

PRANA

*What is Pranayama and how will it help me?*

First understand what *prana* is. Briefly put, it is the life-force and not breath as is often thought. It is the most subtle life-essence that pervades all animate and inanimate forms. Pranayama is the yogic practice of breath control. It is a process through which one can stop the influence of constant inflow of thoughts. Through the practice of Pranayama, an aspirant can gain control over the mind and reach a heightened state of awareness. The result depends on the goal an aspirant has set for himself.

*What are the functions of the five Koshas: Annamaya kosha, Pranamaya kosha, Manomaya kosha, Vijnanmaya kosha and Anandmaya kosha?*

The *koshas* or sheaths interpenetrate each other, meaning that the inner kosha is subtler than the outer. The subtlety of the kosha is measured by its pervasiveness. For example, we see that a cube of ice, which is dense, occupies less space than water so we term water as subtler than ice.

Water, when it turns into vapour spreads over a much larger space and hence, vapour is subtler than water.

Similarly, in the physical body, the Annamaya kosha is the grossest of the five sheaths.

The Pranamaya kosha – the prana we inhale – would fill a greater space when we exhale; it is subtler than the Annamaya kosha.

Our mind, the Manomaya kosha, is still more subtle because it can reach distant places where our breath cannot.

The Vijñanmaya kosha is even more subtle as it can visualise vistas which our mind cannot see and can venture forth into realms unheard of before. For this reason, the Manomaya and Vijñanmaya koshas are considered subtler. The subtlest is the Anandmaya kosha – the sheath of bliss.

The Annamaya kosha, or the physical sheath of the body, is made up of the gross form of prana and of the food we intake, and is referred to as the food body.

The Pranamaya kosha is formed by the prana we breathe in. Its function is to impart the life force (energy, agility and activity) to the senses.

When thought occurs in the Manomaya kosha, the Pranamaya kosha becomes active through the senses. The quality of prana in the human body will depend upon the intellectual tendency and purity of the mind.

In the Vijñanmaya kosha, the intellect evolves to the point where it can grasp the essence behind the words.

While the Manomaya kosha is the doubting element, the Vijnanmaya kosha is the determining factor.

The Anandmaya kosha is the sheath in which we exist during our deep sleep. It is considered blissful because, whatever be the condition in which the individual is in the waking and dream state, once he crosses the threshold of sleep, he experiences peace and bliss. There, one is oblivious of everything. At the conscious level, this nature of the self can be experienced only in short bursts of bliss during the process of meditation.

If one looks from 'within' to 'without', one can think of the Anandmaya kosha as wearing four coats: the Vijnanmaya kosha, Manomaya kosha, Pranamaya kosha, and the outermost sheath of the Annamaya kosha (the food body). This is the only sheath that can be touched and seen.

In order to experience the bliss of the Anandmaya kosha, one will have to work at or drop the grossness from the other sheaths, through conscious living or spiritual practice. For this one has to have patience.

*Will the automatic movements which I experience during meditation ever stop?*

Once the gross karma related to the different koshas gets cleansed through the manifestation of *kriyas* – breathing exercises, yogic postures and meditation practices – these

movements become more subtle and are experienced internally while the process of purification continues. If one has only a few impressions of a certain type, the kriyas related to them will stop in a few days. They are like thought forms – there for a moment and gone in the next. If one has repetitive impressions of a certain kind, the kriyas pertaining to them can go on even for years, until the impressions are all exhausted. This is a purification process. As the purification completes itself at different levels, the external and internal movements will disappear.

*I have done a course in Pranic Healing and meditations up to a certain level. However, I have stopped all practice as I am a patient with high blood pressure. I have also started getting severe headaches plus a general feeling of restlessness, fear and depression. Medication does not help me. Can you please help?*

It is good you have placed yourself under the care of a doctor. If, however, the problems have surfaced after the Pranic Healing course, then it is best you talk to your course teachers also – they would be the right people to guide you. This is for the simple reason that each system has its set techniques, which lock into each other, and if the student is regular in his or her practice then the teacher also knows where the flaw lies and is able to guide the student accordingly.