BIHAR YOGA®

Yoga Nidra

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Yoga Nidra

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Swami Niranjan

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Swami Satyananda Saraswati

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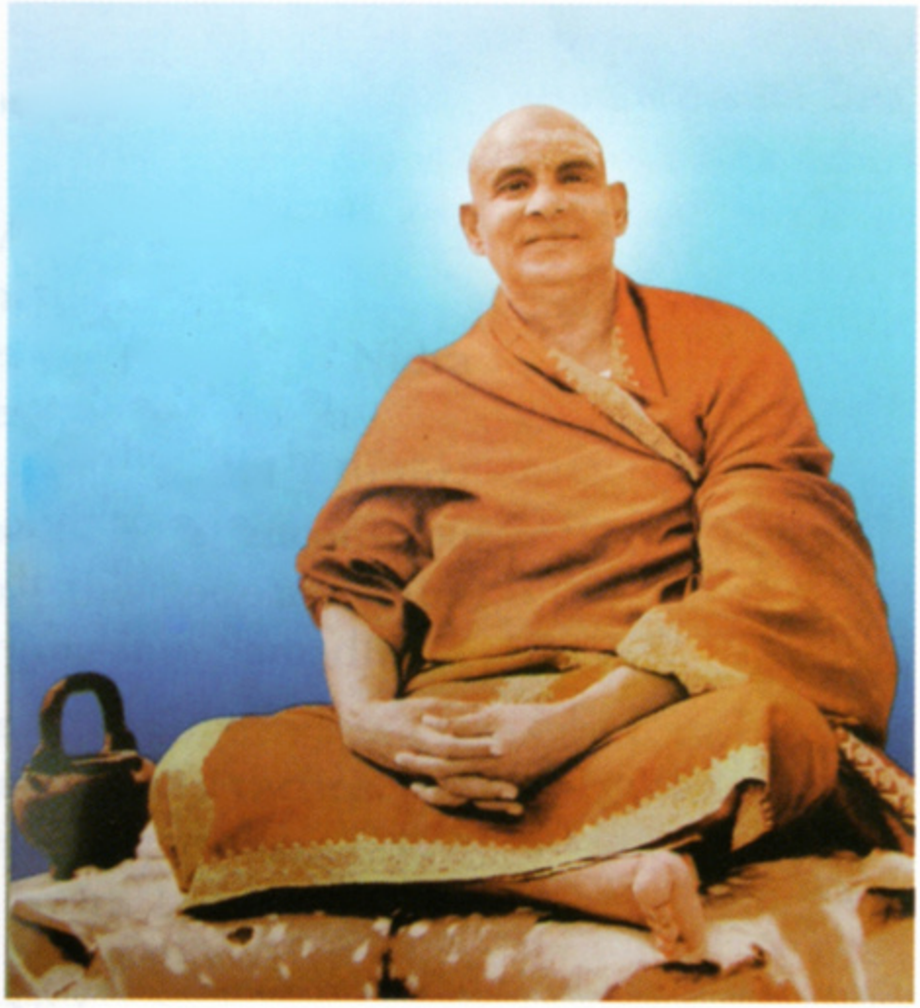

Dedication

In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.

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Introduction

Yoga nidra, which is derived from the tantras, is a powerful technique in which you learn to relax consciously. In yoga nidra, sleep is not regarded as relaxation. People feel that they are relaxing when they collapse in an easy chair with a cup of coffee, a drink or a cigarette, and read a newspaper or switch on the television. But this will never suffice as a scientific definition of relaxation. These are only sensory diversions. True relaxation is actually an experience far beyond all this. For absolute relaxation you must remain aware. This is yoga nidra, the state of dynamic sleep.

Yoga nidra is a systematic method of inducing complete physical, mental and emotional relaxation. The term *yoga nidra* is derived from two Sanskrit words, *yoga* meaning union or one-pointed awareness, and *nidra* which means sleep. During the practice of yoga nidra, one appears to be asleep, but the consciousness is functioning at a deeper level of awareness. For this reason, yoga nidra is often referred to as psychic sleep or deep relaxation with inner awareness. In this threshold state between sleep and wakefulness, contact with the subconscious and unconscious dimensions occurs spontaneously.

In yoga nidra, the state of relaxation is reached by turning inwards, away from outer experiences. If the consciousness can be separated from external awareness and from sleep, it becomes very powerful and can be applied in many ways, for

example, to develop the memory, increase knowledge and creativity, or transform one's nature.

In the raja yoga of Patanjali there is a state called pratyahara where the mind and mental awareness are dissociated from the sensory channels. Yoga nidra is one aspect of pratyahara which leads to the higher states of concentration and samadhi.

The birth of yoga nidra

When I was living with my guru, Swami Sivananda, in Rishikesh, I had a very important experience which triggered my interest in developing the science of yoga nidra. I had been appointed to watch over a Sanskrit school where small boys were learning to chant the Vedas. It was my duty to remain awake all night to guard the school while the acharya was away. At three a.m. I used to fall into a deep sleep, and at six I would get up and return to the ashram. Meanwhile, the boys got up at four, bathed and chanted Sanskrit prayers, but I never heard them.

Some time later, my ashram was holding a large function, and the boys of that Sanskrit school were brought to chant the vedic mantras. During the function they recited certain slokas which I did not know, yet somehow I felt that I had heard them before. As I listened, the feeling grew stronger, and I tried in vain to remember where and when I had heard them. I was absolutely certain that I had never read or written them, yet they sounded so familiar to me.

Finally, I decided to ask the boys' guru, who was seated nearby, if he could explain the meaning of this. What he told me changed my entire outlook on life. He said that this feeling of familiarity was not at all surprising, because my subtle body had heard the boys chanting the same mantras many times while I was sleeping in their school. This was a great revelation to me. I knew that knowledge is transmitted directly through the senses, but from this experience I realized that you can also gain direct knowledge without any sensory medium as well. That was the birth of yoga nidra.

From that experience, further ideas and insights came to my mind. I realized that sleep was not a state of total unconsciousness. When one is asleep, there remains a state of potentiality, a form of awareness that is awake and fully alert to the outer situations. I found by training the mind, it is possible to utilize this state.

Tantric origin

After this discovery, I began studying the tantric scriptures in a new light. I came across many important but little known practices, which interested me greatly. After practising them myself, I decided to construct a new system called yoga nidra which would incorporate the essence of these practices without having complicated ritualistic drawbacks.

The characteristic feature of yoga nidra was the systematic rotation of consciousness in the body, which originated from the tantric practice of *nyasa* (meaning 'to place' or 'to take the mind to that point'). Nyasa was practised in a sitting posture and involved the use of specific mantras which were placed, felt or experienced at different parts of the body. First the name of the part was recited, then it was visualized or touched, and the mantra was placed there. Nyasa was a means of consecrating the physical body by instilling higher awareness or divine consciousness into the various parts during tantric ritual practices. For example, the Angushtadi-Shadanga-nyasa[1] was used to place mantras in the hand as follows:

- Thumb: *Hram angushtabhyam namah*
- Index finger: *Hrim tarjanibhyam swaha*
- Middle finger: *Hrum madhyamabhyam vashat*
- Ring finger: *Hraim anamikabhyam vashat*
- Little finger: *Hraum kanishthabhyam vaushat*
- Palm and back of hand: *Hrah karatalaprishtabhyam phat*

In a similar manner, in the Hridayi-Shadanga-nyasa, certain mantras were placed at the various parts of the body.

The present form of yoga nidra, which I have devised, enables people who are unfamiliar with Sanskrit mantras to

gain the full benefits of the traditional nyasa. It can be beneficially practised by people of any religion or culture. In the beginning I used to call this practice 'yogic sleep', but now I have become more aware of the vast potentialities of yoga nidra and I think that yoga nidra is nothing but yoga nidra. If you ask me to translate yoga nidra into French or Spanish, I will say 'yoga nidra'. It is an international practice.

Experiments with yoga nidra

Since devising the practice, I have carried out many experiments to validate these ideas. First I tried it on myself and then on different people. I even succeeded in training an Alsatian dog. Later on I experimented with some of my disciples and with many children, giving them knowledge, experience and instruction while they were sleeping soundly.

One of my most interesting experiments was with a little boy who presented himself at my ashram for sannyasa. I wanted to send him to school, but he flatly refused. He was a very naughty boy, an absolute monkey. All day long he broke things, harassed visitors and caused accidents. Finally he became such a liability for the ashram that I decided to try yoga nidra on him.

I began by chanting the 15th chapter of the Gita to him about three minutes after he had fallen asleep. Then when he got up in the morning I would have him read through the chapter, which he would do, of course, mindlessly. After one week he was able to recite the whole chapter by heart. When this succeeded I went ahead with other texts, and in this way I managed to teach him Srimad Bhagawatam, Upanishads, Bible, Koran, English, Hindi, Sanskrit, all that I knew, while he was sound asleep.

Now that boy is twenty-one and I have sent him to the USA. He speaks eleven languages, and writes and lectures in English better than I do, yet he has never been to school. All of his studies and learning took place within that two year period when I gave him yoga nidra, and he does not even remember it.

Soon afterwards I made another experiment. Thirty people were practising yoga nidra and about ten of them were snoring loudly. At that time I instructed them, 'When I say Hari Om Tat Sat, you must get up.' I repeated it twice. When the yoga nidra was finished I said 'Hari Om Tat Sat' and everybody sat up, even those who had been snoring throughout. I asked them how they had awakened. They said, 'Suddenly'. They did not hear the last Hari Om Tat Sat or even the one in the middle of the practice, but somehow they had still followed my instruction. Now, this is a very significant factor. It means even when you sleep, your self is awake and aware.

From these experiments I have drawn my own conclusions. Deepest sleep may not be sleep at all. Perhaps when you are in deep sleep at night, you have more awareness, more potential, than when you are in the dreaming state. This means you can learn more when you are sleeping than when you are awake, and this is how we are utilizing yoga nidra for the evolution of the mind.

Impressing the mind

How does this happen? The answer is simple. When the relaxation is complete, the receptivity is greater. When the consciousness is connected to all the senses, the receptivity is less. This is the secret of yoga nidra. Due to the intellectualization process, the knowledge that goes into the brain does not really impress itself there. But when you withdraw your mind a little bit, and enter into a state where you are neither in deep sleep nor completely awake, whatever impressions enter the mind at that time become powerful, and they remain there.

There are distinct levels of mind. Some are very hard soil; some are very tender soil. The conscious mind is like hard soil because it has intellect and logic in operation. Intellect is a process of analyzing things. It does not accept everything; it rejects as well. But the deeper consciousness is not like that. Whatever impression you plant within the

subconscious mind cannot be rejected. It will grow and the fruits will enrich every aspect of your life.

Therefore, you should not be worried if you sleep in yoga nidra. On the other hand, maybe that is more powerful. But, you must keep one thing in mind: 'I am not going to sleep.' You should not try to sleep. You should try to keep awake, because if you sleep, then it is not yoga nidra.

Supposing you play a tape, but you go to sleep and hear nothing. Then what you should do is replay the tape in the morning when you wake up. Listen to that replay with direct attention. This will create the communication or bridge between conscious and unconscious. This is how languages are learned. You can learn anything like this. If you have certain habits which you want to overcome, the suitable seeds or sankalpas should be first put into the unconscious and then you must listen to them during consciousness. This is a very important science of yogic self-transformation for the future.

The hypnayogic state

In yoga nidra, the consciousness is in a state between waking and sleep, but it is subject to neither. In modern psychology this has been termed 'the hypnagogic state' but I prefer to call it 'the hypnayogic state'. But the best name of all is 'yoga nidra'. In this state the mind is exceptionally receptive. Languages and other subjects can be learned rapidly. Suggestions given at this time are successful in removing unwanted habits and tendencies. In fact, yoga nidra can be used for directing the mind to accomplish anything. This is the secret of the extraordinary accomplishments of great yogis and swamis.

The practice of yoga nidra enables one to receive intuitions from the unconscious mind. This state is the fount of artistic and poetic inspiration. It is also the source of the most creative scientific discoveries. Wolfgang von Goethe used the inspirations and intuitions from this state to solve problems arising in his work. In dreams occurring

in this state, Kekule realized the circular molecular structure of benzene, Noble laureate Niels Bohr saw the planetary structure of the atom, and Einstein accelerated his awareness to the speed of light in the famous 'thought experiments' which led to the theory of relativity.

The intuitions received in yoga nidra enable one to find within himself the answers to all problems. One's true nature and integrity manifest, enabling him to live a meaningful and peaceful life in any environment. This is the opening of the 'third eye', which takes the consciousness beyond the conditioned personality with its tensions and complexes. No longer emotionally identified with the mind and body, one's entire being is pervaded with divine consciousness.

In the Tripura Rahasya[2] it is stated: "Therefore, realize with a still mind your own true nature, which is the one pure, undivided consciousness underlying the restless mind which is composed of the whole universe in all its diversity. Realize, with a still mind, the state between sleep and wakefulness... This is the real Self, inherent in which one is no longer deluded."

Yoga Nidra – The Blissful Relaxation

Most people sleep without resolving their tensions,
This is termed nidra.
Nidra means sleep, no matter what or why,
But yoga nidra means sleep after throwing off the burdens,
It is of a blissful, higher quality altogether.

When awareness is separate and distinct from the vrittis,
When waking, dream and deep sleep pass like clouds,
Yet awareness of atma remains
This is the experience of total relaxation.

Relaxation does not mean sleep.
Relaxation means to be blissfully happy,
It has no end.
I call bliss absolute relaxation;
Sleep is a different matter.
Sleep gives only mind and sense relaxation.
Bliss relaxes the atma, the inner self;
That is why, in tantra,
Yoga nidra is the doorway to samadhi.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Theory

The Art of Relaxation

During the last hundred years or so, the way of life has changed greatly throughout the world. The social system and other systems are no longer the same as they used to be in ancient times. This has brought about a dispersion of human energies at all levels. The mind of man has lost the point of balance and harmony in every sphere of existence. We are so engrossed in material survival that we are not aware of what has been happening to us.

Within the last century or two, diseases have sprung up with new dimensions, expressions and manifestations, and this has reached a peak in the last few decades. Medical science has put an end to the great plagues of the past, but we are now faced with a new epidemic of stress-related disorders caused by our inability to adapt to the highly competitive pace of modern life.

Psychosomatic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, migraine, asthma, ulcers, digestive disorders and skin diseases arise from tensions in the body and mind. The leading causes of death in developed countries, cancer and heart disease, also stem from tension.

Modern medical science has been trying to tackle these problems in many ways, but frankly speaking, they have failed to deliver the necessary health to man. This is because the real problem does not lie in the body; it originates in man's changing ideals, in his way of thinking and feeling.

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When there is dissipation of energy, dispersion of ideals, how can you expect to experience harmony in your body and mind?

The international problem today is not hunger, poverty, drugs or fear of war. It is tension, hypertension, total tension. If you know how to free yourself of tension, you know how to solve your problems in life. If you are able to balance your tensions, you can control your emotions, anger and passions. You can control heart disease, high blood pressure, leukaemia and angina pectoris.

The threefold tensions

Whether you think too much or you don't think at all, you accumulate tensions. If you work physically or you do not work at all, you accumulate tensions. Whether you sleep too much or not at all, you accumulate tensions. Whether you take a heavy protein diet, a carbohydrate diet, or a vegetarian diet, you accumulate tensions. And these tensions amass in the different layers of the human personality. They accumulate in the muscular, emotional and mental systems.

In yoga we deal with the problems of tension with a wide periscope. We realize that if the mind is tense, the stomach will also be tense. And if the stomach is tense, the whole circulatory system is also tense. It is a vicious circle of events. Therefore, in yoga, relaxation from tension is one of the chief concerns.

These inner tensions of the individual contribute to collective psychological tensions which can manifest in unhappy family life, chaos and disorder in social life, and aggression and warfare between communities and nations. Religions have failed to give peace of mind to the individual. Law, police, armies and governments have been unable to establish harmony between people. The yogic texts all unequivocally state that peace can only be found within, never without. Therefore, if we wish to create a more peaceful world, we must first learn how to relax and harmonize our own body and mind.

Yogic philosophy, as well as modern psychology, enumerates three basic types of tension which are responsible for all the agonies of modern life. Through the systematic practice of yoga nidra, these threefold tensions can be progressively released.

Muscular tensions are related to the body itself, the nervous system and endocrinal imbalances. These are easily removed by the deep physical relaxation attained in the state of yoga nidra.

Emotional tensions, which stem from various dualities such as love/hate, profit/loss, success/failure, happiness/unhappiness, are more difficult to erase. This is because we are unable to express our emotions freely and openly. Often we refuse to recognize them, so they are repressed, and the resulting tensions become more and more deeply rooted. It is not possible to relax these tensions through ordinary sleep or relaxation. A method such as yoga nidra can tranquilize the entire emotional structure of the mind.

Mental tensions are the result of excessive mental activity. The mind is a whirlpool of fantasies, confusions and oscillations. Throughout our life, the experiences registered by our consciousness are accumulated in the mental body. From time to time these explode, affecting our body, mind, behaviour and reactions. When we are sad, angry or irritated, we often attribute that condition of the mind to some superficial cause. But the underlying cause behind man's abnormal behaviour lies in the accumulated tensions on the mental plane. Yoga nidra is the science of relaxation which enables each of us to dive deep down into the realms of the subconscious mind, thereby releasing and relaxing mental tensions, and establishing harmony in all facets of our being.

Resting more efficiently

Most people think that relaxation is very simple; just recline and close your eyes. Yet, excepting the scientists, nobody understands what relaxation really means. You are tired so you go to bed and think that is relaxation. But unless you

are free from muscular, mental and emotional tensions, you are never relaxed. Despite a superficial sense of wellbeing, most people are full of tensions all the time. They habitually bite their nails, scratch their head, stroke their chin, or tap their feet. Or they may pace about restlessly, talk compulsively, display constant irritability, or chain smoke.

People do these things because they lack awareness of their own inner tension. They may think that they are relaxed, but a closer look reveals that they are not. Even while sleeping, thoughts and worries revolve in the mind, so that the tense person wakes up feeling exhausted. In order to relax completely, the inner tensions of the body, emotions and mind must be released. Then the actual state of relaxation dawns. The practice of yoga nidra is the scientific method of removing these tensions.

Yoga nidra is a more efficient and effective form of psychic and physiological rest and rejuvenation than conventional sleep. Those who adopt this technique in their daily routine soon experience profound changes in their sleeping habits. The total systematic relaxation of a yoga nidra session is equivalent to hours of ordinary sleep without awareness. A single hour of yoga nidra is as restful as four hours of conventional sleep. This is one of the secrets of the superhuman efficiency and energy of many great yogis, past and present, who have managed to achieve so much in one short lifetime.

In fact, the capacity to sleep and dream consciously in yoga nidra is an evolutionary process which has been utilized by many exceptional people throughout history, paving the way to greater inspiration and achievement in their lives. The officers of Napoleon, the 17th century general and emperor of France, for example, have reported that he possessed an unfathomable and tireless source of energy and inspiration. At the very height of pitched battle, just when the outcome was in the balance, he would hand over his command to a subordinate, leaving instructions that he was not to be disturbed for twenty minutes under any

circumstance. Then, retiring to his tent and stretching out upon an enormous bearskin, he would enter yoga nidra. Within seconds his loud, regular snores would be emerging to mix with all the desperate sounds of battle. Precisely twenty minutes later he would emerge, fresh, invigorated and inspired, remount his horse and inevitably lead the French army to a decisive victory.

Secret of transformation

Through the practice of yoga nidra, we are not only relaxing, but restructuring and reforming our whole personality from within. Like the mythological phoenix, with every session we are burning the old samskaras, habits and tendencies in order to be born anew. This process is not only much quicker than other systems which work on an external basis only, but the results are also more reliable and permanent.

I will tell you about an experience I had with hardened criminals which will make this more clear. In 1968, during a world tour, I was invited to a detention camp to teach yoga. As soon as I arrived in the compound, about six hundred prisoners converged on me. They laughed and hooted, pulled my dhoti and one of them presented me with a packet of cigarettes. They had no sense of honour or respect.

I knew I could not teach them any yoga in that state, so I decided to try yoga nidra. I told them all to lie down quietly on their backs and get ready for the practice. But they could not be still. They kicked and pulled each other, shouted, spat and did many disturbing things while I was waiting for them to calm down. For half an hour I only uttered two sentences, "Please close your eyes. Don't move your body." I was waiting for them to become quiet, but they never did, so finally I gave up and returned to my hotel.

The next day I phoned the detention camp to inform them that I would not be coming again. But the man in charge begged me to return. "Swamiji," he said, "you have cast a spell over them. They have been quiet ever since you left." So they persuaded me to come again.

The second time I went to the prison, the same prisoners lay down quietly. When I asked them to get ready for surya namaskara, they said, "No, we want the yoga that you taught us yesterday." So for six days I taught them yoga nidra, how to relax from top to bottom, outside to inside, every part of their being. Daily reports came to inform me that their dispositions were improving and there had been fewer quarrels than ever before.

On the seventh day there was a farewell meeting, and all of them were there. When it was my turn to speak, I took out the packet of cigarettes which I had been given and said, "The first day you wanted me to smoke. Here are the cigarettes you gave me, and now I will smoke them with you." The man who had given the cigarettes to me immediately came running up onto the stage and apologized profusely, "Swamiji, I am so sorry that I gave you those cigarettes. Please give them back to me." This man, who had not known how to behave with a swami one week earlier, was completely transformed, without being taught anything except yoga nidra.

What is the secret of this transformation? Sermons? No. Admonitions? No. Release of tension, relaxation and peace of mind are the secret of transformation. When a man is under tension, his behaviour is influenced, and when he relaxes, he becomes natural. He knows the reality, the truth. Then he also knows how to behave, because the knowledge of truth is necessary for right behaviour. And knowledge of truth only comes when you are free of tension.

Training the Mind

Yoga nidra means sleep with a trace of awareness. It is a state of mind in between wakefulness and dream. When you practise yoga nidra you are opening the deeper phases of your mind. At this moment, your intellectual mind is operating, but when you are able to relax, the subconscious and unconscious levels of the mind open.

If you practise yoga nidra, then the nature of your mind can be changed, diseases can be cured, and your creative genius can be restored. The subconscious and the unconscious mind are the most powerful forces in the human being. This simple practice of yoga nidra has the capacity of penetrating into the depths of the human mind.

The subconscious mind is a very obedient disciple, and immediately carries out the orders that you put to it. If you know how to practise yoga nidra, you can train your subconscious mind completely. Then the ordinary mind and intellect will follow suit.

The root of creativity

Yoga nidra is regarded as a tantric practice because in tantra the evolution of mind should become a spontaneous matter. You do not have to fight with your nature, habits and limitations, because by doing so, you are creating animosity within yourself. Therefore, most people who try to correct themselves through the religious path become schizophrenic.

For the last century, psychologists have been telling us, "If you have a fault you must accept it. You cannot remove it by hatred." Then how can we eradicate it? Go down to the lower recesses of the mind and cut the root, then the tree will die by itself. The unconscious mind is the base of man's normal and abnormal behaviour; the base of all that we are is in the subconscious and unconscious realms. Therefore, why keep on cutting the branches and the leaves? Yoga nidra is a practice which will help you to dive deep into the depths of your mind.

Man is weak because he is depending merely on his intellect and the information of his senses. But once you open the doors of the deeper mind and you repose in yoga nidra, you are at the root of creativity. In Hindu mythology the symbol of yoga nidra is Lord Narayana reposing on the ocean of milk. He is lying on a large serpent with many hoods, and the beautiful Lakshmi is massaging his feet. From his navel a lotus flower springs, and seated in the pericarp is Lord Brahma, symbol of the unconscious. This means that in yoga nidra, your unconscious manifests. Lord Narayana is in repose; your blanket is the serpent, and the floor is the milk ocean.

Therefore, when you practise yoga nidra, you must completely relax, because this is not a practice in concentration. If you keep following the instructions of the person who is guiding you in yoga nidra, it is possible to open the doors of your personality. However, if you happen to miss a few instructions it does not matter; what is important is that you keep on listening to the voice.

The state of receptivity

In daily life most people are not very receptive, but in yoga nidra the mind assumes a very receptive phase. Just as you melt iron and then cast it into a particular mould, in the same way, there is a phase when the mind is melting and at that time you can cast good and creative impressions on it. Receptivity of mind can be awakened only when the

dissipations are annihilated, and in yoga nidra we do this by awakening the emotional structure of the mind.

If I say that this is right and that is wrong, you may agree with me, but that is an intellectual agreement. In spite of the fact that you agree, you may not be able to implement it in your daily life. What is the obstruction? There must be some reason why it is so difficult to put our ideals into practice. All the highest ideals of life should not remain in the scriptures; we must start to live them. Yoga nidra puts us in touch with our psychic personality which is responsible for all that we think and do. With the help of yoga nidra, we can start to act on those ideals in which we believe.

For instance, once I met a man who was a professional thief and hardened criminal. After speaking with him for a long time, I finally convinced him that stealing was not the right thing to do. He even came to the point of feeling that he was a sinner and I thought I had performed a miracle and converted him. After five years I returned to his village and found he was still following the same profession. Why? Because I had only converted his intellect, not his inner self. I then remained in that village for six months and taught yoga nidra to the children and teachers in a school. The thief also attended these sessions, and he left his profession shortly after.

Intellectual conviction is one aspect of human life. We are all intellectually convinced about good and bad, but we also have to be emotionally receptive to everything that we need to assimilate. This is only possible when the distractions are withdrawn and the mind is calm and flowing on one smooth level. Then, whatever is impressed upon the mind becomes the corrective, the destiny, the directive.

If you know a person with bad habits, instruct him in the practice of yoga nidra. Wait until he is completely relaxed, then make some positive suggestions. During this peak period of receptivity he will listen to you. The illogical, restless mind can be disobedient, but the yoga nidra mind is absolutely obedient.

Understanding human nature

Before applying yoga nidra for a specific purpose, it is necessary to study the nature of the person you are instructing so that the material you teach does not cause a revolt in him. Although you may suggest great and sublime things in yoga nidra, the personality of another might oppose them. At some stage in our lives, most of us revolt against established rules, canons, or political order. This is because the ideas put into our mind are contrary to our real nature.

Everyone has his own nature by birth, and you cannot change it. In yoga this nature is known as swabhava (one's own emotional responses). Habits and religions can be changed, but not the nature. This nature continues with a person throughout his life and it is responsible for all his achievements and failures. In order to understand a person's nature, you will have to study his spontaneous behaviour, not his intellectual behaviour. Adults have been indoctrinated so much that their behaviour is very rarely natural and spontaneous. However, children are very spontaneous and because of this they can attune themselves to the practice of yoga nidra easily and thus gain maximum benefits.

Sowing the seed of change

In yoga nidra, perhaps the most effective means of training the mind is found in sankalpa, which you make for yourself during each practice. Anything in life can fail you, but not the sankalpa made during yoga nidra.

Sankalpa is a Sanskrit word which can be translated as resolve or resolution. It is an important stage of yoga nidra and a powerful method of reshaping your personality and direction in life along positive lines. If you know what you wish to achieve in life, sankalpa can be the creator of your destiny. Whether you want to become a painter, writer, orator or spiritual leader, you can train yourself through this simple technique. But first you must have a direction.

Most of us are floundering in the darkness, like ships without rudders, sails without sheet anchors. We don't know

which way we are headed because we are being led, forced and pushed by the tempest of life. Sometimes we go the right way too, but that is usually because we are pushed into it; we have no choice. Using the technique of yoga nidra, however, we have a choice in life, and that choice is created by the sankalpa or resolve.

The sankalpa takes the form of a short mental statement which is impressed on the subconscious mind when it is receptive and sensitive to autosuggestion during yoga nidra. The sankalpa has to be made, not when you are intellectually active, but when your mind is calm and quiet. Before and after the practice of yoga nidra there is a short period dedicated to sankalpa. The resolve you make at the beginning of the practice is like sowing a seed, and the resolve at the end is like irrigating it.

Sankalpa is a determination to become something or to do something in your life. Everyone has many desires and ambitions, however, most of them get lost, exhausted or destroyed, just as when you scatter seeds in different places, some may grow but most will not. Sankalpa is a seed which you create and then sow in the bed of your mind. When the mind is clear, the sankalpa grows very well. If you first prepare the bed with fertilizer and manure, remove the weeds and grass, and then sow the seed, the plant will grow better. In the same way, you have the mind and you have an idea. If you prepare the mind and sow the seed properly, then it will grow in your life and become a powerful directive.

Many people make intellectual resolves which rarely bring results. This is because the resolve is either not planted deeply enough, made when the mind is disturbed or when the mind is not ready to receive it. For success, the sankalpa needs to be planted with strong willpower and feeling. It should be planted when the mind is relaxed and ready to accept and absorb it. Such a state occurs during yoga nidra.

Once the seed of sankalpa is planted deep in the subconscious, it gathers the vast forces of the mind in order to bring about its fruition. This deep and powerful seed will

eventually manifest itself again and again at a conscious level and bring about changes in your personality and your life. Each of us has the power to remould our own mental structure. No personality is beyond reformation, and no fear or obsession is so deep rooted that it cannot be changed.

The seed of change is found in the resolve made in yoga nidra. This resolution must be backed by deeply ingrained willpower in order to be carried through. Sankalpa is a powerful technique and it should be used intelligently. Although you can use the resolve for therapeutic purposes, it should rather be used for a greater purpose, such as achieving self-realization or the state of samadhi. If you want to transform your life pattern, that can be done by the power of the sankalpa made during yoga nidra. If there is a negative tendency or habit in your life and you want to correct it, that can also be done through a positive sankalpa.

Sankalpa is a very powerful instrument in the hands of man. The purpose of sankalpa is not to fulfil desires, but to create strength in the structure of the mind. You can even say that sankalpa is the force of will. A sankalpa should only be made when one understands its real purpose and meaning. In the beginning most people do not know what sankalpa is or which sankalpa they should make. Therefore, it is better to wait until understanding develops.

Sankalpa can create a direction for your whole life if you use it wisely. But if you utilize it only for the eradication of bad habits such as smoking or drinking, then you are misusing it. The purpose of sankalpa is to influence and transform the whole life pattern, not only physically but also mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Then, if you are a heavy smoker or drinker, you will automatically give it up. It is for this reason that we don't recommend the use of sankalpa for eliminating bad habits. It is better to choose a sankalpa that will change your whole personality so that you become more balanced, happy and fulfilled. When sankalpa becomes the directing force, everything you do in life becomes successful.

Experiences in Yoga Nidra

In what way does yoga nidra affect the body and mind? It can relax the whole system, awaken the psychic body, give one experiences of the astral plane, shift pressures from the coronary system and also exert an influence on the physical matter in the brain. When we practise yoga nidra, we are trying to transcend the behaviour of the external mind. Various centres in the brain are stimulated systematically, so the experiences we undergo are natural. When the mind becomes subtle during the practice of yoga nidra, its experiences are almost on the same level as we have in dreams. There is, of course, the fundamental difference that the experiences in yoga nidra are much more vivid and clear than those that occur in the dreaming state.

Doctrine of karma

Yoga nidra is a practice which brings the deeper layers of the psyche into conscious experience. In every area of the brain, there are millions and millions of impressions stored in the form of archetypes. These archetypes, in themselves, are the sum total of each and every experience of life, which we call karma. Just as a camera registers whatever has been photographed onto the negative, in the same manner every experience we undergo, consciously or even unconsciously, is registered by the subconscious mind, and in the course of time it is turned into what we call an archetype. Even as a

tree produces seeds every year, and in the course of its life span it will produce millions, in the same way, the human mind produces billions of seeds from its experiences, and these seeds are known as karmas, samskaras or archetypes.

Man is not only a biological substance, he is the microcosmic creator. The macrocosmic creator is known as God, and the microcosmic creator is known as man. The macrocosmic creator evolves the planets and the universe, and the microcosmic creator makes karma out of every action and experience.

Karmas or samskaras are accumulated in the layers of man's inner consciousness. The deepest layer in which samskaras are engraved and processed is the unconscious where they remain latent and unmanifest. The second layer of samskaras is not so deep. This is the subconscious level where the samskaras are in the process of transition, manifestation and storage. The third layer of samskaras is in the process of maturity and fructification at the conscious level. In the doctrine of karma these three levels are known as current karma, accumulated karma and destiny.

Karmic experiences

During the practice of yoga nidra your consciousness travels through one layer of consciousness to another, according to its possibility and capacity. Sometimes it goes very deep, then you have more fantastic and exploding experiences. Sometimes the consciousness is not able to go deep; it only remains within the precinct of the conscious mind. Then you have some sort of relaxation, sleep or pleasant experience.

Experiences such as levitation may occur while the consciousness is traversing through the subconscious mind. When the awareness penetrates into the subconscious realm, it is temporarily detached from the body idea. When this dissociation takes place between mind and body, you have a lot of wonderful experiences. All these experiences, which you have in the different layers of your subconscious and unconscious, are nothing but the manifestation of your

karmas either from this life or previous lives. This is how the process of yoga nidra eliminates the whole store of karmas and purifies the deeper levels of the mind.

Sometimes experiences of a past life arise directly, but mostly they manifest symbolically. Words and concepts are the language of the conscious 'intellectual' mind. The subconscious mind has a language of its own based on symbols, colours and sounds. These are the archetypes which emerge from the psychic realm during yoga nidra. A single image or picture can convey an experience which words cannot adequately express. This is why the subconscious memory can be such a vast and efficient storehouse of our past.

The whole process of knowledge takes place through these archetypes which form our inner programming. According to modern psychology, everything in the cosmos is contained within the mind in archetypal form, just as modern neurophysiologists now regard the brain as a hologram of the entire universe. These innumerable archetypes are locked inside our being, and they must be brought out and experienced if we are to know what we are.

During yoga nidra, the specific symbols which are visualized strike at the different areas of the mind and explode the archetypes or latent samskaras. The symbols used in yoga nidra are actually mandalas or pictorial conceptions – a rose, a temple, a boat, a lion or a man. Mandalas are composed of yantras. These are fundamental geometrical arrangements. All the permutations and combinations of a line, a point and a circle. Yantras and mandalas are the most powerful way of releasing the stored archetypes into conscious awareness.

Extrasensory experiences

Behind the senses and the mind which we know, there are many other faculties which most of us have not experienced so far. Sometimes in yoga nidra, we are able to go to the core of the unconscious. Then we can manifest the latent faculties of the suprasonic cerebral circuits.

We can all see external objects; that is objective awareness. We can see an object, smell a flower, hear a sound, or experience a taste. This is called sensorial experience. For this, we must have an object to cognize or perceive. If there is no flower, our eyes cannot see it. However, there can be experience without an object; that is called extrasensorial perception. Even a blind man can see, and a deaf man can hear if they have developed those centres in the brain.

In this brain there are centres of extrasensorial perception which sometimes explode in yoga nidra or in meditation. These inner experiences cannot be dismissed as hallucinations just because they are not objective. For example, some time ago when I was abroad, a gentleman came to my room and said that he could distinctly smell sandalwood. Surely there was no sandalwood there, but I did not doubt his experience just because I did not experience it. At that time, within the precincts of the brain, a particular centre was awakened.

The extrasensorial centres in the brain are known as suprasonic circuits, and they are very powerful. I don't think these extrasensory experiences have anything to do with our karma. The possibility of this experience is inherent in every human being. However, only a few yogis and madmen have attained those experiences or developments.

Handling the experience

In my opinion, madness is not a sickness; it is a developmental state of the brain. I consider madness a spiritual experience which man has not been able to handle. In India there have been many great yogis who lived like madmen, and there were also such yogis in Greece. What is the difference between a yogi and a madman? A yogi is able to handle his experiences and a madman generally ends up in a lunatic asylum. In India there are many madmen who are able to handle themselves, and in the west there are many yogis who cannot. Gradually, through techniques such as yoga nidra, we are teaching them how to handle themselves.

The mind is something like a motor car. If you don't handle it properly you will have an accident. But if you are a good driver you know how to manage, whether you are driving a motor car or a truck. Now, in yoga nidra, sometimes you can go very deep. Although this practice is presently only intended to offer relaxation, its ultimate purpose is to take you deep into the state where you are completely united with your inner being.

Yoga nidra is not concentration

Therefore, in yoga nidra it is not necessary to concentrate, in fact, you should not. Just keep your mind moving from point to point and be aware of every experience. If you try to concentrate in yoga nidra you will obstruct the natural flow of awareness which takes the mind deeper into the Self.

Whether you hear your teacher's instructions or not does not matter. Even if you are dreaming of something else, the suggestions made by the teacher are still going to work on the subconscious mind. It is very natural for the practitioner of yoga nidra to miss some of the instructions because in the practice, very often the conscious mind withdraws itself so that the subconscious mind comes to the forefront. Then whatever is being spoken is imprinted on it. So whether you are practising yoga nidra with a teacher, or you are listening to a taped class, and your mind is drifting and vacillating, it does not matter.

In yoga nidra it is not important to make yourself peaceful. Even if your mind is full of anxiety and worry, fantasy and imagination while practising, it does not matter. If you are disturbed, it does not matter. Even if you are agonized mentally, it does not matter. If you are not able to lie down because of some sort of excitement, get up and see what it is. Don't try to be too strict and force yourself to remain absolutely motionless. In yoga nidra the important thing is simply to expose yourself to the instructions of the teacher, and to view any experiences which may arise with total awareness and detachment.

Process of Pratyahara

In the yogic system, yoga nidra is considered as a form of raja yoga. The classic exposition of raja yoga is found in the Yoga Sutras, a masterful collection of 196 sutras or aphorisms, written by sage Patanjali several centuries before the birth of Christ. Patanjali divided the path of raja yoga into eight stages, starting with the basic rules of attitude and behaviour that are conducive to mental peace and ending with samadhi, or self-realization, in which the contents and activity of the mind are completely transcended.

Stages of raja yoga

1. Yamas (social code)
2. Niyamas (personal code)
3. Asanas (postures – states of being)
4. Pranayama (control of prana, life-force, cosmic energy)
5. Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses)
6. Dharana (concentration)
7. Dhyana (meditation)
8. Samadhi (transcendental consciousness)

The first four stages are preparatory or external stages, and are concerned with specific practices. These stages are performed essentially by the conscious mind – the rational, analytical part of consciousness which is active in the normal waking state. The last four stages are higher or external stages; these are states of consciousness as well as the

practices needed to achieve them. These higher stages involve the subconscious mind, which is the storehouse of all experiences; and the ego, which regulates the flow of information into the conscious mind. (For more information on this topic refer to *Four Chapters on Freedom*, published by Yoga Publications Trust.)

Withdrawing the mind

Yoga nidra belongs to the higher stages of raja yoga, since it is essentially a method of pratyahara. Awareness is progressively withdrawn from the external world, the body, the process of breathing, the conscious mind, and finally, the unconscious mind. In advanced stages, when relaxation is complete, yoga nidra involves dharana and samadhi.

In the practice of yoga nidra, the mind gradually becomes one-pointed. In order to prevent the consciousness from becoming completely withdrawn, which would result in sleep, awareness is maintained by concentrating on the auditory channel. The rest of the terminals are disengaged and their connections in the cerebral cortex are dissociated so that no message gets through to the motor organs. Otherwise, the senses continually carry stimuli to the brain where the messages are relayed, and the motor organs are automatically stimulated, whether we are conscious of it or not. When the senses are disconnected for some time in yoga nidra, this is the fifth stage of raja yoga known as pratyahara.

The science of yoga nidra is based on the receptivity of consciousness. When consciousness is operating with the intellect and all the senses, we think we are awake and aware, but the mind is actually less receptive and more critical. When the consciousness is operating through only one sensory channel (e.g. hearing), it becomes far more sensitive, but not total. However, if consciousness is divested of all the associations of the senses, it becomes total.

This profound state is such that even the sense of self-awareness is completely consumed. During concentration you know you are concentrating, but when you are in the

state of yoga nidra, there comes a moment when you do not even know you are in yoga nidra. When the mind dissociates itself from all the sensory channels, it becomes very powerful, but then it needs training. Unless the involuntary systems of the brain have been trained, there is practically no difference between yoga nidra and sleep.

In yoga nidra we train the mind by taking it through a series of practices which bring about the desired state of awareness. Scientifically it has been found that when you practise yoga nidra, it is not just a monotonous kind of concentration. When you fix your awareness on the parts of the body, the feelings or the visualizations enumerated in the practice, you are actually monitoring the higher centres of the brain. This is how involuntary control is established and awareness is maintained, even though the sensory channels are not supplying the necessary information.

On the borderline

During the practice of yoga nidra the consciousness is at different levels. Sometimes it is very close to the senses and at others, it is at a very remote distance. When the consciousness is at a remote distance, then it is only possible to understand through the auditory channels. During yoga nidra the consciousness is suspended for a few moments periodically, which means that it alternates between the subconscious and unconscious states.

When pratyahara becomes deep and powerful, total isolation of the brain takes place. Then the cerebral fluid which flows around the brain underneath the skull is charged with a high level of energy. The late Dr Itzak Bentov developed a sound scientific model of this process. He recorded that standing resonant waves are set up in the circulatory system in deep meditation. In response to these waves, small rhythmic currents and wave forms are generated within the fluid surrounding the brain. These gradually stimulate and awaken the higher cerebral and psychic faculties of the brain.

At this point one begins to have psychic experiences. However, in yoga nidra these deep psychic experiences must be avoided. When you begin to develop psychic awareness, you are going beyond the range of yoga nidra. This is the fundamental difference between light and deep pratyahara. In the state of yoga nidra you are always on the borderline. When you enter the deep state of pratyahara, you are no longer practising yoga nidra.

In yoga nidra there should be no psychic experiences, no visions or explosions. The pattern of awareness in the mind should be constant and unbroken. You are neither on the psychic plane nor the conscious plane; you are on the borderline. The quantum of consciousness is not the same as when you are thinking. This is a very beautiful state which scientists call the hypnagogic or hypnopompic state, but which I call the threshold between this and that.

Yoga nidra and hypnosis

Because yoga nidra brings about a state of sensory withdrawal, many people think it is a form of hypnosis. But the truth is that these two are totally different sciences. Although they may start from the same point of relaxation and receptivity, yoga nidra proceeds in one direction and hypnosis in another.

The state of mind achieved in yoga nidra is far beyond hypnosis, but when the mind is dissociated from the sensory knowledge it does pass through a hypnotic state. However, if you can disconnect the sensory channels and still maintain awareness, you will be able to transcend the barriers of your personality and go to any depth or height. The consciousness can go as far as you can lead it. This is the aim of yoga nidra. But, at the same time, you must know when you are transcending, that up to a certain point, you are passing through the range of hypnosis.

Therefore, throughout the practice, one important instruction is always given: "Do not sleep." In yoga nidra you must try to maintain awareness. You are relaxed, but

you do not sleep. You are not conscious on the sensory level, but you are conscious of practising yoga nidra. A process of automatic thinking is going on. During yoga nidra the brain is completely awake. It receives a higher quality of stimuli and develops a different type of awareness than what we are experiencing now. However, in hypnosis, the subject is led into a deep sleep in which the brain is completely shut down. The consciousness is confined to a small area and the capacities are limited. This is a very tamasic condition, while yoga nidra increases the capacity and creates a sattvic condition.

