

Module 7 Clarifying Opportunity

Methodology:

Setting Intentions

- **Sankalpa** means intention in Sanskrit, combining the ideas of a goal and a process of healing.
- In yoga, setting an intention offers a mental, emotional, or spiritual focus to return to throughout the practice.
- Many people disconnect their mind, body, and emotions... intention helps unify these parts.
- Intentions are affirmations spoken in the present tense, e.g., *“I am healing,” “I am grounded,” “I stand for justice.”*
- They serve as internal anchors, helping practitioners redirect their attention inward when distracted.
- As a facilitator, you can offer examples of intentions to help participants find their own meaningful words.
- A personal or collective intention can shift the energy of a class and even spark social change.
- Setting intentions may feel difficult at first... especially when disconnected from self—so providing suggestions can be helpful.
- Your own intention as a guide may evolve over time, deepening as you grow through your own healing journey.
- Shared intentions like reducing harm or seeking truth can foster a compassionate, connected space.

Finding The Unexpected Support System

- **Healing through yoga leads to gentle, internal shifts**, especially in how individuals relate to themselves and others.
- **Trauma-informed yoga strengthens self-awareness and self-soothing**, creating space for new patterns and support systems to emerge.
- **Correctional environments often discourage vulnerability**, and many individuals inside do not feel safe relying on others... or even themselves.
- **Yoga supports nervous system regulation**, helping to slowly release survival-based conditioning from past trauma.
- As individuals **rebuild trust with themselves**, their self-confidence, awareness, and emotional resilience grow.
- A strong internal relationship helps individuals **recognize external harm** and begin the process of healing relational dynamics.
- Healing fosters **greater empathy and compassion...** for self and others: *“Hurt people, hurt people. Healing people, see people.”*
- **Facilitators may witness participants inviting others to join the practice**, even those with whom they’ve had tension or conflict.
- **Consistent, welcoming facilitation helps cultivate community**, showing others that safe connection and transformation are possible.

Embodied Anatomy:

The Nervous System – Neuroscience of Trauma

- **The nervous system is autonomic**, meaning it operates without conscious control, but it can be influenced by awareness and mindfulness.
- It has two key components:
 - **Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS):** Activates the fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response in the presence of threat or stimulation.
 - **Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS):** Restores calm after the threat passes—slowing heart rate, resuming digestion, and regulating breath.
- **These systems are designed to work together**, creating balance between alertness and calm.
- **Trauma disrupts this balance**, often leaving the SNS stuck in “on” mode—even in the absence of actual danger.
- Triggers from trauma (e.g., sounds, smells, memories) can cause the body to react as if it’s under threat.
- **Yoga and mindfulness practices** can help re-regulate the nervous system by building awareness of bodily responses.
- Through **breathwork and embodiment**, individuals can learn to notice activations and communicate safety to the body.
- Over time, this awareness helps **retrain the nervous system** to respond more appropriately, reducing overactivation and supporting healing.

The benefits yoga offers:

Breath

- **Exhale stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system**, promoting calm and restoration.
- **Slow, intentional exhales** (especially in inverted positions) help the body shift out of fight-or-flight.
- Postures like **forward fold, rag doll, humble warrior, down dog, and puppy pose** support this calming response.
- Even **off the mat**, poses like a **seated forward fold** can aid in nervous system regulation.

Movement

- Trauma-informed sequencing helps **train the nervous system** to regulate rather than stay in chronic stress.
- Beginning with **energy release** supports embodiment and awareness of **discharge and stimulation cycles**.
- The sequence moves like a **wave**, alternating **stimulation and restoration**, helping participants **observe natural shifts** in heart rate and breath.

