

WHAT IS YOGA Nidra?

Yoga Nidra is an ancient, sacred yogic process of meditation. It is a form of mindfulness training wherein the mind regains its ability to be one-pointed and undistracted. It is simple to learn, easy to practice and a tool you can use throughout your lifetime.

During Nidra you enter a profound state of receptive relaxation, while remaining totally aware and alert throughout the process. Yoga Nidra deepens the experience of meditation, and encourages meditative inquiry in order to provide healing and ease stress. Nidra invites intelligence and clarity to rise to the surface of the conscious mind; and allows the brain to access wisdom resources of higher levels of consciousness.

Nidra is the deepest and most profound form of relaxation that takes a person to a 'hypnagogic' state (somewhere between sleeping and wakefulness). Although you are in a profound state of relaxation, you remain totally aware and alert in the practice. Nidra doesn't require that you believe anything; the only requirement is you practice and discover for yourself the intrinsic healing powers of the process.

BENEFITS OF YOGA Nidra

- Profound relaxation in mind and body – induces deep and permanent relaxation of entire body, mind and personality.
- Commences a state of meditation.
- Eradicates deep-rooted psychological problems, complexes, neuroses and inhibitions.
- Rejuvenates the whole human organism on all levels (physical, pranic, mental).
- Acts as a non-chemical tranquilizer that quickly removes insomnia and induces sleep.
- Opens up the potential of the mind and awakens intuition.
- Increases memory and learning capacity of students; brings extraordinary improvement in the absorption and retention of information from external sources as well as the internal knowledge within one's own mind.
- Neutralizes and overcomes anxiety, fear, anger and depression.
- Aids in sleep ailments, as one-hour of Nidra equals approximately four-hours of non REM sleep: a light can affect our over REM also.
- Helps remove psychosomatic ailments (i.e. blood pressure), eliminates stress, overcome issues within personal relationships and can resolve past trauma.

WELCOME DISCOMFORT

Your body is a guesthouse and Nidra teaches you how to invite every imaginable guest in for 'tea and conversation'. When discomfort arises, don't try to adjust it away. First, receive and welcome it in as a messenger and inquire as to what its message is.

Sometimes discomfort simply wants to whisper something in your ear and then it goes away. Other times it may want you to adjust your body.

Observe your tendency to react – your propensity to jump away from experience. Nidra is a path of welcoming where you are learning to meet, greet and welcome everything that life brings. Only then can you uncover your innate clarity, right action and peace of mind.

EMOTIONS and MEMORIES ARISE

At times, Nidra will invite memories and emotions in for 'tea and conversation'. You have an innate intelligence that knows exactly what to do in every situation in your life. Fear is always about the future. Reactivity is about the past. The correct action is being in the NOW moment – present.

Nidra practice reveals and teaches you how to live in the NOW so that you can access your inborn ability to respond appropriately to every situation.

OPEN TO BEING – AWARENESS

Nidra reveals that your body, mind and entire universe lives within you, in your awareness.

You may experience beyond the confines of your body; this can feel like you're having an out of body experience. However, no matter how far out you expand, you always here as the witness to your experience. Yoga Nidra hands you a key that unlocks the mystery that is your life and this world.

THE SCIENCE OF YOGA Nidra

THE SCIENCE OF YOGA Nidra NEUROPLASTICITY AND NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION.

Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to modify its connections and re-wire itself and reorganization. These changes range from individual neuron pathways making new connections, to systematic adjustments like cortical remapping.

Beyond physical form, the practice of yoga is about becoming aware of what is occurring on the inside. So remember to pay attention to your thoughts, feelings and internal dialogue as you practice. When it comes to neuroplasticity, the inner journey is just as important as creating new musculoskeletal patterns.

Yoga Nidra is, essentially the lying down bit of a yoga practice where you consciously relax your mind. The practice engages the left and right side of the brain which aids creativity, reduces stress and builds neuroplasticity. Western science has proven that a 45-minute Yoga Nidra session has the same impact on the brain as two to four hours of deep sleep.

To provided evidence to this concept, we will look at an article written by Robert Nilsson: Pictures of the brain's activity during Yoga Nidra.



Preparation for the scanning at The State University Hospital in Copenhagen. The 21 electrodes connected to the EEG are in place on the head. Now, all that are needed are headphones for Yoga Nidra. Only the person being measured is in the room when the scan begins.

Researchers have, for the first time, succeeded in taking pictures of the brain during a meditative deep- relaxation, with as short a scanning time as one minute per image. The pictures were taken by one of the most advanced medical research instruments, the PET scanner, at The State University Hospital in Copenhagen. The initiators were researchers, Dr. Hans Lou and Dr. Troels Kjær from the Kennedy Institute in Copenhagen. Published in 1999. When they contacted us, they said they wanted to measure awareness! But how do you do that? At the Scandinavian Yoga and Meditation School, we have previously collaborated with a number of researchers who were examining the effects of yoga's breathing exercises on blood pressure, among other things.

We have also measured participants for six consecutive years, at Haa Retreat Center, to determine the effects of the Three Months Retreat on the level of cholesterol in the blood, on the body's hormone balance, and on the balance between the two brain halves; as well as the result of awareness training, for instance, on the reduction of fear in a normal person. To actually measure consciousness and how the brain functions by conscious control of awareness, was, however, quite new for us.

At first, we proposed that people doing Kriya Yoga could be measured. This is a meditation which has given very distinct results in other studies (see Mapping the brains activity after Kriya Yoga). However, at present, it is only possible to lie down in a PET scanner, so a person sitting in a meditation pose cannot be measured.