The fundamental difference

Scientifically speaking, when the central nervous system and the master cortex do not supply the needed stimuli to the brain, and when the brain is isolated, it enters into a state which is called hypnosis. It is a momentary happening, a very small range of experience where the brain and cerebral cortex are dissociated from the energy channels.

According to yoga there are three important nadis or energy channels in this physical body known as ida, pingala and sushumna. Ida conveys the mental force, pingala the vital force, and sushumna the spiritual force. In other scientific terminology they are referred to as the sympathetic, parasympathetic and central nervous systems.

Throughout our lives, ida and pingala nadis are continually feeding the brain with the necessary stimuli which enable it to cognize an object, a sound, an idea. If you close off ida and pingala by means of pratyahara, then the brain is isolated. That is hypnosis. But if, at the same time, you can awaken sushumna (which is closed in most people), then, although you have dissociated the two channels of communication (ida and pingala) from the brain, the central nervous system is awakened, and in place of ida and pingala, sushumna will supply the necessary energy and stimuli to the brain.

The energy your brain is receiving now is through ida and pingala. What it lacks during hypnosis is the ida/pingala

connection. But in yoga nidra, the central nervous system – sushumna nadi, awakens the brain completely. During yoga nidra, because sushumna nadi is functioning, the brain receives a higher quality of stimuli and a different type of knowledge. Therefore, the kind of awareness experienced is completely different from at any other time. However, in hypnosis the brain is isolated from the sensory channels, therefore its knowledge is limited, its resources conditioned and it is not able to function beyond its limitations. That is the fundamental difference between the states of awareness achieved through hypnosis and yoga nidra.

One follows the instructions not the instructor

Yoga nidra does not depend on suggestion and persuasion. The instructions are given directly and the only suggestion is contained in the resolve, which is made entirely by the practitioner himself. In yoga nidra one learns to induce his own state of relaxation by following the spoken instructions. The instructor is only a guide. He gives the technique, but he will never force or compel the student in any way. It is the technique which leads the mind to illumination and independence of judgement, not the instructor. The practitioner consciously cultivates his own inner faculties and allows the intuitive inner knowledge to blossom forth.

In hypnosis, however, the therapist generally dominates the mind and will of the subject. This often results in obsession, captivity, lack of self-confidence and initiative. The sex drive, intellect, logic and determination are suppressed. The subject asks the therapist,. "Shall I go to the toilet now?" and the therapist replies, "Yes" or "No". If you ask the yoga nidra instructor the same question he will tell you, "That is your business, not mine. I am not responsible for you. You are responsible for yourself and I am responsible for myself." Even if the student's bad habits or behaviour rebound on him, the instructor remains unaffected and makes no attempt to alter his character. This is the attitude which yoga nidra develops.

A type of brainwashing

Of course, yoga nidra is a method which can be used to correct bad habits or attitudes. Therefore, many people ask, "Is this not a type of brainwashing?" Actually brainwashing is a method which was designed for political blackmailing. If you call yoga nidra brainwashing, then I think there is nothing in this world that is not brainwashing. What are televisions, radios, advertisements, newspapers, magazines and novels doing to our brains every minute of the day? It is really very good if the brain is washed with something clean.

In the receptive state created by yoga nidra we are able to correct the negative patterns already existing in the brain. Take a girl suffering from a fear psychosis. Doctors have tried all methods to treat her but have failed. If you are able to resolve her fears by injecting one simple idea into her mind, is this brainwashing? Perhaps, but in a positive sense.

In yoga we are taught to follow the path of knowledge, where we experience the pain, the sorrow, the agony, and transcend it. This is the best way, but is everybody capable of understanding and transcending their pain? For those who are not, this way of brainwashing is useful. After all, everybody is brainwashing himself all the time anyway. How to stop it? You don't have the awareness to stop it, even if you wanted to. You can only do it in samadhi perhaps, but not before.

Yoga Nidra and the Brain

Modern neurophysiologists have been able to demonstrate an obvious relationship between the body and the brain which was first recognized by the ancient yogis thousands of years ago. Using stimulating electrodes to probe the brains surface, neurosurgeons have shown that each part of the body is precisely mapped out along the surface of the central gyrus or fold of the sensory motor cortex of the brain.

Relaxing the mind by relaxing the body

This is where we make the connection between the latest neurosurgery and the meditation technique of yoga nidra. If you have ever practised this technique, you will recognize the signposts on the sensory-motor cortex as precisely those parts of the body through which your awareness passes during rotation of consciousness.

The brain is the physical mediator of consciousness, linking mind, body and emotions into one harmonious unit. The neurosurgeon affects the body by stimulating the brain. The practitioner of yoga nidra begins at the other end of the nerve pathway by heightening the awareness of the body in order to stimulate the brain. The progressive movement of awareness through the parts of the body not only induces physical relaxation, but clears all the nerve pathways to the brain, both those governing the physical

activity and those concerned with incoming information. At the same time we make a total run through the brain surface, from inside out. In this way, yoga nidra relaxes the mind by relaxing the body.

The motor homunculus or 'little man'

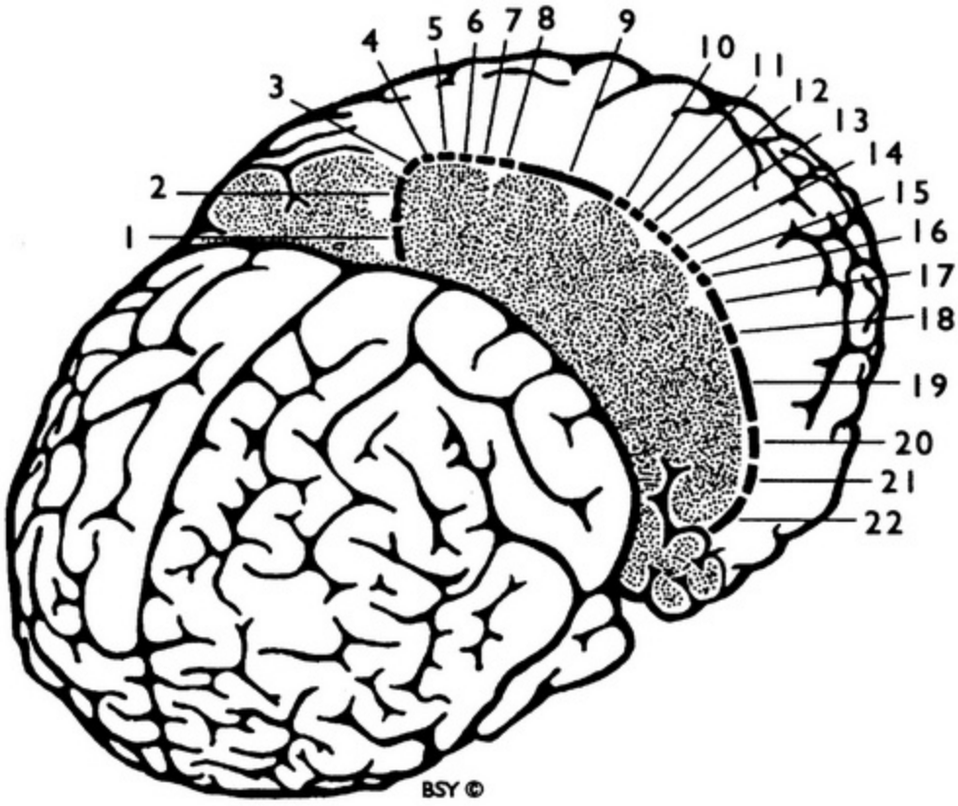
Researchers have named this neuronal map or hologram of the physical body existing within the cerebral white matter, the motor homunculus or 'little man' All the body parts through which the awareness passes during rotation of consciousness can be located there, for example: "Right hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, right side, right waist, right thigh, kneecap, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe..."

However, in terms of brain tissue, importance has been placed upon the hands, fingers, lips and nose which occupy areas far in excess of the relative size and dimensions of those parts in the physical body, and it is these same areas which receive added emphasis during rotation of consciousness in yoga nidra. These areas are almost as large as the space allotted to the entire remainder of the body from the wrists to the toes.

By physical standards, the motor homunculus is a little man of grotesque proportions, with enormously enlarged hands, fingers and facial features. He exists as a neuronal abstraction of the physical body, operating in the realm of neurotransmissions and conscious electrical energy flowing throughout the central nervous system and the network of nadis which form the pranic body.

Now we can begin to understand why the precise order of rotation of consciousness throughout the body parts is so important in the practice of yoga nidra. Once this sequence is established it should not be altered, as it induces a flow of pranic energy within the neuronal circuit of the motor homunculus. This flow is accompanied by a subjective

Cross Section of the Brain



Cross section of the brain revealing the motor cortex and indicating the areas of the body as mapped along the precentral gyrus. This is the motor homunculus – the symbolic man lying within the brain matter.

1. Toes
2. Ankle
3. Knee
4. Hip
5. Trunk
6. Shoulder
7. Elbow
8. Wrist
9. Hand
10. Little finger
11. Ring finger
12. Middle finger
13. Index finger
14. Thumb
15. Neck
16. Brow
17. Eyelid & eyeball
18. Face
19. Lips
20. Jaw
21. Tongue
22. Swallowing

experience of relaxation, release or 'letting go', as spontaneous dissociation of consciousness from the sensory and motor channels of experience occurs. Familiarity and daily repetition of this sequence exerts a rapid inturning effect upon the normally fragmented and dissipated awareness.

This state of withdrawal of sense consciousness, pratyahara, is enumerated by Patanjali as the fifth stage of raja yoga and the prelude to dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

How yoga nidra restores health

It is impossible to ignore the connection between the discoveries of modern brain researchers and those of the enlightened yogis who long ago evolved the practice of yoga nidra. Of course the yogic scientists of former ages did not devise this powerful technique merely as a means of alleviating diseases, but primarily as a way of attaining higher consciousness by expanding and liberating individual awareness from its fixation within the physical body and its sensory modalities, towards the more subtle pranic, psychic and spiritual dimensions underlying gross material existence.

However, in the context of modern man suffering from stress-related diseases, it is sufficient to recognize that these originate out of excessive identification of the psyche with the soma or material body, through the medium of the sensory channels, leading to nervous depletion and even breakdown. In yoga nidra, this destructive psychosomatic tendency is effectively alleviated by the opposite somato-psychic route. The psychosomatic imbalance is restored spontaneously due to liberation of prana or nervous energy, which is withdrawn from the sensory channels and modalities as pratyahara is attained. This energy is redirected for healing and rejuvenation of overtaxed tissues, glands and organs.

Sensations and feelings

Besides rotation of consciousness, there are many other practices in yoga nidra which are directly derived from the Tantras: awareness of the whole body, the brain and internal

organs; contact between earth and body; feelings of heaviness and lightness, heat and cold, pain and pleasure. After relaxation of the sensory-motor surface of the brain, the practice shifts to arousal of feelings or experiences. These seem to emanate from the core of our being, while simultaneously being experienced in a part of the body or throughout the body as a whole.

Throughout the body tissues and structures there are numerous specially adapted sensory nerve terminals which respond to specific types of stimuli, including touch, pressure, change of position, temperature, pain, pleasure and so on. These tiny sense organs including the proprioceptors of the joints, the pacinian corpuscles beneath the skin and the pain and temperature receptors, are continually gathering information from all parts of the body and relaying it to specific sites deep within the brain. Brain researchers have been able to locate and isolate the majority of these important centres in the base of the brain. The most relevant are those concerned with food and water intake, temperature regulation and the experiences of pain and pleasure.

As we awaken the sensations of heaviness and lightness, heat and cold, pain and pleasure, etc., we stimulate those centres of the brain responsible for maintaining harmony between our inner and outer environments. Each of these centres has its reciprocal centre for balancing our basic drives. For example, the pain centre and the pleasure centre, the hunger centre and satiety centre, etc. The pairing and alternation of these sensations in yoga nidra helps to maintain this homeostatic balance and even evolves it by bringing normally involuntary unconscious functions under control. In this way yoga nidra progressively transforms our total experience of sensual life within the physical body.

The real experience

By developing various feelings and sensations in yoga nidra, you are reminding yourself of the actual experience. When you are tasting a particular fruit, at that moment you actually

experience it, but after a few days, weeks or months, you can only imagine the experience. You cannot manifest the actual taste experience because of the inability of the untrained mind to bring the experiences of the past into the present.

The various experiences which individuals have in their lives lie buried in the past. What remains in the mind and in the brain is only a memory, not an actual experience. However, in yoga nidra, not just the memory, but the actual experience itself can ultimately be recreated via this somatopsychic route. Then one not only vividly remembers pain/pleasure, heat/cold, etc., but relives it, even to the extent of awakening physiological responses of sweating, shivering, etc. In yogic terms, this capacity to completely relive a past experience is one criterion of an evolved and truly creative mind.

After hearing some beautiful music which you like, you will certainly remember it. You may even imagine or feel it. But if you close your eyes and really begin to hear that music inside, exactly as you heard it originally, it is an exploding experience of reality which changes the whole structure of the mind completely.

This is why in yoga nidra the experiences of pleasure and pain, heat and cold, lightness and heaviness, should be brought to the forefront of the mind as real experiences. If you are trying to feel heaviness, you should feel your body so heavy that even if you want to lift your hands or feet, you will not be able to do so. Or if you are feeling heat, you must feel the heat in such a way that you may even perspire. Just to remember or feel heat is not enough. It has to become a real, living experience.

Experiencing the opposites

In yoga nidra the first experience to be awakened is the feeling of heaviness. Physical heaviness is a whole body sensation which accompanies deep muscular-skeletal relaxation. If deep-seated tensions and contractions remain within the network of postural muscles, then the instruction:

"Your body feels so heavy that it is sinking into the floor," acts as a command from the brain encouraging them to 'let go' and release their residual burden. Only then is the total weight of the body surrendered completely into the earth, producing the distinct experience that the body is actually merging with the surface on which it is lying.

After intensifying the feeling of heaviness, it is then superseded by the sensation of lightness: "Awaken a sensation of lightness and weightlessness in all parts of the body... Your body feels so light...it seems to be floating away from the floor."

Invoking the opposite sensation is not an arbitrary choice, but is in accordance with electrophysiological operating principles of the brain. Whenever a neuron fires, it transmits an impulse which is relayed and registered in the brain. However, if the same cell continues to fire repeatedly for some time, its message is no longer acknowledged by the brain, becoming a constant electrical background feature of the central nervous system.

This phenomenon can be readily demonstrated with the sense of smell. Upon entering a room where incense is burning, you are initially very much aware of its fragrance. However, after remaining in the room for a while you develop sensory inattention and no longer notice the previously overpowering smell. Researchers have called this phenomenon habituation, where the brain becomes accustomed to the stimulus, and soon ceases to register it as important.

During yoga nidra, when developing the sensation of heaviness throughout the body, a volley of specific impulses initially inundates the brain. After some time, the brain starts to ignore these impulses and the connection of awareness with the body is temporarily displaced. The feeling of lightness then arises spontaneously as our awareness drifts free of its physical vehicle. The result is that, rather than physical sensations infiltrating and shaping our consciousness, our consciousness can now determine and direct what experiences will be felt by the body.

Developing emotional control

Electrical stimulation of specific parts of the hypothalamus, limbic system and amygdalar regions of the brain is found to elicit specific emotional responses including rage, aggression and fear. For most people, these negative feelings are harder to control than positive emotions such as love, joy, security and pleasure. Nevertheless, in advanced yoga nidra, practitioners are asked to submit voluntarily to these threatening emotions, while preserving a state of deep relaxation and 'witness awareness' to the whole process.

This practice brings into simultaneous operation nerve circuits in the opposite hemispheres of the brain which, under normal circumstances, never operate at the same time. Thus a new neuronal circuit is established which incorporates two previously irreconcilable states of awareness simultaneously, e.g. love and hatred, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow. This occurs in such a way that relaxation and witness awareness of the conflicting and contrasting emotional reactions are maintained.

With repeated practice, this new circuitry becomes an established response, enabling the practitioner to gradually go beyond the realm of conventional human sufferings which arise out of attachment and aversion for the duality of life experiences. In the life of a spiritual aspirant, transcendence of this barrier of duality is a prime goal. It is accompanied by the single experience of an increasing sense of bliss or indwelling ecstasy (anandam) which lies beyond the confines of pleasure and pain and all other dual notions. At the psychological level, the fruit of this practice is a detached outlook in life and maturity of the personality. Yoga nidra thus develops control of the emotional reactions and autonomic responses. This evolutionary advance is reflected in daily life as increased perceptual awareness, emotional control and an increasingly conscious destiny.

Symbols of the Unconscious

The technique of visualization in yoga nidra is an important practice for unlocking the stored up contents of the unconscious mind which normally only manifest during dreams. In the *Raja Yoga Sutras* (1:38), Rishi Patanjali states: "*Svapnanidrajnanalambanam va*" (the mind can be made steady by giving it knowledge of dream and sleep for support). We need to understand the nature of the dream state in order to fully comprehend the use of visualization in yoga nidra.

Conscious dreaming

Yoga nidra has been termed 'sleepless sleep' because we learn to enter the state between sleep and wakefulness without loss of awareness. This is the beginning of the experience of yoga nidra, but its meaning and significance go beyond this. Unenlightened man is dreaming constantly, even when he is awake. He does not know this because his sensory functions are extroverted. The moment you cut off your awareness from the sensory functions and relax, you begin to witness the dreams. This is exactly what yoga nidra accomplishes. The psyche of man is dreaming all the time, consciously as well as unconsciously. The dreams we have at night are only a small part of this totality.

In the usual state of dreaming, the content and expression of dreams are related to the spontaneous buildup and

release of psychic tension from the subconscious, as well as the awakening and expression of deeper, unconscious instincts and drives. However, in the visualization practices of yoga nidra, recognition and release are voluntarily induced as we create the dream consciously in accordance with instructions given by the guide or teacher.

If the dream state is to be recognized and used to gain knowledge and hasten our evolution in life, a good communication between the dream and waking states must be developed and maintained, and this is precisely what is induced during the visualization sequences. The subconscious and unconscious material of the mind is awakened and released to become integrated into consciousness. This is the dawning of creative imagination as distinct from the usual processes of 'daydreaming' and sleeping.

The mind store

Guided imagery in yoga nidra is a method of using the symbol or image as a catalyst to provoke a reaction in the unconscious parts of the mind. How these symbols are used and how they cause this reaction is worth further investigation if guided imagery is to be used creatively.

Everything that we experience through the senses, and even in thoughts, leaves an imprint on the mind. The experiences of previous lives, early childhood and maturity are all registered in the unconscious mind. Often when people begin to practise yoga nidra and meditation, they will remember earlier experiences they had previously forgotten or thought were insignificant. This indicates that the material of the unconscious mind is beginning to manifest. Often the recollection of these experiences is different from the original experience, and sometimes it will apparently bear no relation to the original experience at all.

To understand this, we need to know how the mind processes and stores these impressions or samskaras. This can be illustrated by the example of transmission of radio waves. To transmit radio waves we require a transmitter to

send a signal, and a receiver to pick it up. The signal can be represented by a wave pattern. Normally the whole wave pattern is transmitted, however, another method which can be used instead is to take 'samples' of the wave at regular intervals, and transmit these samples. When the receiver is synchronized to the same frequency of sampling, the original wave pattern can be reconstructed at the receiving end. This means that less energy is required to transmit the signal, and more information can be transmitted at the same time by taking samples of one signal in between the samples of another. So, we can see that the relayed information will bear no apparent relationship to the original signals or messages, but when reprocessed, it assumes its original form.

The mind also processes information in a similar way. It can be said that the massive amount of information stored in the unconscious is in symbolic form. A symbol represents or contains the implications of a wider range of information. According to our samskaras, social and religious conditioning, actions and reactions, different symbols of our life's experiences form the content of the unconscious mind.

We do not normally have access to the unconscious mind because our awareness in not tuned to the nature of these symbols or seeds of information. However, by invoking certain images and symbols during deep relaxation, we can bridge the gap of awareness between our waking state and the unconscious. The guided imagery provided by the teacher during yoga nidra provokes a chord of response with other symbols in the mind.

Selection of imagery

Careful selection of imagery is required on the part of the teacher of yoga nidra. The teacher should be sensitive to the types of symbols being used and the levels of the mind they appeal to. The symbols used form two categories. Firstly there are the conditioned symbols, which are associated with our day to day social, cultural, religious and moral

experiences. These would vary for persons of different localities, countries and races and the images used from a certain cultural situation may be completely meaningless to the practitioner whose mind has been conditioned by other types of symbols.

Then there are the universal symbols (as described by Jung) such as mantra, yantra and mandala, which form part of the consciousness of every man, woman and child, irrespective of social, religious and cultural traditions. These symbols form the 'collective unconscious' mind of mankind, and symbols used in this area invoke very deep responses.

Hence the teacher should understand the use of the symbols and the types of responses that could be created in the student's mind.

Releasing the samskaras

As the mind becomes withdrawn and one-pointed, consciousness is maintained by focusing on a series of symbols or images. Each symbol has a definite form, which may be a figure such as Christ, Buddha or your guru. Or it may take the form of a lotus, golden egg, chakra symbol, geometric form, mandala, yantra, colour, or even a sound.

Initially, when one attempts to visualize the symbol, many distracting images may arise. They may have disturbing forms such as demons, dragons, ghosts or serpents; or they may appear as beautiful gardens, serene lakes, or visions of holy men and gods. These are symbols from the unconscious, the samskaras or impressions that comprise the ego. They can express painful memories, frustrated needs, unfulfilled desires, inhibitions, fears, complexes and neuroses. These deep-rooted samskaras condition our thoughts and experience, and compel us to act in certain ways. They are often the root cause of tension, mental disturbances and disease. The process of visualization in yoga nidra enables us to purge these samskaras from the mind, thus purifying the layers of our consciousness, which is necessary before real progress in yoga is possible.

The attitude of a witness

The play of symbols and images should be viewed in a detached way, as though one were merely watching a movie. One should simply remain aware of the images. There should be no attempt to analyze or become involved in them by judgement or condemnation. When the images are thus viewed objectively, the ego becomes temporarily inactive. It no longer identifies with the inhibitions, likes or dislikes that reinforce its individual nature. Therefore, it no longer represses material that is in conflict with its preconceptions, nor does it selectively apprehend only that material which supports its opinions and prejudices. Irrational, fearful, or impractical devices and desires rise into the conscious mind, and when viewed objectively, disappear or are integrated into consciousness.

As a result, the energy that had formerly been used for repressing these elements of the unconscious can then be usefully directed to other activities. Over a period of time one gains greater understanding of his own nature, and the conflict between the conscious and unconscious mind becomes reduced.

Direct and abstract association

The symbols visualized during yoga nidra can act by direct association with the samskaras, or by an abstract association. For example, the students may be instructed to visualize a tree. One student may visualize a tree which is growing in his own backyard. This is a direct association. Another student may not be able to visualize the tree, but may recall the painful experience of falling out of a tree which occurred in childhood. This is the abstract association. Recollection of a tree is provoking that painful childhood memory which has been associated with trees ever since. Images used in yoga nidra are most powerful during this process of abstract association, as a whole host of repressed memories and samskaras can be recalled and witnessed if the symbols are carefully chosen by the teacher.

Mantra, yantra, chakra

Different symbols reach different depths of the mind. This is how the science of mantra and yantra evolved, as these sounds and symbols probe the deepest levels of consciousness. The different chakra symbols of colour, form, deity and mantra were designed to produce direct association with the particular psychic centres, and consequently an abstract association with all aspects of manifestation of that chakra in the individual. In fact, the archetypes in the human brain are represented in the chakras. So, in discovering the symbology of the chakras we are discovering and releasing our own archetypes.

The chakras do not exist in the physical body. They exist in the psychic body, which cannot be experienced by the senses. This requires an altered state to be perceived through the mind. In yoga nidra we induce this state of perception by gradually withdrawing the senses during the rotation of consciousness throughout the body, and by practising breath awareness. This induces both pratyahara and deep relaxation. In fact, deep relaxation has been shown to be an altered state of perception. Once this state has been induced, the guided image visualization proceeds under the teacher's instructions.

So, it is apparent that the use of guided imagery in yoga nidra is a very powerful method of resolving suppressed conflicts, desires, memories, and samskaras. At the same time it is the key to the awakening of a new creative individual with unlimited resources of knowledge readily accessible.

The awakening of creativity

Many, if not all, of the truly creative discoveries in life, such as those of science, art, music and religion, were made during creative 'flashes' of intuition which we can understand as occurring when the inherent knowledge of the unconscious surfaces into consciousness. There are many documented examples. Newton's revelations about gravity occurred while he was relaxing under an apple tree. Van

Gogh said that "pictures come to me as in a dream". Mozart once composed an entirely new musical composition while dozing in the back of a carriage. Einstein increased his perception of relativity while visualizing himself walking along a sunbeam.

All these people allowed themselves to relax deeply enough for the images and forms of their unconscious mind to manifest as solutions to their particular problems or quest. It has even been reported that through the use of deep relaxation and visualization, people have been able to diagnose their own particular disease before confirmation by medical examination. These deeper layers of the mind contain the solutions to all our problems, but we have to be able to allow them to manifest while maintaining complete detachment. One of the hallmarks of a genius is the ability to produce imagery in great abundance. Children also possess this ability, which usually becomes repressed as they are more conditioned by worldly experience.

Steps to visualization ability

One frequent problem encountered in yoga nidra is difficulty in visualization. We all have the ability to visualize clearly once the mind becomes focused. However, when the mind is dissipated, visualization is difficult because the attention cannot be held long enough for the image to take form. At this stage it is advised not to visualize, but merely to think about and try to recollect experiences associated with the image. Most people find this easy to do, and it is the initial step. Then as one continues to practise, and the consciousness becomes more withdrawn, images will start to appear. These images may not stay long, or they may change in shape or form, but this process should be allowed to continue without trying to force the image to become clear and steady. Once the consciousness is completely withdrawn, then it can be concentrated and a clear image can be created. When this state is achieved, the image appears as clear and as vivid as in real life.

Actually, visualization is an effortless process. Many people try to visualize by projecting an image outside themselves. However, while visualizing, it is important to relax and let the image arise within the consciousness. There is no effort involved, no projection of the image. It appears naturally and spontaneously. This is one useful key to visualization ability.

Another key is to begin to practise by visualizing familiar objects, daily routines, and events which have left a strong impression on the mind. When visualizing an object, it should be made as large as possible in the mental space (chidakasha) and it should have dynamic expression. So, if you are asked to visualize a lion. don't try to visualize a lion sitting tamely in a corner of a cage, but make it large and ferocious, prowling and roaring through the jungle. Dynamic images which have action and expression can be visualized more easily in the beginning. Once this stage is accomplished, static images can be introduced.

Don't be afraid to make use of the ridiculous in your visualizations. If the elephant you are attempting to visualize is standing on his head, that is alright, in fact you can make him do a few acrobatics as well. You have complete freedom within your own mind, so use it in your visualizations.

Memory training

Visualization in yoga nidra can also be used to improve memory. This is done through the power of association of symbols. When required to remember something, you should find as many objects and symbols associated with that object as possible. Then, when recall is necessary, you have a vast array of associations to draw upon.

Memory can also be trained by continuous verbal or mental repetition of the word, numbers, formula or whatever is desired to be remembered. However, this process is monotonous and time consuming. Using associated symbols is a more direct and effective method. For example, if you have to remember someone's name, firstly you can also

recall other people with the same name. Then you could draw associations from the meaning of the name or what the name may suggest to you. Mentally picture that person's actions, dress, complexion, etc. along with the name as the process is continued. The more associations you can make, the easier the recall will be. The more fanciful you make your associations, the stronger the impression, and hence recall value, which will be left in the mind.

Other suggested practices

- Review of the day's events is very useful in memory training and in observing your own actions and reactions in daily life. This practice can be further extended by recalling a day in your life from a week ago, a month ago, a year ago, and so on back into early childhood. All that is necessary is to recall one small incident, then expand your memory of the sequence of events surrounding it. You will be surprised how clearly and vividly the memories will manifest.
- An extension of the previous practice is to recall and witness past traumas. If the witness attitude is maintained, this becomes an effective method of overcoming the negative samskaras of the mind, but it can be extended further by recreating the experience in the mind, only this time with an outcome that would have left a positive impression rather than a negative one. This not only helps ease the pain, but prepares the mind to respond positively when similar situations occur in the future.
- The breath can be used to conduct visual images such as breathing in light, and breathing out smoky impurities. Pain and discomfort can be relieved by directing the inhaled breath to the affected part, and releasing the pain with the exhalation. The science of prana vidya utilizes techniques such as visualizing the affected part of the body being bathed in golden light and warmth, or a process of removal of the diseased tissue and a rebuilding of healthy tissue to facilitate healing.

- To develop feelings of empathy and security, you can visualize yourself in a bubble or cocoon, warm, comfortable, safe and secure. Begin to expand your bubble to include others near you, then all persons in the room. If the sensation is uncomfortable, withdraw to a comfortable space until you are able to expand again. This expansion can be continued to include everyone on the locality, country, world and universe.

There are many other visualization possibilities which may be utilized once the doors of the unconscious have been opened. The creative potential is vast and through the practice of visualization in yoga nidra, the possibility of self-realization advances another step.

Beyond the Body and Mind

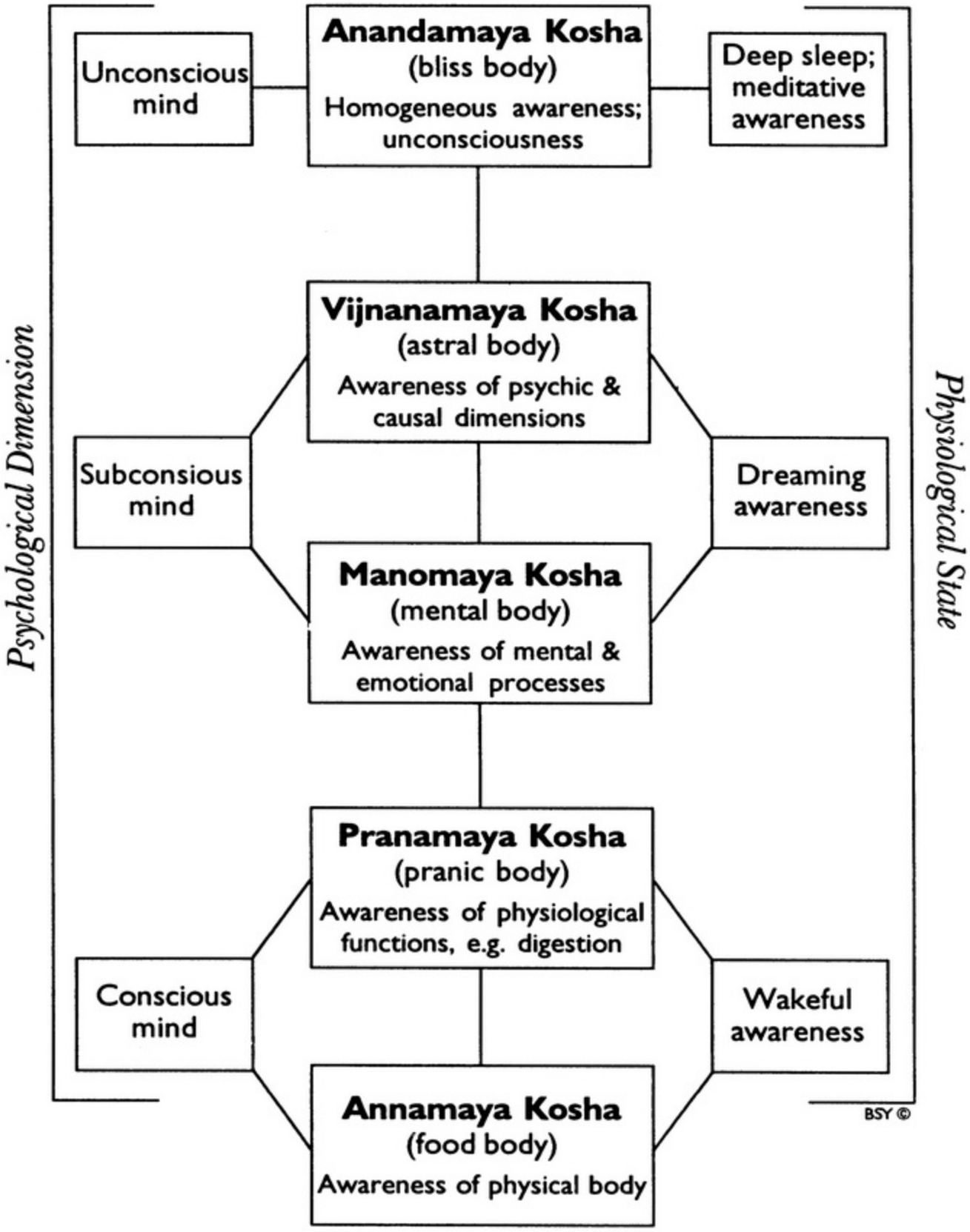
The initial purpose of yoga nidra is to relax the body and the mind, and when you come to the last stage of the practice you try to dissociate yourself from the body and the mind. Tension, stresses and strains only afflict you when you identify yourself with the body and the mind. In the night, when you enter profound sleep, the process of dissociation takes place automatically. You don't remember your name, your body or the nature of your surroundings during profound sleep. In the same way, during the practice of yoga nidra, after entering a state of deep relaxation, you should try to disidentify yourself emotionally from your body and mind.

The five koshas

Modern psychologists refer to the three dimensions of the mind as the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. In the philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga they are known as the gross, subtle and causal dimensions of the human personality. These three dimensions are again subdivided into the five koshas or bodies which constitute the total expression of the human personality from the grossest to the most subtle dimensions of existence.

The five koshas can be readily related to the psychological dimensions, physiological states and different levels of awareness as illustrated in the following diagram.

The Five Koshas



The five koshas are defined in the yogic texts as follows:

Annamaya kosha (the food body) is the physical body of blood, bone, fat and skin, which is perceived through the senses. This is the grossest level of human manifestation. The level of awareness is of the physical plane.

Pranamaya kosha (the pranic body) is the underlying energy network of the human structure, which consists of currents of prana or bioplasmic energy. The level of awareness here is of physiological functions, e.g. digestion and circulation.

Manomaya kosha (the mental body) is the layer of conscious operation within the sphere of the mind. Awareness here is of the mental and emotional processes.

Vijnanamaya kosha (the psychic body) is the dimension of our personality which is operating on the astral plane. This is the body we experience during dreaming, out of body experiences, and the various types of psychic phenomena. Awareness is of the psychic and causal planes.

Anandamaya kosha (the bliss body) is the transcendental dimension of human personality existing in total absence of pleasure or pain. This is very important, but difficult to explain. 'Ananda' has been misinterpreted as 'felicity', 'joy' or 'bliss'. It is actually a particular state where there is awareness of neither pain nor pleasure. At that time, a total homogeneity is experienced, and this state of homogeneous awareness is known as anandamaya. Normally, when you experience either pain or pleasure, it produces mental fluctuations. It means pain is an experience, and so is pleasure. But in anandamaya kosha, the most subtle body of all, there is no experience. The instrument of experience has been totally transcended.

Ultimately, the ongoing practice of yoga nidra will lead you right to this point, where only the fundamental vibration of the unconscious remains, without fluctuation or modification. This is the deepest experience of yoga nidra, the dimension of total unconsciousness – anandamaya kosha or the bliss body.

This homogenous experience has been defined clearly by Adi Shankaracharya in the ancient text Yoga Taravali:

> *"When mind has transcended maya (delusion),*
> *When ego has become static,*
> *When senses are no more functioning.*
> *And when all communication between the*
> *mind and the senses has been cut,*
> *When 'I' and 'you' no longer exist*
> *for a period of time..."*

Experiencing the subtle bodies

In yoga nidra, the more subtle koshas are realized progressively after sensory awareness is withdrawn. Just as the gross body consists of the physical organs – the lungs, heart and intestines, through which the physiological processes of respiration, circulation and digestion are accomplished, so the more subtle bodies also possess their own anatomy and characteristics.

Pranic and psychic energies flow within the framework of nadis and chakras (psychic centres) which form the energy infrastructure underlying the gross, physical body. Nadi means 'current, flow or passage', and over 72,000 nadis are referred to in yogic texts. Of these, three are considered most important. These are known as ida, pingala and sushumna nadis, and they exist within the central axis of the vertebral column. Ida nadi flows on the left side and conducts the mental energy (manas shakti) which is responsible for the entire range of our mental and psychic functions; pingala nadi flows on the right side of the spine and conducts the vital energy (prana shakti) which activates and maintains the entire physical body and its processes.

Sushumna, the third major nadi, is considered to be the most important. It flows within the centre of the spinal chord, but at the outset of spiritual life this nadi remains inactive. Yogic texts refer to sushumna passage as the

sleeping or latent nadi which is responsible for conducting the spiritual energy (atma shakti).

Ida, pingala and sushumna emanate from mooladhara chakra at the very base of the spinal column in the floor of the perineum. This is the seat or trigger point in which the evolutionary energy of creation is contacted and awakened within the human body. It is symbolized as a sleeping, coiled serpent, termed kundalini shakti. In the male body, mooladhara chakra is situated at the perineal body, between the urinary and excretory passages, and in the female it is located at the neck of the cervix.

Ida and pingala nadis emanate from mooladhara chakra on either side and they recross one another in the central axis of the spine at four intermediate chakras, before finally converging in ajna chakra, at the top of the vertebral column, directly behind the mid-eyebrow centre. The four intervening chakras situated along the spine are swadhisthana – at the level of the tailbone; manipura – directly behind the navel; anahata – in the centre of the chest, behind the heart; and vishuddhi – at the level of the throat.

Sushumna nadi is the direct line between mooladhara and ajna. It is the ladder connecting the earth and the heavens. Unlike ida and pingala, which function in everybody, sushumna nadi and the spiritual energy must first be awakened. The sushumna path or channel must be awakened by the practices of yoga. That awakening is a historical event in the evolution of the spiritual personality of the individual.

Entering the unconscious

Just as you possess sensory awareness of the physical body, so it is also possible to evolve awareness of the pranic, mental, psychic and unconscious bodies. This is the process of expansion of awareness upon which you embark in yoga nidra. When you dive into your own consciousness, as in yoga nidra, your awareness passes through these levels. As you go on in the practice you dive deeper and deeper.

From physical awareness to pranic awareness you remain in the domain of the conscious mind. Then from pranic awareness to mental awareness you enter the realm of sleep and the subconscious mind, but the thread of awareness remains intact. The senses are now withdrawn, except for hearing, which is preserved intact. Here the consciousness is introverted and you become aware of the mental manifestations, dreams and visions. By practising yoga nidra at this level, self-knowledge can be increased and memory can be enhanced. The nature can be transformed and the personality overhauled, eliminating many vicious habits of thinking and living.

The transition from mental to psychic awareness brings the entire astral and psychic dimensions of experience into view. At this level, the practitioner becomes receptive to a higher quality of stimuli and an altogether different quantum. It is in this dimension that psi phenomena, astral projection, and out of body experiences usually take place.

These capacities can also be developed in yoga nidra but they are not the aim or goal of the practice. There is no limitation or restriction upon what can be attained or explored, but from the spiritual viewpoint these goals are insignificant. They may be temporarily fascinating, like a new plaything for a child, but this fascination soon pales in the intense light of ongoing self-realization.

The final descent is from psychic to homogeneous awareness. Here the unconscious mind, where all mental fluctuations and modifications cease and the fundamental rhythm of the unconscious/superconscious universe, beyond all restrictions of space, time and individual personality, is revealed. This is the ultimate experience of yoga nidra, the illumination of the unconscious mind to reveal the superconscious state

Emerging into Samadhi

Yoga nidra is a technique which can be used to awaken divine faculties, and is one of the ways of entering samadhi. In the path of yoga nidra we use awareness of the physical dimension to amplify the inner vision and awareness. By the practice of raja yoga techniques, particularly yoga nidra, we try to become aware of the subconscious and unconscious states and ultimately to enter the state of superconsciousness.

In raja yoga, the term 'chitta' represents the total area of human consciousness, and the waves or patterns of consciousness are known as 'vrittis'. Just as you throw a pebble into a clear lake and it produces dozens of concentric ripples or waves, in the same way, when an experience flashes through the mind, it produces waves. When you look at any object through the eyes, it produces waves in the chitta. When you hear a sound or think about something from the past, that also produces waves. If you go out in the dark and mistake the shadow of a tree for a person, that produces waves. When you go to bed at night and relax totally, that also produces waves. Anxiety, love and hatred all produce waves. Whatever the mind responds to in the form of an experience makes waves. Cognition in any form makes waves.

In the philosophy of raja yoga these waves or vrittis are classified into five basic patterns: right knowledge, wrong

knowledge, imagination, sleep and memory. Therefore, sleep is considered as one of the mental formations; it is not a state of total unconsciousness. When chitta assumes the form of nidra or sleep, there is some trace of cognition. That is the reason why in the morning when you wake up and someone asks, "How did you sleep?" you say, "Very well". If you were totally unconscious, and there was no one to witness, how would you know that you had slept well? This means that in the deep sleep state the self witnesses the state of the chitta, but the chitta does not witness the self.

Sleep and samadhi

In Samkhya philosophy and also in Vedanta, the states of deep sleep and samadhi are equated. There are many indications in samadhi and in sleep that are almost the same. In samadhi, for example, there is no awareness of time, space and object because the ego is absent. In sleep there is also no awareness of time, space and object because the ego is withdrawn. In sleep you are perfectly calm and tranquil and there is total ananda. In samadhi there is also total ananda, but a basic difference is there.

Whereas in samadhi the ego has been eradicated, in sleep it is only withdrawn for the time being. In sleep, the ego hibernates so to say, but in samadhi the ego is consumed in toto. Therefore, after samadhi there is no revival of ego, but after sleep there is continuous revival.

Also, in samadhi there is total inner awareness because the self, the atman, is effulgent. In sleep, however, there is only a trace of inner awareness, and the atman or self is not within the range of cognition. That is why sleep is considered as a hibernative condition, and samadhi as chaitanya, the blissful state of conscious awareness.

Pranic phenomena during sleep

During sleep, the mind is withdrawn and undergoes a process of introversion and transformation. At this time there is an adjustment of pranas. When sleep occurs, the pranas are

brought down through various chakras, according to the level of consciousness and the state of experience.

In those individuals in whom sleeping patterns and general levels of awareness remain unevolved, pranas function predominantly in manipura and swadhisthana during the dreaming state, much as they do during the active waking life. In those of a more sattvic temperament, the pranas sometimes operate predominantly in vishuddhi where there is the experience of complete unconsciousness, and at other times in anahata chakra where dreams occur. The higher psychic and causal functions are also modulated through these chakras. However, in those who are highly evolved, the pranas rest not in vishuddhi or anahata, but in sahasrara during deep sleep, and in ajna during the experience of dream and vision. This is the tantric explanation of sleep and dreams.

