



Shameem Akthar has trained as Yoga Acharya with the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre, Kerala, and is a master-trainer in neuro-linguistic psychology.
Email: sama_yama@yahoo.co.in
<http://jaisivananda.blogspot.com>

AWARENESS OF
THE FIVE
SHEATHS OF YOGA
IS POSSIBLE ONLY
THROUGH DEEP
AWARENESS AND
REGULAR
SADHANA

by **Shameem Akthar**



five sheaths in a pose

There are stages of evolution in each pose. The deeper you get into your practice, the more intimate and more precise your awareness of the five sheaths or koshas that yoga talks of.

On the immediate level, the natural discomfort that you experience while trying a pose is where you may feel the annamaya kosha or the body or food sheath. The stiffness, the constriction of the breath, the squeeze of the organs, and the pain are all part of your more gross, physical sheath.

Next, how you respond to your ability in a pose comes from your manomaya kosha or the mind-emotion sheath. For me, it is amazing to see that most of us carry a pattern of emotional response to any challenge. This is often a hangover from our childhood, of how we felt when our parents either criticised or praised us after we completed a task. In whatever form it takes, this responsive or reactive self on the mat invites the ego subtly back from the seat we seek to dislodge it from, with our practice.

The breath is experienced at the pranamaya kosha or breath/life force sheath. Here we move into something rather subtle if you keep your inner awareness alert.

There are several parts to this experience: when we use the breath to reach deeper in the pose; when we deliberately relax the breath by relaxing different parts of the body; when we inhale to expand or exhale to relax is how we learn to be in contact with the subtle pranamaya kosha.

When the pose leads you into vijnanamaya kosha or the intellectual sheath is where you may experience something far more powerful. If there is an intellectual and philosophical concept that must be experienced and you ache not to just understand it but experience it as well, a well-executed pose can help you crack that veil between theory and intuition. From here, when you experience asana jaya, or are relaxed in a difficult pose so much so that your breath is smooth, your limbs feel supple, your mind is rested, your thoughts settled and still, then that is when you enter the anandamaya kosha or the bliss sheath. This gives a sip of that which you seek. To move through these stages, you must maintain a constant, firm sadhana.

Dwikonasana or Double angle pose

Stand with feet a metre apart. Flare out feet slightly. Grasp hands behind, interlocking fingers. Inhale. Exhaling bend head down. Lift hands up, as high as you can behind you. Hold the pose, breathing normally. Release. Repeat a few times.

Points to note: Avoid if you have lower backache.

Benefits: Tones the arms, especially the soft insides. Tones back of legs. Trims hips. Boosts breathing.



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