We therefore agreed with the researchers to measure people practising Yoga Nidra from the CD Experience Yoga Nidra, guided by Swami Janakananda. This also ensured that all those who were measured did exactly the same thing.

We limited the research to those who practised Kriya Yoga regularly – they were to do Kriya Yoga in the morning, before going to the hospital to have brain scans.

The measurements

The subjects lay, one at a time, in the PET scanner. It takes just one minute to gather the data of the brain scan, but there must also be an interval of ten minutes before the next scan can be made. Eight pictures were produced from the scanned material.



They show which areas were active before (one picture), during (four pictures) and after Yoga Nidra (three pictures).

The person lying in the PET scanner is not disturbed by the procedure, but practises the Deep Yoga Nidra without pause from start to finish.

Also, during the whole procedure, the brain's activity was being measured by an electroencephalograph (EEG, see *The relaxed state and science*). The EEG curve showed, as expected, that the subjects were in a meditative state during the entire Yoga Nidra.

Afterwards, the images were resized into the standard size (Talairach space) to ensure that they are proportional and that the different areas of the brain are exactly in the same location, regardless of the subjects' differences in brain size and overall shape.

The data from the pictures was compared and the mean values calculated.

Pictures were taken of a normal waking state with closed eyes, as well as of four different practices in Yoga Nidra. By comparing this data and eliminating the normal activity from the activity during Yoga Nidra, it is possible to see which areas of the brain were stimulated by the relaxation.

And in order to discover what is characteristic of the normal state, in comparison to the state of Yoga Nidra, the values of the pictures taken before and after Yoga Nidra were combined, and then the values of the four pictures taken during Yoga Nidra were subtracted.

Now, the researchers wanted to see the difference between the various sections of Yoga Nidra. While the first picture was being taken, the subject was experiencing his/her body, especially the various parts of the face. The next image was taken during the experience of happiness and contentment, the third during the experience of a summer day in the countryside and the fourth at the end of Yoga Nidra, during the experience when asked “who am I”.

The sampled data showed that the more ‘concrete’ tasks, such as the experience of the body and the landscape, activated more or less the same regions in the brain (fig. 4); while the more ‘abstract’ tasks, such as experiencing happiness and who am I, activated other regions (fig. 3). The results increased dopamine production, up to 65%, while listening to the CD “Experience Yoga Nidra” by Swami Janakananda.

An article about the scientific study conducted in London is under preparation, with contributions by the people who were measured in the research.

The first scientific study; “A 15O-H2O PET study of meditation and the resting state of normal consciousness” (Hans C. Lou, Troels W. Kjaer et al.), done in Copenhagen, is published in the magazine: Human Brain Mapping , Volume 7 Issue 2, pages 98-105, February 1999.

The second study; “Increased dopamine tone during meditation-induced change of consciousness” (Troels W Kjaer, Camilla Bertelsen et al.), done in London and Denmark, is published in Cognitive Brain Research, Volume 13, Issue 2, April 2002, Pages 255-259.

Unfortunately in this abstract the writers have not clarified that, what they call the “meditation”, is actually the Yoga Nidra. However, this is clear in the paper itself.

The measurements of the brain’s activity (EEG) indicated that the subjects were in a deeply relaxed state, similar to that of sleep, during the whole Yoga Nidra. The theta activity rose significantly (11%p) on all the twenty-one electrodes. The reduction of the alpha activity (2% NS) was insignificant, showing that this meditative state is altogether different from that of the sleeping state and comprises conscious awareness. Furthermore, the state was constant and evenly distributed over the entire brain for the forty- five minutes the relaxation lasted.

The research took one and a half hours per participant. During that period, the person lay completely still in the same position. When the state prior to and following Yoga Nidra – where one just lies and rests – was compared with the state during Yoga Nidra, the measurements showed a significant difference between the two states. This confirms the importance of using a technique if one wants to achieve results, such as those described in this and other Bindu articles.

The PET scanner's pictures show that the subjects were not in a drowsy or unconscious state during the relaxation, as one would expect of a person in such a deep state. The participants remained considerably aware of what was happening. It is clearly visible how specific regions of the brain were activated sequentially, according to where the subject was in Yoga Nidra. What happens in the brain during Yoga Nidra or where it happens is not a matter of chance.

There was a significant similarity between the pictures of the seven yoga teachers who were measured.

Effortless concentration

Something that may seem paradoxical to those who have no experience of meditation, is the fact that these clear results, which reveal a high degree of concentration, are brought about entirely without effort. While you are lying in Yoga Nidra, you are not trying to force the various things that you experience. On the contrary, as the EEG shows, you are completely relaxed from start to finish. You just listen to the instructions and experience clearly what happens, as a child listening to a fairy tale – actively participating, but without effort.

The results confirm the experience of the yogi: Concentration is a spontaneous state, which comes of its own accord when a method is used that removes whatever is hindering it.

And as the doctors said: " It proves that the 1.5 kg (brain mass) with the unknown content can control its own activity in an astonishingly precise manner. From a holistic point of view, it indicates that the soul and body act in unity."

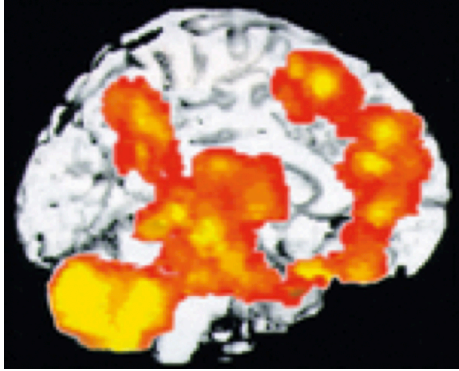
Conclusion

Consciousness during Yoga Nidra is in a very deep and stable state.