Transcending our limitations

According to the study I have made, the ego is only able to move within a certain zone in the brain. There are many compartments which are not consciously functioning, and therefore the ego or jivatma is not able to manifest throughout the whole brain. During yoga nidra what happens is that the brain becomes a homogeneous entity, and then the self or the atman is able to pervade the whole structure. Therefore, if we try to practise this form of dynamic inner awareness we can learn to maintain total consciousness even during sleep.

I will give another point in order to explain it. When you concentrate on the trikuti, or meeting point at the eyebrow centre, you see a small light. When you go deep into concentration, this light enlarges more and more and eventually the prana or the breath stops altogether. As long as you visualize that amplified light, the breath remains in a state of suspension. The moment the light disappears, the breath begins to revive. What is this light? It is the symbol of awareness in the total unconscious. This is precisely why concentration on a yantra or a mandala is recommended.

If you can sleep with awareness of a mandala or a symbol, then you can become aware of the total unconscious. This also means that your awareness is pervading the whole brain and not only part of it.

At present you are not able to function through the whole brain in any state of consciousness. There are large areas of the brain which are not under your jurisdiction. During the practice of yoga nidra, when you go into the state of sleep with a symbol, you are able to transcend the limitations of nature.

Opening the doors of perception

Man as he stands today is incomplete. He may have the use of all his organs and limbs; he may be able to understand mathematics, physics, chemistry and so on, but he is incomplete because his higher mind is not functioning. He is not knowing and understanding through the whole brain. Therefore his cognition is limited or faulty.

Many philosophers from the east as well as the west have pointed out that man's perception is erroneous. When all the silent areas come into function, and you are able to perceive through the whole brain, who knows what you will see? Perhaps all your theories and scientific equations will change. Your philosophical, moral and ethical definitions may also change.

That is precisely the reason why yogis have a different way of thinking. Many times we find their ideas strange and we do not agree with them. This is the thing which we have to understand; the nature of the total brain is unconscious, while the nature of a partial brain is conscious.

This worldly brain is only externally conscious. The partial brain is incapable of looking within, but it is capable of dreaming the external experiences. You know how the experiences are. There is no pleasure inherent in the external object, but this partial brain superimposes pleasure on it. There is nothing painful outside, but this limited brain superimposes all pain because it is suffering from cataract.

This partial brain experiences the external object in a faulty fashion, and the same thing applies when it looks within. There is no problem inside, but this little brain sees many problems. It imagines an experience, a desire, a memory. That is not the case in the total brain, which is homogeneous, and the vehicle of the unconscious.

Sleep represents that homogeneous brain. When you are sleeping you are reposing in the total unconscious, completely pervading it. In yogic philosophy the total unconscious is known as hiranyagarbha. It is also known as the causal body or as shivalingam. Now the question arises: from this total unconsciousness where no differences are perceived, from this point of perception where all creation proceeds forth, how to awaken the consciousness? When you can awaken a tiny point of awareness in that total unconscious, that is called superconscious.

Importance of the symbol

This is precisely the explanation of idol worship or symbolic meditation. We are not confusing God and idol here. God is formless and nameless, beyond all the barriers of time and space. There cannot be two opinions about it. But our problem remains: how to emerge from the unconscious yet still remain on the bosom of it? Therefore, right from the beginning, one has to have a symbol. The symbol can be a light, candle flame, blue or red lotus, full moon, brilliant sun, twinkling star, or your guru. You can chose any object, but the best and easiest of all symbols is the bindu.

In Tantra it is said that everything has emerged from the bindu – a point which can be visualized as a tiny light. This inner point of illumination, which emanates from trikuti, is known as atmajyoti, light of the Self. The word Self does not imply ego here. In yoga we use Self with a capital 'S' to mean the atman or transcendental awareness. It has nothing to do with name and form, etc. It is self-effulgent. It is here, there, and everywhere. Therefore, in order to transform sleep into samadhi, in the beginning we use the symbol.

Mindfulness not mindlessness

Lord Buddha spoke of shoonya, the unconscious state, which is generally interpreted as void, absence of anything and everything. Many people have come to believe that shoonya means meditation on nothing, but that is a misunderstanding. If you examine the Buddhist system of meditation, whether vipassana of anapanasati, you will find no mention of shoonya. There is always a base for the mind, a path for the awareness. In fact, in all the systems of meditation, no practice of shoonya is given.

If you read the Buddhist scriptures, in every passage Buddha speaks about 'mindfulness'. There is not one passage in the teachings of Buddha which says to be mindless. He always uses the word 'mindfulness'. When you breathe in and out, be mindful. If your body fluctuates, be mindful. Whether your mind is concentrated or dissipated, be mindful. Follow all the experiences by the mind. Follow the mind by the mind. Buddha even said, "Be mindful of mindlessness." So, shoonya should not be misinterpreted.

The dark night of the soul

According to Hindu philosophy, shoonya is a very important digit. Those who have studied mathematics know the value of zero. Shoonya and zero have the same significance. You cannot say shoonya is nothing. Shoonya has an overall value. Anybody who wants to wake up in that dark night of the soul must have a symbol to guide him through the unconscious area of shoonya.

Have you ever read about the dark night of the soul? Unfortunately those who have interpreted this state have never experienced it. This is not a criticism, it is a statement of fact. Unless you have the experience, what do you know about the dark night of the soul? Once a year in India we celebrate Shivaratri, the night of Lord Shiva. Now, in this dark night of the soul, let the light emerge.

So the symbol has its own importance. You cannot say that it is all imagination and hypothesis. Only the people

who do not understand say this. If you look at a flower, and then close you eyes and see the counterpart of the flower inside, would you call that imagination? It is true that the flower is not inside, but your chitta has assumed the pattern of a flower. And if you can make your chitta more efficient, it can exactly visualize the flower inside.

When you have visualized the flower clearly and completely within, and you know that you are visualizing it, you are on the subconscious plane. When you have visualized the flower in exactly the same colour and dimension, but you are not aware that you are visualizing it; when you are not aware of time and space, when the process of visualization is beyond cognition and you are not aware of the symbol, there is only a flower, exactly as you see here; you are awake in the dark night of the soul.

You have emerged from the total unconscious, and this stage is followed by total elimination of the symbol, because in samadhi there is no form. All the forms, symbols and concepts merge completely into that homogeneous super-awareness. There is no differentiation. Therefore, yogis understand how close sleep is to samadhi. Sleep in Samkhya, in yoga, is known as nidra, and emerging out of that state is known as yoga nidra.

The yoga nidra which you have been practising off and on is just the beginning, the very beginning.

Practices

Outline of the Practice

Yoga nidra is a practice which generally lasts for twenty to forty minutes. There are separate techniques for people suffering from hypertension and other problems, and for those who want to go deep into the spiritual side of yoga.

Yoga nidra is actually a very simple practice, and you can learn it from a tape or record. Before starting, choose a quiet room and close the windows and doors. Turn off the television or radio, loosen your collar and tie, and switch on the tape recorder. Then lie down in shavasana and listen to the instructions. Go on following the instructions mentally. Do not concentrate, do not control your breath, just listen to the instructions and follow them mentally. The most important thing in yoga nidra is to refrain from sleep. If you fall asleep you lose the awareness which you are aiming for in the practice.

Preparation for the practice

Yoga nidra is performed in shavasana, which minimizes touch sensations by eliminating contact between the limbs of the body. Fingertips, which are extremely sensitive organs of touch, are kept away from the floor by turning the palms of the hands upwards. Light, loose clothing should be worn. The room should be neither hot nor cold, and there should be no breezes or drafts directed toward the body. Sight stimuli are eliminated by simply closing the eyes.

The mind is then focused on external sounds. If all sensory impressions were forcibly excluded, then the mind would become restless and disturbed. Therefore, the mind is directed to think of external sounds, and to move from sound to sound with the attitude of a witness. After some time the mind loses interest in the external world and automatically becomes quiet. This method of calming the mind is called antar mouna. It prepares the consciousness for practising yoga nidra.

Resolve

You must choose your own sankalpa very carefully. The wording should be very precise and clear, otherwise it will not penetrate the subconscious mind. The following are a few short, positive and clear statements which can be used:

- I will awaken my spiritual potential.
- I will be a positive force for the evolution of others.
- I will be successful in all that I undertake.
- I will be more aware and efficient.
- I will achieve total health.

Choose only one sankalpa according to your needs and inclinations. Do not be in a hurry. Once you have chosen a sankalpa you must not change to another. Don't expect results overnight. Time is required depending on the nature of the resolve and the degree to which it is planted in the mind. The result depends on your sincerity and deep felt need to attain the goal of your sankalpa.

Rotation of consciousness

Rotation of consciousness through the different parts of the body is not a practice of concentration, and it does not involve any physical movement. During the practice there are only three requirements to be fulfilled: (i) remain aware, (ii) listen to the voice, and (iii) move the mind very rapidly according to the instructions. When the instructor says 'right hand thumb', repeat it mentally, think of the right hand thumb and move on. It is not necessary to be able to

visualize the different body parts. You have only to become accustomed to following the same sequence, mentally repeating the names of the different body parts in the same way that the child learns to repeat the letters of the alphabet. You don't have to remember what part comes next. The whole process takes place in the subconscious mind.

The sequence of body parts has to be automatic, spontaneous and thorough. Some people teach yoga nidra in a very unsystematic way. Sometimes they start at the head and go to the toes. Sometimes they begin with the left thumb and other times with the right. However, the practice of yoga nidra is very systematic.

The rotation of consciousness in yoga nidra proceeds in a definite sequence, beginning with the right thumb and ending with the little toe of the right foot; then the circuit from the left thumb to the little toe of the left foot. Subsequent circuits proceed from the heels to the back of the head, and from the head and individual facial features to the legs.

Awareness of the breath

After these rotations of consciousness have been completed, physical relaxation is then continued and completed by drawing attention to the breath. In this practice one simply maintains awareness of the breath; there should be no attempt to force or change it. One may watch the breath in the nostrils, in the chest, or in the passage between the navel and the throat. Usually, greater relaxation is attained by simultaneously counting the breaths mentally. Awareness of the breath not only promotes relaxation and concentration, but also awakens higher energies and directs them to every cell of the body. It assists pratyahara from the subtle body in the practices that follow.

Feelings and sensations

Next comes relaxation on the plane of feelings and emotions. Feelings that are intensely physical or emotional are recalled or awakened, experienced fully, then removed. Usually this

is practised with pairs of opposite feelings, such as heat and cold, heaviness and lightness, pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, love and hate. The pairing of feelings in yoga nidra harmonizes the opposite hemispheres of the brain and helps in balancing our basic drives and controlling functions that are normally unconscious. This practice also develops willpower on the emotional plane and brings about emotional relaxation by means of catharsis, as memories of profound feelings are relived.

Visualization

The last stage of yoga nidra induces mental relaxation. In this part of the practice, the student visualizes the images named or described by the instructor. Since the images that are used often have universal significance and powerful associations, they bring the hidden contents of the deep unconscious into the conscious mind. The images used in this book include landscapes, oceans, mountains, temples, saints and flowers, stories, and descriptions of powerful psychic symbols such as the chakras, the lingam, the cross, or the golden egg.

The practice of visualization develops self-awareness and relaxes the mind, by purging it of disturbing or painful material. It leads the mind to concentration or dharana. In advanced stages, visualization develops into dhyana or pure meditation. Then there is the conscious experience of the visualized object in the unconscious, the distinction between conscious and unconscious dissolves and distracting images cease to arise.

Ending the practice

The visualization practice is usually finished with an image that evokes profound feelings of peace and calmness. This makes the unconscious mind very receptive to positive thoughts and suggestions. Therefore, the practice of yoga nidra ends with a resolve. This direct order from the conscious mind to the unconscious is the seed enabling one

to radically change one's attitude, behaviour and destiny. It is very important that the resolve be stated clearly and positively. This will give the mind strength and a positive outlook. One should have sincere faith that the resolve will be effective. This faith strengthens the effect of the resolve on the unconscious mind, so that the resolve will become a reality in one's life.

The practice of yoga nidra is concluded by gradually bringing the mind from the condition of psychic sleep to the waking state.

General Suggestions

Yoga nidra can be practised in a yoga class or at home. It should be performed in a quiet, closed room that has a comfortable temperature and is free of insects. Privacy is essential, and all sudden interruptions must be avoided. Yoga nidra should be practised in semi-darkness, not in total darkness or in bright light. Darkness and light have a powerful effect on the brain. In total darkness the mind tends to sleep, while in bright light the mind is attentive. Therefore, in order to maintain a state of relaxed awareness, a balance between introversion and extroversion, semi-darkness is necessary.

The room should be well ventilated, but not breezy. If a fan is necessary, one should not lie in its direct draft. If yoga nidra is done in the open, the head and body should be completely covered to avoid any physical disturbance. In a class, each person should be physically separate from his neighbours. Clothing should be light and loose. Because body temperature tends to drop during relaxation, it is advised to cover the body with a thin blanket.

Yoga nidra should be practised at the same time every day, either early in the morning, preferably between four and six, or in the evening just before going to bed in order to induce deep and refreshing sleep. People returning home from work in the late afternoon should first retire to their room and practise yoga nidra for five to ten minutes. This

will help them to relax and make the transition between work and home with greater ease.

Yoga nidra should be practised on an empty stomach. Allow at least three hours for digestion of a heavy meal and half an hour for the settling of light refreshments. In yoga nidra the inner body temperature drops very fast and the production of digestive enzymes is greatly reduced. Those people who have a hyperacid constitution can safely take a little tea, coffee, fruit juice, bread or a few biscuits. But if one's constitution is hypoacidic, it is preferable not to take anything at all.

During yoga nidra, there is one thing to be particularly careful of, and that is not to fall into a deep slumber. If one feels sleepy or the practice is being done just before sleep, a cold shower should be taken beforehand.

Need for a qualified teacher

Yoga nidra is actually a very simple technique and it can be learnt from a tape recording. However, it is preferable for beginning students to practise yoga nidra under the guidance of an experienced teacher.

Regular lessons, accompanied by private practice with a tape recording of the same practice used in the class, enable the student to understand the technique and to recall all the instructions effortlessly. While in a state of deep relaxation the student quickly learns and absorbs the content, speed, and sequence of instructions. This unconscious learning process is more thorough than an intellectual understanding, which can actually be an obstacle to the successful practice of yoga nidra.

A teacher knows the type of practice which will be suited to a student's needs and can vary it accordingly. For example, if a student is tense, then the technique will emphasize relaxation; whereas if the student relaxes easily, then the yoga nidra practice will progress more towards meditation. Sleeping commonly occurs in yoga nidra, as well as in other types of concentration and meditation. Indeed, recent

research has shown that experienced practitioners of meditation spend from 10 to 50 percent of their meditation time sleeping. When one is practising yoga nidra alone, it is easy to fall asleep without being aware of it, but in class the teacher can help the student to remain alert by inserting the reminder, 'No sleeping please' at the right moments. If one falls asleep there is no harm, but staying awake will develop the practice.

If no teacher is available, a good alternative is a cassette tape recording of a live class. Failing this, one could make a tape recording for use during practice. If there is no tape recorder available, then ask a friend or family member to read the instructions while you practise.

It is not recommended to instruct yourself until the entire practice is very clear in your mind, so that you do not have to stop anywhere and try to remember what comes next. Otherwise you will strain yourself trying to remember the sequence of body rotation and the whole practice will lose its flow. Instead of achieving relaxation you will become very tense. Therefore, in the beginning it is much better to practise by following the teacher's voice or the instructions on a tape recording. Of course, after some time you will be able to practise the whole process unaided by any external agency. You will be able to initiate the instructions and respond to them effortlessly.

Preliminary asanas

Pain, stiffness and general tension in the body are great obstacles to the practice of yoga nidra. Therefore, yoga nidra should ideally be performed after yoga asanas. A typical sequence could be as follows: pawanmuktasana, shavasana (for beginners); sarvangasana, halasana, matsyasana, paschimottanasana, bhujangasana, shalabhasana or sirshasana (for more advanced practitioners).

As a shorter alternative to this series, six to twelve rounds of surya namaskara is excellent for loosening the joints and muscles and massaging the internal organs. Naukasana

practised three to five times induces general physical relaxation and is an excellent preparation for yoga nidra.

Position

Yoga nidra is practised in shavasana. Scientific studies have shown that this is the position most conducive to relaxation, since it reduces sensory stimulation to the minimum. One should lie on the back on a blanket or thin mat placed on the floor. The spine should be straight. The arms should be straight and placed slightly away from the body. The hands should be relaxed, palms upward, with the fingers slightly bent. Alternatively, the hands may be placed flat, one over the other, on the chest, with the elbows on the floor. While this increases physical contact, it is suitable for persons who find the preferred position uncomfortable. The legs should be straight and placed thirty to thirty-five centimetres apart in order to avoid contact between the thighs.

Ideally, no pillow should be used. However, if this is uncomfortable, a thin pillow or folded blanket may be placed under the head. The corners of the pillow should be under the shoulders in order to relax the neck and shoulders. Thick pillows should not be used, since they cause tension in the neck. The lower back may be supported by a small pillow if pain or discomfort is felt in this area during the practice of yoga nidra.

Although shavasana is the best position for yoga nidra, it can also be practised in a sitting posture or while standing. If you have a tendency to fall asleep very quickly in yoga nidra, then it is better to practise while standing.

How the practice is given

The instructions in yoga nidra should be given at a speed that keeps the mind moving fast, but allows it to understand and carry out each instruction as it is being given. Speed will vary according to the stage of practice as well as the student's state of mind. The rotation of consciousness and rapid images are usually very quick. The mind should not stay on

any one point for a long time; keep on jumping from point to point. Don't allow any time for concentration or psychic images will come. Yoga nidra is not concentration. The images for visualization, like mango tree, rose flower, boat on a river, sandy beach and so on, should be precise and in rapid succession.

When you give extended visualizations, such as walking in the park, golden egg, a story, etc., the images should be adjusted in such a way that they serve as stepping stones to further concentration practices later on.

If you are teaching yoga nidra to children, just give them inner visualization, distinct unassociated images in rapid succession, using numbers, colours, forms, scenes from nature, or something imaginative.

Visualization ability is actually the ultimate point in yoga nidra, and the purpose here is to check one's perceptive capabilities. If the instructor says pink rose and you imagine how it looks, this means that your receptivity is keen. If he says pink rose and you try hard, but cannot picture it, this means you have not yet come to the point of receptivity. If he says pink rose, and you see the rose as a slight interpsychic vision, then you have gone too deep and have passed beyond the state of receptivity. In visualization, rapid sequence images retain the receptive state most effectively.

The practice of yoga nidra should be varied to suit the time available and the capacity of the students. It is more desirable to do this by adding or deleting whole parts, rather than by varying the speed at which the instructions are given. The practices that follow have been arranged to facilitate this, as well as provide a graded series of practices for each part of yoga nidra. A complete scheme of yoga nidra practices 1–5 is included in this section.

Guidelines for ensuring a successful practice

First of all, while practising yoga nidra, don't aim at going deep. That is the greatest mistake. Try to be spontaneous, relaxed, and very much at peace with yourself. Even if the

brain does not cooperate sometimes, this is not bad. Periodic distractions which come from time to time will help you in yoga nidra because they keep the awareness in a very alert condition and don't allow you to slip into slumber.

If you feel any kind of tension during the practice on account of sickness, physical tightness or some sort of mental disturbance, always remember that this is a temporary experience. It might be there for a few sessions, or it may be an irregular or frequent feature. In any case, you should continue with your practice; the next session is likely to be better. However, during yoga nidra, if restlessness or discomfort grows, there is no harm in moving your body to adjust your position, or you can even sleep a little.

Care should be taken in the selection of visualization. The images used are often powerful symbols and can produce negative reactions in people who associate them with unpleasant experiences or irrational fears. Particular care should be exercised with images that evoke fear of falling, of deep water, being burned, or being struck by falling or overhanging objects. Where such images are used it may be appropriate to insert reassurances. Although yoga nidra should increase one's awareness of the contents of the mind, this should happen only gradually, not traumatically.

During the practice, if the mind is deluged with negative thoughts or images, try not to let them disturb you. These thoughts are an expression of the mental toxins existing in the deeper layers of consciousness, which seek a channel of release. By allowing free passage to these negative expressions, the practice may not be very successful in the beginning, but after some time the negativity will exhaust itself and tranquility will prevail.

Some of the advanced practices may bring about a deep state of relaxation and meditation. It is very important, therefore, that the mind be brought out of this state gradually. An abrupt transition from this deep state to waking consciousness temporarily shocks the mind, and may induce a headache. Similarly, some people become

frightened by the depth of their relaxation if they are brought out too quickly. In either case, the subject should lie down in shavasana and practise awareness of breath until he becomes calm.

Finally, it is especially important that teachers avoid making negative value judgements, direct or implied, about a student's experiences. All experiences, whether apparently positive or negative, should be validated. The teacher should absolutely avoid statements of the type, 'Don't worry if you don't see this,' since they are certain to make the student worry. Students should be discouraged from idle discussion of their experiences in yoga nidra.

Yoga Nidra 1

Preparation	Introductory
Relaxation	Body/Om
Resolve	
Rotation of consciousness	Right side, left side, back, front, major parts
Breathing	Counting breaths with navel, chest, throat and nostril awareness; each 27 to 1
Image visualization	Introductory
Resolve	
Finish	
Alternative short practices	As an interlude at work As a prelude to sleep

Preparation: Please get ready for yoga nidra. Lie down on your back on the floor and adopt the pose called shavasana. In this position the body should be straight from head to toe, the legs slightly apart and the arms a little away from the body, with the palms of the hands turned upwards. *(pause)* Adjust everything, your body, position and clothes, until you are completely comfortable. During yoga nidra there should be no physical movement. *(pause)* Close your eyes and keep them strictly closed until you are told to open them. Take a deep breath and as you breathe out feel the cares and worries of the day flow out of you. *(pause)*

In the practice which follows you are going to develop the feeling of relaxation in the body. It is not necessary to make movements or deliberately relax your muscles, simply develop the feeling of relaxation. *(pause)* It is like the feeling you have just before sleep...when relaxation becomes deep, sleep does come but you should try to keep yourself completely awake, this is very important. Make a resolution to yourself now that 'I will not sleep, I will remain awake throughout the practice.' *(pause)*

During yoga nidra you are functioning on the levels of hearing and awareness, and the only important thing is to follow the voice of the instructor. *(pause)* You must not try to intellectualize or analyze the instructions as this will disturb your mental relaxation. Simply follow the voice with total attention and feeling, and if thoughts come to disturb you from time to time, do not worry, just continue the practice. *(pause)* Allow yourself to become calm and steady...when you are doing the practice yourself, allow five minutes for this. Do not start too suddenly. *(pause)*

Relaxation: Now bring about a feeling of inner relaxation in the whole body...concentrate on the body and become aware of the importance of complete stillness. *(pause)* Develop your awareness of the body from the top of the head to the tips of the toes and mentally repeat the mantra

O-o-o-m-m-m. *(pause)* Complete stillness and complete awareness of the whole body...again O-o-o-m-m-m. *(pause)* Continue your awareness of the whole body...the whole body...the whole body. *(long pause)* Become aware of the fact that you are going to practise yoga nidra...say mentally to yourself, 'I am aware...I am going to practise yoga nidra...repeat this to yourself again. *(pause)*

The practice of yoga nidra begins now.

Resolve: At this moment you should make your resolve. *(pause)* The resolve will have to be very simple...try to discover one naturally. You must develop a resolve to say at this time. *(pause)* It should be a short, positive statement in simple language...stated three times with awareness, feeling and emphasis. *(pause)* The resolve you make during yoga nidra is bound to come true in your life. *(pause)*

Rotation of consciousness: We now begin rotation of consciousness, rotation of awareness by taking a trip through the different parts of the body. As quickly as possible the awareness is to go from part to part. Repeat the part in your mind and simultaneously become aware of that part of the body. Keep yourself alert but do not concentrate too intensely. Become aware of the right hand. *(pause)*

Right side: Right hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, palm of the hand, become aware of your palm, back of the hand, the wrist, the lower arm, the elbow, the upper arm, the shoulder, the armpit, the right waist, the right hip, the right thigh, the kneecap, the calf muscle, the ankle, the heel, the sole of the right foot, the top of the foot, the big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe...

Left side: Become aware of the left hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, palm of the hand, back of the hand, the wrist, the lower arm, the elbow, the upper arm, the shoulder, the armpit, the left waist, the left hip, the left thigh, the kneecap, the calf muscle, the ankle, the heel, the sole of the left foot, the

top of the foot, the big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe...

Back: Now to the back. Become aware of the right shoulder-blade, the left shoulderblade...the right buttock, the left buttock...the spine...the whole back together...

Front: Now go to the top of the head. The top of the head, the forehead, both sides of the head, the right eyebrow, the left eyebrow, the space between the eyebrows, the right eyelid, the left eyelid, the right eye, the left eye, the right ear, the left ear, the right cheek, the left cheek, the nose, the tip of the nose, the upper lip, the lower lip, the chin, the throat, the right chest, the left chest, the middle of the chest, the navel, the abdomen...

Major parts: The whole of the right leg...the whole of the left leg...both legs together. *(pause)* The whole of the right arm...the whole of the left arm...both arms together. *(pause)* The whole of the back, buttocks, spine, shoulder-blades...the whole of the front, abdomen, chest...the whole of the back and front...together...the whole of the head...the whole body together...the whole body together...the whole body together.

Repeat one or two rounds gradually decreasing speed.

Please do not sleep...total awareness...no sleeping...no movement. *(pause)* The whole body on the floor, become aware of your body lying on the floor. *(pause)* Your body is lying on the floor, see your body lying perfectly still on the floor. in this room. *(pause)* Visualize this image in your mind. *(long pause)*.

Breathing: Become aware of your breath. *(pause)* Feel the flow of your breath in and out of your lungs. *(pause)* Do not try to change the rhythm, the breathing is natural, automatic...you are not doing it, there is no effort. *(pause)* Maintain awareness of your breath, continue...complete awareness of breath. *(long pause)*

Now concentrate your awareness on the movement of your navel area...concentrate on your navel movements. *(pause)* Your navel is rising and falling slightly with every

breath, with each and every breath it expands and contracts...concentrate on this movement in synchronization with your breath. *(pause)* Go on practising, but be sure that you are aware. *(long pause)* Now start counting your breaths backwards from 27 to 1, like this: 27 navel rising, 27 navel falling, 26 navel rising, 26 navel falling, 25 navel rising, 25 navel falling, and so on. Say the words and numbers mentally to yourself as you count your breaths. *(pause)* Be sure that you don't make a mistake; if you do, you must go back to 27 and start again. *(long pause)* With total awareness that you are counting, go on counting from 27 to 1. *(long pause)* Keep on with the practice...no mistakes. *(long pause)*

Now stop your counting of the navel breath and shift your attention to the chest, please shift to the chest. *(pause)* Your chest is rising and falling slightly with each and every breath, become aware of this. *(pause)* Continue concentrating on the movement of the chest and start counting backwards from 27 to 1, in the same way as before...27 chest rising, 27 chest falling, 26 chest rising, 26 chest falling, 25 chest rising, 25 chest falling, and so on. Again repeat the words and numbers mentally to yourself as you count. *(long pause)* No mistakes, if you make a mistake you must go back to the start again, to 27. *(long pause)* Continue counting, 27 to 1, keep on with the practice, counting and awareness, awareness and counting. *(long pause)*

Cease your counting of the chest breaths and move your awareness to the throat, please move to the throat. *(pause)* Become aware of your breath moving in and out of the throat...become aware of this. *(pause)* Concentrate on the movement of the breath and start counting backwards from 27 to 1 in the same way as before...complete awareness of counting and the breath. *(long pause)* No sleeping please, just total awareness that you are counting. *(long pause)* Keep on with the practice, continue counting your breaths in the throat. *(long pause)*

Stop counting and go now to the nostrils...become aware of the breath moving in and out of the nostrils. *(pause)* Concentrate on the movement of the breath in and out of the nostrils and start counting as before, you know it very well by now, 27 breathing in, 27 breathing out. *(long pause)* Complete awareness please, continue counting, no mistakes. *(long pause)* Keep on with the practice, continue. *(long pause)*

Image visualization: Stop your counting and leave your breathing...we now come to visualization. *(pause)* A number of different things will be named and you should try to develop a vision of them on all levels...feeling, awareness, emotion, imagination, as best you can...*(pause)* If you are able to find this vision your relaxation is complete for the time being...and if you are not able to, then you need a little more practice. *(pause)*

Burning candle...burning candle...burning candle... endless desert...endless desert...endless desert...Egyptian pyramid...Egyptian pyramid...Egyptian pyramid...torrential rain...torrential rain...torrential rain...snow capped mountains...snow capped mountains...snow capped mountains...Greek temple at sunrise...Greek temple at sunrise...Greek temple at sunrise...coffin beside a grave...coffin beside a grave...coffin beside a grave...birds flying across a sunset...birds flying across a sunset...birds flying across a sunset...red clouds drifting...red clouds drifting...red clouds drifting...a cross above a church...a cross above a church...a cross above a church...stars at night...stars at night...stars at night...full moon...full moon...full moon...smiling Buddha...smiling Buddha... smiling Buddha...wind from the sea...wind from the sea...wind from the sea...waves breaking on a deserted beach...waves breaking on a deserted beach...the restless sea...eternal restless sea...eternal restless sea...waves breaking on a deserted beach...*(long pause)*

Resolve: Now is the time to repeat your resolve...repeat the same resolve that you made at the beginning of the

practice, do not change it...repeat the resolve three times with full awareness and feeling. *(pause)*

Finish: Relax all efforts, draw your mind outside and become aware of your breathing...become aware of the natural breath. *(pause)* Awareness of the whole body, and awareness of breathing. *(pause)* Your body is lying totally relaxed on the floor...you are breathing quietly and slowly. *(pause)* Develop awareness of your body from the top of the head to the tips of the toes and say mentally in your mind O-o-o-m-m-m. *(pause)* Repeat O-o-o-m-m-m mentally to yourself twice more. *(pause)* Become aware of the floor, and the position of your body lying on the floor...visualize the room around you, become aware of your surroundings. *(pause)* Lie quietly for some time and keep your eyes closed. *(pause)* Start moving your body and stretching yourself. Please take your time, do not hurry. *(pause)* When you are sure that you are wide awake, sit up slowly and open your eyes. The practice of yoga nidra is now complete.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Alternative short practices

The practice of yoga nidra can also be adapted for use as a short relaxation in the workplace or as a prelude to sleep.

As an interlude at work: For the purpose of relaxation, the essential elements of this form of yoga nidra are rotation of consciousness and counting of breaths. These elements can be easily adapted to allow for practice in the workplace or at home, if a short break of five to twenty minutes presents itself. Additional flexibility is provided by the breathing practice, from which any number or combination of the four parts can be chosen as required. The following is an example of a practice suitable for the office or home, or wherever some privacy can be obtained.

Lock the door, switch off the light and draw the curtains or blinds. Make a mental note of how soon you want the

practice to finish (e.g. 10 minutes). Lie down on the floor or a couch and close your eyes. Commence relaxing the body by lying quietly in the shavasana position for a short time. Let your mind wander around the environment listening to sounds reaching you from outside; don't analyze or intellectualize these sounds, just become aware of them as something external. Bring your attention to the body, take a deep breath and as you breathe out feel yourself letting go. Focus your mind on the meeting points between your body and the floor and develop this feeling for a couple of minutes. Then rotate your consciousness quickly around the body starting with the right thumb and moving in the same fashion described in the practice (right side, left side, back, front, major parts). Become aware of your natural breath. Focus your attention on the breath as it moves in and out of the nostrils (or focus on the throat, chest or navel as desired). Maintain your awareness of this for some time. Count the breaths backwards from 11 to 1 (or 27 to 1 if there is time). Stop counting and take a long, deep breath. Lie quietly for a few moments and stretch yourself slowly. Open your eyes and get up. This completes the practice.

While it is possible to practise yoga nidra sitting or standing, this is not recommended here. The distinctive feature of this form of relaxation is systematic rotation of consciousness around the body, and this gives best results in the prone position. If quick mental relaxation is required and only a chair is available, for example in the kitchen while the dinner cooks or in the bus on the way home from work, then it is best to practise awareness of the breath only, particularly mental awareness of alternate nostril breathing (anuloma viloma).

The procedure is similar to the one above. Once again become as still as possible and let your body become loose. Then check yourself quickly for particular areas of tension and try to relax them. Are you frowning? Is your neck stiff? Are your hands clenched? Tense all the muscles in your body internally and then let them relax; repeat this. Focus

your attention on the breath moving in and out of the nostrils and maintain your awareness of this for some moments. Imagine that the breath moves in and out of the nostrils alternately; in left, out right, in right, out left, and so on. Start counting the breaths backwards from 27 to 1 (or whatever number you think is appropriate for the time available). Continue this practice for as long as required. When you want to finish, leave the counting and again become aware of the body. Before you get up, take a deep breath and stretch yourself fully. This completes the practice.

As a prelude to sleep: In cases of insomnia or over-excitement of the mind, yoga nidra can also be used to induce sleep. Start by switching off the light and getting into bed. Adopt the shavasana position and rest your head on the pillow, although this should not be too high. Allow your hands to relax into the most comfortable position, probably palms down. If you have a sagging mattress it may be a good idea to support it with boards underneath. The procedure is the same as for the first short practice. Start by listening to external sounds and then become aware of the meeting points between your body and the bed. Follow this with two or three rotations of consciousness around the body and this will normally put you to sleep. If necessary you can continue the practice with mental alternate nostril breathing, starting at 54 and counting backwards to 1. If sleep does not come, a good idea would be to take some exercise before going to bed, for example a long walk, or 15 minutes of surya namaskara.

Yoga Nidra 2

Preparation	
Relaxation	Antar mouna
Resolve	
Rotation of consciousness	Right side, left side, back, front, major parts
Body/floor awareness	
Breathing	Throat to navel: 54 to 1 or 27 to 1
Awareness of sensations	Heaviness/lightness, cold/heat, pain/pleasure
Inner space	Chidakasha
Visualization	Park/temple
Inner space	Chidakasha
Resolve	
Finish	
Alternative visualizations	Mountain Floating body Well/ocean

Preparation: Get ready for yoga nidra. Lie down in shavasana, the dead man's pose, and make yourself as comfortable as possible. Keep your feet apart and let them flop a little sideways, arms slightly away from the body with the palms of your hands upwards. *(pause)* Adjust your blanket, clothes and position, so that you can practise yoga nidra without moving and with no physical discomfort. Please close your eyes and keep them closed. *(long pause)* The practice of yoga nidra is the act of hearing and the act of feeling, these are the only important factors. *(pause)* In yoga nidra you function on the level of awareness...plus the level of listening. In dreams you have no control, in yoga nidra you are the creator of the dream. *(pause)* Say to yourself mentally, 'I will not sleep, I shall only listen to the voice'...repeat to yourself, 'I will not sleep.' *(pause)* Give yourself some time to become calm and steady...take a deep breath and as you breathe in, feel calmness spreading throughout the body. *(pause)* As you are breathing out, say to yourself mentally, 'R-e-l-a-x.' *(pause)*

Relaxation: Become aware of sounds in the distance... become aware of the most distant sounds that you can hear. *(pause)* Let your sense of hearing operate like a radar beam...searching out distant sounds and following them for a few seconds. *(pause)* Move your attention from sound to sound...without attempting to identify the source. *(pause)* Gradually bring your attention to closer sounds...to sounds outside this building...and then to sounds inside this building. *(pause)* Now develop your awareness of this room...without opening your eyes visualize the four walls, the ceiling, the floor, your body lying on the floor, see your body lying on the floor. *(pause)* Become aware of the existence of your physical body lying on the floor...total awareness of your body lying in perfect stillness. *(pause)* Your body is lying on the floor...develop your awareness of all the physical meeting points between your body and the floor. *(pause)* Become aware of the natural breath, become aware of the deep,

natural, spontaneous breath, do not concentrate for this will interfere with the natural process. *(pause)* Keep on listening to me, and know that you are breathing. *(pause)* The practice of yoga nidra begins now...say mentally to yourself: 'I am going to practice yoga nidra. I will not sleep. I am going to practise yoga nidra.' *(pause)*

Resolve: This is the time to make your resolve. *(pause)* Simple resolve...simple resolve. Please state your resolve clearly with feeling and awareness three times. *(pause)*

Rotation of consciousness: Rotate your consciousness through the different centres of the body...as quickly as possible; the awareness has to jump from point to point. Please repeat mentally the name of each part after me, and simultaneously become aware of that part. The practice always begins with the right hand...

Right side: Right hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, waist, hip, right thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, top of the foot, right big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe...

Left side: Left hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, waist, hip, left thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, top of the foot, left big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe...

Back: Right shoulder, left shoulder, right shoulderblade, left shoulderblade, right buttock, left buttock, the spine...the whole of the back together...

Front: Top of the head, forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, the eyebrow centre, right eyelid, left eyelid, right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right cheek, left cheek, nose, tip of the nose, right nostril, left nostril, upper lip, lower lip, chin, jaw, throat, right collarbone, left collarbone, right chest, left chest, middle of the chest, navel, abdomen, lower abdomen...

Major parts: Whole of the right leg, whole of the left leg, both legs together...whole of the right arm, whole of the left arm, both arms together...whole of the back, whole of the front, whole of the head...together...legs, arms, back, front, head, together...the whole of the body together...the whole of the body together...the whole of the body together. *(pause)*

Repeat two additional complete rounds.

Body/floor awareness: Develop homogeneous awareness of the whole body...and become aware of the space occupied by the body. Become aware of the body...and this space that is occupied by your body...body and space, *(long pause)* Become aware of the whole body and the floor, the whole body in relation to the floor...and at the same time become aware of the meeting points of the body and the floor. *(pause)* These are very subtle physical points between body and floor. *(pause)* Feel the meeting points between the back of your head and the floor...shoulderblades and the floor...the elbows and the floor...the back of the hands and the floor...the buttocks and the floor...the calves and the floor...the heels and the floor. *(pause)* Awareness of all the meeting points between the body and the floor, the sensation of all points simultaneously, evenly. *(pause)* Go on feeling these points clearly and distinctly, please do not sleep, continue. *(long pause)* Switch your attention to the eyelids...feel the narrow line of meeting between the upper and lower eyelids. Feel the sharp points where they meet. *(pause)* Intensify your awareness between the eyelids, *(pause)* And then the lips...centre your attention on the line between the lips, the space between the lips. *(long pause)*

Breathing: From the lips we go to the breath, draw your attention to the natural ingoing and outgoing breath. *(pause)* Feel the breath moving along the passage between the navel and the throat...on inhalation it rises from the navel to the throat, on exhalation it descends from the throat to the navel. *(pause)* Be completely aware of the

respiration, navel to throat, throat to navel...do not try to force the breath, just awareness. *(pause)* Maintain your awareness and at the same time start counting your breaths backwards as follows: 'I am breathing in 54; I am breathing out 54; I am breathing in 53; I am breathing out 53; I am breathing in 52; I am breathing out 52.' and so on from 54 to 1 or from 27 to 1. Count to yourself mentally as you follow the rise and fall of your breath from navel to throat and back again. *(pause)* Total awareness of breathing and counting. *(pause)* The breathing is slow and relaxed...please continue counting.

