

HOW TO TEACH – INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING YIN YOGA

Definition of a ‘Teacher’

A teacher is someone who helps the students to meet their goals. Anyone who has a desire to help others in reaching their goals can be a teacher.

Qualities of a Good Teacher

As a yoga teacher, you will need to develop a few qualities. Some of these qualities you might have already possess whereas some you might have to develop. The good news is that all of these qualities can be developed in time.

Some of the important qualities of a teacher (not in order of importance):

- Trustworthy
- Patient
- Role model
- Good communicator
- Professional
- Responsible
- Punctual
- Humorous
- Attentive
- Clear

As a yoga teacher, your responsibilities include providing guidance and a safe atmosphere for a meaningful practice.

Understanding Your Students

Every student is different and unique in terms of physical capabilities, motivation, and discipline. As a teacher, you should understand these basic differences in your students. This will help you to guide them better.

Adjustment and Support

As a teacher, you need to help your students to find the most suitable alignment with the use of hands-on adjustment or by providing support with props.

Functional Yin Yoga Sutras of Paul Grilley

1. The purpose of yoga asanas is to harmonize the flow of the chi in our bodies. This is accomplished by stressing the 14 skeletal segments and the 10 myofascial groups.

The 14 skeletal segments are: toes, talus, tibia, femur, pelvis, lumbar, thoracic, cervical, fingers, wrist, radius, ulna, humerus, and clavicle.

The 10 myofascial groups are: groin, quads, hip flexors, glutes, hamstrings, thoracolumbar, cervical, rectus abdominis, obliques, and scapular.

2. When you learn to see the body as 14 skeletal segments being moved by 10 myofascial groups, you will be able to skilfully adapt the seven archetypal asanas to suit every student.
3. The seven archetypes are: Shoelace, Saddle, Caterpillar, Dragonfly, Twist, Dog (Yang), and Dragon (Yang).
4. In a functional approach to Yin Yoga there is no perfect pose. Every hand and foot position either helps or inhibits our ability to stress the target areas. The most effective way to do this varies from person to person.
5. Every bone in everybody is different. What is easy for one skeleton may be impossible for another. The three stresses are tension, contraction, and compression. Flexibility refers to the extensibility (capacity to stretch) of the myofascial groups, ligaments, joint capsules, and discs. Compression is the ultimate range of motion.

Alignment Versus Target Areas

According to Paul Grilley, there is no fixed alignment possible for a pose because each body is unique and different in terms of bone structure and range of motion. The main cause of injuries in yoga classes is the misinformed obsession with alignments.

Paul suggests focussing on target areas rather than alignments.

The 80% Rule

Students must be reminded of this rule on a regular basis. This rule says that in order to stretch the deeper yin tissues, the student should not go beyond 80% of their capacity in the pose. If they go deeper the pressure will go to the yang muscles and may lead to injuries. Therefore, the use of props is highly encouraged in yin classes.

Rebound

Asanas create tension, contraction, and compression. These stresses change the gel/sol balance in the fascia. When the asanas are released, there are strong rebalancing movements of chi and fluid. These rebalancing movements are called 'Rebound'. The rebound can be experienced at several levels:

- Physical sensations like warmth, pressure, or fluid movement.
- Emotions like sadness, relief, grief, or contentment.
- Deep experiences like insight, calmness, or acceptance.

The rebound period can be from 30 seconds to 10 minutes. The easiest positions to feel rebound:

- Corpse Pose
- Crocodile Pose
- Child's Pose

Breathing in Yin Yoga

During Yin Yoga poses we maintain easy and relaxed breathing.

How to Teach Functionally?

1. Identify target areas.
2. Offer variations of the archetype.
3. Mention areas where pain should not be experienced.
4. Demonstrate how to use the limbs or upper torso as levers to increase or decrease the stress in the target areas.
5. Demonstrate the use of props to increase or decrease stress.
6. Ask students how any adjustment has affected them.

Teaching Safely

1. There is no risk-free exercise.
2. Even experienced practitioners sometimes injure themselves doing familiar movements.
3. Be conservative and always relieve a student's concern by offering props or variation that reduces unnecessary stress.
4. If a student cannot relax the muscles, then the asana needs to be changed or modified.
5. It is not necessary to go to a 100% range of motion. Even a gentle stress can produce a strong rebound.

Guiding the Levels of Functional Awareness

1. Physical body: Talk about target areas, tissues and the rebound.
2. Astral body: Talk about emotions, thoughts, read poetry, play music
3. Causal body: Talk about philosophy, spirituality, mindfulness

Use of Props

The use of props is very beneficial in Yin Yoga classes. If used properly, props can help us to:

- Increase the stress of the pose
- Decrease the stress of the pose
- Become more comfortable in a pose
- Relax in a pose
- Increase the length and space
- Make a certain pose more accessible/ doable

Different Props

- Cushions
- Blocks
- Bolsters
- Belts / Straps
- Blankets



Caution

- Do not overuse props.
- The purpose of the prop is not to take all the stress away from the target area.
- Placement of the prop is crucial for providing proper support.