

# **Class 1 Yoga as an Awareness Practice that Supports our Lives**

## **Introduction**

*Over the next 8 weeks we'll be exploring Yoga as a life supporting practice. How we can learn Yoga principles and tools to support our life, our baby's life and how we give and receive support through our connection to the greater web of life of which we are a part. Giving and receiving, being and doing will be central themes throughout the series just as they are throughout our lives.*

*Our **first class** in this series will introduce Yoga as an **awareness practice**. We'll explore the fundamental tools of cultivating awareness: pausing, centering, observing and responding. In pausing we give ourselves time. In centering we create the space in which to observe the state of our bodies and the experience of our breathing. In observing we can identify areas where we may be out of balance, tense or relaxed, tired or energized, pained or at ease. We can then respond by breathing, moving and relaxing in ways that restore balance. Finally, we learn to pause again to consciously integrate the effects of our practice – to digest it like we enjoy a good meal: all its nourishing qualities become part of us and our babies. It is in this integrated balanced state that insights often arise. Gifts from our inner wisdom which help us perceive ourselves and the world more clearly.*

*My hope is that these tools will become reflexive – we'll learn to practice them on the spot any time of day or night to restore and balance ourselves. We'll pause, observe, center and respond. We can explore a wide range of responses that restore our bodies, our hearts and our minds. We can use the simple and most accessible tools like a breathing, a movement or a meditation practice. It might also mean setting some time aside for creative expression or journaling or perhaps making a truly nourishing meal.*

*In **Class 2** we'll deepen our **body awareness** with guided meditations in stillness and in movement. We'll explore stretching, stabilizing and relaxing movements to relieve areas of discomfort and restore energy in our bodies and our minds. My hope is that you'll find ways to breathe, ways to move and ways to relax that are particularly nourishing for you and your baby and that you will use them on and off your yoga mat.*

*In **Class 3** we'll deepen our **breath awareness** through observation and specific pranayamas or breath practices which can create certain energetic affects. We'll explore what prana is and how we can use prana or energy building methods and breathing in ways the calm and restore our body/minds and our baby's body/minds. My hope is that you will be able to use these practices on the spot – during the day when you might be stressed or in the evenings when you need to calm and rest your body/mind.*

*In **Class 4** we'll continue to refine our **energy awareness** by again pausing and observing our state of being in the present moment. Do we need to restore and soothe our body/minds or do we need to strengthen and build resilience? We'll explore our habitual response to stress or to strong sensation. Is our response a conscious choice that relieves struggle or are we reacting reflexively in ways that actually increase stress? My hope is*

*that we'll develop ways of consciously responding to the stresses in our lives, to build our stress resilience. Not through struggle but by letting go, breathing, moving and in stillness: finding an inner place of peace: a sanctuary inside though tools like Yoga Nidra.*

*In **Class 5** we'll continue to develop our **subtle or energy awareness** by learning about our energy centers and developing our **chakra awareness**. Chakra is a Sanskrit word that means "wheel." These wheels are centers of energy or vital life force or prana within the body. These centers receive energy from the universe, store it, and distribute it to specific areas of the body-mind through a network of subtle channels called nadis. There are seven major chakras that have their own energy frequency and developmental patterns in our body/minds. By balancing these areas we can enhance our well being and our baby's well being. Our learning will be experiential – we'll explore these centers in breath, in movement and in stillness. My hope is we can use the chakras as self awareness to tools to learn deeper truths about our selves, our relationships with others and the world around us.*

*In **Class 6** we'll develop our **self awareness** by learning about the 5 dimensions of our being and developing our **kosha awareness**. Kosha is a Sanskrit word that means "sheath" or layer. The 5 koshas form a psycho-emotional model that describes every dimension of our being: our physical bodies, our energy bodies, our psycho/emotional bodies, our wisdom bodies and our spiritual bodies. They can serve as guides from which we learn how to care for and work with our body and mind through our life's journey in which ultimately we hope to come into integration and wholeness. I hope to use our explorations to find specific ways to support you and your babies today at your current stage of pregnancy and to help you grow into motherhood.*

*In **Class 7** we'll expand our **inner resource awareness** by learning about the Yamas and the Niyamas which are the yoga principles that can support us in leading a balanced life. They are subtle practices of behavior and awareness. The Yamas offer guidance about the choices we make that affect others. The Niyamas offer guidance about how we choose to treat ourselves. These principles remind us of our fundamental interconnection with all beings. We don't live alone and we don't birth alone. I hope you can use these guidelines to explore the nutrition and lifestyle choices you face on daily basis and also, very importantly, how you intend to birth your babies.*

