

Yoga is not merely a set of practices to develop flexibility or concentration; it is the act of entering into a 'state of being' quite unlike those states that we normally operate within in daily life. A practice is the act of re-entering a mode of experience and to exist in a place of total absorption. A practitioner can become adept at entering into the direct experience of the moment, uncluttered by memories and desires – clear, proprioceptive vision.

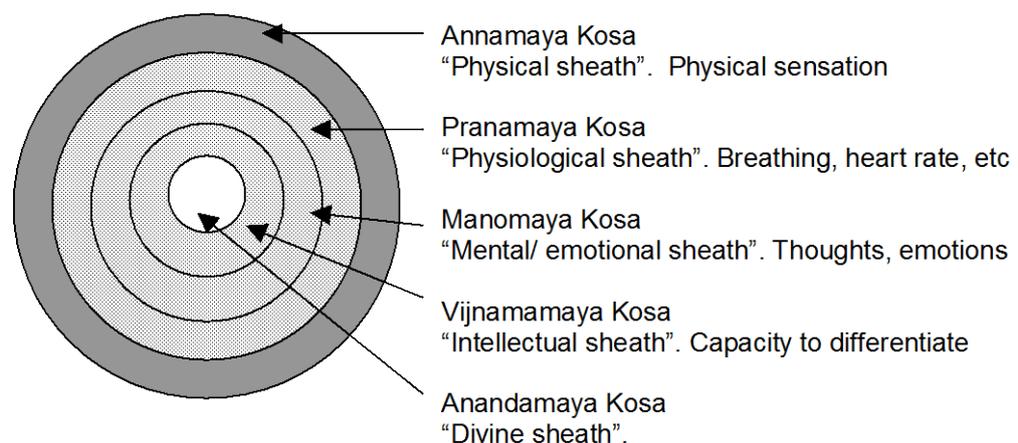
Proprioceptive vision refers to our capacity to experience directly. To know things from our experience, without interpretation; without distortion. To view the world directly.¹

More often than not, however, there is a disparity in the layers of our experience. What we do with our body, our mind and our emotions lacks unity. For example, we often have jobs that require we apply our intellect and yet our emotional world may be completely at odds with the task. Alternatively, we carry out tasks mindlessly, devoid of concentration and awareness, as the mind roams elsewhere. This disconnect between body, mind and emotions is evident in many areas and examples in daily life. The capacity to be elsewhere in mind gives us an imaginary life of richness and diversity, as the mind is free to imagine and conceive, but in busy lives with little down time the disconnect becomes entrenched. The need to adapt to these demands often requires that we disengage one aspect of ourselves to discipline another aspect. We become fragmented when there are demands upon us, for example, to be physically present for long work days or to be creatively productive on timelines for our livelihood.

Kosas

Yoga psychology acknowledges that whilst we exist as a physical entity, we are ultimately much more than our body. In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali has classified five layers or kosas to our existence. Our physical presence is undeniable but this is merely the outer layer. The second layer is the physiological form or energetic form. Then follows the mental/emotional layer and the intellectual layer. Finally, there is the divine layer. We are in harmony when our actions are cohesive across and between each of these five kosas. We exist, in effect, as complex organisms without distinction between body, mind and soul.

The kosas are often referred to as sheaths; like skins. Patanjali names the sheaths as:



¹ Proprioception is the awareness of posture, movement and changes in equilibrium and the knowledge of position, weight and resistance of objects in relation to the body. (Taber's Cyclopedic medical dictionary FA Davis Company, Philadelphia Nov 1982)

This feedback system provides a means by which fine motor actions are possible. We perform complex tasks with great dexterity and constantly learn new skills. Balance, poise and refined action provide the means to develop concentration and refine awareness. These new skills leave imprints which supersede memory. This in turn cleanses our actions of the residues of past experience and enables us to observe (vision) from the current experience (see article *Yogic Imprinting* by Alan Goode for further details).

Although we may have an experience in the body, it is also experienced in each of the kosas. Acts of the body affect the breath, heart rate, secretions such as saliva, and hormonal responses, etc. These experiences are not devoid of emotion either. We differentiate between experiences of similar origin too. For example, a fall on a slippery surface may cause pain in a twisted ankle but also affects our breathing and heart rate. It will be associated with emotion too. The experience in the tissue is but one aspect of the composite of the experience.

Consider also that the way experiences are understood affect how they are felt. An injury received whilst assisting a friend in trouble is often perceived differently from an injury received through someone else's carelessness. The suffering increases with the sense of injustice. An individual may subject themselves to skin tattooing and yet the same experience would be intolerable if inflicted without choice by someone else. The trauma would be exponential for that person. The change results from the way we understand and place the experience. The perception is crucial. Pain relies on context.