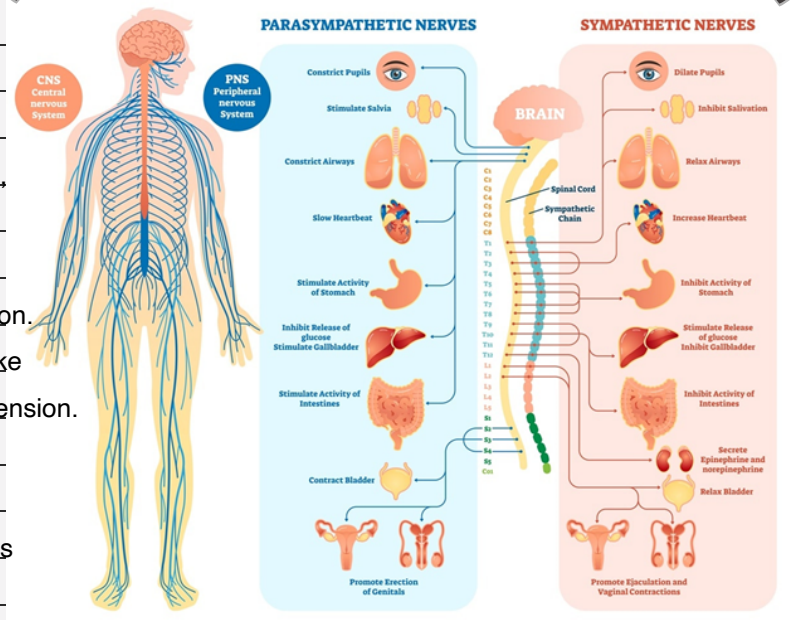
Embodied Connection

- Facilitators cue breath and movement to **guide awareness of bodily reactions**.
- Over time, students learn to **recognize physical signs of stress or calm** and use this information to respond mindfully.
- This embodied awareness allows participants to **differentiate between a new threat and a trauma trigger**, and respond in a way that supports safety and presence.

HUMAN NERVOUS SYSTEM

Internal Connections – How Trauma Impacts the Body:

- Trauma-informed yoga recognizes that trauma leaves lasting emotional and physical imprints on the body.
- Traumatic experiences can result in embodied symptoms—both visible and invisible—such as tension, fatigue, pain, or numbness.
- These residual effects can impact posture, breath patterns, sleep, digestion, and nervous system regulation.
- Emotional situations often trigger physical responses like tightness in the chest, stomach discomfort, or muscle tension.
- Many individuals hold emotions in specific areas of the body (e.g., jaw, shoulders, hips).
- Physical symptoms like exhaustion, illness, or foggy can follow emotionally intense or stressful events.
- Disassociation or a feeling of detachment from the body is common after trauma or high stress.
- Triggers such as sounds, smells, or images can cause the body to “relive” a past traumatic event through involuntary reactions.
- Regular yoga practice offers healing by helping individuals reconnect with their bodies and regulate the nervous system through mindful movement and breathwork.



Key insights from *Freedom From the Inside: A Woman's Yoga Practice Guide* by Josefin Wikstrom and James Fox:

- Prisons intensify trauma and disconnection from body and emotions, increasing anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness.
- Incarcerated conditions can re-trigger previous trauma and amplify emotional and physical distress.
- Yoga reconnects individuals with their body, mind, heart, and emotions—countering the numbness often caused by trauma and incarceration.
- Mindful movement and embodied awareness in yoga support both behavioral change and overall well-being.
- Clinical experts recognize yoga as a powerful tool for managing trauma symptoms and reducing stress-related illness.
- Healing from trauma requires building a deep connection to one's body and heart.
- Yoga builds self-awareness and self-regulation, fostering non-reactivity and self-acceptance.
- A consistent practice supports mental clarity, emotional stability, and physical ease—creating space for personal transformation and learning.

The Chakra System – A Comparative Look:

- **Chakras as Energetic Centers:** Before the nervous system was understood scientifically, chakras were studied as energy centers that reflect physical and emotional well-being.
- **Blocked vs. Clear Chakras:** When chakras are blocked due to unresolved emotions or experiences, energy flow is disrupted—affecting both physical health and emotional balance. Clear chakras allow optimal energy flow and communication within the body.
- **Comparison to the Nervous System:** Chakras provide a philosophical lens that aligns with scientific understanding of the nervous system—both reflect how internal and external experiences impact the body's function and healing.

