

K A R E N   B R O D Y

# DARING TO REST

*Reclaim Your Power with  
Yoga Nidra Rest Meditation*



SOUNDS TRUE  
BOULDER, COLORADO

# CONTENTS

Dear Sister . . . ix

Introduction . . . xi

## **The Foundation . . . 1**

- 1 Why Rest Is So Important for Women . . . 3
- 2 Welcome to Yoga Nidra . . . 11
- 3 The Daring to Rest Program . . . 25

## **PHASE ONE Rest . . . 35**

- 4 Intention: Aligning with Your Heart's Desires . . . 39
- 5 Body: Feeling Grounded, Relaxed, and Safe . . . 51
- 6 Energy: Welcoming Back Your Life Force . . . 65

## **PHASE TWO Release . . . 75**

- 7 Mind: Letting Go of Burdens . . . 79
- 8 Wisdom: Becoming the Witness of Your Life . . . 97
- 9 Bliss: Knowing Everything Is Okay . . . 113

## **PHASE THREE Rise . . . 129**

- 10 Lead: A New Model of Embracing All of You . . . 133
- 11 Life: Daring to Rest Forever . . . 149

## CONTENTS

EPILOGUE	Final Yoga Nidra Pompom Shake . . .	165
	Gratitude . . .	167
APPENDIX 1	Scripts for Daring to Rest Yoga Nidra Meditations . . .	169
APPENDIX 2	Your Daring to Rest Toolbox . . .	213
	Notes . . .	217
	Recommended Reading . . .	221
	About the Author . . .	223

# WHY REST IS SO IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN

**Y**ou probably don't need to be convinced how important it is to rest. You know you're exhausted, stressed out, and frazzled. And you're not alone. Consider these statistics:

- In a 2014 report by the National Sleep Foundation, 24 percent of women said they had woken up feeling well rested for zero of the past seven days.<sup>1</sup>
- Women have more insomnia and higher depression levels than men.<sup>2</sup>
- The number of women aged 20–44 taking medications for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) increased 264 percent between 2001 and 2010.<sup>3</sup>

Do you truly think that the number of women having problems with focus and attention suddenly jumped for no clear reason? Of course not. This dramatic rise in medication use is our cry for help. Add to this the high numbers of women taking medication for depression—in one survey, 23 percent of all American women between the ages of 40 and 59—and one thing is clear: women are out of rhythm.<sup>4</sup> And how do you come back into rhythm? Rest. What if the inexpensive treatment of *rest* could give women their lives back?

Sleep specialist Rubin Naiman, PhD, says, “Buddhist philosophy teaches that depression results from excessive activation that is not

properly balanced by rest.”<sup>5</sup> By “activation,” he means that nonstop doing keeps our sympathetic nervous systems on high alert all the time. This Buddhist take on depression makes sense when I think of many of the women I support: They’re very busy and rarely rest. Many are on multiple medications, and most feel significantly better—and quite a few are virtually cured of insomnia, anxiety, and depression—once they consistently practice yoga nidra meditation. You can be busy, and even occasional stress is okay and quite normal, but you must balance it with rest and relaxation—otherwise, it’s a recipe for burnout.

What if, instead of putting women on medication or telling us to cure our health issues with a checklist of ten steps, we put them on an intense rest program first and then supported their unique needs as they began to feel whole again? What if rest could teach us the holy grail of womanhood: chunking perfect? And what if resting and restoring flow in our bodies, minds, and spirits is the key to more effective, sustainable women’s leadership? This is why I created the Daring to Rest program. I want you to try rest as a remedy. I want you to feel how deep rest can change your life. Now, with this program, any woman can easily plug in to rest for forty days and see how it begins to change her life.

Years ago I interviewed a nutritionist who helps women lose weight. She told me that for a long time, her first step was to get women on specialized diets. But now, before asking them to make any dietary changes, she has them chart their sleep for one month and then work on improving their sleep. Why? Because trying to lose weight when you’re sleep deprived is much more challenging than trying to lose weight when you’re well rested.

What’s clear is that rest is key to well-being and that women’s well-being is suffering. In my world, all roads lead back to the importance of deep rest.

### **What Exactly Is Rest?**

When I ask women what their self-care activities are, they often tell me things like this: take a bike ride, read a book, go to the movies, meet

a girlfriend for dinner, have a glass of wine, play a game (often on a smartphone). There's nothing wrong with these activities, but they should not be considered rest. Rest is not active. To rest is to surrender from the active, the goals, and the will to achieve something. Activities like going for a bike ride keep you focused on your outer world. Rest invites you to experience the gentle exchange between your outer and inner worlds.

