



Yoga Teacher Training

Introduction to Yoga Nidra

**By: Nancy Wile
Yoga Education Institute**

Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra is a form of deep relaxation where the practitioner's body is completely relaxed and the teacher guides the student with verbal instructions. A typical session lasts 30-45 minutes, but may also be done at the end of a hatha yoga practice for a shorter time (about 15 minutes).

The term "Yoga Nidra" means "yoga sleep" in Sanskrit. The purpose of yoga nidra is to come into a state of consciousness that is between waking and sleeping, in which your body is completely relaxed. And, then once in that state, become increasingly aware of your inner world by listening to the verbal instructions of the yoga nidra teacher. In yoga nidra, we encourage the practitioner to withdraw or internalize the senses, except for hearing, which still connects them to the instructions. The goals of yoga nidra are similar to meditation in that you are moving towards an increasing state of meditative consciousness, or Samadhi.

The practice of yoga nidra starts with concentration, examining what we want from life and setting an intention for the practice. The teacher then guides students to focus their awareness on breath, sensations in the body, and thoughts, simply observing each part.

Benefits of Yoga Nidra

Some of the benefits of yoga nidra include:

- Reduced tension and anxiety
- Release negative emotions
- Calms the nervous system
- Helps people cope with PTSD or other trauma
- Relieves headaches
- Lowers blood pressure

History of Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra first originated in India more than 2000 years ago based on the Sankhya philosophy. This philosophy taught that there was a separation between the witness and that being witnessed (thoughts, objects, feelings, etc). Sankhya taught that the key to happiness is to become aware of this dualism. Centuries later the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta advanced the idea that the "objects" we witness or experience are not in fact separate, but are a projection of our witnessing and that we are connected to them in that way. By exploring the objects in our awareness, we can experience connectedness with everything. Yoga Nidra gives students a way to observe their thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, as a separate witness, but also to fully experience them.

In modern time, yoga nidra first became popularized by Satyananda Saraswati (1923-2009), who was a student of Sivananda Saraswati, the founder of the Divine Line Society. His teachings emphasized an integral approach to yoga, attempting to integrate the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions into each practice. He developed a technique of yoga nidra that is officially known as Satyananda Yoga Nidra, and standardized the different stages of Yoga Nidra.

Yoga Nidra has continued to evolve. Clinical psychologist, Dr. Richard Miller, has developed the iRest system of Yoga Nidra as a therapeutic practice that can be used in settings such as hospitals and clinics for war veterans. In 2005, he published a book, *Yoga Nidra: A Meditative Practice for Deep Relaxation and Healing*. He currently leads the nonprofit, Integrative Restoration Institute, an organization dedicated to the research, teaching, and practice of yoga nidra and yoga philosophy.

"Most people are trying to change themselves," Miller says. "Yoga nidra asks them to welcome themselves. That moment of true welcoming is where the profound transformation takes place."

Getting Started:

For your own yoga nidra practice, or for your students, you can use the following guidelines:

1. Set up your yoga nidra practice space

You can set up your space in any of the following ways: 1) lie with your back on your mat with a bolster under your knees and a folded blanket under your head, or 2) place a bolster lengthwise on your mat and slipping a block under the top end, so that the bolster slants gently, and then lie down with your sitting bones on the mat and with the bolster supporting you from the low back to the head.

Once you are settled into your space, notice and welcome sounds, smells, and taste as well as color and light. Release excess tension throughout your body and feel a sense of relaxation spreading throughout your entire body and mind. Then follow these steps:

2. Connect to Your Heartfelt Desire (Sankalpa). Bring to mind your heart's deepest desire (sankalpa)—something that you want more than anything else in life. Perhaps it is a desire for health, well-being, or awakening. Feel this heartfelt desire with your entire body while imagining and experiencing it in this moment as if it were true.

3. Set an Intention. Reflect on your intention for your practice today. It might be to relax and rest, or to inquire into a particular sensation, emotion, or belief. Whatever your intention, welcome and affirm it with your entire body and mind.

