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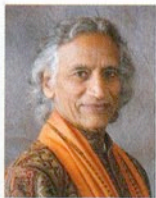
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BY YOGI AMRIT
DESAI

Yoga Nidra

– The art of conscious sleep

Integrating the higher centres of consciousness, Yoga Nidra is a dynamic form of relaxation that, according to Yogi Amrit Desai, works to unblock our unconscious obstructions while reactivating and renewing the physical form

Meditation. The very word invokes scenes of serenity and tranquility, beckoning us to a mystical place of awareness and knowledge.

But how many of us actually reach that state during hours of attempted meditation?

For most, meditation is as elusive as any esoteric practice could be. In frustration, many practitioners may give it up in favour of Hatha yoga or some other discipline in which they feel a greater sense of accomplishment.

Without question, meditation is complex. In a single hour, our brain processes approximately 2 000 thoughts. How challenging it is to sit and simply observe those myriad thoughts without becoming involved in a mental dialogue about them. Our legs invariably begin to ache, our skin itches and we become totally frustrated with our performance, deriding ourselves for our inability to sit still for even half-an-hour. Such self-judgement could not be further from the aim of meditation.

In the practice of Yoga Nidra, the practitioner has the opportunity to drop all the typical entrapments of traditional meditation. Yoga Nidra is the marriage of science and spirit, a simple healing technique practised by yogis for millennia. It is the unique combination of alert awareness and deepest relaxation, which takes your brain to the alpha state and eventually the even deeper theta wave state, releasing the integrative powers of the Third Eye and the higher centres of consciousness. Here, without effort or strain, you are able to tap into your own source of intuition, creativity, health and abundance.

The literal translation of *nidra* is sleep. However, in the practice of yoga, it is a dynamic state, not the unconscious inactivity of slumber. It is performed in a comfortable lying down position, *savasana*. The facilitator guides you through a series of breathing exercises and simple instructions that you perform mentally. In some methods, visual imagery is used or a scan of the body, where the mind momentarily focuses on a *marma* point (e.g. shoulder, elbow, wrist, and so on). This occupies the mind with something mundane,

preventing it from becoming involved in the usual mind chatter that absorbs our ordinary consciousness and diminishes our energy.

Within a short time, the practitioner is submerged in the alpha state, where brain rhythms drop into the silent space within. Once your body is relaxed and your mind is calm, all energies are focused on the Third Eye, the inner sanctuary located between the eyebrows. Here you are simultaneously able to access the logical left brain and the intuitive, insightful right brain. This naturally and effortlessly brings you into integration, where you experience deep relaxation yet remain aware and conscious.

Modern science now reinforces what yogis discovered thousands of years ago –that focusing on the Third Eye reactivates hormones in the pineal gland located in the centre of the brain. Scientific studies confirm that the pineal gland hormone, melatonin, is a powerful agent in helping prevent illness, retarding premature aging, reducing stress, inducing more restful sleep, boosting the immune system, and promoting healing.

While ordinary sleep may renew the body and refresh the mind, it cannot alter your unconscious programming. Yoga Nidra relaxes, rejuvenates and renews not just the physical body, but also empowers you to eliminate the unconscious obstructions that keep you from connecting to the source from which your inborn potential may be actualised. 🧘

For more than 40 years, Yogi Amrit Desai (Gurudev) has been a pioneer in reestablishing the spiritual depth of yoga. In 1970, he experienced a spontaneous Kundalini awakening by the grace of his guru, Swami Kripalvanandji. The yoga society Yogi Desai founded eventually grew to become Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, one of the largest centres of its kind in America. Yogi Desai is the author of six books and 45 CDs on yoga and holistic living. Yogi Amrit Desai can be contacted at info@amrityoga.org or visit www.amrityoga.org