

THE PRACTICE OF WOMEN DURING THE WHOLE MONTH

Dr. Geeta S. Iyengar



We should like to thank Dr Geeta S. Iyengar for allowing us to publish the lecture she gave in Poland during her visit to Europe in 2002. She has very kindly given permission for us to publish it to coincide with her visit to London this year (2009) where it will be sold in aid of the Bellur Trust. With her usual generosity and care she has edited and added to the lecture for this purpose. Succinctly and clearly she explains how women should adjust their practice to the hormonal changes of the menstrual cycle. All teachers, men and women, and all female practitioners will find this lecture an invaluable source of knowledge and wisdom which will enhance their practice and understanding of the marvellous and vast subject of Yoga.

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Dr. Geeta S. Iyengar

In 2002 Geetaji toured Europe teaching and lecturing in many countries. This article is the transcript of a lecture given in Czestochowa (Poland) on 29th April 2002 and edited by Geetaji December 2008

Friends! Yoga Practitioners!

Today, I have been asked to speak about women's yogic practice concerning the changes which take place in a woman's body due to her monthly hormonal changes. Before touching the topic, let me clarify the universal factors regarding yoga.

Yoga is meant for everyone. Nobody is excluded from it. Whether they are men, women or children, elderly or aged people, diseased or disabled, the path of yoga is open to everyone. However you have to practise according to your physical, mental and spiritual capacity. Yoga is meant to give us a way to discover or rediscover ourselves. It teaches us how to find the great margin of maximum capacity that we have inside us so that we are able to expose ourselves to ourselves and find out what we really are. When I say that you have to adapt according to your capacity, I mean that you have to find out the potentiality, or the potential energy, that you all have inside and how to bring it to the surface in order to utilise it properly. Yoga exposes inner hidden potentialities. In fact, there is nothing in yoga which dictates who has to do what. Yoga is universal in this sense. It is inappropriate to say, "Do and do not do". We do not say that this is not to be done or that is to be done. To make such differentiation there has to be some cause. Patañjali says that we have to find out what stage we are at and what our level is. We need to know what our energy is, what our potency is, what we can do and so on. As we proceed further, we have to see that we achieve every step gradually.

In other words, there is no barrier, there is no restriction, no demarcation as such. The words Patañjali uses like potentialities or capacities, are certainly very meaningful, since not everyone has the same energy levels, not everyone can put in the same amount of effort. The power to grasp is not the same in everyone. The practitioner has to understand subjectively the potentialities he or she has and try to expose them to the yogic path rather than exploit them.

When the question arises about men and women, Patañjali did not say anywhere that one thing is meant for men and another thing is meant for women. He does not consider anybody, either man or woman, to be more important than anyone else. Basically, it is the practitioner, the *sādhaka*, himself or herself, who has to be honest at all times and always keep trying to bring inner weaknesses to the surface so that you begin to understand yourself more clearly. You can deal with yourself directly. So as far as the practice of yoga is concerned, there is no difference between men and women.

However, we must recognise some basic differences as far as the biological body is concerned. Yoga is one, but women and men differ from each other, and every individual differs from each other. Constitutionally though there is no difference as far as the physiological functioning of the body is concerned, yet constitutively there are differences between men and women. It does not mean that yoga is different for a particular kind of body, but the capacity or ability is different for each person. It is only a question of how we adapt the practice so that it brings a proper balance and becomes suitable as far as the physical body and mental capacity is concerned. So we are supposed to understand this basic fact regarding the adoption of adjustments in the practice. Moreover, the bodies of women have certain biological functions to perform, which need to be taken into account. Men and women both have generative or reproductive organs but in women the functioning of the reproductive system differs from that of men. Due to this difference the practice differs. As far as the principles of yoga are concerned, the sincerity in approach and the application of methodology do not make the difference. However when it comes to the practice of *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* their adaptation in *sādhanā* (practice) differs. This has to be noted by women in order to maintain physical and mental health.

Today the main topic is how women have to adjust their practice during their monthly cycle. Every woman knows that her body undergoes certain changes during the whole month because every month she menstruates. It is a significant function, which differentiates her from a man and in this respect has to be acknowledged as far as her yogic practice is concerned.

A man also has certain hormones which create changes in his body - but these changes are not as visible as the changes in a woman's body. Menstruation itself is the indication of womanhood and obviously a necessity for motherhood. A healthy menstruation is a significant indication of a healthy state of body and mind. We have to respect our womanhood, we have to respect our bodies which have got this very important function to perform. Obviously, we need to adjust our practice. If we do not respect this fact, then we are disrespecting our own existence as well as that of the future generation. And when I say we disrespect our own existence, this applies to men too. Although this talk is related to women, it is necessary for men to know it too. Why? Because it is a matter of fact that each man has himself come into existence through the existence of a woman, that is his mother, who was menstruating. If men understand their mothers, they will understand their wives also.

Men have a great role to play in order to maintain the health of women. As a father a man has to see that his daughter maintains a good health for her womanhood. As a husband he has to learn to respect the health of his wife. Often men do not think deeply about the physical strength, physiological capacity and emotional health of a woman. Often misunderstanding comes, especially when a woman feels physically weak, emotionally upset, tired, depressed or moody. If a man understands how to cope with such conditions he may be able to help her in a better way. Then life will be adjustable and amicable. Therefore, I welcome the men who are attending this lecture.

Every living being has the inner tendency to procreate. Even the small amoeba, which lives just for few seconds or minutes, wants to see its progeny come into existence. Similarly men and women have this inner tendency, which according to Patañjali is a strong wish, a strong will, to reproduce. *Asmitā* (egoism, pride, I-consciousness) which in a subtle form exists in everyone, leads to procreation. A woman, being oriented for reproduction, has to take care of herself. When we sow a seed in the field, we take care of the field first. We need to see that the field is fertile, the soil is of good quality. We need to do many things before sowing the seed so that the field is ready for a proper crop to grow. The weeds have to be taken off. Therefore, in the tilling process, the weeds, bushes and grass are burnt. Similarly, it is also most important for a woman to prepare herself in a proper manner to see that her body has that inner potency. She has to cleanse her reproductive system from inside through the proper circulation of blood. She has to keep the correct functioning of the ovaries. The ovum should be clean. The hormonal production and balance need to be maintained. The fallopian tubes have to remain open. There should not be any blockage. The wall of the uterus should be neither too thick nor too thin. Its position has to be correct. So her practice of yoga needs to be of an all-round approach to bring not only good progeny but also to have continuity in the *yoga-sādhanā*. If you know this, you know why we as women need to change our practice over the month, from one menstruation to the next menstruation.

