BODY & ENERGY

Restorative Yoga: Rest as a Practice

Twelve fully supported postures built with what you have at home, five sequences for five kinds of days, and what the texts and the studies really say about rest



विश्रान्ति

viśrānti

YOGIDE

Free sample

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Before you begin

There is a moment in every good yoga class that nobody photographs. The postures are over, the room is dim, and the students lie on the floor under blankets, not moving. Some teachers call it the most difficult posture of all, because it asks for something modern life rarely allows: to stop doing, completely, while staying awake.

Restorative yoga makes a whole practice of that moment. A handful of postures, each supported so fully by blankets, cushions, a chair or a wall that no muscle has to work; each held for five, ten, sometimes twenty minutes; the body warm, the eyes covered, the breath left alone. Nothing is stretched hard and nothing is achieved. And yet, for many people, an hour of this is the most demanding and most useful practice of the week.

This book does four things.

First, it tells where restorative yoga comes from, honestly: the props of B.K.S. Iyengar in Pune, the American teacher Judith Hanson Lasater who did much to shape and popularise the practice from the 1990s, and, much further back, the seat "with support" that Patañjali's commentator already listed and the yogis' meditation crutch.

Second, it shows what the texts say about rest: the corpse posture of the haṭha manuals, Patañjali's "slackening of effort", the Gita's measure in sleep and waking.

Third, it gives you a complete practice built with what you have at home: how to turn blankets, cushions, a chair and a wall into props; twelve supported postures, each with its set-up, its time, its way out and its precautions; and five sequences for the heavy days, the evening before sleep, the day after a long journey, the weeks after an illness (with your doctor's agreement) and the days of the menstrual cycle when you need less.

Fourth, it tells you what research shows, and what it does not, with every study checked on PubMed, including the trial where simple stretching did better than restorative yoga on stress.

> **About the translations.**
>
> All translations of Sanskrit verses in this book were written for Yogide from the Sanskrit text. They are not copied or adapted from any modern published translation. Modern books on restorative yoga are cited and summarised; their sequences are not reproduced. The sequences in this book are our own.

> **Health first.**
>
> Restorative yoga is gentle, but it is not without precautions. Talk to your doctor before you start if you are pregnant; if you have had a recent operation (especially of the hip, knee, spine or abdomen); if you have glaucoma or a detached retina, uncontrolled high blood pressure, heart disease, reflux, a hernia, a blood-clotting disorder or a history of deep vein thrombosis; or if you live with severe depression, the effects of trauma, or a dissociative condition. Restorative yoga does not treat any illness. Stop and seek

help at once if you feel chest pain, sudden breathlessness, a sudden severe headache, or numbness or weakness on one side. Emergency numbers: 911 (US, Canada), 999 or 112 (UK), 112 (EU, India), 000 (Australia). Chapter 11 gives the precautions in full; each posture has its own.

How the texts are numbered

- **Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (HYP)**: GRETIL electronic text (version of 31 July 2020), as in our Hatha Yoga Pradipika Explained. For 1.34, the number is the same in the public-domain translation by Pancham Sinh (1915).
- **Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā (GS)**: GRETIL text, typed from Peter Thomi's edition (1993); 2.19 has the same number in Srisa Chandra Vasu's public-domain translation (1914-1915).
- **Yoga Sūtra (YS)** and the commentary attributed to Vyāsa (Yoga Bhāṣya): GRETIL, input by Philipp A. Maas from the Ānandāśrama edition (Pune, 1904).
- **Bhagavad Gītā (BG)**: the critical edition of the Mahābhārata (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune), as given by GRETIL. The verses quoted here have the same number in the common editions.

How to use this book

Read Chapters 1 to 3 in one evening. Then read Chapter 4 and build your props: it takes half an hour and a pile of household linen. Learn the postures of Chapters 6 and 7 one or two at a time; by the end of the second week you will know all twelve. Then choose a sequence in Chapter 8 according to the day. Chapter 10 (research) and Chapter 11 (precautions) are short; read them before your first long session.

