

Insight of Yoga Nidra: Scientific Basis

Anita Choudhary

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Introduction

When awareness is separate and distinct from mental activity, When waking, dream and deep sleep pass like clouds, Yet awareness of Self remains, This is the experience of total relaxation...That is why, in tantra, Yoga Nidra is said to be the doorway to Samadhi.¹ - Swami Satyananda

Yoga Nidra is also known as “Yogic Sleep” is a simplified form of a traditional Tantric relaxation technique.. Yoga Nidra means to sleep consciously. It is a state of deep relaxation that encourages us to go into the subconscious mind and helps melt accumulated tensions and stress. An updated and systematized version was introduced by Swami Satyananda Saraswati ji, according to him Yoga Nidra is described as a ‘systematic method of inducing complete physical, mental, and emotional relaxation, and in this state, the relaxation is achieved by turning inwards, away from outer experiences.’ Traditional meditation is most often experienced in the ‘waking state’, associated with the beta and alpha wave brain states. Yoga Nidra explores the deeper layers of Self, moving beyond the waking states into the more subtle layers of self. The ultimate goal of Yoga Nidra is to achieve complete relaxation Yoga Nidra has its roots in tantra, and despite being a powerful meditation technique, it is one of the easiest to learn and to continue to use, can be practiced by all from beginners to advanced practitioners of Yoga, affecting from single cell to complete systems of body and had a sound scientific basis.

Department of Physiology, Ruxmaniben Deepchand Gardi Medical College, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Correspondence to: Anita Choudhary, Department of Physiology, Ruxmaniben Deepchand Gardi Medical College, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, India.. E-mail: dranitats@gmail.com

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Yoga Nidra is a multi-step process that involves a specific set of steps that starts from preparation, taking a Sankalp then Rotation of consciousness, breath awareness, visualization, repetition of Sankalp and then the ending of the session. So it is a journey through the multiple layers or sheaths (Koshas).

- Physical Layer (Annamaya Kosha) This includes the muscles, bones, and ligaments. and tendons.
- Energy Layer (Pranayama Kosha) that includes our nadis.
- Mid/Emotional Layer (Manomaya Kosha) it is complex and home to emotions and mental health. Stagnant emotions and energies reside here.
- Creative/higher intelligence Layer (Vijnanomaya Kosha) It can be associated with our ‘Gut Feelings’.
- Bliss Layer (Anandamaya Kosha), It is the last of the five koshas and the subtlest of all the koshas. that help you reach your inner self. Yoga Nidra is a valuable stepping stone on the path to Samadhi.

Paramahansa Yogananda has vividly described Yoga Nidra’s associated perceptual experiences in his famous autobiography.²

Clinical studies have shown that Yoga Nidra meditation is associated with positive physiological changes, Yoga Nidra has been widely employed as a technique for managing stress and associated stress-induced disorders³ and also hormonal imbalance.⁴ In many psychological and Psychosomatic Disorders.^{5,6} Yoga Nidra practice showed changes in hematologic markers including hemoglobin and total leucocyte count (TLC).⁷ Two neuro-imaging studies have shown that

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Yoga Nidra produces changes in endogenous dopamine release and cerebral blood flow.⁸ The current findings show that Yoga Nidra relaxation increases HRV, and that the responses are unaffected by a previous Hatha yoga session.⁹ Control of fluctuating blood glucose in T2DM patients when Yoga Nidra practice was combined with oral hypoglycemic medications.

Beyond the obvious benefits of Yoga Nidra Practice including deep rest and relaxation, Yoga Nidra has also been found to improve sleep, decrease anxiety and experience of depression, alleviate stress, direct experience with all layers of self, gain clarity and focus, greater experience of presence, helps to rework limiting beliefs, patterns and habits

“In Yoga Nidra we experience a state of harmony between body, brain, and mind. Then the unconscious barriers and blockages within the personality, which exist due to our negativity, are removed and the healing power of the mind begins to manifest.”

- Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

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