wisdom that lies beneath the processing, thinking aspect of the mind. It knows,



decides, judges, and discriminates between the information it processes. One aspect of the Yogi's sadhana (spiritual practice) is to gain access to this sheath. Vijnanamaya Kosha has the higher wisdom to seek Truth by going within and toward the eternal center of consciousness. The yogi who rests in the Vijnanamaya Kosha is more sattvic and reflects more golden qualities due to this layer's close proximity to the transcendent Self. However, as with all the Koshas, the Yogi soon realizes that even the highest aspect of the Mind cannot be the Self as it is of the material world and subject to laws of name and form and is not eternal.

The innermost and finest of all the Koshas (and that which is closest to the pure consciousness of Atman) is the *Anandamaya Kosha*. The Anandamaya Kosha is known as the bliss sheath. It is the Causal Body and permeates all the other Koshas. The Yogi who resides in the Bliss sheath experiences absolute peace, joy, and love. This bliss sheath offers a perfect reflection of Atman: a spontaneous and effortless joy that is independent of any reason or stimulus that may cause a mental reaction. The subtlest of the five Koshas, the Anandamaya Kosha may be seen as the Self in the silence of deep meditation. But beware! This too is only illusion and not the Self. Although Anandamaya Kosha is a perfect reflection of Atman, it still remains a covering over the true Self. The Yogi who is established in Anandamaya Kosha may become deluded that he has already achieved his goal: achieving the absolute state of bliss. But soon, the Yogi will realize that the bliss sheath cannot be the Self because he is able to witness the bliss (mind activities). In the state of Self Realization, the Anandamaya Kosha (along with the other four Koshas) will fall away because they are just mental activities.

The goal of Yoga, the Science of Self Realization, is to directly experience and realize *Atman*. By doing so, the Yogi merges completely with the divine. Atman is omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, but to even describe it is incomplete and incorrect (in reality, Atman is beyond consciousness, form, name and time). Atman is indescribable. Through sincere and constant study of the fivefold sheath, the Yogi makes rapid progress, finding a shortcut to immortality by quickly realizing the truth within his own heart. May we all be blessed in understanding the divine knowledge bestowed on to us by the great saints and sages of the past, and as always please be receptive, Om Shanti Om, Dharma Mittra

Legendary Sri Dharma Mittra teaches regularly at his school Dharma Yoga Center on 23 Street and 3rd Avenue in New York City. He is the author of Asanas 608 Poses, Maha Sadhana DVDs Levels I and II, and the director of the Life of Yogi Teacher Training Program in the United States and worldwide. Go to www.dharmayogacenter.com to find out more.