The measurements show, for the first time, that one can be completely aware in such a deep state – that one can consciously experience and control the brain's activity simultaneously. This confirms that meditation is the fourth major state, equal to dreaming, sleeping and wakefulness.

The results can therefore be said to be very important news within this field of research.

1-REST

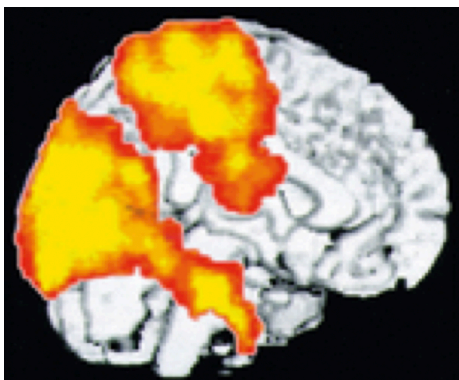


This picture is based on the data gathered prior to and following Yoga Nidra. It illustrates the state closest to normal waking consciousness, though without being a tired or stressed state.

Those who use Yoga Nidra remark that not only do they get something out of the deep relaxation while doing it, but that it has a definite beneficial effect on the remaining part of their day. In this picture, it is the frontal part of the brain, responsible for the overall management, which is active.

One of its capacities is to ensure that we can function in a complex society, as it processes the signals from the deeper emotional and instinctive regions of the brain. The brain stem and the cerebellum are also active, indicating that one is 'ready for action'.

2-MEDITATION

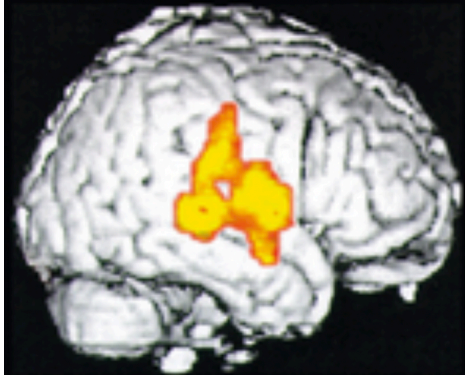


This picture shows the general state during the entire Yoga Nidra. The visual centre at the back of the head and the somatosensory centre at the top of the head (for the sense of touch and body position) are active and are in contact with the limbic system. This implies an increased ability to visualise and, more importantly, that there is better contact with emotions.

Some of the teachers also had distinct activity in the centre for long term memory, which is consistent with accounts from people who meditate, that very lucid memories can appear during or after a meditation.

We must, however, emphasise that the subjects' experience and regular use of Kriya Yoga (meditation and pranayama practice) possibly intensifies the effects of Yoga Nidra.

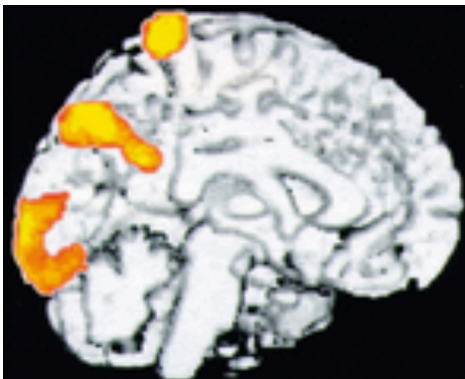
3-ABSTRACT



This picture is created on the basis of measurements taken during the feeling of happiness and at the end of the relaxation during the experience of identity, of being centred. During these 'abstract experiences' in Yoga Nidra, the centre for speech and language was especially active.

It must be said, however, that this and the next picture only show the areas where the most activity occurs, and not the general activity in the whole brain, as is shown in picture 2.

4-CONCRETE



It was primarily the visual and tactile centres which were active as the subjects went through the body's different parts (especially the face) and also when they experienced a pleasant summer day in the country.

When looking at these pictures (1, 2 and 4) one must bear in mind that the luminous areas are within the brain, and not only on the surface of the cerebral cortex.

In picture number three, on the other hand, the activity is in the cortex. All active areas were basically the same, that is symmetrical, in both brain halves.

The pictures of the brain were taken in a PET scanner (Positron Emission Tomography), which measures the flow of blood through different parts of the brain. This is done by injecting water with a weak radioactive trace into the blood stream.

Tomography is derived from the Greek word “tomos”, meaning section. In the PET scanner, numerous 4.25 mm thick sections of the brain are registered, giving a three dimensional picture of the brain’s activity.

When one part of the brain is particularly active, the flow of blood increases, and by comparing several pictures it is possible to see where the brain’s activity rises under certain conditions.

Why it is interesting – a comment by psychologist Ronny Öhrnell:

The EEG measurements have previously only been one dimensional – skin resistance, blood pressure etc. – and have only shown that the state changes.

That means that a perpendicular dimension has been described, for example a deepening of the state. On the other hand, it has not been possible to measure or substantiate the content of that altered state.

With this latest research, a horizontal dimension is added to the measurements of the altered state of consciousness, giving it life. What occurs on the deeper levels of consciousness can now be measured and shown.

The research shows that some sensory centers in the brain are active, but that activity is internal. From our own experience, we know that internal experiences are more changeable than those we see and hear through our senses in the reality around us. Our thoughts, our imagination and our dreams continuously take on new forms. When we allow these centers to be involved with the inner experiences, without being aware of anything from outside, where then do the impulses come from? From deeper planes? From the surroundings, after all? Or are they formed there, in the sight and touch centers? Does the language center have the same function on the deeper inner plane? Or does it have other functions?