The month is calculated from the first day of menstruation to the next menstruation and one has to know the changes which occur between two menstruations. These changes occur on the hormonal levels, therefore we need to pay attention to them. Let me tell you one fact here. In the past, when a woman practised, she did so on her own. Therefore others were unaware of what she was doing. Now group practice or mass classes are widespread. Classes are even held where pregnant women can get together and practice. Therefore, in group classes or mass-classes, when a woman is menstruating she often does not want to separate herself from the group. She feels embarrassed. But I insist on the fact that during menstruation she must stick to a certain type of practice, a different programme.

Everyone's needs differ, therefore, every woman should have discrimination. Though there is a general practice done during menstruation, such as forward extensions and supine postures and avoidance of all the inversions, yet as a practitioner of yoga a woman should understand her own problems, her weakness and the particular needs of her own body. Regular practice brings a new awareness in her. She becomes sensitive to her body. The body speaks to her whether it wants to rest, wants to sleep, She wants to learn by herself so that the required and corrective adjustments can be made which differ from the routine practice.

We must understand clearly that the differences in hormonal levels cause the female physical body to undergo certain changes along with changes in mental attitudes. Thus the health of the women will be maintained with this particular way of practice. During this period, from one menstruation to the next menstruation, a great change will occur in the hormonal levels. The different hormones in our bodies will change from day to day.

Sometimes we feel that we are very active; we are able to take more stress at such times than men. Sometimes we feel that we are so exhausted that we just cannot do anything. Sometimes we feel nicely balanced from inside as far as our mental balance is concerned. At other times we find that our emotional imbalance is so great that despite being strong people, if somebody says something, we suddenly get disturbed and become shaky. We feel healthy or unhealthy, normal or suffering in our body and mind due to the hormonal ups and downs which take place in us. We become over-sensitive.

Sometimes we feel absolutely healthy and sometimes we feel hopeless. If you observe yourself carefully while practising *āsana*-s you find that you are unexpectedly very stiff. However much you try, it is as if something is holding you from within. You are not able to do much. You are not able to bend, you are not able to turn and so on. At other times you find that you are able to do everything just so easily and you do not know how things can possibly be so easy. All these moods of the body depend upon the hormones, according to modern science. So first we have to find out how to get rid of these moods of the body and mind and try to keep a hormonal balance.

In *Āyurveda*, there is no concept of hormones. Yet, *Āyurveda* does not rule out situations such as becoming emotionally sensitive, getting mood swings, losing one's temper, having shakiness of the body and so on. Obviously all these problems are rooted in *tridoṣa*; namely *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha*. These three humours of the body get vitiated as per one's constitution during menstruation. The starting of menstrual bleeding happens with the aggravation of *vāta*. Less bleeding or sudden stoppage of bleeding is because of *vāta*. The body's aches and pains are because of *vāta*. Nausea, vomiting, feeling suddenly hot or cold, excessive bleeding or running a fever happens because of aggravated *pitta*. Slowness, dullness, water retention, swelling in the body and breasts, increased gap between two periods from 30 to 35 days is because of *kapha*. Though *vāta* initiates the bleeding process, *pitta* keeps the continuity of flow and *kapha* brings the stoppage to the flow. Basically, the ingredient called *rakta* (blood), which is one of the seven ingredi-

ents (*sapta dhātu*), undergoes a transformation due to the three humours, and *ārtava*, (the menstrual blood), is thrown out as *mala* (the waste matter). Therefore, *Āyurveda* deals with the correcting and cleansing process from the very first day following the last day of the period. Yoga too remains confined to this idea. As soon as the monthly period ends, it is very important to start the practice with inversions in order to establish the constitutional balance of *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha*.

Vāta, *pitta* and *kapha* not only affect the physiological functions and metabolism of the body, but also affect the mind and the nerves. One experiences emotional upheavals, change in mental attitudes and moodiness. They affect the power of determination, discrimination, thinking and memory power too. Energy level differs so performance differs. Therefore, during menstruation, young girls, and mid-age women are taken care of. Food too is administered in such a way that they build up physical and mental strength. They are often isolated from their usual routine in order to get rest. They are entertained with a good *Śavāsana*, a long duration of sleep, with good music, spared from mental work or strenuous jobs. No responsibility is thrown on them. In fact, the days of menstruation are like casual leave and not a sick leave. It is a well deserved holiday for women. Often women cannot get a holiday from the kitchen and household responsibilities. But in the Indian way of life, a woman is completely freed from these responsibilities during menstruation.

Now, let us look into yogic practice. There is a general tendency in the practitioners of yoga to practise *āsana*-s as though they are physical exercises. First of all one should know how to generalise one's practice or how to do the general practice when not menstruating. Normally selected *āsana*-s are done in the general practice. All of you should understand that if you treat the *āsana*-s like an exercise, then you might do merely the standing *āsana*-s without paying any attention to your structural adjustment. You may also do forward extensions and backward extensions in order to have control over the muscles and perspiration. However, you neglect the inversions such as *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* (headstand and shoulderstand). Whereas in a general practice session you need to do standing *āsana*-s, forward and backward extensions, lateral twistings, as well as the inversions, as you need to maintain general health. The *āsana*-s belonging to these groups will take care of general health such as postural and functional correction of the body. They will take care of circulation, digestion, excretion and so on. You often avoid the practice of *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana*, whereas it is *Śīrṣāsana*, along with the variations such as *Pārśva Śīrṣāsana*, *Parivṛttaikapāda Śīrṣāsana*, *Śīrṣā Baddha Koṇāsana*, *Prasārita Pāda Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana*, with the variations such as *Supta Koṇāsana*, *Prasārita Pāda Sarvāṅgāsana*, *Sarvāṅgāsana Baddha Koṇāsana*, which are very important in order to keep hormonal balance. Just as we take a bath everyday, we eat food, drink water and sleep at night, similarly we have to practise these *āsana*-s every day. We have to make it a habit to see that in our practice programme, even if nothing else is done, headstand, shoulderstand and variations are always done. If you keep on with such a practice you will understand how much it is of help to maintain hormonal balance. It is only during menstruation that you should avoid *Śīrṣāsana*, *Sarvāṅgāsana* and other inversions.

You should know the cause behind this avoidance. You avoid *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* or any inversions during menstruation because the inversions are a hurdle to the menstruation's flow. The inversions arrest the flow. When you are standing on your head or on your shoulders you retain that which is only fit to be thrown out. According to *Āyurveda* health is maintained by throwing out whatever has to be thrown out by the body. To retain it inside means to invite disease. The toxins are to be thrown out. If the toxins, the waste matters such as sweat, urine, faeces, gas, menstrual blood and pus are retained, then the body suffers. When you are not keeping well your doctor asks, "Are you constipated? Do you pass urine properly? How much urine do you pass?" Sometimes he asks you to measure the urine you pass. Likewise during menstruation, the blood that you have to throw out definitely has to be thrown out and not retained. So during the menstrual period you avoid *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* in order to see that you do not retain those things which must be thrown out.

