

# **Teaching Pregnancy and Postnatal Yoga the Vijnana Way**

## **by Einav Feit**

Yoga for pregnant women is taught around the world, but Vijnana Yoga has a unique contribution to make in this field.

In my experience, yoga classes for pregnant women usually offer a space where it is safe to let go and yoga teachers tend to focus on stretching and elongation, which combined with the hormone relaxin, released in the pregnant woman's body in preparation for birth, allow her body to extend in new ways. The question is: what is the purpose of yoga practice during pregnancy?

Vijnana offers a different experience of yoga in which effort and relaxation co-exist. This contrast is mirrored in giving birth: contraction – effort, rest – relaxation between contractions. The Vijnana Principles, the Vayus and methodology aim to contain the effort and breathe through it. They are what create Rooting, Connecting and Intent, out of which come Elongation and Expansion and true Relaxation. Thus even in a pregnancy yoga class we should move beyond the comfort zone to experience effort and challenge, without tension or pain, directing awareness to breathing, relaxation and release to create "an effortless effort." In my body's experience, Vijnana Yoga connects and strengthens while also relaxing and releasing.

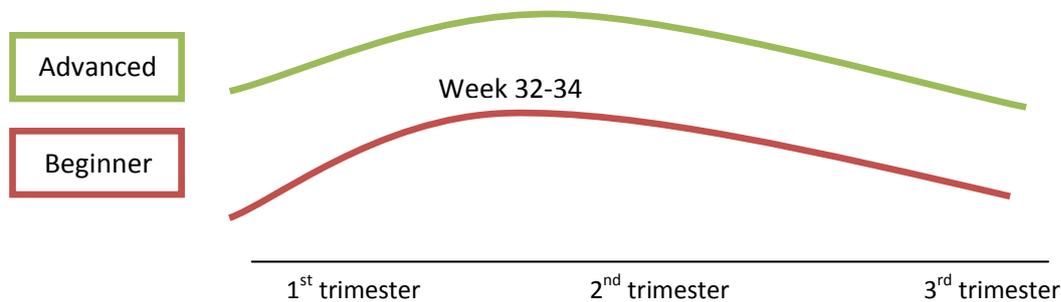
Yoga for pregnancy aims to support a woman during her pregnancy and prepare her for active birth, physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally. This is especially so for women with no previous experience of yoga. Obviously, many women give birth less actively, with the help of midwives and medical intervention, but here too the contribution of yoga during pregnancy is enormous. In a relatively short period, six months at best for newcomer to yoga, we have to help a woman make a transition from point A to point B. The teacher should choose what to focus on, taking all the circumstances and constraints into consideration.

### **Practice for pregnant women according to the phase of pregnancy, birth and after the birth**

Here I offer guidance for a yoga practice plan designed for a group of pregnant women, mainly new to yoga. The plan refers to the various stages of pregnancy, divided into three trimesters, including the extra postnatal "trimester". Women who practiced yoga before pregnancy can continue their regular practice while being attentive to their bodies and the constant changes they experience. In particular, they should pay attention to what is right for them at any given moment, instead of clinging on to what they used to be able to do before they got pregnant. For example, inverted poses, strong Kapalabhati, extended breath retention (Kumbakha), Uddiyana Bandha, and abdominal strengthening exercises all need to be significantly modified.

As a general rule, women who practiced yoga before pregnancy in a normal group, can continue with the normal group, until approximately weeks 26-28 of pregnancy, depending on individual circumstances. The teacher should request that students tell her in advance of any health problems, as well as the early stages of pregnancy, and continue to report any pain, symptoms or change in their medical condition.

The diagram below shows how the practice of advanced and beginner pregnant women progresses..



We can see that unlike a normal group that continues with a teacher over time, where the graph would mainly rise, in a yoga group for pregnant women the graph drops around the last trimester when the degree of difficulty of practicing asanas and Pranayama increases.

