

# Origins of Yoga Nidra

- 05 May 2011
- [Dr Swami Shankardev Saraswati](#)
- [Yoga Nidra](#), [Relaxation](#)



Yoga Nidra – yoga technique and yoga philosophy

**Relaxation does not mean sleep. Relaxation means to be blissfully happy; it has no end. I call bliss absolute relaxation; sleep is a different matter. Sleep gives only mind and sense relaxation. Bliss relaxes the ātma, the inner self; that is why, in tantra, Yoga Nidra is the doorway to Samādhi.”**

**– Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Yoga Nidra, pub. Bihar School of Yoga, 1976.**

Whether you're an experienced yogi or a newcomer to the world of yoga, meditation and mind-body healing, it's important to understand that Yoga Nidra has two different meanings.

# Yoga Nidra has two distinct meanings

## 1. A Yoga-tantra technique



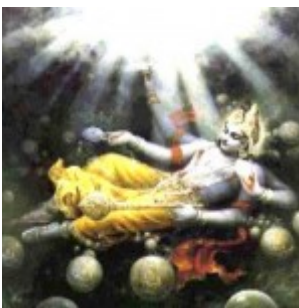
Yoga Nidra Practice

Yoga Nidra is a powerful relaxation and meditation technique derived from ancient tantra and developed by Swami Satyananda of the Bihar School of Yoga. This technique induces deep body-mind relaxation with the ultimate goal of increasing self-awareness.

The Yoga Nidra technique enables you to remain aware while you enter into the dream and sleeping states of consciousness. The state of Yoga Nidra occurs when you can remain conscious during the deep sleep state (called *prajna* in the Mandukya Upanishad).

The technique is practical and easily accessible, while creating deep relaxation for health, mental peace and higher awareness. Ultimately, Yoga Nidra enables you to experience exalted states of higher consciousness.

## 2. An Indian philosophical concept



Vishnu in Yoga Nidra

Many Indian philosophical and mythological texts refer to Yoga Nidra as the state that occurs when the Indian god Vishnu sleeps at the time when creation is destroyed (called *pralaya*). Vishnu is the cohesive power of the universe, so when he sleeps, the universe dissolves.

Modern usage of the term Yoga Nidra typically refers to the relaxation and meditation technique developed by Swami Satyananda, rather than to the state of absorption into the highest Self.

## The beginnings of Yoga Nidra

Few people realize that the Swami Satyananda is the originator of Yoga Nidra. He formulated the basis of this technique while serving as a disciple of his guru, the great yoga master Swami Sivananda, in Rishikesh, India during the 1940s and early 1950s.

Swami Satyananda describes how, as a young student, he fell asleep while a nearby group of people chanted mantras – many of which he had not heard before. Even though he was deeply asleep during the chanting, when he awoke and heard these mantras again, he seemed to know them. A yogi explained to Swami Satyananda that his *subtle body* had heard the mantras.

## Nyasa – awakening subtle energy

The characteristic feature of Yoga Nidra is the systematic rotation of consciousness in the body, which originated from the tantric process of nyasa (meaning ‘to place’ or ‘to take the mind to a point’).

During nyasa, a yogi consciously touches various parts of his or her body while repeating mantras. When this is done in the prescribed manner, the yogi can awaken subtle energy within the physical matter of the body.

## Yoga Nidra is for all of us

By making highly complex and advanced techniques accessible to everyone, Swami Satyananda has offered a great contribution to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

Swami Satyananda recognized that complex and ancient tantric techniques had great potential, but needed to be translated to fit our modern lives. He saw a deep need for simple techniques with great power to reduce stress and suffering. He simplified the ancient yoga-tantra methods and made them both accessible and practical.

He also recognized that directing your awareness to a specific part of the body would relax and recharge that area – opening a doorway into other parts of the body and mind for further healing and rejuvenation.

As Swami Satyananda wrote, “The present system of Yoga Nidra, which I have devised, enables people who are unfamiliar with Sanskrit mantras to gain the full benefits of the traditional nyasa. It can be beneficially practiced by people of any religion or culture.”

[1] Saraswati, Swami Satyananda, Yoga Nidra, Bihar School of Yoga, 1976, p. 3