In his book *Consolations*, the poet and essayist David Whyte deliciously captures what rest really is and describes it as having five states:

**In the first state of rest is the sense of stopping, of giving up on what we have been doing or how we have been being. In the second, is the sense of slowly coming home, the physical journey into the body's un-coerced and un-bullied self. . . . In the third state is a sense of healing and self-forgiveness and of arrival. In the fourth state . . . is the give and the take, the blessing and the being blessed and the ability to delight in both. The fifth stage is a sense of absolute readiness and presence, a delight in and an anticipation of the world and all its forms; a sense of being the meeting itself between inner and outer, and that receiving and responding occur in one spontaneous movement.<sup>6</sup>**

There seems to be a huge number of women who don't know how to rest. My hand is raised here too. I'm a mom, and it took me a while to understand that as much as I enjoyed sitting down to watch a movie at the end of the day, that was recreation, not rest. Activities such as reading a book or knitting are also not rest because while they are physically relaxing, they engage your eyes and mind, keeping you mentally active and alert.

Most self-care today is about activation or doing—exercising, taking a trip with friends, going out to dinner. While this activation may nurture parts of your body, mind, and spirit, it does not deeply replenish your mind and body. Being busy stimulates the sympathetic nervous system, the part of your autonomic nervous system that controls your

“fight-or-flight” response. If you live in active, busy mode for long periods of time, keeping only the sympathetic nervous system active, you put stress on your entire nervous system. The result? Anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. To reduce this stress, you must take time to stimulate the opposite part of the autonomic nervous system—the parasympathetic nervous system—for balance.

Giving yourself nonactive time allows not only your physical body the opportunity to rest and rejuvenate, but also your mind. The key feature of rest that distinguishes it from other forms of self-care is that it invites you to step out of your everyday life and dip into your inner world, the space where wonder and creativity flourish and where you can discover a fresh perspective on your everyday life. Rest could be sitting in a chair at dusk and quietly observing the sunset. You are essentially doing nothing, but by allowing yourself to rest in a gap of nothingness, where your thoughts slow down, you can get out of your mind and, often, touch the mysterious familiarity of your soul. Meditation and some types of yoga can take you to this same gap of nothingness. Sleep and a good nap can do this too. Deep sleep can take us to our inner world. Dream exploration does too.

The result is often feeling as if you have rebooted your entire system because when you rest, you stimulate your parasympathetic nervous system, the “rest-and-digest” function of your overall autonomic nervous system. But many people are not sleeping well or dreaming much, which is why we need rest practices like yoga nidra meditation—to teach us how to enter our internal world.

### **Why Rest Is the Ideal Remedy for Women Today**

Why is deep rest an ideal remedy for worn-out women today? Here are three important reasons.

#### **Rest Is Part of Our Natural Cycles**

After you do something active, it is best to follow up with something that is less active. Pioneering sleep researcher Nathaniel Kleitman called

this pattern our “basic rest-activity cycle,” or BRAC.<sup>7</sup> He observed that our bodies typically operate in ninety-minute cycles, both when we’re asleep and awake. As we transition from waking to light sleep, our brain waves slowly lower. A healthy sleeper will transition in the second half of the BRAC period to high brain waves, a deeper sleep stage. This cycle continues every ninety minutes. When we’re awake, our brain waves are faster for the first half of the BRAC, and then our brain waves begin to slow down, which is why we often get tired and less focused as we get closer to the end of a ninety-minute period of concentration.<sup>8</sup>

The problem comes when we override this cycle by deciding to not take a break after ninety minutes. This is often when we reach for pseudo-fuel, such as caffeine or sugar, to keep going on high alert for longer than ninety minutes. Overriding your BRAC too consistently leads to burnout because by going against your body’s natural rhythm and staying in activation mode all the time, you are stimulating only the sympathetic branch of your nervous system. This, as explained earlier, creates stress on your overall nervous system and releases an abundance of cortisol, known as the stress hormone.