Along with the above inversions you have to avoid *Adho Mukha Vr̥kṣāsana*, *Pinchā Mayūrāsana*, arm balances and so on. Also you need to know that your legs should not get tired and that is the reason why you avoid the standing *āsana*-s. The legs are basically the province of the earth element. However, if we think of the main action of the legs, these are our 'auto-mobiles'. We can walk because of the legs. Therefore, as the 'walkers', they are of the fire element. While doing the *āsana*-s we mainly require firmness of the legs, their inward stretch into sockets, their full support in our movements. Though legs are controlled by the lumbar spine, or the nerves in the legs that come from the lumbar, the fire element in the legs has to be ignited from the basic earth element. The heavy *apāna vāyu* needs to be made light. All these activities bring about these changes which are unnoticed by us. But during menstruation when the body has fatigue or is already heated by its special function such as forming either 'a placenta for the unborn baby' or 'a funeral of the unborn baby' or 'a throwing out the non-utilised blood', then the legs need rest. The five elements have to be quietened. Therefore the inversions or standing *āsana*-s are avoided. In inversions especially you need to keep the legs firm, otherwise the spine pays heavily for the looseness of legs. The *mala* is retained inside which is harmful. This is the reason behind the avoidance.

Now as you know that the menstrual blood has to be discarded, you should not hold the abdomen tight. So you have to choose those *āsana*-s in which you do not hold the abdomen hard and tight. For example in the supine postures (*Supta Sthiti*) such as 1) *Supta Svastikāsana*, 2) *Supta Baddha Koṇāsana*, 3) *Supta Virāsana*, 4) *Matsyāsana* 5) *Supta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana*, the abdomen is not hardened but softened. These supine postures are done during menstruation,

which relieves you from abdominal grips and cramps. Now you should find out which *āsana*-s are easier and which are more difficult and proceed from easier to complicated ones. If you have the bolster under your back, you find there is no abdominal grip and abdominal tension. The breathing becomes softer and your diaphragm also gets space for free movement.

Many women and young girls get cramps and abdominal pains during menstruation. Pains in the legs, body ache, heavy perspiration, and fatigue are very common complaints. These are the *āsana*-s which help them. Those who cannot bend the knees, especially westerners, can do simple cross legs in *Svastikāsana* and lie down in *Supta Svastikāsana* which gives great relief. Dysmenorrhoea, or painful menstruation, in which the ovaries, fallopian tubes or womb get inflammation and undergo spasms, is extremely painful. In such cases the supine *āsana*-s help to get relief. Some minor adjustments are done in *āsana*-s, though basically the supine *āsana*-s are suggested. *Supta Pādāṅguṣṭāsana II (Pārśva Supta Pādāṅguṣṭāsana)* is done with support to get rid of swelling, spasm and exhaustion. *Setubandha Sarvāṅgāsana* done on cross bolsters, with legs either on the floor or elevated, apart or together, help in individual cases to get rid of abdominal cramps, pain, nervousness, anxiety, fear, neurosis, low blood pressure, mental tension and so on.

Supine Postures (*Supta Sthiti*)



Supta Svastikāsana



Supta Baddha Koṅāsana



Supta Virāsana



Matsyāsana

“the abdomen is not hardened but softened”



Supta Pādānguṣṭhāsana II



Cross bolster Setubandha

Now, after supine *āsana*-s one should do forward extensions (*Paśchima Pratana Sthiti*). The *āsana*-s like *Adho Mukha Virāsana*, *Adho Mukha Svastikāsana*, *Adho Mukha Baddha Koṇāsana*, *Jānu Śīrṣāsana*, *Triāṅg Mukhaikapāda Paśchimottānāsana*, *Ardha Padma Paśchimottānāsana*, *Marīchyāsana*, *Adho Mukha Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana*, *Pārśva Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana*, and *Paśchimottānāsana* are the main *āsana*-s that come under this category. In these postures women are given bolsters so that they rest their foreheads on the bolster. In a usual practice, if you do not use the bolster, you want to extend your body forward and the forehead rests on the shinbone, but here a woman has to respect her energy level, her body state and so on.

When she does the *āsana*-s with the forehead support in that manner, she realises that her abdominal region is soft. She feels the softness and soothing sensation. These *āsana*-s which come under *Paśchima Pratana Sthiti* become progressively advanced and perhaps a little harder. But it depends upon the amount of strength the woman has during her periods. However, *Jānu Śīrṣāsana*, *Triāṅg Mukhaikapāda Paśchimottānāsana*, *Paśchimottānāsana*, *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana* are the *āsana*-s among these forward extension which help one and all in general.

During menstruation women often get a heavy headache or a migraine. So if you have very heavy migraine, the forward extensions really help. *Adho Mukha Svastikāsana* and *Adho Mukha Virāsana* are the best *āsana*-s where women can rest easily, but the forehead has to be elevated to rest on a support and not down on the floor, so that relaxation can be found in the posture. In no way is there less to do. Women can do plenty of *sādhana* during menstruation and you have to practise in such a manner that you stay quietly for a while in all these *āsana*-s. Heavy menstruation will be checked to a great extent. This is true especially for those who suffer from Menorrhagia or Metrorrhagia, in other words, heavy bleeding during those 72 to 96 hours that a period normally lasts.

After these forward bends there are a few standing *āsana*-s known as *Utthiṣṭha Sthiti* which you can do, provided you are not tired and do not tense the abdominal region. For instance *Uttānāsana*, *Adho Mukha Śvānāsana*, *Pārśvottānāsana*, *Prasārita Pādottānāsana* with extension of spine or concave back, help greatly. In *Utthiṣṭha* you can keep the legs apart, fold the arms and take the arms down. You can either fold the arms or keep the hands down on the floor so that the abdomen is not tensed or hardened. In *Adho Mukha Śvānāsana* you can keep a bolster for the head to rest. *Adho Mukha Śvānāsana* on the rope too helps where you move the thighs backward so the abdomen finds more space and the heavy bleeding gets checked.