Awareness of sensations

Heaviness: Awaken the feeling of heaviness in the body, the feeling of heaviness. *(pause)* Become aware of heaviness in every single part of the body. *(pause)* You are feeling so heavy that you are sinking into the floor. *(pause)* Awareness of heaviness, awareness of heaviness. *(long pause)*

Lightness: Awaken the feeling of lightness, awaken the feeling of lightness. *(pause)* A sensation of lightness and weightlessness in all parts of the body. *(pause)* Your body feels so light that it seems to be floating away from the floor. *(pause)* Awareness of lightness. *(long pause)*

Cold: The experience of cold. Awaken the experience of bitter cold in the body. *(pause)* Imagine you are walking on a cold floor in winter...your feet feel very cold, you feel cold all over. *(pause)* Awareness of coldness, awareness of coldness. *(long pause)*

Heat: Awaken the sensation of heat, awaken the experience of heat. The whole body is hot, the whole body is hot...you feel hot all over. *(pause)* Recollect the feeling of heat in summer when you are out in the sun with no shade...heat all over the body, heat all around the body. *(pause)* Awareness of heat. *(long pause)*

Pain: The experience of pain, concentrate and try to remember the experience of pain. *(pause)* Any pain you have experienced in your life, mental or physical, recollect the feeling of pain. *(long pause)*

Pleasure: Recollect the feeling of pleasure, any kind of pleasure, physical or mental. *(pause)* Recollect this feeling and relive it, make it vivid...awaken the feeling of pleasure. *(long pause)*

Check that you are awake. Are you drowsy or sleepy?... Make sure that you are not sleeping. Say to yourself: 'I am awake.' *(pause)*

Inner space: Withdraw your mind and concentrate on the space in front of your closed eyes, the space we call chidakasha. *(pause)* Imagine before you a transparent screen through which you can see infinite space...a space that extends as far as the eyes can see. *(pause)* Concentrate on this dark space and become aware of any phenomena that manifests within it; whatever you see is the manifesting state of your mind. *(pause)* Continue your awareness of this space but do not become involved, practise detached awareness only. *(long pause)*

Park/temple visualization: Imagine yourself in a park in the early morning...the sun has not risen and the park is deserted, except for yourself. *(pause)* It is a beautiful park, calm and peaceful...walk across the springy grass...listen to the birds whistle and call as they welcome in the new day. *(pause)* There are gardens of flowers, roses, yellow, pink, red, purple...smell their fragrance and see the early morning dewdrops on their petals. Nearby the rose garden is a fishpond...goldfish swim in and out amongst the water lilies, see their graceful movements. *(pause)* You walk between trees, beautiful trees...bare trees and trees with leaves, wide spreading trees and tall stately trees. There is a clearing between the trees...in the clearing is a small temple with an aura of light around it. *(pause)* Go to the door, it is cool and dim inside...inside on the walls there are pictures of great saints. You sit down on the floor, close your eyes and become still...a sense of deep peace and harmony envelops you as the sounds outside fade into the distance. *(pause)* Continue your awareness of meditation inside the

temple...stay there for some time until peace and harmony pervade. *(long pause)*

Inner space: Bring your awareness back to chidakasha, bring your awareness to the dark space you see in front of your closed eyes. *(pause)* Actually this space can also be visualized in front of the forehead, so if you want to explore it a little you can shift your gaze slightly upwards...but do not strain. *(pause)* Watch the darkness that you see before you very carefully, with detachment, do not become involved. *(pause)* Rest your mind in this warm and friendly darkness...if any subtle phenomena manifests, for example colours or patterns, simply take note of these and continue with your awareness. *(pause)* If thoughts occur let them come and go but continue watching the dark space, continue this with detached awareness. *(long pause)*

Resolve: Now remember your resolve, your sankalpa. Repeat the same resolve you made at the beginning of the practice in the same words and with the same attitude. Repeat your resolve now three times clearly, with feeling and emphasis. *(pause)*

Finish: Become aware of your breathing, become aware of your natural breathing. *(pause)* Awareness of breathing... and awareness of relaxation. *(pause)* Develop awareness of your physical existence. *(pause)* Become aware of your arms and legs and your body lying stretched out on the floor. *(pause)* Become aware of meeting points between your body and the floor. *(pause)* Develop awareness of the room, walls, ceiling...noises in the room and noises outside...take your mind out, become completely external. *(pause)* Lie quietly for a few moments and keep your eyes closed. Start moving your body and stretching yourself... please take your time, do not hurry. *(pause)* When you are sure that you are wide awake, sit up slowly and open your eyes. The practice of yoga nidra is now complete.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Alternative visualizations: These may be substituted in place of the park/temple visualization

Mountain: Imagine that it is very early morning, still dark, and you are walking through hills climbing up towards some mountains. You are alone. *(pause)* You are walking east and if you look back you can see a crescent-shaped moon low in the sky...soon the sun will rise over the mountains ahead of you. *(pause)* Far below in a valley the lights of a small town twinkle through an early morning mist. *(pause)* The track twists back and forth on the side of a steep slope...it winds between huge boulders and over bridges suspended across deep chasms. *(pause)* A gap between two hills gives a glimpse of a huge snow-covered mountain ahead...the pale sky behind it heralds the dawn. *(pause)* You climb up through snow, it makes a crunching sound as you break the surface and sink in...A glacier lies across your path...there are creaks and groans of moving ice as you quickly move across. *(pause)* Near the top of the mountain it becomes very cold...winds howl around your body and snatch at your clothes...snow and ice cling to your shoes. *(pause)* You reach the top and a magnificent scene reveals itself before your eyes...to the east a vast range of snow covered peaks and dark valleys...to the west hills leading to rolling plains and the sea. *(pause)* Intensify your imagination and visualize this scene...see the sun rise like a golden ball in the east, scattering rays of golden light off snow that dazzles your eyes. *(pause)* Sweep your eyes around the sky...to the west it is still grey, above you blue...in the east a delicate pink as it nears the sun. *(pause)* Watch the sunlight strike the tops of mountains and move down their sides...deep valleys emerge as the shadows retreat. *(pause)* You sit with legs crossed and contemplate this grand scene...the dawn of a new day. *(pause)* Let yourself experience this for some time...let your mind flow freely with this experience. *(long pause)*

Floating body: Imagine that you are on the ceiling...and you see below you your body lying in shavasana on the floor,

practising yoga nidra beside other people. *(pause)* Now see your body slowly stand up and tiptoe to the door, quietly open it...and go outside, closing the door softly behind you. See your body walking outside this building, see the familiar things around you...there is no sense of effort, only lightness. *(pause)* You meet some people that you know...see them, but they can't see you. Watch them as they walk past, perhaps they are making their usual conversation. *(pause)* Suddenly you find that your body is floating over the sea...become aware of this...see the dark blue sea glistening below, across its surface a ship is steaming. *(pause)* Your body floats like a cloud...wherever the wind blows the clouds, your body is also blown...wisps of cloud brush past your face. Below you sunlight reflects off banks of white cloud...above you puffs of cloud scurry across a blue sky. *(pause)* Now your body is lifted by currents of air and carried over the land...on the ground below you see farmhouses, carefully laid out fields, thick forests, winding rivers that reflect the sun. *(pause)* Pause a moment and look closely at yourself...your body is totally relaxed and on your face is an expression of peace and calm. *(pause)* See your body suddenly immersed in colour as it passes through a rainbow...feel yourself washed and purified by subtle colours...yellow, green, blue, violet, red, orange, golden yellow. Feel the colours penetrating your whole body, nourishing and invigorating you at some deep level. *(long pause)* Then slowly make your return...see your body return to the outside of this building...see again the familiar objects. Quietly open the door, walk inside and close it after you. You lie down on the floor, taking care not to disturb other people. *(pause)* Now see your body slowly practising some asanas...your body rests again in shavasana. *(long pause)*

Well/ocean: Imagine yourself walking along a deserted road on a hot day; beside the road is a high wall and in the wall a small door. You go through that door and discover inside a garden...birds singing...beautiful flowers...cool

shady trees. *(pause)* You explore the garden and come to a well with butterflies dancing around the top; look inside the well...it is very deep...a cylindrical tunnel boring into utter darkness. *(pause)* A spiral stairway twists around the walls...you start walking down...in the walls are polished stones...yellow and white marbles, emerald green serpentines...look up and see the circle of light at the top of the well. *(pause)* From holes in the walls you hear the sounds of small animals...squeaks and rustling sounds; now you are completely surrounded by darkness...you feel your way along the walls. *(pause)* Large green eyes gaze at you and blink shut...there is the beating of wings and the hoot of an owl. You pass through a cloud of luminous insects...completely transparent...you are surrounded by these but none ever touches you; the walls are damp and mossy...there is a dim light below. *(pause)* You reach the bottom, run through a tunnel and come out on a golden beach...a golden beach on the shore of an infinite ocean of peace and bliss. *(pause)* On the water a large white lotus flower is rocked gently by the waves...on the flower there is a baby lying, and that baby is you...feel yourself as that baby, rocking gently on the waters of the infinite ocean. *(long pause)* Continue this experience of yourself as a baby, rocking gently on the water...and experience the sound of *Om* over the infinite ocean...hear the vibration of *Om*. *(long pause)*

Yoga Nidra 3

Preparation	
Relaxation	Antar mouna
Resolve	
Rotation of consciousness	Right side, left side, back, front, major parts
Skin awareness	
Breathing	Mental alternate nostril: 108 to 1
Inner space	Chidakasha
Visualization	Eyebrow centre/Om
Inner space	Chidakasha
Resolve	
Finish	
Alternate visualizations	Eyebrow centre Golden egg Well/golden egg Climbing the sacred mountain

Preparation: Get ready for yoga nidra. Lie down in shavasana, feet apart and the palms of the hands facing upwards. *((pause))* Close your eyes and quickly become motionless...now is the time to make any adjustments, there should be absolutely no movement until the practice is finished. *(pause)* For just an hour, forget your problems and worries and concentrate on yoga nidra...forget all your cares. *(pause)* Take a long deep breath...and as you breathe out feel yourself letting go. *(pause)*

Relaxation: Become aware of outside sounds, become aware of distant sounds outside the building. *(long pause)* Allow your sense of hearing to range into the distance...and then gradually withdraw it back into this building, back to this room. *(long pause)* Develop your awareness of this room...and yourself lying on the floor...become aware of your body lying on the floor. *(pause)* Become aware of your breathing...just be conscious that you are breathing, do not concentrate. Awareness of your breath and awareness of your body. *(pause)* Remember your purpose and say mentally to yourself: 'I am going to practise yoga nidra. I will remain awake; I will not sleep.' *(pause)*

Resolve: Now state your resolve. Repeat your resolve mentally with full awareness and feeling three times. *(pause)*

Rotation of consciousness: Now we move into rotation of consciousness. Awareness of different parts of the body by taking a trip through the body. Let your mind jump freely from one part to the next.

Right side: Right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, side, waist, hip, right thigh, kneecap, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, top of the foot, right toes, one, two, three, four, five...

Left side: Left hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, side, waist, hip, left thigh, kneecap, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, top of the foot, left toes, one, two, three, four, five...

Front: Go to the top of the head, forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, eyebrow centre, right eyelid, left eyelid, right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right nostril, left nostril, right cheek, left cheek, upper lip, lower lip, chin, jaw, throat, right collarbone, left collarbone, right chest, left chest, middle of the chest, navel, upper abdomen, lower abdomen, right groin, left groin, right thigh, left thigh, right knee, left knee, right calf muscle, left calf muscle, right ankle, left ankle, right toes, left toes...

Back: Now the back. Right sole, left sole, right heel, left heel, right calf muscle, left calf muscle, back of right knee, back of left knee, back of right thigh, back of left thigh, right buttock, left buttock, right hip, left hip, whole spine, right shoulderblade, left shoulderblade, back of the neck, back of the head, top of the head...

Major parts: Major parts. Whole right leg, whole left leg, both legs together; whole right arm, whole left arm, both arms together; whole of the head, together; whole of the back, together; whole front, together; the whole body, together...whole body, together. *(long pause)*

Repeat two complete rounds.

Skin awareness: Become aware of the meeting parts between body and floor...and concentrate on them for a short time. *(pause)* Feel the meeting points between the body and the floor...intensely, evenly. *(long pause)* Bring your attention to the soles of the feet; feel the skin on the soles of your feet...from the heels...to the tips of the toes. *(long pause)* Go to the palms of your hands...feel the skin on the palms of your hands and fingers. Feel the skin and also become aware of the lines on your palms and fingers...intensely, with full awareness. *(long pause)* Bring your awareness to the face, become aware of the skin on your face, develop your awareness. *(pause)* Develop your awareness of the skin on your forehead, cheeks and chin...become aware of any lines on your face. *(pause)* Bring your attention to the eyelids, feel the meeting points between the eyelids. *(pause)* And now the lips, feel

the meeting points between the lips, intensely, with feeling. *(long pause)*

Breathing: Now bring your attention to the natural breath...become aware that you are breathing quietly and slowly. *(pause)* Become conscious of your breathing, nothing else. *(pause)* Concentrate now on the flow of the breath between the navel and the throat...feel the breath moving along this passage. *(pause)* As you inhale the air rises from the navel to throat, as you exhale, it falls from throat to navel...become aware of this. *(long pause)* Now become aware of the breath through the nostrils, the natural breath flowing through both nostrils and meeting at the top to form a triangle. *(pause)* Think of the breaths as starting separately from a distance, drawing near...and uniting in the eyebrow centre. *(long pause)* Now commence to practise mental nadi shodhana, mental awareness of breathing through alternate nostrils...counting backwards from 108 to 1, as follows: 108 inhale left nostril, 108 exhale right nostril, 107 inhale right nostril, 107 exhale left nostril...and so on, say this mentally to yourself as you practise. *(long pause)* Remember if you make a mistake, you must go back to 108 and start again. *(long pause)* Full awareness of mental alternate nostril breathing and counting. *(long pause)* There should be no mistake and no sleeping. *(long pause)* Continue counting with total awareness. *(long pause)* Continue with total awareness. *(long pause of 5–10 minutes)*

Inner space: Become aware of chidakasha, the inner space you see behind your forehead. *(pause)* Develop your awareness of this space...an infinite space that extends as far as you can see.. as low or as high, and as wide as you can see. *(pause)* Become aware of this space. *(long pause)* Be totally aware but not involved...observe it as if you are watching a movie...what you see is a projection of your subconscious. *(pause)* If you see patterns...this is simply the way your mind is manifesting...maintain your awareness. Continue. *(long pause)*

Eyebrow centre/Om visualization: Bring your attention to the eyebrow centre, focus your attention on the eyebrow centre. *(pause)* Imagine you are sitting in a meditative pose in the eyebrow centre chanting the mantra *Om* in synchronization with your breath...you are sitting in lotus or some comfortable position doing this. *(long pause)* Awareness of sitting in the eyebrow centre chanting *Om* in time with the breath, continue. *(long pause)* Visualize circles of *Om* growing from the eyebrow centre as you continue the practice. *(long pause)* Now bring your attention back to the eyebrow centre only...cease visualizing yourself practising meditation...prepare to return to chidakasha. *(pause)*

Inner space: Return your awareness to chidakasha, return again to that inner space...the space you see behind the forehead. *(pause)* Watch this space carefully for any colours or patterns that may emerge...there should be no effort, just awareness of watching. *(long pause)* Total awareness of watching with no involvement. *(long pause)* Continue watching this space and become aware of any images, any spontaneous thoughts that emerge...try to become aware of these. *(long pause)*

Resolve: Become aware of your resolve, remember the resolve you made at the beginning of the practice; this is the time to repeat your resolve. *(pause)* State your resolve three times in the same words and with the same attitude, with feeling and emphasis. *(pause)*

Finish: Become aware of your breathing, become aware of the natural breath, become aware of the breath through the nostrils. *(pause)* Develop total awareness of the nostril breath and continue practising this. *(long pause)* Mental awareness of alternate nostril breathing...practise this for a short time. *(long pause)* Extend your awareness of the breath to every part of the body...as you inhale feel the life-giving force permeate your whole body. *(long pause)* Take a long, slow, deep breath and become aware of your relaxed body, become aware of your physical existence.

(pause) Develop awareness of your surroundings...the floor you are lying on, the room you are in...externalize your attention. *(long pause)* Start making small movements in preparation for sitting up, take your time, there is no hurry. *(pause)* Sit up slowly and open your eyes. The practice of yoga nidra is now complete.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Alternative visualizations: To be substituted in place of eyebrow centre/Om.

Eyebrow centre/golden egg: Bring your attention to the eyebrow centre...focus your attention on the eyebrow centre. *(pause)* Now become aware of a golden door...become aware of a big, solid, golden door. *(pause)* Try to open that door. *(long pause)* Now you are on the other side of the door, at the entrance of a dark cave...visualize that dark cave. *(pause)* Deep within that cave you can see a flaming light...go towards that light...see what you can find. *(pause)* Within that light there is a small golden egg, very bright...a small golden egg, small as a mustard seed...very small, very bright. *(pause)* Intensify your visualization and see the golden egg within the flaming light...these are symbols of yourself...big self and little self. *(long pause)* Leave the flaming light and golden egg and pass back through the golden door...bring your awareness back to the eyebrow centre...once again become aware of the eyebrow centre. *(pause)*

Well/golden egg: Imagine yourself walking through a field of green and golden grass...the sun is shining...a cool breeze wafts the air...birds are calling sweetly from the trees. *(pause)* You come to a well in a field of flowers...there is a lovely fragrance in the air and butterflies play follow-the-leader amongst themselves. *(pause)* Visualize yourself going down the well...use whatever means you find necessary to do this. *(pause)* The bottom of the well is dark but from a tunnel there comes a faint light. Enter

that tunnel...it goes down a slope around a corner, up another slope, and then turns back on itself. You come into a big cave...there is a flaming light...go over to that light and inspect it more closely. *(pause)* Within that light is a golden egg...very, very small, bright, golden egg; from the golden egg three streams of light project towards you, one to the left eye, one to the right eye and one to the eyebrow centre. Gaze steadily at the golden egg and become aware of these streams of light. *(long pause)* Now leave the golden egg and go back through the cave...go quickly up the well...and out into the field of golden grass. Once again feel the warmth of the sun and the cool breeze blowing on your face. *(pause)*

Climbing the sacred mountain: See yourself setting out on a journey to climb a sacred mountain. You know that it is going to be a long and difficult climb...but you feel sure you will reach the summit. *(pause)* As you leave your home town you meet your guide...a person whom you have never met before...but you know he is a qualified and experienced guide. *(pause)* You find it difficult to assess his character...and he is not very talkative...but as you want to make the journey, you follow him. *(pause)* The path you are following passes through a large forest...beneath a canopy of trees and crossing many streams. *(pause)* You come to an enormous lake...a tranquilizing blue colour...clear and fresh...and you stop. You and the guide drink the water and rest for a while. *(pause)* After continuing the journey, you begin to feel some frustration and mistrust of the guide...the forest has become so dense that you cannot see far in any direction...the sacred mountain is completely obscured from your view and you feel far from your home. *(pause)* However, after a little time you begin to ascend and the forest becomes less dense...you look back into the direction you came from...you see the forest and the rooftops of the houses of your town. The sight of the town and the tiredness of your body make you feel that the journey is

perhaps useless...and you want to return to the comforts of your home and the friends you have left behind...but the guide insists you go on...so you follow. *(pause)* The ascent becomes steeper and you are feeling tired...but the guide continues at his steady pace. Sometimes you feel angry at his relentless pace; but at other times you are grateful for his expertise in climbing the more difficult terrain and in avoiding places that would have been impossible for you to climb. *(pause)* The vegetation becomes less dense...the ground is rocky and rugged. All thoughts of home and past have gone as you need to concentrate completely on climbing and keeping up with the guide. *(long pause)* Overcome by fatigue, you collapse on the ground to rest...you feel exhausted and defeated and do not care if the guide waits for you or not...the whole journey seems pointless. *(pause)* The guide comes to you, takes you by the hand and starts walking again...with each step he repeats the words 'I will'...you find that you are walking in step with him, and the sound of the words 'I will' is echoing through your body and mind, giving you tremendous strength and energy. *(pause)* The guide releases your hand, but the words keep resounding in your mind as you follow him further upwards. *(pause)* As you near the top of the sacred mountain, the ascent is even more difficult...and the guide is far ahead of you. You trudge languidly on alone...and finally reach the top...where the guide is waiting for you. *(pause)* As you observe the spectacular panoramic view, a feeling of exhilaration floods through your body and mind. *(pause)* The guide gives you a meaningful smile...and you are grateful to him for his forcefulness during the climb. You are exalted by the environment; overcome by a feeling you have never experienced before. *(pause)* You are still absorbed in this exhilaration when the guide says, 'Follow me'...and leaps from the peak, disappearing into space...without a further thought you follow. *(long pause)*

Yoga Nidra 4

Preparation	
Relaxation	Om/breathing
Resolve	
Rotation of consciousness	Right side, left side, right side reverse, left side reverse, whole back down, whole back up, whole front down, whole front up, major parts
Body/mirror awareness	
Breathing	Mental alternate nostril: 54 to 1
Awareness of sensations	Heaviness/lightness, pain/pleasure
Inner space	Ocean, well, spontaneous thought
Visualizations	Asana, movement in time, rapid image, ocean/jungle, golden egg
Resolve	
Finish	
Alternate visualization sequence	Psychic centres (location) Psychic symbols

Preparation: Please get ready for yoga nidra. Lie down in shavasana, your body stretched out, feet apart, the palms of the hands turned upwards and your eyes closed. *(pause)* Make all the necessary adjustments so that you are as comfortable as possible, there must be no movement, neither conscious nor unconscious. *(pause)* Remember that you are about to practise yoga nidra, psychic sleep, and that you have only to maintain awareness of hearing and feeling. *(pause)* The body sleeps but the mind remains awake...you must remain alert so that you do not sleep. Say to yourself mentally: 'I will not sleep, I will remain awake'. *(pause)* Take a deep breath and as you breathe in feel coolness and calmness spreading throughout the body...as you breathe out, feel your cares and worries flowing out of you, dropping away. *(long pause)*

Relaxation: Become aware of your body and relax yourself completely, make yourself physically calm and steady. *(pause)* Feel that the legs are relaxed, the trunk, the head, the arms and hands. *(pause)* Develop the awareness of your physical body right from the top of your head to the tips of the toes, and say in your mind *O-o-o-m-m-m*. *(pause)* Complete awareness of the whole body...say to yourself again *O-o-o-m-m-m*. *(pause)* Relax your whole body mentally, relax yourself mentally, relax yourself by breathing normally and becoming aware of the breath as it moves between the navel and throat. *(pause)* Awareness of your natural breath, no forcing. *(pause)* Navel to throat breathing, please go on with this awareness and slowly feel yourself becoming more relaxed. *(long pause)* Now leave your breathing and become aware that you are going to practise yoga nidra. Yoga nidra begins now.

Resolve: Now is the time to make your resolve. *(pause)* Be consistent, plant the resolve at one place and do not change it. Certainly the resolve will come true if the soil is perfect. *(pause)* Repeat your resolve with feeling and awareness three times. *(pause)*

Rotation of consciousness: Awareness of the parts of the body...the consciousness should move around the body and keep on moving. *(pause)* As it moves it changes into prana, the vital energy, in the form of a current of energy. Do not concentrate on any one part, but let your mind jump freely from one part to the next. *(pause)*

Right side: Right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, waist, hip, right thigh, kneecap, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, top of the foot, right toes, one, two, three, four, five...

Left side: Left hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, waist, hip, left thigh, kneecap, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, top of the foot, left toes, one, two, three, four, five...

Right side reverse: Go to the right toes, and start from the bottom. Right big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth, top of the foot, sole, heel, ankle, calf muscle, kneecap, thigh, hip, waist, armpit, shoulder, upper arm, elbow, lower arm, wrist, back of the hand, palm of the hand, right thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth...

Left side reverse: Go to the left toes. Left big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth, top of the foot, sole, heel, ankle, calf muscle, kneecap, thigh, hip, waist, armpit, shoulder, upper arm, elbow, upper arm, lower arm, wrist, back of the hand, palm of the hand, left thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth...

Whole back down: Go to the back of the body. Go to the back of the head, where it touches the floor. Back of the head, right shoulderblade, left shoulderblade, whole spine, right hip, left hip, right buttock, left buttock, back of the right thigh, back of the left thigh, back of the right knee, back of the left knee, right calf muscle, left calf muscle, right ankle, left ankle, right heel, left heel...

Whole back up: Right ankle, left ankle, right calf muscle, left calf muscle, back of the right knee, back of the left knee,

back of the right thigh, back of the left thigh, right buttock, left buttock, right hip, left hip, whole spine, right shoulderblade, left shoulderblade, back of the head...

Whole front down: Go to the front of the body, go to the top of the head. Top of the head, forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, the space between the eyebrows, right eyelid, left eyelid, right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right nostril, left nostril, right cheek, left cheek, upper lip, lower lip, chin, jaw, throat, right collarbone, left collarbone, right chest, left chest, middle of the chest, navel, upper abdomen, lower abdomen, right groin, left groin, right thigh, left thigh, right knee, left knee, right toes, left toes...

Whole front up: Right toes, left toes, right knee, left knee, right thigh, left thigh, right groin, left groin, lower abdomen, upper abdomen, navel, right chest, left chest, middle of the chest, right collarbone, left collarbone, throat, jaw, chin, lower lip, upper lip, right cheek, left cheek, right nostril, left nostril, right ear, left ear, right eye, left eye, right eyelid, left eyelid, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, eyebrow centre, forehead, top of the head...

Major parts: Now the major parts of the body. The whole of the right leg, whole of the left leg, both legs...together. Whole of the right arm, whole of the left arm, both arms...together; whole of the back...together; whole of the front...together; whole of the head...together; the whole body, whole body, whole body. Visualize the whole body. *(pause)* Intensify your awareness...the whole body, the whole body, the whole body. *(long pause)*

Body/mirror awareness: Become aware of the meeting points between your body and the floor. *(pause)* Feel the meeting points between the body and the floor...sharp meeting points...body and floor. *(pause)* Feel the floor holding you to its bosom, like a baby in arms. *(long pause)* Now concentrate on your body as if you are seeing it from the outside, look on your body as an object. *(pause)* See your head, your clothes, your whole body from top to

bottom, lying in the dead man's pose on the floor. *(pause)* See your body as an object, a reflection in an imaginary mirror. *(pause)* You are looking at your own reflection in the mirror and you see your self lying on the floor...your feet, your legs, abdomen, chest, arms, hands, clothing, nose, closed eyes, forehead, hair...everything reflected in that mirror. *(pause)* Awareness of your body as an object. *(pause)* Make sure you are not sleeping. *(long pause)*

Breathing: Bring your attention to the natural, quiet breath. Become aware of the breath through the nostrils. *(pause)* The natural breath flows through both nostrils...and meets at the top of the nose to form a triangle. *(pause)* The spontaneous breath enters through the nostril openings... moves upwards and draws together to form a triangle with its apex in the eyebrow centre. *(pause)* Be aware of the breath passing through both nostrils...become aware of both breaths, separately...and simultaneously. *(pause)* Think of the breaths as starting separately from a distance, drawing near...and uniting in the eyebrow centre. *(pause)* Now concentrate on each breath and try to determine its temperature...move back and forth and compare the temperatures. *(pause)* In yoga we say the left nostril breath is ida, moon, and the right is pingala, sun. *(pause)* Ida, the left breath, is cooler; pingala, the right breath, is warmer. *(pause)* Continue your awareness of breathing, but imagine you are now breathing through alternate nostrils...in through one nostril, and out through the other; up and down the sides of the triangle and back again. *(pause)* Maintain your awareness and start counting each breath with full attention; inhale left 54, exhale right 54, inhale right 53, exhale left 53, and so on...continue counting and breathing to zero. *(long pause)* Total awareness of counting and breathing. If you make a mistake or reach zero, start again from 54. *(long pause)* Stop your counting and remain aware of the breath only...inhaling evenly through both nostrils; total awareness, no sleeping, no sleeping please. *(long pause)*

Awareness of sensations

Heaviness: Heaviness; awaken the experience of heaviness in the whole body. *(pause)* Become aware of heaviness in each part of the body as it is named: toes, heels, ankles, calves, knees, thighs, buttocks, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, arms, palms, head, eyelids, the whole body...heavy, the whole body...heavy, the whole body... heavy. *(pause)* Experience this feeling of heaviness in the whole body. *(pause)*

Lightness: Lightness; manifest the experience of lightness in the body. *(pause)* Manifest the feeling of lightness from the top...from the top of the head, the whole head, shoulders, palms, back, chest, abdomen, thighs, knees, calves, heels, soles, toes. Manifest the experience of lightness in the whole body from top to toe. *(pause)* The lightness of the body can be developed by feeling the meeting points between the body and the floor...point by point, or as a whole, a whole surface of body-floor meeting. *(pause)* Concentrate on this area of meeting and gradually experience lightness. *(pause)* Feel yourself floating up from the floor...you are so light that you are floating to the ceiling, drifting back and forth. *(pause)* Continue this experience until lightness is manifest, go on. *(pause)*

Pain: Pain; recollect the experience of pain, any kind of pain you have experienced in your life...head pain, stomach pain, any physical pain or mental pain. *(pause)* Everyone has experienced pain at some time in his life...remember that pain, feel that pain. *(pause)* Try to make that experience of pain as clear as possible...deepen your awareness and feel that pain intensely...acutely. *(pause)* Continue to concentrate on the experience of pain. *(pause)*

Pleasure: Pleasure; try to experience the feeling of pleasure, any pleasure. *(pause)* Concentrate and remember the feeling of pleasure...it may be according to your sense of touch, smell, taste, hearing or sight...any kind of mental pleasure. *(pause)* Recall that pleasure and try to develop it into an intense ecstatic experience. *(long pause)*

Inner space

Ocean: Think of an ocean...think of a dark blue ocean and become aware of the waves. *(pause)* That ocean lies within the inner space, the chidakasha, and the rolling waves represent sleep...the manifesting unconscious state of your mind. *(pause)* Become aware of sleep and try to visualize this state of unconsciousness within you, like waves on an ocean. *(pause)* Above is a beautiful blue sky and below is the vast ocean with infinite waves...the manifesting process of unconsciousness. *(long pause)*

Well: Imagine a well, imagine a well and that you are looking into it. The well is dark and deep...a cylindrical tunnel into the depths of the earth. *(pause)* There is a bucket on a chain; you lower it into the well...and it moves into abysmal darkness...you can feel it on the chain, in the depths...but you cannot see it. *(pause)* Now pull the bucket up, up out of the darkness and into the light...let's lower the bucket again, but this time if you wish, you can get into the bucket, and I will lower you down and pull you up again, perfectly safely. *(pause)* Now the bucket is winding down, you are descending slowly through the light and moving into darkness...unknown, all-pervading darkness. *(pause)* Complete darkness and emptiness all around...so dark you cannot see yourself, but you can know and feel that you are. *(pause)* You descend a little further, with complete awareness that you are. *(pause)* Now I am winding you up, up through the darkness...and into the dim light; from the dim light into daylight and out of the well. *(pause)*

Spontaneous thought: Now ask yourself: 'What am I thinking?'...do not 'think' but become aware of the spontaneous thought process...become a witness, do not suppress any thought. *(pause)* Try to witness your thoughts and ask yourself again and again: 'What am I thinking?' *(pause)* At the same time, maintain total awareness of any thought that is passing through the visible frame of your consciousness. *(long pause)*

Visualization

Asana: Now you have to concentrate on yourself as if you are doing asanas, yogic poses. You should try to visualize yourself from the outside doing the poses with psychic awareness only...do not move your body. *(pause)* Practise mentally *surya namaskara*, salute to the sun. See yourself in each of the poses, 1,2,3...to 12. *(pause)* Now you are lying down, visualize yourself in *shavasana*, dead man's pose...from shavasana you move to *sarvangasana*, shoulderstand; *halasana*, plough; and the counterpose *matsyasana*, fish; now *paschimottanasana*, forward bend; *bhujangasana*, cobra...turning over, *padmasana*, lotus; and then *sirshasana*, headstand. Check that you are not sleeping. *(long pause)*

Movement in time: Now you are going to travel into your past, in the same way you have travelled from the past to the present...retracing the steps of your memory and consciousness backwards from this time. The past is part of time and time is part of your mind. Normally you walk forward in time...this time try and walk backwards. By remembering your past you are going into the deeper recesses of your consciousness. *(pause)*

Try to remember what happened from the present time to the time you got up this morning...you have to go back in time as if you were watching a film running in reverse, or if not a film, a series of slides. *(pause)* Remember back to the start of the yoga nidra, then recall what you were doing in the half hour before that. *(pause)* Remember the important objects and feelings in that time, and then keep on proceeding in half hour or one hour stages, to when you woke up. *(long pause)* Stage by stage, with full awareness, visualize and recall what you were doing, thinking and feeling. *(pause)* When you have finished, bring your mind directly back to the present. *(long pause)*

Rapid image: Bring your awareness to the present and make sure you are not sleeping, no sleeping please. I am going to name a few objects and you should try to visualize

them on the levels of feeling, awareness, emotion and imagination as best you can. *(pause)* You should move as fast as I go, jumping your mind from image to image; do not waste your time concentrating on any one image, but keep moving.

Shivalingam...standing Christ...flickering candle...weeping willow tree...tall palm tree...car moving on a road...dead body burning over a fire...coloured clouds gathering... yellow clouds...blue clouds...starlit night...full moon...dog standing...cat reposing...elephant moving...horse racing... rising sun...setting sun...ocean with waves... shivalingam... standing Christ...a big pond with clear water...blue lotus...white lotus...pink lotus...golden spiderweb...sandy bank of a wide river...boat sailing on the water...see the ripples...dead body burning on a fire...human skeletons... yourself lying down without clothes...completely naked... golden cord extending from your navel into the sky...cross over a church...within the church a priest praying... worshipper kneeling...chimney smoke rising from an old house...a cold winter...a fire burning in the house...dawn of the day...temple bell ringing...a monk with shaven head...a yogi sitting in deep meditation...Buddha in repose...Christ showing compassion. *(pause)*

Ocean/jungle: Intensify your awareness, intensify your awareness and go to an infinite ocean, calm and quiet...and try to discover a sound there. *(pause)* There is a sound, an infinite ocean, dark green jungles on the shore, snakes, lions, and goats living in friendliness. *(pause)* From the shore a path leads to a lonely cottage in the jungle...and a yogi is sitting outside in lotus pose. *(pause)* There is a fire and a smell of incense, the fragrance of flowers, and an atmosphere of tranquility. *(pause)* All around can be heard the sound of *Om*, the chanting of *Om* over the infinite ocean. *(long pause)*

Golden egg: Become a witness of your awareness...not the body, not the senses, not the mind, nothing but the different awareness. *(pause)* Become aware that you are

observing yourself. *(pause)* Look within and try to be aware of the one who is looking, who is aware of what you have been doing so far. *(pause)* Go into chidakasha...go into the cave of chidakasha. Within that cave there is a flaming light...find that light. *(pause)* Find that light and find a small golden egg in the centre of the light...a small golden egg. very bright, with light all around. *(long pause)*

Resolve: Resolve, resolve, resolve...now you should remember your resolve and repeat it three times. *(pause)* With maximum feeling and awareness, three times. *(pause)*

Finish: Now relax all efforts and bring your attention to the natural breath, the natural breath flowing in and out of the nostrils. *(long pause)* Maintain your awareness of the breath and at the same time develop your awareness of physical relaxation. *(pause)* Awareness of relaxation...and awareness of your physical existence; become aware of the physical existence of your body. *(long pause)* Develop awareness of your body and visualize your body lying on the floor. *(pause)* Take your mind out and visualize the surrounding room, let your mind become completely external...do not open your eyes. *(pause)* You are practising yoga nidra, become aware of this fact. *(pause)* Lie quietly until your attention is completely externalized. Start moving, moving your body and stretching yourself...please take your time, there is no hurry. *(pause)* When you are sure that you are wide awake, sit up slowly and open your eyes. The practice of yoga nidra is now complete.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Alternative visualizations: The following visualization sequence can be substituted for the visualizations from 'Rapid Images' to 'Golden Egg' and completed with 'Resolve' and 'Finish' as above.

Psychic centres: Visualization of chakras in the physical body, starting from the bottom and progressing upwards. First there is mooladhara chakra, situated in the perineum in

men, between the anus and the genitals, and in women at the cervix. Concentrate on the mooladhara psychic centre. *(pause)* The second chakra is called swadhisthana and is located at the bottom of the spinal cord, in the coccyx. Concentrate on swadhisthana. *(pause)* The third chakra is manipura, located in the spinal cord behind the navel. Concentrate on manipura directly or indirectly, breathing back and forth in a straight line from the navel. *(pause)* Anahata chakra is the fourth, situated in the spinal cord directly behind the heart and sternum. Concentrate on anahata directly...or indirectly by breathing back and forth in a straight line from the heart. Vishuddhi is the fifth chakra, and is located in the neck. Concentrate on vishuddhi. *(pause)* The sixth chakra is ajna, situated behind the brain at the top of the spinal cord...in the same place as the pineal gland. Concentrate on ajna directly or indirectly by breathing back and forth in a straight line from the eyebrow centre. *(pause)* Bindu is the seventh, and is located at the top and back of the head, where Brahmins wear a small tuft of hair. Concentrate on bindu. *(pause)* Last is sahasrara chakra, situated on the crown of the head. Concentrate on sahasrara. *(long pause)* Now a second rotation, this time faster. As each chakra is named, repeat it mentally and imagine touching the physical point with your thumb: mooladhara...perineum, cervix; swadhisthana...spinal terminus; manipura... behind the navel; anahata...behind the heart; vishuddhi...at the neck; ajna...behind the eyebrow centre; bindu...top back of the head; and sahasrara...crown of the head. *(pause)*

Once again: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna, bindu, sahasrara. Sahasrara, bindu, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara. *(pause)*

Psychic symbols: Visualization of the chakra symbols, the symbols of the psychic centres. When your concentrated consciousness touches the right spot of the particular

chakra, then the appropriate symbol or vision will flower within your awareness.

The psychic symbol for mooladhara is a red inverted triangle. Concentrate on mooladhara and imagine a red inverted triangle. *(pause)* Swadhisthana represents unconsciousness. Concentrate on swadhisthana and visualize the unconscious in the form of waves on a vast ocean at night. *(pause)* A bright yellow sunflower is the symbol for manipura. Concentrate on manipura and visualize this. *(pause)* Concentrate on anahata, see a tiny flame of light on a small lamp, burning in the absolute darkness of a very big room; the whole universe is filled with a dark atmosphere, and in a corner a tiny oil lamp burns with a golden flame. *(pause)* The psychic symbol for vishuddhi is cold drops of nectar...concentrate on cold drops of nectar. *(pause)* Ajna is the seat of intuition, concentrate on ajna. *(pause)* Visualize a crescent moon at night, that is bindu. *(pause)* And lastly sahasrara is visualized as the fireplace where the rituals are performed, initiations are given and worship is carried out...the fireplace with the burning fire, big tongues of flame. *(long pause)*

Yoga Nidra 5

Preparation	
Relaxation	Antar mouna
Resolve	
Rotation of consciousness	Right side, left side, front, back, inner parts, major parts
Breathing	Eyebrow centre; 54 to 1
Feelings	Cold/heat, pain/pleasure
Inner space	Person in chidakasha, ocean, well, spontaneous thoughts, willed thoughts
Visualization	Eyebrow centre/Om Ocean/temple
Resolve	
Finish	
Alternate visualization sequence	Psychic centres (location and form) Psychic symbols Eyebrow centre/Om Rapid images Transparent body Aura Golden egg

Preparation: Please get ready for yoga nidra, you know the position very well. *(pause)* Close your eyes and adjust yourself until you are comfortable. If you want to move or make any final movements, do so now. Once you have adjusted yourself finally, the body should not move until yoga nidra is over. *(pause)* Slowly become quiet, as quiet as possible. Take three long, deep breaths and each time, as you breathe out, feel yourself l-e-t-t-i-n-g g-o. *(pause)* Just for an hour forget your cares and worries and concentrate on yoga nidra. *(pause)*

Relaxation: Become aware of distant sounds. *(pause)* Move your attention from sound to sound...listening only, do not try to analyze. *(pause)* Bring your attention closer, become aware of sounds outside the building; then become aware of sounds inside the building, inside this room. *(pause)* Develop awareness of this room...the walls, the ceiling...your body lying on the floor...see your body lying on the floor, become aware of your physical existence. *(pause)* Become aware of the existence of your physical body, concentrate on your physical body as a whole...total awareness of the natural breath. *(pause)* Continue with this awareness and feel yourself becoming relaxed. *(long pause)* Become aware that you are going to practise yoga nidra, say to yourself: 'I am going to practise yoga nidra; I am going to practise yoga nidra.' Only two doors of perception are open... feeling and hearing. Yoga nidra begins now.

Resolve: Resolve, resolve...state your resolve with feeling and awareness three times. *(pause)*

Rotation of consciousness: Awareness of different parts of the body...as quickly as possible the mind is to jump from point to point.

Right side: Right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, side, waist, hip, hamstring, right thigh, kneecap, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, top of the right foot, right toes, one, two, three, four, five...

Left side: Left hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, side, waist, hip, hamstring, left thigh, kneecap, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, top of the left foot, left toes, one, two, three, four, five...

Front: Go to the top of the head. Top of the head, forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, the space between the eyebrows, right eyelid, left eyelid, right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right nostril, left nostril, right cheek, left cheek, upper lip, lower lip, chin, jaw, throat, right collarbone, left collarbone, right chest, left chest, middle of the chest, navel, upper abdomen, lower abdomen, right groin, left groin, right thigh, left thigh, right knee, left knee, right ankle, left ankle, right toes, left toes...

Back: Now go to the back. Right toes, left toes, right sole, left sole, right heel, left heel, right ankle, left ankle, right calf muscle, left calf muscle, back of the right knee, back of the left knee, back of the right thigh, back of the left thigh, right buttock, left buttock, right hip, left hip, whole spine, right shoulderblade, left shoulderblade, back of the neck, back of the head, top of the head...

Inner parts: The inner parts of the body. Take your mind to the brain, start with the brain. The brain, the nasal passage between the nose and throat; the tongue, the teeth, the palate or roof of the mouth; the right eardrum, the left eardrum; the throat through which the air passes; the alimentary canal or food passage; the right lung, the left lung; the heart, feel the heart by concentrating on the heartbeat; the stomach, which is above your navel towards the left side; the liver, above the navel towards the right; the right kidney and the left kidney towards the back above waist level; and in the abdomen a very long, coiled tube called the small intestine and an inverted U-shaped tube called the large intestine...

Once again, faster. Start with the brain. The brain, nasal passage, tongue, palate, right eardrum, left eardrum,

throat, alimentary canal, right lung, left lung, heart, stomach, liver, right kidney, left kidney, small intestine, large intestine, whole abdomen...

Major parts: Now the major parts of the body. Whole of the right leg, whole of the left leg, both legs together...whole of the right arm, whole of the left arm, both arms together...whole of the head together...whole of the back together...whole of the front together...all of the internal organs together...the whole body...the whole body...the whole body...visualize the whole body as you say it. *(pause)* Intensify your awareness. *(long pause)*

Repeat one complete round.

