

# Yoga Nidra

The iRest Meditative Practice for  
Deep Relaxation and Healing

Richard Miller, PhD

New Edition



## CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	XI
Foreword by Lorin Roche	XIII
Preface to the Second Edition	XVII
Introduction	
<i>The Open Secret</i>	1
Chapter One	
<i>The Marvelous World of Yoga Nidra</i>	15
Chapter Two	
<i>The Practice of iRest Yoga Nidra</i>	37
Step One: The Search for Truth	
<i>Setting Your Intention</i>	39
Step Two: Discovering Footprints	
<i>Affirming Your Heartfelt Desire</i>	46
Step Three: Perceiving Truth	
<i>Experiencing Your Inner Resource</i>	55

Step Four: Catching Truth	
<i>Sensing Your Body</i>	63
Step Five: Knowing Truth	
<i>Awareness of Breath and Energy</i>	67
Step Six: Taming Truth	
<i>Awareness of Feeling and Emotion</i>	70
Step Seven: Riding Truth Home	
<i>Awareness of the Body of Intellect</i>	78
Step Eight: Transcending Truth	
<i>Awareness of the Body of Joy</i>	82
Step Nine: Truth and Self Transcended	
<i>Awareness of the Body of Ego-I</i>	85
Step Ten: Reaching Source	
<i>Living the Natural State</i>	91
Back in the Marketplace	
<i>Living Essential Nature in Everyday Life</i>	99
Chapter Three	
<i>Final Reflections</i>	103
iRest Yoga Nidra Worksheet	107
Examples of Opposites	117
Resources for Supporting Your Practice	123

Notes	125
References	129
Readings in Nondual Śaivism	133
About the Author	135

## INTRODUCTION

# The Open Secret

*When we dwell in the pleasures of our senses, attractions to further pleasures arise. From attraction comes attachment, the desire for possession that leads to passion and burns into anger. Passion and anger cloud judgment and lead to confusion, the inability to learn from past mistakes, and the failure to choose between what is wise and what is unwise. This is the path of separation. But when we move in the world of the senses, yet keep our senses in harmony, free from attachment to attraction or aversion, we rest in the wisdom heart of our Essential Nature, the true Equanimity of Being, in which all sorrow and suffering cease.<sup>7</sup>*

I was first introduced to the rudiments of Yoga Nidra in 1970, during my first-ever Yoga course. At the end of my first lesson, after slowly performing an exquisite sequence of asanas that heightened sensitivity to every part of my body, our instructor

led us through *Śavāsana*, the traditional yogic pose for inducing deep relaxation while lying completely still on the floor. The instructor expertly guided us into being conscious of sensations throughout our body, as well as to opposing experiences such as warmth-coolness, agitation-calmness, fear-equanimity, sorrow-joy, and separation-oneness. I was invited to rotate my attention through the sensations elicited by pairs of opposites until I was able to embody these opposing experiences with neither attachment nor aversion to what I was experiencing.

I drove home that evening feeling totally relaxed and expansively present. For the first time in years, I felt free of all conflict, radiantly joyful, and attuned with the entire universe. I experienced life as being perfect just as it was and felt myself to be a spacious, nonlocalized Presence. Instead of my usual experience of being in the world, I was having a non-mental experience of the world being in me, similar to experiences I had known as a child.

This experience continued to resonate and left a longing in me to consciously awaken into and fully abide as this sense of Presence. It awoke in me the strong desire to deeply understand the art of Yoga and especially the process of *Śavāsana* that I had experienced, which I would later learn as Yoga Nidra. My yearning would eventually lead me to study with some of the most renowned teachers in the world and become adept as a teacher of Yoga Nidra through years of personal practice and by guiding thousands of students in its process during countless group classes, individual sessions, workshops, trainings, and meditation retreats.

During that first Yoga class, I recovered a secret that I now know is open to everyone who is interested in finding true peace of mind and unbreakable and unchanging Equanimity, joy, and

well-being that remain undisturbed, free of circumstance or situation. And I know that if I can realize this, so can you. The key to inner peace is not some impenetrable secret. While seemingly obscure, it is actually in plain sight and readily available to you—as an “open secret.” Let Wei Wu Wei explain.

The old Masters were fond of a little joke. One of them might say that the Buddha had a secret, but that Mahākāśyapa let it out.

*Mahākāśyapa, you may remember, was the bodhisattva to whom the Supreme Vehicle, chiefly represented by Ch’an and Zen today, is attributed. He it was who understood the famous sermon when the Buddha held up a flower and spoke no word.*

*Then one Master would remark that only as long as you do not understand, is it a secret. And, indeed, do not all mysteries and miracles only appear so, in so far as we may not understand how they arise or occur? Then another might add that once you do understand, it is Mahākāśyapa not keeping the secret.*

*Therefore, a secret is only something that people in general do not understand and Mahākāśyapa not keeping the secret was the real secret of the Buddha. Thus, the secret that is not kept secret is what is meant by an Open Secret.<sup>8</sup>*

Most of us know the kind of fragile peace that is easily disturbed by the onslaught of daily life. Through the exquisite practice of Yoga Nidra, I discovered an unshakable equilibrium that is present under all circumstances and situations. If it weren’t, it wouldn’t be real peace. I know that this is true peace

because I've tested it over many years in my daily life: in my job, in the marketplace, and in family life.