A pregnancy class is always a very mixed group, with pregnancy as the one common denominator. When planning a lesson, we should prepare 2 or 3 variations for each posture, as well as different options for the whole sequence, since there will always be someone who cannot perform a pose or comes to class feeling unwell or extremely tired. The entire lesson may change direction as it proceeds, or one student may modify the poses depending on how she feels that day. So when planning a lesson, we should treat the class like a medical-rehabilitation yoga group, both in its structure and in the focus on each student's needs and abilities. Props are very useful in this context: pillows, belts, blocks, stools, blankets, bolsters, physio balls, the wall and so on.

### **First trimester**

Most women who come to pregnancy yoga classes join as beginners, starting after the first three months. Many of them are afraid of miscarrying, some feel extremely tired. Many suffer from nausea, vomiting, weakness or other pregnancy-related symptoms, which might prevent them from embarking on any kind of physical activity. For some, the motivation to start practicing yoga develops at a later stage, from the second trimester on, when their strength gradually returns.

A woman who feels well during the first trimester can practice almost everything, but she should be treated as a beginner, and we need to keep in mind the purpose for which she came to yoga in the first place: to prepare her body for birth and minimize possible harm along the way. So we should not just teach her yoga, as we do with beginners, but also impart a certain attitude towards pregnancy and childbirth. By guiding her towards appropriate practice, we can help alleviate many of the symptoms that appear in the first trimester.

### Structure of classes in the first trimester :

<b>Emphasis</b>	Breathing, postures, movement, Rooting
<b>Pranayama</b>	Exploring the breath and observing it while lying down or sitting, with and without hands.
<b>Asanas</b>	Lying on the back, pelvis and hip openers, gentle twists, Supta Baddha Konasana, woman's pose תנוחת האשה, Setu Bandha.
	Didactic instructions and exercising of the hands and feet.
	Cat pose, dog pose, Uttanasana, Tadasana, sun salutation-I, tree pose, baby pose.

### Second trimester

Most women begin to feel better in the second trimester; they want to move more, to get stronger, feel energetic, work harder and prepare their body for the advanced stages of pregnancy and childbirth. At this point we can go deeper, assuming they did not join the class as beginners, in the practice of Pranayama and Asana, deepening guided imagery, meditation and relaxation as well as integrating the Principles and the Vayus into the general practice. We can start building a regular daily practice for them, combining what makes them feel good with what they need most.

### Structure of classes in the second trimester :

<b>Emphasis</b>	Breathing, Asanas, Rooting, strengthening, releasing, Connecting, guided imagery and relaxation, slow continuous movement, use of voice, Intent.
<b>Pranayama</b>	External Vayus, Ujjayi, Anuloma Viloma, Nadi Shodhana, lying down and sitting.
<b>Asanas</b>	Lying on the back or on the side, pelvis and hip openers, gentle twists, Setu Bandha, leg stretches with a belt, strengthening the legs lying on the side, awareness and strengthening of the pelvic floor, Supta Baddha Konasana.
	Variations of cat pose to release the back, teaching 'quiet back', Uttanasana, sun salutation-I with variations, balancing, Trikonasana, Ardha Chandrasana, with and without the wall, warriors, Prasrita Padottanasana.
	When seated, strengthening and releasing the shoulder girdle, poses that allow pelvic asymmetry, Baddha Konasana, Upavishta Konasana, Vajrasana, strengthening the feet and thighs, baby pose

### Third trimester

Some women will be able to practice right up to the birth and some will stop a little earlier. They need to know poses which are helpful as the birth draws near. We can work with them on breathing exercises appropriate to the various stages of labor. We can get them to work with sounds: Ah, O, Om, Sh, S, F and continue to work on strengthening exercises and standing poses, within reason. However, at this stage pregnant women require more adjustments and support and gradually the practice will evolve into learning how to slow down, let go, relax, rest, practice visualization, and to be attentive to themselves. The teacher can provide information on yoga breathing and asanas relevant to giving birth. She can also explain how to recover after the birth

(see below "Yoga after birth"). During labor there are more intervals than contractions, so yoga practice preparing for birth should reflect this. We should stress the need to relax when going into a pose and also while holding it. So rather than a dynamic, strengthening practice with rapid transitions from one pose to another, we should offer poses that promote relaxation and rest.

