YOGA (PSYCHOLOGY)

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According to yoga philosophy, human psyche is considered to be part of the material world. As everything that exist, it is composed of interaction of two basic substances: unconscious matter or energy and universal consciousness or spirit. Human psyche could potentially attain different stages of consciousness, according to the degree of universal consciousness or degree of matter (energy) implied in it. From this perspective, psychological health is reflection of physical health of body, uninterrupted energy flow that comes to the body through chakras, regulated breathing and the degree of consciousness one is able to attain during his life. It is assumed that everybody could attain the highest state of consciousness with the help of proper yoga techniques and experienced teacher.

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8. SĀṂKHYA

Sāṃkhya is regarded as one of the oldest philosophies, as its principles could be already found in Vedas and Upanishads.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is the theoretical base of yoga and the foundation of yoga psychology.[[2]](#footnote-2) The earliest known treatise is Sāṃkhya-kārikā by Īśvarakṛṣṇa. Its date is not definitely established, but it cannot be later than the fifth century of our era.[[3]](#footnote-3) Sāṃkhya ontology presupposes two basic modes of being (noumenon) – the Self, universal spirit or pure

consciousness – puruṣa, and unconscious material world, primordial matter or substance – prakṛti.[[4]](#footnote-4) The relation between two basic modes of being (noumenon) explains all possible manifestations or phenomenal modes of existence. The particular relation between them also explains the cause of human suffering: “People suffer because they do not understand the exact relationship of Self and non-self, of consciousness and unconscious matter, and of Conscious Noumenon, *Purusa*, and unconscious noumenon, *prakriti*. When man understands this relationship and realizes the nature of conscious Noumenon, *Purusa*, he becomes free from suffering and attains his real nature. The technical name of this knowledge is *prakriti-Purusa-Anyatakhyati* (exact knowledge and relationship of conscious Noumenon with unconscious noumenon).”[[5]](#footnote-5) The main purpose of all Indian philosophies is to emancipate people from suffering. This purpose could be attained with the aid of knowledge (such as Sāṃkhya) or by means of techniques (such as yoga). “…the fact remains that no knowledge has any value, if it does not seek the ‘salvation’ of men.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Prakṛti consist of different modes of being, called guṇas. They are infinite in number but in accordance with their three main characteristic they have been arranged in three types: tamas (dullness, inertia and darkness), rajas (activity and dynamism) and sattva (the potential consciousness, light).[[7]](#footnote-7) The psychological manifestations of tamas are ignorance, laziness, heaviness, apathy, lack of enthusiasm and sloth; of rajas are activity, restlessness and change; and of sattva are happiness, goodness and peace.[[8]](#footnote-8) All three types of guṇas exist simultaneously in every physical, biological and psycho-mental phenomenon, though in unequal proportion.[[9]](#footnote-9) Thus guṇas are categorized in three main categorises in accordance to the proportion of consciousness or prakṛti implied in unconscious material world. Evolution and involution depends on the combination of those three guṇas. Creation is manifestation and destruction is dissolution. When impediments are removed, a thing is manifested. The form of manifested thing is sattva, the force that brings manifestation is rajas and the inertia, which keeps all components of matter together in a mass is tamas.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Human psyche is also divided into different categorical modes of potential psychological existence, according to the degree of consciousness or matter implied in it.[[11]](#footnote-11) “Sattva, shining fluidity, is the intrinsic nature of mind but mind is clouded by the force of *tamoguna*, inertia or ignorance. Hence the shining nature of *sattva* is not experienced.”[[12]](#footnote-12) The first, most sattvic mode of potential psychological existence is the cosmic intelligence or cosmic law. It has its psychological (buddhi) and cosmological aspect (mahat). From the psychological point of view it is the subtlest substance of all mental processes and from the cosmological point of view it governs the well-defined line of evolution of universe. It is beyond the subject-object division or relationship. It contains all saṃskāras or previous impressions one has ever been through.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The second manifestation of psychological existence is ahaṃkāra – individuating principle, responsible for limitation, separation and variety in the universe. It presupposes the distinction between subject and object. It designates the self-consciousness or ego-consciousness. Buddhi is to ahaṃkāra as consciousness is to self-consciousness.[[14]](#footnote-14) It is phenomenal I, which has nothing to do with the real I or Self (puruṣa), which is beyond subject-object distinction.[[15]](#footnote-15) Ahaṃkāra has the ability of transformation in accordance with which guṇa predominates in it. If sattvic guṇas predominate in it, it transforms into subjective phenomena and in the case of predominance of tamasic guṇas, it transforms itself into objective phenomena.[[16]](#footnote-16) In the first case, under the influence of sattvic guṇas, the ahaṃkāra causes manas or mind, the principle of cognition that hat has cognitive, conative and affective functions. In the second case, under the influence of tamasic guṇas, ahaṃkāra gives rise to bhūtādi, the physical principle of universe. It is physical substance in its preliminary manifestation, devoid of any physical or chemical attributes. If rajasic guṇas predominate in bhūtādi, it induces potential energy called tanmātrās. It is the subtlest manifestation of matter, without magnitude, but nevertheless implies potential for differentiation: potential of sound, touch, colour, taste and smell.[[17]](#footnote-17) Under the influence of tamasic guṇas, bhūtādi gives rise to five gross elements: ether, air, fire, water and earth.

With the help of yoga, everybody could evolve toward more sattvic, conscious mode of being and that results in the improved psychic health. The means to attain psychological growth toward higher consciousness and the basic impediments on this path were already described by Patañjali.

1. **PATAŇJALI**

Patañjali was the first person who systematically gathered all known information about yoga in his book Yoga Sutras.[[18]](#footnote-18) Yogic means toward attaining higher consciousness are described by him as ashtanga – eight limbs of yoga.

