

A practical application to integrate *Panchakosha* and *Trisharira* with *Ashtanga yoga*

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Abstract

Vedic philosophy presents *Panchakosha* (five sac of spiritual body) and *Trisharira* (three forms of soul) as frameworks for understanding human existence across physical, energetic, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. Originating in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Panchakosha* comprises *Annamaya Kosha*, *Pranamaya Kosha*, *Manomaya Kosha*, *Vijnanamaya Kosha* and *Anandamaya Kosha*. *Trisharira* refers to *Sthula*, *Sukshma* and *Karana Shariras*. These interconnected frameworks provide insights into human wellness and spiritual growth. *Ashtanga Yoga* serves as a practical method to integrate these layers.

This study explores the concept of *Panchakosha* and *Trisharira*. Mapping the *Panchakosha* and *Trisharira* frameworks to uncover their interconnections. To explore the implications of *Ashtanga Yoga* in aligning and harmonizing these multi-dimensional models.

The research draws from the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, scholarly articles, and reliable resources. It maps *Trisharira* to *Panchakosha* and

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analyzes *Ashtanga Yoga's* eight limbs to understand their role in harmonizing these frameworks.

Trisharira aligns with *Panchakosha: Sthula Sharira* corresponds to *Annamaya Kosha*; *Sukshma* integrates *Pranamaya*, *Manomaya*, and *Vijnanamaya Koshas*; and *Karana* connects to *Anandamaya Kosha*. The progress from the gross physical body to subtler dimensions of consciousness serves as a roadmap for self-realization and spiritual realms. *Ashtanga Yoga* guides individuals from their daily routines toward achieving mental and physical balance and ultimately reaching higher states of meditation and spiritual connection, which systematically fosters balance across all layers.

By harmonizing the principles of *Ashtanga Yoga* with these multi-layered frameworks, individuals can methodically move beyond physical and psychological boundaries, advancing toward self-discovery and complete health.

Key words : *Vedanta, Sthula Sharira, Sukshma Shariras, Karana Shariras, Dasavidha prana vayus, Atma, Mana.*

The *Panchakosha* framework (table-1), originating from the *Taittiriya Upanishad*,¹⁷ offers a profound structural analysis of human existence by delineating five interconnected sac (*koshas*) that envelop the *Atman* (the true Self).¹²

The *Annamaya Kosha* (sheath composed of food), nourished by food, represents the outermost layer, while the *Pranamaya Kosha* (sheath composed of *prāṇa* or vital force) governs life-sustaining energies.¹⁵ The *Manomaya Kosha* (mind-formed sheath) encompasses emotions and sensory perceptions that are perceived through the *manas*, from the senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell. The *manas* does the functions like *Indriyabhograha*, *Swanigraha*, *Uhya* and *Vichara*.¹⁹

Whereas the *Vijnanamaya Kosha* (a

shell that is composed of intellect) relates to discernment and wisdom.¹⁵ The innermost *Anandamaya Kosha* embodies bliss, reflecting the ultimate state of unity with universal consciousness.⁵

According to the *Vedantic* philosophy, the *Trisharira* concept describes three interrelated bodies:—*sthula* (gross), *sukshma* (subtle), and *karana* (causal) *sharira*.²⁶

Among these contributions, the frameworks of *Panchakosha* (five sac) and *Trisharira* (three bodies) stand out for their detailed explanation of human consciousness and well-being. Existing knowledge on human consciousness often emphasizes physical and psychological dimensions while neglecting the deeper spiritual and intellectual aspects. The integration of *Panchakosha* and *Trisharira* addresses this gap by offering an insight of

human existence across multiple layers.²

Objectives :

1. This study explores the concept of *Panchakosha* and *Trisharira*.
2. Mapping the *Panchakosha* and *Trisharira* frameworks to uncover their interconnections.
3. To explore the implications of *Ashtanga Yoga* in aligning and harmonizing these multi-dimensional models.

The core yogic and Vedantic concepts of the *Panchakosha* (Five Sac of spiritual body) and *Trisharira* (Three forms of soul) form a multipurpose map for presence of human existence from the subtle spiritual core to the gross physical level. The three main stages of human being are defined by the concept of *Trisharira*: the *Sthula Sharira*²⁸ which is nourished by the *Ahara* (food), the *Sukshma Sharira*²⁵ (Subtle Body), which includes the energetic, cognitive, mental, and consciousness. The *Karana Sharira* (Functional Body), which is the most subtle layer and contains the seed of future existence as well as all of the functioning potential.²³

A multi-layered understanding of *Trisharira* is offered by the *Panchakosha*, which describes the five sac that encircle the soulfulness (*Atman*). These two frameworks are directly mapped to each other for analysis and application purposes: The *Annamaya Kosha*, which stands for the physical body, is equivalent to the *Sthula Sharira*. The *Pranamaya Kosha*, *Manomaya Kosha*, and *Vijnanamaya Kosha* are the three inner sacs that comprise the *Sukshma Sharira*. The

Anandamaya Kosha (Bliss Sheath), the most imperceptible layer of unadulterated bliss and potentiality, is equivalent to the *Karana Sharira*.