**Structure of classes in the third trimester :**

<b>Emphasis</b>	Breathing exercises, postures, Connecting; guided imagery; slow and continuous movement; use of voice, Intent, poses and movements to alleviate contractions; different poses for relaxation and rest between contractions.
<b>Asanas</b>	Contracting and compressing the pelvic floor compared to releasing and relaxing it; Birth advancing poses.
	Modified sun salutation, sun salutation-I with variations and modifications, warrior poses.
	Pelvic openers, pelvic asymmetry, strengthening the thighs and shoulder girdle, stretches, gentle twists. Less lying on the back and more variations on the side; baby pose, cat pose, Eights and round movements.
<b>Pranayama</b>	Lengthening the out breath, exhaling from the mouth, work with sounds and voices, "contraction breaths".

**Yoga after birth**

- Post partum. This stage lasts up to 6 weeks after the birth, and in this phase a woman will feel her body trying to re-organize itself. It is very important to rest and not overload the body with any physical exertion. A woman can start paying attention to the sensations in her pelvic floor, using Apana and Samana Vayus to train both the pelvic muscles and the transverse abdominals to contract on exhalation and release on inhalation. At the postnatal stage, a woman doesn't usually join a regular yoga group, and we should advise her to avoid forward bends, twists and lifting weights. At this stage, even Kapalabhati and deep exhalations without supporting the pelvic floor are undesirable.
- Advanced students can return to practicing yoga immediately after the birth, as long as they practice sensibly, not disturbing the body during the first 6 weeks. A gradual return is recommended, without trying to hasten the process.
- Carrying the baby involves carrying a weight that increases day by day. The baby grows, only now it grows away from its mother's center of gravity, so she needs to rebuild the stabilizing muscles of her body.
- The order of postnatal recovery is:  
Pelvic floor muscles → Transverse abdominal muscles → Oblique abdominals → Rectus abdominis.
- Working with women immediately after childbirth and for a few months afterwards, the main recommendations are:
  1. Strengthening the pelvic floor muscles and helping the uterus return to normal: Setu Bandha or Supta Vajrasana + Mula Bandha (Apana and Samana Vayus can be combined) + creating a closed circle movement with hands on front

- hips and with exhalation, approximation and resistance while contracting pelvic floor and transverse abdominal muscles.
2. Strengthening the pelvic floor muscles + transverse abdominal muscles + adductors of hip muscles: Supta Vajrasana with legs spread, the back of the hand on the inside of the thighs, bringing them close while pushing back with the hands during exhalation.
  3. Releasing tension in the shoulders and neck arising from carrying the baby.
  4. Achieving proper posture after pregnancy, childbirth and carrying the baby.
  5. Stimulating blood circulation and body energy.
  6. Relaxation and plenty of rest to recover from accumulated fatigue.
  7. Breathing.
  8. Focus and concentration of the mind.

## Principles of Vijnana Yoga

*For yoga to blossom, listening and responding to what one hears from inside is the golden rule. (Orit Sen-Gupta **Vijnana Yoga Practice Manual.**)*

By coming to know the Principles, an expectant mother, who is undergoing the constant changes of pregnancy, develops a new, deeper understanding of what is happening to her.

*Within the framework created, there is space for adapting the practice to the particular needs of the day or the person. It is important to remember that the mere repetition of the various daily practices is not enough. The quality of the practice depends on a deep listening and responding to the body, heart and mind. (**Vijnana Yoga Practice Manual.**)*

Not everyone starts off with the ability to listen inwardly, but it can be learned and improved with correct instruction and practice.

*1. **Relaxing the body** – In the beginning, relax the body. Inhale, and with the exhalation release tension. Inhale, and with the following exhalation scan the body from top to bottom and from the bottom upward. Whenever there is gripping or tension – relax. The mind is looking at the body with a parental eye. With time, one can observe tense areas releasing and embracing space. If areas of weakness are noticed, inhale into them with courage and enliven them with energy. Let excess leave the body – relax. In this way the body becomes stable and quiet. (Orit Sen-Gupta, **A little book of Yoga** p. 46)*

This is the first and last principle, without beginning and without end, the most central and important. This is particularly so for a pregnant woman, who comes to yoga class with a stowaway inside, a clandestine passenger in the shape of the fetus, and brings with her stress, anxiety, aches and pains, changes, and worries. A large part of the class should therefore be devoted to relaxation: at the beginning, at the end and also

within the poses. At first, the student will use it in the practice and perhaps even off the mat, but with time, her understanding of the principle will deepen and become part of her being, in her pregnancy, in childbirth and in the challenges that arise after her baby is born.

