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Menopause musings

The trials and tribulations of the menopause and how yoga and greater awareness can play a role in helping us through. **By Sally Parkes**

When we practice yoga regularly in its truest form, it helps us to shed the layers that we often cover ourselves with as a way of protection. These layers can be emotional, intellectual, physical and/or aesthetic, and it is my belief that such layers exist because our psyche deemed it necessary at the time for us to move through life with the least amount of harm done to us as women.

For example, not showing emotions that show us in a vulnerable state may help us to feel safer, while looking a certain way with regards to our appearance, can cause less attention than otherwise, which again can instigate a feeling of safety.

These layers, in addition to the skills of adapting to our surroundings and the people within them, help us fit into a society that is not currently very well geared for the wellbeing of women, especially as we move through various feminine cycles including menstruation, pregnancy, postpartum, perimenopause and menopause, and finally the female third age.

Place on top of this ageism and societal beauty standards that do not currently idealise a naturally ageing woman's body, and we have a pretty big challenge on our hands with regards to a woman feeling mentally and physically safe and well in our society, especially when she reaches menopause in her midlife (or earlier when experiencing an early or medical menopause).

No wonder then that women, upon reaching perimenopause and menopause, often experience a complex array of symptoms that can leave them feeling discombobulated and disempowered. This

can often be in addition to feeling grossly undervalued by society, colleagues, peers and sometimes family members as well.

Through the regular practice of yoga, however — especially if we combine asana and pranayama with the practice of acceptance and truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa) — we can gradually be guided back to the essence of ourselves. This is because yoga, by nature, encourages us to shed what no longer serves us, and in this instance of drastic change, the practice of yoga can encourage women to shed some, if not all, the layers that have been worn for so long. It can be likened to a heavy shell weighing down upon one's true essence of fantastic-ness!

Perimenopause, however, allows the opportunity to start shedding the layers of this shell, while menopause allows women to discard this shell completely, should we choose to do so. This can feel somewhat unnerving however, in that the true self is exposed and there are no layers to hide behind. The mirror, both literally and metaphorically speaking, now shows the true self with no pretence; there is only truth and space for radical transformation.

This is not an easy journey to take though, because ultimately the truth can hurt. It is a journey that takes a consistent application of courage and energy to move through, and to deal with the potential repercussions too....so go gently. 🧘

Sally Parkes BSc is an author and senior yoga teacher who runs yoga teacher training on women's health. For more info about her online and in-person Menoyoga Yoga for Menopause Teacher Training, visit: sallyparkesyoga.com @sallyparkesyogaschool



Sally Parkes BSc: one of *Om Yoga Magazine's* '10 Great Online Teachers' and author of 'The Manual of Yoga Anatomy'.

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Linda Lyons, Midwifery lecturer & pregnancy & postnatal yoga training graduate



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