From the onset of puberty through menopause, women are given a sacred reminder of our powerful creative force: the monthly flow from our wombs. Yet all too often in our culture, we don’t see menstruation as sacred at all. Instead, we dread it. I used to frequently complain about my menstrual cycles; through years of painful cramps, ovarian cysts, headaches, back pain, and digestive disturbances, I just couldn’t find the joy in celebrating this mark of my womanhood. But after my encounter with a Mayan shaman in Mexico, that all changed.

I was in the Yucatán, attending a yoga retreat, when I booked a traditional healing massage with a local Mayan healer. I had no expectations beforehand, just a desire to unwind and rejuvenate my body, mind, and spirit. What unfolded in that two-hour massage was the most blissful, powerful healing experience of my life. As the shaman’s hands moved rhythmically across my body, he quietly chanted prayers in Mayan, intuitively melting my tensions along the way. He began to work deeply around my navel and lower abdomen. As I relaxed into it, I was suspended in a state of timelessness, cooled by the light breeze coming through the beachside palapa. He blew into my navel and continued chanting his prayers. A white light engulfed me. I opened my eyes to see if the bright tropical sun had somehow pen-
I learned that a tipped uterus is often the cause of a long list of female complaints, including many of the symptoms I’d suffered over the years. Although none of my doctors had ever associated my problems with the position of my uterus, with just a basic understanding of pelvic anatomy I could now see the connection: A slew of seemingly unrelated symptoms can be attributed to a malpositioned uterus because of the organ’s close proximity to the colon, small intestine, and bladder, as well as to the nerves and blood vessels that supply these organs through the lower spine and sacrum.

Arvigo explained to me that the longer the uterus is out of place, the more the musculature and connective tissue can tighten around it, increasing pelvic congestion and stagnation inside the womb. The restricted flow to the uterus of blood, nerve impulses, lymphatic fluid, and energy can lead to painful cramps, the deterioration of the uterine lining, hormonal imbalance, and problems with fertility. The longer the stagnation lasts, the greater the possibility for more complicated symptoms to arise, including ovarian cysts, endometriosis, fibroids, and, possibly, uterine and ovarian cancers.

After her decade with Panti, Arvigo knew that she wanted to share this simple yet essential healing technique with women around the world, and 14 years ago she developed her protocol, the Arvigo Techniques of Maya Abdominal Massage. These combine the ancient Mayan massage she’d learned from Panti with a number of different bodywork techniques, herbal therapies, and dietary and lifestyle changes culled from her earlier trainings in other healing modalities.

I didn’t get a chance to receive more Mayan massage before my daughter was conceived.
According to Arvigo, a severely displaced uterus, if not corrected prior to pregnancy, often results in painful pregnancies and difficult labor. I experienced this firsthand. After a very difficult 36 hours of labor, I finally, with the help of midwives, delivered my healthy, eight-pound daughter at home. My stalled cervical dilation, my intense back pain, my third-degree tear, and the fact that my coccyx broke during delivery—all were signs that my uterus was still tipped back. That single massage in Mexico hadn’t been enough to permanently realign my uterus, though it had allowed the miracles of conception and pregnancy to occur.

Arvigo explains that the uterus is susceptible to displacement by a variety of causes, especially from high-impact activities such as sports, running, jumping, or impacts from falls or automobile accidents. Actions as simple as lifting a heavy object, or repeatedly carrying a child on one hip, can displace the uterus from its proper position in the pelvis, and set off a chain reaction of reproductive and digestive imbalances.

Problems caused by abdominal scar tissue from surgeries or invasive procedures can also be helped by the massage. “For women who have had a cesarean, we can promise better arterial supply to the pelvic organs, better venous drainage from the legs up, less backache, less sciatica, less fluid congestion, and a better possibility for a VBAC [vaginal birth after cesarean],” states Arvigo.

According to Arvigo, there are many ways the uterus can sit improperly in the pelvis (see illustration of uterine displacements). A side-lying uterus often affects ovarian function, sometimes leading to ovarian cysts, irregular ovulation or no ovulation (anovulation), hormonal imbalance, and difficulty in conceiving. An anteverted (forward-lying) uterus can result in frequent urination, chronic bladder infections, and other urinary-tract disorders. A prolapsed (low-lying) uterus can lead to painful intercourse, varicose veins, and bladder and bowel incontinence. A retroverted (tipped-back) uterus can block movement in the colon and result in chronic constipation, especially around the time of menses. It can also put pressure on the sacral nerves to create low-back pain, which can intensify at the time of menstruation. Uterine flexions (where the fundus is folded) can also occur in any direction, resulting in very painful cramping.

Before I became pregnant again, I wanted to be sure I’d learned this type of uterine self-massage. And so, just before my daughter turned two, I signed up for an Arvigo Self-Care
Training. These workshops are designed to empower women to assess the alignment of the uterus and, if it’s displaced, to reposition it. Doing the massage daily not only helps to ensure the uterus’s correct position, it also begins the important process of cultivating a conscious connection between mind and womb.

For the weekend workshop, I joined a dozen other women at a hot-springs resort in Colorado. The first day, we gathered in a candlelit room, the air thick with the scent of burning copal, a tree resin from Central America. Our instructor informed us that she would be guiding us in a group meditation to help each woman connect with her womb. We lay on blankets in a circle; our eyes closed as a slow drumbeat pulled us into a deep, meditative state. As we moved through the meditation, I felt sad to realize how much negative energy I’d held toward this miraculous organ. After all, every one of us had arrived in this world thanks to a uterus! I now understood the ultimate gift of my womb. Tears flowed, and my heart swelled with gratitude.

A few weeks later, I sat in shock on my bathroom floor, a pregnancy test in my shaking hand. The result was positive. That was it—I was a believer. I immediately signed on for the journey to become an Arvigo practitioner myself.

At home, in a birthing tub, I delivered our 10-pound, 2-ounce son after eight hours of relatively easy labor, this time with no difficulty in dilating, not much back labor, and not a single tear to stitch up. And since I began regular self-massage, my menstrual cycles have been easy and painless. Now that I’m a certified Arvigo practitioner, my clients report the same. I’ve at last found joy in celebrating the monthly mark of my womanhood, and I’m grateful to help others find their joy, too—one beautiful uterus at a time.

For more on fertility, log on to www.mothering.com/links and see the Web Exclusive “Secondary Infertility,” by Nancy Stiefel.