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Moms-to-be Lori Cohn, Megan Slaven, Julie Wedzina and Nicole Hall-Gendjar flank Katherine Austin, center.

Yoga For Moms-To-Be

Karma Yoga in Bloomfield Hills launches prenatal and family classes.

Lynne Meredith Golodner
Special to the Jewish News

Practicing and teaching yoga for nearly two decades has transformed Katherine Austin. As yoga changed Austin, it also enhanced the way she parented her three sons — and that's what she aims to share with local families during prenatal and parent-child yoga classes at her Bloomfield Hills studio, Karma Yoga.

"Yoga has grounded me, centered me and inspired me," says Austin, who opened her studio in 2003. "It puts everything in perspective. Yoga is a spiritual foundation on which to build any pursuit — from parenting to professional life."

The launch of prenatal classes last month is the first step in Karma's mission to become a full-scale family yoga center.

For Julie August, one of Austin's cadre of teachers, "Yoga was the spark, the igniter of my spirituality, the key that unlocked the door," she says.

"From yoga, you become more patient, compassionate and grateful."

Research shows that the nine months of gestation constitute the most consequential period of life — and the time when a mother can most influence her child's development.

The conditions encountered in utero, according to author Arnie Murphy Paul, "shape everything about us — from potential diseases, anxiety levels, even intelligence."

The most powerful tool in yoga, the breath, can influence and guide stress levels and help people reach healthier outcomes. Karma's prenatal classes include partner yoga and meditations to help expectant parents silence the noise of the world and focus inward, on themselves and on their growing family.

Austin has worked with adults for years as well as their tween and teen children. A year ago, Austin realized

she needed to offer yoga earlier — at the beginning of life — so children could learn from the start how to manage whatever challenges arise.

While yoga studios offer occasional prenatal or parent-child yoga classes, Karma is the first in Southeast Michigan to put prenatal and mom-and-me classes on the regular schedule. Austin is the first Michigan graduate of the prenatal yoga technique the Khalsa Way. The studio also offers teachers trained in Mindful Mamas and Digyoga prenatal.

Lori Cohn is one of Karma's prenatal yoga teachers. Cohn has been teaching at Karma for five years and practicing yoga for 18. "By offering prenatal yoga, we are able to provide pregnant women with the tools they need to have a healthy, confident and graceful pregnancy," she says.

"The knowledge you receive from yoga translates to the language of the heart, spirit and mind," says Deborah Roberts, a Karma student. "The principles of yoga teach you how to deeply care for yourself and how to be kind to others. Prenatal yoga classes connect heart, spirit and mind. Learning to take better care of yourself while pregnant will transform how you parent."

August, Cohn and Roberts agree that yoga complements their Jewish identity and faith. August says yoga ignited her own spirituality. "The more I study yoga, Mussar and meditation, the more commonality I see among all spiritual paths," she says.

Next month, Karma will launch Spirit Baby Yoga, a parent-child yoga class for babies ages 6 weeks to 3 years. In the fall, more family yoga offerings will be launched.

Karma Yoga is located at Maple and Lahser Roads, next to Plum Market. For more information, www.karmayoga.net or call (248) 723-9168. □

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