

Introduction to Yoga Nidra:

This handout is intended only as brief introduction to yoga nidra,

If it's something you feel you'd like to learn more about, use the bibliography as a starting point.

What is yoga nidra?

Yogic sleep or the sleep of the yogis

I feel Yoga Nidra is a form of meditation and relaxation.

In some ways it is very simple, in that like all forms of meditation it is a way of calming the mind so we can realise we are more than just our thoughts and feelings. Allowing us to see ourselves as the witness; a space to connect to the source/ god / universal consciousness etc.

It is a way of turning the focus inwards and can be a form of sense withdrawal (pratyahara).

Yoga Nidra is an effortless practise, there's nothing that needs doing- you don't have to remember to sit up straight, refrain from thinking, repeat a phrase/mantra .

Normally you are guided through a nidra

Yoga nidra's origins are ancient but its modern form -like that of today's asana is far more recent. Swami Satyanada is generally credited with 'developing' yoga nidra as a practice, he drew on ancient yogic and tantric traditions, his own experience and psychology to form this. And his is the book most people come across.

Yoga nidra has similarities to hypnosis (both induce a trance state), lucid dreaming, sleep and journeying. Like during sleep (and hypnosis) we are changing our brain waves rhythms but while we're still awake.

It has also been compared to entering 'flow state' or 'being in the zone'.. You can glimpse this when children are engrossed in play or when we're totally absorbed in an activity.

[How is a yoga nidra practice done?:](#)

People usually sit or lie with props and blankets so they stay comfortable, supported and warm (body temperature drops during relaxation) and so they don't have to think about their physical body.

Normally a yoga nidra is guided- people may use a recording, go to a yoga nidra session, do it online live and some people can practice yoga nidra on themselves.

All of these can be nice and beneficial but if a yoga nidra is specifically created for the people present it can be much more beneficial/powerful.

There's debate over what exactly Yoga nidra is and isn't and the 'right way' to practice, as with everything in yoga.

As with yoga there are many paths and you work with what's right at the time/ suits you.

Some different forms of yoga nidra are: Satyananda , Himalayan Institute, Richard Miller / i-rest, Rod Stryker (Para yoga), Total Yoga Nidra, Iam yoga nidra (Amrit and Kamini Desai) , Swami Janakananda

[What stages are there/how made up?](#)

Below is a general basic structure but not everything is always included and there are different ways of forming a yoga nidra.

Structure:

1. Preparation. This is important as we want to be so comfy that the body almost falls away. It starts to bring people into a relaxed/trance state.
2. Settling (can be nice to use breath) if people aren't settled hard to relax into/focus on the rest. Using grounding, earthing/ elemental vocabulary images can be good.
3. Sometimes yoga nidras have sankalpa/ resting in heart space/heartfelt desire.

4. Rotation of consciousness -there are a number of different rotations some based on marma points (similar to meridians in Chinese medicine) and some based on the way our sensory or motor centres of the brain work. While naming different parts of the body there may be an invitation to rest awareness there, repeat the name of the body part, or imagining something like a light or star at each point.
5. Pairs of opposites - This can be sensations in the body e.g. hot and cold or emotional states e.g. calm and stress, or even abstract concepts such as high and low.
6. Breath awareness- deepen awareness in yoga nidra,. It can further induce trance or settle people if they are feeling weirded out- can have different intentions again= healing, growth, letting go etc.
7. sometimes Visualisation
8. Reiterate Sankalpa/ resting in heart space/heartfelt desire.
9. Bringing back- externalisation. Important to guide people back properly
- 10.End- gives a definite end (“This practice of yoga nidra is now complete”).
Brings people back

3) and 8) if you do 3) is nice to revisit before the end. (see section on Sankalpa)

Why practice yoga nidra?

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- You can use it as :
- a deep relaxation e.g. near the end of a class/ on a retreat.
- A form of meditation for spiritual development.
- As an aid to sleep.
- In the morning (like a guided meditation) to get day off on the right foot
- In times of stress.

- It can be used as a therapeutic tool to promote healing/ overcome problems.
- The opposites part of a yoga nidra can help us realise that feelings and emotions are not permanent and that we can dis-engage from them, change how we think/feel.
- It can help to bring about a state of balance- enables the body to return to homoeostasis/to reset.

From my own experience I find it's very calming for people, it can really be effective at relieving stress, promoting sleep and can help with chronic pain.

There is some research to prove it can help stress and 'psychosomatic disease' (researchgate.net)

Richard Miller (I-rest) uses it to help people with PTSD and through his work with American army veterans has been able to research this.