Body/floor awareness: Concentrate on the body lying on the floor...your body lying on the floor...and become aware of the meeting points between the body and the floor. *(pause)* Head-floor; shoulders-floor; arms-floor; back-floor; buttocks-floor; thighs-floor; calves-floor; heels-floor; the whole body and the floor. *(pause)*

Breathing: Bring your awareness to the breath; become aware that you are breathing...become aware of your breath in general...just become conscious that you are breathing, nothing else. *(long pause)* Continue your awareness of breathing and gradually bring your attention to the eyebrow centre...imagine that you are breathing through the eyebrow centre and that the breath moves in and out from the forehead. *(pause)* Imagine that your breath moves through the eyebrow centre to a point in the centre of the back of the head, passing through ajna chakra...maintain your awareness of the breath. *(long pause)* Maintain your awareness of the breath through the eyebrow centre and start counting your breaths backwards from 54: I am breathing in 54; I am breathing out 54; I am breathing in 53; I am breathing out 53, and so on. *(long pause)*

Awareness of counting and breath...no sleeping...if you make a mistake you must go back to the start. *(5 minute pause)* Breathing through the eyebrow centre, be sure

that you are aware of counting...if you reach zero, go back to 54 and start again. *(5 minute pause)* Cease your counting, but maintain awareness of breathing...you are aware of breathing, and you are aware that you are lying in shavasana, nothing else besides these. *(long pause)*

Awareness of sensations

Cold: Awaken the feeling of cold. Concentrate on your spinal cord and develop the feeling of coldness and shivering. *(pause)* Concentrate on the breath in your left nostril and develop the feeling of cold in the whole body...every breath you take in makes the body cooler and cooler. *(pause)* Concentrate on the left nostril and the left breath...with every breath you take into the body, experience the cold. *(long pause)* Concentrate on vishuddhi chakra in the neck...it is the seat of the cold experience...concentrate on vishuddhi. *(pause)* When your consciousness is located in this psychic centre, the whole body will be enveloped in the absolute feeling of cold. *(long pause)*

Heat: Concentrate on creating heat surrounding the body...develop the manifestation of heat in the body. *(pause)* Concentrate on becoming enveloped in an atmosphere of heat throughout the body from head to toes, permeating the whole body. *(pause)* Concentrate on the breath in the right nostril...and with each inhaled breath, increase the feeling of heat in the whole body from head to toe. *(long pause)* Develop the feeling of heat in the body by concentrating on manipura chakra in the navel area...from this centre you can produce heat and distribute it throughout the body. *(long pause)* Generation of heat in manipura, the navel centre, and in the right nostril. *(pause)* Concentrate on the heat you have created around the body. *(long pause)*

Pain: Recollect any pain, recollect any pain...try to develop that recollection to such a depth that your mind is infused by the pain. *(pause)* Remember the pain, feel that pain; you should awaken your will and feel pain, real and

imaginary, in any part of the body or in all parts of the body. *(long pause)* Concentrate your mind wherever you awaken the feeling of pain...assemble the energy particles of pain...manifest the experience of pain. *(long pause)*

Pleasure: Recollect the feeling of pleasure, maybe pleasure belonging to the sense of taste, pleasure belonging to hearing or seeing. *(pause)* Whatever that experience is, whether a big experience or a little experience, it should be concentrated and developed into a total ecstatic feeling. *(long pause)* Deepen your awareness...assemble the total energies of will...and manifest the experience of pleasure. *(long pause)*

Inner space: (person in chidakasha) Please bring your awareness to chidakasha, the dark space in front of your forehead. *(pause)* Concentrate on yourself seated in meditation with your legs crossed and your eyes closed. You are seated in meditation in a hall and there is someone seated in front of you, an important person; this is an important event in your life. *(long pause)* You are sitting in meditation and he is sitting in meditation; your eyebrow centre and his eyebrow centre are one. Both of you are breathing through the eyebrow centre, bhrumadhya... when you breath out you touch his eyebrow centre, and when he breathes out he touches your eyebrow centre...a link is established. *(long pause)*

Ocean: Now concentrate on chidakasha and become aware of waves surging over a large ocean, under a dark sky. *(pause)* The waves are symbols of your unconscious...see the dark sky, the vast ocean and the waves. *(pause)*

Well: Intensify your concentration and imagine a well...very deep. With the help of a rope, go down as far as you can, then come out...have this experience. *(long pause)*

Spontaneous thoughts: Return now to chidakasha and become aware of any spontaneous thoughts. *(pause)* Become aware of any spontaneous thought process for some time...and then without completing it, dispose of it...detach yourself completely and go to another thought. *(long pause)*

Willed thoughts: Now stop the spontaneous thought process, reject all spontaneous thoughts, reject spontaneous thoughts. Instead, you must choose a thought and develop it at will. *(pause)* Reject any spontaneous thoughts and develop a thought of your own making...clearly see that thought and continue. *(long pause)*

Visualizations

Eyebrow centre/Om: Concentrate on the eyebrow centre, concentrate on the eyebrow centre. Discover there a nerve pulsating in a rhythmic way...and with the rhythm of that pulsation become aware of *Om*. *(long pause)*

Continue concentrating on the eyebrow centre...and discover there a small circle...a small circle which becomes bigger and bigger until it merges with the infinite... discover circles growing from the eyebrow centre. *(long pause)* Concentrate on the symbol *Om* as it is written there...concentrate on the symbol *Om*. *(pause)* With the breath, see the expansion and contraction of *Om* in a circle; in the eyebrow centre, with the rhythm of the breath...expansion and contraction of *Om* in a circle. Concentrate on *Om*, see it clearly. *(long pause)*

Ocean/temple: Intensify your imagination and concentration, and the power of conception. *(pause)* Imagine an ocean, calm and quiet...dark. Imagine you are on the surface... slowly start sinking. *(long pause)* Become unconscious... sink deeper and deeper. *(pause)* Sink deeper and deeper and discover the secrets of the body...in a world which is absolutely inside. *(long pause)*

Intensify your imagination and the power of conception. *(pause)* See a deep and dark jungle, enter into the jungle...go deep into it, continue on. *(pause)* Go much deeper into the jungle...see a lonely clearing with an aura of light around...the light comes from a temple close by. *(pause)* The temple is like a house lit from the inside at night...but as well, there is a great aura of light around the outside...from far off you see that. *(pause)* You become aware that the temple is pulsating with the vibration of

the sound *Om*...inside the temple there is the chanting of mantras and the ringing of bells...the smell of incense. *(long pause)* Draw closer to the temple and feel the atmosphere of peace...the door of the temple is open...you peep inside and there is nothing there. *(pause)* Nothing but a sannyasin monk in orange robes...he is sitting in lotus posture with his eyes open. Sit in front of him, and look at his face...find out who he could be...concentrate. *(long pause)*

Resolve: Become aware of the breath...become aware of the breath. *(long pause)* Remember your resolve, your sankalpa... repeat your resolve with absolute faith and awareness... please repeat your resolve or sankalpa three times. *(pause)*

Finish: The whole body...the whole body...the whole body. Relax all efforts and become aware of the whole body. *(long pause)* Bring your attention to the natural breath, the quiet breath...develop your awareness of the quiet breath. Maintain your awareness of the breath and gradually deepen it...make it stronger. *(pause)* Become aware of your physical existence...become aware of the physical existence of your body and your state of physical relaxation...at the same time your breath is growing stronger, take a long, slow, deep breath in...and let it out. *(pause)* Develop awareness of your body...deeply relaxed lying on the floor...visualize the surrounding room...let your mind become completely external...start making small movements of your body...bend your fingers, move your toes...move your arms and legs. *(pause)* Keep your eyes closed, take a few deep breaths and stretch yourself thoroughly three times, with your arms above your head. Please take your time, there is no hurry. *(pause)* When you are sure that you are wide awake, sit up slowly and open your eyes. The practice of yoga nidra is now complete.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Alternative visualization sequence: The following visualization sequence can be substituted for the visualizations 'Eyebrow Centre/Om' and 'Ocean/Temple', and completed with 'Resolve' and 'Finish' as above.

Psychic centres: Discover the psychic centres or chakras... Speak with me mentally and feel the position of the chakras as if you were touching them with a small flower: mooladhara...perineum, cervix; swadhisthana... spinal terminus; manipura...behind the navel; anahata... behind the heart; vishuddhi...behind the throat; ajna... behind the eyebrow centre; bindu...top back of the head; sahasrara... crown of the head. Sahasrara...bindu... ajna...vishuddhi...anahata...manipura...swadhisthana... mooladhara.

Again: Mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna, bindu, sahasrara. Sahasrara, bindu, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara.

Once more: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna, bindu, sahasrara. Sahasrara, bindu, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara. *(pause)* Concentrate on the form of the chakras. As each chakra is named, try to feel as if a lotus is springing up from the centre.

Mooladhara...red lotus with four petals...in the centre is the beeja mantra or seed mantra *lam. (pause)* Swadhisthana...vermillion lotus with six petals...in the centre is the seed mantra *vam. (pause)* Manipura...from manipura springs a yellow lotus with ten petals...in the centre is the beeja mantra *ram. (pause)* Anahata...blue lotus with twelve petals...the beeja mantra is *yam. (pause)* Vishuddhi...violet lotus with sixteen petals...the beeja mantra is *ham. (pause)* Ajna...smoky lotus with two petals...the beeja mantra is *Om. (pause)* Bindu...no lotus, a crescent moon. *(pause)* Sahasrara...red lotus with one thousand petals and a shivalingam in the centre. *(pause)*

Psychic symbols: Concentrate on the symbols of the psychic centres...and develop definite images as they are named: Mooladhara...inverted red triangle, swadhisthana...the

unconscious, like waves on the ocean at night, manipura... bright yellow sunflower, anahata...solitary yellow flame of light, vishuddhi...cold drops of nectar, ajna...seat of intuition, bindu...crescent moon at night, sahasrara... fireplace with burning fire. *(pause)*

Eyebrow centre/Om: Concentrate on the eyebrow centre. *(pause)* With the breath, see the expansion and contraction of *Om,* in a circle. *(pause)* In the eyebrow centre with the rhythm of the breath, expansion and contraction of *Om* in a circle. *(long pause)*

Rapid images: Now we begin the practice of *dharana,* the mental control of the concept of an object. As I name each of the objects, intensify your imagination and quickly follow in the form of vision or awareness of the item named...

Shivalingam, standing Christ, flickering lamp, large banyan tree, tall mango tree, guava tree, car moving on a road, dead body burning on the fire, many coloured clouds forming, yellow clouds, smoky clouds, pink clouds, starlit night, moonlit night, full moon, dog standing, cat reposing, elephant moving, horse racing, rising sun, setting sun, ocean waves, shivalingam in a temple, standing Christ, big pond with clear water, blue lotus, white lotus, pink lotus, spider's golden web, sandy bank of a river, boat sailing on the water, dead body on a fire, human skeletons, yourself lying down without clothes, completely naked, cross over a church, within the church a priest praying, worshippers kneeling, chimney smoke rising from an old house, a cold winter, fire burning in the house, dawn of the day, temple bell ringing, sannyasin with shaven head, yogi in meditation, Buddha in repose, Christ showing compassion, cross with illumination, an infinite ocean, calm and quiet, dark green jungles on the shores, cobras, lions, and goats, living together in friendliness; experience the sound, the vibrations of *Om* all around in the jungle, intensify the awareness of *Om.* *(long pause)*

Transparent body: Go into your own body...go into your own body and become aware of your prana or life force...the life force which is in the form of heat. *(pause)* You are aware of yourself, you are aware of a kind of heat, you are aware of a comfortable sensation...become aware of your prana, the life force...experience prana as heat...experience it through the whole body. *(long pause)* Concentrate on your navel, a golden cord projecting upwards from your navel; at this end of the golden cord is your physical body...at the other end of the golden cord is your transparent body. *(long pause)* Try to see it. *(pause)* Try to see the transparent body...see it without distinction of eyes or other organs. *(pause)* Try to see the physical body as distinct from the transparent body; the physical body may be smoky or else it may be well defined. *(pause)* See both the physical body and the transparent body floating above it...connected by a shining golden cord at the navel. *(long pause)*

Aura: Become aware of your own self...look to your own self. *(pause)* Look to your own self as you would look in a mirror...or as I look at you, or you look at me. *(pause)* Look to your own self and look to your own aura...look at yourself from different angles, from the front...from the right...from the left...from the top...from below. *(pause)* Find out your own aura and see whether it is yellow, golden, pink, red, purple, pure yellow, brown, green, burning yellow, black, white, blue, violet. *(long pause)*

Golden egg: Become aware of yourself. Find out by asking yourself: 'Am I aware of myself? Am I asleep or awake?' See your whole body from top to toe, as clearly as I see it...try to see your body by being outside it. Ask yourself: 'Am I this body, the body that is eventually going to die?' *(pause)* Now look to your senses, the five senses by which you know this world. Ask yourself: 'Am I these senses, the senses that die with the body?' *(pause)*

Now, try to become aware of yourself, look to the mind, the mind by which you understand yourself and the world.

Ask yourself: 'Am I the mind, the mind that also dies?' *(pause)* Become aware of yourself, look to yourself and become aware of your aura...become aware of this. Ask yourself: 'Am I this aura, whose existence is tied to the body?' *(pause)* Look further...become aware of the prana in your body. Ask yourself: 'Am I this prana?' *(pause)* Again look within and become aware of the existence of your consciousness, by which you know that you are practising yoga nidra. Ask yourself: 'Am I this consciousness? Does this consciousness still survive after the death of the body?' *(pause)*

Look within, and become aware of a golden egg in the centre of your brain...a golden egg, very small, very small, that is the seat of your highest consciousness. *(pause)* A golden egg, very small, that is the seat of supreme consciousness within you, at your centre...try to identify with it. *(long pause)* Try to see yourself as the golden egg...and say to yourself: 'Beyond the mind, body, senses, the karma, the nature, and everything that is physical, mental, psychic, unconscious, I am in the form of this golden egg.' *(long pause)* Say to your mind: 'I am that.' *(long pause)*

Complete Scheme of Practices 1–5

Preparation	Shavasana, general instructions, admonitions not to move or go to sleep
Relaxation	Body/Om; Antar mouna, Om/breathing
Resolve	Make your own resolve
Rotation of consciousness	Right side, left side, back, front, major parts, front and back, right side reverse, left side reverse, whole back, whole front, inner parts
Body awareness	Body/floor; body/mirror; body/skin
Breathing	Navel, chest, throat and nostril. Throat, navel; mental alternate nostril; eyebrow centre
Sensations	Heaviness/lightness, cold/heat, pain/pleasure
Inner space	Space in front of the eyes and forehead; chidakasha; colours and patterns; ocean, well; spontaneous thought, meditation
Story visualization	Park/temple; mountain; floating body; well/ocean; eyebrow centre/Om/golden egg; well/golden egg; inner space (optional)
Psychic centre visualization	Position and form of psychic centres or chakras, rotation through them
Psychic symbol visualization	Symbols for each chakra
Eyebrow centre/Om visualization	Circles of Om centred on eyebrow centre

Asana visualization	See yourself doing asanas
Movement in time	A backwards review of the events of the day
Rapid image visualization	Quick recitation of a wide selection of images
Story visualization	Ocean/temple; ocean/ jungle
Transparent body visualization	Physical body and transparent body connected by golden cord
Aura visualization	Colours
Golden egg visualization	Golden egg in flaming light in chidakasha; golden egg in centre of brain
Resolve	Repeat resolve
Finish	Breathing, body and room awareness

Short Class Transcription

Preparation	
Resolve	
Rotation of consciousness	Right side, left side, back, front
Body/floor contact	
Awareness of sensations	Heaviness, lightness, alternation of heaviness and lightness, heat and cold
Rapid visualization	
Chakra visualization	
Finish	

Introduction

Yoga nidra is a form of tantra. It is not sleeping. It is not concentration. It is opening the inner chambers of your mind. In yoga nidra, you step down into the internal dimension of your consciousness. Even if you do not understand anything in yoga nidra, it does not matter. The sound of my voice acts as a rope. Just as you take a rope and go in and out of the depths of a cave, so with the help of sound, you will venture in and out of the mind.

Preparation: Get ready for yoga nidra. Eyes are closed and the body is still. The mind is in a mood to relax. You are not trying to concentrate. Make no effort to control the mind.

You are practising yoga nidra. Become aware of your whole body. You are lying in a beautiful room with other people on the same mental level. Almost everybody is emitting the same frequency of vibration. The whole atmosphere is charged with one type of powerful vibration. In this atmosphere you are lying on your mat. Your body is still.

The sound of your breath is very rhythmic and slow. Your body is in a state of relaxation. Now think mentally, 'I am going to practise yoga nidra. I am listening to the instructions. A constant communication is taking place between the instructor and myself. I can hear the sound of his voice and we are connected. One transmitter and many receivers.'

Resolve: At this point remember that a sankalpa has to be made. The sankalpa is a resolution. You don't have to make it now, but if you have one, please repeat it. If you can think of one, do it now. If you don't have one, it can wait. The greatest of all sankalpas is the resolve to awaken kundalini who dwells in mooladhara chakra. If you already have a sankalpa, please repeat it. But if you need one, you can use this sankalpa: 'I am awakening kundalini, who dwells in mooladhara chakra, and makes its headway

through sushumna up to sahasrara.' This is the sankalpa: 'I am awakening my kundalini.'

Rotation of consciousness: Keep on listening to me, and go on doing the practices I indicate. No concentration please. Do not try to analyze things. Become aware of your right hand thumb and mentally say, 'Right hand thumb.' No movement.

Right side: Right hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, waist, hip, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, top of the foot, sole of the foot, right big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe.

Left side: Now go to the left side. Become aware of the left hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, lower arm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, waist, hip, thigh, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, top of the foot, sole of the foot, left big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe.

Back: Next go to the back of the body. Back of the head, back of the neck, right shoulder blade, left shoulder blade, right buttock, left buttock, right heel left heel.

Front: Now, the front of the body. Top of the head, forehead, right temple, left temple, right ear, left ear, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, middle of the eyebrows, right eye, left eye, right nostril, left nostril, whole nose, right cheek, left cheek, upper lip, lower lip, both lips together, chin, neck, right collarbone, left collarbone, right side of the chest, left side of the chest, middle of the chest, navel, upper abdomen, lower abdomen, right leg, left leg, right arm, left arm, the whole of the head. The whole body, the whole body, the whole body.

Body/floor contact: Become aware of the body lying on the floor. There is a point where the body is in contact with the floor. Bring your awareness to that particular point of contact. The heels and the floor. Both the heels are on

the floor and there is a point where they touch the floor. Now, from the top of the body. The head and the floor the back and the floor, the right hand and the floor, the left hand and the floor, the right elbow and the floor, the left elbow and the floor, the buttocks and the floor, the hamstrings and the floor, the heels and the floor. Imagine the meeting points of the body and the floor, the whole body and the floor. The body is on the floor. Become aware of the whole body. Do not contract and do not expand.

Awareness of sensations

Heaviness: Just imagine in your mind that the body is becoming very heavy. Awaken the idea of heaviness in the body. Gradually feel that the body is becoming heavier and heavier. The head is becoming heavy. The right palm is heavy, the left palm is heavy. Both arms and the shoulders are heavy. The back is heavy, the buttocks and the groin are heavy. The right thigh is heavy, the left thigh is heavy. Both the kneecaps are heavy, both legs are heavy, both arms are heavy, the whole head is heavy, the eyes are heavy, the lips are heavy. The whole body is heavy. Keep on thinking that the whole body is heavy. Intensify the feeling of heaviness. Then, gradually relax, part by part.

Lightness: Now feel the whole body becoming lighter and lighter. The head is light, so light that it can even rise from the floor. The right and left palms are becoming lighter. Both arms and both shoulders are light. The back is light, the buttocks and groin are light. The right thigh is light. The left thigh is light. The right heel and the left heel are light. The whole body is light and weightless. When your body becomes weightless, you feel as if it is rising from the floor. As if your whole body is a mass of cotton.

Alternation of heaviness and lightness: Cotton represents lightness and steel represents heaviness. Now practise these two experiences alternately. The whole body is

steel; the whole body is steel. There are no bones, marrow or blood, just a steel frame. Change the idea. The whole body is cotton. The whole body is as light as cotton. There are no bones, marrow or blood, everything is composed of cotton. The whole body is as light as cotton.

Again change the idea. The whole body is like steel, heavy steel, no bone, marrow or blood. The whole body is as heavy as steel. Change the idea. The whole body is as light as cotton. Feel as if the body was composed of cotton. Cotton is so light it can rise up from the floor.

Heat: Now change the idea to heat. Imagine you are near a burning furnace and you feel intense heat. Now the whole body should experience the heat of a blazing furnace, of the hot tropical sun. Awaken the experience of heat as vividly as possible.

Cold: Change the experience. The whole body is experiencing the cold winds that blow from the snowy mountains, the same cold one feels in a deep freezer. The experience of cold, awaken the experience of cold.

Rapid visualization: Bring your mind to the eyebrow centre. Do not leave that point until I tell you to. I will enumerate a few objects and as I name each one, try to visualize it very quickly. If you cannot, don't worry. Keep on following my instructions. Sometimes I will go very slowly, and sometimes very fast. I will also come back to the image a number of times. Some of the images may be known to you, but do not think too much. The image should shine by itself.

Bring your awareness to the eyebrow centre. Darkness, pink rose, waves on the ocean, blue sky in the evening, dark night, tiny shining stars studded in the heavens, high mountain range with snow-capped peaks, a ship sailing on the high seas, white sandy beach, virgin forest with tall and dense trees, a dove, a galloping horse, a small hut in the woods, burning fire in the bush, stormy night, full moon, mountain stream, a lonely rock in the mountains, big garden of blooming flowers, rising sun.

Keep your awareness focused at the eyebrow centre. Visualize a large lake with lotus flowers, a sailing boat, people swimming, a lonely wooden hut in the mountains, a desolate valley, a high mountain with snow-capped peaks, a quiet evening, beautiful sunset, chirping birds, tiger in the forest, elephant, cobra, symbol of Om, sound of a bell ringing, waves on the ocean, ship at sail, full moon, calm and quiet evening in a moonlit valley, mountain stream, refreshing cold bath in the mountain stream, experience of exhilaration.

Now become aware of the breath. Inhale through the left nostril and exhale through the right. Start to practise mental alternate nostril breathing: left in, right out; right in, left out.

Come back to the middle of the eyebrows again. Visualize the rising sun, red like a tomato, clouds gathering in the sky, drizzling rain, fog all around, pink rose, sunflower, apple, lettuce leaf, hot water spring, tall pine tree, cluster of grapes, symbol of Om, lonely wooden hut in the valley, snow-capped peaks, mountain stream, cold bath, ship at sail on the sea, lotus on a lake, people swimming.

Chakra visualization: Now develop awareness of the chakras and their positions in the spine. Mooladhara chakra at the perineum, in between the urinary and excretory organs. In women it is at the base of the uterus. Awareness at mooladhara. Don't contract the point, but try to feel spontaneous contractions there. Imagine contractions, but don't contract. Contractions at mooladhara.

Next, at the base of the spine, is swadhisthana. In the vertebral column behind the navel, is manipura. Behind the heart is anahata. At the throat is vishuddhi. At the top of the vertebral column is ajna. At the top back of the head is bindu. And at the crown of the head is sahasrara. Try to remember the location of the chakras. Repeat the names mentally after me and mentally touch your spine very rapidly at the correct point. Even if you cannot feel it, this does not matter.

Repeat the name mentally after I say it: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna, bindu, sahasrara; bindu, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara; swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna, bindu, sahasrara; bindu, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara.

Finish: Now, to complete the practice, become aware of the whole body. Think that, 'I am practising yoga nidra.' Visualize your whole body and everybody in this room. Become aware of the external environment. Become aware of yourself. Say to yourself, 'I am practising yoga nidra. Everybody around me is practising yoga nidra. I am visualizing my body and everybody here.'

Next, repeat your sankalpa three times. If you have one, use it. But if you don't have one, try to find one for yourself. If you want, I will suggest one: 'I am awakening my kundalini who dwells in mooladhara chakra, who moves through sushumna and makes its headway to sahasrara.'

Become aware of your external environment. Come out of the spirit of yoga nidra and return to normal awareness. Open your eyes and slowly sit up.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Long Class Transcription

Preparation	
Relaxation	
Awareness	Subtle movements and breath
Resolve	
Rotation of consciousness	Right side, left side, right/left, in parts
Body/floor contact	
Awareness of sensations	Heat/cold, heaviness/lightness
Chakra visualization	
Finish	

Introduction

The language of the instructions does not matter in yoga nidra. If you practise in a completely unknown language, you are actually bypassing the intellectual aspect of yoga nidra. For instance, even if I dictate to you in Hindi instead of English, your consciousness will still become more aware. It is the tone of voice, the person and the personality that are important. Since an instructor is not always available, you can listen to a tape and practise the technique. Start the tape, lie down and listen to the voice, even if you do not understand the language. The sound of the voice of a great person such as your guru will have a great impact on your whole physical and psycho-emotional structure. Because this voice is not just the voice of an ordinary person, it works more like a grace and blessing. If Swamiji taught you in Sanskrit it would be better still, because it is the melody of the language, as well as its meaning, which goes into the interior consciousness and restructures your awareness.

Preparation: Now get ready for the practice of yoga nidra. Lie down and cover yourself, at least the feet, if necessary. Head should be resting on the mat. Close the eyes and lie in shavasana, palms facing upwards, feet a little apart. Any movement you want to make, please do it now. Then you should not allow yourself to move physically for at least forty-five minutes.

Keep the eyes and the mouth closed. Stop all physical movement, and lie completely motionless, like a dead body in shavasana. The body is quiet, but under your control. You are still conscious, although you are not allowing the body to move. No physical movement. No movement of the toes, fingers, head or legs. No quivering of any part of the body. No tightening of any muscles. No stretching of the body.

Relaxation: Now, take your awareness inside and begin to investigate the whole physical body. Every joint and muscle should be completely relaxed. Relax the palms,

fingers, feet, toes, ankles, calf muscles, knees, thighs, hamstrings, buttocks, back, shoulders, chest, arms, elbows, hands, head and neck. Relax the whole body. Investigate if there is any tension. If there is tension, loosen it. If the muscles are tight, release them.

Now there should be no more physical movement. During the period of yoga nidra you should not move the physical body. No physical movement should take place under any circumstances, no matter what sensations you may feel, whether itching, pain, mosquitoes or insects biting you. No matter what happens, you should not move the physical body. This is the first and most important condition for yoga nidra.

You are also not supposed to sleep. Yoga nidra is the practice to make you more and more aware, to raise the subtle inner awareness, not the gross upper layer. Let the whole body remain quiet for some time and work with the subtle awareness.

Awareness of subtle movements and breath: Now that your whole physical body is quiet and not moving, try to experience all the subtle movements in the body. The physical body is moving on its own, without effort, in spite of all control. Which parts are moving? Where is the movement? Are your feet moving? Are the toes, fingers or thighs twitching? Is the head turned to one side? Is the chest or the stomach moving?

Yes, the stomach is moving forward and back, up and down. You are not doing this. It is happening on its own and you are not going to stop it. Just watch it. How does all this movement take place? Have you discovered the reason for the movements of the navel, the stomach, the abdomen and the chest?

They seem to be expanding and contracting a little bit all the time. The breath is flowing in and out, and as a result the chest seems to be expanding and contracting just a little. In the throat, between the collarbones, there also seems to be some movement. The depression of the

throat seems to be moving upward and downward with respiration.

The breath is flowing in and out through the nostrils. The breath is the cause of all this inner movement, even causing palpitation in sushumna and between the two eyebrows. In spite of all your control, movement is still occurring in the physical body. This has been going on by itself, all the twenty-four hours of the day, from the moment you were born.

Become aware of this movement – the movement of the breath, the inspiration and expiration through the nostrils. This breath is causing movement in many parts of the body. The grossest movement occurs in the abdomen, stomach, heart, chest, throat and nostrils. These are the grosser movements which I am bringing to your notice. Of course, the whole body is vibrating, each and every hair of the body and all the pranas are moving, but ordinarily we are unaware of it.

The breath is going in and out through the nostrils. Particularly watch the process of the breath. The movement seems to be from the navel up to the throat, in; and from the throat down to the navel, out. Keep on watching, just witness it. This is sakshi bhava, the attitude of witnessing.

Now let your consciousness rotate between the throat and navel. The movement of the breath may be through the nostrils, but the consciousness must go from the navel to the throat and from the throat to the navel.

Resolve: Before beginning the actual practice of yoga nidra we make a sankalpa, a short resolve. A resolve can be of three types: material, mental or spiritual. First you must choose which kind of resolve you want to make. Some people resolve to get rid of bad habits, cure their sickness, serve humanity in a certain way, achieve some siddhi or mysterious power. But it is better not to waste the power of sankalpa on such small things. A wise man makes a sankalpa to attain divine qualities or to achieve progress

on the spiritual path. Therefore, consider well before making your sankalpa.

Choose one thing as your resolve for yoga nidra. You are free to make your own choice. I am not trying to influence you. You can make any resolve, whatever you think of. But the sankalpa should be very brief, only a few words, the same sentence should always be used whenever you repeat the sankalpa. The wording should not change, even if the meaning stays the same.

Every time you practise yoga nidra, meditation or any sadhana, you should remember your sankalpa in the beginning and repeat it a few times. You can decide on a sankalpa now, or you can wait until later on. If you have already decided on one, recall it now. Although you don't have to hurry in choosing your resolution, you can make it now, if you know what you want to achieve, what you want to be, or what you want to do in your life.

Make a resolve and fix the language of that resolve. Don't make the resolve today in English, tomorrow in Italian or the next day in Hindi. Whichever phrase and language you choose, it should always be the same, until the resolve is fulfilled.

The sankalpa made during the practice of yoga nidra is always fulfilled. It never fails. But you cannot be impatient; you must wait patiently and keep practising it. Repeat the sankalpa mentally.

Now, again continue with your breath awareness. Make sure you are not moving your physical body. Keep the sleep away and avoid becoming unconscious. Do not become lost in thought. Remain conscious and aware of what I am saying. Follow consciously and not mechanically. Know that you are following what I am saying.

Rotation of consciousness: Now I will guide you through the different parts of your physical body. One by one I will take your consciousness to each and every part of your physical body. At the same time you will visualize each part and repeat its name mentally. You are not

going to make any physical movement. You are only going to move the consciousness. Visualize that particular part which I will name, and say the name mentally. Go along with me at the same speed. I will move from one part to another and you will follow along with your awareness.

Right side: Get ready to move your consciousness; do not move your body. Now, visualize the right hand thumb and say mentally, right hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger. Visualize all five fingers together, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, forearm.

I am guiding you along the right side. I will tell you when to change to the left one. Visualize the right elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, right chest, side, waist, hip, buttock, thigh, hamstring, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole, top of the foot, right big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all five toes together.

Left side: Now, take your consciousness to the left side. Just as we were visualizing the parts of the right side, now we will visualize those parts on the left side. Start with the left hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, all five fingers together, palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, left chest, side, waist, hip, buttock, thigh, hamstring, knee, calf muscle, ankle, heel, sole of the foot, top of the foot, left big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all five toes together.

Right/left: Now I will take you from your toes up to the crown of the head. Be prepared, make your consciousness ready to move from the toes up to the head. Right big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all the five right toes together. Left big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all five toes together. Visualize all the left toes together.

Now move your consciousness right and left, as I say the parts alternately. Right sole, left sole, both soles together.

Right heel, left heel, both heels together. Right ankle, left ankle, both ankles together. Right calf muscle, left calf muscle, both calf muscles together. Right knee, left knee, both knees together. Right thigh, left thigh, both thighs together. Right hamstring, left hamstring, both hamstrings together. Right buttock, left buttock, both buttocks together, right hip, left hip, both hips together. Waist, lower abdomen, upper abdomen, whole of the abdomen. Right side of the chest, left side of the chest, whole chest. Right collarbone, left collarbone, centre of the collarbones, throat.

Right shoulder, left shoulder, right arm, left arm, right elbow, left elbow, right hand, left hand. Right thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, all five fingers together, palm of the hand, back of the hand. Left hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, all five fingers together, palm of the hand, back of the hand.

Shoulders, upper back, middle back, lower back. Right side of the back, left side of the back. Whole of the spine. Back of the neck, front of the neck, the whole neck.

Chin, lower lip, upper lip, both lips together, teeth, tongue. Right cheek, left cheek, both cheeks. Right nostril, left nostril, both nostrils, tip of the nose, whole of the nose. Right eyelid, left eyelid, right eyeball, left eyeball, both eyeballs together. Right eyebrow, left eyebrow, eyebrow centre. Right temple, left temple, forehead, back of the head, crown of the head. Whole face, whole head.

In parts: Now we will take the body in parts. Whole right arm, whole left arm, whole right leg, whole left leg, whole front, whole back, whole right side of the body, whole left side of the body. Whole body together, whole body together, whole body together.

Body/floor contact: See the whole physical form lying on the floor, as though you are standing outside the body. Become aware of the touching points between the floor and your physical body. Become aware of the parts of

your whole physical body absorbing energy from the floor. Be aware of the front part of your body deriving prana from the air. Feel the vibrations of prana moving through your body.

As a result of this practice, the physical body has become completely quiet. Become aware of the other bodies surrounding you. Be aware of me instructing you in the practice, and of you following along mentally. Experience tranquillity, peace and quiet. Become aware of the whole environment and your whole body. Whole body, whole body, whole body.

Please do not sleep. This is the secret of yoga nidra. You should not sleep, especially if you are practising for spiritual gain. In the practice of yoga nidra, you are neither sleeping nor awake, but somewhere in between. The consciousness is functioning with a little bit of awareness. If you want to achieve the state of yoga nidra, avoid sleep and do not become lost in thought. Try not to become unconscious. Do not listen mechanically. Listen to the instructions carefully. Follow them, and practise what is said.

Awareness of sensations

Heat: Now, visualize the whole body lying on the floor completely relaxed and tranquil. Feel the body becoming very hot. Try to experience the sensation of heat throughout the body. Recall the feeling of being very, very hot, whether due to summer sun, a heater, or warm clothing. Try to create the sensation of heat now. Try to feel the sensation of heat exactly as you have experienced it in the past. If you have never felt extreme heat, then try to feel it now.

Cold: Next, reverse the feeling. Try to feel cold, shivering cold, as if you are standing outside in an icy wind, wearing only thin clothing. How chilled you would feel. Try to feel that coldness through conscious effort, because there is no cold wind here. There are no external influences affecting the body, to make you feel cold. Create this

sensation of cold with your consciousness. Try to experience this cold.

Heaviness: Now, try to experience heaviness in the physical body. The body is becoming heavier and heavier. It has become so heavy that you are unable to move any part. You are unable to raise even an eyelid. You are not even able to wiggle the toes or fingers, the body has become so heavy.

Lightness: Now, experience the sensation of lightness throughout the body, not heaviness but lightness. Feel the body becoming lighter and lighter and lighter, as if it is completely weightless. The body is so light, as light as a piece of cotton. Try to experience the lightness of your physical body.

Chakra visualization: Now we will go on to chakra awareness. In this light, physical body, visualize the chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna, and sahasrara. Sahasrara is located at the crown of the head. It is associated with the pituitary body. Ajna, the guru chakra, is behind the eyebrow centre. It is associated with the pineal body at the top of the spinal cord. Next is vishuddhi, located within the spinal cord, behind the throat where you feel palpitations. Below is anahata, behind the heart, manipura behind the navel, swadhisthana at the third disc of the sacrum, mooladhara at the base of the spinal cord within the perineum.

These centres are junctions for branches of the nervous system. They are symbolic, and are always represented by different coloured lotus flowers.

Try to remember the location of each chakra as it is named. Mooladhara at the bottom of the spinal cord, swadhisthana in the third disc of the sacrum, manipura behind the navel in the spinal cord, anahata behind the heart, vishuddhi behind the throat, ajna at the top of the spinal cord and sahasrara at the crown of the head. This light body you are experiencing is able to see the subtle body within, and the places where the chakras are situated.

Finish: Now get ready to end the practice. Again remember your sankalpa and repeat it mentally. Without opening the eyes, you may quietly sit up and turn around. You may place the palms over the eyes and hold them there for some time. Now bring them down and move the physical body, gradually and quietly, without stretching or touching anyone. Sit with the head straight, eyes closed, and palms on the knees. We will chant Om three times together. Breathe in deeply...Om, Om, Om.

Chakra Visualization

Preparation	
Relaxation	Breathing/Soham
Resolve	
Rotation of consciousness	Right side, left side, whole front up, head and face, back
Chakra visualization	
Resolve	
Finish	

Preparation: Lie on the floor with your feet slightly apart. The back of your hands and your elbows should be touching the floor and your head should be facing directly upwards. Relax your whole physical body. Loosen the whole physical body. Do not let any tightness remain in any part of your body. Make each and every part of your physical body looser and looser. When your whole physical body has become loose and relaxed, begin to relax mentally as well. Make yourself as comfortable as possible, so you do not have to move your physical body until I say 'Hari Om Tat Sat' at the end of the practice.

Inspect your whole physical body and make sure that it is all loose and relaxed. The fingers are loose and not stiff, and the toes are not moving. They are still and relaxed. The thighs and feet are not shaking; they are still and relaxed. The head is facing upwards, and the whole body is now lying comfortably on the floor. It is like a dead body, so still, so quiet, so immobile. Maintain this tranquillity and immobility until I ask you to move.

Relaxation: Become aware of your natural and normal breath, the spontaneous, effortless breath. Witness its coming in and its going out, without making any effort to breathe in or out. Make the breath and the awareness go together. From the throat to the navel the breath comes in and from the navel to the throat the breath goes out. Of course, this breathing process goes on all the time, but now you are doing it consciously. The process of the natural breath causes the whole body to move and shake. In some places the movement is slow and in others fast; in some it is gross and in others mild. So feel the stomach moving up and down, and the throat depression as well. Now become aware of your natural breath. In the natural breathing process, the breath comes from the navel to the throat and goes from the throat to the navel. Keep watching each and every breath. Do not let a single breath go in or come out without your noticing. To keep the awareness more constant and continued, you can use

a mantra, either your personal mantra, your guru mantra, or a general mantra. You may use 'Om' or 'Soham' if you don't have a personal mantra. From the navel to the throat is 'So', and from the throat to the navel is 'Ham'. If the direction of the breath becomes reversed, and the mantra also reverses and becomes 'Hamso', don't worry. It is natural. This does take place after some time. Then you have become one with the breath. Continue 'So' from the navel and 'Ham' from the throat.

Please keep awake. Remain aware of what I am telling you and be conscious of what you are doing. Do not become lost in any thoughts. Do not allow yourself to slip into unconsciousness. During the period of yoga nidra, sleep should be strictly avoided. You will not sleep or move your physical body unless I ask you.

Resolve: Now remember your sankalpa. Repeat the sankalpa. Repeat the sankalpa. Repeat the sankalpa.

Rotation of consciousness: Now I will quickly take you through the different parts of your physical body and you will visualize them and repeat their names mentally as I say them.

Right side: Start from the right side. Right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, all right five fingers together. Right palm, back of the hand, wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, side, waist, hip, buttock, thigh, hamstring, knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole. Right big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth, all five toes together. Visualize all your right toes together.

Left side: Go to the left part of your physical body. Start with the thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, all five left fingers together. Left palm, back of the hand, wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, side, waist, hip, buttock, thigh, hamstring, knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole. Left big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth, all five toes together.

Whole front: Now make your consciousness ready to travel alternately, right and left, from the toes up to the top of

your head. Start from the right big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth, all right five toes together. Left big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth, all five left toes together. Right sole, left sole, both soles, right heel, left heel, both heels, right ankle, left ankle, both ankles, right calf, left calf, both calves, right knee, left knee, both knees, right thigh, left thigh, both thighs, right hamstring, left hamstring, both hamstrings, right buttock, left buttock, both buttocks. Right hip, left hip, waist, lower part of the abdomen, upper part of the abdomen, the whole abdomen, navel, stomach, right side, left side. Right chest, left chest, centre of the chest, depression of the chest, whole chest. Right shoulder, left shoulder, right armpit, left armpit, right arm, left arm, right elbow, left elbow, right forearm, left forearm, right wrist, left wrist, right palm, back of the hand, left palm, back of the hand. Right thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, all five fingers together, left thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, all five fingers together. Right shoulder, left shoulder, right collarbone, left collarbone, centre of the collarbones, depression of the neck, back of the neck, whole neck.

Head and face: Chin, lower lip, upper lip, both lips, right cheek, left cheek, both cheeks, right ear, left ear, both ears, all the teeth, tongue, right nostril, left nostril, nose tip, root of the nose, whole nose, right eyelid, left eyelid, right eye, left eye, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, both eyebrows, eyebrow centre, right temple, left temple, forehead, back of the head, crown of the head, whole face, whole head.

Back: Right shoulder blade, left shoulder blade, centre of the shoulder blades, upper back, centre of the back, lower back, right side of the back, left side of the back, whole back, whole spinal cord. Right from mooladhara up to ajna, visualize the whole spine, not only the external bony vertebrae, but the delicate interior spinal cord as well. Visualize the whole spinal column like a rod, a corrugated rod, lying on the floor. It is like a chain, made

out of rings of living bone, which have been laid in a straight line on the floor. Feel every part of it from mooladhara up to ajna.

Chakra visualization: Visualize just your spine lying on the floor, only the spine and not any other part of the body. Feel as if you are standing nearby and watching it. At the very bottom of the spine, see a stem emerging from the inside. At the top of this stem a flower is forming, and around the flower are several leaves, beautiful green, round leaves with drops of dew glistening on them like pearls. If you shake the leaves, the pearls fragment into many small beads. If you shake them again, the small beads come together again to form big pearls. As you shake the leaves, the water comes together and then disperses and fragments.

The lotus flower at mooladhara is dark red with four petals. You are looking at it from the top because the root is underneath the spinal cord which is lying on the floor. Then at the base of the spine, in swadhisthana, see the vermilion lotus with six petals. The leaves also have drops of water on them just like those in mooladhara. You can shake them in the same way as you did in mooladhara, and all the water disperses into many pearl-like drops.

The water never touches the petals of the lotus flower. Though the lotus is rooted in the bottom of the pond, and it rises up through the water, yet its petals are never wet. Therefore, the sages and yogis advise us always to be as detached from everything in the whole universe as the lotus leaf is from the water, completely non-attached. The lotus comes from the water; it only survives due to the water, yet it does not get wet; the water cannot touch it. In the same manner, we all live in the world, we eat and enjoy and suffer, we practise sadhana and do many things, yet we should be detached from all of this.

Now at manipura, behind the navel, visualize a ten petalled yellow lotus. See the leaves underneath, sparkling with pearl-like drops of dew. Behind the heart, at anahata

chakra, see a twelve petalled blue lotus. It also has many leaves underneath, covered with many fine drops of dew. Visualize it. At vishuddhi, behind the throat, is a sixteen petalled purple lotus with many leaves under it, and dew drops shining on them like pearls. At ajna, behind the eyebrow centre, see a two petalled grey lotus with two leaves beneath it, covered with dew drops like pearls. And the radiant full moon is above them, about three inches away. Above ajna chakra, at the top back of the head, is bindu. There you will find the bright full moon. And if you go still further, above the full moon, another three inches away, you see the thousand petalled bright red lotus at sahasrara.

There are so many petals at sahasrara, and the water droplets are like gleaming corals all around the bottom of them. Now go to the moon again; it is so quiet, tranquil, peaceful and cool. Then go to ajna. See the dew drops on the leaves in ajna...in vishuddhi...in anahata...in manipura...in swadhisthana...in mooladhara. As the moonlight strikes them, the drops of water on the leaves shine like hundreds of jewels. Some look simple, like pearls, and other look like coral – it depends on your angle of vision. They are shining like diamonds, like nuggets of gold and silver, like many moons, like stars. And the flowers are only able to be seen due to the light reflected from those brightly shining jewelled drops.

Again visualize mooladhara, with all the leaves and dew drops on them. Then swadhisthana...manipura...anahata...vishuddhi...ajna...bindu...sahasrara. In sahasrara see the thousand petals, see the leaves with the droplets of water shining like jewels. Feel the qualities of the different chakras, and whatever sensations are emanating from them. Again: sahasrara...bindu...ajna...vishuddhi... anahata...manipura...swadhisthana...mooladhara.

Now place your whole physical body on a lotus flower. Your whole physical body is lying relaxed on the lotus, and the flower is merging into your physical body.

Resolve: Now remember your resolve, your sankalpa. Repeat the sankalpa. Repeat the sankalpa. Repeat the sankalpa.

Finish: And now become aware of this physical body, the gross, mortal body. Become aware of its position lying in shavasana, practising yoga nidra. And as a result of this relaxation, the whole body, on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels, has become so quiet, tranquil and peaceful, yet so fresh, revived and energetic. The whole body, become aware of the whole body.

Become aware of the whole environment. Become aware of you and me together in this room. Become aware that I am leading you in yoga nidra, and that you are practising it. Become aware of the whole environment, the whole environment, the whole environment.

Now, without jerking your body or opening your eyes, sit up slowly and face me. Sit in sukhasana with the head and back straight. Now inhale deeply and while exhaling, chant Om.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Yoga Nidra for Children

Preparation	
Rotation of consciousness	Parts of the body, body/floor contact
Breathing	In a bubble, counting the breaths
Inner love visualization	
Advice for instructors	
Further ideas for guided visualizations	
Alternative visualizations	Inner light visualization Nature visualization Becoming a fruit tree

Teaching yoga nidra to children

Yoga nidra can be practised even by small children, taking into account their nature and special requirements. For children between 8 and 14 years, it is difficult to remain still in one spot for even 10 minutes. Yet they relax far more quickly and deeply than adults. Therefore practice sessions of 10 or 15 minutes are sufficient.

Rotation of consciousness through the body parts is most effective, and the interest of younger children can be renewed by various fantasies which stimulate the imagination. For example – imagine a butterfly landing here and there, visualize lights which turn on at each body part, explore the body as if it were an island. The possibilities are only limited by the instructor's imagination.

Simple, short visualization sequences are also an important part of yoga nidra for children, whereas in adults this practice is forestalled until the art of simple, physical and mental relaxation has been acquired by more preliminary practices. In general, children are far less tense and preoccupied than adults. They are more open and receptive to the experience of yoga nidra.

Advice for instructors

- Adapt the practices according to the particular age and understanding of the child or children.
- If you are conducting group sessions it is best when six or seven children combine from the same age group.
- Whenever it is possible, use a room that is spacious and airy and which has a fine vibration. Try to use the same room for all practices.
- Follow each session with a short discussion, and perhaps with drawing, colouring or acting out what was experienced during the practice. Allow each child to volunteer his experiences. Those who are shy should also be encouraged to talk about what they saw and experienced. Reaffirm everyone's experiences and make sure no child is confused, lost or unhappy.

