

## Vinyasa Krama: A Therapeutic Context

It is possible to train as a yoga therapist but meanwhile please note that your teaching already has many therapeutic aspects which will benefit students whether in a class or a 121 situation. This will be especially true when we take a vinyasa krama approach.

Vinyasa krama means 'step-by-step' or 'special placement' denoting how we will create a practice that suits an individual recognising that one size does not fit all, and will ensure that there is a sense of gradual development over time.

Our tools of vinyasa krama include:

- General knowledge of cautions so that we know what is helpful or unhelpful for specific conditions
- The use of modifications, physical aids, and staging to make practice accessible
- Possible alternatives
- Specific targeted long term and short preparation for practices so we build up over time
- A balanced practice where we move intelligently through the bases, creating a curve of intensity in a practice, to include warming, cooling off and counterposing
- Use of variations to create interest and generate adaptability in our students' skills

So how is our teaching potentially therapeutic? Simply stated:

**A balanced practice balances the vayus**, the 'winds' or directional energetic vibrations (prana, apana, udana, samana and vyana vayus) which govern the way the systems of the body function. These are responsible for the physiological cycles and co-ordination of all of the systems of the body, including the functioning of the mind. Illness occurs if the vayus are agitated, moving too fast, too slow or in the wrong direction. So, if we can help the vayus to function efficiently (i.e. balance vata dosha) it will always help to return to health. Unbalanced Vata dosha is considered to be the main endogenous (inwardly created) cause of disease so this is always beneficial.

**In allopathic (western medical) terms a balanced practice balances the nervous system**, whereby we can counteract the destabilising effect of an overly active sympathetic nervous system by initiating the rest and digest response of the parasympathetic nervous system. This has far reaching benefits for the body/mind.

To accomplish this in practice we can help students to:

- Harmonise breathing in basic breathing & asana which is directly related to the vayus & nervous system and the way the body/mind functions
- Direct attention to the moment to moment experience of body and breath during practice so that awareness of direct experience is emphasised rather than mental projections and the practice becomes more than two-dimensional where we are just giving gross placements
- Embody words used such as lengthening, easing, opening, unfurling, inviting etc. so there is time for transition during practice, remember thoughts are reflected in the body
- Use the focus upon the breath and body to calm the mind
- Find the edges of practice, experiencing the tone of the body and breath to learn how we can release constriction through creating ease, gradually increasing capacity through easing off at the first point of resistance
- Practice with a gentle body pace rather than the quick mental pace usually experienced

- Have moments of quiet inner reflection, especially after more intense practice, so they can become more acquainted with quiet mind and allow time for listening inwardly
- Highlight space as overwhelm occurs when there is no feeling of spaciousness
- Experience how thoughts are like inner sensations which can move through awareness and be simply witnessed
- Have times of whole-body awareness so that the body does not feel fragmented, and there is a feeling of being fully embodied
- Surrender completely in relaxation so resetting the body/mind to neutral

In this way students' relationship to their body and mind can slowly transform and personal insights can arise.

All of these skills will slowly filter through into daily life where students become increasingly aware of their inner experience being able to better determine when they are becoming constricted and dissociated from the body, and when the mind is beginning to spin or is moving into negative thinking. And as energy starts to flow and a connection with inner calmness begins to be established a quiet joy can start to bubble up which is the most healing experience of all.

Whilst we can focus on specific ailments, and can create a practice that addresses physical ailments by for instance strengthening the muscles around the knees for knee ailments, Yoga generally focuses on the whole so that any parts of the body/mind that have become separated can rejoin the whole.

It also recognises that thought and emotions play an enormous role in our overall wellbeing and as these are calmed so our body is regenerated.

We can start off with simple flowing asana, and a few short stays, and moments of stillness and reflection. Gradually increasing the time spent in static asana and also the complexity and challenge. We can give short basic breathing exercises and short relaxations, gradually introducing simple, helpful pranayama and short periods of meditation. Keeping all practice accessible, making it simple and increasingly familiar so students can begin to practice independently.

Do not underestimate the beneficial effects of yoga and the use of vinyasa krama. This can be very healing and a tremendous resource for students to have.

Remember however as a yoga teacher you can never diagnose and if in doubt as to whether they should practice yoga you must ask a student to seek medical advice first. If there are deep psychological problems then students may be better served finding professional help.

You will learn a great deal from your students and will grow from every experience, so do elicit feedback from students during and after classes, meanwhile remember that simple is best and it is only the mind that thinks it likes complexity!