**ASHTANGA**

Ashtanga is a systematic eight-phase approach to mastery over all aspects of our functioning. “Mastery of each step leads to work on a more subtle aspects of our being, beginning with habits and behaviour, then proceeding to work with the body and breath, and then mental functioning.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

Patañjali classifies eight limbs of yoga in his Yoga Sūtras in the following way:[[20]](#footnote-20)

1. **YAMA - Abstentions[[21]](#footnote-21)**

*Ahiṁsā* - nonviolence: in thought, ward and deed

*Satya*– truthfulness: words and thoughts being in exact correspondence with facts

*Asteya* – refrainment from stealing: not taking things belonging to others, not even harbouring desire to do so

*Brahmacharya* – celibacy: controlling sexual drives

*Aparigrahāḥ* – renunciation of (unnecessary) possessions: ability to see problems caused by the acquisition, preservation and destruction of things

He further explains that yamas are universal and should be not exempted by one's class, place, time or circumstance.[[22]](#footnote-22)

1. **NIYAMA** – **Observances[[23]](#footnote-23)**

*Śhaucha* – cleanliness: external cleanliness that pertains to the body, and internal cleanliness that consist of purifying the mind

*Santoṣa* – contentment: disinterest in accumulating more than one’s immediate needs in life

*Tapaḥ* – austerity: ability to tolerate hunger and thirst, as well as all dualities of life, to avoid useless talk and to perform fast

*Svādhyāya* – study (of scriptures): reading sacred scriptures whose subject is liberation

*Īśvara-praṇidhāna* – devotion to Īśvara: attuning to the supreme consciousness

1. **ASANA** – posture[[24]](#footnote-24)
2. **PRĀṆĀYĀMA** – breath control[[25]](#footnote-25)
3. **PRATYĀHĀRA** – disengagement of the senses[[26]](#footnote-26)
4. **DHĀRAṆĀ** – concentration[[27]](#footnote-27)
5. **DHYĀNA** – meditation[[28]](#footnote-28)
6. **SAMĀDHI** – absorption[[29]](#footnote-29)

**KLEŚAS (Kleśas)**

Patañjali mentions five kleśas that act as impediments toward attaining higher consciousness and physical health. Those are:

* **AVIDYĀ (ignorance**)

Ignorance is the main cause of the other kleśas whether they are in a dormant, weak, intermittent, or fully activated state.[[30]](#footnote-30) It is the notion that takes the self, which is joyful, pure and eternal to be the non-self, which is painful, unclean and temporary.[[31]](#footnote-31)

* **ASMITĀ (ego)**

Patañjali designates ego as the false sense of I-am-ness: “Ego is (to consider) the nature of the seer and the nature of the instrumental power of seeing to be the same thing.”[[32]](#footnote-32) The seer designates awareness of puruṣa and the instrumental power of seeing refers to the buddhi as the instrument of awareness.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Ego is the specific aspect of ignorance that identifies the non-self, specifically the intelligence, with the truest Self. The problem with ego is not the fact that we have one; it is useful and even necessary to have an ego in order to function and live. The problem arises when we falsely identify with the instrument – ego. It is mistaking the physical, emotional and mental aspects of the mind-body for the true Self.[[34]](#footnote-34)

* **RĀGAḤ (attachement)**

Patañjali explains that potential cause for attachment is experience of happiness.[[35]](#footnote-35) Attachment means irresistible or uncontrollable craving for pleasure or the means to attain pleasure by one who remembers past experiences of it. It is thus deeply connected with memory. Those previous impressions of past experiences of pleasure are not necessary conscious. They cause the mind and its perception to be unconsciously drawn towards objects that have produced pleasure in the past. We could be irresistibly attached to material objects, relationships, status, power, or just to the idea of them.[[36]](#footnote-36)

* **DVEṢAḤ (aversion)**

Patañjali furthermore explains that potential cause for experience of aversion is the experience of pain.[[37]](#footnote-37) It is the feeling of resistance, anger, frustration, and resentment toward pain and its causes, by one who experienced similar pain in the past. Thus when we feel aversion to something, it is because of (un)conscious memory of pain that was caused by it.

* **ABHINIVEŚAH (clinging to life)**

Clinging to life or fear of death is inherent tendency of all living beings, expounds Patañjali. Attachment to life or aversion to death is explained with the assumption of the unconscious memory of previous deaths. This kleśa is connected with the experiences in past lives and not in the present life. This could be the reason why clinging to life it is treated by Patañjali as separate, the fifth kleśa.

From the psychological point of view we could say that fear of death means fear of experiencing new things in life or that clinging to life means the attachment to the same, repetitive patterns in life. This unconscious aversion to transformation is considered as one of the main obstacles towards psychological growth.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Patañjali clarifies that kleśas could exist in four possible states: dormant state, weak, intermittent or fully activated.[[39]](#footnote-39) Dormant kleśas reside in mind in their potential form. Their potential power could be activated when a person encounters a particular situation or context that serves as a trigger. Then they develop into fully activated state. When kleśas are continually interrupted by some opposite or exclusive tendency, they are described as intermittent. When one consciously cultivates the mind toward the opposite or exclusive tendencies of particular kleśa, it becomes weak. According to sage Vyasa in his commentary to Yoga Sūtras, there are actually five states of kleśas. The fifth state is burnt state – they could actually lose their power by yogis who have cultivated deep meditation. The burnt kleśas won’t activate even when yogi encounters situation that could act as a trigger. [[40]](#footnote-40)

Thus according to Patañjali one could weaken or even deactivate latent power of the obstacles towards psychological growth and higher states of consciousness with the opposite tendencies or with meditation.[[41]](#footnote-41) The possible states of consciousness that could be experienced by a person are described in yogic psychological theory as fife sheaths of consciousness or five koshas.

