

PRACTICAL EXERCISES • NUTRITION • MINDFULNESS • LIFESTYLE & WELLNESS

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STRETCH, STRENGTHEN, SHINE

ECLIPSES & YOGA PRACTICE

शिवरा
शक्ति

yoga &
SACRED SEXUALITY

UNVEILING
THE
Zen

8
**PARTNER
POSES**

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The piece explores the energetic nature of wealth, focusing on self-worth, subconscious beliefs, and fostering an abundance mindset through gratitude and empowerment.

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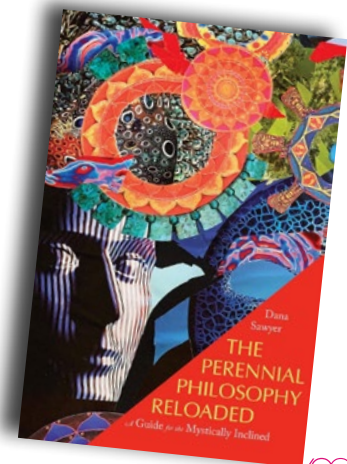
Anahita Rao's article explores how eclipses, significant in Vedic astrology, offer a unique opportunity to enhance yoga and spiritual practices by going inward.

34 BREATHING TECHNIQUES FOR KIDS

Victoria Tso's guide introduces children to breathing techniques like Diaphragmatic, Alternate Nostril, and Bee Breath to manage stress, improve focus, and enhance well-being, all while making the practice engaging and fun.

84 BEDITATION - CREATING EASE IN THE BUSYNESS OF LIFE

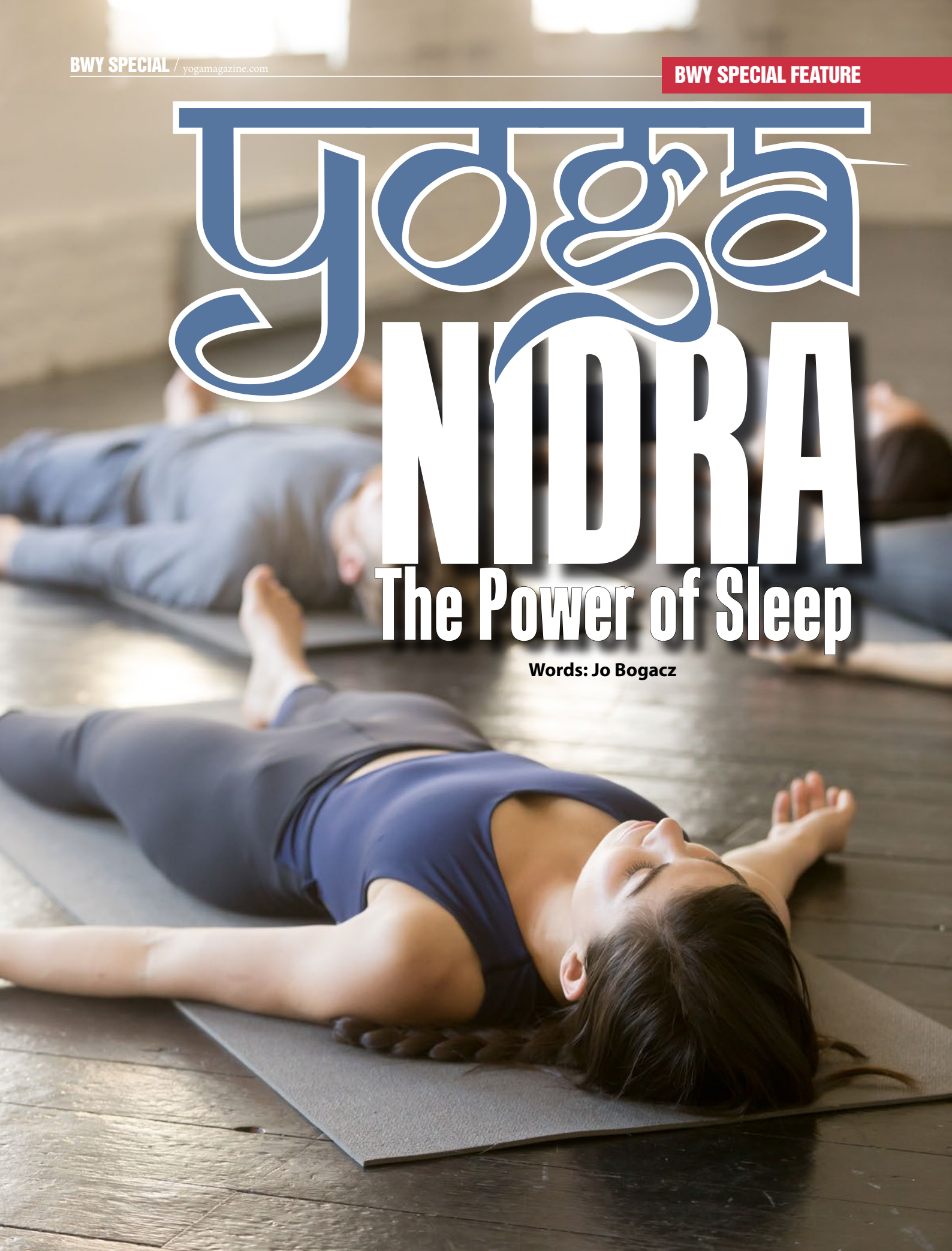
Beditation, a blend of restful awareness and conscious relaxation, helps create ease amidst busyness, enhancing creativity and mental clarity while reducing stress and fatigue.



