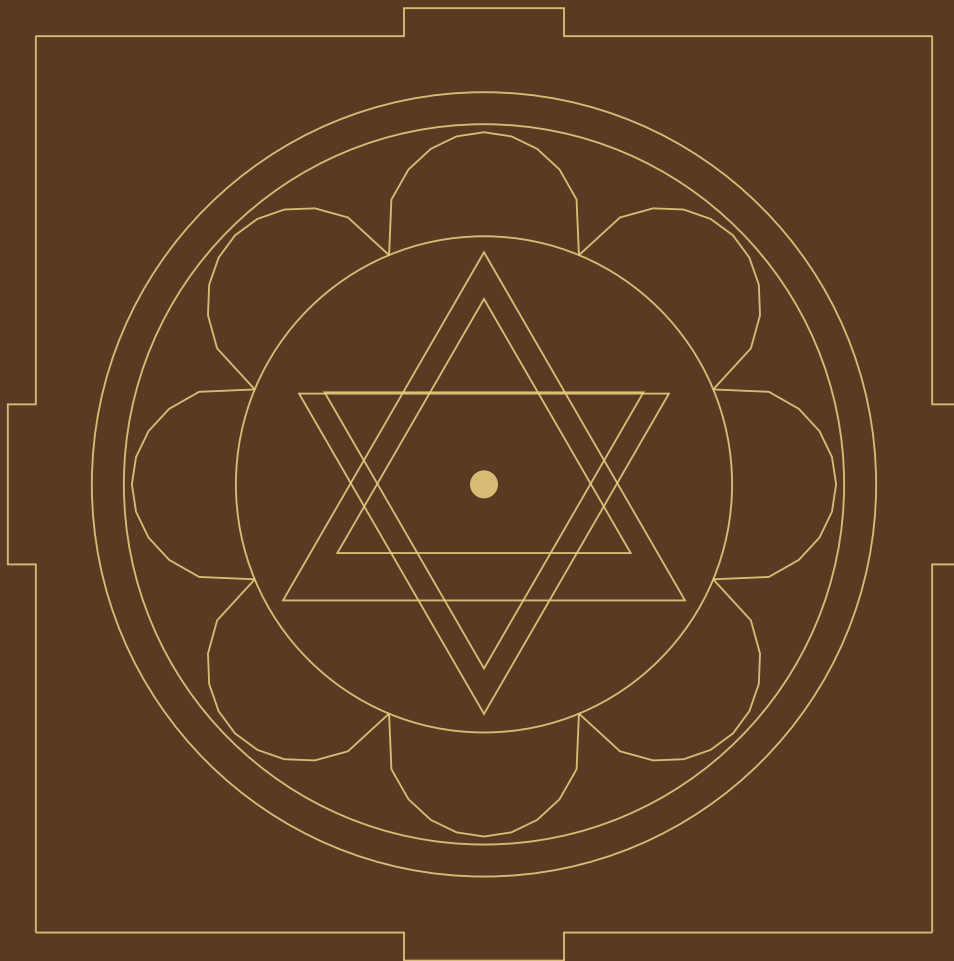


BODY & ENERGY

Yoga Nidra: Practice and Scripts

*The honest history of yogic sleep, its eight stages, and eight original guided scripts from
10 to 40 minutes, to read aloud or record*



योगनिद्रा

yoga-nidrā

YOGIDE

Free sample

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teacher or medical advice. Questions: administration@lacangel.fr

Before you begin

Yoga nidra is a practice of lying still and listening. A voice guides your attention around the body, through the breath, through contrasting sensations and a few images, while you remain awake and the body rests deeply. The name means "yogic sleep" (yoganidrā, योगनिद्रा). It is one of the gentlest practices in yoga, and one of the most loved: in Rishikesh it is often taught after the āsana class or in the early afternoon, when the heat makes everyone heavy.

This book gives you three things.