1. **FIVE KOSHAS**

According to Unpaniṣads (ancient Sanskrit texts that contain some of the central philosophical concepts and ideas of Hinduism), the essence of human personality is Atman. Atman in conjunction with gross and subtle bodies becomes subject to experience of pleasure and pain. Its true nature becomes engrossed in five types of sheaths or layers of consciousness called koshas, which are hierarchically organized.[[42]](#footnote-42) They are first mentioned in Taittirīya Upaniṣad.[[43]](#footnote-43)

* 1. ANNAMAYA KOSHA

The first sheath or aspect of experience is called Annamaya kosha. It concerns gross physical body and is explained as food sheath, since it is dependant on food, water and air.[[44]](#footnote-44) The importance of physical body in yoga lays in its connection to the mind. In early phases of yoga practice the student learns how to discipline and master his body. As he becomes more supple, relaxed and healthy, he can be ready to work with his mind.[[45]](#footnote-45)

It is believed that the physical state is an embodiment of a mental state: every posture a person takes is a reflection of his state of mind. For example when we feel stressed the brows are knit and the muscles of the forehead become tense, the stomach is pulled in and is rigid. In this way postures and feelings become so well knit that one almost always leads to another. For this reason, holding the body in a certain position can provoke the feelings or thoughts associated with it. A body or posture which has become habitual as a reaction to certain mental state may actually perpetuate that state.[[46]](#footnote-46) Thus yoga theory assumes, that the bodily position and physical posture are basically linked to personality and emotions.[[47]](#footnote-47) Practicing asanas in the right way relieves the pressure and pain in the body and through that also relieves the mind of unpleasant feelings.

Cultivating a relaxed and tension free posture allows the student to do mental work and introspection – the main aspects of yoga practice.[[48]](#footnote-48) In addition to that, yoga postures along with its techniques of relaxation also prepare the student for meditation: with simple physical tasks student becomes able to master his attention and concentration - those are necessary, preliminary steps towards meditation.[[49]](#footnote-49) When meditating, one’s attention easily wanders. So it is important that one knows how to gently redirect the attention back to the observation of thoughts and not to struggle against it. Similar process occurs when we stretch our body and do yogic postures (asanas). When we are fully concentrated on the practice, we can become aware how each posture immediately affects sensations of body and the state of mind.[[50]](#footnote-50) Sometimes it happens that this attention wanders. As this happens, we immediately but gently bring it back to our body. Similar process needs to be done if attention wanders when doing meditation..

3.2 PRANAMAYA KOSHA

Pranamaya kosha is the energy field (aspect) of the individual.[[51]](#footnote-51) It is intrinsically connected with breathing patterns, that could be consciously regulated with the aid of yoga techniques. Namely, even when the body becomes calm and supple, free from muscular tension or nervous movements, one could not be completely relaxed and prepared for further practice of mastering the mind. This is because profound relaxation can be reached by the uncontrolled movement of the breath. Therefore, when the body is brought under control, our attention must turn toward the breath.[[52]](#footnote-52) Controlling the patterns of breath is one of the most important aspects of yoga practice. The breath not only influences the body and the mind, but serves as a powerful instrument toward experiencing higher consciousness.[[53]](#footnote-53) The depth and rhythm of breath is one of the most powerful indications of personal psychological state. Slow, deep and regular breathing indicates calmness of mind and the potential state for focussing attention, whilst fast, shallow and irregular breathing indicates emotional and mental disturbances. When person becomes able, through yoga practice, to consciously control the breath, he could master both emotions and the mind.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Yogic techniques not only help the student to be able to consciously control the depth and rhythm of breathing, but also the flow of breath between the two nostrils: right and left. Usually we breathe through one nostril for two to three hours while the tissues of the other one are engorged.[[55]](#footnote-55) The flow of breath through the particular nostril indicates distinct mode of psychological functioning. When breath flows through the right nostril, the right side of the body and the left hemisphere of the brain are predominant. Consequently we became more involved in logical thinking, analysis and verbal and mathematical functions. The mode of thinking becomes linear. And when breath flows through the left nostril, the left side of the body and the right hemisphere predominates. In this case we increase abilities to orient in space, to be artistic and to recognize familiar people and events. The mode of thinking becomes holistic and brain processing simultaneous.[[56]](#footnote-56) When nostrils open and close in rhythmic cycles, the person is psychically balanced. If such cycles are interrupted and the same nostril stays open for more than several hours, there is a predominance of one aspect of the personality. That also indicates that something in the body and in psyche is amiss.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Breathing pattern is inherently connected with energetic channels in the body. When breath flows through the right nostril, the energetic channel (nadi) called pingala, located on the right side of the spinal cord, is activated. And when the breath flows through the left nostril, the energetic channel ida, located on the left side of the spinal cord, is activated.[[58]](#footnote-58) Sushumna, the third principal channel is opened when the breath flows equally through both nostrils.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Both channels influence different psychological processes. Pingala corresponds to the sympathetic nervous system. It is connected with extroversion and activities that require external interaction. On the other hand, pingala corresponds to parasympathetic nervous system. It is connected with introversion and is active while relaxing, reading, thinking or reading.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Psychical balance is not possible unless one is able to balance ida and pingala.[[61]](#footnote-61) This could be done through yogic practice called pranayama.[[62]](#footnote-62) Prana is life energy that sustains all living beings.[[63]](#footnote-63) We receive prana from the environment, food, water, sun and air. Also positive thoughts, good feelings and yogic practices produce higher levels of prana.[[64]](#footnote-64) With the means of pranayama technique one becomes able to control the prana. As the breath is external manifestation of prana, the practice of pranayama controls the prana with controlling the breath. With the help of breath control, one could influence the level of prana and clean the energetic channels in the body. Consequently all functions of the body, brain, mind and consciousness are affected. As prana is grosser than the mind, it is easier to control it.[[65]](#footnote-65) When the yogi learns to control prana, he could move to the next level of controlling the mind that is represented as third sheath or manomaya kosha.