Mothers, especially with babies and young toddlers, override their BRAC all the time. They ignore their body’s natural urge to rest because there are few opportunities in their day to rest. Working women do this too. Rachel, a woman in her early sixties and mother of teenage twins, worked privately with me for months. During our first visit, she confessed that while she loved her work and her children, it felt like the successful company she had built for three decades was killing her. She had fibromyalgia, a chronic disorder of pain and other symptoms, and now her doctors suspected she may have rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disease of chronic inflammation. She told me she had not gotten a good night’s sleep since her twins were born and had been on sleep medication for fifteen years, even though she knew it was bad for her health and probably not even working. It’s impossible to know exactly why someone gets any disease, but it is clear that if we spend years overriding our body’s natural need for rest, health issues can arise. In fact, Dr. Rubin Naiman calls depression “broken BRAC,” or essentially staying in a state of activation without rest.<sup>9</sup>



The bottom line: it is not healthy to live in high-alert mode. Living well means living in harmony with our BRAC. We need to balance our high-alert periods with low-alert rest periods—opportunities for the parasympathetic branch of our nervous systems to kick in and for our cortisol levels to come back to healthy levels. The good news is that through the use of a yoga nidra nap, the Daring to Rest program will teach you how to take back your BRAC.

### Rest Helps Us Cool Down

Science is showing that the planet is heating up, and perhaps not coincidentally, so are we. The explosion in the number of people experiencing autoimmune diseases, allergies, and other inflammation-related conditions suggests that people's systems are overheated. Eighty percent of people with autoimmune diseases today are women, and scientists cannot find clear reasons for this.<sup>10</sup> But in my experience, when I follow the trail of stressed-out women not getting good sleep, there are some compelling clues why this number is so high.

When we are truly resting, our core body temperature drops, and our brain goes into delta brain waves, which helps our organs regenerate. If you don't get good sleep or other types of rest, you don't cool down. And even if you do get good sleep, it might not be enough to counteract the effects of inflammation and overheating. The typical person consumes too much energy in daily life, and as a result, we have elevated heart rates, elevated cortisol levels, decreased melatonin levels, an overactive sympathetic nervous system, and an overactive hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HTPA) axis, a major part of the neuroendocrine system that controls our reaction to stress, regulates digestion, the immune system, mood and emotions, and sexuality, not to mention the part of the brain that channels energy into consciousness. Truly restful practices, such as yoga nidra meditation, give our bodies the opportunity to cool down, as well as calm down.

## Rest Connects Us with Our Deep Knowing

When life gets crazy busy, it's easy to lose a part of our creative, passionate, and instinctive self. Lack of rest is causing us to forget our instinctive, wilder nature. Jungian psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estés calls this a “female psychic slumber.”<sup>11</sup> Men betray their instinctive nature too, but according to Estés, women will die if they lose touch with this deep, wild knowing. Women must connect to their inner world to redevelop this deep knowing, and rest can take us there because slowing down opens the door to this world. It's here you find your internal power switch, the “wild” you who doesn't run around like a robot or the good girl you were trained to be, following the masses when your gut tells you not to—and as a result, you wake from your slumber. Turning that switch back on is the goal of the Daring to Rest program.

## WELCOME TO YOGA NIDRA

**T**he first time I experienced yoga nidra, I fell in love, and here's why: I could lie down. It was as if *finally* I had been given permission to rest. I called it my adult nap. I made yoga nidra the centerpiece of my Daring to Rest program because it's the best tool I know to help people slow down, recover from burnout, and relieve stress. I can't wait for you to experience this "meditation with a cherry on top."

Why do I call yoga nidra that? Because meditation is typically practiced sitting upright, and during most types of meditation, you remain in waking state consciousness, sometimes focusing on a mantra or the breath. Yoga nidra, on the other hand, is typically practiced lying down, underneath a blanket, and it guides you from waking state to a dreaming state to a deep-sleep state and then beyond to a fourth state of consciousness where all thoughts stop. Without any effort, your mind goes into the deepest state of relaxation imaginable. Yoga nidra doesn't pick a fight with meditation. Both are great. But if yoga nidra gives you all the benefits of deep meditation *plus* the benefits of deep sleep, *and* you get to lie down while doing it, then to me it is clearly the hot-fudge sundae of meditation.

### What Is Yoga Nidra?

Yoga nidra is a sleep-based, conscious relaxation and meditation technique. It is also known as *yogic sleep*. *Yoga* means "union" or "oneness" in Sanskrit, and *nidra* means "sleep," or more specifically, the consciousness that pervades all states, from waking to sleeping. In yoga nidra, you are guided into a sleep state but invited to remain conscious

in a semi-awakened state while deeply relaxed. It's similar to a nap because you're asleep, but different because a typical nap shuts down everything, including awareness, while yoga nidra meditation guides you to shut down everything and *add* awareness. As a result, you become aware of different parts of the body, and relaxation is more effective. You also become open to erasing emotional and mental patterns that are holding you back.