Similarly, *Pārśvottānāsana*, done with rope support, brings softness to the abdomen. Now sometimes women find that taking the head down makes them heavy in the abdomen and they start getting cramps. If they raise the head up and make the back concave, this releases them from cramps in the abdomen. In such a case we even use a bench so that the woman may rest her abdomen on the bench, which brings smoothness to the abdomen. Often problems occur because of the wrong posture of body. So one can do some of the standing poses in this manner. If one does *Ardha Chandrāsana* and *Virabhadrāsana III* with all the supports, they do not harm. Often the abdomen supported in *Virabhadrāsana III* helps to check the abdominal pain and correct the bodily posture.

The sitting postures (*Upaviṣṭha Sthiti*) are definitely helpful when one wants to sit just quietly. For instance one can sit in *Daṇḍāsana*, *Svastikāsana*, *Virāsana*, *Baddha Koṇāsana*, *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana*, *Gomukhāsana*, *Padmāsana*, *Siddhāsana* and so on. Especially, one can learn these *āsana*-s to get freedom in the movements of knees. One can learn to sit longer, so one gets accustomed to sitting. One can take the support of the wall in order to learn to lift the

spine.

Forward Extensions (*Paśchima Pratana Sthiti*)



Adho Mukha Virāsana



Adho Mukha Svastikāsana



Adho Mukha Baddha Koṅāsana



Jānu Śīrṣāsana



Triaṅḡ Mukhaikapāda Paśchimottānāsana



Ardha Padma Paśchimottānāsana



Marichyāsana



Adho Mukha Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana



Pārśva Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana



Paśchimottānāsana

Then *Ūrdhva Hastāsana*, *Ūrdhva Baddhānguliyāsana*, *Paśchima Baddha Hastāsana*, *Paśchima Namaskārāsana*, *Gomukhāsana*, and so on, can be practised in order to get free movement in the shoulders, armpits, wrists, fingers and so on. Those who have arthritis or rheumatoid arthritis will benefit. Pain in the heels or spurs, burning feet, knee pain, can be dealt with by practising these *āsana*-s. Lateral twisting such as *Bharadvājāsana I* and *II*, *Pārśva Virāsana*, *Pārśva Daṇḍāsana*, *Pārśva Svastikāsana* and *Pārśva Padmāsana* help to remove rigidity of muscles. Many women suffer from the accumulation of lactic acid in the joints which causes the body to ache. Therefore these twists, where there is no abdominal compression, can be practised without any problems.

The women who have cervical spondylosis, lower back pain or any spinal problems find these problems flare up during menstruation. In this situation they can do *Ūrdhva Mukha Śvānāsana* on the rope, rope neck curvature, bench-neck curvature, *Bharadvājāsana* and *Utthita Marichyāsana* on the chair in order to arrest these problems.

The inverted postures (*Viparīta Sthiti*) are avoided during menstruation, though these are practised invariably otherwise. Yet, these *āsana*-s have alternatives. These alternatives are possible because of the invention of the use of props by Guruji. You can do *Viparīta Daṇḍāsana* and *Setu Bandha Sarvāṅgāsana* using props. These two *āsana*-s done with the help of props certainly give the same effect of *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* during menstruation. You can keep the legs elevated if it causes backache or any other pain. So you have to understand and do those postures in such a way that the pelvic and abdominal regions do not shrink, do not contract, and you can rest.

There are many women who also suffer from depression, asthma, cold and cough during menstruation but when they raise the chest upward and open the sides of the chest in *Viparīta Daṇḍāsana* and *Setu Bandha Sarvāṅgāsana*, then they find they get great relief.

Finally, oestrogen which is at low level during pre-menstruation, gradually begins to rise during menstruation, ready for the next part of the cycle. It is this oestrogen in the body that makes you active, keeps your mind fresh and makes you recover from fatigue. Therefore during menstruation, in these postures you begin to be more active to bring the oestrogen level up higher. In other words, in this way you produce the hormones that bring you to a healthy state.

According to *Āyurveda*, the period of menstruation is the time of *pitta* (*vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha* are the three humours of the body). During the menstruation period *pitta* dominates and it is called *pittakāla*. So you saw that forward bends and supine *āsana*-s were introduced, and these are the postures which are good because these *āsana*-s pacify *pitta*. So you bring a balance in such a way that you don't get headaches and vomiting sensations, which may come during menstruation. You have to see that the practice does not bring fatigue and that the fire of the body does not just get wasted. These are the *āsana*-s which help achieve that balance.

So everyone has to know why these *āsana*-s have been introduced. It is true that in standing poses you will be throwing the blood out and there won't be any hindrance of that function. But you will not be preserving the energy that is required for the further practice after menstruation. The *āsana*-s I have listed preserve energy. It is important to understand that during the menstrual period, because oestrogen is going up, you feel active and you think that you can do everything. But the same oestrogen that will be reaching its peak in the next four days can be utilised for the right purpose. The subsequent energy fall needs to be avoided. So you should not create an imbalance in the hormones. But if you preserve energy during menstruation, and if you use that energy after menstruation, it will help you improve your yogic *sādhana*.

Now next I will deal with what to do after menstruation; what has to be done next when the bleeding comes to an end. Normally the tendency is that when bleeding stops you feel fresh, relieved, light and active. So you feel like doing everything. Let me remind you here how you are very methodical when you eat your dinner. First you take soup as that creates hunger. Soup is an appetiser. And towards the end of dinner you take something sweet as dessert. So there you go in a very methodical way; salad first, then hot food and so on. As the courses of the food are designed in sequence, the practice of *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* also need to be designed. Do not think that you can practise anything, picking any *āsana* up out of blue. You must remember that there is a method, a proper course to practise and it is connected to ovulation which has to occur in the next 12 or 15 days. Somewhere at the middle of two menses the seed for the next menstruation is sown in the ovulation period and you have to see that it is protected.

After menstruation comes to an end and the bleeding has completely stopped, you have to see that you begin your practice with *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana*. You have to start with these *āsana*-s which you had omitted during menstruation. These are the two postures which will bring hormonal balance in the first instance. Instead, more often than not, what you do are standing poses, you do back bends, and you do everything. Especially if you are good at advanced *āsanas*, such as balancings and advanced back bends, you want to do them all. Instead you should stay in inverted postures for at least 8 to 10 minutes. You can certainly do all the variations of *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana*, whichever you are able to do. I would suggest you do *Baddha Koṇāsana*, *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana* in *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* as well as *Supta Koṇāsana*. These *āsana*-s make the uterus settle back properly. Every period is like a small pregnancy resulting into mini miscarriage. Suppose I hurt my hand, it will hurt all the time because my skin is hurt. The wound has to get healed. This is similar to what has been happening during menstruation. Healing has to take place in the uterus and the vagina. This is the reason you have to do headstand and shoulder stand and variations. Then when you do them you will understand how the inner skin, which means the inner membrane of the vagina and the inner membranes of the uterus are allowed to recede inside. In these postures such as *Eka Pāda Śīrṣāsana* and *Pārśva Pāda Śīrṣāsana* you will find that the vaginal area recedes inside as the drying up process begins. Because you want that area to be healed, you have to know how the inner healing happens. You can do those variations in inverted postures where you find you get space in the lower abdominal region and the pelvic region opens and the uterus is drawn inwards. You get the feel of compactness. These are all fine to do, no harm will be done.