First, an honest history. The word yoganidrā is old: it appears in the epics, in the great hymn to the Goddess, in medieval hatha yoga texts. The guided technique most people now call yoga nidra is modern: it was systematised in the twentieth century, above all by Swami Satyananda Saraswati of the Bihar School of Yoga. Chapter 1 separates what the texts say from what was built later, and says which links are claimed rather than proven.

Second, eight complete guided scripts, written for this book, from ten to forty minutes, including one for falling asleep and one short seated practice. You can read them to yourself, record them in your own voice, or read them to someone else. Pauses are marked "(pause)" for two or three breaths and "..." for a shorter breath.

Third, the research, without exaggeration. Chapter 14 describes real studies, each checked on PubMed and listed in full at the end with its DOI and PubMed number. The research is promising and still young: many studies are small, and reviews rate the certainty of the evidence as low or very low. We say so.

Yoga nidra is not a treatment.

If you live with severe depression, psychosis, bipolar disorder, a dissociative condition, or the effects of trauma, read Chapter 4 first and talk to your doctor or therapist before practising alone. If you have a sleep problem that has lasted for months, see a doctor: insomnia can have causes that need treatment. In a crisis, call your local emergency number (911 in the US and Canada, 999 or 112 in the UK, 112 in the EU and India) or a crisis line in your country.

How to use this book

Read Chapters 1 to 4 once. Then choose a script. If you are new, begin with Script 1 (ten minutes) for a week, then Script 2 or 3. Use Script 6 at night in bed. Use Script 7 at your desk, on a train or in a waiting room. Keep Scripts 4 and 5 for days when you have time.

Write your sankalpa, your resolve, with the help of Chapter 13. It takes a few minutes the first time and it will accompany every practice.

What you need

- A place where you can lie down undisturbed for the length of the script.
- A mat, a rug or a firm bed; a thin cushion for the head; a cushion or rolled blanket under the knees.
- A blanket. The body cools as it rests.
- An eye cover or a folded cloth, if you like.
- A phone or recorder, if you want to record the scripts.

Chapter 1. Origins: what the texts say, and what is modern

The sleep of Viṣṇu

In Indian cosmology, at the end of each great cycle of time, the god Viṣṇu rests on the cosmic waters, lying on the coils of the serpent Śeṣa. His rest is not ordinary sleep. The epics and Purāṇas call it *yoganidrā*: a sleep that is also yoga, a withdrawal of the whole universe into stillness before it is born again. The Mahābhārata already associates Viṣṇu with this yogic sleep: describing the ocean, it calls it the place where Padmanābha (Viṣṇu) keeps his *adhyātma-yoganidrā*, his bed at the beginning of the ages (Mahābhārata 1.19.13, critical edition).

The Goddess who is sleep

The Devī Māhātmya (देवीमाहात्म्य, "The Glory of the Goddess"), a hymn of thirteen chapters inserted into the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa and usually dated between about 400 and 600 CE, gives *yoganidrā* a face. In its first chapter, two demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, rise from Viṣṇu's ear-wax while he sleeps and threaten Brahmā, who sits on the lotus growing from Viṣṇu's navel. Brahmā cannot wake Viṣṇu. So he praises the power that holds Viṣṇu asleep: the Goddess herself, as *Yoganidrā*. Moved by the hymn, she comes out of Viṣṇu's eyes, mouth, nostrils, arms, heart and chest; Viṣṇu wakes, and the battle can begin (Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 81.49-70 in the GRETIL numbering, i.e. Devī Māhātmya 1).

This text is recited every year during Navarātri across India. For a practitioner, the image is worth keeping: yogic sleep is not unconsciousness. It is a power, something sacred, that can hold and that can release.

None of these early texts describes a technique. They describe a divine state.

Yoganidrā in hatha yoga: a name for samādhi

From around the eleventh or twelfth century, some yoga texts use *yoganidrā* as a name for the highest meditative absorption, *samādhi*, in which the yogi no longer thinks or moves. The best known example is in the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (fifteenth century, attributed to Svātmārāma), in its chapter on *samādhi*, in the context of *kecharī mudrā*, the practice in which the tongue is turned back into the cavity behind the palate:

abhyaset khecarīm tavad yāvat syād yoganidritaḥ | samprāpta-yoganidrasya kālo nāsti kadācana ||

(Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā 4.49 in many editions; numbering varies.) Our translation: "Let one practise *kecharī* until one is asleep in yoga. For one who has reached yogic sleep, there is never time" (*kāla*, time, also means death).

