



Ana Forrest--The Pregnancy Perspective

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By Colleen Millen

The woman next to me was trembling as she reached her left elbow toward her right knee. She was doing elbow-to-knee pose, one abdominal staple in master teacher Ana Forrest's classes.

My neighbor wasn't alone--more than 60 students also were sweating and occasionally groaning through the pose during Ana's recent workshop at Moksha Yoga Center.

I, however, was doing a side stretch. For good reason, as I was seven months pregnant. But at the moment when I noticed my neighbor, I thought, "I want to do what she's doing!"

I was able, thankfully, to quickly recognize my ego talking. I smiled and laughed to myself. I thought of the amazing nights my husband and I spent watching my belly move. Love swelled in my heart, and I sunk deeper into my side bend.

It was a different but equally empowering experience to be in Ana's presence again. A certified yoga instructor since 1975, Ana has studied with Krishnamurti, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar. However, she does not adhere to a lineage of yoga. The yoga she teaches stems from years of learning to walk with her own spirit and overcome many personal traumas. On a physical level, her classes will encourage relaxation of the neck, work vigorously with the core and create strength and space in the body. On an emotional level, she brings focus to stuck energy and urges students to become curious about these places to make room for healing.

I was thrilled to see Ana and partner Jonathan Bowra again. In August and September 2000, I had attended her teacher training intensive at Moksha. Since the training, I had completed almost all of the certification requirements and learned so much about myself. Most of all, though, I wanted to show Ana my beautifully swollen belly.

The teaching intensive with Ana had helped me create, as she would put it, "a womb with a view"--a place where life would want to be and grow. I had shoveled out tons of "gunk" during training. I'm convinced the core work, including what seemed like endless elbow-to-knee poses and pranayama such as uddiyana, helped make space for my baby. My husband and I conceived the month after my training.

I recall some yoga friends' surprise when I told them I was attending Ana's May workshop. Ana is known for her powerful yoga and intense classes. But I had no worries regarding the workshop. For months, I had been in touch with my baby through my own practice. Above all, though, I trust Ana and her teaching. I've always felt safe to explore in her classroom.

Besides, I knew Ana had extensive experience with pregnant women. A whole chapter in our training

manual was devoted to pregnancy. I already had followed much of the advice in that chapter: "Ask [the student] not to 'fascinate on' what she can no longer do, but what she can do today;" "Do no abdominal exercises...other than having her use the belly for exhale;" "teach her to open up the chest muscles and breathe into the back."

My personal practice has been influenced by such advice. Though I've avoided postures that constrict stomach muscles, during my first trimester I was doing regular two-hour sessions. (I practiced in the afternoons, though, due to morning nausea.) During the second trimester, I found long holds in triangle and forward and side bends to be lovely. This third trimester has been most interesting. I'm retaining water and feeling typical aches in my wrists and feet. So, instead of downward dog, I do dolphin. I do standing poses for 10 to 15 minutes, move to floorwork and, if I feel like it, return to standing poses. I focus on chest and upper back breathing regularly.

During Ana's Mother's Day weekend workshop, I was given many gifts. The most precious came in Saturday morning pranayama. My baby started playing drum on my belly. With each deep inhale, I felt my baby dance wildly. My fingertips tingled on top of my belly. Later, Ana asked me if my baby had been dancing during pranayama--that she had seen all this energy being emitted from my womb. I was awestruck. This life already was touching others.

Modifications during the workshop were a must and Ana was attentive throughout. "Pregnant people--and I know who you are," she said jokingly Saturday, "--do a sitting side bend." Two other pregnant women and I would do different frog poses, forward bends and side bends during core work. Though I discovered my hips are a bit tighter than I would like, overall I was delighted to have an opportunity to connect with my baby and my own strength. Out of the 13-hour workshop, we did about 12 hours of yoga. I couldn't do much else that weekend, but it was empowering and invigorating to keep up with the classes. Just when I thought my experience couldn't be brighter, Ana added more light. She guided us through a visualization for the final savasana. First, we were to connect with a moment when we felt loved, then take that energy and fasten it to our spinal cord and "amp it up." She asked us to do the same with an instance in which we gave love, and then one in which we felt gratitude. This energy of love and gratitude pulsated along my spine until tears streaked from my closed eyes.

What a wonderful Mother's Day gift. I must admit, though, I can't wait for next year when I'll be holding my little dancer in my arms.

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