

PRACTICE

The Evening Practice: 21 Evenings of Yoga for Rest

Gentle sequences of 10 to 20 minutes, minute by minute, with the long out-breath, bhrāmarī, a screen-off ritual, a 21-night sleep journal and seven cards to print



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yoga

YOGIDE

Free sample

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Before you begin

The evening is the hour when the day is put down. In India it has long been treated as a junction: the lamp is lit, the evening prayer is said, the Ganga aarti burns on the ghats of Rishikesh as the light goes, and the noise of the street slowly falls. This book asks you to make that junction yours, for twenty-one evenings in a row, with ten to twenty minutes of gentle yoga, a longer out-breath, a soft hum, a few quiet words, and a lamp switched off at the right moment.

It is not a programme to "beat insomnia". It is an evening practice, in the old sense of the word *sādhana*: something you do every day, with care, until it does something to you. You will lie on the floor, put your legs up a wall, twist gently, fold forward, hum like a bee and count your breaths down into silence. You will switch your screens off earlier than usual. You will write three lines in a sleep journal each morning. After three weeks, you will know which of these practices your body likes, and you will have a ritual of your own.

What this book contains

- **What the tradition says about the evening and sleep** (Chapter 1): the evening *sandhyā*, the Bhagavad Gītā on measure in sleep (6.16-17), Patañjali on sleep as a movement of the mind (Yoga Sūtra 1.10), and the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad on deep sleep, *suṣupti*. Every verse is checked against the Sanskrit on GREIL; every translation is ours.
- **What sleep medicine recommends** (Chapter 2), from public health services (NHS, NHLBI, Inserm, the French HAS) and the European Insomnia Guideline, so that your yoga sits on solid ground.
- **Safety and warning signs** (Chapter 3), before any practice.
- **The evening toolkit** (Chapter 4): eleven gentle postures, five breaths and sounds, and one short guided release written for this book.
- **The screen-off ritual** (Chapter 5).
- **Twenty-one evenings**, minute by minute (Chapters 6 to 8), from ten to twenty minutes.
- **Variations** (Chapter 9): in bed, on a chair, pregnancy, older age, chronic insomnia, travel.
- **What the studies say** (Chapter 10): real reviews of yoga and sleep and of slow breathing before bed, each checked on PubMed, with the size of the effects and the level of evidence.
- **Your 21-night sleep journal and seven evening cards to print** (Chapters 11 and 12).

This book is not a treatment.

If you have had trouble sleeping three or more nights a week for three months or more, if you snore loudly with pauses in your breathing, gasp or choke at night, fall asleep during the day without wanting to, or if poor sleep comes with low mood, hopelessness or thoughts of harming yourself, **see a doctor first** (Chapter 3). Chronic insomnia has an effective first-line treatment, cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia (CBT-I). In a crisis, call your local emergency number: 911 in the United States and Canada, 999 or 112 in the United Kingdom, 112 in the European Union and in India. In the United States you can also call or text 988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline); in the UK, Samaritans answer on 116 123.

How to use this book

1. Read Chapters 1 to 5 once, over a weekend. They take about an hour.
2. Choose your evening time: the practice ends ten to thirty minutes before you want to be asleep.
3. Each evening, open the book at the evening of the day, or simply follow the card for the week (Chapter 12).
4. Each morning, fill in one line of the journal (Chapter 11). It takes one minute.
5. On evenings 7, 14 and 21, read your journal and adjust.

If you miss an evening, do not start again from zero: continue where you were. The journal will show you the gaps, and that is information, not failure.

Companion books

This book is the evening companion to Yoga Nidra: Practice and Scripts. It does not repeat it: when you want a full guided yoga nidra, a saṅkalpa, or the history of "yogic sleep", go there. Where this book uses bhrāmarī and the long out-breath, it follows the method and the precautions of Pranayama: The Breath Manual. If getting down to the floor is difficult, Chair Yoga for Seniors gives the seated foundations used in Chapter 9.

What you need

- A mat or a rug, and a clear space next to a bare wall.
- Two firm cushions or a bolster, and two blankets (one to fold, one to cover you).
- A small lamp with warm, dim light, or a candle in a safe holder (never left burning when you lie down to sleep).
- A watch or clock you can see without a phone. A cheap kitchen timer is perfect.
- This book, a pen, and the journal page.
- Optional: a mala (a string of prayer beads, traditionally 108) for the japa evenings.