Preparation

Yoga nidra can be practised in any position, but for long sessions it is best to lie flat on the back. Make sure that the head, neck and shoulders are in a straight line; hands are at the sides palms up; legs are straight, feet placed a little apart. Commence with progressive tensing and relaxing of the body parts, beginning with feet and legs and concluding with facial muscles. The child should then relax completely in shavasana and follow the instructions for rotation of consciousness throughout the body

Rotation of consciousness: Relax your whole body. Breathe out all your tensions and weariness. Feel that you are becoming very heavy. Become aware of the parts of the body which I am naming, but do not move them. Just feel the parts and follow my voice. You must not sleep.

Become aware of the right hand. The right hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, little finger, whole right hand, whole right arm, shoulder, right side of the chest, waist, hip, whole right leg, right foot, the toes, one, two, three, four, five, all five toes together.

Now go to the left hand. Become aware of the left hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, little finger, whole left hand, whole left arm, shoulder, left side of the chest, waist, hip, whole left leg, the left foot, the toes, one, two, three, four, five, all five toes together.

Feel the two feet together, the two legs together, the buttocks, stomach, chest, back, the two shoulder blades, the two arms, the neck, head, scalp, forehead, eyes, right ear, left ear, nose, right cheek, left cheek, mouth, lips, tongue, teeth, chin, the whole face, the whole head, the whole neck, the whole back, the four limbs. The whole body, whole body, whole body.

Feel the contact between your body and the floor. Be aware of the back of your head where it touches the floor, back of your shoulders, back of your arms, buttocks, calf muscles, heels.

Breath awareness: Feel that you are breathing in a lovely, transparent bubble. Every time you breathe in, the bubble expands; every time you breathe out, the bubble contracts. Now count the number of breaths backwards from 10 to 0. Be careful not to lose count or miss a breath.

The breath can alternatively be imagined passing in and out of the navel or in and out the left nostril, then the right nostril.

Inner love visualization: Relax your body and become aware of your heart, right in the middle of your chest. Make sure your mouth remains closed and imagine that you are breathing in and out through your heart. You should breathe deeply and be completely aware of each incoming and outgoing breath.

Imagine the air you are breathing is a golden colour...like mist...and you are taking this golden mist into your body through the heart and spreading it about inside.

Fill your body with this golden mist. Feel that every time you breathe in you are cleaning out your whole body with this mist and it is giving you many good qualities. It gives you all forms of goodness, love, honesty, co-operation, understanding, peace and happiness. As you breathe out, all the things you don't want or don't like about yourself pass out from your body: unhappiness, disobedience, anger, meanness, cruelty, dislikes...all these things are carried away by the golden mist. Become aware of your heartbeat. Listen to the steady sound of your heart. Imagine that in your heart the golden mist has formed into a very small golden egg. The golden egg breaks open and there in your heart, sitting on a beautiful flower, is a tiny little being, the size of your thumb. This little being is surrounded by a cloud of bright light. It is sitting very still and silently and looking at you and sending you love and happiness. Let yourself be filled by its love.

This beautiful little being is sending you so much love, and the more it gives, the brighter its light becomes. It is giving you so much love that you cannot keep it all in,

you must send it out to all other people. Think of your parents and your brothers and sisters and send this love out to them. Think of all the sick, unhappy and lonely people in the world and send them this love. Think of all the people you do not like, send out the love to them. Remember your friends and send them this love. The more love you send out the more the little being in your heart fills you with love. Now become aware of the room in which you are sitting. Fill this room with the love that is within you.

Finish: Now bring your attention back to your body which is lying on the floor in shavasana, the dead man's pose. Become familiar with your surroundings and the sounds coming from outside. Set yourself a positive goal or resolve for the day. Say it to yourself mentally in clear simple words. Repeat it three times and let it sink deep inside. Now, slowly begin to move your body. When you are sure that you are completely aware of your environment please sit in a comfortable cross-legged position with eyes closed and chant Om with me three times.

Hari Om Tat Sat

Advice to instructor: After this practice ask the child or children to discuss their experiences with you. Ask such questions as: "Could you feel the little being in your heart? Is it still there? What did it look like? What colour flower was it sitting on? How do you feel now?" etc.

Further ideas for guided visualizations

The following ideas can be expanded upon, altered or used to inspire your own creativity:

- Imagine you are drifting in infinite space, among the planets and stars. Visit and explore some other planets before you return to earth.
- Imagine you are a bird, a fluffy white cloud, a plane, a kite, a submarine, etc.

- Imagine you are a shoe and retrace each step you have taken in a day.
- Pay a visit to a circus or festival.
- Read a fantasy story from the Puranas, the Arabian Nights, Hans Christian Andersen, or some other such book.

Do not introduce the visualization sequence until full body and breath relaxation has been achieved. The visualization sequence should not continue for much more than five minutes, otherwise loss of concentration could occur.

Alternative visualizations

Inner light visualization: Imagine a shining star on top of your head radiating rays of energy and light. This star is illuminating everything in your mind, just as the sun lights up the whole earth. You can direct your inner light to any thing you wish to see, and it will reveal it for you.

Imagine a beautiful red rose, glistening with morning dew. The light from your star is lighting up the rose bud from within. Slowly the petals unfold, exposing the long delicate stamens at the centre.

There are many more things to which you can direct your inner light. I will just name a few. Without opening your eyes try to visualize and light up the various objects as I say them. But do not worry if you are not able to see each one.

Red rubber ball, sandy beach, brightly coloured sea shells, fish swimming in water, kite flying high in the sky, sleeping cat, butterfly amongst the flowers, rainbow across the sky, waterfall, green balloon, school bus, children playing, monk in meditation, snow-capped mountain, rising sun, blue sky, fluffy clouds, bird in a tree, boat on the river, yellow square, red triangle, white circle, black dot.

Next take your star to the eyebrow centre and try to visualize it there for a few seconds, illuminating your whole brain and mind and increasing your ability to study and learn, and to accomplish all that you wish to do in life.

Nature visualization: Imagine you are outside walking through a beautiful garden. It is early in the morning and you are completely alone. There are no other people around, there is only you to enjoy the beauty of nature.

Become aware of the earth beneath your bare feet. It feels cool and very pleasant. Now see all the plants and trees growing out of the earth as you walk by them.

Listen. You hear a loud clap of thunder. Look up. The sky has become very dark and now it is starting to rain. You are standing on very green grass and you are watching the raindrops bounce off the blades of grass. Smell the wet earth, and witness the storm. Do not be afraid about getting wet. Just relax and allow yourself to become completely wet. It does not matter. It is very pleasant to get wet.

Now the storm has finished. The sun is beginning to shine through the clouds. Feel the warmth of the sun on your skin. You are no longer wet. Your clothes are dry and you feel very warm inside. Look up at the sun and feel its warmth and energy penetrating your skin and entering your body.

Now you are running in the garden. You are very happy and cannot help but laugh with joy. All around in the trees, brightly coloured birds are singing. Hear their melodious song all about you.

A cool gentle breeze is blowing in the trees. Hear the wind rustling in the trees and feel it blowing against your face and through your hair. Breathe in this fresh life-giving air.

Becoming a fruit tree: Imagine you are a seed that has been planted in the soil. Feel the soil all about you. Beneath the soil it is very dark. It has started to rain, and the earth above you is getting wet and is making the soil around you very moist and cool...The sun starts to shine and the earth begins to dry. You can feel the energy and warmth of the sun. You would like to see the sun and experience its light.

After some time you send out a tiny shoot, breaking the surface of the ground above. At the same time you start sending roots down into the earth for support and nourishment.

You continue to grow up towards the light of the sun. And now you have bright green leaves.

You drink water through your roots and absorb sunlight through your leaves. These are your food, and you produce life-giving oxygen for all the animals and people of the world to breathe. Now you are bearing large flowers and many bees are coming and spreading pollen. Notice the colour of your flowers and how many bees come to see you. The bees are your friends, they will never sting a fruit tree. You are now bearing fruit. What fruit do you wish to produce? You have many beautiful fruits and children are coming with their baskets to pick and enjoy them. The fruit makes them very happy. Now the fruit is falling to the earth beneath and is rotting in the soil. You are a seed once more, hidden within the fruit. A whole cycle is beginning again.

Scientific Investigations

Sleep, Dreams and Yoga Nidra

Whereas the wakeful state of consciousness is known to us all, the sleeping state is less well understood. Nevertheless, modern researchers have been able to determine many of the psychophysiological functions and characteristics of sleep, and their findings can provide a basis for the scientific analysis of yoga nidra.

Sleep is a natural, regularly occurring condition of generalized rest and relaxation of the mind and body, characterized by the absence of conscious thought, sensation or movement. Sleep is a natural form of pratyahara (sense withdrawal) which occurs as our consciousness spontaneously detaches itself from the sensory and motor channels of experience. When the consciousness dissociates itself from both the sensory organs (jnanendriyas) and motor organs (karmendriyas), contact between the sensory/motor cortex of the brain and the external world is gradually lost. As this occurs, the consciousness is progressively withdrawn and redirected internally towards its source.

Research has shown that during this period, the sense modalities are disengaged systematically in a fixed order as the awareness is internally directed towards the deeper levels of the mind. According to tantric philosophy, this entry into sleep can be understood as the progressive withdrawal of the awareness back through the chakras towards its cosmic source (sahasrara). For example, according to the research,

the sense of smell (olfaction) is the first sense to disengage. In tantra this corresponds to mooladhara chakra and the earth tattwa or element. Smell is followed by taste (gustation), corresponding to swadhisthana chakra and the tattwa of water. After taste, visual capacity, which is the modality (tanmatra) of manipura chakra, disappears, then touch (anahata, air element), and finally hearing (vishuddhi, akasha or ether element). We can now understand that yoga nidra, in which awareness of the verbal instructions alone remains, corresponds to a stage of sleep at the very borderline between wakefulness and dreaming.

States of consciousness

Yogis, psychologists and physiologists alike recognize the existence of three fundamental and distinct states of individual human consciousness. These are the waking, dream and deep sleep states. Each of these states of consciousness, as well as the borderline state of yoga nidra, has been correlated with distinct patterns of electrical activity in the brain, as summarized in Table 1.

In the wakeful state of awareness, the conscious mind is actively engaged with the external environment through the sensory channels of experience. During this period, fast rhythm beta waves (frequency 13–20 c.p.s.) predominate. During the dreaming state, when the subconscious mind becomes predominant, the suppressed desires, fears, inhibitions and deep-seated impressions samskaras are actively expressed. This is characterized by theta waves (frequency 4–7 c.p.s.).

In the deep sleep state, the unconscious mind, source of instincts, drives and deeply buried experiences of earlier evolutionary stages, manifests. In contrast to the dream state, all mental activity and fluctuation disappears during deep sleep. In this state, the samskaras (past impressions) and vasanas (latent desires) are inactivated and the mind and body are paralyzed. Consciousness and prana alike withdraw from the individual body and mind and retreat

Table 1
States of Consciousness

Stage	State of consciousness	Psychological dimension	Brainwave pattern	Realm of experience
1	Awake	Conscious mind	Beta (13–20 c.p.s.)	Sensory awareness, external knowledge
2	Yoga nidra	Superconscious mind (turiya), hypnagogic borderline between awake and asleep	Alpha (8–12 c.p.s.)	Deep relaxation, visionary states, conscious dreaming, archetypal imagery
3	Dreaming sleep	Subconscious mind	Theta (4–7 c.p.s.)	Release of emotions, suppressed fears and desires
4	Deep sleep	Unconscious mind	Delta (0–4 c.p.s.)	Awakening of instincts and primitive drives

The descent into sleep

During the sequential pattern of descent from wakefulness to deep sleep, the normal person's brainwave frequency descends from beta through to theta, and then lastly to delta. As this occurs, the consciousness passes from being awake to dreaming and then to being asleep. In yoga nidra, however, the process of descent is different. Here beta waves are superseded by alpha waves, and the period of alpha predominance is greatly extended. Since increased alpha activity is characteristic of relaxation, this finding implies that yoga nidra promotes a much more relaxed state of sleep than is otherwise obtained.

Most people sleep without resolving their threefold muscular, mental and emotional tensions. This is because they merge directly from the beta state into the delta state with no platform of alpha predominance and total relaxation in between. This is why many people wake up tired in the morning. Deep relaxation, even during sleep, only occurs when alpha waves become intense. The difference between normal untrained sleep and yoga nidra is that in yoga nidra, an intermediate platform of alpha wave predominance and total relaxation is developed between the beta predominant wakeful state and the slow delta rhythm pattern of deep sleep. This is why the quality of rest created through yoga nidra is so beneficial and refreshing for both body and mind.

Yoga nidra is considered to be a different state of consciousness altogether from nidra. Nidra means sleep, no matter how or why. But yoga nidra means sleep after throwing off the burdens. It is the experience of absolute relaxation.

Glimpsing the total mind

Most people lose awareness within the first few minutes as they enter the state of sleep. However, it is possible to extend this important transition phase at the portals of sleep, so as to preserve the thread of awareness. This enables us to experience the sleeping state with our conscious awareness intact.

The ultimate outcome of yoga nidra is total harmony and integration between all levels of consciousness. One who perfects yoga nidra transcends the three initial states of awareness, entering into a fourth, unitive state beyond individual consciousness – a merging with the universal consciousness. In religious terms, this experience has been termed liberation or God-realization, but in yoga and tantra we know it as the experience of the total mind in operation.

For most people, the contents of the dream and deep sleep states are glimpsed only in a haphazard way by the conscious mind through occasional recall of a dream, trance or vision. Even these are often so highly symbolic and archetypal that they are not understood by the conscious mind and therefore remain unintegrated.

As a result, the ordinary man lives solely within the highly restricted compass of the conscious mind, unaware of his deeper needs, capacities and attributes. Because his consciousness is fragmented, he is unable to tap the vast resources of knowledge within himself. Deprived of a way of reintegrating the psychic experiences of the dream and sleeping states into his conscious awareness, modern man remains unable to understand all the levels of his consciousness. He does not know who he is, nor where he is going, and this is really the cause of all his suffering. Because of this alone, he is unable to accept and live harmoniously with himself. How then can he hope to understand and be at peace with others?

Yoga nidra is a means of contacting the source of self-knowledge and inspiration lying within each person. It is a technique of 'self-induced dreaming' in which the treasure house of our own consciousness can be systematically illumined, explored and then utilized to enrich our daily life.

Controlling the dreaming process

Dreams arise as energy patterns due to an awakening, release or explosion in the psychic body. They come of their own accord, and in yoga nidra we even precipitate this release.

Once you reach a certain stage in spiritual life, it becomes possible to change your dreams while they are taking place, and actually create your own dream. But to do this, you must be able to maintain the dual consciousness of the dreamer and the dream, so that while you are dreaming, you know that you are dreaming. The ability to witness this dream consciousness is a dynamic form of pratyahara.

Yoga nidra is the best way to increase the level of awareness of the dream. Many people have dreams, but their awareness of the dream remains gross and ineffectual. This is why they usually cannot remember their dreams. It is only possible to visualize the dream clearly when the witnessing consciousness remains alert. This awareness is attained by yoga nidra.

Cerebral awakening

Researchers now propose that if the underlying witness consciousness can be maintained during the experiences of sleep and dreaming, a fundamental evolutionary change in the central nervous system and its operation occurs. This change is accompanied by the experience of an altogether distinct fourth state of consciousness in which subtle dream states of perception, including the astral, psychic and causal dimensions, are experienced simultaneously with the normal wakeful state of sensory perception.

This fourth superconscious state, which includes simultaneous awareness of the waking, dream and deep sleep states but is not affected by any of them, has been described clearly in yogic texts for thousands of years, and is known as turiya. However, it has remained unknown and unfathomed to researchers until recently, when it was clearly demonstrated in the laboratory.

From a neurophysiological point of view, this fourth state of heightened consciousness is mirrored in the electrophysiological operation of the brain as the enhanced operation of the higher cortex – known as the witnessing or 'conscious brain' – together with heightened control and reduced

arousability of the limbic centres of the 'emotional brain'. This manifests in the evolution of a human personality possessing heightened levels of internal and external awareness, with simultaneously decreased emotional reactivity.

Yoga nidra thus initiates an ongoing process of increasing self-awareness, which is accompanied by a resetting of the inbuilt controlling and regulatory mechanisms of consciousness in the brain and is reflected in greater autonomic stability, enhanced emotional control and an increasingly conscious destiny.

Experiments with Swami Rama

Outstanding experimental evidence of the existence of a fourth state of unified, transcendental consciousness, whose portal lies in the yoga nidra state at the transition between sensory and sleep consciousness, was first recorded at the Menninger Foundation in Kansas, USA in 1977.[1] Under the direction of Dr Elmer Green, researchers used an electroencephalograph to record the brainwave activity of an Indian yogi, Swami Rama, while he progressively relaxed his entire physical, mental and emotional structure through the practice of yoga nidra.

What they recorded was a revelation to the scientific community. The swami demonstrated the capacity to enter the various states of consciousness at will, as evidenced by remarkable changes in the electrical activity of his brain. Upon relaxing himself in the laboratory, he first entered the yoga nidra state, producing 70% alpha wave discharge for a predetermined 5 minute period, simply by imagining an empty blue sky with occasional drifting white clouds.

Next, Swami Rama entered a stage of dreaming sleep which was accompanied by slower theta waves for 75% of the subsequent 5 minute test period. This state, which he later described as being 'noisy and unpleasant', was attained by 'stilling the conscious mind and bringing forth the subconscious'. In this state he had the internal experience of desires, ambitions, memories and past images in

archetypal form arising sequentially from the subconscious and unconscious with a rush, each archetype occupying his whole awareness.

Finally, the swami entered the state of (unconscious) deep sleep, as verified by the emergence of the characteristic pattern of slow rhythm delta waves. However, he remained perfectly aware throughout the entire experimental period. He later recalled the various events which had occurred in the laboratory during the experiment, including all the questions that one of the scientists had asked him during the period of deep delta wave sleep, while his body lay snoring quietly.

Such remarkable mastery over the fluctuating patterns of consciousness had not previously been demonstrated under strict laboratory conditions. The capacity to remain consciously aware while producing delta waves and experiencing deep sleep is one of the indications of the superconscious state (turiya). This is the ultimate state of yoga nidra in which the conventional barriers between waking, dreaming and deep sleep are lifted, revealing the simultaneous operation of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind. The result is a single, enlightened state of consciousness and a perfectly integrated and relaxed personality. Those who have realized this state do not dream at all. They have one state of being which does not alter. Waking and dreaming are alike for them, because they are continuously experiencing the fourth spiritual state of superconsciousness.

Superconsciousness

In the past this state of superconsciousness was always considered in mystical and religious terms, but now it has been recognized and defined as a physiological reality. Modern psychologists such as Carl Jung have sought to define this state as a merging into the collective unconscious. Now research in parapsychology, psi phenomena and psychotronics is providing experimental evidence that 'the

universal mind', a single underlying matrix of consciousness, does in fact exist.

The superconscious or universal mind is realized progressively as the barriers separating the three normally distinct forms of awareness are removed by such practices as yoga nidra and meditation. The murky and unknown unconscious mind of the individual is then illumined, revealing the entire superconscious dimension. This process of illumination of the total mind is the real meaning of liberation, self-realization, kaivalya, moksha or samadhi.

Educating the Whole Mind

Yoga nidra is not only an effective way to release stress and induce deep physiological rest and relaxation. Experiments are now revealing that it is an extremely efficient means of increasing learning capacity as well. Yoga nidra promises to revolutionize teaching procedures in the decades ahead, enabling students of all ages to assimilate knowledge spontaneously, without effort.

Some children want to learn, but their conscious mind is either weak or unreceptive. Through yoga nidra they can absorb knowledge through the subconscious mind. The learning capacity of the child who practises yoga nidra is remarkably improved; it can come as quite a surprise to see children reading books and solving mathematical problems that would have been much too difficult for them before.

Yogic system of education

There are various processes through which knowledge can be implanted in the human brain. During the last few decades many methods have been introduced into the educational system. The most common method, of course, is teaching in a classroom using rewards and punishments. The teacher gives a lecture and the student tries to understand it. If the student is intelligent he gets a good grade, and if he is dull he fails. This might be a system of teaching, but it is definitely not a system of education.

Real education is educating the behaviour of the mind and brain. Even the newer forms of teaching which have been introduced in the last few decades fall short of this goal. In most of them the learning process takes place at an intellectual level. In the yogic system, however, the process of imbibing knowledge is a spontaneous affair, which takes place at the deeper levels of the mind.

At every moment of our lives, right from birth, we are constantly receiving impressions. But these are not registered in the brain in the same form as when they went in; they are registered in the form of symbolic vibrations. Therefore, any real system of education must take the symbolic nature of the mind into account.

There is no subject which cannot be taught using symbolic methods. This form of education is especially well suited to the dull type of student. Intellectual concepts can be explained directly to an intelligent child, because he is capable of understanding them. But the dull child cannot be taught in this way, because his conscious brain, his intellect, is incapable of receiving the information directly. The knowledge has to be transmitted in symbolic form directly into his subconscious mind, and this is precisely the role of yoga nidra in education.

Increasing memory function

Yoga nidra is a method which has been adopted by many pioneering educators as a means of improving conscious recall and thereby increasing memory function and learning capacity. Two factors are involved in the process of memory. The first is the brain's ability to absorb information and the second is its ability to recall the information later on. Yoga nidra works on both of these levels by establishing a state of maximum receptivity in the subconscious mind, along with a simultaneous state of awareness.

The possibility of assimilating knowledge while we are asleep and recalling it during the waking state, termed hypnopedy, depends on the capacity of the mind to passively

absorb knowledge by suggestion when it is in a state of relaxation. This is not inexplicable if we can accept that at all times, even during sleep, there remains a dimension of consciousness which is alert and aware. Like a passive witness, it makes a continual recording of all the events and perceptions of our daily lives as they occur, even those of which we are not consciously aware.

For example, unknown to us, the auditory faculty is making a continual recording of every sound that reaches it. These impressions are stored in the vast memory banks of our grey matter computer, the cerebral cortex. Here they are destined to remain latent and inaccessible, unless we can find a way to recall them. The method of recalling these dormant records of earlier experiences into consciousness is to present an appropriate stimulus during the ordinary waking state. For example, an adult who hears a particular melody may suddenly be flooded with long forgotten memories from early childhood.

In the same way, the information recorded by the subconscious mind during yoga nidra can also be accessed and retrieved, given the appropriate stimulus. In this case, the stimulus takes the form of the replaying or rereading during the waking state of the same material that was assimilated during sleep.

Yoga nidra integrates the hemispheres

Researchers propose that yoga nidra is an appropriate state in which to learn something new because it employs both hemispheres of the brain in the task: the logical, conscious left and the non-logical, subconscious right. In the traditional classroom, students are encouraged to pay attention (a left hemisphere function), but while trying to absorb what the instructor is saying, their subconscious mind (right hemisphere) is continually recording signals that have nothing to do with the learning task at hand. However, in yoga nidra, the signals which are being received by the subconscious are reorganized in such a way that the whole

mind is receptive to them. Thus, far more of the total brain is focused effortlessly on learning.

Music is a most effective medium in this regard. While listening to suitable music, the student's right hemisphere is totally open and receptive, and the logical, critical left hemisphere remains passive. This allows, for example, a crucial language lesson to be inserted into the subconscious almost coincidentally. Later on, when the lesson is reread in the ordinary waking state, both the logical left hemisphere and the subconscious right become active in integrating and expressing the newly attained knowledge.

Applications of effortless learning

Modern educational methods which make use of this state are producing spectacular results. Educational innovators such as Dr Georgi Lozanov, a Bulgarian psychologist and the founder-director of the Institute of Suggestopedy in Sofia, are now utilizing yoga nidra to create an atmosphere in which knowledge is gained without effort and can then be reawakened without blockage.[1]

Recognizing that the state of active and relaxed awareness in students awakens the desire to learn, improves memory and reduces inhibitions, Lozanov has devised a teaching procedure which altogether transforms the traditional classroom atmosphere. Students are comfortably installed in armchairs and the teacher gradually creates a spontaneous attitude of relaxed awareness through the medium of games, sketches, chants, relaxation, breathing practices and music in a carefully alternated way. As the class proceeds, the students effortlessly assimilate an enormous amount of specific knowledge which, under conventional classroom conditions, would surely precipitate strain, tiredness and loss of concentration.

Using this technique, Lozanov has been able to teach a foreign language in 1/5th of the time required by conventional methods. His research procedures indicate that the phenomena of exceptional recall power and even

photographic memory (termed hypermnesia) can be systematically developed under the twin conditions of deep relaxation and spontaneous awareness which characterize the yoga nidra state. EEG studies of the brainwave patterns of students during these particular sessions also confirm that the state of passive awareness which is generated is a combination of these two factors. This is the key to the success of the technique.

Psychologists at Florida University (USA) have clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of this form of linguistic education. Over a 5 day period they played recordings of Russian nouns, linked with their English counterparts, to 20 sleeping students, none of whom had prior knowledge of Russian. EEG monitoring of brain activity ensured that the normal waking awareness had been withdrawn. The average retention rate was 13%, while the highest was 30%, a definite indication that subconscious learning does occur. Furthermore, average retention scores rose from 10% on the first 3 nights to 17% on the last 2 nights, showing that sleep-learning improves with time.

In Canada, where civil servants are required to speak both English and French, the Public Service has adopted Lozanov's yoga nidra technique with remarkable results. Not only is the learning of a foreign language 5 times more effective, but according to Dr Gabriele Racle, who heads the program: "The approach benefits the whole person. Not only do his psychosomatic problems often disappear (headaches, stomach cramps, anxiety), but we see his personality develop; he becomes more self-assured, more creative, and expresses himself more easily."[2]

Schoolteachers in several countries are using yoga nidra to augment the capacities of receptivity and attention, and to awaken the joy of learning in their young students. They report that techniques such as rotation of consciousness and visualization heighten the capacity for relaxation and interest among schoolchildren.[3] Fatigue and boredom evaporate in the new, relaxed atmosphere, which encourages

the development within each child of a solid internal focus for self-discipline and inner discovery. The children absorb a method of spontaneous relaxation which they can utilize whenever they feel fatigued or depressed.

Psychic development in children

Psychic receptivity and extrasensory perception (ESP) are found to increase with the level of relaxation.[4] Therefore, yoga nidra is perhaps the most effective of all the yogic techniques in precipitating the experience of the psychic and intuitive dimensions lying beyond the barrier of sensory consciousness.

The child's capacity to 'see' the mental screen without strain or difficulty is awesome. Many young children, when left to their own devices, have the ability to dwell simultaneously in the objective adult realm of awareness and in an inner dimension of experience in which imaginary friends and guides advise them through an extraordinary pageant of play events each day. What is more, they can switch over from this private inner dimension to the down to earth adult reality effortlessly whenever demanded upon by parents or teachers.

According to yogic psychophysiology, this is possible because ajna chakra, the command centre or seat of intuition, contacted at the mid-eyebrow point, is still naturally functional in young children. This internally directed 'third eye', which bestows ready access to the higher states of conscious awareness, corresponds to the pineal gland, situated at the top of the spinal cord in the midline of the brain.[5]

Up to the 8th year, this gland remains large and functional, exerting a controlling influence over the secretory behaviour of the pituitary gland. However, this control is gradually relinquished as the process of puberty occurs. The pituitary gland then assumes an autonomous role as the master gland of the entire endocrine system, activating the reproductive glands and initiating the onset of mature sexual behaviour.

With the onset of adult life, the pineal gland generally becomes little more than a calcified remnant, and so too the experience of the child's higher dimensions of awareness becomes only a dim memory. The childhood capacity to visualize and fantasize at will is virtually lost in adult life today, depriving modern man of the gifts of a creative personality, leaving him socially isolated, denying him the comfort of emotional self-expression and making him highly susceptible to major psychosomatic diseases as a result.

Yoga nidra has a vital role to play in ensuring the future psychological health and wellbeing of children who are growing up in the urban technological culture. Its action images of nature and animals come as a breath of fresh air to city children deprived of a green landscape and countryside, living in the harsh concrete reality of the inner city.

Furthermore, the present audio-visual era, in which the child grows up surrounded by radio, television, computers, comic books and cinema screens, causes a paradoxical degeneration of his own self-generated imaginative functions. This is due to the damping influence of innumerable images coming from the external environment, which stereotype the child's own eidetic capacities, impeding the natural flow and development of internal awareness and intuitive knowledge. However, yoga nidra is the ideal antidote; it preserves and enhances his natural abilities and develops the child's creative faculties in the most effortless and spontaneous way.

Counteracting Stress

A survey conducted by the Australian Federal Health Department in 1980 revealed that stress is the aspect of modern life that concerned most people. It is clear that life has become so complex, hypnotizing and confusing for many people today that they find it very difficult to slow down, relax and unwind even when they get the opportunity.

Constant concern with 'making ends meet' economically, coupled with the tensions and frustrations of modern social, marital, family and community life, frequently transform life into a pressure cooker without a safety valve. Deprived of more traditional forms of emotional and psychosomatic release such as prayer, religious worship, sport or creative recreation, many sensitive modern men and women confront a situation of spiralling tension without escape. When the cooker explodes, mental breakdown and physical disease commonly result.

The stress response

States of anxiety, depression, frustration and anger are accompanied by a variety of physical responses including palpitations, excessive sweating, diarrhoea, indigestion, headache and weakness. These responses are the outcome of the complex process by which the physiological systems of the body adapt to stress. This process has been termed 'the stress response' by pioneering researchers such as Dr

Hans Selye[1] of Canada, and includes states of accelerated heart rate and increases in blood pressure, skeletal muscle tension and cortisone and noradrenalin levels in the blood.

As stressful conditions persist, the body's resistance is sapped away. Imbalances in the autonomic nervous system, endocrine glands, and in the chemical and hormonal composition of the blood become permanent, with increasingly disturbed functioning of all the organs and systems of the body.

As the equilibrium of the body, even at rest, becomes increasingly disturbed, a variety of nervous symptoms usually manifest, including insomnia, anxiety and irritability, often leading to neurosis. As the imbalance is further aggravated, physical changes in sensitive or weakened organs result. In this way, major psychosomatic diseases such as asthma, peptic ulceration and hypertension evolve out of poorly managed psychological tensions which are relayed into the physiological systems of the body.

The work of Dr K.N. Udupa of Banaras Hindu University (India) suggests that stress-related disorders evolve gradually through four recognizable stages.[2] Initially, psychological changes such as anxiety, irritability and insomnia arise due to over stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system. In the second stage, distinct physical symptoms such as high blood pressure, elevated heart rate or increased intestinal motility appear. In the third stage, a more profound physical and/or biochemical imbalance sets in, and evidence of malfunctioning organs manifests clinically. Finally, detectable and often irreversible lesions appear, often with severe symptoms requiring surgical or long term pharmacological management.

Yoga nidra counteracts stress

Yoga nidra is now prescribed by doctors in many countries both as a preventive and curative therapy in the first three stages of stress-related disease. In addition, it is also a most effective adjunct in management of psychosomatic disorders that have progressed to a severe or structurally irreversible

stage. Here yoga nidra provides effective symptomatic relief, alleviates depression and long standing anxiety, and helps the sufferer to recognize and accept his condition and evolve the best possible outlook towards it.

The deficiencies of the modern technological lifestyle are being recognized by many sensitive people, including doctors, who are now seeking an efficient, scientific way of attaining deep, systematic relaxation. Yoga nidra, which is subjectively oriented and internally directed, comes as a great boon to them, providing both a calming retreat and an effective coping device. Many previously tense, alienated and frustrated people report that by modifying their lifestyle to include daily yoga nidra, they have totally transformed their outlook, and greatly enhanced their appreciation and experience of life.

The relaxation response

The yoga nidra state appears to reflect an integrated response by the hypothalamus, resulting in decreased sympathetic (excitatory) nervous activity and increased parasympathetic (relaxatory) function. This 'relaxation response' can be thought of as the inverse counterpart of the so-called 'fight or flight' response. This well known state of sympathetic hyperactivation of the hypothalamus and endocrine network prepares the body for immediate protective action in response to imminent danger. It is an evolutionary remnant of man's early tribal life when his physical existence was under constant threat.

Unfortunately, this mechanism has become a distinct liability for the average individual of today, who has not attained any degree of autonomic control. The highly stressful conditions of modern urban life often cause this emergency coping mechanism of our tribal forebearers to remain permanently activated. This has seriously detrimental short and long term effects. Research studies have clearly implicated the 'fight or flight' mechanism, which was defined by Cannon as long ago as 1931, in the pathogenesis of

arterial hypertension and many of the other mental and psychosomatic disorders which confront modern society.

The level of relaxation attained in yoga nidra serves to lessen the harmful effects of this 'fight or flight' response. Studies have shown that regular practise of yoga nidra induces a significant decrease in both systolic and diastolic blood pressures in hypertensive patients, and also alters the circulating levels of the stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol, which are secreted by the adrenal glands.

Yoga nidra appears to work by changing the neuro-humoral reactivity to stress, creating somatic conditions essentially opposite to those prompted by sympathetic over activity. During yoga nidra the organs and systems of the body attain deep, physiological rest and the body's powerful, inherent, regenerative mechanisms are set in motion. As a result, body tissues are physiologically braced against stress, becoming less susceptible to its harmful influences. The profound experience of muscular, mental and emotional relaxation attainable in yoga nidra enables a balance of psychic and vital energies within the psychic channels (nadis) of the energy framework underlying the physical body. Free flow of these energies forms the basis of optimal physical and mental health.

Increasing stress resistance

The ultimate objective of yoga nidra goes far beyond merely combating stressful influences and rectifying the imbalances created by poor stress management. The rishis who first formulated the practice were not concerned with the complexities of modern life. They devised yoga nidra as a direct pathway for the attainment of self-realization (samadhi). Samadhi is not a state of trance, torpor or passivity as many people believe. The term 'self-realization' suggests a passive experience, but samadhi is a dynamic state of activity and self-expression.

The glimpse of samadhi obtained by the practitioner of yoga nidra is sufficient to transform him from a victim of

stress into a victor in life. As well as becoming 'stress-resistant' amidst the pressures, insecurities and difficulties of modern life, he actually learns to thrive on the same difficulties, tensions and adverse circumstances which lead others to the brink of mental anguish, emotional self-destruction and physical breakdown. This is the great secret of yoga nidra. It is not only a way of coping with stress; it provides a means of transforming and positively utilizing tension as a stepping stone to greater awareness, efficiency and achievement in life.

Path to success

Yoga nidra can be utilized to deal with anticipated stress by a process of 'living in advance'. Every forseeable physical and mental detail of a stressful event or encounter is rehearsed in the imagination as if it were happening perfectly. This is one of the greatest of all yogic practices for succeeding in life.

Worry originates in the attempt to will a stressful situation away. This only increases its stressfulness, exaggerating it to the point of loss of confidence, anxiety neurosis, psychosomatic disease and failure in life. But even where willpower fails, the imagination succeeds.

By utilizing the positive force of imagination and consciously directing it into the future, a course of action can be plotted which leaves no room for failure. Unpredictable outcomes are transformed into inevitable successes, and life becomes a process of 'conscious enactment'.

In recent years this process has been recognized by some outstanding sportsmen, coaches and trainers, who are utilizing it to enhance their performance and bring home gold medals.[3] However, yoga nidra's real potential as a technique of self-realization has as yet been barely glimpsed; it can transform each event and situation of life, without exception, into a windfall and a milestone.

Controlling Centres of the Brain

The precise mechanism by which yoga nidra acts centrally upon the brain to induce relaxation throughout the nervous system and to bolster the resistance levels of the physiological systems, has become an important area of research. Various research groups have defined this relaxed state of awareness in different terms, including 'the hypnagogic state', 'the creative surrender' and 'the relaxation response'. Each is referring to the same process of yoga nidra – a state of profound psychophysiological relaxation and metabolic rest in which a fundamental release and readjustment in the controlling mechanisms of the autonomic nervous system appear to occur.

Many of the physiological parameters of this experience have now been identified in scientific experiments. They include altered frequency of the brain's electrical rhythms, decreased heart rate and systolic and diastolic blood pressures, altered levels of circulating 'stress hormones' including adrenaline and cortisol from the adrenal glands, and decreased sympathetic nervous activity, as reflected in increased galvanic skin resistance (GSR).

Psychological tests have recorded a reduced neuroticism index, enhanced concentration capacity and higher levels of mental and physical wellbeing. During the practice of yoga nidra, a liberation of the healing energies inherent in the entire psycho-physiological framework appears to take

place, and this area has become the focus of much of the current research.

The role of the hypothalamus

Experimental evidence suggests that the yoga nidra state represents an integrated response by the hypothalamus, the region of the brain serving as the control centre for the whole autonomic nervous system. This small area on the anterior under aspect of the brain plays two vital roles: it integrates psychosomatic and somatopsychic functions, and is responsible for maintaining homeostasis.

The hypothalamus receives input from the external environment via the sensory/motor areas of the cerebral cortex. It also receives information from the more subtle psychic dimensions of existence through various other 'silent areas' in the cerebral cortex. Both environmental and intrapsychic stimuli mediated through the hypothalamus initiate mental and emotional reactions which precipitate autonomic and hormonal responses throughout all the physiological systems of the body.

The hypothalamus is also directly connected with many other important areas of the brain. It is richly enervated by nerve fibres from the 'emotional centres' of the limbic system and the amygdalar nuclei in the base of the brain. Through this link, our physiological and hormonal responses are directly influenced by our emotions.

The hypothalamus also forms a part of the ascending reticular activating system (RAS), the part of the brain stem responsible for patterns of sleep, arousal and wakefulness. Through this mechanism, the altered sleeping patterns observed in practitioners of yoga nidra appear to be mediated.

The role of the pituitary gland

The pituitary is a small bi-lobed central outgrowth from the under surface of the brain. It hangs suspended from beneath the hypothalamus by the infundibular stalk. Until the age of 8, it remains under the control of the pineal gland, but as

the pineal decays, the pituitary assumes its primary role as the master control gland of the entire endocrine network.

Pituitary behaviour and secretion patterns are directly influenced by levels of mental and emotional activity modulated in the hypothalamus. This occurs via minute amounts of vital neurosecretions which flow down the long secretory axons of the infundibular stalk from the nuclei of the hypothalamus to the posterior lobe of the gland. Thus the pituitary receives neurosecretory messages from the hypothalamus above and responds by secreting its various hormone products directly into the bloodstream.

These vital pituitary hormones, about 20 in number, are responsible for harmoniously integrating the emotional and instinctive behaviours of the body with the conscious desires, ideals, wishes and aspirations. Travelling via the blood to their respective target sites, tiny concentrations of these extremely potent neuro-hormones, termed releasing factors, activate and control all of the glands of the endocrine system, including the thyroid, adrenals and gonads (testes or ovaries).

In this way, pituitary hormones are involved in every aspect of life in the physical body. That is why so much emphasis is placed upon the psychophysiology of this gland in the science of kundalini yoga. The functions of the pituitary, as modulated by the pineal, are recognized in kundalini yoga to be those of ajna chakra. Yoga nidra is one of the most powerful means devised to awaken this psychic centre.

The command centre

In kundalini yoga, and in the whole science of tantra, ajna chakra is recognized as one of the most vital psychic centres in the more subtle structure of the pranic body underlying the gross material frame. Recognized as the integrator of the mental (internal) and physical (external) spheres of activity in which we are all simultaneously operating, ajna chakra is also termed the 'command centre' or 'guru chakra'.

In Sanskrit ajna means 'command' and the name is most suitable, because from this gland emerge the vital hormonal

despatches which prompt the physiological actions and responses necessary to regulate every aspect of daily life, just as the vital orders and instructions emerging from the control tower govern all the air traffic movements at an airport.

Pituitary growth hormone (GH) directs our body's physical growth and development; thyroid releasing factor (TRF) is responsible for the body's metabolic rate; sexual and reproductive responses are initiated by the gonadotrophic hormones; childbearing and suckling behaviour are influenced by prolactin; and our response to ever changing environmental situations is mediated via the releasing factor of adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH). In addition, pituitary secretions known as endorphins and encephalins seem to be involved in the psychic integration of painful perceptions and experiences.

In tantra, ajna chakra is considered to be situated at the top of the spinal column, directly in line with the mid-eyebrow centre (bhrumadhya). Using concentration and meditation upon this point (shambhavi mudra), and the practices of visualization in yoga nidra awaken this third eye which in most people remains closed. This awakening bestows a greater vision, purpose and understanding of life. Inner guidance in the form of intuition awakens and is gradually recognized as an infallible guide leading us to respond perfectly in all situations. This faculty of awareness which is awakened in yoga nidra is termed 'the inner guru'. With this additional dimension of awareness, the yogi has a vision of the mysteries of life which ensures him of success, even where others inevitably fail.

Therapeutic Applications

Yoga nidra has widespread application in the management of diseases of all kinds, and promises to play a far greater role in the future as its potential becomes fully recognized by doctors, psychologists and healers. Its value as both a curative and a palliative has been investigated in recent years in many research centres around the world, with extremely favourable results.

Yoga nidra can be utilized either by itself, or in conjunction with other conventional forms of medical therapy. It has been found useful in both acute and chronic conditions, especially in the degenerative and stress-related conditions such as hypertension, coronary disease and arthritis. Diseases with a high psychosomatic component such as asthma, peptic ulcer and migraine headache respond favourably to yoga nidra therapy.

Yoga nidra also plays an important palliative role in the fields of rehabilitation and geriatrics, where intractable pain, loss of motivation and psychological depression pose major barriers in conventional treatment. In addition, yoga nidra has its most widespread application as a preventive measure, to be practised by healthy, active people as a means of relieving accumulated tensions, increasing stress resistance and overall efficiency, and preventing the development of psychosomatic diseases.[1]

Psychological disorders

Yoga nidra is an effective adjunct to traditional forms of psychiatric treatment, especially in cases which are unresponsive to routine psychotherapy.[2] The practitioner of yoga nidra becomes his own psychotherapist, recognizing and systematically alleviating his own personal problems and interpersonal difficulties.[3]

In yoga nidra the subconscious mind is tapped, much as crude oil is brought to the surface of an oil well. Previously suppressed material, which is the source of psychic pain and aberrant behaviour, is permitted to rise spontaneously into awareness, where it can be relived and reintegrated into the conscious personality. The process is facilitated by the use of specific images and archetypes designed to liberate this subconscious material. Self-recognition and desensitization to painful memories follow spontaneously.

Yoga nidra is a successful therapy for both recent and long standing psychological disturbances of all kinds, especially high anxiety levels and neurotic behaviour patterns.[4–6] Anxiety is an unpleasant emotional state or condition characterized by subjective feelings of tension, apprehension and worry, and also by activation of the autonomic nervous system. The practice of yogic relaxation has been found to effectively reduce tension and improve the psychological wellbeing of sufferers from anxiety.[7] The autonomic symptoms of high anxiety, such as headache, giddiness, psychosomatic chest pain, palpitations, sweating, abdominal pain and nervous diarrhoea, respond exceptionally well. Even severely disturbed people can be taught to practise on their own, and to relieve mounting fear or anxiety in any setting, not only during regularly scheduled therapy sessions.

