

The Gift of Yoga Nidra

Excerpted from, *Yoga Nidra*, by Swami Satyananda Saraswati

In Yoga Nidra, the state of relaxation is reached by turning inwards, away from outer experiences. If the consciousness can be separated from external awareness and from sleep, it becomes very powerful and can be applied in many ways, for example to develop memory, to increase knowledge and creativity, or to transform one's nature.

How does this happen? Simply, when the relaxation is complete, the receptivity is greater. When consciousness is connected to all the senses, the receptivity is less. This is the secret of Yoga Nidra. Due to the intellectualization process, the knowledge that goes into the brain does not really impress itself there. But when you withdraw your mind a little bit, and enter into a state where you are neither in deep sleep nor completely awake, whatever impressions enter the mind at that time become powerful, and they remain there.

The practice of Yoga Nidra enables one to receive intuitions from the unconscious mind. This state is the fount of artistic and poetic inspiration. It is also the source of the most creative scientific discoveries. The intuitions received in Yoga Nidra enable one to find within oneself the answers to all problems. One's true nature and integrity manifest, enabling one to live a meaningful and peaceful life in any environment. This is the opening of the third eye, which takes the consciousness beyond the conditioned personality with its tensions and complexes. No longer emotionally identified with the mind and body, one's entire being is pervaded with divine consciousness. Therefore realize, with a still mind, your own true nature which is the one pure, undivided consciousness underlying the restless mind, composed of the whole universe in all its diversity. Realize with a still mind, the state between sleep and wakefulness. This is the real Self, inherent in which one is no longer deluded.

Yoga Nidra is considered a tantric practice because in tantra the evolution of mind should become a spontaneous matter. You do not have to fight with your nature, habits, and limitations, because by doing so you are creating animosity within yourself. How to remove faults? Go down to the lower recesses of the mind and cut the root, then the tree will die by itself. Yoga Nidra is a practice which will help you to dive deep into the depths of your mind.

Pratyahara

Yoga Nidra is essentially a method of pratyahara. Awareness is progressively withdrawn from the external world, the body, the process of breathing, the conscious mind, and finally the unconscious mind. In Yoga Nidra, the mind gradually becomes one-pointed. In order to prevent the conscious mind from falling asleep, awareness is maintained by concentrating on the auditory channel. When the senses are disconnected for some time in Yoga Nidra, this is pratyahara. The science of Yoga Nidra is based on the receptivity of consciousness. When consciousness is operating with the intellect and all the senses, we think we are awake and aware, but the mind is actually less receptive and more critical. When the consciousness is operating through only one sensory channel (e.g. hearing), it becomes far more sensitive. When the mind dissociates itself from all the sensory channels, it becomes very powerful, but then it needs training. Unless the involuntary systems of the brain have been trained, there is practically no difference between Yoga Nidra and sleep.

In Yoga Nidra, experiment with maintaining awareness. You are relaxed but you do not sleep. You are conscious of practicing Yoga Nidra. This is the difference between hypnosis and Yoga Nidra. In hypnosis, the subject may be led into deep sleep. The other difference is that Yoga Nidra does not depend on suggestion or persuasion. The resolve is made by the practitioner. The instructor is only the guide.

Preparation for Practice

Yoga Nidra should be practiced in shavasana. To begin, the mind is focused on external sounds, with the attitude of the witness. After some time the mind loses interest in the external world and automatically becomes quiet. This method of calming the mind is called antar mouna.

The Power of Sankalpa: Creating a Resolve

In Yoga Nidra, one of the most effective means for training the mind is found in sankalpa. Sankalpa is a Sanskrit word meaning resolve or resolution. It is an important stage of Yoga Nidra and a powerful method of reshaping your personality and direction in life along positive lines. If you know what you wish to achieve in life, sankalpa can be the creator of your destiny. Whether you want to become a painter, writer, musician, orator, or spiritual leader, you can train yourself through this simple technique. But first you must have a direction.

Sankalpa takes the form of a short mental statement, which is impressed on the subconscious mind when it is receptive and sensitive to autosuggestion during Yoga Nidra. The sankalpa should be made not when you are intellectually active, but when your mind is calm and quiet. Before and after the practice of Yoga Nidra there is a short period dedicated to sankalpa. The resolve you make at the beginning of the practice is like sowing a seed, and the resolve at the end is like irrigating it. Once the seed of sankalpa is planted deep in the subconscious, it gathers the vast forces of the mind in order to bring about its fruition. This deep and powerful seed will eventually manifest itself again and again at a conscious level and bring about changes in your personality and your life. Each of us has the power to remold our own mental structure, no personality is beyond reformation, and no fear or obsession is so deeply rooted that it cannot be changed.

Choose your Sankalpa carefully. Your words should be precise and clear, stated with conviction and gratitude. Possible choices: "I awaken my spiritual potential", "I am aware and efficient", "I live in total health", "I have abundance in every way", "I speak my truth with clarity and with kindness".

Yoga Nidra – Blissful Relaxation

Most people sleep without resolving their tensions. This is termed Nidra.

Nidra means sleep, no matter what or why.

But Yoga Nidra means sleep after throwing off the burdens.

It is of a blissful, higher quality altogether.

When awareness is separate and distinct from the vrittis,

When waking, dream, and deep sleep pass like clouds,

Yet awareness of atma remains,

This is the experience of total relaxation.

Relaxation does not mean sleep.

Relaxation means to be blissfully happy,

It has no end.

I call bliss absolute relaxation; sleep is a different matter.

Sleep gives only mind and sense relaxation.

Bliss relaxes the Atma, the inner self;

That is why, in tantra,

Yoga Nidra is the doorway to Samadhi.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Yoga Nidra