Research in pain therapy confirms that, when subjected to the same stimulus, individuals respond differently even in their descriptions of the physical sensations. These differences can be seen in the areas of the brain that trigger and light up during brain scans. This confirms that the mind interprets experience – that the pain is not just in the tissue. We use more than one sense to confirm our knowing, to understand and make sense of, what has happened.²

When we conduct our yoga practice, there is the possibility to observe these sheaths and study the dynamics between them but it is only possible as we move from a mode of **doing** into **a state of being**, as we act. The need to establish **state** arises from the fact that we can become so busy in our doing of asana that there is little room to receive the experience of the activity as we become focused on performance, improvement and progress in the outer sheath, the annamaya kosa. If our gaze is constantly directed to the physical, we may overlook the more subtle layering.

Yogasana

The term Yogasana is used to describe the way a practice of asana is conducted to create unity across the kosas. Yog means to unite, and a Yog-asana is an asana (posture) that brings unity to experience.

In the book *Alpha and Omega of Trikonasana*, Prashant Iyengar explains Yogasana. Once the body is positioned in the asana:

...create a 'condition' in the embodiment which is the next step and the most vital, as it is this internal conditioning which makes an asana a 'Yogasana'. Here the sadhaka learns to unite one part of the body with another part of the body, the body with the mind, the body with the breath and senses, also the breath with the mind and senses and this takes one into the inward journey which makes the practice of yoga a svadhyaya (self-study). It is this unification which justifies the definition of the word Yog which means, 'to unite'. Merely doing an asana by the body, through the body and for the body is not Yog. Yogasanas are to be done by the body but for the mind, for the psyche, for the consciousness and for the culturing and refinement of a human being.³

If Yogasana is a unity in asana, then it must be conducted in the moment of experience. It is a here and now thing. In a previous article entitled *Yogic imprinting* (AYL issue 20), I outlined the role that memory plays in a practice. It could be said that memory is drawn on each time we practice and that memory is instrumental in what we do, and yet it must be transcended by bringing the practitioner into the present moment. It is only when we act in the present that we can undertake Yogasana. BKS Iyengar writes:

Past and future are woven into the present, though they appear different due to the movement of moments.

² Further reading in the book *Explain pain* by Butler & Moseley, Noigroup publications, Adelaide 2003.

³ P Iyengar, *Alpha and Omega of Trikonasana*, YOG, Mumbai, 2004

Desire nourishes action aimed at its gratification. The intermission between desire, action and fulfillment involves time, which manifests as past, present and future. True understanding of motivation and the movement of moments releases a yogi from the knot of bondage.

Moment is changeless and eternal. Moments flow into movements eternally and are measurable as past, present and future. This measurable time is finite, when contrasted with eternity.

The negative effects of time are intellectual (lack of spiritual knowledge, avidya, and pride, asmita); emotional (attachment to pleasure, raga, and aversion to pain, dvesa); and instinctive (the desire to cling to life, abhinivesa). Time's positive effect is the acquisition of knowledge. The experience of the past supports the present, and progress in the present builds a sound foundation for the future. One uses the past as a guide to develop discriminative power, alertness and awareness which smooth the path for self-realisation. The yogi who studies in depth this unique rotation of time keeps aloof from the movement of moments; he rests in the present, at which crucial point desires are kept in abeyance. Thus he becomes clear of head, clean of heart, and free from time which binds consciousness. When the conjunction between movements of moments and consciousness terminates, freedom and beatitude, kaivalya, are experienced..⁴

A practice of asana is not the creation of a set of stretches in the body. Yoga uses this most gross manifestation of our existence as the vehicle to interact with the realm of our consciousness. We begin by learning the asanas but gradually progress towards studying, practicing and maturing within the asana actions. By refining our interaction with the asana over time, it is possible to observe the quality of our actions and their effects in the consciousness. When considered at the level of the daily practice, it is best to formalise and ritualise the practice to develop continuity of application and attention. As we undertake this process from learner to practitioner – from studying the body to a culture of consciousness – it is necessary to enter into the *state* of asana as we practice. The ability to establish ourselves in the *state* highlights for us, as we apply ourselves, the discrepancies between the layers of experience (kosas). We are able to study this nuanced layering of our actions when the aim is to stabilise the awareness and develop continuity. As this process develops, we can observe the way experience reflects in the consciousness (citta).

In the passage below, BKS Iyengar describes the process of asana:

To the new student or non-practitioner of yoga a relentless pursuit of perfection in asana may seem pointless. To advanced students, a teacher teaches a whole asana in relationship to what is happening in a single action...

