Five Koshas, the Bodies of Man
Category : January/February/March 2004
Published by Anonymous on Jan. 01, 2004

FROM THE VEDAS

Five Koshas, the Bodies of Man

Being human is to be physical and so much more

Translation S. Radhakrishnan

The human being is a soul body encased in four other bodies called "koshas " or "sheaths." These are a physical body, a body of vital energy, an instinctive-intellectual body and a mental or cognitive body. The inmost soul body is the fifth, the blissful, ever-giving-wisdom anandamaya kosha. This soul is neither male nor female. It is that which never dies, even when its four outer sheaths perish as they naturally do. We are the immortal soul, atman. The sum of our true existence is the anandamaya kosha and its essence, our Self, which is the Divine Mind and Transcendent Absolute Being of God. The five bodies are a reality to be experienced as we progress in our spiritual evolution. They are clearly described in the Vedas in the following verses.

The five sheaths are made of vital air, mind, understanding and bliss. What is brought into being only by the essence of food, what grows only by food, that which finds rest in earth full of the essence of food, that is the sheath made of food, annamaya kosha. That alone is the gross body. The five vital airs, along with the organ of action, constitute the sheath made of the vital principle, pranamaya kosha. Mind, along with the organs of perception, is the sheath made of mind, manomaya kosha. The understanding, along with the organs of perception, is the sheath made of intelligence, vijnanamaya kosha. These three sheaths (of life, mind and intelligence) form the subtle body. The knowledge of one's own form is of the sheath made of bliss, anandamaya kosha. That is also the causal body. Paingala Upanishad, II.7

From this Self, verily, ether arose; from ether air; from air fire; from fire water; from water the earth; from the earth herbs; from herbs food; from food the person. This, verily, is the person that consists of the essence of food. This, indeed, is his head; this the right side, this the left side; this the body; this the lower part, the foundation.

From food (anna), verily, are produced whatsoever creatures dwell on the earth. Moreover, by food alone they live. And then also into it they pass at the end. Food, verily, is the eldest born of beings. Therefore is it called the healing herb of all. Verily, those who worship Brahman as food obtain all food for food, verily, is the eldest born of beings. Therefore is it called the healing herb for all. From food are beings born. When born, they grow up by food. It is eaten and eats things. Therefore is it called food. Verily, different from and within that which consists of the essence of food is the self that consists of life (prana). By that this is filled. This, verily, has the form of a person. According to That One's personal form is this one with the form of a person; the inbreath is its head; the diffused breath the right side; the outbreath the left side; ether the body, the earth the lower part, the foundation.

The Gods breathe along with life breath, as also men and beasts; the breath is the life of beings. Therefore, it is called the life of all. They who worship Brahman as life attain to a full life, for the breath is the life of beings. Therefore is it called the life of all. This (life) is indeed the embodied soul of the former (physical sheath). Verily, different from and within that which consists of life is the self consisting of mind (manas). This, verily, has the form of a person; according to That One's personal form is this one with the form of a person. The Yajur Veda is its head; the Rig Veda the right side; the Sama Veda the left side; teaching the body; the hymns of the Atharvans and the Angirasas, the lower part, the foundation.

Whence words return along with the mind, not attaining it, he who knows that bliss of Brahman fears not at any time. This is, indeed, the embodied soul of the former (life). Verily, different from and within that which consists of mind is the self consisting of understanding (vijnana). By that this is filled. This, verily, has the form of a person. According to That One's personal form is this one with the form of a person. Faith is its head; righteousness the right side; truth the left side; contemplation the body; the great one the lower part, the foundation.

Understanding directs the sacrifice and it directs the deeds also. All the gods

worship as the eldest the Brahman which is understanding. If one knows Brahman as understanding and one does not swerve from it, he leaves his sins in the body and attains all desires. This (life) is, indeed, the embodied soul of the former (the mental). Verily, different from and within that which consists of. understanding is the self consisting of bliss. By that this is filled. This, verily, has the form of a person. According to That One's personal form is this one with the form of a person. Pleasure is its head; delight the right side; great delight the left side; bliss the body, Brahman the lower part, the foundation. Taittiriya Upanishad II. 1-5

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), born in traditional Tamil Nadu, world renowned philosopher, statesman and President of India, was one of the 20th century's most learned and prolific commentators on Hindu philosophy.

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, sruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 bce.