

~~yesterday~~

NOW

~~tomorrow~~

shantarām

HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

# DOSHAS, BANDHAS, MUDRAS KHOSAS and aetcetera...



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# DOSHAS

Ayurveda means the Knowledge of Life. This philosophical and medical system is a branch of Vedic understanding dating back at least four thousand years. Every being contains a slightly different blend of the five elements. To somewhat simplify things, Ayurveda distilled the five elements into **three Doshas** or qualities, within a living being. These three doshas contain a mixture of the five elements

As humans, we contain a mixture of these three doshas. Usually two of the three are predominant, creating genetic differences in personality, energy levels, and appearance. In Ayurvedic understanding, when the energies in the body are out of balance, disease can follow. The cure for disease is to restore the body's natural harmony through lifestyle appropriate for the particular dosha, and of course yoga practice.

Determining your dosha can help you understand your natural tendencies and plot a course of action to stay as balanced as possible. As an example, someone with a Kapha constitution (strong in earth and water energies) may have great patience and endurance and not get rattled if they miss a meal, but cultivating speed and determination may be a challenge.

Yoga practice for this constitution might emphasize the fire and air elements of a dynamic practice rather than slow, restorative postures. This type of practice may not be initially appealing to a constitution strong in Kapha energy. Those of us with plenty of Vata in our constitution might find long holds in asana practice irritating and challenging in the same manner. Balanced practice includes working with your weaknesses as well celebrating your strengths.

As a yoga teacher, embodying these five energies, observing them in students and employing them specifically toward encouragement, are all part of the art of effective teaching. The strongly Pitta student may need to be reminded not to go beyond her edge into injury. The Vata student should be encouraged to keep his feet rooted. The Kapha student may need to be awakened from Savasana regularly.

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# DOSHAS

Doshas are the forces that create the physical body, they determine our conditions of growth and aging, health and disease. Typically, one of the three doshas predominates and determines your constitution or mind-body type. By understanding our individual habits, emotional responses, and body type, we can adapt our yoga practice accordingly. The same goes for Ayurveda treatments focused on alleviating any doshic excesses [illness] via powerful herbs and/or via the improvement of general lifestyle practices such as pranayama, meditation and yoga postures.

Something will indicate when you have an excess of a dosha, as it throws your system off balance. For example, with excess vata, there can be mental, nervous and digestive disorders, including low energy and weakening of all body tissues. With excess pitta, there is toxic blood that gives rise to inflammation and infection. With excess kapha, there is an increase in mucus, overweight, edema, lung diseases, amongst other. The key to managing all doshas is taking care of vata, as it is the origin of the other two.

## **Prana, Tejas and Ojas**

Yoga is an alchemical process of balancing and transforming energies of the psyche. At the root of vata, pitta and kapha are its subtle counterparts called prana, tejas and ojas. Unlike the doshas, which in excess create diseases, these promote health, creativity and well-being.

- Prana is our life force and is the healing energy of vata [air]
- Tejas is our inner radiance and is the healing energy of pitta [fire]
- Ojas is the ultimate energy reserve of the body derived from kapha [water]

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# DOSHAS

On the mental and astral plane 3 attributes or GUNAS correspond to the 3 humors that make up the physical constitution. In the ayurvedic system of medicine, these 3 attributes provide the basis for distinctions in human temperament and individual differences in psychological and moral dispositions.

The 3 basic Gunas are :

**SATTVA** [adj : sattvic] expresses essence, understanding, purity, clarity, compassion and love. People of sattvic temperament have healthy bodies and their behavior and consciousness is pure, they are religious and attain self-realization without much effort while rajas and tamasic people must make much more effort to attain this state.

**RAJAS** [adj : rajasic] Rajas implies movement, aggressiveness and extroversion. The rajas mind operates on a sensual level. They are interested in business, prosperity, power, prestige and position. they can be religious but very political.