The fivefold layers of human consciousness in vedanta :

The concept of *Panchakosha*, is explained in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, described five sac that encapsulate human existence. They are-

Table-1. Enumerating the Pancha kosha¹²

Sl no.	<i>Kosha</i>	Description
1	<i>Annamaya Kosha</i>	Physical body nourished by food
2	<i>Pranamaya Kosha</i>	Vital energy sac
3	<i>Manomaya Kosha</i>	Mental and emotional sac
4	<i>Vijnanamaya kosha</i>	Intellectual sac
5	<i>Anandamaya Kosha</i>	Bliss or spiritual sac

Annamaya kosha⁻²⁹ The term *anna* means food, whereas *Maya* signifies being encircled or covered, and *Kosha* refers to a sac or compartment. *Annamaya Kosha* represents the physical body, which is nourished and sustained by food, which is then transformed into the bones, muscles, veins, and blood cells etc. It is the outermost sheath of human existence and forms the foundation of all other *koshas*.⁹ When a person eats a balanced diet and exercises regularly, their *Annamaya Kosha* grows properly, and they become fit and enjoy good health. Human beings are nourished from food which serves as a medication.¹

Pranamaya kosha :

Internal to Physical Sheath is *Pranamaya Kosha* or Vital Sheath Prana. The *Vasishtha Samhita*,²⁰ narrates *Dasavidha prana vayus*, which governs physiological functions in the human body.

- *Prana Vayu* (one of the five subtypes of *vata*, that is seated in head), located in regions including the *kanda*(larynx/front of the neck/throat), *Mukham* (mouth), nostrils, *Hridaya* (heart), navel etc, is responsible for essential functions like breathing, sighing and coughing.
- *Apana Vayu* (one of the five subtypes of *vata*, situated in the pelvic region operates in the lower body regions including the penis, anus, thighs, scrotum, calves, knees, waist and root of the navel, controlling the excretion of urine and faeces.⁷
- *Samana Vayu* (one of the five subtypes of *vata*, that is seated in proximity to agni) permeates the whole body, facilitating crucial processes like growth, digestion, distribution of nutrients to all body parts, and overall nourishment.¹⁸
- *Udana Vayu* (one of the five subtypes of *vata*, that is seated in thorax cage) is active in all joints, hands and feet, enabling physical movements like raising the body.²⁷
- *Vyana Vayu* (one of the five subtypes of *vata*, which is present in *hridaya*) circulates between the ears and eyes, neck, ankles, nose, throat and eye regions, coordinating actions such as throwing, picking up objects and general body movements.²⁸

Among the subsidiary *pranas*, *Naga Vayu* residing in the skin and bones etc

regulates functions like regurgitation, while *Kurma Vayu* in similar regions controls eye movements including winking. *Krikara* governs the sneezing reflex, and *Devadatta* induces drowsiness and *yawning*. Finally, *Dhananjaya* leaves the body then death occurs. This comprehensive pranic system works synergistically to maintain physiological equilibrium and support all bodily functions from basic reflexes to complex metabolic processes. The primary five *vayus* handle major life-sustaining activities while the five *upa-pranas* assist in more specialized secondary functions, together forming an intricate energy network that sustains human life.²⁰

Manomaya kosha :

The *Manomaya Kosha* is the mental and emotional layer of our being that governs thoughts, feelings, and desires. Unlike our physical body, this mental layer can travel anywhere instantly through imagination and memory, making it challenging to control. Within this *kosha*, four key aspects interact: *Manas* (mind, psyche - the faculty through which *indriya* (cognitive organs) connect with the *atma* (soul), *Chitta* (the subconscious storing all our memories and impressions), *Buddhi* (the discerning intellect that helps us judge right from wrong), and *Ahamkara* (the ego that creates our sense of "I" and separation). When unbalanced, this *kosha* becomes dominated by negative emotions like anger, jealousy, and attachment, which *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* identify as the root cause of suffering. These turbulent mental states create stress (*Adhi*) that can eventually manifest as physical illness (*Vyadhi*- disease/ syndrome). By mastering this *kosha*, we prepare ourselves to access deeper layers of wisdom and ultimately,

the pure bliss consciousness that lies at our core.²⁸

Vigyanmayakosha :

