

## Yoga: Letting Go as the Path to Transformation

Two months after my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday I had the most incredible experience of my life: I became a mother for the first time to my beautiful daughter Kalini Miryam. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that I would sacrifice so much of my ‘normal’ way of living to facilitate this experience. I use the word ‘facilitate’ as I know it was ultimately a gift from God. However, Miryam arrived only when I had learnt to ‘let go and create space’ - not just physically, but mentally and spiritually: creating room in my life for this new being. And my yoga practice was the catalyst for transformation. Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra II.1 comes to mind: “*Tapah svadhyaya Isvarapranidhanani kriyayogah.*” Guruji translates this phrase in Light on the Yoga Sutras as “Burning zeal in practice, self-study and study of scriptures and surrender to God are the acts of yoga.”

I had always expected that when I was ready and tried I would fall pregnant and nine months later would have a baby. It was just a matter of planning when that optimum time was or when it would best suit my career, calendar and general life goals. How wrong I was. Actually it was on a yoga course with Swati and Rajiv Chanchani (senior pupils of BKS Iyengar) in Dehradun, India that I met a woman from the Maida Vale Institute who has since become a close friend. She urged me not to wait, but begin this journey immediately – and she was so right as it took over 4 years to have Miryam. I had three miscarriages in the interim and I now believe I was not karmically ready to have a baby before Miryam. Patanjali Yoga Sutra II.12 states that, “*Klesamulah karmasayah drsta adrsta janma vedaniya.*” which can be translated as “The accumulated imprints of past lives, rooted in afflictions, will be experienced in present and future lives.” After the miscarriages I consulted various medical specialists in the field as well as attending the Recurrent Miscarriage Clinic at St Mary’s Paddington. I kept searching for a specific medical rationale as to why this was happening to me, but no doctor could give me a sound explanation.

The multiple tests that were done were all negative and two doctors suggested surgical procedures. It must have been around this time that something switched on in me. None of the doctors’ interventionist recommendations seemed to increase the probability of a live birth for me. So I decided to pursue a complementary path through yoga and ayurveda. I looked for guidance in other women yoga teachers such as Swati Chanchani, Johanna Heckmann-Mohan and Mira Mehta (founder member of the IYI MV) and consulted a reputed ayurvedic physician. However, it was not the bitter herbs that were hard to swallow, but rather the change to my yoga practice. I had become so attached to my practice that I found it

hard to let it go and only do postures I was told were good for me. I remember being back with the Chanchanis: I was in the corner with a brick between my thighs doing a 20 minute headstand - while the rest of the class had a really fun arm balancing class with Rajiv! But that was just the beginning. The next time I fell pregnant I stopped going to yoga class completely. I went only to Johanna's pregnancy class after 16 weeks giving myself an extra two weeks post the risky period. I remember Richard Agar Ward telling me gently that it was best if I did not come to his Intermediate 2 class and Swati had instructed me to give up my yoga teaching. All this 'giving up' was still very difficult for me and I really had to fight the urge to just do what I wanted. At Johanna's class she was watching every toe I moved and I did only poses Johanna showed.

A few weeks into my pregnancy yoga classes something switched on – it was as though I had another step change. Rather than resisting, I felt I was moving with the flow. My anxiety levels about another miscarriage reduced. Even though the specific asanas of my yoga practice were limited I seemed to have made a leap in my understanding and internal working of my practice. It was very strange - the less I pushed the more I learned and the more confident I became about the viability of my pregnancy. Johanna noticed this change in me and started to change my programme and helped me develop my practice.

My learning continued. After the birth of Miryam I decided to take a full three months' rest. I assumed that I would rest for three months and then start my own practice and be back at Richard's Intermediate class. Again I was wrong. My very established practice did not seem to get off the ground with the new addition to my life. There was always something else I had to do for her even if I had organised cover. Furthermore, it seemed that I had acquired a new body – everything about myself seemed different and new to me. I did not feel I could even go back to a Beginners' class at the Institute so I asked Johanna if I could come back to her pregnancy class. This was an amazing decision as the pace was perfect: I felt calm, relaxed and unhurried. Most importantly, my mind could not set counterproductive standards – I could not say to myself you could do this before but now you cannot. The rush to get back into shape had gone and, simultaneously, my shape started to come back.

I believe it is important for women to share their experience with other women and I hope my article has been useful. I am grateful to Johanna and my women yoga friends who supported me in my pregnancy.