

Water the Roots 4

Yoga Nidra

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The Second Generation



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Yoga Nidra ~ Taming the Wild Monkey

I want to share some ideas about yoga nidra because I feel that it is important to understand yoga nidra in a broader perspective. Yoga nidra is a practice derived from the tantric tradition. The literal meaning of *yoga nidra* is 'profound sleep with union'. Therefore, the purpose of yoga nidra is union between external and internal consciousness. The practices of meditation are usually practised in asanas such as padmasana and siddhasana, but the practice of yoga nidra is done while lying down, while you are relaxing yourself completely.



Many years ago when I formulated the practice of yoga nidra, it was not possible for people to understand what it was, but later I was able to explain to them that yoga nidra had already been instructed in the tantric texts, where its efficiency is clearly mentioned. Most people think that if they have sound sleep at night they are relaxed, but in fact this is not relaxation. Sleep rests the body, but yoga nidra rests body and mind. When you are asleep, your consciousness sleeps in your astral body, but in yoga nidra your consciousness is awake within.

UNIFIED AWARENESS

In the practice of yoga nidra there is special emphasis on the maintenance of unification of awareness during the state of relaxation. This means that your consciousness, which is normally extroverted, should become unified and totally aware inwardly during the process of relaxation. Therefore, yoga nidra literally means relaxation by following a process of unification of the mind.

In Sage Patanjali's raja yoga there is a state called *pratyahara* when the mind and mental awareness are disassociated from the sensory channels. The perfection of *pratyahara* leads to concentration and then to meditation. Yoga nidra is one aspect or form of *pratyahara*. When one practises yoga nidra, one is not asleep. The consciousness is functioning in a certain state of awareness. It is a state in which one is neither asleep nor awake.

Yoga nidra is a state in which there is awareness of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious fields of the mind at the same time. This profound state of consciousness is such that even the sense of self-awareness is completely consumed. When you are concentrating, you know you are concentrating, but when you are in yoga nidra, there comes a moment when you do not know that you are in yoga nidra. When the mind disassociates itself from the sensory channels, it becomes powerful, but at this point it needs training. The involuntary

systems of the brain have to be properly trained; otherwise, there is practically no difference between ordinary sleep and yoga nidra.

Yoga nidra performs two beneficial functions: firstly it removes fatigue and invigorates the body, and secondly it removes tension and restores the elasticity of the mind. The dross of day-to-day life is deposited in the subconscious mind and in due course it exerts a deleterious influence on one's mental makeup. Just as a house must be swept daily to keep it clean, similarly to have a normal personality, the *samskaras*, the mental dirt that accumulates daily in the subconscious, must be removed. Yoga nidra performs this essential service for us, removing our mental abnormalities and clearing the way to spiritual progress.

Sage Patanjali has defined yoga as the control of *chitta vrittis*, mental modifications. Good behaviour is the outcome of *chitta vrittis*; our conscious, subconscious and unconscious fields are our *chitta*. Simultaneous awareness of these three fields is *aham asmi*, 'I am'. This state in which we are aware but not aware that we are aware, is experienced in yoga nidra. A process of sure but imperceptible sublimation takes place within.

THE INNER FIRE

It is said that meditation creates a fire which burns away your sins. What is sin? Actions that create uneasiness and abnormal feelings in the mind are sins. Cynics dismiss the word 'sin' with a smile of derision. Whenever your conscience pricks you for any action of yours that is sin. Cynics are no exception to this rule, for sin is there whether you admit it or not. In meditation your consciousness penetrates the various layers of your inner self. This is the fire that burns away the dross of *samskaras* within. Thereafter comes the yogic state of supreme peace and tranquillity of mind described in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Yoga nidra is one of the main techniques for the attainment of this peace.

Most diseases and errors in behaviour which you attribute to your present circumstances have an intimate connection with your past and your early childhood. This means that diseases pertaining to the body and the problems pertaining to the mind, your difficulty in adjusting with the circumstances and environment, are not necessarily due to the present circumstances. They may be deeply rooted in some of the impressions or experiences of your childhood. Therefore, it is necessary for everyone to follow the whole series of their experiences right from childhood. However, these impressions and experiences are so strongly embedded in the subconscious that unless total relaxation of the mind takes place, they do not really come up. You can never see them, feel them or know them. It is only when complete relaxation has taken place, when the mind, the senses and the present experiences are withdrawn that the subconscious mind emerges and comes up to the surface level.

During yoga nidra, the subconscious mind is brought to the surface and you are able to perceive a series of experiences, of karma or impressions, which have been buried in your subconscious mind for years, from your childhood up to this day. In yoga nidra, the emphasis is on relaxation together with unified or total awareness.

HOW TO PRACTISE?

How to practise yoga nidra? First do a few asanas and pranayamas and follow them up with yoga nidra. This technique is best learned from a guru. Not that it will cause any harm if you practise it without a guru's help, but if you do it on your own, the chances are that every time you begin you will end up falling asleep. Your samskaras will not be destroyed and you will not make any progress. To be absolutely successful, yoga nidra presupposes a spirit of communion between the guru and disciple. Only that disciple who has complete reverence for the guru can receive the real benefits of yoga nidra.



Yoga nidra should not be practised immediately after meals. Trataka will increase the efficacy if practised before yoga nidra, but if it is found to be too difficult, shambhavi mudra or nasikagra drishti can be practised. If these preliminaries are performed, the guru is in a better position to help the disciple.

The important point in yoga nidra, as well as other meditation practices, is that you must not allow yourself to fall asleep. In yoga nidra sleep tries to overpower you. If you can overcome this weakness, you will gain in willpower, and through willpower you can achieve great things in life. If sleep comes, concentrate on the body or on the sleep itself as if it is trying to possess you and you are watching it. If images arise before your mind, go on watching them. In yoga nidra, when you feel that you are unconscious, it actually means that you are conscious of being unconscious, but if you sleep, if you lose your consciousness, then it is *nidra*, sleep, and not yoga

nidra. Therefore, in yoga nidra the mind is not allowed to concentrate or unite at one particular point, but it is made to move from point to point.

It is always better to practise yoga nidra either with someone or with the help of a recording. If you practise yoga nidra by yourself, there is a problem. You will retain your memory, your intellectual awareness throughout the practice and that should not be the case. The instructions should be the same, but it is better if they are recorded. Day after day, the same system should be repeated. The emphasis, the sentences, the arrangement, everything should be the same point by point; nothing should differ.

THE RESOLVE

Those who want to influence themselves and impress their personality through yoga nidra must make some kind of a resolve, an auto-suggestion, at the beginning of the practice. The individual consciousness becomes so sensitive and receptive during the practice of yoga nidra that if you try to influence yourself you can. This indicates the importance of the deeper layers of the consciousness. There are much deeper, higher and more potential states of individual awareness than we are aware of at this moment. Every state of consciousness has its own limitations of experience. The particular state of consciousness in which we exist now is more limited than the subconscious state which we usually experience in yoga nidra. In this psychic sleep there is a greater possibility to induce a new system of thinking, a new process of adjustment and also an absolutely new process of tranquillity.

I call yoga nidra 'taming the wild monkey'. It is a technique of taming this wild monkey, the human mind. This anarchical mind, this disorderly, broken and schizophrenic mind can be brought into a beautiful pattern if yoga nidra is practised correctly.

Hari Om Tat Sat



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