

YOGA NIDRA- A CONSCIOUS DEEP SLEEP**Buddha Nanda Goswami**

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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 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.

Man today needs movement to survive in a different sense. Man's work is divorced from strenuous muscle effort. This way of life is taken its toll, because man is still a biological being who needs to be physically active in order to function actively. There is no substitute for exercise. It is just as important today as when primitive man roamed the plain of Syria.

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 tension which can manifest in unhappy family life, chaos and disorder in social life, and aggression and warfare between communities and nations. 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 tension can be progressively released. The muscular tension, emotional tension and mental tension are the three main tension of an individual. 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. The Practice of yoga nidra is the scientific method of removing these tensions.

Understanding of Yoga Nidra

Yoga nidra, which is derived from the tantras, is a powerful technique in which one learns 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 mean 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.

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.

Through the practice of yoga nidra, we are not only relaxing, but restructuring and reforming our whole personality from within. Yoga Nidra means sleep with a trace of awareness. It is a state of mind in between wakefulness and dream. When you practice 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 practice 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.

Experiences in Yoga Nidra- Affect of Yoga Nidra on 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 practice yoga nidra, we are trying to transcend the behavior 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.

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.

Karma and samskaras are accumulated in the layers of man's inner consciousness. The deepest layers in the samskaras are engraved and processed in 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.

During the practice of yoga nidra your consciousness travels through one layer of consciousness to another, according to its possibilities and capacity. Sometimes it goes very deep and 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 karma 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 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.

A Myth about Yoga Nidra and Concentration

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 the instructions or not that 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 practicing yoga nidra with a teacher, or you are leistering 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 practicing, 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 you to the instructions of the teacher, and to view any experiences which may arise with total awareness and detachment.

Withdrawing the Mind-

Yoga nidra belongs to the higher stages of raja yoga, since it is essentially a method of pratyahar. 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 dharna and Samadhi. In the practice of yoga nidra, the mind gradually becomes one-pointed. In order to prevent the consciousness from becoming completely withdrawn, 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 pratyahar.

The science of yoga nidra is based on the receptivity of consciousness. When consciousness is operating with the intellect and all the senses, 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.

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