This is why after the period comes to an end, first you begin your practice with *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* variations. You can do *Padmāsana* and *Ūrdhva Padmāsana*. You can do *Halāsana*, *Supta Koṇāsana* spreading the legs apart and *Pārśva Halāsana*. Similarly, you can do *Adho Mukha Vṛkṣāsana* and *Pincha Mayūrāsana*. There is no harm in doing full arm balance and elbow balance. Sometimes after doing those *āsana*-s a little bit of bleeding may occur indicating that the body has still retained what has to be thrown out. It indicates the end of the period. This is the indication that the menstruation of that month has ceased. You should concentrate more on the inverted postures and you will realise that you are able to do a little more than you normally do. Your timing of *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* increases and you will find you are well settled from inside as far as your physical, mental and emotional balance is concerned. The inner disturbances, shakiness and nervousness cease. This is the time known as the post-menstrual or late post-menstrual period.

At this post-menstrual time, after the 4 days of menstruation, for almost 5-12 days you will find oestrogen gradually decreases. From the post-menstrual period, gradually increase your practice starting with your standing *āsana*-s, lateral twisting, forward extensions, backbends and so on. This period between menstruation and ovulation is a very good time for everyone to work on backbends, standing poses, balancings etc. so that the glandular system comes into balance.

After 13 days you come to the time for ovulation. When a woman comes to the ovulation period there will be some more changes in hormones. After menstruation you have to do *Śīrṣāsana*, *Sarvāṅgāsana* and variations. You discover at that point the pituitary gland is stimulated. Understand that in your brain, in your hypothalamus, there is a process in which you have a certain power to release hormones. You may already know of this process in which FSH and LH

Standing Asānas (*Utthiṣṭa Sthitī*)



Uttānāsana



Adho Mukha Śvānāsana



Pārsvottānāsana Head Up



Pārsvottānāsana Head Down



Prasārita Pādottānāsana



Adho Mukha Śvānāsana on a rope

hormones (follicle stimulation hormones and luteinising hormones) are released by the hypothalamus. By doing *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* you deal directly with the releasing of FSH and LH from the hypothalamus towards the ovaries. These days, 13 to 16 after menstruation, are called the ovulation period. Those who have no problem can keep the practice as it is. But if you are not getting proper menstrual periods or you have a problem with ovulation, or you are not conceiving, then you need to adjust the practice. You have to see that during the time of ovulation you do not do hard work particularly as far as the backbends are concerned such as *Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana*, *Viparīta Daṇḍāsana*, *Kapotāsana*, *Vṛśchikāsana*, *Viparīta Chakrāsana* and so on. Once again you have to concentrate more on *Śīrṣāsana*, *Sarvāṅgāsana* and forward extensions. If you want to do backbends, then you should do them with props. You have to see that you support the pelvic region in all back bending *āsana*-s.

Let me tell you something about the performance of backbends. While doing the backbends if you push your abdomen downwards as in *Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana*, *Uṣṭrāsana*, *Kapotāsana*, then first of all, understand that you are doing wrongly. The whole of your system will be disturbed. If you have a problem with ovulation then you will disturb yourself further. Ovulation means the unripe egg-cells begin to get developed as the pituitary gland stimulates them. These cells burst and release the mature egg-cell. This egg-cell gets ready to get impregnated. If you want to get pregnant, you have to see that the egg-cell gets fertilized. You have to create a good soil for fertilization. Therefore you have to see that you are lifting yourself up from the lower abdominal region in backward extensions. Suppose that an *āsana* like *Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana* has to be done, do it by keeping the legs higher up, for example with the feet on a bench. Keep the hands down, so that the pelvic region is up. The pelvic region should not be allowed to descend downwards. So one can do *Viparīta Daṇḍāsana*, *Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana* in this manner, where the pelvic region is ascending upwards and is not dropped. In some cases, the area below the navel drops and descends. You have to take care. You can raise the feet up even higher. That means that back bending becomes almost like an inverted posture. Because the feet are up, the vaginal area is up, the anal region is up. For those who do ovulate and may think of conceiving, they have to see that they avoid the other *āsana*-s and stick to *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* and forwards bends, so that they protect themselves from the fear of miscarriage.

Then 17 to 20 days after menstruation comes the post-ovulation period. It is normal for everyone to feel there is a slight loss of strength during the ovulation period. There is a fall in strength whether women are menstruating normally, or leading towards pregnancy. And at that exact moment you get disappointed because you know that you were doing back bending in a better way, you know that you were doing the balancings in a better way and now you find that, in this period, the *āsana*-s are not coming as easily as before. Especially, you find that your body is getting stiffer, you need to put in more effort and you perspire more than expected. You face a tough time after ovulation. Even athletes and sports women face the same situation. You find that you are perspiring. Your performance gets affected. This is because oestrogen levels come down and progesterone levels begin to rise. And that is good for you, because this is the preparation for what comes next, either menstruation or pregnancy. So during ovulation you have to take precautions, because even if you are not going to become pregnant, you still find you do not have the necessary energy to ovulate and therefore you need to adjust your *āsana*-s. Even sportswomen should concentrate on inversions, supported back extensions and *Jānu Śīrṣāsana*, which help to maintain energy.

Do not be afraid of the increase in stiffness in the post-ovulation period. Instead at this time, if you concentrate more on sitting postures such as *Upaviṣṭha Koṅāsana*, *Baddha Koṅāsana*, *Vīrāsana*, *Padmāsana*, *Mālāsana* and similarly on *Supta Pādāṅguṣṭāsana II*, you will find the pelvis opening and that means freedom. Even your irritation can be lessened in this way. You can do *Ardha Chandrāsana*, *Vīrabhadrāsana II*, *Utthita Pārśvakoṅāsana* in order to open the pelvis. You can do it either in a restful way with support or without support. Similarly, you can do *Utthita Hasta Pādāṅguṣṭāsana* with your leg supported to help pelvic opening. After doing these *āsana*-s you can switch over to back bends such as *Viparīta Daṇḍāsana*, *Eka Pāda Viparīta Daṇḍāsana*, *Eka Pāda Rāja Kapotāsana* and so on.