योग NIDRA

The Power of Sleep

Words: Jo Bogacz





In today's fast-paced world, many of us are feeling the strain. With rising uncertainties and increasing pressures at work, stress has become a standard part of our lives.

In small amounts, stress is healthy; it is our body's way of protecting us from danger. Nevertheless, when stress becomes chronic, it can lead to dis-ease. Long-term stress can increase the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and mental health conditions. It does this by suppressing or triggering our immune system, causing inflammation, and affecting our brain and mood.

Fortunately, yoga offers us simple practices that can help. One such example is Yoga Nidra, a profound but accessible method to access a naturally restful state of being, which is becoming increasingly popular today.

What is Yoga Nidra?

Yoga Nidra, which means 'yogic sleep', is a state between being awake and

asleep. Unlike conventional sleep, it's a profoundly relaxing and restful state where you remain aware. You don't have to do anything but lie down and listen as the guide leads you through the process.

In this threshold state, your body rests deeply, your mind slows down, and you may even experience creative insights or problem-solving ideas. It is not about falling asleep but rather about reaching a state of deep relaxation and self-awareness.

Since 1970, researchers have investigated the effects of Yoga Nidra on the brain, with pioneers Green, Green, and Walters demonstrating that people can consciously control their heart rate and stress levels, even while in a deeply relaxed state*.

This laid the groundwork for recent studies on the cognitive and psychological benefits of Yoga Nidra. A recent study in 2023 revealed that even during a 20-minute session,

you can traverse the same brainwave states experienced during a full night's sleep*.

Decoding brainwaves

Our brains are constantly active, and the level of activity can be measured by brainwaves—electrical impulses in the brain. These brainwaves are categorised into five main types, each associated with different states of consciousness.

Gamma Waves (40-100 Hz)

Gamma waves are the fastest brainwaves. People who meditate regularly may experience gamma waves, which are linked to a heightened state of awareness and intuition. In this state, the mind is sharp, with clarity and connection.

Beta Waves (14-40 Hz)

Beta waves are the brainwaves of our waking life. When we are alert, focused, and getting things done, we are in a beta state. This is the state where we spend most of our time

during the day. However, being in this state for too long can make us feel tired and worn out.

Alpha Waves (8-13 Hz)

Alpha waves are slower than beta waves and occur when we are calm and relaxed. You might experience alpha waves when you are taking a walk, reading a book, or enjoying a quiet moment. This state is pleasant; the mind is at ease, and the body can begin to relax.

Theta Waves (4-8 Hz)

Theta waves are even slower and occur when we are in a daydream-like state. You might notice theta waves when you are drifting off to sleep or when you are in a light sleep, especially during REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep when dreaming occurs. In the

theta state, you may experience vivid images, emotions, or thoughts that seem to come out of nowhere. In this creative state, insights and new ideas often emerge.

Delta Waves (1-3 Hz)

Delta waves are the slowest of all brainwaves and occur when we're in deep sleep. In this state, the body is most at rest. In the delta state, thoughts slow down, and the mind becomes quiet. This deep, meditative state is essential for physical and mental health, as it allows the body to repair and rejuvenate itself.

Navigating brainwave states

Yoga Nidra helps by guiding you through the different brainwave states in a cyclical manner. This process

allows you to not stay stuck in one state but move through them, much like going through the cycles of sleep.

For example, during Yoga Nidra, you may start in the beta state, where your mind is active, and then gradually move into the alpha waves as you relax. With practice, you can ease yourself out of the active brainwave states into the calming alpha state. This ability to shift your state of mind is a form of resilience, helping you stay balanced and able to handle life's challenges.

Yoga Nidra also gives you time and space to reflect, gain insight, and become more aware of your thoughts and feelings. As you practise, you become more skilled at recognising when you are feeling stressed or anxious and can use Yoga Nidra techniques to calm yourself.

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Five top tips to practice Yoga Nidra

Create a comfortable space

Choose a position that feels comfortable, whether lying on your back, side, or seated. Use props like blankets, bolsters, and blocks to support your back, knees, and hips. Comfort is key, so make sure to stay warm—cold feet can distract you. An eye bag is optional, but placing it over your eyes or forehead can add a soothing weight. Set a timer so you can fully relax without checking the clock.