The inability to let go is something that most of us share. In pregnancy, and certainly near and during the birth, we need to apply the principle of Relaxation, of letting go, of surrendering. Relaxation is a conscious act. We consciously look at the body with a supportive, maternal gaze that takes in both the fetus and our body with its changing abilities and limitations. Pregnancy is a wonderful opportunity to release tensions that have become a habit and to let the body be much more relaxed.

When practicing asanas we need to feel at home in the pose, with a sense of privacy and safety. Our devotion to the poses lets us find in them a source of relaxation. Just as in the birth itself, where oxytocin, the "love hormone", according to Dr. Michel Odent, is responsible for the contraction and release, our devotion to giving birth comes from a core of relaxation.

**2. Quieting the mind** – *when we position ourselves on the mat we distance ourselves from our responsibility to react to the world. The eyes look inward to catch the inner mood, the state of mind. Whether we are focused, dispersed or nervous; happy, sad or angry; whether we are afraid, tired or energetic – the eyes are positioned at the back of the head. We observe ourselves and our practice from an inner silence. With each inhalation the eyes sink deeper into the back of the head. With each exhalation there is an intensification of concentration. Empty Mind intensifies itself in practice. (Orit Sen-Gupta, **A little book of Yoga** p. 46)*

Yoga practice provides an opportunity to stop being occupied with pregnancy on a conscious level: tests, doctors and nurses, and a stressful environment. We can disengage from the demanding outside world. We can just be, in time and place, and take the opportunity to listen to the body and look, through our inner gaze, without criticism or judgment. By focusing on practice, asanas, and breathing we can get to a quieter, more peaceful place, if only for a few moments, and come out of the practice in better shape than we went in.

In a yoga class time stands still and this corresponds to some extent with giving birth: the time dimension is not important, but rather the experience. The more so at the birth itself, where a woman is in a perfect state of awareness of the here and now. She experiences empty mind: empty of time, place, and external surroundings. She is entirely drawn inward, if we just let her be and she lets herself be. Giving birth requires relaxation and calm. The primitive function of the brain-stem takes over. If her mind is busy with external events she is not present in the here and now, at the birth itself.

**3. Intent** – now the body and mind are at ease: stable, quiet and concentrated. From this place we see our objective – Sitting, Pranayama, Asana – and direct ourselves towards it. The mind directs itself to the practice; the body awaits the practice; the heart embraces the practice with all its might. With each inhalation there is an intensification of intent, with each exhalation the sharpening of its direction. By visualizing ourselves sitting, breathing, moving, or by imagining another person in that practice, we devote ourselves wholly to it. With each breath, with each pose, we reaffirm our intent. (Orit Sen-Gupta, **A little book of Yoga** p. 47)

Some women find it difficult to connect and attune to birth. In class, I encourage them to attune to the baby inside, which is a part of them during their pregnancy; to embrace what is happening inside them, to accept the changes and tune into their goal, the birth. Through guided imagery and Intent, we can imagine ourselves giving birth, we can practice yoga poses, breathing and using the voice, which promote the birth and assist the normal course of pregnancy. Pregnancy and birth are an opportunity for a woman to make a significant personal leap forward.

**4. Rooting** – the mind rests at the place where the body touches the earth. Let the weight of the body sink into this place – for example, the feet. Intensify the weight pressing down, as if the foot would like to sink into the earth, and then feel the power of that downward movement flowing through the body. As the roots of a tree deepen and widen into the earth, so the branches above expand into the sky. It is easy to understand the idea behind rooting, yet surprisingly difficult to execute it in every movement and posture. As rooting is mastered, the body becomes light and loose and moves without effort. (Orit Sen-Gupta, **A little book of Yoga** p. 47)

We can apply this Principle by improving posture and relieving symptoms in pregnancy, through working at doing the poses correctly without pain or effort. We learn to give expression to the idea of "effortless effort" in daily life and when giving birth. First we have to develop awareness of where and how the body is in contact with the ground, being supported by it in every movement and pose. We first understand the concept of Rooting through this contact of our hands, feet or sitting bones with the ground. Then we can begin to understand the re-bounce force that returns upwards.