In contrast, it is at this period when supine *āsana*-s are helpful to those people who begin to get pre-menstrual tension or pre-menstrual syndrome. There are quite a few women who feel heavy in the body, heavy in the breast, get body-ache, cold, cough and even feverish symptoms. These are very common problems before menstruation which disappear and vanish after menstruation. In the post menstruation and post ovulation periods, if you feel healthy, make it a point to maintain the practice of inversions along with backward extensions so that you can avoid or check the pre-menstrual syndrome. However, if you are likely to get pre-menstrual syndrome, then 4 days before menstruation, practise the above mentioned *āsana*-s to get rid of those pre-menstrual tensions. Often during pre-menstrual tension you have a headache. You find that you are not able to eat food or not able to digest food, then you have to do forward extension such as *Jānu Śīrṣāsana*, *Paśchimottānāsana*, *Upaviṣṭha Koṅāsana* by resting the forehead on blankets. Do chair *Sarvāṅgāsana* and half *Halāsana*. Avoid *Śīrṣāsana* and backward extension if you have a headache. But when there is no headache, then certainly do *Śīrṣāsana* as well as supported backbends. Especially, during the period of pre-menstrual tension when you feel low in energy, depression, emotional disturbance, imbalance, then do back bends, such as *Viparīta Daṇḍāsana* on the bench or chair, *Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana* and *Kapotāsana* on a chair. These back bends help you to come out of depression and emotional disturbances.

Postures for cervical spondylosis, lower back pain or spinal problems



Urdhva Mukha Śvānāsana on the rope



Rope neck curvature



Bench neck curvature



Utthita Marichyāsana on the chair



Bharadvājāsana on the chair

Here are certain hints, given as preparation to avoid menstrual problems.

Often you get abdominal cramps during menstruation, or dysmenorrhoea. In that case in the 4 days prior to menstruation you have to adjust the practice so that you avoid the problem. The only difference between practice during menstruation and pre-menstruation is that you don't do *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* during menstruation, but during the pre-menstruation period you certainly should do *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana*. You do inverted postures before menstruation so that you avoid later problems. And you begin with inversions after menstruation in order to bring back hormonal balance.

Those who have heavy bleeding during menstruation should concentrate on standing *āsana*-s before the period begins such as *Utthita Trikoṇāsana*, *Utthita Pārśvakoṇāsana*, and *Ardha Chandrāsana*, using a brick for your hand. You will find that when using a brick the pelvic rotation increases. This is the time for teachers to work on the students to get this abdominal rotation. In *Vīrabhadrāsana II* you also get a similar abdominal rotation. You can adjust yourself with your back to the wall. The more you open the pelvic region and the chest the more freedom you will find. But if you do *Parivṛtta Trikoṇāsana*, *Parivṛtta Pārśvakoṇāsana* and *Vīrabhadrāsana I* during the pre-menstruation period, the abdominal rotation brings hardness in the abdomen, later causing pain. However, if you suffer from dysmenorrhoea, *Parivṛtta Trikoṇāsana*, *Parivṛtta Pārśvakoṇāsana* and *Vīrabhadrāsana I* can certainly be done after menstruation in order to strengthen the abdominal muscles. The rotation comes much better compared to the pre menstruation state and you learn the *āsana*-s in a better way. So you can store the imprint of rotation and progress further. You should also not do *Vīrabhadrāsana III* during the pre-menstruation time if you have a tendency towards headaches, abdominal cramps and so on. Otherwise you can do this *āsana*. I am not asking you to completely avoid the *āsana*. On the contrary, you have to read your body, you have to talk to your body, you have to understand if you get pain, why you get pain, find out which *āsana* has to be avoided, and you will find for yourself what you have to do and what not to do. If *Vīrabhadrāsana III* is done with stool support to the abdomen it helps, as when you do independently, you are likely to grip the abdomen wrongly. After pre-menstruation time you come again to the menstruation period. Therefore stick to the practice that has been given earlier for menstruation.

Now let us focus on the problems which occur during menstruation itself. The first category is the absence of menstruation or the prolonged postponement often from six months to one year. Not menstruating at all is known as amenorrhoea. If prolonged postponement occurs, or recurs often, then see that you stick to a regular practice of inversions and backbends so that you encourage menstruation. If you are healthy you may be eager to do a little more at that time, but it is not good to do more. You should not get over-eager in the practice because you will be disturbed from inside. A balanced practice is required for amenorrhoea which is more likely to happen in cold weather. According to *Āyurveda* this is due to the increase of *kapha*. Increased *kapha* blocks all the areas inside and obviously this effects the ovarian reproductive system. So one needs to stimulate the system. To avoid amenorrhoea you have to stick to *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* and their variations very regularly. Before ovulation you have to see that you practise backbends, as I have already explained, keeping the feet up. One can avoid amenorrhoea by having a proper approach to the backward extension of the body. Inversions and backward extensions stimulate the pituitary and ovarian glands.

I have already told you about dysmenorrhoea, the condition of having pain during menstruation. You have to do *Utthita Hasta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana*, *Supta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana*, *Baddha Koṇāsana*, *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana*, and that really helps to avoid dysmenorrhoea.

Now regarding the question of menorrhagia and metrorrhagia. In menorrhagia heavy bleeding occurs during the 4 days of menstruation, and in metrorrhagia heavy bleeding occurs even after the period has come to an end. So for these conditions you have to see that you stick to supine postures during menstruation more than forward extensions, since supine postures will be of help. If you are sure that you have menorrhagia or metrorrhagia, do the supine postures and a prolonged practice of *Viparīta Daṇḍāsana* and *Setu Bandha Sarvāṅgāsana* on props. The regular practice of inversions, apart from during the time of the menses, controls such a situation.

Here I would like to emphasise one more point. For heavy bleeding or untimely bleeding you should see that the uterus recedes inward. Therefore while practising *Śīrṣāsana* or *Sarvāṅgāsana* the legs have to be taken apart in a similar way to *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana* or *Baddha Koṇāsana*. Even in *Halāsana* or *Setu Bandha Sarvāṅgāsana* the legs have to be taken apart. A lot of emphasis on *Supta Koṇāsana*, *Baddha Koṇāsana*, *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana*, *Supta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana II*, *Utthita Hasta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana II*, *Prasārita Pādottānāsana*, is essential. After the "spreading legs" actions you have to come back to "feet-together" actions such as *Utthiṣṭha*, *Paśchimottānāsana*, *Viparīta Daṇḍāsana*, *Śīrṣāsana*, *Sarvāṅgāsana*, *Halāsana* and *Setu Bandha Sarvāṅgāsana* with the brick or blanket folded between the thighs. After having had the legs spread apart, when the legs are brought together and fastened, the vagina and uterus recede within the trunk. It is a folding process after unfolding. First the space is created and then space is encased. This process helps to check heavy bleeding. If you reverse the process, then the blood is thrown heavily out and finally arrested. For those with amenorrhoea the reverse process is necessary, that is 'feet-together', followed by the 'spreading-legs' action, which stimulates the ovarian glands causing menstrual flow in the patients of amenorrhoea.