**3.3 Manomaya kosha**

The third sheath, called manomaya, implies mental dimension of existence.[[66]](#footnote-66) This mental dimension can be explored and examined when we focus our attention inward. When we learn to control our first and second sheath, we can further explore our consciousness, as our mind makes itself more distanced for observation. We can study it through a specific kind of introspection, which was developed specifically for observing the mental body and is called meditation. “Through the process of mediation one develops a capacity for observing the functioning of the mind without being swayed or overwhelmed by thoughts. The ordinary mind is not able to study itself accurately since it is too much a part of what is being studied.”[[67]](#footnote-67) For that part methods of mediation have been developed that low the person to objectively observe the mind, without being involved in the flow of thoughts.

According to yogic psychology, mind is able to control instincts (need for food, need for sex, need for sleep and need for self-protection), as it possesses capacity of self-awareness and the anticipation of the future. In its conscious state it implies three main domains:[[68]](#footnote-68)

* the lower mind (manas), the sensory motor mind, that gather sense impressions and coordinates them with motor functions
* ego (ahaṃkāra), sense of I-ness, property of subjectivity, transforms sensory impressions into personal experience by relating them to individual identity
* intelligence (buddhi) - power of discrimination, judgement and decisiveness – evaluates the situation and decides on a course of action

Unconscious domain of the mind implies memory bank (chitta) – the storehouse of past impressions and experiences.[[69]](#footnote-69)

**3.4 Vijnanamaya kosha**

The fourth sheath, called Vijnanamaya kosha, is the “intelectulal or intuitive sheat”.[[70]](#footnote-70) It is the dimension of higher consciousness from which the mind can be observed, as it is not limited to ego-oriented consciousness.[[71]](#footnote-71) It contains the buddhi (the power of discrimination and understanding), intuition and awareness. Yoga psychology and Western psychology both assume that there is wide part of mental filed that lies outside awareness – it is either latent (capable to become conscious) or repressed (incapable of becoming conscious unless treated by some therapy). According to yoga psychology, every psychological content could become conscious with the help of meditation: “Mediation developed as a technique for entering these areas and discovering just what lay there. The result is the systematic and detailed conceptualization of the ‘unknown mind’.”[[72]](#footnote-72) With the means of meditation one could bring entire mind, including personal and collective unconscious into awareness.[[73]](#footnote-73) As the person becomes aware of the unconscious material that potentially regulates his inward and outward behaviour, the material looses its power. The process is called integration and it is possible when person reaches the higher states of consciousness.[[74]](#footnote-74)

* 1. **Anandamaya kosha**

Finally, the fifth sheath is the anandamaya kosha, the ‘blissful sheath’. It is the highest state of consciousness that resides in Self or puruṣa, rather then in the mind. It is knowledge that uses the mind as an instrument of knowing. When integration is complete, the person can experience expansion of consciousness beyond ‘good and bad’, to the point that judgements are no longer necessary. From this point even the buddhi can be impartially observed.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Yoga psychology assumes that psychological difficulties result from our identification with the mind – the instrument of knowing, rather that we identify with the consciousness that is using them. Through the practice of yoga one becomes gradually aware of all lower layers of consciousness (lower koshas) in order to be able to develop distance to impartially observe them.[[76]](#footnote-76) Thus he could integrate unconscious material (unconscious memories of experiences) and consciously control their power to influence the psyche. If not doing so, the repressed material will gain even more independent power and will consequently demand its attention during sleep.

**4. SLEEP AND DREAMS FROM YOGIC PERSPECTIVE**

The yogis frequently find that people who practice meditation regularly report needing less sleep each night. The reason for that is, that practicing meditation helps the person to integrate unconscious material. If this material remains repressed, it becomes, with each repression, even more powerful.[[77]](#footnote-77) The person needs to integrate it and if he doesn’t do it consciously, he makes it during sleep. That is why the person who has bigger quantity of the personality that is cut off from waking consciousness (repressed) needs more sleep. “When a huge portion of oneself is not integrated into awareness, more time must be spent in dealing with it separately, in dreams”.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Sleep is known as one of the human body’s most important physiological needs. Modern sleep researchers argue that sleep involves two distinct states. One, known as *‘REM’«,* is associated with dreaming and is identified by rapid eye movements. The other state, when the eye movement comes to a halt is called *‘deep sleep’.* The brain wave pattern reaches its slowest rhythm and one can not remember that he has been dreaming, if he wakes up during this state. Those two stages interchange during sleep, each cycle typically lasts around 90 minutes. With each cycle more time is spent in dreaming and less in deep sleep.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Because a state of consciousness cannot be observed or measured directly, the psychologists use EGG (electroencephalogram) to measure the electrical activity of the brain. The levels of consciousness usually associated with beta, alpha, theta and delta waves. During the usual *waking consciousness*, when our brain is active, the brain wave pattern corresponds to the *beta waves* (14-30 Hz). *Alpha* waves (8-13 Hz) indicate a more relaxed, tranquil, resting state for the brain. The consciousness correlated with *theta waves* (4-7 Hz) is characterized by a dream state during which one is immersed in a world of images. *Theta* brainwaves occur most often in *dreaming sleep* but are also present in deep meditation. This state seems to involve a level of functioning which gives rise to increased integration within the personality The slowest, *delta waves* (1-3,5 Hz) correspond to a much higher state of consciousness. They are generated in deepest meditation and *dreamless, deep sleep*. There is perhaps a highest level where brain waves would be even slower and barely detectable.[[80]](#footnote-80)

