

SUMMARY

How in the care of criminals can we achieve a sense of personal responsibility based on the awareness of legality and human rights, a process of change and rehabilitation towards a personally genuine and socially responsible life? These are the main questions in this empirical study of yoga as an instrument of rehabilitation of male criminals in the prison of Norrtälje, a town some 30 miles north of Stockholm. The central challenge is how to find a way out of the present social situation of increasing criminality among increasingly young males, and the role of care in that context.

During the study, male prisoners who have participated, at different times during a three-year period, in education and training of yoga were asked to answer a number of questions regarding the physical and psychic effects of yoga as well as the prisoners' view of themselves, their life situation, and their attitude to the future. Some of the prisoners offer concrete advice and express desires with reference to the potential improvement of the care in order to make it more effective. All of those who participated in the project were positive toward the yoga initiative, even though not all of them wished to continue this active way of personal development.

Theoretically the project is based on Jonas Salk's view of evolution and his hypothesis of man as both a biological and spiritual being, with a need for increased awareness of personal responsibility of mankind's development in the future. Salk's theories are dealt with only briefly, but they are worth closer examination in relation to the effects of yoga on consciousness and the view of the self. The reflections of the prisoners indicate a great need of help with the existential dimension of the treatment, and yoga has proved to be effective in that connection. The results of the study show that most of those who participated in education and training of yoga are very positive to the initiative, which resulted, inter alia, in

- increased peace of mind and intellectual control
- increased concentration and motivation to learn
- increased physical and spiritual wellbeing
- increased calm and improved sleep

Similar studies of the effects of yoga on criminals in England show also there that the internees become more motivated to do something with their lives. The difference between earlier English studies and the Norrtälje study is that in the latter case yoga was an integral part of the treatment program ART, (Aggression Replacement Training). The inclusion of yoga was an integral part of the training program has brought a very positive effect. It could be developed further as part of other programs, for example The Twelve Steps Program. Suggestions by several of the prisoners include recommendations to reduce the inflow of drugs and to create insight among the internees, in cooperation with the staff. The study stresses the responsibility of politicians in the prevailing social situation, and the question with all its related problems receives detailed attention from a sociological and political perspective, where both increasing secularization and segregation, with related unemployment, are seen as a great challenge for the future.

“Through yoga we receive sensible health care. It ought to be included as an essential and obligatory part of the daily exercises. A required activity that has positive effects.” This is one of the summary comments made by the internees.