Yoga nidra relaxation and visualization are also excellent therapeutic techniques for children with behavioural problems and maladaptive social and environmental responses. Paediatricians, child psychologists and remedial educators are now investigating it as an exciting new adjunct

or alternative to more traditional modes of treatment using drugs and psychotherapy. For example, in studies conducted in the USA and Europe, hyperactive children who were taught yoga nidra displayed significantly decreased hyperactivity levels, improved attention span, decreased fidgeting, fewer random movements, noises and actions, and reduced levels of skeletal muscle tension.[8,9] The technique has been adapted in other spheres of child psychology, including emotional deprivation and handicap,[10] and behavioural disturbances,[11] with highly favourable preliminary results.

Yoga nidra is also being used in psychiatric admission units,[12] enabling patients to reduce dependency on tranquilizing and hypnotic drugs and to increase their self-reliance, thereby reducing the duration of their hospital stay. Yoga nidra is also being taught as a suicide preventive to highly disturbed and depressed patients.[13]

Insomnia

Not surprisingly, yoga nidra is a successful treatment for insomnia,[14] producing definite decreases in the time required to fall asleep. Former sufferers from insomnia who practise yoga nidra at bedtime report that they usually drop into sleep at some stage during the practice. For insomnia, yoga nidra should be adopted in conjunction with a busy daily program which includes asanas and other physical activities and which excludes daytime sleeping. As competence in yoga nidra is attained, dependency on sedative-hypnotic or barbiturate preparations diminishes, thus avoiding the dangers of long term side effects, which include nightmares, disruption in brainwave patterns and sleep rhythms, and other nervous disturbances.

Drug addiction and alcoholism

In response to elevated levels of stress in modern life, addiction to tobacco, alcohol and other stimulants and depressants has become a big problem. Many people think that smoking or

drinking helps them to relax. However, these methods can never be satisfactory, because they fail to provide the means to relax totally and enjoy life more fully, without the side effects of drug and alcohol abuse. By reducing deep seated conflicts and tensions, yoga nidra promotes a general feeling of wellbeing, which helps to curb excessive consumption of coffee, cigarettes and alcohol[15] as well as aiding in the management of drug abuse and addiction.

Chronic diseases

The influence of yoga nidra on chronic degenerative diseases has been investigated in several countries. In one study conducted with patients suffering from major long term disabilities, at the University of California Medical Centre at Davis (USA), researchers concluded that yoga nidra is applicable for bedridden, incapacitated and chronically afflicted patients of all degrees.[16] They report that yoga nidra can improve the lives of these patients in several distinct ways by:

- Relieving insomnia and sleep disturbances.
- Maintaining moderate pain outside the field of conscious awareness.
- Partially relieving feelings of despair and depression which so often complicate the outlook in chronic disease.
- Decreasing the requirements for analgesic, hypnotic and sedative drugs.

Yoga nidra relieves pain

Yoga nidra probably relieves pain by stimulating the pituitary gland to release its own potent pain-suppressing compounds. Research studies have uncovered the existence of endogenous morphine-like brain hormones, termed endorphins and encephalins. These natural substances appear to be produced by the pituitary gland under conditions of extreme stress and prolonged, intractable pain, and are secreted into the cerebrospinal fluid which surrounds and supports the entire central nervous system.

The isolation of these natural analgesics, whose potency far exceeds that of any synthetically produced drug, is positive proof of the contention of the ancient yogis that the body is capable of producing its own medicines. Researchers have proposed that these substances act centrally within the brain to transform the perception of painful stimuli which reach consciousness after being relayed from some peripheral focus of disease in the body. Yoga nidra, by creating the sensations of pleasure/pain, heat/cold, etc., and the visualization of specific yantras and psychic symbols, may well be the key which unlocks these magical secretions from the pituitary.

The ability of yoga nidra to control pain was investigated in a study at the Presbyterian University College Hospital, Pittsburgh (USA), in which the need for analgesic medications was eliminated, or markedly reduced, among the 54 patients participating in the study[17]. Two thirds of them suffered from headaches of either migrainous, muscular or tension types. The remainder suffered from a variety of conditions characterized by long term or intermittent pain, including gastro-intestinal pain (peptic ulcer syndrome), shoulder and neck pain (spondylitis syndrome), and lower back pain (slipped disc syndrome). At follow up after 6 weeks of yoga nidra therapy, patients reported an average of 81% effective pain relief.

Another study of migraine sufferers at the Menninger Foundation in Kansas (USA) reported 80% effective relief of symptoms using biofeedback facilitated yoga nidra,[18] and other studies have produced similar findings.[19] Yoga nidra has also been used successfully in the management of chronic arthritic pain[20] and has been found to control pain, bleeding and salivation during dental surgery.[21, 22]

Pregnancy, childbirth and menstrual disorders

The practice of yoga nidra throughout pregnancy helps to create the most favourable conditions for intra-uterine growth and development. It is now well recognized that

stress liberates hormones into the mother's blood which profoundly alter the wellbeing of the infant. Stress hormones such as adrenaline and noradrenalin cross the placental barrier and enter the foetal circulation. There they act as toxins and poisons, disturbing the ongoing mental and physiological development of the foetus. Highly stressed mothers, who do not yet know the art of relaxation, are thus more likely to produce children who develop maladaptive behaviour, hormonal imbalance and endocrine disturbances in their own teenage and adult lives.[23]

Yoga nidra also has an important role in the techniques of natural childbirth, such as the Leboyer technique,[24] in which deep physical relaxation and spontaneous breath awareness form the basis for drug-free labour and delivery. In maternity hospitals where training in yogic relaxation practices is included in prepartum medical management, expectant mothers routinely experience less anxiety before the onset of labour and less pain during labour and delivery. The result is a confident, conscious mother who experiences a natural childbirth devoid of undesirable complications, and a healthy baby who emerges into the external world relaxed and unscathed.

Yoga nidra has also been prescribed for the relief of pain associated with dysmenorrhoea (disturbance of the menstrual cycle) and excessive levels of pre-menstrual tension. In a study conducted at East Texas University (USA), researchers concluded that yogic relaxation training should be prescribed more frequently as an adjunct or alternative to conventional drug therapy for menstrual dysfunction and pain.[25]

Geriatric medicine

Yogic relaxation helps elderly people overcome many of the specific psychological difficulties related to old age, according to a recent study conducted in a French geriatric hospital.[26] Elderly people may confront a variety of difficulties, including loss of confidence, lowered self-esteem, depression, unmet dependency needs, loneliness, boredom and

fear of the future. The French researchers concluded that yoga nidra is especially helpful for those elderly patients who habitually transfer their psychological difficulties into physical symptoms and complaints associated with their advancing age. These patients unconsciously will themselves into a state of rapid physical and mental deterioration unless their self-destructive coping mechanism is modified.

The elderly patients who learned and practised yoga nidra on a daily basis were more capable of recognizing and managing their problems, maintaining good health, a confident, active and independent lifestyle, and a bright outlook towards the future. In addition, physicians participating in the study reported that yoga nidra improved their patients' ability to communicate about their personal and situational difficulties, thus enabling a more fruitful therapeutic relationship to develop.

Psychosomatic Diseases

Yogic relaxation therapy has been effectively prescribed in conjunction with other medical and yogic procedures in the management of severe psychosomatic diseases, including cancer, bronchial asthma, colitis and peptic ulcer. These are disease conditions in which psychological factors usually play a prominent role. Attacks of asthma, growth of cancers, exacerbation of ulcer symptoms or colonic irritation frequently arise as complex psychophysiological reactions to emotional insecurity, interpersonal stress, intrapsychic conflict, hypersensitivity, rejection, frustration and suppression, personal isolation and other deep seated emotional crises. Yoga nidra therapy leads to conscious and subconscious recognition and analysis of these underlying psychological factors, and initiates the release of suppressed conflicts. It is therefore an important part of yogic and medical management of all psychosomatic conditions.

Alexithymia

Researchers have recently become aware that psychosomatic patients often suffer from a suppressed or impoverished fantasy life in comparison to the rest of the population.[1] This state, which has been termed alexithymia, results in a fixed, utilitarian way of thinking and a characteristic inability to express deeper feelings and emotions in appropriate or acceptable ways. Instead, the arising emotions, deprived of

expression and outlet, are repressed back into the subconscious mind, triggering psychosomatic disease processes such as hypertension, colitis, asthma and eczema.

This explains why a high proportion of sufferers from psychosomatic diseases respond favourably to yoga nidra. Along with the symptomatic relief, they experience a parallel awakening of the internal dimension, with the release of visualization and archetypal imagery which had previously remained locked away and unknown. Relief from physical symptoms comes almost miraculously, as subconscious tensions are released, even in patients who have failed to gain relief from any of the conventional therapies.

Asthma

Asthma is a condition characterized by attacks of respiratory distress due to bronchial spasms, and excessive production of thick, sticky mucus in the airways. Both psychological and physiological factors contribute to airways obstruction during the asthma attack. The various stages and practices of yoga nidra, including deep muscular relaxation, psychic desensitization using visualization and imagery, and autosuggestion (sankalpa) have now been evaluated in clinical trials with children and adults with asthma. These studies have found yogic relaxation to be a significant and effective mode of therapy, producing both subjective improvement as well as clinically objective improvement in respiratory function, airways calibre and other physiological parameters.

As with any form of therapy, the degree of response by the asthmatic to yoga nidra is influenced by factors such as age and the severity of the condition. Nevertheless, a highly significant reduction in frequency and severity of attacks has been reported in asthmatic patients who practise yoga nidra. Many have been able to greatly reduce their dependency on drugs, while a significant proportion have been able to discontinue medication altogether.[2,3] In one study, 18 out of 27 asthmatic patients showed improvement in respiratory function and greater freedom of breathing

after intensive training in yoga nidra, pranayama and other yogic kriyas, and 63% had definite relaxation and dilation of the bronchial tubes when retested on a spirometer.[4]

The yoga nidra state has also been used by a Texas paediatrician to cure severe asthma in adolescents.[5] These children learned to induce the yoga nidra state for themselves by conjuring up a pleasing mental image after relaxing the body in a comfortable posture. One boy pictured himself running along and breathing freely as his lungs cleared out. After learning yoga nidra, the children still suffered from asthma attacks, but these become shorter and less frequent, and required fewer visits to the doctor or admissions into hospital. All of the children were able to stop taking their medications without any adverse effects, and remained improved at 7 months follow-up. The boy who visualized himself running even won a race in real life.

Colitis and peptic ulcer

Irritable colon and ulcerative colitis are two closely related psychosomatic disorders of the large intestine, which becomes tender, inflamed and, finally, ulcerated. The major symptom is recurrent diarrhoea. The cause is primarily psychic, although the condition is frequently aggravated by dietary abuse. The condition frequently flares up at times of stress, and then passes into remission after a period of medical therapy. Mild cases, such as student's pre-examination diarrhoea, resolve themselves once the acute stressful situation has passed. In other cases, employment or family frustrations may precipitate the onset of an attack.

A Swedish study has reported remission of symptoms of colonic irritability following 3 weeks of relaxation training,[6] while severe and long standing ulcerative colitis has been cured or effectively controlled by a daily program of specific asanas, including shavasana, together with ayurvedic treatment and dietary modification, in a controlled study in the Department of Ayurvedic Medicine, Banaras Hindu University in India.[7]

Peptic ulcer is a condition of excessive acid secretion and gastric irritation leading to the erosion of the mucosal lining and the gradual formation of a painful ulcer pit in the gastric or duodenal wall. Worry, mental turmoil and low frustration tolerance are predisposing factors, often accompanied by excessive intake of gastric irritants such as cigarettes, alcohol and rich, spicy foods.

Newly diagnosed and recurrent ulcers respond most favourably to yoga nidra therapy and dietary regulation, with or without conventional medications, administered for one month in the therapeutic atmosphere of a yoga ashram or conventional hospital, away from the usual domestic and employment situations. In this way, surgical correction of ulcer can frequently be averted.

Yoga nidra in cancer therapy

Yoga nidra can be adopted as a form of therapy in cancer of all stages and types. It is especially recommended in conjunction with meditation therapy. This involves intensive meditation in one of the cross-legged sitting postures, followed by yoga nidra in shavasana. In this way a crucial balance between concentration and relaxation is established. While meditation involves effort, yoga nidra involves relaxation, surrender and letting go.

Yoga nidra may be specifically adapted for cancer therapy in a number of ways. In the first place, earlier life memories and experiences can be brought up from the subconscious mind so that defective maladaptations can be recognized and corrected. This appears to bolster deficient immune defence mechanisms and create physiological conditions opposed to continued growth and multiplication of anarchic tumour cells. It can be facilitated by using imagery and archetypal symbols to awaken deeply suppressed memories, experiences and fantasies.

Secondly, in yoga nidra the awakening and mobilization of prana (bioplasmic energy), and its conscious direction throughout the body, is developed. In tantra, this is a specific

therapeutic science known as prana vidya, which reveals itself in the deeper states of yoga nidra. This system forms the basis of psychic, pranic and mental healing. A bridge between yoga nidra and prana vidya is developed by conscious visualization, projection and embodiment of healing forces, energies and forms of various types. Healing may be visualized as a flow of light or energy directed within the physical body, or it may be experienced in other ways as well. It may begin as conscious imagination and become actual experience as the practice proceeds. This is called pranic healing.

Healing can also be initiated on the mental plane by creative fantasy and image visualization. Here the cancer is visualized shrinking in size; an army of white blood cells is conjured up and sent into battle against the cancer cells. The body is visualized again and again in perfect health. This is mental healing.

The final application of yoga nidra to cancer therapy is in promoting the development of the subconscious will (sankalpa shakti). In healing cancer, enormous, sustained endurance and willpower are necessary. In order to attain this, the sankalpa is practised during yoga nidra. The sankalpa is a personal resolution which is released like a seed into the subconscious mind at specific times during the practice of yoga nidra, when the experience of relaxation is deep and the subconscious mind is laid bare and accessible. Our own experiments over many years have shown beyond doubt that when this force rises into the sphere of conscious awareness, it can bring about even the impossible in life.

Cancer research studies

At present, research studies are underway to determine the precise extent to which cancer growth can be directly influenced by yogic relaxation and meditation, either alone or in conjunction with existing forms of cancer therapy such as surgery, chemotherapy and irradiation. The work of Australian psychiatrist Dr Ainslie Meares stands as the most

convincing research evidence to date. He has demonstrated clear regression of cancer of the rectum following meditation[8] and the remission of metastatic (secondary) cancers developing from a primary cancer in the lung.[9]

Significant clinical trials of yogic relaxation in cancer have also been reported by researchers in the USA. For example, Dr O.C. Simonton, a radio therapist from Texas, found in a controlled trial that a specific form of yoga nidra significantly increased the life span of cancer patients undergoing radiotherapy.[10] In Simonton's adapted visualization practice, patients imagined their own white blood cells actively attacking, overcoming and destroying the cancer cells. This seemed to bolster the patient's immune response, leading to clinical improvement in the condition, amounting to partial and even complete remission of symptoms and signs of the disease.[11]

Cancer cure is commonly assessed by medical scientists in terms of the 5 year survival rate after initial detection and therapy. As yet it is too early to make a full and accurate assessment of the exact role of meditation and yoga nidra in cancer management. Nevertheless, the results are most promising and many physicians and researchers around the world are becoming more convinced that yoga nidra, by maximizing the patient's own conscious efforts to become healthy and whole, is an effective form of cancer therapy.

Cardiovascular Diseases

In recent years, yoga nidra has emerged as an effective preventive, alleviative and curative technique in the management of degenerative and ischaemic heart disease. As an adjunct to conventional medical therapies, yoga nidra plays an important role at all the various levels of cardiac impairment, from the acute post-infarction situation in the coronary care unit to the management of cardiac insufficiency and angina pectoris, or to the rehabilitation of the former victim of myocardial infarction who is living as a 'cardiac cripple' at home.

Yoga nidra seems to operate via the same relaxation response as simple japa yoga, which has been found to relieve the fundamental cause of cardiac strain and heart attack by reducing the load of environmental and intra-psychic stress being relayed from the hypothalamus into the electrical conducting fibres of the heart via the sympathetic nervous system.[1] As a result, heart rate, blood pressure and workload on the cardiovascular muscles are reduced.[2]

The coronary personality

According to psychologists, people who succumb to degenerative heart conditions such as ischaemic heart disease, arteriosclerosis, myocardial infarction and angina pectoris often fit the same psychological pattern; they are tense, ambitious, assertive and 'successful' people. This is

the so-called 'type A personality' which appears to be at a higher risk of suffering a premature infarction or other cardiac incident.[3]

The coronary-prone person tends to be one who works compulsively, eats, smokes and drinks excessively and fails to relax or exercise adequately. He often fails to develop a positive outlet for his emotional tensions, appearing hard-hearted and inexpressive, when in fact he is highly sensitive, but 'bottles up' his innermost feelings. These find expression in bouts of frustration, rage, anger, passion or violence. This frequent build up of emotional pressure imposes an enormous strain on the heart, forcing it to labour excessively and fail prematurely at an early age.

Yoga nidra is emerging as an excellent preventive and curative procedure in cardiovascular management. It induces a more relaxed mental attitude and emotional climate, enabling practitioners to successfully withstand the stresses of daily life without mishap.

Influence upon cholesterol and lipid levels

In an important study at the University of Tel Aviv (Israel), yoga nidra significantly lowered levels of serum cholesterol in cardiac patients.[4] Other studies have reported lower circulating levels of metabolic and endocrine 'stress hormones', including lipids, lactate, aldosterone, testosterone, adrenaline and dopamine-beta-hydroxylase.[5]

Hypercholesterolemia (high blood cholesterol) is one of the most clearly recognized risk factors in coronary arterial disease and generalized arteriosclerosis. The serum of cardiac patients whose blood lipid and cholesterol levels are consistently elevated is milky, thick and turbid, in contrast to the clear, water-like serum of a healthy person who consumes a diet low in saturated (animal) fats. Continual pumping of this heavy, viscous liquid throughout the arterial tree over time imposes a great strain upon the heart muscle, much as a motor which pumps a thick, oily mixture will wear out much quicker than one which pumps only water.

In the past, medical scientists have attempted to control hypercholesterolemia by specific drug therapy (such as the cholestyramine resins) in conjunction with a low-fat diet, with limited success. Yoga nidra now offers an effective adjunct in lowering this crucial risk factor in coronary disease.

Influence of the male hormones

Fluctuations in blood pressure due to unstable emotional states and the sudden release of emotional tensions have always been considered harmful to cardiovascular health, and researchers at Texas University, San Antonio (USA) have recently found a clear link between the male hormones and cardiovascular damage.[6] They have discovered specific receptor sites for testosterone molecules within the walls of the great arteries and cardiac chambers. The excessive liberation of testosterone into the bloodstream which occurs under conditions of uncontrolled emotional behaviour is now believed to 'wound' or damage the heart and blood vessels, as the hormone molecules become affixed to these receptor sites.

Many cardiologists, including Dr Christian Barnard, the pioneering heart transplant surgeon, now recognize the value of relaxation and other yoga practices for exerting a stabilizing and harmonizing influence upon emotional behaviour and endocrine secretion patterns. They prescribe yoga nidra routinely, both for protection against premature heart attack, and for inducing deep mental, physical and cardiac relaxation in anxious and fearful coronary patients.

Minor and major heart attacks

Angina pectoris or 'mini heart attack' arises when the heart muscle is temporarily deprived of an adequate supply of blood to meet its immediate needs. These characteristic, passing chest pains of cardiac insufficiency occur under conditions of increased demand due to exercise or emotional reactions such as anger, rage or passion. These pains are relieved by physical rest and mental relaxation. In the past,

scientists considered the major cause of angina to be prior hardening of the coronary arteries which supply the heart muscle with blood. However, this factor may be of only secondary importance.

Myocardial infarction, or major heart attack is signalled by severe and unrelenting chest pain which is unrelieved by rest. It occurs when a section of cardiac muscle is completely deprived of its blood supply, which results in its death. Unlike angina, myocardial infarction has been attributed to thromboembolism, total obstruction of blood flow in one of the tiny coronary arteries due to clot formation or lodgement of an embolus or plaque.

Coronary vasospasm

In clinical practice it is often extremely difficult to distinguish between a bout of angina and a major heart attack, especially at the onset of cardiac pain. Nevertheless, it was generally accepted that two different mechanisms (arteriosclerosis and thromboembolism) were responsible.

Now, evidence from the University of Pisa (Italy), strongly indicates that a single underlying mechanism, termed coronary vasospasm, is responsible for both mini and major heart attacks.[7] In coronary vasospasm, the coronary blood vessels go into partial or complete spasm in response to emotional and psychic tension relayed from the limbic (emotional) centres of the brain down to the walls of the coronary blood vessels via the hypothalamus and the sympathetic (vasoconstrictive) nerve fibres leading to the heart. This revolutionary finding suggests strongly that factors of clot formation and arteriosclerotic hardening may be largely postmortem events, without major clinical significance in initiating heart pain. Therefore, the prime factor in heart attack and angina appears to be a particularly heavy load of emotional and psychic tension preoccupying the individual just prior to the attack.

The capacity of yogic relaxation to alter the emotional and mental climate of the cardiac patient by a combination

of relaxation and diversion of attention, and to avert incipient angina or impending infarction, has not as yet been widely recognized in medical circles, although it was clearly recorded in medical literature over 30 years ago. In 1948, Aaron Friedell, an American cardiologist, recorded that attentive nostril breathing (known in yoga nidra as anuloma viloma or psychic nostril breathing) was a most effective, immediate and drug-free means of controlling and alleviating anginal pain in cardiac patients.[8]

Only now is the significance of yoga nidra as a major therapeutic technique for ischaemic heart disease emerging. The practice induces a state of deep mental peace and emotional relaxation. It rapidly releases coronary vasospasm, alleviating anginal pain and averting potential infarction at the time of its onset.

The future role of yoga nidra in coronary care and management regimes appears to be a major one. The value of the practice of yogic relaxation in prevention of cardiovascular disease has been fairly well recognized and accepted.[9] However, its potential in the relief of acute coronary conditions is now becoming clear as well.

Hypertension (high blood pressure)

Hypertension and its complications are a leading cause of death in modern societies. In this stress-related psychosomatic disorder, widespread damage to the heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys and brain may occur after the prolonged elevation of blood pressure throughout the arterial network for months or years. An increasingly high proportion of the population are today prescribed antihypertensive drug therapy for the rest of their lives in order to prevent these complications and an early demise.

The vast majority (9 out of 10) of hypertensives are diagnosed as having essential (idiopathic) hypertension, for which no cause has been discovered by medical scientists. A high proportion of these patients do not suffer from any troublesome symptoms. To date, lifelong antihypertensive

drug therapy has been the only effective form of management. Unfortunately, the drug regimes available are by no means ideal. They cause major side effects in many patients, who choose to discontinue therapy as a result, even at the risk of dangerous consequences and a shortened life span. In this light, the emergence of yoga nidra relaxation as a safe, effective and inexpensive treatment for mild to moderate hypertension is most encouraging both for doctors and the community at large.

The effectiveness of yoga nidra in lowering the elevated blood pressure levels of hypertensive patients has been validated in numerous clinical studies.[5,10,15] The practice is now widely prescribed by doctors in several countries for patients suffering from mild to moderate hypertension.

Yoga nidra therapy adopted either alone or as an adjunct therapy, has been found to reduce systolic readings (SBP) by an average of 15–20 mm Hg, and diastolic readings (DBP) by 10 mm Hg after 3 weeks or more of daily guided practice.[10,12,13] As a result, newly diagnosed and asymptomatic hypertensives are now frequently capable of restoring their blood pressure to acceptable limits without having to resort to antihypertensive drugs and medications, whose side effects, such as sleep disturbance, depression and male impotency, can be severe and disabling enough to preclude their use. In more severe or long standing cases, yoga nidra is a useful adjunct therapy, enabling a high proportion of patients to significantly reduce or even discontinue their medications. Only a small percentage of subjects fail to respond to this practice.

Research studies

A recent study conducted at the Stanford University School of Medicine (USA) demonstrated that the drop in blood pressure induced by daily yoga nidra practice has a far reaching effect, extending throughout the day, and is not merely a transient effect coincident with the practice session.[14] Another controlled study, which was conducted at the Langley Porter

Neuropsychiatric Institute in California, found that reductions in blood pressure and anxiety levels in hypertensive patients continued for 12 months after yoga nidra training.[15]

As a result of these studies, yogic relaxation is becoming the treatment of first choice in the management of newly diagnosed mild hypertension, while in more severe or unresponsive cases, its use as an adjunct to conventional drug therapy enables dosages and side effects to be reduced.

In one of the most significant investigations thus far, a team of researchers from the Department of Cardiology, K.E.M. Hospital, Bombay, led by Dr K.K. Datey, evaluated the effects of relaxation practice on hypertension. The patients were taught the preliminary form of yoga nidra, called shavasana.

The majority of patients showed definite symptomatic improvement after 3 weeks' training. Headache, giddiness, nervousness, irritability and insomnia disappeared in almost everyone. Other symptoms became less severe, and a general increase in subjective levels of wellbeing was reported. Significant decreases in blood pressure and/or drug dosages were obtained in 52% of patients. The researchers concluded that 'this therapy opens a new avenue in the management of hypertension'. This landmark study is reproduced in full in the appendix following this chapter.

Appendices

Stress and Heart Disease

*Hon. Brig. K.K. Datey and S.S. Bhagat**

Man is subjected to far greater stress and strain today than at any time in history. Technological and economic advancement has created a pace and lifestyle with which the individual cannot keep pace. Man is the victim of the monster he has created for himself, the monster of progress. Mental stress is the penalty he pays for becoming 'civilized'. It is true that some people are more prone to suffer from the effect of stress, but no one is immune to it. Only the threshold varies. Stress affects different parts of the body and can lead to various diseases.

In recent years, the incidence of coronary heart disease and hypertension has gone up. Though high blood pressure is prevalent throughout the world, very little is known about its cause. About 10 percent of high blood pressure cases are secondary to diseases of the kidney, aorta, endocrine glands, etc. These are cases of secondary hypertension. In the other 90 percent no cause for high blood pressure can be detected. In these cases the aetiology is unknown, and therefore the condition is labelled as essential, or idiopathic, hypertension.

It has been seen that urban populations have higher blood pressure levels than the rural populations.[1, 2, 9] This is probably due to the fact that people in the urban areas are

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under much more stress than those in the rural areas. The higher standard of living, higher education, higher incomes and more skilled occupations are associated with higher levels of blood pressure. There is also more stress in certain jobs. Executives, professionals and people working on jobs with deadlines are under stress most of the time. It has been noted by Russek and Zohman,[8] in a study of coronary patients and an equal number of controls, that job stresses accounted for greater differences between the groups than other risk factors like diet, heredity, obesity, smoking or exercise.

Most patients of hypertension are treated by drugs which have to be continued for life. Drawbacks of drug therapy are the cost of drugs and their side effects. Hence other measures which would help in lowering blood pressure without drugs should be welcome. This is where biofeedback, yoga and other relaxation techniques play an important part.

This study was undertaken to find out the effect of relaxation techniques, biofeedback training and shavasana (a yogic exercise), in patients suffering from hypertension.

Material and methods

A total of 27 patients of hypertension were taken up for biofeedback training and 86 for shavasana.

Biofeedback groups

This group consisted of 27 patients, 16 males and 11 females. Their ages ranged from 39 to 78 years (average 55). They were known to be hypertensive for at least one year and in some cases as long as 20 years (average 6.8 years). The aetiology of hypertension was essential in 25 and renal in 2. All except 2 were taking antihypertensive drugs but their blood pressure was not controlled adequately. Twenty hypertensive controls, 9 males and 11 females, were matched from an age and sex register as closely as possible to the treated group. In this group 18 patients had essential and 2 renal hypertension. The average blood pressure in both groups of patients is shown in Table 1.

Table I
Average blood pressure in treated and control groups

	Group	Treated	Control
	Average age	55	57
Blood pressure	Original systolic and diastolic	168/105	170/108
Blood pressure	Pretrial systolic and diastolic	157/98	166/100
Blood pressure	Mean original	126	128
Blood pressure	Mean pretrial	118	122

The original pressure is the one recorded when the subject was first detected to be hypertensive. The pretrial baseline blood pressure is an average of 18 readings taken over 3 separate days after half an hour's rest on each day. Blood pressure was taken in the standing, sitting and supine positions and their average taken as the final reading. Similar criteria applied to the control group.

Symptoms of these patients varied. In order of their frequency they were tiredness, headache, dyspnea on exertion, dizziness, irritability, chest pain with or without angina, palpitation, nervousness and depression. Headache and tiredness were very common and were present in 70% and 65% of the patients respectively. The symptoms in the treated and control groups were comparable.

Technique

All patients were appropriately motivated to get their maximum cooperation. They were seen individually three times a week for a half an hour session for an average of 9

weeks. Their blood pressures were recorded in the standing, sitting and supine positions at the beginning and again at the end of each session. An ordinary mercury sphygmomanometer was used. This was checked frequently for accuracy. All diastolic pressures were taken in the 5th phase. These patients were given training in relaxation and biofeedback methods. The patients in the control group also attended 3 times a week for 9 weeks. Their blood pressure was taken on arrival and again after half an hour's rest on a couch. They were neither instructed in relaxation nor told of their blood pressure levels and they were not connected to any biofeedback instruments.

The training sessions were carried out in a room at a comfortable temperature. External noise was kept to a minimum but no attempts were made to make the room soundproof. No meals were taken for one hour beforehand. Tight clothes and glasses were removed.

During the training session the patient lay on an examination couch fully relaxed. The eyes were kept closed. The patient was at first asked to breathe slowly and rhythmically, allowing the rhythm to take its effortless and natural pace.

During the whole session, the patient was connected to a biofeedback apparatus depicting galvanic skin resistance (GSR) by means of a continuous sound signal. Changes in skin resistance provide a fairly reliable measure of the degree of relaxation. The cause of changes in skin resistance is not completely known, but sweat gland activity, which is proportional to the activity of the sympathetic nervous system, is one of the factors concerned. As relaxation progresses the skin resistance increases and a drop occurs in the pitch of the audio signal. Thus a correct response is immediately reinforced, encouraging the patient to continue efforts in the right direction.

At the end of a session, each patient was told his blood pressure level before and after the session. Patients were encouraged to practise relaxation at home twice a day. The

dosage of drugs was adjusted according to the response and the patient actively participated in dosage adjustment.

Shavasana group

This group consisted of 68 male patients and 18 females. Their ages varied from 22 to 64 years with an average of 40 years. Their original systolic blood pressure ranged from 160–270 mm Hg and diastolic from 90–145 mm Hg. The average blood pressure was 186/115 mm Hg. The etiology of hypertension was essential in 62, renal in 19 and arteriosclerotic in 5. The total number of patients in the shavasana group was 86. These patients were divided into three groups as shown in Table 2.

Group 1 consisted of 15 patients of hypertension. This group had not received any antihypertensive drugs. They were given placebo tablets for 1 month before teaching them shavasana.

Group 2 consisted of 45 patients. These patients were on antihypertensive drugs for at least 2 years and their blood pressure was adequately controlled.

Table 2
Number of patients; etiology of hypertension

Group	Essential	Renal	Arterio-sclerotic	Total
1. No drugs	8	4	3	15
2. BP adequately controlled with drugs	36	7	2	45
3. BP inadequately controlled in spite of drugs	18	8	–	26
Total	62	19	5	86

Group 3 consisted of 26 patients. These patients were on antihypertensive drugs but their blood pressure was not adequately controlled.

The blood pressure of patients not receiving antihypertensive drugs was recorded in the recumbent and upright positions and there was no postural hypotension. However, in those on antihypertensive drugs, it was recorded in three positions: recumbent, sitting and upright. The mean blood pressure was calculated as the diastolic blood pressure plus one third the pulse pressure. The average mean blood pressure in the recumbent position in group 1 and the average of the mean blood pressures in all the three positions of groups 2 and 3 are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Average mean blood pressure of the 3 shavasana groups

Group	Mean blood pressure (original) before any therapy* (mm Hg)	Initial mean blood pressure# with placebo or drugs	
1	136	Placebo	134
2	137	Drugs	102
3	147	Drugs	120

*BP recorded when the subject was first detected to be hypertensive.
#BP recorded after giving drugs or placebo but before starting shavasana.

The symptoms in the patients were giddiness, headache, palpitation, breathlessness, angina, irritability, insomnia, nervousness and exhaustion. All the investigations were carried out in these patients before the commencement of shavasana, and at regular intervals thereafter. Electromyogram of the frontalis muscle was recorded before as well as during the exercise in some patients to confirm muscular relaxation during the exercise itself. These investigations were repeated periodically.

Patients were instructed to attend the Cardiac Centre every day to learn the exercise correctly, then they were advised to attend weekly to check their blood pressure and the correct technique of the exercise.

Technique of yogic exercise (shavasana)

The patient was allowed a light breakfast an hour before the exercise. He wore light and loose clothes while performing the exercise, which was performed as follows:

The patient lies in the supine position, lower limbs 30 degrees apart and the upper limbs making an angle of 15 degrees with the trunk, with the forearms in the midprone position and fingers semiflexed. The eyes are closed with eyelids drooping. The patient is taught slow, rhythmic diaphragmatic breathing with a short pause after each inspiration and a longer one at the end of each expiration. After establishing this rhythm, he is asked to attend to the sensation at the nostrils, the coolness of the inspired air and the warmth of the expired air. This procedure helps to keep the patient inwardly alert and to forget his usual thoughts, thus becoming less conscious of the external environment, thereby attaining relaxation. The patient is asked to relax the muscles so that he is able to feel the heaviness of different parts of the body. This is achieved automatically once the patient learns the exercise.

The exercise is performed for 30 minutes. An experienced supervisor checks that there is no movement of any part of the body, except rhythmic abdominal movements. Physical relaxation is checked from time to time by lifting the extremities and letting them go, to observe their flaccidity. Most of the patients learn the exercise correctly in about 3 weeks. The pulse, blood pressure and respiration are recorded before and after the exercise. After patients learn the exercise correctly, the respiratory rate is usually between 4–10 per minute.

The dosage of drugs in patients of groups 2 and 3 was adjusted according to the response. The percentage of

reduction of drugs was calculated in each case from the original drug requirement before starting shavasana.

Results

Subjective improvement was seen in the majority of patients in both the groups. Symptoms like headache, giddiness, nervousness, irritability and insomnia disappeared in most patients and there was a sense of wellbeing.

Biofeedback group

There was a significant reduction in blood pressure in the treated group as compared to the control group. A total of 21 patients out of 27 showed a significant reduction in blood pressure. The average mean blood pressure had been reduced from 118 to 103 mm Hg. After 4 months follow-up it was 107 mm Hg. In about 50% of patients the drug requirement was reduced from 33 to 100% (average 41%). There was no significant change in blood pressure of patients in the control group.

Shavasana group

A fall of blood pressure was noted in all the three groups. In patients of group 1 the average mean blood pressure came down from 134 to 107 mm Hg (a fall of 27 mm Hg). The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Objective improvement in 15 patients without drugs

Mean blood pressure	Average mm Hg
Initial mean	134
After shavasana	107*
Reduction	27

*p less than 0.05

In group 2 the fall in blood pressure was from 102 to 100 mm Hg but the drug requirement was reduced to 32% of the original in 27 patients (60%). In group 3 the average blood pressure dropped from 120 to 110 mm Hg and the drug requirement was reduced to 29% of the original in 10 patients (38%). These results are shown in Table 5.

Patients who did not respond were mostly those who were irregular in attendance.

Table 5

Objective improvement in groups 2 & 3

(71 patients on drugs)

Group & no. of patients	Average initial mean blood pressure	Average mean blood pressure after shavasana	Drug requirement
II. (45)	102 mm Hg	100	32% in 27 (60%)*
III. (26)	120 mm Hg	110	29% in 10 (38%)

*p less than 0.05

From the above results it is clear that relaxation techniques like biofeedback training and shavasana help in reduction of blood pressure in hypertensive patients.

Discussion

The hypothalamus is a control station of the autonomic nervous system and maintains homeostasis. The resulting hemodynamic changes in essential hypertension are similar to those occurring in a normotensive person during emotional stress.[3] These changes can also be produced by direct electrical stimulation of motor centres and regions of the hypothalamus. It appears that repeated hypothalamic stimulation leads to sustained high blood pressure. Several

papers in the literature have indicated that psychological stress plays an important part in the pathogenesis of hypertension.[4-7]

Whatever the aetiology of hypertension, there is, pari passu, a rise in the level at which the homeostatic mechanisms operate and these react against both rise and fall of blood pressure. Thus the regulatory mechanism in the hypothalamus is probably set at a higher level in hypertension, and if it can be reset at the normal level, the hypertension may be controlled.

Normally the cerebral cortex receives a wide variety of messages from the environment leading to an emotional and mental response. These messages are passed on to the limbic areas leading to hypothalamic and pituitary responses which are reflected as physiological responses, e.g. on getting a telephone call a person may start sweating, having palpitations or a rise in blood pressure.

Yoga training leads to heightened cortical arousability and reduced limbic arousability at the same time, which expresses itself in human personality and subjective experience as heightened perceptual awareness and simultaneously reduced emotional reaction. Thus the regulatory mechanism in the hypothalamus is set at normal or near normal level. This helps in reducing high blood pressure. With biofeedback training, the physiological changes are perceived from moment to moment by means of instruments. This motivates the persons to modify these changes, resulting in modified hypothalamic and pituitary responses. Thus the two techniques achieve similar results though they are mediated through different neurophysiological pathways.

Summary

Man is subjected to more stress and strain in this age than ever before. Stress plays an important part in the pathogenesis of essential hypertension. Twenty-seven patients of hypertension were given biofeedback training. Galvanic skin

resistance (GSR) gave an indication of relaxation. At the end of the trial subjective improvement was noted in most of the patients. Mean BP was reduced from 118 to 103 mm Hg and drug requirement to 41%. Similar results were seen with biofeedback temperature regulation.

Eighty-six patients of hypertension were taught shavasana, a yogic exercise. Patients were divided into three groups. Group 1 consisted of patients who were not taking any antihypertensive drugs. Group 2 comprised patients whose blood pressure was adequately controlled with drugs and group 3 consisted of patients whose blood pressure was not adequately controlled in spite of drugs. After practising shavasana, at the end of 3 months a majority of patients reported a general feeling of wellbeing and marked improvement in symptoms like headache, insomnia, nervousness, etc. In group 1 there was reduction of mean BP from 134 to 107 mm Hg. In group 2 the drug requirement was reduced to 32%. In group 3 mean BP was reduced from 120 to 110 mm Hg and drug requirement to 29%.

The mechanism of reduction of blood pressure is discussed.

Thus biofeedback training and/or shavasana are clearly an important addition to the existing antihypertensive armamentaria.

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Yoga Nidra and Biofeedback

This is a preliminary report on the program of Stress Reduction Courses conducted at Satyananda Ashram, Perth, Australia, in 1980–81, using yogic techniques facilitated by the use of biofeedback. The basis of the courses evolved around training in yoga nidra, although the techniques of asana, pranayama and meditation were included where necessary. Each course was conducted over a 10 week period for 2 hours per week, with groups of 12 to 14 adults, both male and female. The aim was to develop the ability to relax deeply and stimulate personal growth through the practice of yoga, with emphasis on the importance of sustained practice. Biofeedback was an excellent method of showing the participants how they were progressing over the 10 week training period. This gave positive reinforcement to the effectiveness of the yoga nidra practice.

The courses revealed that although yoga nidra is a proficient method of attaining deep relaxation, stress problems do not always originate from overarousal and an inability to relax. Other yoga techniques were found useful in harmonizing imbalances before introducing deep relaxation.

Equipment

The main piece of biofeedback equipment used was an electrical skin resistance (ESR) meter, which is more accurate than the more commonly used GSR meter. It measures the

value of skin resistance in the palm of the hand, which varies in direct proportion to changes in the autonomic nervous system. The meter shows two scales. One scale is graduated up to 2 M-ohms. This measurement indicates the basal skin resistance (BSR), which is the actual value of skin resistance at that time. Generally speaking, a low BSR indicates an activated or aroused state, and a high BSR indicates a state of relaxation, withdrawal or underarousal.

With the other scale, the needle of the meter is set in the centre of the scale, from which it can swing to the right or left and measure the percentage change in response to the autonomic nervous system. Its movement to the right indicates arousal, which is mainly associated with activation of the sympathetic nervous system in response to some challenge or stress. Movement of the needle to the left indicates the degree of relaxation which has been attained, and this is mainly associated with activation of the parasympathetic nervous system.

By using these two scales, in conjunction with a number of tests of the subject's ability to respond to a stimulus, or to relax, a wide range of conclusions about the degree of control the subject has over his autonomic nervous responses can be drawn.

Format

At the beginning of each course the participants underwent the following 6 basic tests using the ESR meter. Their autonomic responses were recorded, and from these, a multidimensional profile of their personal psychophysiological responses to stress was obtained. This enabled the most suitable practices to be prescribed on an individual basis.

1. Measurement of BSR in the 'normal' waking state. This indicated whether the subject was actually highly tense or excessively withdrawn when in a state he considered to be normal for him.
2. Measurement of percentage change in skin resistance while the participants conducted their own untrained

form of relaxation over a 10 minute period. The results were recorded on a graph with a horizontal time axis and a vertical axis measuring percentage change in skin resistance. For example, a good relaxation response would be indicated on the ESR meter by a smooth, steady swing of the needle to the left, and the graph would show as a smooth curve towards the deep relaxation levels. A wide range of results was often obtained. For example, a person who 'tries too hard' to relax could, in fact, become aroused, indicated by movement of the needle to the right, instead of the left. In others, relaxation levels were not as deep as could be attained, or fluctuated in distinct patterns, and so on.

3. Measurement of the BSR after the 10 minute relaxation in test 2. This indicated whether the subject was capable of deep relaxation, or whether arousal, instead of relaxation, was occurring. Subjects were then allowed to return to their 'normal' waking state, and the needle reset at the centre of the scale.
4. Response to challenge. This consisted of providing some form of external stimulus such as a loud sound or a pin prick, and the movement of the needle away from the centre of the scale was then noted. The stimulus acts as a challenge to the nervous system, so this test indicates how a person habitually responds to challenge or stress. A desirable response would be indicated by a steady movement of the needle to the right. Remember that it is normal for a person to respond to stress. Problems begin when we cannot return to our normal state or relax again afterwards. This leads to the next test.
5. Measurement of the time taken for the needle to return to the centre after the stimulus. For a balanced person this takes 1–2 minutes but a tense person usually finds it difficult to relax again, and the needle may stay well over to the right for a longer period, indicating that the sympathetic arm of the autonomic nervous system is dominating.

6. Finally, the group was taken through a simple yoga nidra practice in which individual relaxation levels were plotted on time versus percentage change axes. This invariably showed the participants that much deeper levels of relaxation could be obtained through the practice of yoga nidra in comparison with their prior ideal of maximum relaxation.