There is a new world to be discovered here. It can be done by taking measurements and by combining the measurements with the account the meditator gives of what he or she experiences along the way. The research also confirms a lot of what was previously described about relaxation and meditation by people who knew it through their own experience – and that what you experience within, is another reality to that of the external senses, which to a degree obey different laws.

The process is eloquently explained in a few quotes from the book Yoga Nidra for Complete Relaxation and Stress Relief, by Julie Lusk. Lusk explains:

“Our day-to-day frame of consciousness (beta brain waves) makes it extremely difficult to make and maintain our good intentions because they crash into our long term conditioning, habits, and social pressures.”

“Through no fault of our own, your mind is simply not very receptive to making these changes. During yoga Nidra, we knowingly, consciously, and consecutively experience different types of brainwave levels that are receptive to change that include alpha, theta and delta frequencies, also associated with levels of consciousness. The level reached during Yoga Nidra depends on the depth of your experience. When we implant a resolve in the subconscious mind, useless thoughts and behaviors can be weeded out and the conditions are created for significant and transformative change to take root and grow.” Regular practice will improve the experience of Yoga Nidra.

THE STAGES OF YOGA Nidra

Our mind needs consistent training in order to break free of habits that cause tension, conflict and keep us away from our natural state of peace. Each stage in Nidra addresses a specific sheath (koshas). Sheaths are conceptual tools used to organize Nidra in order to practice in a consistent manner. The Stages of Nidra are conceptual tools used to organize and keep the Nidra practice consistent.

9 STAGES OF Nidra

Stage 1: Entry

Stage 2: Sankalpa

Stage 3: Physical Body - Annamaya Kosha

Stage 4: Energetic Body - Pranayama Kosha Stage 5: Emotional Body - Manomaya Kosha

Stage 6: Intellectual Body - Vijnanamaya Kosha Stage 7: Visualization - Bliss - Anandamaya

Kosha Stage 8: Sankalpa Repeat

Stage 9: Natural State

Stage 1: Entry/Setting/Asana

It is important to practice Nidra in a temperate room, preferably quiet, however studies have shown that external distractions can enhance one's Nidra experience. Turn off All Electronics: Electronics when turned on interfere in brain waves. The brain is unable to fully relax when electronics are turned on.

Wear Comfortable Clothing: It is best to wear comfortable clothing that doesn't constrict circulation or cause discomfort while you practice Nidra. You can use a blanket and pillows to set yourself up comfortably. Although yoga Nidra mimics sleep, you want to remain alert throughout its practice.

Student Body Position

Nidra may be practiced supine on the floor, in a recliner or even on a bed (if need be). Give students permission to move if they become uncomfortable. If students fall asleep, let them sleep - it's a sign they need rest. As you become experienced in Nidra, you will have the mental freedom to practice Nidra anywhere; any room, any surface, under all circumstances and dressed in anyway throughout any external distractions!

Teacher Body Position

Sit upright with eyes open. Read script slowly and pause where stated, with your authentic voice. Project your voice enough for all students to hear.

Stage 2: Sankalpa (highest intention or vow)

Assert a Sankalpa (intention in present tense) to give the Nidra practice your wholehearted attention. The Sankalpa sets the stage for your mind to remain focused and undistracted throughout each sensation of Nidra.

Stage 3: Physical Body/Annamaya Kosha (Sensation)

Rotation of consciousness/awareness through entire body (without physical movement). The sequence of rotation relates directly to motor homunculus: symbolic person embedded within brain matter. This stage of Nidra accesses the brains sensory motor cortex.

Stage 4: Energetic Body (Breath) – Pranamaya Kosha

One becomes acutely aware of breath (often count backwards). - Promotes relaxation and concentration. The brain moves from busy beta state to a relaxed alpha state. - Breathing changes from being a function of brain stem to being a function of cerebral cortex (higher brain). The body releases endorphins (natural pain-killers) during this stage.

Stage 5: Emotional Body/Manomaya Kosha (opposites sensory/feelings)

Opposite emotions or sensations are explored while practicing non-attachment. The Limbic system (reptilian brain) is stimulated during this stage. The opposites stage of Nidra develops will power, emotional control and greater equanimity.

Stage 6: Intellectual Body/Vijnanamaya Kosha (imagery)

Simple thoughts, beliefs and images are visualized. Develops self-awareness; and relaxes the mind by cleansing it of painful and disturbing material: samskaras.

Stage 7: Joy/Anandamaya Kosha (visualization)

This stage is used to strengthen connection between physical, emotional, cognitive, energetic, intellectual and spiritual bodies. Use visualization skill to create desires and pleasures.

Stage 8: Sankalpa (repeat)

Repeat the Sankalpa exactly as it was previously stated. This will anchor the Sankalpa and support the Sankalpa to come true.

Stage 9: Natural State/Sahaj (Return)

Students are guided to return to their physical bodies, into real space.

UNDERSTANDING THE 5 KOSHAS

We humans are like a lamp that has five lampshades over our light. As the light shines through the lampshades, it is progressively changed in color and nature. On the one hand, the shades provide the individualized beauty of each lamp. Yet, the lampshades also obscure the pure light.

The Yoga path of Self-realization is one of progressively moving inward, through each of those lampshades, so as to experience the purity at the eternal center of consciousness, while at the same time allowing that purity to animate through our individuality. These five levels are called Koshas, which literally means sheaths (like lampshades covering the light).