The *Vigyanmaya Kosha* is the layer of wisdom and deep understanding. It represents the intellectual part of our mind, which helps us think, reason, and make decisions. This sheath stores all our knowledge and experiences. Using *Buddhi* (intellect) and *Viveka* (discriminatory wisdom), it helps us analyze right and wrong then helps to choose wisely. Unlike emotions or instincts, this layer works through logic and subtle awareness.⁸

Anandamaya kosha :

The *Anandamaya Kosha* is one of the deepest and most subtle of the five layers of human existence which means the spiritual bliss sac that represent unchanging happiness that exists beyond the mechanical emotions or worldly pleasures. Unlike ordinary happiness that depends on external factors, this layer reflects our true nature of inner peace and contentment. It's considered closest to *Atma* (soul or spirit: principle of life and sensation, the individual self; the only conscious element in the human body), While the other outer layers (like the physical body or thinking mind) are having variations according to the time and nature.³⁰ Unlike temporary pleasures arising from external stimuli, this *kosha* embodies the fundamental joy of existence itself - an unconditioned awareness that persists beyond changing circumstances.¹⁶

Mapping the panchakosha to the three sharira:

The concept of *Trisharira* (three

bodies) from *Vedanta* presents a holistic understanding of the human being, extending beyond the physical body to include the *Sukshma sharira* and *Karana Sharira* bodies. These three layers are interconnected and influence each other, shaping an individual's physical, cognitive, and spiritual experiences.¹⁴

The gross physical body (*Sthula Sharira*) is the outermost layer of human existence, composed of the five gross elements (*Panchmabhutas*). The *Taittirīya Upanicad* refers to this as the *Annamaya Kosha*, emphasizing its complete dependence on nourishment for sustenance. The gross body undergoes six modifications: birth, growth, maturity, reproduction, decay, and death. It remains subject to various limitations including age-related changes, diseases, and social constructs like caste and ashrama (stages of life). Vedānta philosophy teaches that *Mokca* (salvation) comes through realizing the body's transient nature. While essential for earthly existence, the gross body represents only the outermost of three existential layers. Proper understanding of the body's elemental composition serves as the foundation for spiritual discrimination (*Viveka*), the key practice in *Jñāna Yoga*. Through this discernment between the perishable body and immortal consciousness, seekers progress toward ultimate freedom.²²

The *Sukshma Sharira* is formed from the *Pancha tanmatras* (five subtle state of *mahabhuta*) in their unmanifested (non-grossified) state. It arises from virtuous deeds performed in previous lives and serves as the medium through which experiences such as happiness and sorrow are perceived. It is composed of seventeen components: the five

organs of perception (*Gyanendriya*), the *Karmendriya* (faculties of action), the five vital airs (*Pra as*), along with the mind (*Mana*) and intellect (*Budhi*). The three sheaths—the *Pranāmaya*, *Manomaya*, and *Vijnanamaya* koshas can be mapped into *Suksma Sharira*, or subtle body. *Prāna*, or vital air, encompasses the physiological activities sustained by the intake of air, functioning through the *Pranāmaya kosha*. These functions arise from the energy derived from food but do not necessitate direct engagement with the external environment. The *Manomaya Kosha*, or cognitive sac, governs the regulation of *Prāna* and illustrates the link between breath and emotional states. The *Vijnanamaya kosha*, or intellectual sac, involves both the mind and the intellect — the intellect makes judgments and decisions, while the mind relays these directives throughout the system. These three — the *Pranāmaya*, *Manomaya*, and *Vijnanamaya koshas* — form the *Suksma sharira*, or subtle body. The sac of vitality

broadly reflects the inner sense of energy and life force.¹¹

The *Karana Sharira* represents the primordial causal dimension of human existence, unlike the other bodies this inner most fundamental layer has no desired functions except serving as origin of cognitive manifestation (impulses and reflexes). In its essential nature, it is *Nirvikalpa rupam* (un-biased knowledge), existing as pure potentiality before any distinctions arise. It contains the *Samskaras* (alter/transform) of all past karma - the subconscious blueprint that shapes our future experiences and rebirths. Its transcendence marks the final stage before *moksha* (liberation), when all conditional identities dissolve into pure consciousness.¹⁰

Ashtanga yoga: aligning the *panchakosha* & *trisharira* :

Patanjali introduced *Ashtanga Yoga*

Table-2, Structural Correlation Between *Panchakosha*, *Trisharira* & *Ashtanga Yoga*^{6,12}