**TAMAS** [adj : tamasic] manifests in ignorance, inertia, heaviness and dullness. Tamasic people are lazy, selfish and capable of destroying others. They have usually little respect for others and are not religious, all their activities are egoistical.

These 3 subtle mental energies are responsible for behavioral patterns, which may be altered and improved through the practice of spiritual disciplines such as yoga.

## The 5 elements, the organs of senses and their actions :

Element	Senses	Sense organ	Action	Organ of action	Ether	Hearing	Ear	Speech	Organs of speech	tongue	vocal cord	mouth	Air	Touch	Skin	Holding	Hand	Fire	Seeing	Eyes	Walking	Feet	Water	Taste	Tongue	Procreation	Genitals	Earth	Smell	Nose	Excretion	Anus
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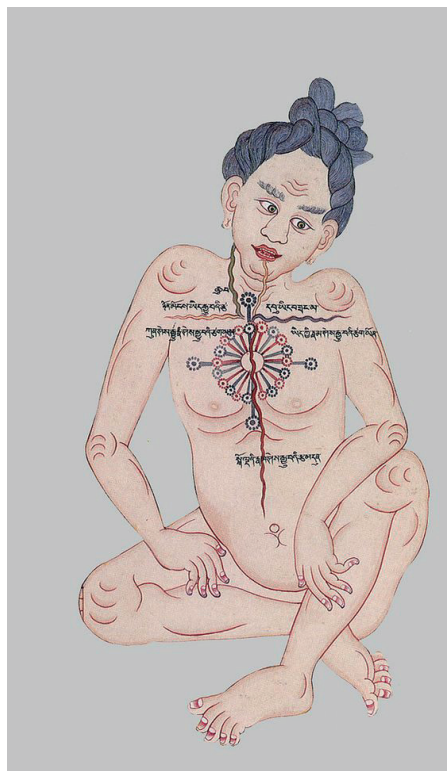
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# DOSHAS

Ultimately, Ayurveda is seeking to reduce diseases, in particular those that are chronic, and increase positive health in the body and mind via these three vital essences that aid in renewal and transformation. Increased prana gives us more enthusiasm, adaptability and creativity, all necessary when pursuing our spiritual path, in yoga this force is necessary to enable us to perform.

Tejas provides us with courage, fearlessness and insight, important when taking decisions. Last, ojas gives us peace, confidence and patience to keep our development consistent and avoiding that we give up.

Eventually, the most important element we want to develop is ojas as it gives us physical and psychological endurance. This can be achieved via the right diet, tonic herbs, control of the senses, and devotion.



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# PRAKRUTI

As mentioned, there are three DOSHAS known as VATA, PITTA and KAPHA and these DOSHAS harmonize the functions of each cell and are present in each cell. When the sperm and the ovum meet in your mother's uterus, an embryo is created, the DOSHAS which are present inside and outside at that time are producing the PRAKRUTI; if the DOSHAS are in harmony, the baby will be in good health, if not, the foetus will not survive or will not be well formed.

When one or two of the three DOSHAS are slightly in excess, they will create a particular constitution on the physical and psychological level that will characterize a person and will never change.

There are 7 types of PRAKRUTI

VATA

PITTA

KAPHA

VATA-PITTA

PITTA-KAPHA

VATA-KAPHA

SAMA

Knowing your prakruti is very important in ayurvedic diagnosis, because for example, a vata [air] person will tend to have vata disorders, the other type of sicknesses are rare for him or easy to dislodge. In order to prevent vata sicknesses, one should avoid food, drink and factors aggravating vata. In the same way a pitta [fire] person should be given remedies that are refreshing and a kapha [cold] type person should be given medicines that are heating. The prakruti are SATWIKI, RAJA and TAMAS. The concept of the mind is very important in ayurveda because it is always considered that an illness is physical and mental. Mental plays a dominant role in the cause of the disease. Psychological factors control the physiological functions in the body and vice versa. Consequently, even with the treatment of physical problems, some measures that act on the psyche are also prescribed.