In truth, all of the levels, layers, koshas, or sheaths of our reality is only appearance, or maya (real in the sense of dealing with the external world); underneath all of those appearances, we are pure, divine, eternal consciousness, or whatever name you prefer to call it. While some view maya as meaning that nothing is real, and turn this into a cold-hearted intellectual practice, others view the illusion of maya as being shakti, the creative force of the universe. In this way, the maya of the koshas is experienced both as unreal and, at the same time, as the beautiful manifestations of the universal oneness. The Koshas date thousands of years back, as they are found in the Upanishads.

Physical - Annamaya kosha

Anna means “food”. All of the physical aspects of life come and go, and are consumed by another aspect of external reality. Thus, the outermost of the koshas is called the sheath of food or Annamaya kosha. In Vedanta practice, we train this aspect of ourselves, take care of it, nurture it, so that we can both enjoy our external lives and go inward without it being an obstacle during meditation time. In meditation, we become aware of Annamaya kosha, explore it, and then go inward, to and through the other koshas.

Energy - Pranamaya kosha

The next of the koshas is Pranamaya kosha. Prana means “energy”. It is the vital force that produces the subtle vibrations related to breath, and which are the driving force behind the physical aspect of the senses and the operation of the physical body. It allows the invisible indweller, our True Self, to be able to animate in the external world. At the same time, however, it allows the eternally still, silent center of consciousness to be mistakenly identified as the moving, visible physical body. For both a healthy life and meditation practice, Vedanta says that it is very useful, or essential that this level of our being be trained, regulated, and directed,

so that it flows smoothly. In meditation, we become aware of Pranamaya kosha, explore it, then go inward, to and through the other koshas.

Mental - Manamaya kosha

The next of the koshas is Manamaya kosha. Mana means “mind”. It is the level of processing thoughts and emotions. It is in direct control of the operation, through the prana, of the physical body and senses. It is like a supervisor in a factory, in that it gives instructions, but is not supposed to be the manager of the factory of life. Because of this, it naturally has doubts and created illusions. When it receives clear instructions from the deeper level, it functions quite well. However, when it is clouded over by its illusions, the deeper wisdom is fogged out. After taking care of the physical body and training the energy flow of prana, the most important kosha to be trained in positive ways is this level of mind. In meditation, we become aware of Manamaya kosha, explore it, then go inward, to and through the remaining koshas.

Wisdom - Vijnanamaya kosha

The next of the koshas is Vijnanamaya kosha. Vijnana means “knowing”. It is the sheath of wisdom that is underneath the processing, thinking aspect of mind. It knows, decides, judges and discriminates between this and that, between useful and not useful. It is the level of ego consciousness, the powerful wave of ‘I-am-ness’. This ‘I-am-ness’ itself is a positive influence, but when it gets co-mingled with memories, and is clouded over by the manas, it loses its positive strength. A major part of sadhana (spiritual practice) is gaining ever increasing access to this level of our being. It is the level that has the higher wisdom to seek Truth, to go within, in search of the eternal center of consciousness.

Bliss - Anandamaya kosha

Anandamaya kosha is the most interior of the koshas, the first of the koshas surrounding the Atman, the eternal center of consciousness. Ananda means “bliss”. However, it is not bliss as a mere emotion experienced at the level of the sheath of mind. Ananda is a whole different order of reality from that of the mind. It is peace, joy and love that is underneath, beyond the mind, independent of any reason or stimulus to cause a happy mental reaction. It is simply being, resting in bliss called ananda. Yet, even this bliss, however wonderful it is, is still a covering, a sheath, a lampshade covering the pure light of consciousness. It is the subtle most of the five koshas. In the silence of deep meditation, this too is let go of, so as to experience the center.

Atman - Self

Atman is the Self, the eternal center of consciousness, which was never born and never dies. In the metaphor of the lamp and the lampshades, Atman is the light itself, though to even describe it as that is incomplete and incorrect. The deepest light shines through the koshas, and takes on their colorings.

Atman, the Self, has been best described as complete connection to all beings, all circumstances, all events - one, with the world - yoga - unite.

CREATING SANKALPA

WHAT IS SANKALPA?

Setting a sankalpa is similar to setting a goal or intention – but it is not the same thing, so do not get them confused! When you set a sankalpa, you assume that you already have the thing that you are striving to achieve. Yes, it sounds contradicting, but this is the essence of non-dualistic teachings: that you already are whole, yet at the same time, you are constantly growing and becoming.

Thus, when you state your sankalpa, you state it in the present tense, not in the future. Whereas with goal setting, you will usually say something like “I will lose 10 pounds”, your sankalpa in this case may sound more like “I am healthy, strong and fit”.

HOW TO CHOOSE/CREATE A SANKALPA?

In order to create a sankalpa, first, you must realize that your sankalpa will change with time. You may follow one sankalpa for a week, and another one for ten years; it depends!

Begin by dropping the following question into your heart. It may help to get out a journal to contemplate your answer.

What is my soul's deepest desire at this moment?

You might hear several different answers come up. If so, ask yourself: Which of these desires feels the most nurturing? For example, perhaps one desire which arises is to buy a nicer car, while another desire is to call in more clients for your business. Your Sankalpa can be stated in different ways, however for ease and simplicity we choose to use the words “I AM”.

On your Yoga Nidra Worksheet, you have a list of potential options for your students to create their Sankalpa.

YOGA Nidra AS A MEDITATIVE PRACTICE

Yoga Nidra is a form of meditation, but there is much more to it than the general definition of meditation; however it is a very structured process. There are similarities, however there are also some key differences:

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEDITATION AND YOGA Nidra MEDITATION

You are generally in a seated position and instructed to remain alert and awake.

Aims to quiet the mind and release attachment to and identification with thoughts and emotions.

The goal is to calm the mind and keep you focused and present.

Usually controlled and conscious breath-work is commonly practiced.