Don't let the term *yoga* confuse you. There are no downward-facing dogs, warriors, or other physical poses in yoga nidra meditation. Instead, yoga nidra looks like an extension of *savasana*, or corpse pose, a pose you do at the end of most yoga classes where you lie down on the floor for rest and integration.

While the roots of yoga nidra are in ancient tantra yoga, a branch of Indian spiritual study, it was developed in the West for a mainstream audience in the 1960s by Swami Satyananda Saraswati of the Bihar School of Yoga. Decades earlier, as a student studying under a guru, Swami Satyananda says he fell asleep while a group of students chanted mantras nearby. Even though he was deeply asleep during the chanting, when he awoke, he could recall all of the mantras. His guru explained that this was because he had heard the mantras with his subtle body.

Swami Satyananda became curious and began to research what ancient tantric texts said about this awakening of the energy of this subtle body, a tantric process called *nysaa* (which in Sanskrit means "to take the mind to a point"). During *nysaa*, you bring your attention from one point in the body to another while you repeat a mantra to awaken subtle energy in the physical body. Seeking to develop the practice of *nysaa* for Westerners, Swami Satyananda got rid of the mantras (knowing most people in the West would be confused by them) but kept the principle of rotating consciousness throughout the body.

Today, the term *yoga nidra* typically refers to this conscious relaxation and meditation technique developed by Swami Satyananda, and its most defining feature is bringing attention to different layers of consciousness, from the most gross, like the physical body, to more and more subtle, nonphysical layers. Others have expanded and/or taken different approaches to yoga nidra over the years, such

as Yogi Amrit Desai, who developed the Amrit Method of Yoga Nidra, and Richard Miller, who developed iRest meditation. But most yoga nidra approaches in the Western world have their roots in Swami Satyananda's method.

## How Yoga Nidra Works

Okay, here's when I start shaking my yoga nidra pompoms. Yoga nidra is very simple: you simply lie on your back (or sit, if you prefer) and listen to the voice (either recorded or live) of the person leading the meditation. The voice prompts guide you from your crazy-busy outer life into your inner senses and into a relaxed, subconscious state of mind.

Typically, you are first invited to set an intention, known in Sanskrit as a *sankulpa*—a positive resolve, like a sacred vow you choose to focus on. I've devoted all of chapter four to setting your intention because it's such a powerful part of the yoga nidra process and the Daring to Rest program. After you say your intention, you are guided to rotate attention to different points throughout your physical body. Then you are guided to move through more subtle layers of yourself, using breathing techniques to relax and mindfulness techniques—including visualization, affirmations, and guided imagery—to dissolve limiting beliefs, lift heaviness from your body, and feel lighter and more peaceful.

What do I mean by moving through more subtle layers of yourself? We tend to think of ourselves as just our physical bodies, because this is what we see when we look in the mirror, but the yoga teachings on which yoga nidra is based tell us that we are actually made up of five bodies of awareness, known as *koshas* in Sanskrit:

The physical body

The energy body

The mental body

The wisdom body

The bliss body

The five-bodies model comes from the Upanishads, a collection of writings from ancient India that form the core of Indian philosophy and have been used as a yoga model for healing for thousands of years. The five bodies, or sheaths, are layered around the central true self, also known as the soul. The physical body is composed of physical matter, while the other four are composed of progressively more subtle layers of energy. If one or more of these bodies is not in balance, then illness or discord can arise.

In every yoga nidra meditation, you are guided to move your attention through all of these five bodies. You will learn more about each of them as you progress through the Daring to Rest program in chapters four through twelve. I like to think of the journey through the five bodies as a journey back to wholeness. Rotating attention to these bodies cleans your system of tension and stress. Imagine an onion and its layers; our five bodies are five layers of awareness that reside in us. The more you focus attention on them, the clearer they get, and the better you feel. They also point you to your true nature, which is essentially your most authentic self.

Pointing you to your most authentic self is the ultimate purpose of yoga nidra because that is where your internal power switch lies. In today's modern world, we're disconnected from our authentic self because we're fixated only on our physical body—through exercise, nutrition, weight loss, and health care, for example. The problem is, the physical body isn't where our internal power switch sits. Instead, accessing this power switch requires accessing all of your five bodies, and this allows your soul to fulfill its purpose.

The four subtle bodies (the energy, mental, wisdom, and bliss bodies) are what inspired Swami Satyananda to develop yoga nidra for modern times. He found that the more our awareness was directed to specific parts of the physical body, the more it relaxed, and relaxing the physical body opened a doorway to the other four bodies. Bringing