4. Find Your Inner Resource. Bring attention to your Inner Resource, a safe haven within your body where you experience feelings of security, well-being, and calm. You may imagine a place, person, or experience that helps you feel secure and at ease and that helps you feel within your body the sense of well-being. Re-experience your Inner Resource at any time during your practice or in daily life when you feel overwhelmed by an emotion, thought, or life circumstance and wish to feel secure and at ease.

5. Scan Your Body. Gradually move your awareness through your body. Sense your jaw, mouth, ears, nose, and eyes. Sense your forehead, scalp, neck, and the inside of your throat. Scan your attention through your left arm and left palm, your right arm and right palm, and then both arms and hands simultaneously. Sense your torso, pelvis, and sacrum. Experience sensation in your left hip, leg, and foot, and then in your right hip, leg, and foot. Sense your entire body as a field of radiant sensation.

6. Become Aware of Your Breath. Sense the body breathing by itself. Observe the natural flow of air in the nostrils, throat, and rib cage as well as the rise and fall of the abdomen with each breath. Feel each breath as flowing energy coursing throughout your entire body.

7. Welcome Your Feelings. Without judging or trying to change anything, welcome the sensations (such as heaviness, tension, or warmth) and emotions (such as sadness, anger, or worry) that are present in your body and mind. Also notice opposite sensations and emotions: If you feel worry, call up feelings of serenity; if you feel tense, experience ease. Sense each feeling and its opposite within your body.

8. Witness Your Thoughts. Notice and welcome the thoughts, memories, and images that are present in your mind. Observe your thoughts without judging them or trying to change them. As you come upon beliefs that you hold about yourself, also bring to mind and experience their opposites, welcoming your experience just as it is.

9. Experience Joy. Welcome sensations of joy, well-being, or bliss emanating from your heart or belly and spreading throughout your body and into the space around you. With every exhalation, experience sensations of warmth, joy, and well-being radiating throughout your body.

10. Observe Your Self. Be aware of your sense of "I-ness," or personality. Notice this sense of identity when you say "I'm hungry," "I'm angry," or "I'm happy." Then, experience yourself as an observing witness or Awareness that is cognizant of these feelings. Set aside thinking and dissolve into Awareness, awake and conscious of the self.

11. Reflect on Your Practice. As you complete your practice, reflect on the journey you've just taken. Affirm how the feeling of pure Being, or pure Awareness, is always present as a deep, unchanging peace that underlies every changing circumstance. Imagine integrating that feeling into your everyday life, in both pleasant and difficult moments, and always reconnecting to that sense of equanimity.

To Finish: At your own pace, transition back to your waking life, reorienting to your surroundings. Come back slowly, and pause for a moment to feel grateful for taking this time for yourself.

Sample Yoga Nidra Script

This script goes through the first four stages of Yoga Nidra. This script works well after yoga class or on its own.

Script:

Entry

Let your body sink into the floor. Get comfortable. Shift and move a little to let your body settle deeper into the ground. Be comforted that at this time, everything is okay. Nothing else matters right now. Everything is okay. Nowhere to go and nothing to do. Here to simply feel your body and listen.

Do not worry or become agitated if you don't hear everything I say. It is natural to flow in and out of conscious hearing. The deepest part of you, your core self, is always listening. Whatever you experience today, this practice will still work. There is no way to do this wrong. Simply listen without trying too hard.

You are in a safe environment, protected space, held space. Come into stillness now and remain still, for deep rest, deep nourishment. Feel your natural breath. Breath flowing through you. Allow your bones to become heavy. Feel your bones heavy and sinking into the earth. Release your bones heavy and sinking.

Sankalpa

Go deep inside now. Deep inside to notice your heart's deepest longing. What does your heart desire? Create a Sankalpa; an intention or affirmation based on your heart's longing. Make a silent positive statement in the present tense, as though it's already happening. For example, you may make your Sankalpa, "I flow through life with ease and peace. I am relaxed." Come up with your own Sankalpa. Then state it three times silently to yourself as though it is already happening.

Body Scan

Allow your awareness to travel through your body now on a journey of sensation. Simply feel each part of your body as it is mentioned, without moving, and remaining still. Welcome all sensation, just as it is. Begin with the mouth, feel your mouth, feel sensation in your mouth. Feel your jaw, lips, upper lip, lower lip, notice where the lips touch, feel the inside of the mouth, roof, under tongue, upper teeth and gums, lower teeth and gums, tongue, roof of the tongue, center of the tongue, tip, notice the sense of taste in your mouth. Feel the left inner cheek, right inner cheek. Now feel all the parts together as a whole. Feel your mouth as sensation, as energy, as radiant vibration.