Performed in the awake state of consciousness, the first level.

YOGA Nidra

- Performed in a laying down or reclined position.
- Aims to have the brain enter a theta state, or the state of mind between being awake and asleep, bordering the conscious and the unconscious.
- The goal is to receive deep rest.
- You want to let go of your breath and surrender to the script your guide is taking you through.
- Because of the structure of Yoga Nidra, you are guided to the fourth state of consciousness where your brain is thoughtless, yet you are awake; every time you reach this state, you bring a little of it with you back into your awake state: The result: calm, peace, healing, all of the benefits of a Nidra practice!
- Yoga Nidra works with the autonomic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system regulates processes of the body that take place without a conscious effort (heartbeat, breathing, digestion and blood flow). This system also includes the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

Meditation

Meditation helps us calm the sympathetic nervous system; mainly, our fight-or-flight response. We do a meditation practice to basically calm the sympathetic, or fight-or-flight and activate the parasympathetic more. There is such a benefit when those are balanced overall for immunity, digestion and stress management. But in this deeper relaxation, the pineal gland is activated and that releases the hormone melatonin: which is a very powerful antioxidant. It can help manage immune function, blood pressure, cortisol levels and induce restful sleep. A recent study showed that while meditation and yoga Nidra were both effective in reducing anxiety and stress, yoga Nidra seemed to be more effective in reducing anxiety. The study also suggested that yoga Nidra can be a useful tool in reducing both cognitive and physiological symptoms of anxiety.

THE LEVELS OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Brainwaves are used to detect our level of consciousness. They are of the greatest amplitude and slowest frequency. They typically center around a range of 1.5 to 4 cycles per second. They never go down to zero because that would mean that you were brain dead.

Brain waves are measured by The EEG (electroencephalograph) that measures different frequencies within the brain. The raw EEG has usually been described in terms of frequency bands:

GAMMA (concentration) greater than 30Hz awake

BETA (anxiety dominant, active, external attention, relaxed 13-30Hz awake ALPHA (very relaxed, passive attention) 8-12 Hz awake

THETA (deeply relaxed, inward focused) 4-8 Hz awake, unconscious, dream DELTA (deep sleep) less than 4 Hz unconscious

Unconscious State

All the way at the bottom of the spectrum of brain waves — below theta waves — are the low, deep, slow delta waves. Both delta waves and theta waves occur when you're asleep, but delta waves are the waves that dominate when you're in a period of deep, restorative sleep. They measure in the 0.5 and 4 Hz range. We get this reading the we are under anesthesia.

Dream State

During REM sleep, electrical activity in the brain oscillates at a frequency between 4 and 7 hertz, generating a type of brainwave known as theta waves. Together, these findings suggest that the most intense dreaming activity occurs when our brains are working hard to process recent, emotionally powerful experiences.

Awake State

Gamma and Beta waves are key measurements when we find ourselves alert and focussed. Alpha waves fall in the middle of the brain wave spectrum. Your brain produces these waves when you are not focusing too hard on anything in particular. Whatever you are doing, you are probably feeling relatively calm and relaxed.

Theta brain waves can also occur when you are awake, but in a very deeply relaxed state of mind; a state that some may describe as “autopilot.” However, if you experience high levels of theta waves while you are awake, you might feel a little sluggish or scattered.

Depressed people range between beta and alpha waves, they rarely get to gamma, theta or delta. Yoga Nidra is an empowering healing system that starts with relaxation and systematically . It changes and cycles through brain wave states, lowering beta and increasing alpha, theta and delta for the better. Yoga Nidra literally changes the 'fluctuations of the mind' by slowing down brain wave frequencies, hence its' healing powers for mental stresses.

DEVELOPING SCRIPTS & FINDING YOUR VOICE

It is important to use your authentic voice when guiding your students through Yoga Nidra. Please do not create a fake voice; this kills the potential formation of trust and connection. You want to keep your authentic voice, the same voice you would use in speaking calmly to a loved one. Read slowly. Insert a few seconds of pause after each sentence, and longer pauses when stated. This will likely feel uncomfortable to teach, however you will receive the benefit as a

student. A little practice and you will have it! When you teach Yoga Nidra, always remain seated with your eyes open.

You have options when it comes to the scripts. You can simply use the Nyasa technique, by rotating through the 18 or 61 points, you can use the General Nidra Script written for this training, the Advanced Nidra Script or create your own scripts using the Yoga Nidra Worksheet.

THERAPEUTIC APPLICATIONS OF YOGA Nidra

Yoga Nidra has been used in patients of:

- menstrual abnormalities
- post- traumatic stress disorder • diabetes
- anxiety
- depression
- sleep disorders
- asthma
- emotional (anger and grief) management • chemotherapy patients
- ms patients
- advanced HIV patients
- surgical preparation or recovery
- addiction recovery
- physical therapy recovery
- abuse recovery
- pre and post natal

INTENTIONS, VISUALIZATIONS & HOW THIS SHAPES THE PRACTICE

Visualizations in a Yoga Nidra practice help create a conversation between your conscious and unconscious mind. Like your conscious, or thinking, mind, your unconscious mind rests in the Vijnanamaya kosha. So much of what you believe about what's possible or what you deserve in the world comes from your unconscious. Visualizations assist the practitioner in activating

different brain waves and levels of consciousness. Along with the intention, which we call Sankalpa (a deeper form of intention), which gives the mind something to focus on from the beginning to the end of the practice. Once the sankalpa takes hold in yoga Nidra, we bring it forth into our lives.