... Asanas act as bridges to unite the body with the mind, and the mind with the soul. They lift the sadhaka from the clutches of afflictions and lead him towards disciplined freedom. They help to transform him by guiding his consciousness away from the body towards awareness of the soul. Through asana, the sadhaka comes to know and fully realize the finite body, and merge it with the infinite - the soul. Then there is neither the known nor the unknown and only then does the asana exist wholly. This is the essence of a perfect asana.⁵

In that passage, BKS Iyengar refers to five afflictions (klesas), which in turn correspond to five types of knowledge (vrtti). These vrtti are:

- Pramana – knowledge from experience; direct perception
- Viparyaya – mistaken identity
- Vikalpa – knowledge devoid of substance
- Smrti – memory
- Nidra – sleep

The term Vrtti means movements, fluctuations or modifications in the consciousness. It refers to the underpinning of what we know and therefore our ways of knowing things – types of knowledge. This indicates that what we perceive can be based in direct perception, or thoughts devoid of substance, or thoughts that are derived from a personal perspective (infused with 'I' ness). Memory and sleep are also types of knowing. The

⁴ BKS Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Thorsons, 2002, p 260

⁵ BKS Iyengar. *Light on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Thorsons, 2002, p 31

knowing is real to us but its foundation distorts the independence and impartiality of what is known. For example, it is possible to know something with great conviction only to find that our understanding changes completely when some further piece of information sheds new light.

In effect, Patanjali indicates that our knowledge can be coloured by each of these aspects and that the colourisation has its source in the klesas (afflictions). Of these five types of knowledge, it is pramana that is cultivated through Yoga.

Correct knowledge is direct knowledge from the core of the being. It is intuitive, therefore pure, and beyond the field of the intellect. Direct knowledge leads man beyond the conscious state.⁶

Knowledge

It can be said that knowledge from experience is gained, not owned, and therefore its validity is tested over and over again through practice. A daily practice is effectively a means to polish our perception. It grounds our knowing in experience. It examines what we perceive in the senses and mind for substance by testing the veracity of our experience. Iyengar makes the following distinction between objective knowledge and subjective experience:

Knowledge has two facets. One is objective and the other subjective. Objective knowledge is based on speculation, thinking and analysis, whereas subjective knowledge is to verify the objective knowledge with experience. Subjective knowledge comes through practical experience and objective knowledge is earned through theoretical study. Yoga is both a practical as well as a theoretical subject, but it is neither blind practice nor a discursive one. Any practice needs some objective knowledge. One puts this objective knowledge or the acquired knowledge into practice, so that one experiences the reality of the objective knowledge. This experienced knowledge again leads towards the act of rethinking, reanalysing and reprocessing to set oneself for a new avenue in knowledge. Due to this renewal of knowledge, practice takes a new shape, leading each objective knowledge into subjective experience and at the same time that subjective experience guides one to express accurately the objective knowledge. This cycle of knowledge from the objective to the subjective and from the subjective to the objective produces a certain reaction in one and develops a memory tasting like a ripe fruit.

This memory is not merely remembrance of imprints but it is like the butter that is churned out of knowledge and experience. This accumulated memory is cleansed and clarified by our rethinking and re-experiencing process. Wrong and unwanted memories are discarded and ripe memories retained. It is actually the ripe memory that stops the fluctuations of the inquiring and acquiring mind. When this cycle comes to an end, then the mind, intelligence and consciousness remain like an ocean without waves.

Thus the yogic method combines and blends the theoretical and practical approaches, offering stability for the sadhaka to experience the real.⁷

The aim of yoga is to become real, not caught in the illusion created by desire and aversion. By entering into a state of being each time we practice, we change the mode in which we experience ourselves. In daily life we often exist in relation to a set of tasks that need attending to. The daily list of undertakings defines our sense of identity, our capacity and even our relationship to ourselves. We become increasingly defined by what we do and what we achieve. However, by changing the mode of being with oneself when we practice, we can exist in the state of Yogasana within the changing experience of asana. The effects of harmonising ourselves reflects in our day to day existence. Actions that are more internally harmonious are by nature less confused. The actions become unburdened of the conflicting undercurrents of emotions. The result is greater clarity and simplicity in actions.

Daily practice is not conversational; in fact, the internal dialogue, which is an impediment to experiencing ourselves, can and should be transcended. One aspect of a practice is to enter into a non-thinking mode, a doing mode. Thinking is about time – speculation on the past (reflections on what has occurred) or on the future (on what may happen, on what I expect). Thinking puts us at a distance from an experiential moment. Our thoughts,

⁶ BKS Iyengar. Light on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Thorsons, 2002, p 56

⁷ BKS Iyengar. Astadala Yogamala Vol 1, Yoga freedom through discipline, p 103

our beliefs, often get in the way of the current moment. Our capacity to enter this state in which we act in the moment is both a skill and an outcome. We discipline the wandering mind and restrain its oscillations through application (abhyasa). By integration of experience in the sheaths (kosas), the mind becomes a watcher. This change in mind enters us on the path of restraint (vairagya). When practicing in this manner, we draw on memory to engage in the practice and yet the memory is re-experienced in the current moment. Memory becomes purified.

Thus, what appears from the outside to be a practice of the body is, in essence, a practice of entering the moment to clarify and unify experience. Asana provides a rich palette of experiences. Some experiences are pleasant and some are challenging, attractive, confronting or indifferent. A practitioner aims to become adept at mastering each asana experience so that the integration of the individual and the unity in action becomes possible. The quest is to master a *state of being*.