Often, some women suffer from continuous bleeding which does not stop even after 12 or 15 days. The menses continues almost up to the ovulation period. Normally inversions are avoided until menstruation comes to an end, but in the above case, when bleeding continues beyond the 12th day, you should start inversions in order to arrest the flow and continue the practice of inversions at least for 3 to 6 months after every menstrual period from the 12th day onwards.

Next is hypomenorrhoea when one gets very little bleeding every month. Menstruation may continue for 3-4 days or only 1 day but very little bleeding occurs. There is a feeling of dissatisfaction. Forward bends help in hypomenorrhoea, for example *Mālāsana*. Doing this *āsana* is useful. Also *Kūrmāsana* helps you in hypomenorrhoea because it throws the blood out at once. During the rest of the month, apart from during menstruation, sufferers of hypomenorrhoea need to practise inversions, standing *āsana*-s, backward extensions and lateral twists. The whole month's practice yields the result during menstruation.

In oligomenorrhoea you find the flow is not too heavy but it lasts for a longer time which creates discomfort. In Menorrhagia the menstrual flow is very heavy continuing for many days but in oligomenorrhoea the flow is not much but it disturbs you for 8-10 days continuously. In that case the standing poses such as *Trikoṇāsana*, *Vīrabhadrāsana II*, *Pārsvakoṇāsana*, *Vīrabhadrāsana I*, *Ardha Chandrāsana*, *Utthiṣṭha*, *Adho Mukha Śvānāsana*, *Pārsvottānāsana* and *Prasārita Pādottānāsana* help you to throw out the blood faster. After doing standing poses you have to do supine postures which brings things under control.

When there is menstruation only for a day, or one and a half days, that is known as polymenorrhoea. Women who suffer from this feel dissatisfied because of the short period of menstruation and its non-completion. In that case, you can follow the above programme during menstruation. One has to correct the regular practice session by doing standing *āsanas*, backward extension and inversions. The twistings mentioned earlier practised during periods are helpful so that the bleeding occurs completely, though the bleeding really depends more upon the functioning of the ovaries and the balance of hormones inside.

The condition called leucorrhoea is where there is a white mucus discharge occurring for the whole time, apart from during menstruation. Women often feel completely tired and irritated all the time. If this is the case do supine postures very regularly, especially *Supta Baddha Koṇāsana*, *Supta Pādāṅguṣṭāsana II* and so on. You should not allow the abdomen to become tightened and hardened in standing *āsana*-s. The abdomen should remain closer to the spine. The position of the uterus also has to be corrected. Best of all are the inverted postures which help you to avoid getting white mucus. Here too 'spreading legs' and then 'legs and feet together' helps. This should make us understand how important it is to do the inverted postures like *Śīrṣāsana* and variations, *Sarvāṅgāsana* and variations, full arm balance and elbow balance very regularly.

Often after menstruation when you practise inverted postures air passes through the vaginal mouth. Many women don't disclose this due to shyness but the discomfort remains. The air passes with force making a sound. One should not get disturbed by this. Often women tighten the vaginal mouth which is incorrect. In fact by correcting the spinal position you can deal with the organic body. It is for this very reason that you have to do *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* when menstruation ends, but in *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* the position of the lower spine has to be correct. You have to make sure that anal mouth region is up and vaginal region is down towards the front of the body during inversions. If the anus is down and vagina is up towards the ceiling then the uterus gets pumped up and down and air passes. Often it becomes a habit - it is a kind of "breathing" which happens in the uterus. It is the wrong movement of the muscles. In fact, while inhaling you take breath in from the vagina and while exhaling you exhale out from the vagina. This happens because of the wrong movement of the abdomen. The abdomen should not be pumped towards the legs. It should be held back towards the spine. For instance, when you do *Tāḍāsana* you should not puff the front of the thighs forward. The front of the thighs have to go to the back of the thighs. The muscles have to go towards the femur bones. The outer thighs have to be rotated from outside in and the back of the thighs have to open from inside out. The buttocks should not be lifted but should go inwards. These are the techniques which are also important in *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana*, so that you can avoid almost all menstrual problems. Often, in order to move the abdomen inwards, women project the buttocks backward which tightens the abdomen wrongly. You have to learn to lift the pubic bone vertically up towards the torso. By correcting its position in this way air does not pass out or go in. I hope this gives a clear idea how you have to work with your body to understand these problems.

Know that after menstruation for the first 15 days your body works superbly. It co-operates with you. But for the next 15 days it does not co-operate much, so you have to co-operate with it. You feel fatigued, angry, heavy, hot and stiff. For this reason you must bring a lot of adjustments into your practice. So the earlier practice helps the next 15 days' practice and this practice helps you during menstruation. A proper practice during menstruation helps your body to function properly during the following month. So it is not a question of doing less or doing more. It is a question of doing the appropriate practice with understanding to face the changes and adjust yourself. A balanced practice is the key for health.

Alternatives to inverted postures during menstruation



Viparīta Daṇḍāsana on a bench



Setu Bandha on a bench

Prāṇāyāma

I have talked about *āsana*-s, so now let me inform you about *prāṇāyāma* too.

During menstruation you can not do much *prāṇāyāma*. You find that your capacity is less. There is a kind of fatigue inside. You should not force your body to do *prāṇāyāma*. During menstruation you have to do *prāṇāyāma* in *Śavāsana*. Even if you sleep, it is nice, and there is nothing wrong with that. A good *Śavāsana* with a good sleep gives you energy later and in fact it helps you to remove your *tamōguṇa* which is there inside.

Perhaps you know that there are three *guṇa*-s namely, *sattvaguna*, *rajoguna* and *tamōguṇa*. Menstruation is the period when there is more *tamōguṇa* present. You don't feel like doing very heavy, strong work, not merely *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*, but any kind of work. If you are suddenly asked to do something, you say, "Oh, it's too much work for me" because this is the time when *tamōguṇa* increases. Therefore even if you go to sleep during *Śavāsana*, it doesn't matter as recovery is essential. The *tamōguṇa* is thrown out with that sleep and you find you get rejuvenated. The period after menstruation is a very good time for doing proper *prāṇāyāma*. Even if you do fall asleep in *prāṇāyāma* in *Śavāsana* you usually find your capacity for *prāṇāyāma* is increased later. Your capacity for inhalation, retention, exhalation, etc., increases. During the ovulation period also, you find *prāṇāyāma* helps proper ovulation to take place. You should not practise *Mūla bandha* and *Uḍḍīyāna bandha* during menstruation and the ovulation period. You should limit the cycles if you want to get pregnant otherwise proper ovulation may not take place. During ovulation the practice of these two *bandha*-s doesn't come well. This is because the lower abdominal region begins to become heavy.