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# GUNAS

According to ayurveda there are twenty base characteristics called GUNA that are classified in ten antagonistic pairs, for example hot and cold, slow and fast, humid and dry etc...

Those opposite strengths function together. The universe in its whole is the manifestation of the two opposite bases, the male energy and the female energy. VATA, PITTA and KAPHA have their own characteristics and the substances that have similar attributes will have the tendency to aggravate the corresponding DOSHAS, according to the law of the similar increasing the similar.

For example the summer season has PITTA attributes, very hot, dry, light mobile and penetrating. Naturally in summer PITTA will be aggravated.

The VATA season, light, subtle, dry, mobile, rough, cold is fall.

KAPHA season liquid, heavy, cold, sticky, cloudy is winter.

The body characteristics can be changed in spite of the natural congenital tendency of the base constitution PRAKRUTI by consuming opposite attributes of someones' constitution. For example if a VATA person eats exclusively KAPHA foods he will suppress the light VATA characteristic and modify it into KAPHA during this time without losing its PRAKRUTI.

To have the full [20] list of Gunas, refer to internet...

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# MENTAL CONSTITUTION

On the mental and astral plan, three attributes or GUNAS match with the three physical DOSHAS. They allow to distinguish the human constitutions and the individual differences to the morals and psychological dispositions.

The three attributes are:

SATTVA express essence, comprehension, purity, clarity, compassion and love. People with a peaceful temperament, a healthy body, a very pure consciousness, practice their beliefs and are often holy.

RAJAS implies movement, aggressiveness and extroversion. People with a rajassic temperament are interested by business, prosperity, power and prestige. They appreciate wealth and are extroverted. They can believe in god and suddenly change their beliefs. They are very political.

TAMAS manifest itself with ignorance, inertia, heaviness, slowness of the mind. Tamasic people are lazy, selfish and capable of destroying others. They generally have little respect for others and they don't have any religion. All their activities are selfish.

# THREE DOSHAS / VATA

## **VATA / AIR**

Vāta or Vata [airy element]. It is characterised by properties of dry, cold, light, minute, and movement. All movement in the body is due to property of vata. Pain is the characteristic feature of deranged vata. Some of the diseases due to vata is windy humour, flatulence, gout, rheumatism, etc.

## ASPECTS

Generally underdeveloped, their chests are flat and their veins, muscle tendons are visible. The complexion is dark, the skin is cold, rough, dry and cracked, There usually are a few moles present, often dark. Vata people are active, they are either too tall or too short with thin frames, the hair is curly, the eyes may be small and dry, and the nails are rough and brittle. The shape of the nose is bent and turned up. The appetite and digestion is variable.

They crave for sweet, sour and salty tastes and like hot drinks. They perspire less and their sleep is disturbed, their hands and feet are cold. These people are creative, active, alert and restless. They talk fast and walk fast but are easily tired. Psychologically, Vata people have short memory but quick mental understanding. They have little will power, suffer from instability and possess little tolerance. They are nervous, fearful, and even anxious. Vata tends to earn money quickly also spend it quickly.

# THREE DOSHAS / PITTA

## **PITTA / FIRE**

Pitta is the fiery element or bile that secreted between the stomach and bowels and flowing through the liver and permeating spleen, heart, eyes, and skin; It is characterised by hotness, moist, liquid, sharp and sour, its chief quality is heat. It is the energy principle which uses bile to direct digestion and enhance metabolism. It is primarily characterised by body heat or burning sensation and redness

## ASPECTS

They are of medium height, are slender and body frame may be delicate. Their chests are not flat. They have many moles or freckles. Muscle development is moderate. The pitta complexion is yellowish or reddish; the skin is soft, warm and not much wrinkled. The hair is thin, silky, and red and they have a tendency toward premature graying or hair loss. The eyes may be gray, green or copper brown and sharp. Nails are soft and the nose is also sharp and the tips tend to be red. These people have a strong metabolism, good digestion and strong appetite.

