



# Arhanta Yoga

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## ASHRAMS

ARHANTA YOGA ® YOGA NIDRA TEACHER TRAINING



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## Chapter 2 - The History of Yoga Nidra

The concept of Yoga Nidra is ancient in Indian traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Yoga Nidra, simply put, is as old as yoga itself.

The contemporary form of Yoga Nidra is widely believed to have been developed by Swami Satyananda. After extensive study of tantric scriptures, he formulated the basis of the modern Yoga Nidra technique in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, the 1940's and early 1950's, serving as a disciple for his guru, Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh, India.

In his work about Yoga Nidra, Swami Satyananda describes eight stages to come into a pure stage of Yoga Nidra. These 8 stages are:

- Internalization
- Sankalpa—a resolution made during the practice by the student, to clearly define and focus on a particular goal.
- Rotation of One's Consciousness
- Breath Awareness
- Manifestation of Opposites
- Creative Visualization
- Sankalpa—understanding one's resolution at a yet deeper level
- Externalization

Swami Satyananda correctly states that the term consists of two words yoga and Nidra, the latter meaning 'sleep'. He defined it as follows:

*"During the practice of Yoga Nidra, one appears to be asleep, but the consciousness is functioning at a deeper level of awareness. For this reason, Yoga Nidra is often referred to as psychic sleep or deep relaxation with inner awareness."*

As a Sanskrit compound, Yoga Nidra could be interpreted several ways, including 'the sleep that is yoga', 'the sleep caused by yoga' and 'the sleep of yoga'. However, the specific meaning of the term depends on its historical context. Based on this historical context, Yoga Nidra has two different meanings.

### The two distinct meanings of Yoga Nidra

#### 1. A Yoga-tantra technique

Based on the studies of Swami Satyananda of tantric scriptures and his further development of this technique, Yoga Nidra refers to a powerful relaxation and meditation technique derived from ancient tantra and developed by Swami Satyananda of the Bihar School of Yoga.

The technique of Yoga Nidra referred to here, brings about deep body-mind relaxation with the ultimate goal of increasing self-awareness.

Yoga Nidra enables the practitioner to remain aware while entering 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 contributing simultaneously to the experience of deep relaxation for health, mental peace and higher awareness. Ultimately, Yoga Nidra induces states of higher consciousness.



## 2. An Indian philosophical concept

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 uniting power of the universe, so when he sleeps, the universe dissolves.

### 2.1. 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').

Nyasa means to arrange, to place. Now in Yoga Nidra we place our attention at will. For example, when during the body scan, we focus on our toe, left toe, right toe, we are placing our attention there.

The power of Nyasa is that wherever you put your attention, energy flows there. During nyasa, we consciously touch various parts of our body. When this is done in the prescribed manner, we can awaken subtle energy within the physical matter of the body. This is the power of nyasa.