Yogic psychology explains the nature of sleep and sleep-experiences in terms of the nature and operations of consciousness. Sleep allows us to enter inner realms of our being, which we are not aware of in our waking state because the consciousness which dominates our waking state is limited in its awareness.[[81]](#footnote-81) Sleep does not merely connect us with the depths of our unconscious inner world, but can also serve as means to experience higher states of consciousness. With the aid of specific techniques, yogis are able to become conscious during sleep.[[82]](#footnote-82) Thus they can gain control over their unconscious, repressed material.[[83]](#footnote-83)

More advanced yogis sometimes practice a special meditation technique, called *yoga nidra,* also known as *yogic sleep*. The term is derived from two Sanskrit words, *‘yoga’* meaning union or one-pointed awareness, and ‘*nidra*’ which means sleep. It is a method that systematically causes deep physical, emotional and mental relaxation. In this state one appear to be asleep, but the consciousness is working at the deeper levels of awareness. [[84]](#footnote-84) One is not only relaxing, but also restructuring and reforming their whole personality from within: “If the consciousness can be separated from external awareness and form sleep, it becomes very powerful and can be applied in many ways, for example, to develop the memory, increase knowledge and creativity or transform one’s nature.”[[85]](#footnote-85) During *yoga nidra* one experiences most highly evolved states of consciousness, known as *‘turiya’*, beyond waking, dreaming or sleeping. In this state the consciousness becomes independent of the central nervous system and can control even the brain.[[86]](#footnote-86)

**5. THE SEVEN CENTRES OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

The bodies or layers of consciousness, which have been previously described as pancha koshas, do not function independently. There is a connection between them, which allows them coordinated functioning. These connections are called chakras.[[87]](#footnote-87) Yogi could travel through the different states of consciousness with the method of focusing attention to the specific chakra and redirecting the energy through it.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Chakras are subtle vortices of energy in the energy field of the body (called bioenergy field or aura). Those vortices appear when life-cosmic energy enters through the energetic field. [[89]](#footnote-89) Life-cosmic energy is an energy that enables life and normal functioning of living organisms.[[90]](#footnote-90) It is everywhere around us and we are submerged in it like fish in water. It is part of the atmosphere and it depends on the energy of the Sun to a great extent.[[91]](#footnote-91)

This energy is used by different physical parts of the body and by the psyche. There are around seventy chakras in the aura whilst the seven of them control the organs without which the body can not exist.[[92]](#footnote-92) The seven main chakras, followed in hierarchical order, are: mooladhara, swadishtana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna and sahasrara.[[93]](#footnote-93) Their positions correspond, in the physical body, mainly to the points along the spinal cord, specifically to major nerve plexuses and endocrine glands. The highest chakras are connected with the highest state of consciousness, while the lowest chakras are more closely tied to the animal or instinct-based side of human nature.

Each chakra contains different energies needed by the organs connected with it.[[94]](#footnote-94) An undisturbed flow of all the energies needed by every system or organ of the body enables their healthy functioning.[[95]](#footnote-95) The number of lotus leaves appearing in the visual representations of chakras shows the number of the main types of energy received by the organs tied to specific chakra. The lowest chakras have small numbers of lotus leaves, that means that merely few different energies are needed for functioning of the lower parts of the body. Whilst the crown chakra located on the top of the head contains almost thousand lotus leaves that means almost one thousand different energies are needed by the brain to function properly.[[96]](#footnote-96) Furthermore, chakras with the narrowest range of energies manifest the lowest states of consciousness, while the chakras with wider range of energies manifest higher states of consciousness. Developing the capacity to concentrate awareness at the higher centres is one aspect of what happens as one`s growth proceeds and consciousness evolves.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Mooladhara, the root chakra, is located at the perineum in the male body and in the cervix in the female body. It is the seat of primal energy *kundalini shakti*.[[98]](#footnote-98) It is psychologically associated with the most basic instincts of survival (the fight-or-flight response), with self- preservation, fear of being attacked or hurt by others or with tendency to attack or hurt others. It could be manifested as anxiety, paranoia and particular kinds of psychosis.[[99]](#footnote-99) Swadishtana, the genital chakra, is located two fingers width above moolandhara chakra. It is the seat of individual and collective unconscious, the storehouse of all past impressions.[[100]](#footnote-100) Furthermore this centre is associated with sexual impulses, lustful feelings and sensory pleasure.[[101]](#footnote-101) It can manifest as overwhelming desires or craving.[[102]](#footnote-102) Manipura, the solar plexus chakra, is located in the spine behind the navel.[[103]](#footnote-103) On a psychological level this chakra is connected to dominance. It could manifest as tendency to control and exert power over other people. The cause of this inclination is the inferiority complex and the feeling of inadequacy that could be normally traced back to the earliest childhood. On the other hand, manipura could manifest itself also as a tendency to submit.[[104]](#footnote-104) Anahata, the heart chakra, is situated in the spine at the level of the heart. It is associated with emotions, that stream from jealousy to unconditional love.[[105]](#footnote-105) It could awake refined emotions, compassion, tendency to provide nourishment to another and sensitivity to the feelings of others. It represents the merging of higher and lower aspects of human consciousness.[[106]](#footnote-106) Vishuddhi, the throat chakra, is located in the area behind the throat pit in the spine.[[107]](#footnote-107) From the psychological point of view it is connected with receptivity, the ability of being nurtured and with the acceptance. It manifest itself in creativity, that is not merely limited to art, but to re-creation of self through the act of self-transformation.[[108]](#footnote-108) The right understanding and ability to discriminate are also developed by the aim of this chakra.[[109]](#footnote-109) Ajna, the third eye, is located in the midbrain, behind the eyebrow centre, at the top of the spinal cord. It is the point when ida, pingala and sushumna merge together. It is connected with the ability of intuitive knowledge and wisdom, along with intelligence, memory and concentration.[[110]](#footnote-110) The main functions of pineal gland are also connected to this chakra. With the help of ajna chakra one is able of deep introspection, beyond reflective consciousness and causality that is limited by human perception of time and space.[[111]](#footnote-111) Sahasrara, the crown chakra, is the seat of supreme consciousness, located at the top of the head. It is the centre of consciousness beyond the realm of psyche. It is the highest form of human evolution, which results from the evolved merging of cosmic consciousness with cosmic prana.[[112]](#footnote-112) [prana, 34] This state of consciousness could be attained with the aim of yoga.