When lying down, we connect to the ground through every part of the body that makes contact with it; in balances we connect through the hands, in standing poses through the feet. When the body has a stable base, the neck, shoulders and upper back are properly supported and can be light and released. The more the body is rooted in the ground, the more its upper part can relax, letting the core muscles and the pelvic floor work efficiently to support the entire posture.

**5. Connecting** – Always be conscious of two opposite directions that are connected to each other. To go up, go down. To go forwards, shift into the back. Wishing for the left side, steady yourself on the right. Wishing to expand, come from the core. The first direction is the arrow, the second direction is the bow; the thread which binds them is Connecting. In each pose, the farthest limb from the ground connects to that which is rooting into the ground. Every single body part in between is whole in itself, a distinct, functioning unit. All the parts are balanced and work together in harmony. Like a chain floating in space, the rings that make up the chain never touch each other. The more each part is distinct, the more the connection between them remains steady; the body, in any situation, moves in oneness. (Orit Sen-Gupta, **A little book of Yoga** pp. 47–48)

The principle of Connecting for the female body comes into sharper focus during pregnancy. Some women only discover that they have a body when they become pregnant. A woman's center of gravity changes during pregnancy and so does her awareness of the boundaries of her body, her balance and her posture. Finding the center, working with the body from a connection, will make it easier for a pregnant woman to deal with her changing body, with the growing fetus, with any pregnancy-related symptoms or postural faults. Later, she can transfer the principle of Connecting from the mat to daily life: connecting with the baby and having faith in her own body to cope with the approaching birth.

**6. Breathing** – Be aware of inhaling, of exhaling. Inhale – go deep within; exhale – connect to the world. Inhale – accept what is; exhale – give yourself to the earth. Inhale along the body, exhale and root. Inhale and connect the farthest parts, exhale and move into the final pose. While inhaling, the body elongates and widens; while exhaling, it steadies itself in rooting and connecting. At times, it is deep and long. Sometimes the exhalation lasts longer than the inhalation; sometimes it is short and decisive. At times it is only in the background, at times the source of action; breath is always present. (Orit Sen-Gupta, **A little book of Yoga** p. 48)

When we feel that the body has a firm base, we can begin to concentrate on our breathing rhythm and the natural cycle of our breath. We can let our exhalations go with gravity, down towards our "roots", and inhale passively. This will give a feeling of lightness that rises up from the stable base and elongates the spine.

During pregnancy breathing tends to shorten. The abdominal cavity is an enclosed pressure chamber. Bad posture, fatigue, pain, discomfort or lack of awareness in pregnancy increase the pressure. The diaphragm is the ceiling of the chamber. On average, by the end of pregnancy the diaphragm has widened 2 cm, and at the top, because it is dome-shaped, not flat, by up to 4 cm. Changes occur in the body so that an expectant mother can breathe easier, but even so, many women get short of breath or their breathing becomes shallow. When pregnant, a woman needs oxygen

for two; for herself and for the baby growing inside her, so she needs a bigger pump. Pranayama is very important for pregnant women, since it also affects the baby. Breathing exercises during pregnancy should be adapted to each individual according to capacity and experience of Pranayama before pregnancy.

Good breathing and relaxation help reduce blood pressure, release analgesic endorphins and improve blood flow in the body. Deep exhalation reduces pressure from the stomach and all the organs below the diaphragm. Concentrating on breathing helps to calm the mind and focus the awareness inwards as we find the center.

Kumbhaka, pausing and holding the breath, does not endanger the fetus, but can become an effort and a discomfort for those who did not practice Pranayama before pregnancy. For beginners, learning to pause the breath is too challenging during pregnancy, though for advanced practitioners it can be relaxing. A pregnant woman's awareness is concentrated on the front of her body, so she has to learn to draw her awareness back and how to breathe into her back and the posterior ribs. With the fetus located at the front, everything that happens in the back will be easier and more spacious, distinct and grounded. Women who did not practice Pranayama before pregnancy should try one type of breathing for a while, and only then add more exercises.