They have a natural craving for sweet, bitter and astringent tastes and enjoy cold drinks. Their sleep is of medium duration, they perspire a lot, the body temperature is high and hands and feet are hot. Pitta people do not tolerate sunlight and heat. Pitta people have a good power of comprehension, are intelligent, sharp and are good orators. When they have imbalance, they have emotional tendencies toward anger and jealousy. They are ambitious and like to lead. They enjoy exhibiting their wealth and luxurious possessions.

# THREE DOSHAS / KAPHA

## **KAPHA / WATER**

Kapha is the watery element, it is characterised by heaviness, cold, tenderness, softness, slowness, lubrication, and the carrier of nutrients. It is nourishing element of the body. All the soft organs are made by kapha, it plays an important role in taste perception, Joint nourishment and lubrication

## ASPECTS

People of Kapha constitution have well-developed bodies. They have tendency to carry excess weight. Their chest is expanded; the veins and tendons are not obvious because of their thick skin. Their complexion is fair and bright, the hair thick, dark and soft, the eyes are dense; the white of the eyes is generally very white, large and attractive. Kapha people have regular appetite, the digestive functions are slow, they tend to move slowly, and they crave for pungent, bitter and astringent food. Sleep is sound and prolonged.

They have a good health, are happy and peaceful. Psychologically, they tend to be tolerant, calm and loving, however when unbalanced they can show tendencies to greed, attachment, envy and possessiveness. Their comprehension is slow but definitive. Kapha people tend to be wealthy; they earn money and are good at holding on to it.

# SEVEN DHATUS

The human body consists of seven basic and vital tissues called Dhatus meaning in Sanskrit constructing element. These seven datus are responsible for the entire structure of the body. The datus maintain the functions of the different organs, systems and vital parts of the body. They play a very important role in the development and nourishment of the body.

They are also part of the biological protective mechanism. With the help of AGNI, the principle of fire and assimilation, they are responsible for the immune mechanism. When one dathu is defective, it affects the successive dathus, as each dathu receives its nourishment from the previous dathus in serial order:

**RASA** or plasma contains nutrients from digested food and nourishes all the tissues, organs and systems, it is kapha.

**RAKTA** or blood governs oxygenation in all tissues and vital organs and maintains life, it is pitta.

**MAMSA** or muscle covers the delicate vital organs, performs the movements of the joints and maintains the physical strength of the body, it is kapha.

**MEDDHA** or fat maintains the lubrication and oiliness of all the tissues, it is kapha.

**ASTHI** or bone gives support to the body structure, it is vata.

**MAJJA** or marrow and nerves fills up the bony spaces and carries motor and sensory impulses, it is kapha.

**SHUKRA** or reproductive tissues contains the ingredients of all tissues and is responsible for reproduction, it is kapha.

When there is a disorder in the balance of vata-pitta-kapha, the dhatus are directly affected. The disturbed dosha [vata, pitta, kapha] and defective dhatus are always directly involved in the disease process. Health of the datus can be maintained by taking steps to keep Vata-Pitta-Kapha in balance through a proper diet, exercise and rejuvenation program

# FIVE KOSHAS

A Kosha is a layer, or a sheath. One of the teachings of the Upanishads is that there are five sheaths surrounding the Self, the individual Consciousness. In the Tantric viewpoint, these layers are not simply maya (illusion). They are, yet again, another form that Consciousness has taken to see itself in a different way. The koshas move from the gross physical plane to the most subtle plane, each layer with its own qualities.

## **Physical: Annamaya Kosha**

Anna means food. All of the physical aspects of life come and go and are consumed by another aspect of external reality. Thus, the outermost Kosha is called the sheath of food, or annamaya kosha. Proper diet, asana practice, and rest all contribute to optimal functioning of the physical body, the health of which influences our ability to become sensitive enough to experience the deeper layers.