Chapter 1. The evening in the yoga tradition

Sandhyā: the junction of the day

Sandhyā (संध्या) means a joining: the meeting point of night and day, and of day and night. The old law books already give it a rule. Manu asks the twice-born to stand reciting the Sāvitrī at the morning junction until the sun is seen, and to sit at the evening junction until the stars clearly appear; seated in the evening, he says, one removes the stain gathered during the day (Manusmṛti 2.101-102). Later practice, the sandhyāvandana or "honouring of the junctions", is usually performed at dawn, at midday and at dusk. Many family manuals have the evening rite (sāyaṃ-sandhyā) performed facing west, towards the setting sun, with verses addressed to Varuṇa, the Vedic lord of the waters and of cosmic order; the details vary with the Vedic branch and the family. It is a rite of initiates, with its own mantras, transmitted in families and lineages; this book does not teach it, and nothing here imitates it.

What we can take from it, respectfully, is the idea behind it: **the end of the day is a threshold, and a threshold is crossed with attention.** In many Indian homes, a small lamp is lit at dusk in front of the household shrine; at Rishikesh, the evening aarti on the ghats of Triveni and Parmarth Niketan gathers people by the river as the light fades. You do not need to adopt any of these rites. But you can borrow their shape: a fixed time, a small light, a gesture of closing, and silence afterwards. Chapter 5 turns this shape into your screen-off ritual.

The Gita: measure in sleep and waking

The Bhagavad Gītā is not a manual of sleep, but its sixth chapter, the chapter of the yogi, gives the one rule that every sleep specialist would sign today: **measure.**

Bhagavad Gītā 6.16-17

· नात्यश्नतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्नतः । न चातिस्वप्नशीलस्य जाग्रतो नैव चार्जुन ॥ युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु । युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥ nātyaśnatas tu yogo 'sti na caikāntam anaśnataḥ / na cātisvapnaśīlasya jāgrato naiva cārjuna // yuktāhāra-vihārasya yukta-ceṣṭasya karmasu / yukta-svapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhahā

Our translation. Yoga is not for one who eats too much, nor for one who does not eat at all; not for one who is given to too much sleep, nor for one who stays awake, Arjuna. For one who is measured in food and recreation, measured in effort in action, measured in sleep and waking, yoga becomes the destroyer of sorrow.

Three words carry the verse. Yukta (युक्त) means "joined, fitting, measured": it is the same root as yoga. Swapna here means sleep, and avabodha waking. And vihāra, which we translate "recreation", covers what you do with your free hours: walking, play, leisure. The Gita does not give a number of hours. It describes a person whose eating, playing, working, sleeping and waking each have their right size, and it promises that

for such a person yoga removes sorrow (duḥkha). Twenty-one evenings is a good way to look honestly at that measure in your own life: the journal in Chapter 11 is built for it.

A second verse of the Gita speaks of night in a way every meditator remembers:

Bhagavad Gītā 2.69

· या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी । यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥ yā niśā sarvabhūtānāṃ tasyāṃ jāgarti saṃyamī / yasyāṃ jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyato muneḥ

Our translation. What is night for all beings, in that the self-restrained one is awake; that in which beings are awake is night for the sage who sees.

This verse is not about staying up late. It is an image: what the world finds dark (inner stillness), the yogi finds bright; what the world finds bright (the restless chase of objects), the sage finds dark. Keep it as an evening thought, not as an instruction to sleep less.

Verses checked against the Sanskrit text of GRETIL (Bhagavad Gītā, Mahābhārata 6.23-40 numbering, 2.69 and 6.16-17). The public-domain translation by K. T. Telang (Sacred Books of the East, vol. 8, 1882) uses the same verse numbers.

Patañjali: sleep is a movement of the mind

The Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali counts sleep among the five vṛtti, the movements or modifications of the mind that yoga learns to quiet (1.5-1.6). Then it defines it:

Yoga Sūtra 1.10

· अभावप्रत्ययालम्बना वृत्तिर्निद्रा ॥ abhāva-pratyayālambanā vṛttir nidrā

Our translation. Sleep is the movement of the mind that rests on the experience of absence.

This is a remarkable statement. For Patañjali, dreamless sleep is not a blank: it is still an experience, the experience of "nothing", which is why we can say in the morning "I slept well, I knew nothing". The classical commentary (the Bhāṣya traditionally attributed to Vyāsa) draws exactly this conclusion from the memory we have on waking. For the practitioner, it means two things. First, sleep is part of the mind's life, not an enemy to be defeated. Second, the way you fall asleep, agitated or calm, colours the night: the evening practice works on the threshold.

