

Therapeutic Yoga Classes for Women in Prisons

Euthymus Athanasiadis

1. PROJECT GOAL: RECLAIMING UNITY - FINDING STILLNESS

Introductory Remarks:

We acknowledge the will and potential for unity that was present in the initial act of separation which led to imprisonment: initial pain and trauma >>> self medication through drugs, theft and other punishable acts >> temporary relief >>> more emotional and psychological pain / imprisonment;

This cycle forms the wheel of life between ragas and dveshas, a vicious circle indeed. Our aim is to assist them having an intuitive understanding (exercise discrimination / viveka) of their ability to move close to the center of the wheel and become a witnessing consciousness (exercise detachment / vairagya); only then they may be able to experience presence in stillness.

We also acknowledge that all "negative" emotions related to "delinquency" may be transcended; no emotional energy should be wasted (application of the tantric notion about our ability of releasing consciousness from the material "substance" of emotions; matter = energy = consciousness)

Thus, we fully accept our target group (the imprisoned women) while fully acknowledging their qualities. We take them from where they are. We do not try to change or teach them; rather we attempt to facilitate their journey back to their true nature.

In this respect our ambition is to help them see their dharma which we define as the ability to see our inner qualities (strengths, inclinations, talents, ambitions) and express them fully as a form of service to other people. However we understand that to achieve this we have to satisfy our need for security (artha) and our need for love, affection and pleasure (kama). Only then can we attain dharma and moksha (liberation of the soul / spiritual realization). To facilitate our quest for artha and kama we have to work on the 1st and 2nd chakra respectively. Artha, kama, dharma and moksha form the "four wheels" of the "chariot" of our life or the "four engines" of our "spacecraft"; all should function well in order to succeed in our journey

2. PROJECT STRUCTURE

We have designed an 8-week program with one introductory class and 7 more classes dedicated to each of the seven chakras.

Introductory class: Inviting Yoga into our lives

Mooladhara / Anomaya: Feeling safe

Swandisthana / Pranomaya: Learning to flow

Manipura / Manomaya: Being in the World Claiming Boundaries

Anahata / Vijnanamaya: Opening the heart

Vishudha / Ananadamaya: Reclaiming Unity

Ajna : Living consciously

Saharsara: Finding Stillness

As evidenced above we have associated each of the first 5 chakras to the koshas; in addition we attach

to each chakra a different tattwa (element) and a different quality of the mind in the realm of prakriti, e.g. the manipura chakra is related to manomaykosha, the fire element and the qualities of the analytical-emotional mind. These correspondences are based on the vedic and tantric literature. In addition, for each chakra we have defined specific conditions and objectives of the suggested yoga classes.

Today, we will present a class on the Anahata Chakra with the title "OPENING THE HEART". The 4th chakra is related to the Wisdom body / Vijnanamayakosha, the element of air, the sense of touch and the key theme of love and self-acceptance.

3.0 CLASSES ON THE SEVEN CHAKRAS

Chakra: MOOLADHARA

Title of Class: FEELING SAFE

Key issue: Lack of security; no understanding of the nature of abinavesha (insecurity)

Kosha: Annamaya

Element: Earth

Quality of mind addressed: Instinctive

Conditions: poor overall health; stress, depression, weak immunity system, toxicity in body organs esp. liver, respiratory system problems, cardiovascular issues, diabetes, weak kidneys and adrenals

Objectives: Build a resilient physical body; on an emotional level help them to reclaim their bodies

Yoga Tools: Asanas releasing toxins such as pawanmuktashnas, depending on cases FBs and BBs, simple balancing poses, moola bandha, physical relaxation

Chakra: SWADISTHANA

Title of Class: LEARNING TO FLOW

Key Issue: self-gratification, love, affection

Kosha: Pranomaya

Element: Water

Quality of mind addressed: Gross Emotional Mind

Conditions: imbalance of the flow of pranas in the nadis, pingala or ida

nadi can be overactive, imbalance bet. sympathetic and parasympathetic system; poor distribution of prana into the system, weak panic reserves in the body; excess or deficiency in the 2nd chakra, poor function of apanavayu; emotional armoring

Objectives: Expanding prana, facilitating its flow, giving fluidity, strength and elasticity to the pranomayakosha; facilitating the expression of the need to be loved and cared; helping them to know that they deserve to be loved.

Yoga Tools: nadishodana pranayama, chandra pranayama as appropriate, anuloma viloma pranayama

Chakra: MANIPURA

Title of Class: BEING IN THE WORLD

Key Issue: claiming boundaries bet. The Self and Society

Kosha: Manomaya

Element: Fire

Quality of mind addressed: Manas, analytical/emotional mind

Conditions: Mental and emotional impact of the imbalance of flow between the ida and pingala nadi

(introversion vs. extroversion and aggressiveness, tamas vs. rajas, flight vs. fight, psychosis vs. neurosis)

Objectives: helping them to go beyond the either-or pattern that defines their relationship to authority and societal norms; facilitating their individuation and socialization process; helping them to accept responsibility, claim their boundaries and accept those of others

Yoga Tools: Nadishodhana, relaxation, mindfulness meditation

Chakra: ANAHATA

Title of Class: OPENING THE HEART

Key Issue: Self acceptance and love

Kosha: Vijnanamaya

Element: Air

Quality of mind addressed: Intuitive mind / Buddhi

Conditions: Avidya / ignorance of their ability to love themselves and others; ignorance of their samskaras (mental impressions) and mental programming; ignorance of the law of karma and the ability to change it by proper action in awareness; fatalism

Objectives: Facilitating their journey towards understanding their potential

to love and be loved; empowering their intuition to see life as relationship in action based on love and service; help them to attain viveka and vairagya and thus see their true nature.

Yoga Tools: meditation, meditative yoga nidra, mudras

Chakra: VISHUDHA

Title of Class: RECLAIMING UNITY

Key Issue: Developing awareness; true communication

Kosha: Anandamaya

Element: Ether

Quality of mind addressed: Chitta

Conditions: Ignorance of their true, blissful nature; ignorance of the initial claim for wholeness and unity in their misguided acts that led them to prison.

Objectives: facilitating the awakening of chitta, a the higher aspect of prakriti

Yoga Tools: meditation, mudras

Chakra: AJNA

Title of Class: Living Consciously

Key Issue: Expanding consciousness

Kosha: -

Element: -

Quality of mind addressed: Purusha, Universal consciousness

Conditions: -

Objectives: Expanding consciousness; help them to establish a relationship with God or their inner Guru through the awakening of the Third Eye

Yoga Tools: Mantra OM, Gayatri mantra

Chakra: SAHARSARA

Title of Class: CULTIVATING STILLNESS & PRESENCE

Kosha: -

Element: -

Quality of mind addressed: the Absolute universal consciousness, transcending all dualism, beyond Purusha / God and Prakriti / its manifested aspect

Conditions: -

Objectives: Facilitating their journey to stillness

Yoga Tools: