

FIVE SHEATHS (Pancha Kosa)

Definition

Five Sheaths in Sanskrit is called Pancha Kosa.

Kosa means a sheath, a case, a cover. A sword is put into a scabbard (protective case for sword). Money is kept in a treasury or Kosa. You must realize that the thing kept in this fivefold case, is the real "I". To see one's own truth one has to remove the five cases, the Pancha Kosa.

The five are,

1. Annamaya

a. What does Annamaya mean?

This body grew in the womb of the mother with the help of the Atma or food taken by the mother. Besides, even after birth, it has grown and is being sustained by food alone. After death, it becomes part of the earth which produces food.

b. Of what importance is this Kosa?

It is the sthula deha, the gross body, which suffers grief and exults in joy.

c. Is it called by any other name?

It is also called "Bhogaayathanam".

2. Pranamaya

a. What does Pranamaya mean?

The sphere of five senses, the five Pranas. They form this cover. Also referred as the vital energy sheath.

b. What are Upa-Pranas?

There are not only Pranas but also Upa-Pranas. They are: Naga, Kurma, Gridhra, Devadatta and Dhananjaya.

Naga causes belching; Kurma causes blinking of the eyelids; Gridhra is responsible for sneezing; Devadatta causes the yawn; Dhananjaya fills the body and causes it to grow fat. Even after death, these affect the body and cause changes in the corpse.

3. Manomaya

a. What does Manomaya Kosa mean?

The sphere of the five Jnanendriyas, plus the mind, of which they have become the instruments. It is the mental sheath and is inside the Pranamaya Kosa.

b. What is "mind"?

That which makes you feel you are the body and feel all things related to the body as "Mine"; that which runs out through the sense to the objects, in order to experience the pleasure there from. It is thus rendered very unsteady; always flitting from one object to another.

4. Vijnanamaya

a. The intellectual sheath

5. Anandayama

a. The innermost, spiritual-bliss sheath.

Analysis

- How is man to realize that he is separate from, beyond and above the Annamaya Kosa?

The body is not evident before birth or after death. It is seen only during the intervening period of time. The body has a beginning and an end, growth and decay. Such things are “products”, “effects”; and effects are conditioned. So the body too is a limited, conditioned thing. The wise man tells himself, “I exist always. I am not material. I have no cause and effect. I am separate from this gross body. So, I cannot be this Annamaya Kosa. I am the knower of the Annamaya Kosa. I am the witness”. When this knowledge is well established, he knows the truth. He must realize that he is beyond the Annamaya sheath.

- How is one to realize that he is beyond the Pranamaya Kosa?

At night, when the individual is asleep, the Prana, or the vital airs are moving; but one does not know what is happening in him or around him. He does not fight if enemies come during his sleep. He is inert and inactive like a log. But, “My nature is not this inertness. I am the ever-conscious witness. I am separate from all the sheaths”. Thus he must discriminate, reflect and know.

Source: Sai Prasnotara Vahini, Page 22

Swami Explains

Five sheaths encase the Atma and hide its splendor from revealing itself. Make all these pure and shining. The Annamaya Kosa (material sheath) must be purified by good, clean, pure food; the Pranamaya Kosa (vital sheath) by calm steady breathing and an equanimous temper; Manomaya Kosa (mental sheath) by holy thoughts and emotions, untouched by attachment to senses or unaffected by joy or grief; the Vijnanamaya Kosa (intellectual sheath) purified by contemplation of the reality and the Anandamaya Kosa (Bliss conscious sheath) by getting immersed in the ecstasy of God-realization.

Source: Sai Rapture – The Ecstatic Journey of a Modern Day Gopi; Sathya Sai Baba, 1976h, 160)

Ascent to the Divine

More effulgent than the Sun,

Whiter and purer than snow

Subtler than ether in space,

The Paramathma dwells in all,

Permeating the entire Cosmos,

Shining in every atom.

You are in that Brahman

That Brahman is in you.

You are that Brahman

And that Brahman is you

What greater truth

Can I convey to you?

Man is not a mere combination of the physical, the mental and the intellectual. The physical form that is sustained by the food that we consume is the gross body. Thereafter we have the Pranamaya, Manomaya and Vijnanamaya Kosas (subtle bodies) which together form the Lingaswarupa—the “Within Body” or the “Sense Body”. There is an entity which keeps under control the three subtle bodies which is the Antharaatma (the Indwelling Spirit). This Antharaatma is also known as the Chaitanya Purusha. The seat of the Chaitanya Purusha is Hridaya Guhyam (a cave in the heart). The “heart” referred to here is not the physical heart in the human body but is the spiritual heart – which is all-prevasive, all-knowing and boundless. The third form is the Anandamaya Kosa, the subtle body which has the “knowledge of the Real Self”.

Sathya Sai Speaks, SSS21-07

The Evolutionary Process

Having known the definitions and the attributes of different sheaths, now let us see how to evolve. Life has evolved from matter and mind has evolved from life. What is meant by matter? Matter is that which is encased in life. Consider the example of paddy. As long as the rice grain is covered by husk it is called paddy. When the husk is removed it becomes rice. Paddy has the power to germinate as long as the husk remains.

Likewise, the vital principle is contained in matter. It may thus be seen that life came from matter. Likewise, the mind evolved from life. Today men are prepared to recognize that mind evolved from life and life from matter. But they are not ready to go beyond this stage in human evolution. Human evolution cannot be complete unless it goes beyond the mind.

The next step in the human evolution is the super-mind. But man has to go forward even from the supramental to the ultimate stage of Sath-Chith-Ananda (Being-Aware-Bliss) to realize his final destiny. The day when man is able to experience the Divine state of Sath-Chith-Ananda is really the holy day of Shivarathiri.

