

## **Thoughts on returning to teaching after maternity leave.**

By Anastasia Yatras

Returning to yoga teaching after a period of maternity leave need not be daunting.

Provided one has thought the process through and planned beforehand, yoga teachers and trainee teachers can make the transition to teaching their classes fairly straightforwardly.

The guide, the foundation, as always, is one's personal yoga practice. Whether one is practicing pre natal yoga, post natal yoga or simply yoga, the essential principles never change. Geeta herself says, that the benefits of asana can be experienced at each and every level.

It is this unequivocal truth that allows us to return to teaching with clarity, cohesion and courage. We never actually shift from that core position of self observation which allows us to be effective teachers as well as practitioners.

Based on my own experience, some of the following guidelines may be useful.

- Think about a locum teacher as early as possible, so you have ample time to find someone who is complementary to the culture and context of your school/ classes. Your regular students *will* miss you and will appreciate the thought behind the choice of locum.
- The more flexible the locum can be in terms of timeframe, the better. It is difficult to predict whether you will actually end up needing more or less time off than anticipated.
- Accept that the parameters around practicing will have shifted remarkably after the birth of your child. It is only after you go through the experience of caring for a new born, that you realise the totality of attention and energy demanded of you. In this context, a more restorative practice, makes more sense.

After my son, Sol's birth, practice was condensed to a few precious minutes of savasana and ujjayu pranayama. In the weeks and months that followed, practice evolved to include half uttanasana to the wall, ardho mukha svanasana and basic standing postures with support. When time was short, even a simple supta badha konasana, done with conscious breathing and attention to alignment, felt restful and refreshing.

- When recommencing teaching, teach from your own practice and from your observation of students in the moment.
- Reintroduce the number of classes you wish to teach gradually. It is easier to withdraw from a smaller number of classes, if needs be, rather than coming back to a full load only to find it overwhelming and to need to step out again.
- Make use of the excellent resources that are available, such as Geeta's 2009 Twin Waters Retreat dvd's.
- Make use of the newfound rhythm of motherhood. Accept that physically and psychically, you will have changed profoundly and this will indeed express itself through your teaching- more often for the better- through a more patient, compassionate and confident voice.
- Conversely, the skills of self observation and self correction- so essential to one's yoga practice will also provide you with much support in your new journey as a mother.

Some more practical suggestions include..

- Try to have as much organised the night before, if teaching early the next morning as babies do not adhere to schedules necessarily.
- If returning from an evening class, ask your partner, friend or relative to provide dinner for you so that you can rest fully afterwards.
- When possible, factor in a return to attending classes with your own regular teacher.

In my experience, motherhood is a sacred responsibility and at the end of the day, not a challenge to our treading of the yogic path, merely a broadening of its edges.