<i>Panchakosha</i> Model (Five Sheaths)	Trisharira Doctrine (Three Bodies)	Application of Ashtanga Yoga
<i>Annamaya Kosha</i>	<i>Sthula Sharira</i> (Gross Body)	Refined through following <i>Yama</i> , <i>Niyama</i> , <i>Asana</i> .
<i>Pranamaya Kosha</i>	<i>Sukshma Sharira</i> (Subtle Body)	Balanced through <i>Pranayama</i> , aligning the breath with mental and energetic stability.
<i>Manomaya Kosha</i>	<i>Sukshma Sharira</i> (Subtle Body)	Quieted through <i>Pratyahara</i> , enabling clarity and calm.
<i>Vijnanamaya Kosha</i>	<i>Sukshma Sharira</i> (Subtle Body)	Sharpened by <i>Dharana</i> and <i>Dhyana</i> , promoting deeper insight and awareness.
<i>Anandamaya Kosha</i>	<i>Karana Sharira</i> (Causal Body)	Experienced in <i>Samadhi</i> , where individual identity merges with universal consciousness.

through his Yoga Sutras,²⁶ the first four limbs—*Yama*,³ *Niyama*, *Asana*, and *Pranayama*-¹³ are considered external practices that address personal and social ethics, physical stability, and breath control, forming the foundation for self-discipline and well-being. The remaining four limbs—*Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, and *Samadhi*-⁴ are internal practices that cultivate deeper concentration and spiritual awareness. The stepwise progression moves from external behavioural disciplines to deeper internal states, culminating in the dissolution of individuality and realization of pure consciousness (table-2).

The link between the *Panchakosha* and the *Trisharira*, presenting a detailed structure of human existence, ranging from somatic existence to spiritual ultimate awareness. *Annamaya kosha* has significant role in the maintenance of physical health which reliance on *Ahara* can be mapped to the *Sthula Sharira*. In the grounding of spiritual aspects *Sharira* is the primary factor which will help to attain the higher level of consciousness, without a healthy body it is not possible. For the *Pranamaya Kosha's* explanation of *Dasavidha Prana Vayus* offers a physiological perspective on subtle energetic management, elevating the idea above simple abstraction. Similar to this, the *Manomaya Kosha's* division of *Manas*, *Chitta*, *Buddhi*, and *Ahamkara* helps to observe mental and emotional pain (*Adhi*) and how it manifests as physical illness (*Vyadhi*). The three *Koshas* such as *Pranamaya Kosha*, *Manomaya Kosha* & *Vijnanamaya Kosha* to *Sukshma sharira* provides a practical guide for self-analysis and growth. *Anandamaya Kosha* corresponds to *Karana Sharira* that has significant role in

past karmic imprints and also to the innermost layer of unconditioned joy and pure potential. This subtle layer represents the transition of one towards the ultimate truth.

The three primary connections identified are : (1) the physical dependency shared by *Annamaya Kosha* and *Sthula Sharira*; (2) the *Pranamaya*, *Manomaya*, and *Vijnanamaya Koshas* can be mapped to *Sukshma Sharira* for the vital and mental activities; and (3) the *Anandamaya Kosha* aligning with *Karana Sharira* as the source of individual existence. Addressing the third objective, *Ashtanga Yoga* is designed to enhance physical health, mental and intellectual growth, inner tranquility, and spiritual fulfillment. This step-by-step framework of *Ashtanga Yoga* leads the man towards gradual unfolding of consciousness, ethical conduct, emotional mastery, intellectual clarity, and finally, spiritual awakening. Integration of *Ashtanga Yoga* with *Pancha Kosha* and *TriSharira* offers a potential practical foundation for overall wellbeing. As mentioned in Table-2, clear instruction of various levels of existence are aligned and harmonized through progressive practice of *Yoga*. The fundamental, moral, and physical practices of *Yama*, *Niyama*, and *Asana* directly address *Annamaya Kosha*. *Pranamaya Kosha*, the bridge between the physical and mental, is directly governed by the help of practice of *Pranayama*. This practice is essential for the functioning of *Sukshma Sharira* by regulating the flow of *Prana*, which in turn calms the *Manomaya Kosha*. *Manomaya Kosha* is managed by *Pratyahara*, which has remarkable part in managing the *Manas* by disconnecting the senses from external stimuli, enabling emotional mastery. *Dharana* and *Dhyana* helps in the refining *Buddhi* and *Viveka* leading

to profound insight and clarity of the *Vijnanamaya Kosha*. When the individual sense of “I” dissolves and experience the unconditioned bliss, they will attain the *samadhi* or experience the *Anandamaya Kosha*.

The synthesis of the *Panchakosha* (five sheaths) and *Trisharira* (three bodies) frameworks offers a profound lens through which to examine the multidimensional nature of human existence, consciousness, and spiritual evolution in Vedantic philosophy. This integration not only clarifies the structural and functional relationships between these models but also provides a roadmap for holistic well-being and spiritual realms. *Ashtanga Yoga* guides individuals from their daily routines toward achieving mental and physical balance and ultimately reaching higher states of meditation and spiritual connection. Further research could explore potential neuroscientific connections, such as correlating the *Koshas* with neural patterns or energetic fields.

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