



Yoga for pregnancy and birth

Lucy Corkhill looks at how the ageless traditions of yoga can help women, and their babies, throughout pregnancy and after birth

Yoga provides women with a huge array of benefits during pregnancy, birth and postnatally. Whilst supporting and nourishing the changing physical body, a regular practice also offers a way of connecting with babies in the womb and finding that inner peace and strength needed throughout the parenting journey. In our increasingly aware world, women are looking for ways that empower them to have the birth that they dream of, and that they feel their babies deserve. Yoga can help them do just that. Janet Balaskas, the internationally renowned childbirth educator and activist, writes in her book 'Preparing for Birth with Yoga' that "setting aside some time each day for yoga will give you this space to focus more deeply on your pregnancy.... It has a miraculous way of making more space and more energy available."

the birthlight trust

Anthropologist Françoise Barbira Freedman was inspired to set up Birthlight in Cambridge in the 1980s. Her research at Cambridge University involved sharing the lives of Amazonian rainforest people in Peru, and she was profoundly influenced by the care and support she received from them while she was pregnant with her first child and as a new mother. The Birthlight Trust is a non-profit organisation dedicated to enhancing the well-being of women and their families from conception through to the third year of a child's life. Through simple body-based practices inspired by yoga and the traditional modes of parenting Françoise learnt about in the Amazon, they aim to support women, their partners and babies. Françoise chose the name Birthlight because of her belief that birth can be a 'light' and fulfilling experience if women

are given the support and care they need in the preparation stage. There is also a recognition of the spiritual element of birth and Françoise remarks; 'William Blake's poem "Visions of Infant Joy" inspires our vision of all babies given a gentle and loving welcome, and cherished as conscious and sensitive beings'.

inner bliss

Yoga in all its forms - including a practice of meditation and breathing - creates a wonderful framework of body and mind awareness that becomes invaluable as the birthing process begins. Over the last three decades, Françoise has assisted at over two hundred births alongside midwives, in both a hospital and home environment. She feels that it is 'always a miracle to welcome a baby into the world, but when a woman can stay connected with their babies and consciously breathe