**6. YOGA AND PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Yoga inherently differs from modern psychotherapy in that the first focuses on the spiritual growth, whereas the second focuses on the alleviation of psychological ailments. In recent years more and more attempts were being made to integrate the concepts and techniques of yoga training with the theory and practice of psychotherapy.[[113]](#footnote-113) “The traditional distinction between ‘sick’ patients coming to a psychiatrist to be made normal, and prepared students seeking a teacher in order to become enlightened is today braking down.”[[114]](#footnote-114) The synthesis of psychotherapy and yoga would mean a mutual process of development and thus of attaining a healthy psyche and personality.

Yoga assumes that every individual has the potential for attaining higher states of consciousness that consequently leads to healthy psyche. This process is facilitated by practicing yoga, with its focuses on discipline, controlling attention, emotions, thoughts and other dimensions of mind and expanding consciousness. One's growth period stops when he starts to cling to the already known and safe aspects of reality that consequently leads to repeating patterns of cognition and behaviour.[[115]](#footnote-115) This results in a state of psychological stagnation and poses risk for the onset of psychopathology.

6.1 Problems of attachment

Attachment is one of the main factors which inhibits the mental health and spiritual growth process. It occurs when the individual clings to memories of past pleasures and tries to repeat them, which leads to repetitive behaviour and reduced creativity.[[116]](#footnote-116) The relation between personality and attachment is most easily seen during infancy. The infant, having yet no stable, permanent sense of I-ness, becomes 'one with' everything in its path. Thus pleasure is experienced in all its intensity, but so is pain. This is the foundation of later mental development and from it spring all later attachments and aversions.[[117]](#footnote-117) Maintaining I-ness means to maintain pleasure that comes from the outside object or from particular idea of it. The child strives to prolong this pleasure that gives him the basis for his sense of I-ness. This is most representative, the earliest example of attachment. Later the child recognizes that he could not maintain the state of constant pleasure and that the word could not always provide him what he wishes. This painful experience forces the child to change his attachments that consequently changes his sense of I-ness. The attachments to the objects, to persons and to mental images of oneself or others will become more refined and their pleasures less dependent on uncontrolled, outside causes. “The child, the adolescent and the adult go through this same process: attempting to maintain the attachments characteristic of a certain level of I-ness; finding that this ultimately fails; and experiencing a sense of loss and disappointment. After the loss and disappointment are experienced, attachments are finally relinquished. I-ness becomes redefined and restructured /.../ Each one reorganizes and expands the identity to some degree as a result of changing the pattern of attachments. I-ness is no more than the sum of one’s attachments. It is defined by the totality of objects, persons and thoughts with which he is entangled.”[[118]](#footnote-118) Thus, if the person wishes to change the causes of his psychological problems, he needs to change first his attachment patterns.

The dilemma of being bound up in attachment is universal and provides a major obstacle to further psychological growth and evolution. “When one’s energy and attention is not directed toward loosening and redefining his attachments, than it comes to be channelled increasingly toward multiplying them. Rather than moving to a new level of consciousness and a new, less compelling set of attachments, he becomes increasingly entangled and enmeshed in those present attachments which define his current self-image. Evolution cease, and fears and anxieties will inevitably result.”[[119]](#footnote-119) Change can be perceived as very frightening thing, and the fear of giving up a position of relative security and current identity may compel one to tolerate the anxiety or stifle it in any number of ways (for example with alcohol or other drugs). Any change tends to be seen as a loss of what has been attained up to this point, which makes the ego react defensively, cling to its stability and oppose any further change.[[120]](#footnote-120) The therapeutic technique known as Gestalt therapy holds similarities with yoga practice in paying attention on forgoing the illusory security of the particular manipulative routine and replacing it with the ability to constantly reorganize one’s life. It gives emphasis on enhanced experiencing of the present moment or simple awareness of the present. “In leaving behind attachments to the intellect and to past and future orientations, there is often a tendency to form new attachments to newly enjoyed sensory and feeling experiences.”[[121]](#footnote-121)

6.2. Practical examples of yoga therapy

Yoga helps the person to eliminate his current, harmful attachments, with the techniques of consciously directing awareness, enhancing the ability of gaining emotional distance and with self-mastery. This therapy has been applied by one of the authors of the book Yoga and Psychotherapy during the in-patient treatment program for those convicted of sex offenses.[[122]](#footnote-122) The majority of them had difficulties due to their own impulsive, unthinking reactions and disability to control themselves. The purpose of the program was the individual's development of self-control in stressful situations. “Comprehensive training in several aspects of self-mastery was taught, following the traditional structure of yoga discipline. The class began with several sessions on how to control the body, which represents the fundamental experiencing of self-control. Yoga postures and breathing exercises were taught to calm the nervous system, relax the body and the mind, and to teach concentration. Later, meditation techniques became the focus and lastly, interpersonal situations occupied the last part of therapy.”[[123]](#footnote-123)