This is the language of an advanced, esoteric practice, not of lying down for twenty minutes after work. It shows something important: in the hatha texts, *yoganidrā* is a **state** reached at the summit of practice, not a guided relaxation.

What is modern

The guided practice that most of the world now calls *yoga nidra*, lying in *śavāsana* while a voice rotates attention around the body, is a modern creation. Historians of yoga have shown that relaxation as we practise it today owes a great deal to late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western methods: the "relaxationist" writings of Annie Payson Call (*Power Through Repose*, 1891) and the progressive relaxation of the American physician Edmund Jacobson, among others. The scholar Mark Singleton has argued that modern yoga's relaxation techniques have little precedent in pre-modern yoga texts (*Yoga Body*, 2010). In France, the yoga teacher Dennis Boyes published a book on relaxation, *Le Yoga du sommeil éveillé* ("the yoga of waking sleep", Paris, Épi, 1973), whose subtitle already uses the words *yoga nidra*.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati and the Bihar School of Yoga

The person most associated with *yoga nidra* is Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923-2009). Born in Almora, he left home in 1943 and became a disciple of Swami Sivananda at his ashram in Rishikesh, on the banks of the Ganga, where he was initiated into the *Daśanāmī* order of renunciants on 12 September 1947. In 1956 Sivananda gave him the mission of spreading yoga, and he left to travel as a wandering renunciant. He founded the Bihar School of Yoga at Munger, on the Ganga in Bihar, in 1963 (its first public conference was held in January 1964).

At Munger, in the 1960s and 1970s, he developed and taught a structured method of *yoga nidra*, and set it out in a book titled *Yoga Nidra*, first published by the Bihar School of Yoga in 1976. He said that the practice had grown out of his own experience while living with Sivananda in Rishikesh. His method has a clear sequence of stages, described in Chapter 2: preparation, *saṅkalpa* (resolve), rotation of consciousness around the body, breath awareness, opposite sensations, visualisation, return of the *saṅkalpa*, and ending.

Satyananda presented his method as derived from the tantric practice of *nyāsa* (न्यास), "placing": a ritual in which mantras are placed, mentally or with the hand, on parts of the body, so that the body is consecrated piece by piece. The resemblance with the rotation of consciousness is real. But the link is **his own claim and interpretation**: no pre-modern text describes his sequence. It is fairest to say that Satyananda built a new method, drawing on Indian sources (*nyāsa*, *pratyāhāra*, the image of *yoganidrā*) and on the relaxation methods of his time.

After him, other teachers developed their own versions: Swami Rama of the Himalayan Institute taught relaxation and breathing practices around the body; in the United States, the psychologist Richard Miller developed *iRest* (Integrative Restoration), a form of *yoga nidra* used in some military and veterans' health settings.

Why this matters for you

Knowing the history does not make the practice less valuable. It frees you from two errors. The first is to believe that *yoga nidra* is a secret technique handed down unchanged for thousands of years: it is not. The

second is to believe it is "just relaxation" with an Indian name: it is not that either. It joins a very old Indian intuition (that there is a state between waking and sleep in which consciousness rests, awake, in itself) to a practical modern method. Practise it with that double respect.

Chapter 1 recap

- Yoganidrā is an ancient word: the divine sleep of Viṣṇu, and the Goddess as sleep in the Devī Māhātmya.
- In medieval hatha texts, it names a state of samādhi, not a technique.
- The guided method is modern, systematised by Swami Satyananda Saraswati at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger; his book Yoga Nidra appeared in 1976.
- Its link with tantric nyāsa is claimed by Satyananda; it is an interpretation, not a textual lineage.

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 35 pages.

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