Focus on your breath

One of the easiest ways to shift from a stressed state to a relaxed one is through breathwork. A long exhale can help move you from the beta state (alert and stressed) to the alpha state (calm and relaxed). Try this simple breathwork exercise:

- Take a deep breath and exhale with a big sigh. Repeat this three times.
- Then, close your lips and let the sighs turn into a soft hum on each exhale.
- Keep humming with every out-breath, allowing the vibration to relax and calm you.

This practice quickly eases tension and helps transition you into a more peaceful state.

Engage your senses

Begin by noticing distant sounds, then focus on the sound of your breath. Keep your breathing quiet but noticeable. With your eyes closed, observe the colours or light visible through your eyelids. Feel the air on your skin. Is it cool or warm? Take a deep breath and notice any smells or

even subtle tastes. Relax your tongue and observe the sensation of air flowing through your nostrils as you breathe in and out.

Body awareness

Yoga Nidra often includes a body scan or 'rotation of consciousness'. Mentally travel through your body, focusing on each part in turn, starting from your hands, feet, or head. Invite each body part to relax fully. This practice may also explore sensations of opposites, like heaviness and lightness, allowing you to witness both simultaneously. A teacher or guided audio will typically lead this process.

Gently exit the practice

Exiting Yoga Nidra can feel challenging, especially if you're deeply relaxed. To help reawaken, start by tuning back into your breath and

senses. Lightly press your thumb to each finger in turn on both hands, helping you reconnect with the present moment.

Bridging science and tradition

The British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) and SOAS University of London are hosting their first yoga summit on Saturday 2 November, bringing together leading researchers and practitioners to explore the transformative potential of Yoga Nidra. I am honoured to lead a chair-based Yoga Nidra practice at this event.

A key highlight will be the presentation of a major new research project led by Carola Chiarpenello of King's College London. Her study examines Yoga Nidra's impact on the brain and body, focusing on how it can reduce chronic stress using advanced neuroimaging techniques. This research builds on her success in treating patients with treatment-resistant depression during the pandemic.

While scientific research into Yoga Nidra continues to grow, it's important to recognise the ancient origins of the practice. One of the greatest challenges facing yoga today is the erosion of its cultural heritage due to over-commercialisation.

References

1. <https://elmergreenfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Voluntary-Control-of-Internal-States-Psychological-and-Physiological.pdf>
2. <https://sleepreviewmag.com/sleep-health/parameters/quality/yoga-nidra-improves-sleep-memory/>

Find out more

Meet Jo Bogacz, Uma Dinsmore-Tuli and Carola Chiarpenello at the SOAS-BWY Autumn Summit on Saturday 2 November. Book your space: <https://portal.bwy.org.uk/user/events/746>



Uma Dinsmore-Tuli—a lifelong yoga practitioner, therapist, and founder of the Total Yoga Nidra Network—has dedicated her life to teaching and preserving the wisdom of Yoga Nidra. She has been instrumental in reconnecting this essential practice to its ancient spiritual roots. At the summit, she will draw from her latest book, *'Nidrā Shakti: The Power of Rest.'*

She comments: "Sadly, many yoga schools today have commercialised Yoga Nidra, losing touch with its deeper, spiritual roots. Yoga Nidra has ancient roots in India, where

it's connected to the South Asian goddess *Yoga Nidrā Śakti*, who represents the power of sleep. According to Indian mythology, *Yoga Nidrā Śakti* is the goddess of sleep, rest, and the space between dreams and waking life. Her Sanskrit name literally means "power of sleep," and she is seen as a force of nature that no one can resist.

One story from the ancient Indian epic poem, the *Devī Mahātmyam*, tells how *Nidrā Śakti* controls the god Vishnu while he sleeps. During this time, a lotus grows from his navel, and from this flower, the god Brahma, the creator of life, emerges. This story symbolises the power of sleep as a source of creativity and life itself.

I believe that by reconnecting with the wisdom of *Nidrā Śakti*, we can restore balance and harmony in our lives and embrace the natural cycles of rest that sustain us."



Jo Bogacz, a full-time yoga therapist and Regional Officer for the British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) in Wales, specialises in mental health, chronic pain, and women's health. A founding member of the Yoga Therapy Association, she teaches professional practice and ethics for a British Council of Yoga Therapy (BCYT) approved Yoga Therapy Diploma.

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A woman with her hair in braids is shown in profile, eyes closed, in a yoga studio. The image is overlaid with a teal-to-purple gradient that transitions from left to right.

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A woman is shown in profile, eyes closed, in a yoga studio. The image is overlaid with a purple-to-blue gradient that transitions from top to bottom.

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