1. This last part dealt with techniques of non-attachments, responsibility and disentanglement from a restrictive and disabling concept of I-ness. Firstly they were thought how to control the stressful and emotionally arousing situations through gaining the ability to make a distance or “the ability to maintain objectivity rather than becoming emotionally engulfed by situations.”[[124]](#footnote-124) Secondly, they were thought to become aware of their responsibility for the present moment. As their present situation was brought about by their past attitudes, desires, thoughts and actions, so also their future could be, for the most part, influenced by them.[[125]](#footnote-125) Thirdly they were thought to overcome their old definitions of I-ness based on role identifications and begin to search their deeper self-definition based on their true Self.[[126]](#footnote-126)

6. 3 Yogic techniques that can be used for psychotherapy

Yogic techniques for mental health should be practiced gradually and carefully as they are not without risk. People with severe mental illness as psychosis should first practice techniques that, besides basic asanas, include breathing techniques, basic awareness of the body and attention control. As they gain control over their breathing and body, they could gradually prosper from more advanced techniques, such as advances pranayama and meditation that result in the ability to gain distance and to control emotions and thoughts. In the first stages of therapy the meditation should be strictly avoided by people with severe mental problems, as it can provoke or worsen psychotic symptoms.[[127]](#footnote-127) Through mediation repressed, unconscious material comes to the surface of consciousness and there it can be observed. As person is able to observe this material with distance (without emotional attachment) the repressed material could loose its power. With the help of meditation he becomes aware of it and could thus consciously reintegrate it. In order to do this, he should firstly have stable sense of I-ness. As psychotics have not developed stable I-ness, their underdeveloped ego cannot digest, assimilate and integrate so much unconscious, repressed material at once.[[128]](#footnote-128)

The risks of worsening mental health problems that could result from practicing yoga are not caused by practices themselves, but from the improper knowledge of what yoga is and the improper guide or teacher who never instruct the student what is the real meaning and purpose of yoga.[[129]](#footnote-129) They could result from incorrect practicing of techniques, as could be wrong modification of asana, or wrong frequency and duration of particular technique.[[130]](#footnote-130)

Thus one should begin with basic techniques and only gradually moves to more advanced ones. Basic yoga techniques that are mentioned below could be done without risk for people with any psychic problems, if practiced correctly and with the guidance of experienced teacher. Those are yogic breathing techniques, asanas and mudras.

6.3.1 Yogic breathing techniques

Breathing is normally performed unconsciously. Yogic breathing techniques help the person to consciously control the breath. That results in the ability to control his autonomic nervous system and consequently his psychological processes[[131]](#footnote-131) The breath is the link between the mind and the body. If we can control our respiration we can control every aspect of our being.[[132]](#footnote-132) The main emphasis of breathing techniques is on nasal breathing, abdomino-diaphragmatic breathing, rhythm of breath, length of breath, balance between the right and the left nostril and ratio between inhalation and exhalation.

Nasal breathing contributes in a great extent to the mental health. It stimulates parasympathetic nervous system, and thus relaxes the mind, reduces anxiety and stress. Similarly the abdomino-diaphragmatic breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system and calms down the mind. In order to avoid fear, stress and anxiety it is important to avoid chest or thoracic breathing. Chest breathing not only reflects physical and mental problems, it also cerates them. It overstimulates the sympathetic nervous system, keeping the hearth rate and blood pressure at highest levels.[[133]](#footnote-133)

The breath rhythm indicates person’s emotional and mental state. Shallow and rapid breathing indicates anxiety, short and forceful breathing signals anger and sighing demonstrates depression.[[134]](#footnote-134) The ability to consciously regulate the rhythm of breath helps the person to control his emotions and mind.[[135]](#footnote-135) Lowering the respiration rate - smooth and slow rhythm results in the tranquilising the dissipated mind, creating the potential for controlling the mind and thoughts patterns.[[136]](#footnote-136)

Breathing technique that produces the beneficial effect on the autonomous nervous system is 2:1 breathing – exhalation is two times longer than inhalation. It slows down the hearth rate and relaxes the mind, reduces fear and anxiety.[[137]](#footnote-137)

The balanced flow of breath through right and left nostril stimulates the balance between left and right hemispheres of the brain.[[138]](#footnote-138) The flow of air through the left nostril relates to the flow of prana in ida nadi, and the flow of air through the right nostril relates to the flow of prana in pingala nadi. Ida is responsible for functioning of the right side of brain and pingala for the left side.[[139]](#footnote-139) Unless one is able to balance the ida and pingala nadis, mental balance is not possible.[[140]](#footnote-140) “The practices of pranayama are of major importance because they purify and balance the flows of ida and pingala nadis to awaken sushumna nadi and kundalini. Thus brain cells are stimulated, the brainwaves are streamlined and the archetypes are reorganized. In this way new languages can be learned, behaviour can be transformed, a culture can be reconstituted and a civilization can be given a new turn altogether.”[[141]](#footnote-141)

Basic pranayama breathing techniques:

- Nadi Shodhana Pranayama (alternate nostril breathing, psychic network purification) – balances the brain hemispheres, calms the nervous system, relieves anxiety and stress, improves concentration and stimulates intuition,[[142]](#footnote-142) enhances balance in autonomous nervous system, reduces predominance of sympathetic nervous system and increases performance speed in repetitive mathematical tasks;[[143]](#footnote-143)