NEUROSCIENCE PERSPECTIVES

Life's stressors can often create hormonal imbalances in the body's endocrine system. The active relaxation of yoga Nidra switches-off the sympathetic nervous system, which often contributes to adrenal fatigue, and switches-on the healing qualities of the parasympathetic nervous system.

Though rest will always assist the body to heal, studies have shown that deep sleep coupled with yoga Nidra is significantly more efficient in restoring hormonal balance than deep sleep alone.

This occurs via a slowing of individuals' brain waves cycles.

The brain uses electricity to communicate from one neuron to another. When synapses, (the bridges between neurons), fire in unison, the synchronized electrical activity is called a 'brain wave.'

BRAIN WAVE CYCLES

Gamma / Higher states of consciousness / 30 - 100 Hertz (cycles per second) Beta / Wakefulness, our normal busy state of consciousness / 14 - 30 Hertz Alpha / Wakeful relaxation with eyes closed / 8 - 13 Hertz

Theta / Drowsiness and during REM (dreaming) sleep / 4 - 7 Hertz

Delta / Deep sleep, non REM / 1 - 3 Hertz

Neuroscientists have found a correlation between an increase in alpha brain waves through meditation and the ability to reduce depressive symptoms as well as an increase in creative thinking, (interestingly, the alpha waves appear reduced when one is drowsy, asleep or relaxing with the eyes open). The brain can learn and change (neuroplasticity), so regular habits of

behaviour and their associated thoughts and emotions have the ability to alter the architecture of the brain, directly impacting cognitive functioning and potentially increasing our brain volume.

It is estimated that of 1 hour of yoga Nidra is equivalent to the healing benefits of 4 hours of deep sleep. One study across a 6-month period showed the practice successfully lowered harmful cholesterol, blood pressure, heart rate and participants' levels of adrenaline and cortisol, the hormones released when one perceives a stressful situation. Another study also found that practitioners had increased levels of dopamine, a neurotransmitter vital to optimal functioning of the brain and nervous system.

THE HISTORICAL, BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF YOGA

Nidra

Yoga Nidra is an ancient practice originating in India. Its roots can be traced back to Sankhya philosophy (first written down around 700 BC but dating back to around 1000 BC through verbal teaching).

In modern times, Satyananda Saraswati, the founder of the Bihar School of Yoga, created the modern relaxation technique Yoga Nidra in the early sixties. He claimed to have experienced yoga Nidra when he was living with his guru Sivananda Saraswati in Rishikesh. He began studying the tantric scriptures and, after practice, constructed a system of relaxation which he popularized in the mid-20th century.

Some yoga teachers do not recognize Swami Satyananda as the creator of Yoga Nidra and instead believe that it is a much older practice. However, the term yoga Nidra itself is much older. But to distinguish and protect Satyananda's own practice, they have trademarked it Satyananda Yoga Nidra™. Yet, there is among present-day yoga researchers doubts regarding Swami Satyananda's sources of inspiration. Yoga Nidra is a more grey area of yoga,

however Modern Science has amazing studies and statistics supporting the vast amount of healing benefits people receive from the practice.

MODERN VARIATIONS OF YOGA Nidra

Richard Miller, a clinical psychologist and yoga scholar, adapted the practice to Western culture toward the end of the twentieth century. The practice became more prominent in Western mainstream culture after the success of a 2006 case study that used the yoga style to treat military veterans with post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The veterans who took part in the study reportedly experienced a decrease in anxiety, sleep disturbances, and other acute PTSD symptoms when regularly practicing Yoga Nidra. Miller developed subsequent Yoga Nidra programs for active and veteran armed forces members to help combat PTSD. You can view Dr. Miller's work at www.irest.org.

The word Nyasa comprises the prefix NI meaning below or under and the word AS which means "to throw or to project". Nyasa is translated as 'putting down or in, placing, fixing, inserting or applying.

Nyasa techniques are traditional techniques that are used in Modern Variations of Yoga Nidra in the Physical Body Rotations sections of most Yoga Nidra Scripts. Nyasa includes a 61-point exercise called shavayatra, which means "traveling through the corpse." Its origin can be traced to The Vasishtha Samhita and the ayurvedic text, The Sushruta Samhita.

The second technique is an 18-point exercise, with focus on the vital Marma points of Sage Yajnavalkya and Sage Vashishta.

The practice involves taking the awareness and awareness of the breath sequentially to 18 points in the body. The vital points are called Marma points (intersections of nadis where prana flows). These points are:

- Big toes
- Ankles
- Roots of the calves
- Mid shin
- Knees

- Mid thighs Perineum
- Centre of the body Generative organs
- Navel
- Heart centre
- Pit of the throat
- Root of the tongue
- Root of the nose
- Eyes
- Eyebrow centre
- Forehead
- Top of the head

The instructions are to hold your full attention on each of the vital points, either beginning from the big toes working upwards, or from the top of the head down. Practice holding your full awareness, and awareness of the breath at each point in turn. You can vary the time spent on each point according to the time you have available. The Vedic texts state that practicing these focal points will bring you to enlightenment. Modern day science has created the 9 Stages of Yoga Nidra to receive even greater benefit to our human brain.

HYPNOSIS CONCEPTS, but not hypnosis

In Yoga Nidra, the conscious mind is still active and can assume control at any time, whereas and in hypnotism, the consciousness often is suppressed and you might have no recollection anymore of what you experienced. In Yoga Nidra, the role of the teacher is to guide and bring you to a state of deep awareness.