Feel your nose. Notice the nostrils; left nostril, right nostril, both nostrils. Notice the breath. Notice your nasal passages, follow the nasal passages all the way back into your head.

Become aware of your ears. Right ear, left ear, both ears simultaneously. Feel the wrinkles and folds of the ears, back of the ears, earlobes, ear canals. Follow the ear canals into the inner ear. Notice your ears receiving sound; listening. Feel your ears hearing.

Feel your eyes; left eye, right eye, both eyes together. Notice your eyelids. Feel each eyelash. Notice where the eyelids touch. Become aware of the surface of the eyes, the center of the eyes, the backs of the eyes. Feel your eyes now as energy. Feel your eyes as radiant glowing embers.

Bring your awareness to the crown of your head, to your forehead, and to your face. Feel your whole head. Feel your neck. Feel the back of your neck, sides of your neck and throat.

Notice your right palm, your thumb, first finger, second finger, third finger, fourth finger. Feel your whole hand, alive with energy. Feel your wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, and whole shoulder. Notice the notch at the base of your throat. Notice your left palm, your thumb, first finger, second finger, third finger, fourth finger. Feel your whole hand, alive and filled with sensation. Feel your left wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, and whole shoulder. Notice the notch at the base of your throat.

Become aware of your upper chest, upper back, and shoulder blades. Feel your heart center. Notice your abdomen, the ribs on your back, your solar plexus. Feel your belly, naval center, pelvis, and hips. Feel your right hip, thigh, knee, lower leg, calf, ankle, foot, toes, sole of the foot, and your whole foot. Feel again the pelvis, left hip, thigh, knee, lower leg, ankle, foot, toes, sole of the foot, and your whole foot. Notice both feet. Feel your root between your sitting bones. Then notice your navel center, your solar plexus, your heart center, throat center, mouth, third eye between your brows, and the crown of your head.

Feel now the back of your body resting on the earth. Bring awareness of the whole back of your body as sensation alive with vibration. Feel now the front of your body. Filled with radiant vibration. Pour your awareness like liquid into the right side of your body. Feel the right side of your body. Pour your awareness like flowing sensors into the left side of your body. Feel your left side. Feel the midline of your body. Feel your body as a whole, complete entity. Feel sensation throughout your entire body.

Breath and Prana Awareness

Begin to notice your breath. Notice your natural breath as it flows through you. Feel the in breath. Note the outbreath. As you exhale, imagine a wave passing downward through your body, carrying away tensions and creating a sense of calm. As you inhale, feel a fresh wave flowing upward through your whole body, invigorating and refreshing every cell. Exhale, feeling a wave flowing downward through your body, creating a sense of relaxation and serenity. Inhale, feel a fresh wave upward that energizes every cell.

Return:

Repeat your Sankalpa. Remember your heart's desire. Remember your affirmation. Repeat it again three times as the present truth. Repeat it three time to yourself. Know that it is the truth. (pause)

Begin breathing more deeply.

Notice the back side of your body touching the earth. Feel all the places where you touch the ground. Notice the front of your body facing towards the sky. Notice all of the space surrounding you. Let your body expand wider into the space that surrounds you. Notice your breath. Feel its rhythm and pace.

We are now completing this relaxation practice. Before moving, sense your fingers and just imagine them moving. Now begin to wiggle your fingers, feeling every sensation as you do. Notice your toes. Begin to wiggle your toes.

Gently rock your head from side to side. Begin to awaken more. Draw a deeper breath into your belly, and into your chest. Rock slowly over to your right side. Imagine that you are water. (pause) Press your left palm into the floor, and flow, like a river, up to a comfortable seated position. Lengthen your spine. Take a full breath in. As you exhale, imagine filling with divine light. Bring your hands to your face. Notice how you feel right now. Notice the effects of your relaxation practice. (pause)

May there always be peace in your heart, eternal peace. When you're ready, slowly open your eyes. Namaste.