We're all aware that the true test of inner peace comes not in the meditation hall but in our daily life and relationships. Yoga Nidra revealed to me the unchanging peace of *Awareness, Being, Presence, Well-Being, and Equanimity* that remains steadfast and true during even the most intense and difficult times of physical pain, interpersonal conflict, and current events. I've uncovered it. I've tested it. Now it is my heartfelt desire to share it with you.

## THE ORIGINS OF YOGA NIDRA

The origins of Yoga Nidra can be traced back to ancient Eastern teachings of Yoga and *tantra* (Sanskrit; *tan-* = extending everywhere), dating back to the *Mahābhārata* (circa the third century BCE) and *Mārkaṇḍeya Purana* (circa 250 CE), which offer a vast array of techniques designed to extend our understanding in order to overcome the mind's penchant to divide indivisible, unitive Essential Nature into separate, objective parts. Tantra and Yoga are not concerned with philosophical intellectualism or secondhand information. These teachings are concerned with firsthand knowing of who we actually are, where we stand, free of psychological, cultural, and philosophical conditioning in the truth of what actually is.<sup>9</sup> Various yogis have revitalized the practice of Yoga Nidra throughout the past century, most notably through the teachings of Dennis Boyes (*Le Yoga du Sommeil Eveillé*), Swami Sivananda (*Yoga Nidra*) and his various disciples such as Satyananda Saraswati of the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Satchidananda of Integral Yoga, and Swami Vishnudevananda of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center; Swami Rama of the Himalayan Institute and his direct disciple, Swami Veda Bharati of the Swami Rama Sadhaka Grama;



and Shri Brahmananda Sarasvati (Ramamurti S. Mishra), who was an initiate of the Radhaswami School of Surat Shabd Yoga, among others.<sup>10</sup>

I was introduced to the term *Yoga Nidra* through the teachings of Swami Satchidananda and in the many literary offerings of Swami Satyananda Sarasvati, especially his book entitled *Yoga Nidra*. Over the years, I've had the privilege of studying with many renowned spiritual teachers who have helped me refine this exquisite art of meditative inquiry through both my studies in psychology and spirituality.<sup>11</sup>

Through Yoga Nidra, I discovered a profound process that teaches us how to carefully and systematically investigate the nature of our beliefs that define our personal identity and differentiate the world around us into separate objects. For instance, we believe that we are solid and separate and that there is an external world that exists independently of us. But we may never have deeply examined the reality of these beliefs. During Yoga Nidra, we investigate our firsthand experience so that we can understand the nature of who we really are and what the world actually is. Yoga Nidra helps us investigate and dispel the roots of our conditioning that underlie our beliefs and misperceptions about reality. Yoga Nidra dissolves the obstacles that stand in the way of our leading an authentic life of purpose and meaning. For those who are interested, it can also awaken us into living an enlightened life of self-realization as our Essential Nature.

## IREST YOGA NIDRA

*iRest* stands for Integrative Restoration. It is a modern-day variation of the ancient practice of Yoga Nidra and grew out of my years of personal practice and work with thousands of

individuals. iRest encompasses the core principles that make Yoga Nidra a powerful practice for health, healing, awakening, and attaining our highest human potential.

iRest is “integrative” as it addresses psychological and physical issues, such as stress, anxiety, insomnia, pain, and trauma in your body and mind. It helps you feel yourself as a fully functioning, integrated, whole, and healthy human being. iRest is also “restorative” as it helps you recover innate and indestructible inner resources of joy, peace, Presence, and well-being. The practice of iRest integrates and restores so that you can experience inner peace, harmony, connectedness, and well-being wherever you are, whoever you’re with, and whatever you’re doing and experiencing.

## USING THIS BOOK AND THESE RECORDINGS

In this book and in the MP3 audio practices that I’ve recorded, I share with you the basic steps of iRest Yoga Nidra, what each step leads to, benefits that you will realize along the way, as well as the ultimate discovery that iRest reveals. At its minimum, iRest will lead you to experience profound relaxation, the release of chronic stress, restful sleep, resolutions to many of your life’s conundrums, and a greater sense of joy and harmony in your daily life and relationships. In its ultimate revelation, it points directly to your Essential Nature, to peace that is beyond description and is your birthright. This peace is not an empty promise or only for a selected few. It is present and available to you right now.

I take great comfort in sharing this incredible practice with you. For me it has withstood the test of time and delivered its promise, and I trust that it will do the same for you. I believe that there is good reason why iRest Yoga Nidra has found its way into your life in this moment. I pray that the practice of iRest

will be, as it has been for me, your companion for life. It's a trustworthy ally through thick and thin.