Yoga-Nidra (the yoga of sleep) is one of these practices. It is similar to hypnosis and other techniques of mind-body methods of healing used in psychotherapy. It will be compared to hypnosis, a systematic, mind-body, trance-inducing technique, used as an adjunct with western forms of psychotherapy.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CLIENTS' NEEDS & HOW TO DEVELOP ONE ON ONE SESSIONS

When working one-on-one with your clients, it is important to understand why they are requesting Yoga Nidra or why you are suggesting it to them. You are now well versed on the benefits of Yoga Nidra, so let's discuss how to create one-on-one sessions.

Guide your client through their Yoga Nidra Worksheet.

Start off with Section 5 of your worksheet: Sankalpa. Have a conversation with your client explaining what a Sankalpa is, and together you can decide what best suits them.

Next look at sections 6 and 7, Emotions and Images. Ask them what emotions and images they find most appealing and calming to them, and which ones trigger them. When working one-on-one, I always insert the calming images and sensations and remove any triggers. Once the student has advanced, the triggers can slowly be added in. If someone has a background of PTSD or another mental ailment, it is recommended to keep all images and sensations calming, and only add in triggers as the recommendation of the client's therapist.

Lastly review the visualizations with them. Let them add or edit or choose the theme for their visualization. Their visualization should create a feeling of safety and happiness. I love working one-on-one as I come up with many different ideas for themes!

YOGA Nidra FOR GENERAL AUDIENCES, SPECIAL POPULATIONS, AND HOW TO TAILOR YOGA Nidra FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS – INCLUDING HOSPICE, FIRST RESPONDERS, NURSES, PRE-NATAL & MORE

As previously mentioned, keep your general audience scripts simple. The general and advanced scripts in this training are very suffice, I have countless amounts of positive feedback from them.

When tailoring your script for specific groups, sit with the group, as you would your one-on-one client and have a conversation about how Yoga Nidra will best serve the group. They can create a collective sankalpa or each group member can create an individual sankalpa. Ask them as group to choose their emotions, images and collective visualization that will bring peace and calm to their experience.

For instance, for hospice workers, nurses and first responders, leave out any images of old people and dead body, anything to do with illness and stress and anxiety.

For prenatal - insert images and emotions about a healthy baby and healthy mom. Bring in ease. The visualization could be on a beach with mom holding a beautiful healthy baby. Bring baby into your theme.

If an individual has suffered a loss of someone - leave out all mention of the similar image or feeling to start.

PROPS AND CLASSROOM SETTINGS

Setting up your physical body for success is a must for Yoga Nidra. If you typically get uncomfortable in a 15 minute savasana; you must find a different way. It is also ok to practice yoga Nidra in a recliner, bed or even a hammock.

A supported savasana has also been successful. How to set up a supported savasana:

- A pillow under low back, knees and head
- Supported arms, especially if tight shoulders
- An eye pillow should your students wish to have (or small hand towel is suffice) * You can add a drop of
- your students favourite essential oil, for one-on-one classes
- A light blanket to stay warm

Classroom should be dimly lit and not too hot. Teacher should be positioned so all students can hear them. Teacher should not be walking around. Students should move their water bottles away

WHEN TO PRACTICE YOGA Nidra

The only answer to this question is to NOT practice yoga Nidra on a full stomach - this increases your chances of falling asleep. Some people prefer to practice in the morning, as it gives them energy, others in the evening, as it relaxes them immensely. You need to commit to a practice and see what time of day works best for you.

PUTTING YOUR SKILLS INTO ACTION

Teaching Yoga Nidra is relatively easy. Keep your voice authentic, and read slowly. I know we have already covered this, but it is very important!

If you do not wish to use your Yoga Nidra Worksheet to create your own custom scripts, you could simply use the General Script for the rest of time and your students would love it.

If you work one-on-one you could also stick to the General and Advanced scripts, or start to customize them by using your Yoga Nidra Worksheet.

Here is a study done by sleep.biomedcentral.com:

Background

Chronic insomnia is a common sleep problem and there is a need to complement the existing treatment options. Yoga Nidra practice is documented to be used for sleep by sages. Recently, yoga Nidra has been used in patients of menstrual abnormalities, post- traumatic stress disorder, diabetes, anxiety and depression but little is known about its effect on sleep or sleep disorders. Although we find description of yoga Nidra in literature, there is no scientific report of its application in sleep disorders. The objective of the study was to develop yoga Nidra model in management of chronic insomnia patients. The model was developed using inputs from yoga school trained instructors of yoga Nidra.

Case presentations

Patient 01: 60 years old widower with complaints of sleep maintenance insomnia since 20 years. He had worry at daytime regarding falling off to sleep which became even worse at bedtime. He had history of benign prostatic hypertrophy and had no history of any medications for sleep or any other disease. Patient 02: 78 years old male self-employed, company owner with complaints of sleep maintenance insomnia since 15 years. He felt quite energetic during the day due to the work requirement but in the evening started feeling anxious about sleep problem which worsened at bedtime. He was on tablet clonazepam 0.25 mg HS off and on since 1 year. After the baseline assessment, yoga Nidra intervention was started followed by five supervised sessions after which the patients were instructed to practice yoga Nidra daily on their own. Regular fortnightly follow ups were done till 4 weeks of start of yoga Nidra intervention. Repeat PSG was offered in case patient volunteered. Sleep diary parameters were analysed using Friedman test and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test. There was an improvement in sleep quality, insomnia severity, depression anxiety and stress scores after yoga Nidra. The improvement remained even after 3 months of start of intervention. Repeat PSG in second patient showed an increase in N3 after 4 weeks of yoga Nidra intervention.

Conclusion

Yoga Nidra can be used as an important adjunct in management of chronic insomnia patients. Trial registration: CTRI/2013/05/003682 [Registered on: 27/05/2013] Trial Registered Retrospectively.