For example:

- 1) Focus on Smelling as we breath – a flower, a baby, any association or image that works for the practitioner.
- 2) Yogic breathing, Anoloma Viloma, or fetal breathing – control, clarity of mind, peacefulness.
- 3) Soft Ujjayi – concentration and focusing awareness helps the body sit upright, grounding, lowering or raising blood pressure.
- 4) Nadi Shodhana, with or without hands – balancing and relaxing
- 5) Sound – S, F, SH, Oh, Oh, M, Brahmari (bumblebee breathing) – extending the outbreath, relaxing.

## **Giving birth**

The phase of labor when the baby is coming out takes place with exhalation, so we need to practice lengthening the outbreath. When giving birth, a woman exhales through her mouth, so towards the end of her pregnancy, it is good to practice breathing out through the mouth in preparation.

***7. Expanding – Elongating and Widening** – When there is rooting while exhaling, inhaling brings about elongation and widening. Or perhaps the elongating and widening that occur as a result of rooting, allow for inhalation. When elongating and widening occur, not one ring touches another as the chain called body moves in space. Then there is no sagging into the joints, no effort in the muscles. The skeleton shields its coverings, while the coverings create space for the skeleton. Thus the body moves about relaxed and connected – one. (Orit Sen-Gupta, **A little book of Yoga** pp. 48–49)*

It is important to create space and expansion in places where there is compression, in the spine, the abdomen and the chest. Expanding in these areas will make more room for breathing, easing pain or discomfort and maintaining posture. It is important during pregnancy to bend the elbows or knees when taking the arms and legs up or down. For example, when going from standing to Uttanasana, avoid stretching your arms straight forward and over your head; when lying on your back, don't lower your legs stretched out straight. We should beware of putting too great a load on the center of the body.

## **External and Internal Vayus**

The external Vayus release stress, remove fatigue and lead us to a more peaceful and relaxed state. They relate to the physical body, are very accessible and connected with each other. They open and widen the muscles around the eyes, the nostrils and the mouth, and help a woman learn to contract and relax in the areas of her body that are called into service in the various stages of pregnancy and childbirth. By practicing the external Vayus, a woman can learn to relax her pelvic floor and her cervix at birth.

The internal Vayus develop awareness and improve posture. Paula Garbourg's investigation of the sphincter muscles in her book "The Secret of the Ring Muscles" also suggests that contracting and collecting actions improve and maintain posture, the more so in pregnancy where the woman's posture changes significantly in a relatively short period. The anal and vaginal sphincters weaken and become less compact and connected to the central axis of the body. The internal Vayus contract and narrow the openings of the body cavities. Starting from the pelvic floor with Apana Vayu, and climbing upward, they create a stable central line. Focusing on specific points with exhalation creates a spontaneous alignment where the spine is supported by a vertical column of air. By doing Apana Vayu, we practice contracting the anus, vagina and urethra, and thus from the pelvic floor, we stabilize the body from bottom to top. If a pregnant woman needs to focus on a particular area, she can practice just the Vayu which relates to that area.

Women may have the same range of postural problems in pregnancy and after giving birth as anyone else, so we can adapt the relevant practice to them:

- a. Inflated chest position: over stretching the front of the body → practice Prana Vayu.
- b. Slouched position: head bent down, shoulder blades rounded, chest compressed → practice Samana Vayu.
- c. Leading head posture: chin and head pulled forward or upward → practice Udana Vayu.
- d. Tilted forward pelvis position: wrong location and orientation of the pelvis and a tendency to tilt it forward or overly relax the abdominal muscles i.e. the situation of the average pregnant woman → practice Samana Vayu.
- e. Scoliosis: back curving from one side of the spine to the other side → practice Samana, Prana and Udana Vayus.

## Posture

The western image of pregnancy emphasizes the prominence of the belly, deepening the lordosis in the back and emphasizing the buttocks. This approach is a continuation of the general discourse on female body image in the West.

