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NAD+

Tribute to
DAISAKU IKEDA

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BWY SPECIAL FEATURE

HOW TO REST & REJUVENATE WITH YOGA NIDRA

Words: Janet Long, British Wheel of Yoga Teacher and Sound Therapist
Photos: BWY



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Have you ever felt that the most enjoyable part of your yoga class was the relaxation at the end?

If you're nodding your head, how would it feel to experience that state for more than just a few minutes?

This is where the practice of Yoga Nidra comes into its own. The term itself is literally translated as "Yoga Sleep" but could also be interpreted as "sleep of the Yogis" or "sleep resulting from Yoga". However, the name seems something of a misnomer as it is not a sleeping state at all. It is a transitional phase, where you are neither fully awake nor fast asleep as it is often known as a hypnagogic state.

Yoga Nidra is beautifully described in the book entitled *'Yoga Nidra Made' Easy* by Umi Dinsmore-Tuli and Nirplipa Tuli: "Yoga nidra is a horizontal meditation upon the threshold of sleep".

It is a completely natural state to be in. However, in the hustle and bustle of Western society, we've lost this inherent ability to daydream, zone out and embrace restful moments.

If I were to ask you how you rest, what would you reply? For many people it will be by doing something, maybe going for a walk, or reading a book, watching the TV or having a glass of wine – really we need to "be" rather than "do" to truly rest.

When you enter the state of Yoga Nidra it can feel like you've come home, which in a sense you have as it is a natural, restful place to be. In this state of not doing anything, the true magic can often happen, including insights and access to a more creative state of being.

I first came across Yoga Nidra on my British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) Teacher Training Course back in 2009 and have continued to explore the practice



ever since. Initially, using the techniques of the Bihar School of Yoga and more recently those of the Yoga Nidra Network.

During COVID, I began to offer a monthly online Yoga Nidra session to my yoga students. The heartfelt responses showed the positive impact this practice had during the uncertainty of those times and I now continue to share these sessions every month.

"In this state of not doing anything, the true magic can often happen including insights and access to a more creative state of being"

Decoding Yoga Nidra

Since the 1970s, extensive research has delved into the impact of Yoga Nidra on various aspects, such as stress, anxiety, and insomnia. This exploration has not only analysed its effects but has also involved the measurement of brainwaves, providing valuable insights into the diverse mental states induced during the practice. There are five brainwave states, all named after Greek letters of the alphabet, and their rates of vibration are measured in Hertz. These are:

Beta waves (14-40Hz) – which occur during the waking, alert state when we are focused on getting things done. We tend to spend most of our time in this state which makes us tired over extended periods. In fact, we may become so used to being in a state of permanent exhaustion that we don't even realise it until we stop.

Alpha waves (8-13Hz) – this is a slower brainwave state which occurs when we are in the present moment, gone are the deadlines and other pressures and we start to feel relaxed both mentally and physically.

Theta waves (4-8Hz) – an even slower brainwave state where we enter the daydream state when awake or REM (Rapid Eye Movement) dreaming state when light sleeping. In this state we often experience surreal imagery or feelings or thoughts. We can also experience insights, resulting in creative inspirations or solutions to ongoing issues.

Delta waves (1-3Hz) – at this point we have entered a deep meditative state where thoughts have slowed down and restorative healing can occur.

Gamma waves (40-100Hz) – a state often observed in frequent meditators, it is considered to be a highly intuitive state of being.



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During a Yoga Nidra practice, while the alpha state tends to be dominant (even in people experiencing yoga nidra for the first time), various brainwave states occur in a cyclical, non-linear manner which means that you dip in and out of the different states.

What do I need to do during Yoga Nidra?

One of the wonderful things about Yoga Nidra is its simplicity. In order to take part in a session, all you need is somewhere comfortable to rest. This can be on a yoga mat or it could be lying on your bed. You would probably need a blanket as your body will soon start to cool down when you're lying still for any length of time. You might like a cushion or pillow under your head and maybe under your knees. It isn't necessary to lie on your back in full *Savasana* (corpse pose), you can rest semi-supine or on your side or tummy.

You don't need to be wearing yoga gear, any comfortable loose-fitting clothing will be fine (even your PJs if you're at home!).

All you need to do is lie back, get comfortable and follow the voice of the facilitator.

What happens during Yoga Nidra?

It flows through a cyclical process which the Yoga Nidra Network likens to a recipe with nine ingredients:

1. Preparation – claiming this moment for the radical act of rest
2. Settling in – getting the body ready for rest
3. Inner listening and/or invitation for intuitive intention (setting a *sankalpa*)
4. Welcoming attention around the body – journeying through spaces & places (rotation of consciousness)
5. Playing with paradox – working with opposite sensations separately and together
6. Connecting to imaginative capacity – visualisation, sensory & extrasensory knowing
7. Inner listening and/or invitation for intuitive intention (re-visiting *sankalpa*)
8. Externalising awareness – preparing to complete the process
9. Completion – returning to everyday attention

Whilst each element remains the same, subtle differences inevitably arise each time just as they do when we cook – the recipe may be the same but sometimes the flavours may vary.



TOP FIVE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IF I FALL ASLEEP?

I have had students ask me many times how to avoid falling asleep during their Yoga Nidra practice, wondering if somehow they're doing it wrong. The truth is that there is no wrong way to do Yoga Nidra, it is simply an opportunity to rest and to be. If you fall asleep at any point then that's what you needed in that moment.

2. IS IT SAFE TO PRACTICE YOGA NIDRA IF I'M PREGNANT?

Yes it is. During pregnancy, the physical and emotional changes as well as fatigue can certainly benefit from the practice. Often the issue is ensuring you feel comfortable during the practice but lying on your side with plenty of props to support you will certainly help.

3. I CAN'T VISUALISE, CAN I PRACTICE YOGA NIDRA?

As someone who suffers from *aphantasia* (a condition that prevents the ability to create mental imagery), I can categorically say "Yes you can". Very little of the practice requires any form of visualisation, you will observe bodily sensations and feel the rest resulting from the practice and be able to respond in some way even if this isn't a vision in glorious technicolour.

4. DO I NEED TO CLOSE MY EYES DURING YOGA NIDRA?

No you don't. If it's more comfortable to have the eyes open, I would suggest you soften the gaze by

allowing the eyelids to become relaxed. The suggestion to close your eyes is purely to help draw the awareness within and help you relax so if this isn't the case, it would be counterproductive to keep them closed.

5. AM I IN A TRANCE DURING YOGA NIDRA?

Yes you are. We all enter into trance states throughout every day though we are probably unaware of the process. When you practice Yoga Nidra, you learn to become more aware of this happening. Remember that the trance state is a natural phenomenon and nothing to be concerned about.

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Would you like to experience it?

The BWY is offering a Yoga Nidra 75-minute practice as part of its Winter Solstice online event, set to take place on Wednesday 20 December 2023, 9.30am – 8pm. This is available to non-members for £50 for the day, which includes the recording. To book on: <https://portal.bwy.org.uk/user/events/633>

Janet began her yoga journey 20 years ago and completed her Teaching Diploma with BWY in 2012. She has since done online training with Yoga Nidra Network, as well as qualifying as a Group Sound Therapist.

Janet is a BWY Foundation and Diploma Course Tutor with her next courses beginning in January and November 2024 respectively. <https://portal.bwy.org.uk/user/trainings/201>



Janet teaches weekly Hatha Yoga classes in Timperley, Cheshire as well as delivering sound and gong baths, workshops and retreats and holds a weekly online Yoga class and monthly online Yoga Nidra.

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