Results

As the programs progressed, it became evident that one of five distinct patterns of responses in the autonomic nervous system invariably appeared. Accordingly, a suitable program of yogic practices was made available to balance the specific tendencies reflected in each response pattern. These five types and their corresponding practices are listed below:

Overarousal: These subjects would record a low initial BSR. Tests 4 and 5 showed an overreaction to stress or stimulus, and an inability to relax afterwards. Characteristically, this type of person is constantly active, aggressive, competitive and ambitious. High levels of anxiety and worry are characteristic of these individuals, and they find it very difficult to 'let go'. Here the autonomic nervous system is imbalanced in the direction of sympathetic dominance. This is a reflection of a highly externalized lifestyle, in which there is excessive identification and attachment for the transitory events of life. This personality type is especially prone to cardiovascular disease, and practices such as yoga nidra, nadi shodhana, ujjayi and pawanmuktasana were most effective in restoring a degree of nervous balance in such individuals.

Fixed: The fixed type of personality was indicated by little or no movement of the ESR needle during any of tests 2–6. This type would be unable to respond fully to external situations, nor could they relax and enjoy any of the inner experiences of the mind. They usually believe that 'I'm okay', whereas their life is actually dull, colourless and uninspired. They have only arranged to avoid living by

building an insulating shell around themselves as protection against outside influences as well as their own thoughts and feelings. The tests revealed that this type responds to neither stimulation nor relaxation.

Therefore, it was necessary to begin by utilizing other yoga practices such as shakti bandhas, trikonasana, surya namaskara, bhastrika, bandhas, Om chanting, kirtan and, in more drastic cases, shankhaprakshalana, which has powerful psychological as well as physiological effects. Once the initial blockages had been overcome, yoga nidra and simple meditation techniques could be successfully introduced. A certain degree of control over the autonomic functions is necessary before deep relaxation can be induced, otherwise there will be no response to the technique.

Fluctuating: This type of person was characterized by erratic movements of the needle of the ESR meter during all tests. These were people who were characteristically temperamental, excitable and moody. For example, such a person might be highly enthusiastic about a project initially, only to become depressed later on when some difficulty is encountered. Having no internal stability, this type is often forced to depend excessively on others. Response to yoga nidra was usually most favourable, and was potentiated by a yoga program of static major asanas, balancing postures, abdominal breathing, nadi shodhana (with emphasis on breathing ratios and kumbhaka), japa and trataka.

Underarousal: The underaroused person presents a very high BSR, weak response to challenge (test 4), and rapid withdrawal (test 5), often returning to a point below the initial value from which he started. This personality is basically introverted and withdrawn. These subjects tend to live within their own thoughts, failing to interact efficiently and meaningfully with the external world. Here the parasympathetic nervous system (ida nadi) is predominant. This group can undoubtedly relax; however, they seek a cocoon-like, introverted state, failing to respond to life's challenges and opportunities alike.

For this fourth type of personality, yoga nidra is not applicable as the practitioner will have great difficulty emerging from the increased state of withdrawal induced by the practice. The aim of yoga is to gain control over the autonomic nervous system, which means not only mastery over the capacity to relax, but also the ability to become aroused as well. Yoga nidra practices can only be used by such individuals once they have gained the ability to arouse themselves from their withdrawn state. To facilitate this, their practice program included surya namaskara, dynamic asanas, shakti bandhas, bhastrika pranayama, agnisara kriya and kunjal kriya.

Balanced: The healthy, balanced personality type is indicated by a medium range BSR in test 1, with a smooth relaxation curve to a high BSR in tests 2 and 3. Tests 4 and 5 indicate a normal response to challenge with a steady relaxation back to normal levels within a few minutes. After initial training, this group can practise yoga nidra and any of the yoga techniques with benefit.

Discussion

Originally the courses were intended for the typical overaroused type of person (group 1), but it soon became apparent, as the other four autonomic behaviour patterns emerged, that people who consider themselves to be living under stress do not belong only to this single category. It was found that each group would evolve along quite different lines, with varying needs and requirements emerging. For example, during one course conducted especially for members of a particular religious group, it was found that most of the participants belonged to the second or 'fixed' type of behaviour pattern. So the techniques used with this group were considerably modified from what was more generally adopted in the other course. It was also interesting that the Stress Management Courses attracted quite a different type of person to those who would normally enrol in a yoga class, but their attitude to yoga would become

much more positive once it was shown through the biofeedback results that it actually worked, and had a sound empirical basis.

'Letting go' process

"*Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah*" (sutra 1), Patanjali's classic response to the question 'What is yoga?' states that yoga is a process of blocking the patterns of consciousness. In this context blocking does not mean suppression, but an ability to 'let go' and flow with the various patterns of consciousness. This is precisely the capacity acquired through yoga nidra training. As we have seen in the preceding discussion of our own research, the person who can let go of his normal state in response to stress and then relinquish the aroused state once the stressful situation is over; let go of his normal waking state in order to relax deeply, then again emerge from that relaxed state when the situation demands, is the one who possesses a psychophysiological maturity. He can truly cope with all life's situations with awareness, control the nervous system and its responses and live a balanced, happy and fruitful life. This is the aim and experience of yoga.

Each of the other four types defined on the ESR tests illustrate some form of mental obstruction to this 'letting go' process, preventing a balanced functioning of the autonomic nervous system, hence an imbalance between ida and pingala, between mental energies (manas shakti) and vital energies (prana shakti). In yogic physiology we know that when ida and pingala are balanced, sushumna nadi (spiritual energy) flows and the state of meditation exists, while in yoga therapy it is imbalance between these two forces which is the root cause of mental imbalance and psychosomatic disease.

The beauty of the experiments conducted in the Stress Reduction Program lies in the fact that they clearly illustrate Swami Satyananda's statement that all the yogic practices, without exception, are orientated towards producing the

state of meditation in daily life by balancing ida and pingala, thus gaining control over the functioning of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. It also shows that irrespective of the precise problem, there is always a range of yogic techniques to counteract it and move the system towards balance. Similarly, we must be well aware that certain practices can be unsuitable in specific states of imbalance. Yogic techniques are like powerful medicines, and should not be prescribed without experience.

Although five distinct types of psychophysiological behaviours have been described, there is actually no clearcut and distinct demarcation between each one. For example, some people begin to exhibit a normal relaxation response, only to become 'stuck' at a certain point, or sometimes even aroused, once a certain level of relaxation is attained. The first situation suggests that there is a blockage to the relaxation process at a certain subconscious level, while the second situation indicates that this blockage is actually causing fear or distress such as may occur when a repressed traumatic experience which has not been fully resolved is confronted. These obstructions often recur for the same person at the same stage of yoga nidra, which helps in assisting the person to recognize and assess the problem, and then 'let it go'.

Finding one's own level

It is also important that each person is considered individually, as we all have different methods and capacities for coping with stress, and some people can function normally under greater stress levels than others. Stress can be simply defined by the formula:

$$\textbf{Stress} = \frac{\text{number of stressful situations}}{\text{ability to cope}}$$

Hence, in order to reduce stress we can either reduce the number of stressful situations by changing our liefestyle, or increase our ability to cope through techniques such as

yoga, and often an element of each is necessary. Each individual lives under varying levels of stress according to his external situation and his ability to cope. Hence, yoga nidra training should not emphasize that everyone should produce exactly the same results on the biofeedback equipment. It is sufficient that each trainee learns to induce positive changes in the right direction. From there, he will evolve and find his own level through daily practice.

Consolidating the changes in life

Throughout this program, sankalpa therapy was encouraged in order to help the subjects to consolidate the changes in their lives. This included consideration of psychological attitudes, coping mechanisms, yamas and niyamas, all of which can help people live more fully yet less stressfully. It involved talks, discussions and encounter-type situations which enabled each participant to see where his or her wrong attitudes were creating difficulties in relaxation. As this was done only at an intellectual, conscious level, the sankalpa in yoga nidra then became a powerful medium for transferring the desired changes into the deeper subconscious levels of the mind.

A fair degree of skill was necessary in the management of the courses in order to prevent overobsession with the biofeedback equipment, and competitiveness in gaining the 'right' results rather than each individual naturally finding his own level. But generally it was observed that the biofeedback results only gave positive reinforcement to the idea of the need for change, and the effectiveness of yoga nidra and the other yoga techniques.

Further possibilities

Although this study offers only a small glimpse into a vast field, the combination of yoga nidra and biofeedback can be an important breakthrough for those who have not developed sufficient self-awareness to be able to assess their inner actions and reactions.

The courses mainly concentrated on stress reduction, but they could easily be developed further to lead people into meditation and unlock the creativity of the mind. This would involve the use of an EEG (electroencephalograph) to record the brainwave patterns during progressive yogic practices. Although this more complex device was available during the courses, it was found that the ESR meter alone was sufficient to take people a long way into self-awareness.

Relaxation is a necessary prerequisite to meditation. Once this is mastered, then meditation becomes a much more meaningful experience. From here the possibilities can only expand.

Pictures of the Brain's Activity During Yoga Nidra

Robert Nilsson

Researchers Dr Hans Lou and Dr. Troels Kjaer from the Kennedy Institute in Copenhagen, Denmark have for the first time succeeded in taking pictures of the brain during a meditative deep relaxation, (yoga nidra) with as short an exposure time as one minute per photograph.

The pictures were taken at the State University Hospital in Copenhagen using one of the most advanced medical research instruments, the PET scanner (Positron Emission Tomography). Tomography is derived from the Greek word *tomos*, meaning section.

In the PET scanner, numerous 4.25mm thick sections of the brain are registered, giving a three dimensional picture of the brain's activity by measuring the flow of blood through the different parts of the brain. This is achieved by injecting water with a weak radioactive trace into the blood stream. When one part of the brain is particularly active, the flow of blood increases, and by comparing several pictures it is possible to observe where the brain's activity rises under certain conditions.

When the researchers contacted us, they said they wanted to measure awareness! At the Scandinavian Yoga and Meditation School we have previously collaborated in a number of different yogic research projects, but to measure consciousness and how the brain functions with conscious control of awareness, was, however, quite new for us.

We proposed and agreed to limit the experiment to 7 subjects who regularly practised kriya yoga. This is a meditation that has given very distinct results in other measurements. The subjects practised kriya yoga in the morning, before going to the hospital for their brain scans. As, at present, it is only possible to lie down in a PET scanner, a person sitting in a meditation pose cannot be measured. We therefore agreed with the researchers to measure people practising yoga nidra from a tape or CD guided by Swami Janakananda. This ensured that all those who were measured did exactly the same practice.

The measurements

The subjects lay one at a time in the PET scanner for one and a half hours. During that period, each person lay completely still in the same position.

It took just one minute to gather the data of the brain scan, but there also had to be an interval of ten minutes before the next picture could be taken. Eight pictures were produced from the scanned material. The pictures show which areas were active before (one picture), during (four pictures) and after yoga nidra (three pictures).

The person lying in the PET scanner was not disturbed by the photography, but practised the deep yoga nidra without a pause from start to finish. At the same time the brain's activity was measured by an electroencephalograph (EEG) during the entire procedure. The EEG curve showed, as expected, that the subjects were in a meditative state during the entire yoga nidra.

Afterwards, their brain pictures were made to the same size, as it was important that the different areas of the brain were precisely the same size and in the same location (Talairach space). The data from the pictures was compared and the mean values calculated.

Pictures were taken during a normal waking state with closed eyes, as well as pictures of four different practices during yoga nidra. By comparing this data and eliminating

the normal activity from the activity during yoga nidra, it was possible to see in which areas of the brain the activity had increased. In order to discover what was characteristic of the normal state, in comparison to the state during yoga nidra, the values of the pictures taken before and after yoga nidra were combined, and then the values of the four pictures taken during yoga nidra were subtracted.

Then the researchers wanted to see the difference between the various sections of yoga nidra. While the first picture was being taken, the subject was experiencing his/her body, in particular the various parts of the face. The next photograph was taken during the experience of happiness and contentment, the third during the experience of a summer day in the countryside and the fourth at the end of yoga nidra, during the experience of 'who am I?'.

After preparing the sampled data, two different pictures emerged. They showed that the more 'concrete' tasks such as the experience of the body and the landscape, activated more or less the same regions in the brain (fig. 4); while the more 'abstract' tasks, such as *happiness* and *who am I*, activated other regions (fig. 3).

The results

The measurements of the brain's activity (EEG) during yoga nidra indicated that the subjects were in a deeply relaxed state the whole time, similar to that of sleep. The theta activity rose significantly on all the twenty-one electrodes (11%p). The reduction of the alpha activity (2% NS) was insignificant; this shows that this meditative state is altogether different from that of the sleeping state and comprises conscious awareness. Furthermore, the state was constant and evenly distributed over the entire brain for the forty-five minutes the relaxation lasted.

When the state prior to and following yoga nidra – where one just lies and rests – was compared with the state during yoga nidra, the measurements showed a significant difference between the two states. This confirms the importance of

using a technique if one wants to achieve results such as those described in this article.

The PET scanner's pictures show that the subjects were not in a drowsy or unconscious state during the relaxation, which is something one would expect of a person in such a deep state. The subjects remained in considerable control of what was happening. It is clearly visible how specific regions of the brain were activated sequentially, according to where the subject was in yoga nidra. What happens in the brain during yoga nidra or where it happens is not a matter of chance.

There was a surprisingly significant similarity between the pictures of the seven yoga teachers who were measured. Something that may seem paradoxical to those who have no experience of meditation, is perhaps the fact that these clear results, which reveal a high degree of concentration are brought about entirely without effort.

In yoga nidra, the various states that are experienced are not forced. On the contrary, the EEG shows that the subject is completely relaxed from start to finish. By just listening to the instructions and experiencing clearly what happens, like a child listening to a fairy tale, he is active and participating, but without any effort.

The results confirm the experience of the yogi: concentration is a spontaneous state, which comes of its own accord when a method is used that removes whatever is hindering it. And as the doctors said: "We had not expected the meditators to be able to control their consciousness to such an extent... It proves that the 1.5kg (brain mass) with the unknown content can control its own activity in an astonishingly precise manner. From a wholistic point of view, it indicates that the body and soul act in unity".

Conclusion

Consciousness during yoga nidra is in a very deep and stable state. At the same time the measurements show, for the first time, that one can be completely aware in such a

deep state – that one can consciously experience and control the brain's activity simultaneously. This confirms that meditation is a fourth major state, equal to dreaming, sleeping and wakefullness. The results can therefore be said to be very important news within this field of research!

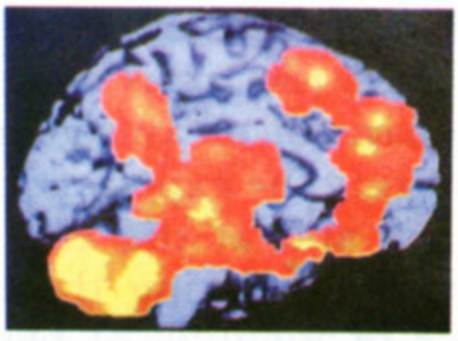
Why it is interesting

(*A comment by psychologist Ronny Ohrnell*)

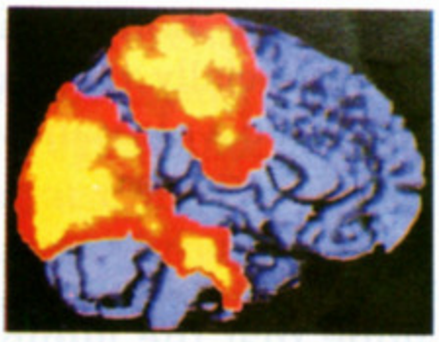
The EEG measurements have previously only been one dimensional – skin resistance, blood pressure etc. – and have only shown that the state changes. That means that a perpendicular dimension has been described, for example, a deepening of the state. On the other hand, it has not been possible to measure or substantiate the content of that altered state. With this latest research, a horizontal dimension is added to the measurements of the altered state of consciousness, giving it life. What occurs on the deeper levels of consciousness can now be measured and shown.

This research shows that some sensory centres in the brain are active, but that activity is interr al. From our own experience we know that internal experiences are more changeable than those we perceive through our senses. Our thoughts, our imagination and our dreams continuously take on new forms. When we allow these centres to be involved with the inner experiences, where then do the impulses come from when we are not aware of anything from outside? From deeper planes? From the surroundings, after all? Or are they formed in the sight and touch centres? Does the language centre have the same function on the deeper, inner plane? Or does it have other functions?

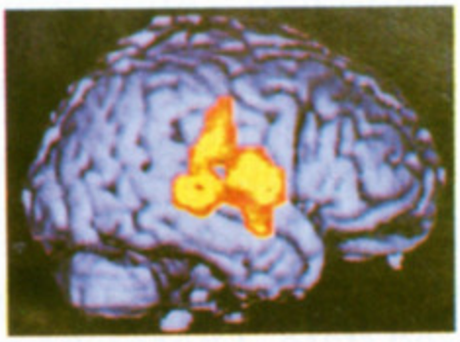
There is a 'new' world to be discovered here, by taking measurements and combining them with the account the meditator gives of what he or she experiences. The research also confirms a lot of previous descriptions from people's experiences of relaxation and meditation, and shows that what is experienced within, is another reality to that of the external senses, which to a degree obey different laws.



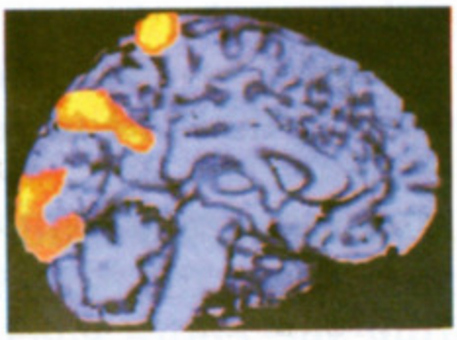
1. **Rest**: This picture is based on the photographs taken prior to and following yoga nidra. It illustrates the state closest to normal waking consciousness, though without being in a tired or stressed state. Those who use yoga nidra remark that not only do they benefit from the deep relaxation while doing it, but that it also has a definite beneficial effect on the rest of their day. In this picture it is the front of the brain which is active and responsible for the superior control. One of its capacities is to ensure that we can function in a complex society, as it 'processes' the signals from the deeper emotional and instinctive regions of the brain. The brain stem and cerebellum are also active, indicating that one is 'ready for action'.



2. **Meditation/yoga nidra**: This picture shows the general state during the entire yoga nidra. The visual centre at the back of the head and the centre for tactile sense (sense of touch and direction) at the top of the head are active and are in contact with the limbic system. This implies an increased ability to visualize and, more importantly, that there is better contact with emotions. Some of the subjects also had distinct activity in the centre for long term memory, which is consistent with accounts from people who meditate, that very lucid memories can appear during or after a meditation. It must, however, be emphasized that the subjects' experience and their regular use of kriya yoga possibly intensifies the effects of yoga nidra.



3. **During 'abstract' experiences**: This picture is created on the basis of measurements taken during the experience of happiness and at the end of the relaxation during the experience of identity, of being centred. During these 'abstract experiences' in yoga nidra, the centre for speech and language was especially active. It must be said, however, that the pictures only show the areas where the most activity occurs and not the general activity in the whole brain as shown in picture 2.



4. **During 'concrete' experiences**: It was primarily the visual and tactile centres which were active as the subjects went through the body's different parts (especially the face) and experienced a pleasant summer day in the country.

Note: When looking at these pictures (1, 2 & 4) one must imagine that the luminous areas are within the brain, and not only on the surface of the cerebral cortex. In picture number three, on the other hand, the activity is in the cortex. All active areas were basically the same, that is symmetrical, in both brain halves.

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Yoga Nidra – Altered State of Consciousness

Swami Mangalteertham (Dr A.K. Ghosh)

Yoga nidra is a systematic method of inducing complete mental, emotional and physical relaxation. It is usually performed in shavasana (supine with the arms to the sides and palms upwards) but in a therapeutic role in an institutional setting, it may be performed seated.

The feature of systematic rotation of awareness through the different parts of the body originates from the tantric practice of nyasa. In nyasa, a seated yogi would, in ritual fashion, place or feel specific mantras at different parts of the body. Instructions are normally given throughout by a yoga teacher or tape recording. With experience the subject can give the instructions to him or herself.

Chitta vrittis and their modifications

According to yogic thought everything we express and experience in day to day life manifests in the form of buddhi (intellect), smriti (memory), bhaya (insecurity or fear) and bhavana (the positive emotion), which are different manifestations of chetana tattwa.

The term chitta represents the total area of human consciousness, and the waves or patterns of consciousness are known as vrittis. Just as when we throw a pebble into a clear, deep, blue lake dozens of concentric ripples or waves are produced, when an experience flashes through the mind it produces waves. Therefore, chitta means the aspect which

observes, which sees, which is consciously active in the world. Chitta does not mean the mind because the vrittis are the mind. Fear, anxiety, love, hatred etc. all produce specific types of wave patterns and create specific chitta vrittis. In rajá yoga these waves or vrittis are classified into five basic patterns: (i) right knowledge, (ii) wrong knowledge, (iii) imagination, (iv) sleep, and (v) memory.

These chitta vrittis percolate into the brain causing a change in its electrical potential, specifically in the cerebral cortex, and form a brain wave pattern.

EEG

By placing electrodes on the scalp and leading via suitable amplifiers to a cathode ray oscillograph, or to an ink-writing device, a record is obtained of the electrical activity of the cerebrum. The human brain is in a constant state of electrical activity which can be read as brain waves by a machine called an EEG. (electroencephalograph).

In a normal subject who refrains from mental activity and keeps his eyes closed, the usual pattern of electrical activity consists of a sequence of waves which recur at a frequency of 8–12 Hz. These alpha waves occur in bursts or spindles, gradually building up and then receding. On opening the eyes, the regular alpha rhythms are replaced by small irregular oscillations. A typical distribution of electrodes is shown in Figure A.

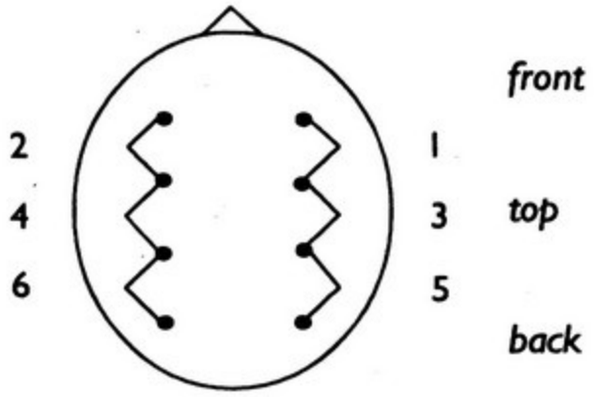


Figure A

The maximum number of alpha rhythms are present in the occipital and parieto-occipital areas and are usually diminished by visual or mental activity. Theta rhythms are often found over the parietal and temporal areas, the waves having a low amplitude of 10 microvolts. Delta waves dominate in deep sleep.

Frequency (Hz)	Name
1–3.5	Delta (δ)
4–7	Theta (φ)
8–13	Alpha (α)
14–30	Beta (β)

During the normal sequential pattern of descent from wakefulness to deep sleep the brainwave frequency changes from fast beta waves (above 14 cycles per second), to theta waves (4–7 cycles per second) and, lastly, to delta waves (0–4 cycles per second).

The difference between normal sleep and yoga nidra is that in yoga nidra an intermediate platform of alpha wave predominance (7–14 cycles per second) associated with relaxation is created between the beta wave patterns of the wakeful state and the slow delta rhythm of deep sleep. The result of this is complete relaxation of mental, emotional and muscular tension.

Philosophical aspects

Therefore, in yoga, sleep is considered as one of the mental formations, and not as a state of total unconsciousness. When chitta assumes the form of nidra, or sleep, there is some trace of cognition. This means that in the deep sleep state the self is the witness. The self witnesses the state of the chitta, but the chitta does not witness the self.

As we go in deeper in spiritual life, developing the personality and consciousness, the different manifestations

of chetana tattwa also become more refined and one is able to express transcendental feelings. To the eternal question, 'What is yoga?' Sage Patanjali replied, "Atha yoga anushasanam" yoga is a form of discipline. What is the result of discipline? He then replied, "Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah", through this discipline control is gained over the different modifications of chitta.

This is only possible when distractions are withdrawn by practising the techniques of pratyahara (yoga nidra, antar mouna) and the mind is calm and flowing on one smooth level. Then, whatever is impressed upon the mind becomes the corrective, the destiny, the directive, Swami Satyananda says, "In yoga nidra, the mind is absolutely obedient". The study of consciousness has drawn the attention of philosophers and thinkers since early time. With the advancement of scientific knowledge, scientists started to believe that consciousness is the emergent property of matter and associated with the activity of the cerebral cortex in the human brain.

Methods

The study took place in January 1988 at Charing Cross Medical School in London, UK. 34 female subjects were assigned into three groups.

Group 1 consisted of experienced yoga practitioners selected from a pool of volunteers associated with the Satyananda Yoga Centres in Essex and London, UK. The mean age of the 13 subjects in this group was 32.7 years (range 25–43 years). The mean length of yoga practice was 8.3 years (range 4–15 years).

Group 2 subjects consisted of Charing Cross Medical School students with no previous experience in meditation or yoga. They were randomly selected and had a mean age of 22 years (range 20–25 years).

Group 3 was a 'control' group of medical students drawn from the same pool as Group 2. The difference in mean age between Group 1 and Group 2 and 3 was unavoidable due to

difficulty in finding: (a) young experienced yoga practitioners, and (b) an older control group of inexperienced subjects.

All subjects were studied while seated in a sound attenuated light controlled neurophysiological chamber (Faraday cage). Data was taken by means of a Brain Electrical Activity Mapping (BEAM) instrument. (Neuroscience Pvt. Ltd. USA). This transforms the brain's electrical activity from the three-dimensional curved surface of the scalp and cortex to a two-dimensional colour image on a visual display unit with an outline of the head in the centre. Input was derived from 26 monopolar electrode sites, using a modified 10–20 electrode system recommended by the International Federation of EEG studies.

The special cup-shaped electrodes were placed inside a nylon mesh cap and contacted the skin through a 'cushion' of electrolyte gel. The electrodes convert ionic potential generated by nervous tissue into measurable electric potentials. Electrolyte gel was injected through the electrode cup hole and had the effect of both reducing the impedance between the skin and the electrodes, and sticking the electrodes firmly to the skin. The distance from the cathode to the anode was measured and the frontal polar electrodes positioned 10% of that distance above the cathode. The occipital electrodes were placed the same distance above the anode. Reference electrodes were attached to each earlobe, thereby connecting the subject to the common earth of the BEAM machine.

Single values were obtained for each of the electrodes representing the amount of energy in a given EEG frequency band. The outline, electrode coordinates and the interpolation weights were stored together in a computer for map generation.

The visual display unit can present a 'map' in four manners and left and right hemispheres. The dual presentation is a top-down (superior-inferior) view with the subject's nose at the top of the screen. The specific frequency band and voltage colour scale is presented at the right edge

of the screen. The number of frames since the beginning of any operation is also shown with the equivalent time span alongside it (1 frame=2.5 seconds). In this way the topographic distribution of spectral energy in any classic EEG frequency band can be viewed at any 2.5 second epoch. The numerical matrices underlying the images are stored for later statistical analysis.

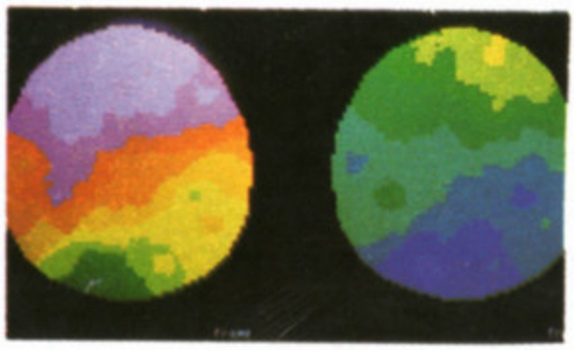
At the beginning of each session subjects were asked to sit quietly for five minutes with their eyes open while basal data was recorded. These subjects were asked to gaze at a target and suppress their eyeblinking until a period of one minute of artefact free recording was established. At this stage verbal communication ceased and lighting was dimmed.

Group 1 (experienced yogis) and Group 2 (inexperienced) then listened to a tape recording of a yoga nidra practice with their eyes closed. The practice was comprised of four parts: progressive awareness of the parts of the right then left side of the body (2 minutes duration each), awareness of the face, chest, back, abdomen and thighs (2.5 minutes duration) and finally a visualization sequence with images of a walk through the mountains, on a beach and returning home (25.5 minutes duration). Group 3 listened to a 'control' tape by the same speaker in the same tone and at the same rate of speech. The subject matter concerned the physiology of meditation.

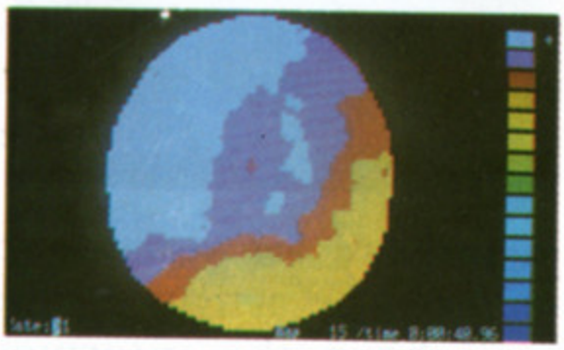
After listening to the tapes, the subjects were again asked to sit quietly while basal data was recorded. Subjects who had listened to the yoga nidra tape were questioned as to the nature of the visualization, in order to determine whether the subject had fallen asleep.

Results

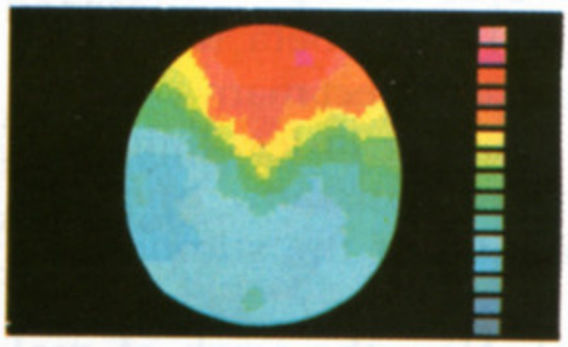
The results were analyzed from the averages of BEAM for the whole of Group 1 at various intervals during the practice as can be viewed in the following five slides.



1. The image on the left shows the map of a person at work and facing the problems of management. Characteristically, all the hyperactive colours, pink, red, yellow and green, have appeared in the map. Here the EEG showed the dominance of beta waves. The image on the right side shows the averages of a person at home relaxing with his family. The map shows a relatively relaxed state with the appearance of green and blue colours.



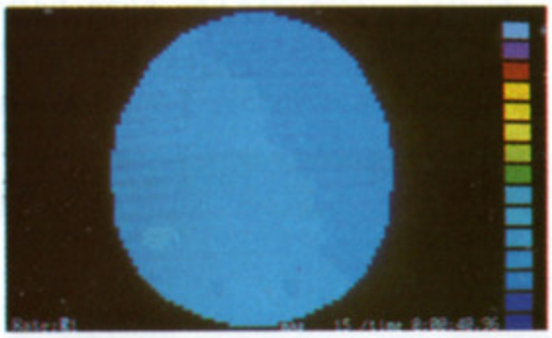
2. This shows the averages of an angry man. The map shows the optimum hyperactivity of brain cells. The EEG records a burst of beta waves. However, when the successive brain maps of people practising yoga nidra are analyzed, a progressive change in brain maps can be seen. This clearly indicates how it is capable of inducing a quantitative change in EEG patterns and modifying qualitative capacities in the vrittis of the human mind.



3. This shows initial phase of yoga nidra when relaxation begins. During yoga nidra the dual representation of both hemispheres was average during the first period, after the eyes were closed. Activity of varying intensities was seen in the purple, red, yellow and green colours covering the frontal lobes. Beta activity was seen in the mid-portion of the brain with alpha restricted to the darkish blue region in occipital areas. Further, it was observed that, during the beginning of rotation of awareness through the different parts of the body, muscular activity

decreased and there was more pronounced alpha activity which spread round to the right hemisphere.

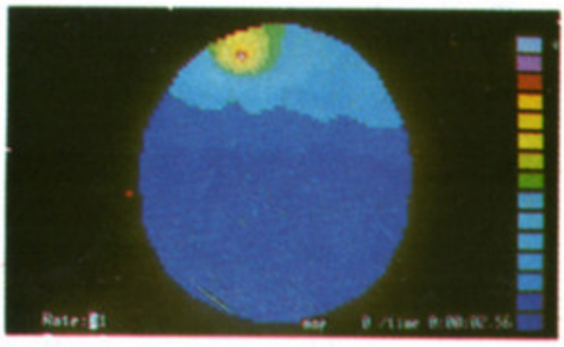
During the stage of yoga nidra where awareness was moving down the frontal part of the body, Group 1 experienced alpha, which is generally associated with relaxation and receptivity, spreading to both hemispheres. This indicates a state of calmness descending in a synchronized fashion over the brain.



4. This shows synchronization of brain waves representing progressive relaxation. Furthermore, the Group 1 average EEG showed, at the point when the rotation of awareness had ceased and subjects were asked to prepare for visualization, that alpha had been largely replaced by activity in the frontal lobes. This, then, may have been the intermediate platform of alpha wave predominance claimed to be developed by yoga nidra.

EEGs indicate a significant change in the brain's activity, even when the eyes are simply opened then closed. Alpha waves appear more frequently when the eyes are closed; beta waves appear as soon as the eyes are opened. Alpha waves correspond to a quiet mental state, beta to mental activity. Simple light stimulation will also effect many changes in the mind and body. Thus, by allowing in less light and keeping the source of stimulation constant, one can temporarily deactivate the functioning of the stimulation/response mechanism. The mind, which was lost somewhere in the outside world, is regained. Now the work of real concentration may begin.

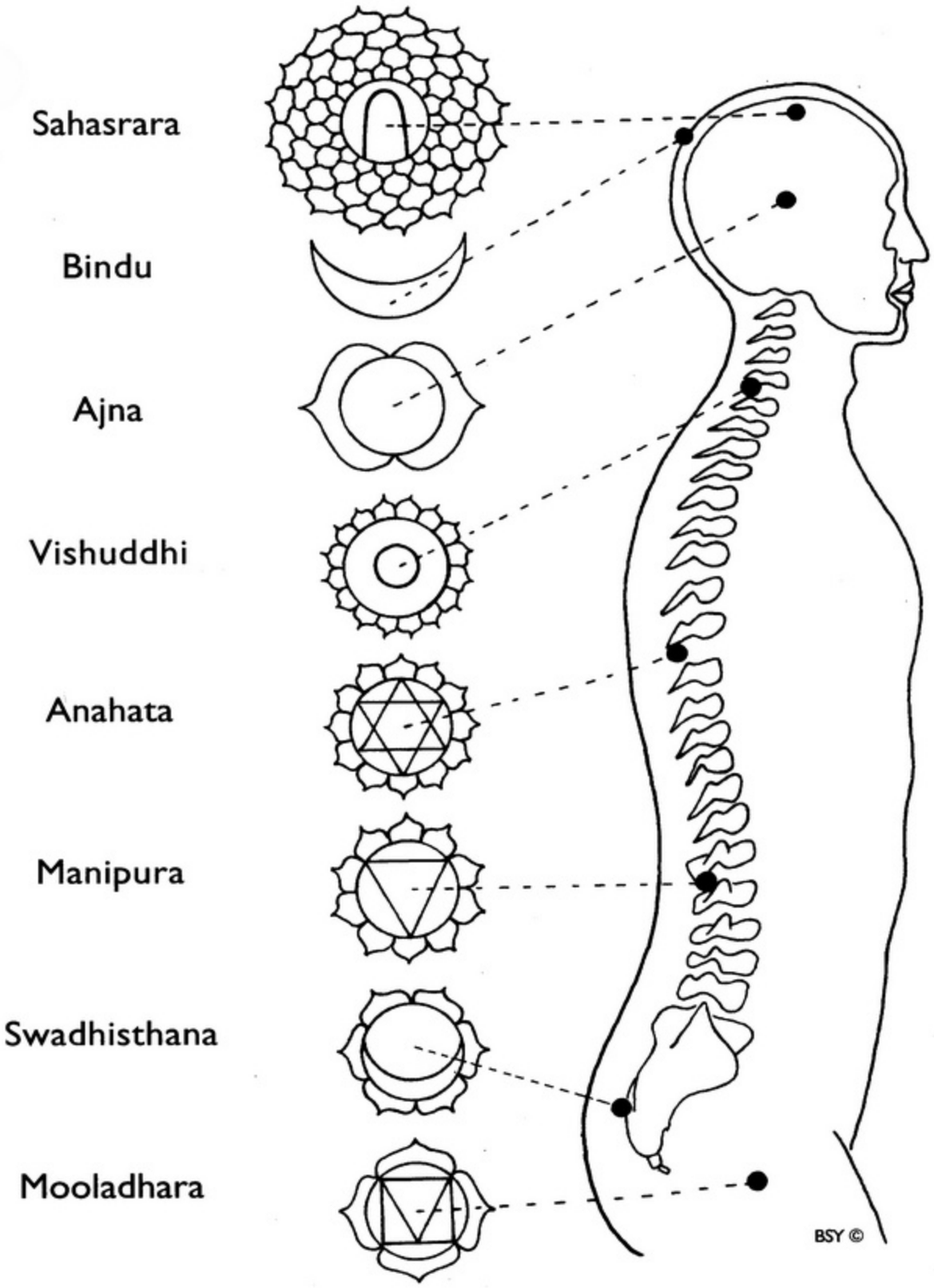
The process of relaxation as movement from asymmetry to symmetry is mirrored in the yogic concept of relaxation as having a balance between ida and pingala, sympathetic and parasympathetic, between passive and active, mental and physical energy respectively.



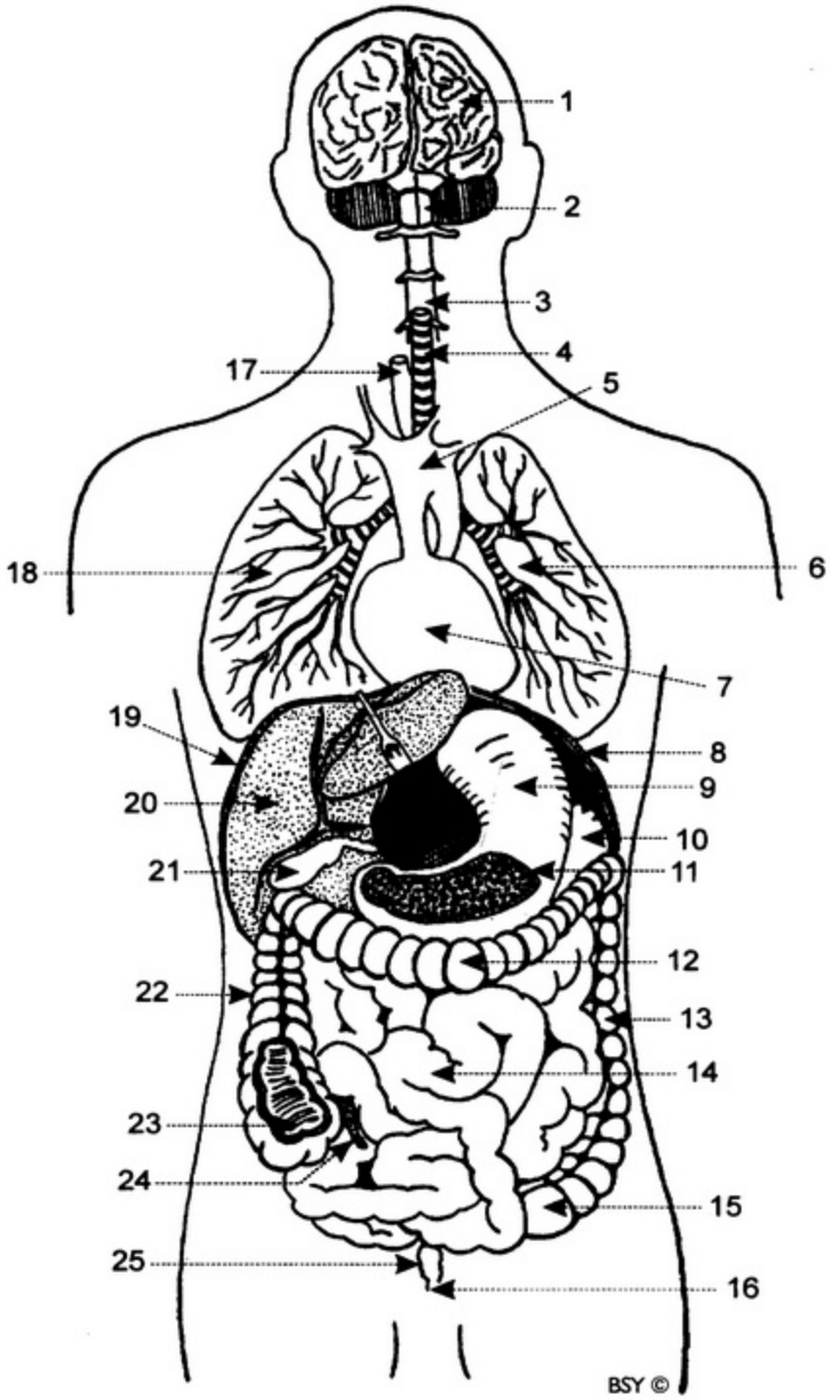
5. This shows the deep relaxation phase. During the practice of yoga nidra, some people may fall asleep. This is the beginning of sleep induction in the brain. The EEG pattern and maps now clearly show the appearance of theta and delta wave dominance. This is how yoga nidra is capable of inducing deep sleep and a state of deep relaxation which is characterized by awareness rather than unconsciousness, as in normal sleep.

The two hemispheres of the brain rarely operate together and the ability of yoga nidra to generate synchronized and symmetrical alpha and delta indicates its possible beneficial application in a large variety of psychosomatic problems.

Chakra-Endocrine Complex



Internal Organs



1. Brain
2. Cerebellum
3. Spinal cord
4. Trachea
5. Aorta
6. Left Lung
7. Heart
8. Diaphragm
9. Stomach
10. Spleen
11. Pancreas
12. Transverse colon (large intestine)
13. Descending colon
14. Small intestine
15. Sigmoid colon
16. Anus
17. Oesophagus
18. Right Lung
19. Diaphragm
20. Liver
21. Gall Bladder
22. Ascending colon
23. Cecum
24. Appendix
25. Rectum

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Notes

Swami Satyananda was born at Almora, Uttar Pradesh, in 1923. In 1943 he met Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh, where he lived as a sannyasin for the next 12 years.

Swami Satyananda founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. Over the next 20 years he toured internationally and authored over 80 books.

In 1984 he founded Sivananda Math, a charitable institution for aiding rural development, and the Yoga Research Foundation.

In 1988 he adopted kshetra sannyasa and settled in Rikhia, Jharkhand, where he now lives as a paramahamsa sannyasin.

Satyananda Yoga Nidra™ is a simple yet profound technique adapted by Swami Satyananda Saraswati from the traditional tantric practice of nyasa. This text explains the theory of yoga nidra in both yogic and scientific terms and includes class transcriptions of the practice. It also presents the various applications of this versatile technique, which has been used for deep relaxation, in stress management and therapy, to enhance the learning process in education, to harmonize the deeper unconscious and awaken inner potential, and as a meditative technique. A research section is also included.

This systematic method of inducing complete mental, emotional and physical relaxation is suitable for all practitioners.

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