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Things to be aware of with yoga nidra:

If you ever come to teach yoga nidra these are things you will need to take into consideration. They can also be useful to help you assess why you did/didn't like yoga nidras you've listened to. Especially if you had a strong reaction to it.

- Whoever is leading the session has to make sure they keep people safe. People are unlikely to injure themselves physically but we need to be aware of how going into such a deep state can affect people mentally and emotionally.
- Make sure you create a safe space and you can see everyone (think about arranging people, lighting etc). And that you're somewhere you can see the entrance and intercept anyone trying to come in. This is not always going to be possible with online sessions but you could suggest people tilt their computers so you can see them or at least see if they raise a hand. Then you could agree beforehand on signals if they feel uncomfortable or to let you know they are alright (e.g raising their hand with the thumb up to show they're okay).

- If you are using a script someone else has written check carefully what it's for and its suitability for you/ your students . Learn it rather than reading from it and shuffling papers etc.
- Always watch your students if possible, be aware of fidgeting, changes in breathing etc.
- Make sure you and they are comfortable and going to be warm enough
- You should always give them a get out clause/safety net- ' if you want to come out at anytime just roll over onto your side, take a few breaths to bring yourself back and open your eyes.
- Rather than instructing them , you can invite, e.g. you can imagine, you may feel -give them some control.
- Visualisations in nidra can be very powerful so unless you know your clients you may want to leave them out (and/or see below).
- If you are planning something specific check first everyone is okay with this, e.g. if it's about a sea/water theme, check nobody has any fears/bad experiences of this. Flowing and letting your body become water may be wonderful and even therapeutic for one person, but for another could be very traumatic.
- Using music: although it's relaxing, music draws the senses outwards and can be very emotive. Using sound can be a nice way of bringing people back or marking the beginning and end of the nidra.
- Take them in slowly and bring them back slowly and completely, remember they have to go out and function in the world when they leave the yoga nidra session. Giving a definite beginning and end to a yoga nidra practice can help
- Don't rush the end.

Sometimes people will take a while coming around, keep talking to them, bringing their awareness back. If someone has not come out of nidra just check they can hear

you and are alright (e.g. “raise thumb if you can hear me”). Then if it's ok to do so let them rest. This probably won't happen in a class situation as people are aware another class will be coming in soon.

- Make sure people are fully grounded and functioning before going back out into the world (e.g. after yoga nidra could do some gentle movement)

Sankalpa:

This can be included or not. Some schools always use a Sankalpa, this is alternately described as a heartfelt desire or an image, words, feelings that arise from your subconscious.

If people don't know what a Sankalpa is, they can become confused/worried in the yoga nidra and this isn't our aim. So best to clear this up first. 'Resting in your heart space' can be a nice alternative. As can be setting an intention at the beginning of the yoga nidra while people are preparing and settling. You can also invite people to do this themselves.

There's also debate about whether Sankalpa should be included or not as it's triggering the 'ego-I', rather than quieting that brain state.

Personally I don't use it except in a 1-2-1 session where it has a specific purpose and I think it will be beneficial. I always explain about sankalpa before starting the nidra. However that's just my preference.

Ultimately as always it's up to you to decide your own way.

If you are interested here's some information on brain waves:

Brain waves:

Brain waves change with different states of consciousness, how we feel, what we're doing etc. Yoga nidra replicates the way we naturally pass into and through these when we go to sleep. Replicating some of the benefits of them and uses them to expand our awareness and sometimes to enable healing/change.

a basic explanation of the different brain waves is:

Beta- everyday consciousness and activity (outward looking/engaged)

Alpha quite state, daydreaming or 'I the moment. Go into this is relaxation and early stages of yoga nidra

Theta- like in REM sleep, good for creativity, processing, memory (some forms of these). Said to be a good state as cortisol release stops, tissue repair happens, helps memory and getting rid of useless info.. Theta waves seen in nidra and meditation.

Delta- seen in deep sleep, deep meditation and nidra. Good for healing and regeneration.

It's been suggested that during transitions within yoga nidra we can enter hypnogogic and hypnopompic states .

In yoga nidra we can be consciously aware in these different states

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www.yoganidranetwork.org

Books:

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Satyananda Saraswati , 'Yoga Nidra'

Rod Stryker, 'The Four Desires.'

Uma Dinsmore Tuli 'Womb Yoga'

Kamini Desai 'Yoga Nidra'.