## **Energy: Pranamaya Kosha**

Prana means energy. It is the vital force that produces the subtle vibrations related to breath and is the driving force behind the physical aspect of the senses and the operation of the physical body. For both a healthy life and practice, our prana needs to be smoothly regulated, utilizing the practice of Pranayama and asana.

## **Mental: Manamaya Kosha**

Mana means mind. It is the level of processing thoughts and emotions. It is in direct control of the operation, through prana, of the physical body and senses, and organization of ideas. It is dependent on the previous sheaths for well-regulated energy (prana) and a healthy physical body. It functions clearly when connected to the deeper koshas that inform it.

## **Wisdom: Vijnanamaya Kosha**

Vijnana means knowing. It is the sheath of wisdom that is underneath the processing, thinking aspect of mind. It knows in a different way than manamaya kosha, embodying wisdom rather than mental acuity.

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# FIVE KOSHAS

## Bliss: Anandamaya Kosha

Anandamaya kosha is the most interior of the koshas, the first of the koshas surrounding the Atman, the eternal center of consciousness. Ananda means bliss. However, it is not bliss as an emotion experienced at the level of the sheath of mind. Ananda is a different order of reality from that of the mind. The bliss experience here is said to be millions of times greater than our conditioned mind's ability to grasp.

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## Self: Atman

Atman is the Self, the eternal center of consciousness, which was never born and never dies. Like a pure light shining through various lampshades (koshas), Atman is the light itself, where subject and object (observed and observer) are seen as one.



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# BANDHAS

Bandha means “lock.” This kind of lock, rather than a closure, like the kind of lock a key is needed to open, was actually a farming term. These locks are like an irrigation ditch used to direct water to different parts of a field. Bandhas in the body are used to direct energy both physically and energetically. Physically, the bandhas work to maintain the lift and tone of our internal organs. Energetically, they assist the movement of prana, or energy, in the body.

There are three main bandhas used in the asana practice:

## **MULABANDHA**

Located between the anus and genitals, it is the perineal muscle for men. For women its location is near the top of the cervix. The engagement of Mulabandha is not a hard contraction by force of the muscles surrounding it—it is more subtle than that. Mulabandha can be experienced by setting the thighs back, increasing lumbar curvature in the spine, then allowing the tailbone to grow heavy, encouraging the abdomen to tone and the base of the pelvis to lift.

- Setting the thighs back sets the femur heads back and creates expansion in the pelvic area.
- Dropping the tailbone firms the buttock flesh. The lower abdomen lifts from the pubis to the navel.

The synergy created by these two complimentary, yet opposing forces, creates Mulabandha. Rather than a hardening or bearing down on the pelvic floor area, a lift is created akin to drawing the last half-inch of a milkshake up a straw.



# BANDHAS

## **UDDIYANA BANDHA**

Located a little below the navel, Uddiyana Bandha means “flying upward” referring to its effect on prana. This second bandha is best approached in the same manner as Mulabandha, with a minimum of outer hardness or contraction. In the process of performing this lock, the center of the solar plexus is drawn in and up and an abdominal lift and tone takes place. In full expression it is performed by exhaling fully and then drawing the lower belly inward and upward while lifting the diaphragm.

This level of Uddiyana Bandha would be used in the practice of exhalation retention in Pranayama, but due to the inability to inhale while performing it to this level, simply maintaining a stillness about three fingers below the navel allows space for the diaphragm to drop during each inhalation. As the diaphragm drops, the breath is encouraged to move into the side ribs, back and chest. On each exhalation the abdominal muscles encourage a complete emptying of the lungs. The procedure takes practice, and the subtleties of the relationship between breath and bandhas need to be explored experientially.

## **JALANDHARA BANDHA**

This lock is created by lifting and rolling the shoulders back to first broaden and lift the chest. Next the back of the head extends toward the sky and the chin itself moves into the notch, which is formed where the two clavicle bones meet. The lock occurs spontaneously in some postures such as shoulder-stand, but is not used as extensively as the other two locks.