Leaving aside the cultural dimension, on the physiological level the ligaments lengthen due to the hormone relaxin, the center of gravity changes and pulls forward, and posture becomes a serious challenge. So it is very important to attend to good posture by strengthening the core muscles i.e. the pelvic floor, the oblique abdominal muscles, the erector spinae and other back muscles.

Good posture comes from the rooting of the foot, by finding the right distance between the feet and correctly locating the arches, inner, outer and transverse. The following help with understanding posture: practicing with the heels turned in and turned out, transferring the weight to the toes or to the heels, playing with the position of the ankles, releasing the knees, relaxing the buttocks, pelvis and groins.

When the abdomen pulls forward, the whole area of the sacrum and the coccyx goes back. Experimenting with the position of the heels and observing the effect on the knees, the pelvis and the sacrum helps with understanding postural change and its consequences: pain and limited mobility.

As the womb expands with the growth of the fetus, it is contained by the pelvis. Preserving muscle tone in the pelvic floor is important and so is releasing the pelvic girdle. For example, creating asymmetry in the pelvic girdle causes immediate relaxation of the pelvis.

Pregnancy stimulates an increase in the relaxin hormone, which softens and relaxes the tissues and ligaments, and the result is flexibility. Accordingly, we need to work more on strengthening core and skeletal muscles rather than on flexibility, in order to maintain proper posture. Muscles, unlike the ligaments, are not softened by relaxin. The emphasis in yoga classes should therefore be on strengthening, to preserve the postural integrity of pregnant women in preparation for active birth and recovery afterwards.

Pregnant women bring all their postural habits to their yoga, and these are expressed in the asanas, so we should work primarily on awareness of habitual posture, before moving on to work on posture in the asanas. If there is no sign of understanding or internalizing in one asana, we can try another.

## **On a personal note**

During my first pregnancy, I participated in a yoga course for teachers in their pregnancy-childbirth year, on pregnant and post-partum women, tutored by Irit Falkovich. I felt great during this pregnancy and I really enjoyed the course both on a professional and a personal level. I felt softness in the practice and found myself in a very safe, but free place both in my pregnancy and in the yoga.

With my second pregnancy, I started an advanced teachers' training course with Orit Sen-Gupta. Although towards the end of the first year I could not do much and was more engaged in observing the class and the teacher, I felt I had found what I was looking for. The teaching, methodology and precision, the Principles, the Vayus and their impact on my posture in pregnancy, Pranayama and Sitting, even though it was very hard for me, all started to take shape in my personal practice as well as in my teaching. In this pregnancy I suddenly understood things differently, perhaps because I had matured both in my yoga and in my life, perhaps because I had drawn conclusions from my first experience of giving birth. What I realized was that the practice during pregnancy should not only be soft and enveloping, directed at developing flexibility and caring, but should also aim at strengthening, placing an emphasis on good posture. Integrating the Principles with the practice, learning the Vayus and their meaning for me, meant I was less afraid to do certain poses often treated as "forbidden" for pregnant women and made me listen more to my own body from the inside.

While teaching yoga for pregnant women, as well as for general groups, a more distinct approach to teaching began to take shape in me. The huge impact of the Principles and the Vayus and my various experiences of pregnancy and childbirth all helped me internalize and deepen what I found important during my personal journey.

When I put this article together and went through the material I had studied at different times, I found it weaved in similar insights that actually were there all the time, only I was not then ready to understand them, and maybe they were not presented to me simply and distinctly. Today I see them differently, more profound, more embedded in me, in my personal practice and in my teaching.

## **About the author**

Einav Feit, lives in Pardes Hana with Assaf and her three children: Agam, Eden and Noga. She has a BA in Behavioral Sciences and is a former director of Human Resources in an international high-tech company. After 11 years as a dancer, she looked for a different expression of movement, stemming from a more accurate, responsive and true place in the body. She was introduced to yoga and has been practicing it since 2002. She is a graduate of yoga teachers' courses in various methods: Sivananda, Vinyasa (Desikachar), Vijnana, and Yoga For Pregnancy (pre- and postnatal). Einav has been teaching and practicing Vijnana Yoga since 2009 with Orit Sen-Gupta. She teaches classes for groups and individuals, pregnancy and postnatal yoga, yoga as preparation for birth and mother and baby yoga workshops.

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