During the pre-menstruation period, when you know that you get tension, hardness etc., the best thing you can do is *Viloma prāṇāyāma* and especially *Viloma II*, exhalation-pause, which comes better. The inhalation-pause (*Ābhyantara Viloma*) helps you more after menstruation; the exhalation-pause (*Bāhya Viloma*) helps you more before the menstruation. And you have to learn to observe these small differences that occur. The more and longer you do exhalation during the pre-menstrual time, the better you will be able to conquer pre-menstrual tension. Then you will be better prepared to face pre-menstrual tensions if they come. Normally when you are healthy you may not observe these rules rigidly, but you should certainly observe how the body responses change. Before ovulation you are actually storing your energy with *ābhyantara viloma* and *antara kumbhaka*. So as you go through the whole month you have to organise your practice in this manner so that your energy is not wasted. During menstruation, however, you should not do *Nauli*, *Bhastrikā*, *Kapālabhāti*, *Uḍḍīyāna*, *Mūla bandha* and *Mahā Mudrā*.

I have explained what should be done during the whole cycle, from menstruation to menstruation, but actually you have to consider the whole of a woman's practice, from the 'menarche' (the first period) to menopause. You have to

organise your practice. During menstruation, from menarche to the first pregnancy, you can do forward bends and standing poses as mentioned earlier. But during 'middle age', that is between the last pregnancy and the menopause, whatever the duration of menstruation is in a woman's life, she has to continue practising the āsanās as I have described specifically.

During the pre-menopause period, when menstruation still continues, you will find *Jānu Śīrṣāsana*, *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana*, *Baddha Koṇāsana*, *Supta Pādāṅguṣṭāsana* and *Utthita Hasta Pādāṅguṣṭāsana* are of great help. However you should not do *Nāvāsana*, *Ardha Nāvāsana*, *Ubhaya Pādāṅguṣṭāsana*, *Ūrdhva Prasārita Pādāsana*, etc., *Ūrdhva Mukha Paśchimottānāsana*, *Jathara Parivartanāsana*, since hot flushes increase during this stage. Often the abdomen becomes hard and bleeding is heavy and the duration of pre-menopause is prolonged unnecessarily. You can continue to do *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* when you are not menstruating, but the abdominal āsanās (*Udarākunchana Kriyā*) will make you suffer as you are straining the uterus instead of allowing it to heal and get dried up.

Often when you are leading towards pre-menopause you find the body becoming heavy, the abdomen getting puffed, the buttocks, hips and abdomen getting fatter. Obviously, you become anxious. In fact women have to accept their age and respect it. Often, they think of losing weight and force the body to exercise and get exhausted. But this is the wrong way of doing, a wrong way of thinking. Doing this you harm yourself more, your hot flushes will increase, blood pressure will never come down, the body will become hot, the face will become red. Often you may feel that you can physically perform *Nāvāsana*, *Ūrdhva Prasārita Pādāsana* etc. but the body does not accept. It rebels. So the question is not whether you are able to do it or not. The question is, why are these things happening after doing these āsanās? You should not allow them to happen. One day this kind of practice may cause diseases like high blood pressure, hypertension, swelling and so on. If you work hard to reduce the fat that may cause more problems. Your body needs to settle after menopause so that you can begin to do everything.

Somebody asked me why it is difficult to do the class especially when the inversions are held for a long time. The reason behind this is that you lack the practice and you don't balance your regular programme over the one month period in a proper way. I get annoyed because often women say that they are practising everything including back bends, forward bends and so on, but they don't practise *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana*. They remember their neck pain and shoulder pain when they have to practise *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* and therefore they avoid the practice. They often do other āsanās for a long period. You have to see that you do *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* regularly along with variations, which may take 30 to 45 minutes. It is better to do *Śīrṣāsana* and variations for 8 to 10 minutes regularly. If you are not able to do *Śīrṣāsana* for a long time, then at least *Sarvāṅgāsana* has to be practised. You can do rope *Śīrṣāsana* and chair *Sarvāṅgāsana*, to make up that time if you cannot do independently. If you practise these timings you will find these problems related to menstruation, menopause and the reproductive system decreasing.

Endometriosis has become common for various reasons. At least you, as the practitioners of yoga, know well that you should not avoid the inversions, although you immediately start doing other āsanās after menstruation. For Endometriosis one should do standing poses with a concave back such as concave *Pārsvottānāsana* with the hands on bricks, *Prasārita Pādottānāsana*, *Utthiṣṭha*, *Pādāṅguṣṭāsana*, *Pāda Hastāsana* and so on. The elongation of the spine in these āsanās lifts and extends the lower abdomen. *Baddha Koṇāsana* and *Upaviṣṭha Koṇāsana* in *Śīrṣāsana*, or rope *Śīrṣāsana*, work effectively on endometriosis, also *Sarvāṅgāsana* in the chair with *Baddha Koṇāsana*, *Supta Koṇāsana* and so on. In backbends from the floor such as *Viparīta Daṇḍāsana* and *Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana* you have to take care to work with the feet raised up onto a lift. I have already mentioned earlier that in certain āsanās after 'spreading-legs' actions you should do 'feet-together' actions. That method is applicable here too.

In short, whether you have problems with regard to menstruation, conception or not, being a woman you have to respect your womanhood. During menstruation, you have to learn to rest physically and mentally. You have to learn to do *Śīrṣāsana* and *Sarvāṅgāsana* properly which are often neglected. You have to adjust your whole month's programme. You cannot be heedless. Remember that you are paying attention in order to avoid future problems. If you want to arrest common problems such as obstructions in conceiving, miscarriages, cysts, fibroids, bulkiness of uterus, thinness of uterus, pronation towards infection, then the format of above mentioned practice has to be adopted. You need to follow the rules and guidelines regarding your practice. You have to structure your practice properly. You have to pay attention to maintain your emotional balance through your practice. You should not physically exert your body just because you are able to do so. Your will power should not be exerted wrongly. Discriminative practice is the key for health. Remember what Patañjali says, "*Heyaṁ duḥkham anāgatam*" - "The pains which are yet to come can be and are to be avoided" (*Yoga Sūtras II:16*).