- Brahmari pranayama (humming bee breath) – relieves stress and helps to alleviate anger, anxiety and insomnia,[[144]](#footnote-144) enhances inhibitory response and cognitive control[[145]](#footnote-145) (b, 13), stimulates hypothalamus, the pineal and the pituitary gland, has tranquillising effect due to increased melatonin secretion (that results from stimulation of pineal gland);[[146]](#footnote-146)

- Complete yogic breath – relaxes and calms down the mind;[[147]](#footnote-147)

- Ujjayi pranayama (the psychic breath) – tranquilizes, soothes the nervous system and calms the mind, has profoundly relaxing effect, relieves insomnia;[[148]](#footnote-148)

- Bhastrika pranayama (bellows breath) – balances and strengthens the nervous system, introduces inner peace, tranquillity and one-pointedness of mind,[[149]](#footnote-149) stimulates extra electrical impulses in the central autonomous system, resulting in extra activity of the brain;[[150]](#footnote-150)

- Kapalbhati pranayama (frontal brain cleansing breath) – balances and strengthens the nervous system, cleans the nadis, removes sensory distractions, removes sleepiness, ameliorates the mind for mental work,[[151]](#footnote-151) stimulates extra electrical impulses in the central autonomous system, resulting in extra activity of the brain,[[152]](#footnote-152) creates a feeling of exhilaration, increases alertness;[[153]](#footnote-153)

- Sheetali pranayama (cooling breath) – affects important brain centres associated with biological drives, cools and reduces mental and emotional excitation, enhances tranquillity.[[154]](#footnote-154)

Warming up exercises:

* Pawanmuktasana (1,2,3) – brings profound relaxation, removes energy blockades that impede psychological health, prepares the person for practicing advanced asanas;[[155]](#footnote-155)
* Surya namaskar (salutations to the sun) – brings mental clarity, influences the endocrine glands that helps to balance the transition period between childhood and adolescence.[[156]](#footnote-156)

Basic asanas:

Each asana opens particular chakra and helps for specific psychological problems.[[157]](#footnote-157)

**7. YOGA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN**

Yoga could help children gain psychological health already in early years of development. It could be practiced with pre-school children. It gives them the opportunity not only to develop a supple healthy physical body, but also creative thinking and intellectual growth.[[158]](#footnote-158) It is necessary that it is practiced through play. Asanas should be modified to meet their physical abilities and adapted to the point of stimulating their imagination.[[159]](#footnote-159) The ordinary yoga, that includes sun salutation and breathing techniques (pranayama) without breath retention, should not be introduced to them until the age of eight. The eight year of life represents a crucial milestone in the physiological and psychological development of children. Sun salutation and alternate nostril breathing pranayama could help children use appropriate responses to each new situation and circumstances in life. “This ensures that they will always respond in a healthy, adaptive way to all sets of conditions, rather than responding according to the fixed ‘cellular’ record encoded up to the eight year, when development of the immune memory ceases in an average person. This inability to integrate later life circumstances and situations with the pre-existing cellular memory is one cause of the immune deficiency and hypersensitivity diseases which are so rampant in modern societies.”[[160]](#footnote-160) Besides healthy adaptive faculties, yoga also helps children experience a delay in pubescence. The practice maintains the childlike state for several more years, postponing the adult emotional and sexual impulses, until an individual is more experienced and ready to cope with them. Children in whom puberty occurs later are found more intuitive, intelligent and sensitive adults. Those who practice yoga from year eight are also more successful in developing their natural attributes, capacities and talents to a greater extent.[[161]](#footnote-161) Emotionally disturbed, destructive, aggressive, hyperactive children can also benefit from yogic discipline. Namely, pranayama and asanas work directly on the brain and the endocrinal system, and therefore on the mind and the emotional nature of the child, helping to re-establish emotional harmony and normal attention span.[[162]](#footnote-162) This is especially helpful for teenagers that suffer from emotional imbalance. Meditation techniques should be taught after age twenty-one.[[163]](#footnote-163)

It has been suggested by yogis that yoga should be introduced to the educational system. Namely, Western educational system is paying too much attention in developing the left brain faculties. Yoga could help the children unify the brain, creating balance between left and right hemisphere.[[164]](#footnote-164) Yoga practice can also alleviate the problem of attention deficit during lecture. After practice, they could be much more relaxed, and consequently more attentive, as relaxation stimulates alertness.[[165]](#footnote-165) Regular practice also helps harmonize the whole personality of a child and creates the right balance between introversion and extroversion. With its aim to keep the pineal gland healthy, sexual glands under control and enhanced balance between the physical, emotional and mental factors, it can reduce causes for children delinquency.[[166]](#footnote-166)

Mentally disabled children can also benefit from yoga postures and pranayama.[[167]](#footnote-167) It helps them realize their potential and to lead creative, productive lives, so that they can maximally benefit from themselves. Medicine should be combined with the science of yoga to optimize the benefits that can be obtained by the disabled.[[168]](#footnote-168)

Recent scientific research assessed the impact of Kindergarten-based yoga on cognitive performance, visual-motor coordination and behaviour of inattention and hyperactivity in 5-year-old children. They were testing children at the beginning and after 12 weeks. The research shows that Kindergarten-based yoga improves selected visual attention and visual-motor precision parameters and decreases behaviour of inattention and hyperactivity of 5-year-old children. From that point of view, we can easily say that yoga represents a sufficient and cost-benefit effective exercise, which could improve behavioural factors relevant for learning and academic achievement among young children.[[169]](#footnote-169)

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