



Azahar Foundation Teaching Methodology at Aheza Healing & Career Center

Background on both organization:

Azahar Foundation Organization is an international not-for-profit organization 501(c) 3, registered in the US, Switzerland and in Cambodia. Its mission is to promote PEACE BUILDING and CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION through YOGA, MEDITATION & ARTS and supporting methodologies in post conflict and developing countries. Currently it is working in Cambodia and Rwanda. Starting late of 2019 we are working with GEARG through its **Aheza Healing & Career Center** as one of our partners in Rwanda.

Aheza Healing & Career Center opened in 2019 and is managed by GAERG, an organization founded by graduate student survivors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The building was originally donated by Rwanda's Energy Utility Corporation in 2016, to be used as a care home for elderly widowed survivors. In 2018, First Lady Janette Kagame helped to move those widows into sheltered accommodation in partnership with AVEGA-Agahozo. The Energy Utility Corporation continue to sponsor the building whilst GAERG develop and facilitate the health and career services. The vision of the organization is of a world where Rwanda's genocide survivors receive the mental health care they need, and go on to live productive, and fulfilling lives free from trauma.

Who are our beneficiaries: So far the clients Azahar facilitators are serving at Aheza are adults and elderly genocide survivors who have been affected by genocide through the loss of loved ones, loss of properties, and also they are physiologically and psychologically wounded. Besides living with trauma, some also have hard time to meet with the daily necessities of daily life (thus includes basic needs, and financial means). Some of our clients has different health conditions, like chronic back pain, digestion problems, persistent headache, diabetes, heart diseases, and cancer in addition some of our clients have post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

Methodology: Our teaching methodology are combination of tools from different mindfulness practices that we have trained to teach thus include Yoga, Trauma Informed Yoga, Qi gong, Breath Body Mind, and Meditation. The core of our service is that we are neither doctors nor therapist, we are simply there to share those tools we acquired from trainings and through own experience and from professional studies that have proven to help people heal and prosper in their communities when they are well applied.

Yoga: term yoga is defined as union of body mind and spirit. Yet this not the only definition it has, as it can be defined as path to liberation of individual's soul. In our concept we use yoga exercises as tools to heal ourselves physically, mentally and psychosocially and as result it help us live peacefully in harmony with ourselves, our community and surroundings.

Trauma Informed Yoga: is a methodology for yoga created specifically to work with trauma. Trauma affects both mind and body. A therapy that does not include both mind and body is therefore incomplete. Body based practices aim to look at therapy as a bottom up (body to mind) therapeutic process, while psychological interventions are aimed to target trauma as a top down (mind to body) intervention. An ideal therapy combines both of these and trauma informed yoga is proposed as an evidenced based type of bottom up therapy. **Practically:** In trauma informed yoga we learn how trauma affects body systems and we learn how we can share the exercise of yoga with the people affected by trauma and the best way to approach them with the right tools that makes them heal. Here are the point we focus on.

1. People with trauma are not safe : We create safe environment for them to be
2. We develop empathy through authentic listening with our full presence
3. We don't lead, we partner, we invite, and we create space for choice and options and we use invitational and directional language instead of commanding language.
4. We create space of trust
5. Trauma may affect one's self-esteem, phrases of self-compassion and motivational are used
6. We involve yoga poses that help body open and release. We don't have to follow the all the yoga sequence style from the methodology we have been trained, we simply follow what is working for our clients.

The methodology on trauma informed we teach are inspired from **Fundacion Radhika, Africa Yoga Project** and **Yogis In Service**

Breath ~ Body ~ Mind

Is mindfulness practices for physical, mental, psycho-social and well-being. The practice was developed by 2 physicians and uses breathing techniques, physical movements and meditation. It borrows many physical exercises from Yoga and Qi gong and it has it's a special breath known as "**coherent breath**". Through medical studies and practical studies, it is proven to help people from the communities where civil wars, genocide, and natural disaster happened, it helps them to heal from PTSD, depression, anxiety and improving calmness and self-esteem. It has proven to help one control life stress, boost immunity, health sleeping, and overall body systems to the person who practice it regularly.

Example of the class script we offered

1. Introduction

- Step 1: Warm welcome (Greetings: more of Rwandan hugs)
- Step 2: Sit in circle where each one can see other easily (and ask everyone how they are doing)

2. The principle of today's class: **My breath is my most powerful tool**

- **Step One:** We explain and talk about the nature of the breath with emotions, feelings, and state of the mind. We remind them that breath is the connection between body and mind. Help them think the breath in different scenarios. Ask them to think of when our breath may be shallow, deep, smooth, steady, fast and slow? Can we relate in any way? An example: Slow steady breath is linked to a slow and steady heartbeat, which slows the mind and the thoughts. If you calm the body, you calm the mind
- **Step two:** We help our group to experience the rapid and unregulated breath by doing random quick exercises and then have them experience active deep breathing. (The goal is to show them what is and what is not so they can see it in practice).

3. Mindful practice (mindful thinking practice)

- Using invitational language we invite our students to sit in comfortable position. We prepare them for mindful practice. Using invitational language we request them to allow their gaze to soften or to close their eyes.
- Without any change we ask them to feel their breath and notice if it is moving faster or slow. We ask them if the breath is moving through the mouth or through the nose. We ask them to feel if the breath is traveling down the chest or the belly?

- After that we invite them to manipulate the breath, inhale with my count guidance 1...2....3.....4 Exhale with my count guidance 1....2....3.....4. We ask them to repeat (4 seconds breaths 5 times). On the next breath we ask them to envision breath traveling throughout the entire body. Each breath filled with immense power. This power allows for you to create individual path for growth. Your breath gives you the strength to overcome the odds. And it is always with you. Know that you can use your breath for power at anytime. Repeat 4 seconds breath 3 more times, and allow your body to strengthen as much as possible. Allow your breath to slowly return to normal pace. When you feel ready, gently open your eyes if your eyes were closed.

4. Physical practice

- We invite our students to practice together with us, the physical movements and postures that focus in opening and releasing all the joints of our body, with the much focus on chest, neck, upper back , lower back and pelvis joints (as these mentioned part store greater amount of tensions in our body).
- In these physical practice we bring the awareness to the breath as the most powerful tool.

5. Inquiry (Mind and Body)

- Inquiry is an ongoing curiosity and questioning about your current experience and what is possible for you. Example: What does your feel like in your comfort zone, growth zone? Does your breath give you information?

6. Closing the session

- Short mindful thinking practice bringing awareness to the breath. Take home (my breath is my most powerful tool).After this, people are most welcome to ask questions, share the experience and recommendation.