Patañjali also lists sleep and dream among the possible supports of a steady mind:

Yoga Sūtra 1.38

· स्वप्ननिद्राज्ञानालम्बनं वा ॥ svapna-nidrā-jñānālambanaṃ vā

Our translation. Or [the mind becomes steady] by resting on the knowledge that comes in dream and in sleep.

Commentators read this sūtra in different ways (meditating on a calm dream, or on the quality of

dreamless sleep). We do not build a technique on it. We simply note that the yoga tradition does not look down on sleep: it looks into it.

Both sūtras checked against the GRETIL edition of the Yoga Sūtra (numbering 1.10 and 1.38, standard in all editions). Public-domain translation: J. H. Woods, The Yoga-System of Patañjali, 1914.

The Māṇḍūkya: deep sleep as the third quarter

The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, twelve short prose verses on the syllable Om, describes the self in four "quarters": waking, dream, deep sleep, and a fourth which is not a state among others. Its fifth verse is the classical definition of deep sleep, suṣupti (सुषुप्ति):

Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 5

· यत्र सुप्तो न कञ्चन कामं कामयते न कञ्चन स्वप्नं पश्यति तत्सुषुप्तम् । सुषुप्तस्थान एकीभूतः प्रज्ञानघन एवानन्दमयो ह्यानन्दभुक्चेतोमुखः प्राज्ञस्तृतीयः पादः ॥ yatra supto na kañcana kāmam kāmāyate na kañcana svapnam paśyati tat suṣuptam / suṣuptasthāna ekībhūtaḥ prajñānaghana evānandamayo hy ānandabhuk cetomukhaḥ prājñas tṛtiyaḥ pādaḥ

Our translation. Where the sleeper desires no desire and sees no dream: that is deep sleep. Its field is deep sleep; it has become one; it is a mass of knowing; it is made of bliss and enjoys bliss; awareness is its mouth: this is Prājña, the knower, the third quarter.

Notice how the Upanishad describes deep sleep: not as loss, but as **gathering**. In waking, attention is scattered outward; in dream, inward among images; in deep sleep, it "has become one" (ekībhūta). Every evening practice in this book does a small version of this gathering: from the street to the room, from the room to the body, from the body to the breath, from the breath to silence. You cannot will deep sleep, but you can stop scattering yourself.

Text checked against GRETIL (Māṇḍūkya, verse 5). The same verse is studied, with the whole Upanishad, in our companion book The Upanishads for Yogis. Public-domain translation: Robert Ernest Hume, The Thirteen Principal Upanishads, 1921 (Max Müller's Sacred Books of the East volumes do not include the Māṇḍūkya).

Śavāsana, the posture of rest

The Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (fifteenth century) ends its list of postures with the simplest one:

Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā 1.34

· उत्तानं शववद्भूमौ शयनं तच्छवासनम् । शवासनं श्रान्तिहरं चित्तविश्रान्तिकारकम् ॥ uttānam śavavad bhūmau śayanam tac chavāsanam / śavāsanam śrānti-haram citta-viśrānti-kārakam

Our translation. Lying on the ground on one's back like a corpse: that is śavāsana. Śavāsana takes away fatigue and brings rest to the mind.

Numbering of the GRETIL text (1.34); some modern editions number it 1.32. GRETIL prints śabavad, a spelling variant of śavavad. Every evening in this book ends in śavāsana or in your own sleeping position,

which is its bedroom version.

What is old and what is modern

Be clear about one thing, because many websites are not. The old texts give us **principles** (measure, the junction of the day, the nature of sleep, śavāsana) and **practices** (prāṇāyāma, japa, bhrāmarī). They do not give us a "bedtime yoga sequence". Legs up the wall, supported reclining postures with bolsters and blankets, and evening flows are modern creations of twentieth-century teachers, built on hatha foundations. The Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā does describe a viparīta karaṇī, "the inverted action" (3.78-82 in GRETEL), but it is a mudrā with the navel above the palate, the head down and the feet up, to be learnt from a guru, not the restful pose against a wall that this book uses and that is often given the same name. We use these modern tools with gratitude, and we name them for what they are.

Chapter 1 recap

- The evening is a **junction** (sandhyā): cross it with attention, at a regular time, with a small light and a gesture of closing.
- The Gita asks for **measure** in food, recreation, effort, sleep and waking (6.16-17).
- Patañjali counts sleep among the movements of the mind (1.10): the way you approach it matters.
- The Māṇḍūkya describes deep sleep as **gathering** (verse 5).
- Śavāsana "takes away fatigue and brings rest to the mind" (HYP 1.34).
- Bedtime sequences are modern; their roots are old.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 44 pages.

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