When a person is attached to the body and considers the physical alone is real, he is bound to remain ignorant. The gross body is sustained by food and is limited by its material basis. But then is a subtle body which transcends the physical. This is called Lingadeha. After understanding the nature of the subtle body, men should try to proceed further to know the nature of the Karana Deha (Causal body, which is subtler than the Lingadeha), which is the experience of Ananda (Divine Bliss). Everything has its origin in Bliss and is dependent on Bliss. Bliss is present in a subtle form in every object in creation.

Sathya Sai Speaks, SSS21-07

Sathyam-Jnanam-Anantham

Every human being should strive to progress towards the ultimate state of “Over-mind” consciousness—the state which has been described by the seers as Vijnanamaya Kosa (the Super-intellectual Mind). Vijnana (modern science) is concerned with exploring the Supreme Reality—the Omnipresent Consciousness. This alone is true scientific enquiry. It is from the Vijnanamaya Kosa that one proceeds to the Anandamaya Kosa—the state of Super consciousness, of Total Bliss.

It may appear difficult to attain this state. But without making the necessary effort, it should not be treated as beyond one’s capacity. ***Listen to My words, I shall show you the way. If you merely listen but do not practice what I say, you will not reach the goal.***

Sathya Sai Speaks, SSS21-07

Subtler to Subtlest

The Vedas declare that the Brahman is of the nature of supreme Bliss. Elaborating on the Atma, they mention the sheaths that treasure it. The food sheath, the vital-air sheath, the mental sheath and the intellectual sheath in that sequence. After these four comes the innermost, spiritual-bliss sheath (ananda-maya Kosa). Each sheath is subtler than the next, the subtlest being the fifth, the bliss sheath. Therefore, all these can be taken to be the “body (upadhi)” of the Brahman.

The food sheath or coat is a gross covering, which protects the coating that is less gross, namely, the vital-air sheath. The vital airs are nurtured and directed by the less gross mental sheath. The mental sheath controls the vital airs (pranas), which regulate and operate the physical and sensory instruments. So the mental sheath is more powerful than the breath. Subtler than this sheath is the intellectual sheath. It is ever engaged in discriminating between the temporary and the permanent (a-nithya and nithya). It is very close to the experience of spiritual bliss (ananda). In fact, it

helps to evoke that experience, which is awareness of Brahman itself.

In order to guard the body against disease, we wear different varieties of clothes – an undershirt, then a shirt, then a coat, and over the coat a shawl. When the heart is to be examined, the shawl, then the coat, shirt, and finally the undershirt must be removed. Only then can the heart be examined. Similarly, one has to eliminate the food, mental, vital air, intellectual and mental sheaths in order to be intimately aware of the supreme Atma or Brahman, which is spiritual Bliss (Ananda) itself. The journey known as “life” is but a pilgrimage from the food plane of matter to the blissful spiritual plane. This is the goal, the end. The aphorism conveys this truth to us. The supreme soul (Paramatma) is essentially of the blissful nature.

Spiritual Bliss

Spiritual Bliss is the characteristic of every living being. As a consequence, every human being seeks to express and develop it. Living beings are found renouncing various desires and lines of conduct in order to attain spiritual bliss. But belief that spiritual bliss can be secured by external objects is a sign of ignorance.

From all outside you, grief;

From all within you, happiness.

Saravam para-vasham dukham;

Sarvam Atma vasham sukham.

According to this axiom, when one feels that one’s spiritual bliss (ananda) is dependent on external objects, one is moving oneself and courting grief. One plunges into needless grief by the enslavement of objects that, according to one’s fancy, can make one happy. One becomes the target for anxiety and worry. One has to suffer much, just as a person afflicted with thirst running toward a mirage gets nothing to quench the thirst and has a miserable end. The attempt to derive spiritual bliss through external objects and external activities is, therefore,

not commendable at all. Those who long for genuine spiritual bliss have to turn their attempts inward, bound to the Atma.

Sai Sutra Vahini, P-64

21 Omkars and the five that are for the sheath

Five Oms are chanted for the organs of action: vocal chords, hands, feet, elimination organs (represented by the anus) and generative organs.

Five Oms are chanted for the organs of perception: eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin, which correspond to sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

Five Oms are for the five vital airs of the body. Prana (located in lungs), apana (flatus, which moves downward through the rectum), vyana (diffused throughout the whole body), samana (navel, essential to digestion) and udana (rises through throat to head).

Five Oms are for the five sheaths; material, vital air, mind, intellect and bliss. Chanting purifies and clarifies these.

The last Om is for the person itself –and the person’s self-realization.

SSS 14, Ch3, discourse on 6 June 1978

How to practice in daily Life

Since we learnt each sheath is protecting the other inside, it is our primary duty to guard the subtlest by ensuring proper use of the outer sheaths.

Example, food we consume should be pure and saathwic in nature. Eat food only when prepared in such mindset. This guards the “breath” sheath.

Be aware of the breath and breathe in only that is pure. This guards the “mental” sheath.

The thoughts are controlled now when the two sheaths covering the “mind” are pure and blemish less.

When the mind is calm, it can enquire and turn towards the “intellect” which can discriminate and advice the state of being.

When the intellect is pure existence, one can experience Ananda, the Bliss, the true nature of man.

Practice Questions for Study Circle

1. Would you be able to start practicing focusing on the “food” sheath this week?
2. Would you be able to record in a journal the progress once started and share with others the effect of altering the food sheath and its short term effects on the “prana”?
3. Would you be able to do 21 Omkars every morning with the realization of each of the five Omkars clarifying and purifying?