Chapter 1. Where restorative yoga comes from

An ancient seat "with support"

Most people think of props as a modern invention. They are not. The commentary on the Yoga Sūtra attributed to Vyāsa (composed, according to recent research, together with the sūtras, probably between about 325 and 425 CE), explaining the sūtra "posture is steady and at ease" (YS 2.46), lists the seats a yogi may use. One of them is called sopāśraya, "with support":

Yoga Bhāṣya on YS 2.46 (excerpt)

padmāsanaṃ bhadrāsanaṃ svastikaṃ daṇḍāsanaṃ sopāśrayaṃ paryaṅkaṃ …

Translation. The lotus seat, the auspicious seat, the svastika, the staff seat, the seat with support, the couch seat… (Our translation of the opening of the list, from the GRETIL text.)

The commentary attributed to Śaṅkara (the Vivaraṇa) explains the "seat with support" as a seat with a yoga strap or with a prop such as a crutch; later commentators (Vācaspati, Vijñānabhikṣu) speak only of the strap, the yogapaṭṭa (योगपट्ट), which holds the crossed legs and the back, so that the yogi can sit for hours without effort. The historian James Mallinson has documented that a meditation crutch was widely used by ascetics from the sixteenth century onwards, and still occasionally is: he photographed a yogi using one at the Kumbh Mela of Haridwar in 2010. Sculptures from the Great Stupa of Sanchi (around the turn of the common era) to Hampi (fourteenth century) show yogis seated with a band around the knees and the back.

So the idea that a support can free the body for stillness is old. What is modern is what follows.

Props in Pune

The person most associated with props in modern yoga is **B.K.S. Iyengar** (1918-2014), who taught in Pune from 1937 and founded the **Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute** there in **1975**, named after his wife. Iyengar yoga is known for precision, sequence and the use of props: belts, blocks, blankets, bolsters, chairs, ropes on the wall, benches. In that method, props help beginners, older people and people with limitations to practise a posture correctly and safely, and allow postures to be held longer. Supported versions of postures, held for long periods, became part of the practice for people who were ill, tired or recovering. Our book Precision and Props: Alignment Yoga at Home tells that story in detail.

Judith Hanson Lasater

The practice we now call **restorative yoga** took its shape in the United States, through one of Iyengar's early American students, **Judith Hanson Lasater** (born 1947). Trained as a physical therapist, she began

teaching yoga in Texas in 1971; she co-founded the California Yoga Teachers Association in 1974, the Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco, and the magazine Yoga Journal. Her book ***Relax and Renew: Restful Yoga for Stressful Times*** (Rodmell Press, 1995) set out its method: a small number of postures, fully supported, held for a long time, in a quiet, warm, dim room, to rest the body. A later book, Restore and Rebalance (Shambhala, 2017), describes twelve basic postures with their variants.

Other teachers have built their own sequences since. The practice has no lineage holder, no certifying body, and no fixed series. What is common to all good restorative teaching is a handful of principles, which this book follows (Chapter 5).

Restorative and yin: cousins, not twins

Restorative yoga is often confused with **yin yoga**, another style of long holds born in the same decades. They differ in intention:

	Restorative	Yin
Aim	rest: no muscle working, no strong sensation	a gentle, sustained stretch of the deep tissues, with sensation
Props	as many as needed so that nothing works	some, to adjust intensity
Sensation sought	comfort, nothing pulling	a moderate, tolerable sensation
Roots	Iyengar's props; Lasater (1990s)	Paulie Zink, Paul Grilley, Sarah Powers (1980s-1990s), with Taoist ideas

Our book Yin Yoga: Long Holds, Real Roots, Honest Limits tells the history of yin. If a restorative posture produces a stretch you can clearly feel, it is not yet restorative: add a support.

Where this book stands

This book keeps the principles of Pune and of Lasater, uses only props you can make at home, and ties the practice back to what the Indian texts say about rest. It sells no school and claims no authorisation from any lineage; the names Iyengar and Lasater are used here only to say where the ideas come from.

Practise: notice how you rest

Tonight, before sleeping, lie on your back for three minutes without any support. Then put a folded blanket under your knees and a thin cushion under your head, and lie three more minutes. Write one sentence about the difference.

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 31 pages.

Get it here: https://yogide.com/books/restorative-yoga-rest-as-a-practice/

One-time payment, instant PDF.