The 7 Chakras & Their Associations:

Root Chakra (Muladhara)

- Location: Base of the spine
- Physical: Stability, elimination, grounding
- Emotional: Safety, security, survival

Sacral Chakra (Svadhishthana)

- Location: Between pubic bone and navel
- Physical: Reproductive health
- Emotional: Creativity, desire, self-control

Solar Plexus Chakra (Manipura)

- Location: Upper abdomen
- Physical: Digestion
- Emotional: Confidence, self-worth, power

Heart Chakra (Anahata)

- Location: Center of the chest
- Physical: Circulatory and respiratory health
- Emotional: Love, compassion, empathy

Throat Chakra (Vishuddha)

- Location: Throat
- Physical: Ears, nose, throat health
- Emotional: Communication, truth, expression

Third Eye Chakra (Ajna)

- Location: Forehead, between eyebrows
- Physical: Brain, pituitary gland
- Emotional: Intuition, clarity, insight

Crown Chakra (Sahasrara)

- Location: Top of the head (or just above)
- Physical: Brain and nervous system
- Emotional: Higher consciousness, life purpose, spiritual connection

Integrated Awareness: The chakra system offers a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern science, especially in understanding how trauma and emotion affect the body.

Posture & Sequencing:

Concentration & Focus:

- **Invitation to Let Go of Expectations:** Facilitators are encouraged to release assumptions about what balance, coordination, or flexibility *should* look like—for themselves and others.
- **Inspired by Aparigraha (Non-Attachment):** Practicing non-attachment helps facilitators lead with authenticity and compassion, rather than comparison or pressure.
- **Exploration Through Movement:** Participants engage in mindful movement—balance, coordination, and stretching—

with curiosity and self-compassion.

- **Support Personal Empowerment:** The goal is to help participants connect to their bodies, challenge themselves appropriately, and discover areas of growth without self-judgment.
- **Establish Healthy Boundaries:** This phase helps cultivate patience, awareness, and the ability to set personal limits in movement and life.
- **Builds on Previous Sections:** Concentration & Focus continues the journey of embodied awareness, following Energy Awareness, Range of Motion, and Centering.

Key Focuses in Concentration & Focus:

- **Balance & Coordination:** Explore physical and mental balance, encouraging agency and adaptability; offer accessible props and variations.
- **Effort & Recovery:** Invite participants to observe their reactions to challenge and recovery with self-compassion.
- **Mindful Stretching:** Transition from active movement to intentional stretches (e.g., forward folds, dragon lunge); promote body awareness and personal choice.
- **Seated Exploration:** Use seated or supported postures for deeper connection (e.g., bridge, camel), while honoring individual comfort levels.
- **Facilitator Role:** Use invitational language and emphasize personal agency; support exploration without forcing effort or performance.
- **Bridge to Restorative Work:** Gently shifts from active engagement to restorative practices by building focus, resilience, and inner awareness.

Building Awareness and Empowerment:

- **Self-Awareness for Facilitators:** Reflect on your own inner narrative—expectations, impatience, limiting beliefs—and how they may show up in your teaching.
- **Use of Aparigraha:** Let go of attachment to outcomes to create space for growth and freedom in your practice and facilitation.
- **Empowering Participants:** Balance and coordination postures invite exploration of boundaries, self-advocacy, and replacing limiting self-talk with affirmations.
- **Language Matters:** Use invitational cues to promote agency, safety, and self-respect in every movement.
- **Foster Curiosity & Patience:** Cultivate confidence, resilience, and sustainable growth by encouraging a mindset of self-compassion and inquiry.
- **Guided by Yamas:** Let Aparigraha (non-attachment) and Brahmacharya (moderation) shape how both you and participants approach practice—with care and intention.