*In **Class 8** we'll integrate our practices to develop **mothering awareness** by learning the tools you can use once you have your baby in your arms during the postnatal period what many people consider the second nine months. We'll consider the critical importance of self care in the midst of doing baby and family care. We'll explore restorative practices in breathing, moving and resting. We'll consider how you can build an inner & an outer sanctuary to nurture your self and your baby.*

## **Opening (20-25 minutes)**

1. Intake/Check-In (5 minutes)

*We'll do things a bit differently today. Let's go around the room and I invite you to share your name and in one or two words, a phrase perhaps, describe how you're feeling.*

## 2. Theme/Intention/Education (5-10 minutes)

*Today we explore Yoga as an awareness practice. The first step in becoming aware is the ability and the willingness to attend, to focus our attention and in order to do this we have to pause. In pausing we observe the state of our bodies and truly experience our breathing. In observing we can identify areas where we may be out of balance, tense or relaxed, tired or energized, pained or at ease. So in using the fundamental tools of awareness: pausing, observing, centering we can then respond in ways that restore balance. We'll begin with a short body awareness practice.*

## 3. Body awareness (10 minutes)

### *Body Awareness for Pregnancy Class 1*

#### a. Sharing

*Let's go around the room again and I invite you to share in one or two words or a phrase what you experienced perhaps in awareness, in feeling or in sensation.*

*We can use these discoveries to inform the way we breathe, the way we move and the way we pause in stillness in our practice today.*

## **Practice (50 minutes)**

## 4. Breath Awareness/Initial Pranayama/ Mudras (5 minutes)

### *Centering Circle Breath Awareness*

*Babies tune into the rhythm of the breath. They know when you are taking time to relax. They can feel the humming breath on their skin, like a sonic massage for them within the womb. Practicing yoga together in this way is establishing the basis of a relationship with your baby once he or she is born. Babies who have experienced yoga in their mother's wombs already recognize the relaxed breath, and readily respond to all the sounds & movements of these practices. This recognition of the rhythm & sound of pranayama can be invaluable in the immediate post-natal period when you and your baby are getting to know each other.*

### *Bhudi Mudra*

5. Warm-ups (5-10 minutes)

6. Asana (35-40 minutes)

*Weave the theme of pausing, centering, observing: breath, body, mind and then responding.*

### **Integration (15 minutes)**

7. Yoga Nidra/Guided imagery (5 minutes)

*(1) Supporting our selves, our babies and deepening our connection to all of life begins with awareness. We begin cultivating awareness by giving ourselves this time in awareness of our bodies and our baby's body.*

*(2) Through body awareness we discover where we may be out of balance, where we are at ease- we can sense the presence of our growing baby, floating or moving inside us perhaps stretching in ways that to balance his or her body.*

*(3) As we follow our breath we become aware of how we breathe – whether our breath is truly nourishing? Are we refilling the well that serves both ourselves and our babies?*

*(4) As we pause and center as we observe our mind awareness leads us greater self awareness – we can more easily notice how we are reacting or responding to the many changes we are undergoing as we grow a new life inside and continue to face the responsibilities of life outside.*

*(5) In these precious moments of stillness we can allow our inner wisdom to bud like a flower blossoming into an awareness of our deepest truth. We can listen for healing messages from our hearts, the part of us that knows because it knows. How do we really feel about becoming mothers? Are we willing to accept our true feelings and respond to them with compassion?*

*(6) In our willingness to be present we allow our greater purpose awareness to emerge. This awareness enables us to connect with our baby's being. We can give and receive communication with our baby with our bodies, hearts and minds. We can express our loving intentions for our baby's growth and well being speaking with our whole being. We can listen and respond to our baby's whole being: body, mind & spirit.*

8. Silent Relaxation (5 minutes)

*Come back to a seated posture. Once again pausing, centering, observing. . .*

## 9. Mudra/Pranayama/Meditation (5 minutes)

### *Centering Circle Breath Awareness*

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### *Bhudi Mudra*

## **Completion (5 minutes)**

### Final Sharing and Affirmation (5 minutes)

*Reflecting back on your experience of practice, the changes, the feelings, the insights perhaps inspirations. I invite you to express in just a word or a phrase any awareness or feeling you wish to share.*

*May we be willing to pause, to center, to observe. May we be willing to respond lovingly with breath, with movement & with stillness to ourselves, our babies and our world.*

## Home Practice

### *For home practice this week*

*Experiment with pausing on the spot – some time during the activities of your day. See if you can give yourselves a few moments of centering – noticing how you're really feeling, how you're really breathing. See if you can give yourselves just 5 minutes of breathing. You can use the centering circle breath or any relaxing breath that you find nourishing. Then integrate the experience: just notice how you feel afterward. Give yourself a moment or two to integrate the experience – how does your body feel, how does your mind feel, how does your heart feel?*