I suggest you read this book in its entirety before proceeding to listen to the MP3 audio recordings (available at [SoundsTrue.com/YogaNidra](http://SoundsTrue.com/YogaNidra)). Orienting your mind to the underlying perspective and principles of iRest allows mind and body to relax as you listen to the recorded practice sessions. That said, if you are a person who doesn't like reading manuals, then by all means, dive into the practice. Firsthand experience is the best teacher. But after using the MP3 recordings, do come back to this text in order to deepen your understanding, which will enable you to obtain maximum advantage from each practice session. I do advise, however, before listening to the MP3 recording, that you read through the segment entitled "Setting the Stage" at the end of this introduction so that you can derive maximum benefit from your first experiences with iRest.

### **What's in the Book**

Chapter 1 provides an orientation to the perspective of iRest Yoga Nidra. Reading about iRest is a bit like reading a description of sugar before you've ever tasted such a treat. The actual taste is beyond words. But I have learned that intellectual understanding helps the thinking mind relax and allows us to plunge more deeply into the experience. Keep in mind that iRest is not a philosophy. It is a series of experiments you engage in to discover the living truth about yourself and the world. In the final analysis, the proof is in the tasting.

Chapter 2 is an overview of the stages of iRest, which you can access as actual practice sessions in the MP3 recordings. The MP3s are set up so that you can work with one or more of the stages of iRest depending upon your needs of the moment.

Chapter 3 presents some final reflections on iRest.

Following chapter 3 you will find worksheets that can help you further refine your practice of iRest.

Before listening to a particular iRest practice through the MP3 recordings, I suggest you make a copy of the iRest Yoga Nidra worksheet on pages 107–116 and fill it in with emotions, beliefs, images, etc., that are specific to you in order to personalize your practice within a particular mini-session of iRest.

The practice of iRest should never be mechanical. You want the practice to be alive and meaningful. Over time you will learn to adapt the practice to suit your individual needs respecting your gender, age, cultural background, and stage of life. Keep in mind the adage “Make the practice your own.”

The references section at the end of this book contains resources for further studies that will provide continuing support for your practice of iRest Yoga Nidra. Why reinvent the wheel? Take advantage of those who have come before you. We have much to share in our journey together.

### **MP3 Recordings**

The initial practice sessions on the MP3 audio recordings comprise a series of mini-sessions, each representing a stage of iRest. You can listen to an individual mini-session by itself or listen to a recording that comprises the entire ten-step practice of iRest. As you become adept in your practice, you may wish to engage in only one or two mini-sessions to address an existing issue. At other times, you will enjoy flowing through the entire practice.

iRest Yoga Nidra can be performed in a matter of seconds, a few minutes, or it can be an in-depth practice lasting an hour or more. Mahātmā Gandhi in India practiced Yoga Nidra on the train between speaking engagements. Swami Veda Bharati used

Yoga Nidra to learn new languages overnight. I've used it with students and clients to help them prepare for surgery and solve complex personal conundrums and interpersonal issues. Others have used iRest to dissolve their fear of flying, heal through PTSD and resolve past traumas, and obtain restful sleep. And some, as I have, have used iRest to inquire into the mystery of life and awaken to our Essential Nature as Unqualified Presence.

There are several complete practices of iRest on the MP3 recordings, which are integrated sessions of iRest that you can listen to many times over. Multiple layers of understanding are embedded within these and all the recordings. These MP3 audio files are designed for you to return to time and again over many years, gaining greater understanding and benefit with each practice session. I have heard from innumerable students after they have listened to the same session countless times over many years who've repeatedly said to me, "I never heard that before!"

## SETTING THE STAGE

Before beginning your first practice on the MP3 recordings, please read the following guidelines, which will help make your first sojourn into this wondrous land of iRest Yoga Nidra a fruitful journey.

- Find a quiet place to practice. It's important to practice iRest in a room where you can be "on vacation," away from external distractions. Think of this room as your personal oasis or sanctuary where you are on temporary retreat.
- Turn off the phone. Let your roommate, spouse, or children know that you're not to be disturbed.

When your support system helps you maintain your sacred iRest retreat, they will witness the marvelous benefits the practice brings to your life. They will want their own retreat time for iRest, too.

- Wear comfortable clothing. Clothing that doesn't constrict circulation or cause discomfort while you practice is best.
- Lie on a comfortable surface, preferably a soft rug or mat. I caution you against using your bed because your subconscious mind associates your bed with sleep. Although iRest Yoga Nidra mimics sleep, you want to remain alert throughout the practice. When possible, practice in a room other than where you sleep.
- iRest may also be practiced in a sitting position on a comfortable chair, cross-legged on the floor, standing, and even while walking around. When sitting, keep the spine straight and the lower back in its normal concave position. Your knees should be lower than the rim of your pelvis, which enables your back to be upright and comfortable. Whether prone or sitting, keep your forehead, chin, and eyes lowered so that your gaze is toward the floor rather than the wall. When chin, forehead, and eyes move up, thinking engages. When chin, forehead, and eyes are soft and down, thinking abates. During iRest, you want soft eyes so that you are gazing out through the "eyes of your heart" instead of your thinking mind.