

**In Defence of the Practice of Yoga Nidrā:  
A joint declaration of independence for Yoga Nidrā Shakti**

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This purpose of this statement is to inform, educate and reassure. Our intention is to support and uplift practitioners and facilitators of all forms and methods of yoga nidrā worldwide, whilst calling to account all the organisations which promote this practice. We offer our perspective on the current context of yoga nidrā teaching, including a summary of our understanding of recent and historic abuses in all major yoga nidrā organisations. We also reveal, in brief, some neglected and hidden histories of yoga nidrā, in order to provide a broader, more nuanced and complete context of understanding of this diverse and ancient practice.

We intend is to inspire practitioners and facilitators to reclaim the experience of yoga nidrā as a human birthright. Our statement ends with an affirmation of our efforts at The Yoga Nidra Network to uphold integrity in our facilitation of yoga nidrā, and an invitation for other facilitators to reaffirm their own commitment to an ethical practice and sharing of yoga nidrā. This statement is an extract from the Introduction to the *Nidrā Shakti Encyclopaedia of Yoga Nidrā* which we have been researching for the past eleven years.

**Yoga nidrā is a practice of value, merit and healing for millions**

We write in defence of yoga nidrā as a practice of value and merit for many people. We write to affirm that the experience of yoga nidrā is neither intrinsically manipulative nor inherently triggering or dangerous. We write to distinguish the diverse variety of experiences of yoga nidrā from the many standardised, trademarked and branded methods of yoga nidrā practice promoted in the commercial yoga marketplace.

We write to liberate by distance the vast spectrum of precious and often restorative experiences of yoga nidrā from the unethical behaviours of prominent teachers who promote their own brands of yoga nidrā practice methods. We seek to free individual and collective experience of yoga nidrā from the often abusive and controlling power dynamics of yoga nidrā schools and institutions that have been established to promote trademarked methods of practice. We observe that the original and intended purpose of yoga nidrā practice is to invite us to encounter in freedom those meditative, liminal, healing and inspirational states of consciousness that are every humans' birthright, and that these states of consciousness ought neither to be trademarked nor owned by any individual or organisation.

Sadly the practice of yoga nidrā in the transnational, transactional yoga world has become commodified to such an extent that it is now intimately associated with the commercial brands owned by those who profit from the promotion of their own trademarked methods of practice. There are very many good individuals within all of these organisations, sharing valuable work with skill, kindness and compassion. It is however important to observe that founders and lead teachers of these organisations have proven histories of a variety of abuses and harassments of their students, and so the association of yoga nidrā with these institutions has tarnished the reputation of yoga nidrā, since many people only know the practice through trademarked methods that have been promoted by these organisations and by prominent teachers with well-marketed brands. These organisations and schools tend to promote origin and discovery stories of yoga nidrā that privilege their own founders, and/or neglect to inform students and practitioners of the older, indigenous roots of the practice. They also tend to marginalise or exclude those aspects of yoga nidrā history (including evidence of abuses within their own organisations) that do not enlarge and affirm the power of their own founders and lead teachers.

We write in defence of yoga nidrā because we feel a duty to state clearly that none of these organisations and individuals accurately define the hybrid history or truly diverse and inclusive nature of the practice they have standardised, trademarked and branded.

We write in support of all those ethical and independent facilitators of yoga nidrā who share this valuable practice with integrity and kindness, thereby bringing much goodness and healing into this world.

We affirm that there is a vast difference between the authoritarian, often sleep-prohibitive, standard, one-size-fits-all scripts that many people may believe to be yoga nidrā, and the kind of responsive and intuitive yoga nidrā facilitation that gives agency and power to practitioners.

We honour the neglected ancient global substratum of indigenous trance practices allied to nidrā, and we seek to illumine the hidden history of yoga nidrā, as 'her-story' whose suppression by those whose trademarking of their own brands of yoga nidrā has led to neglect of the divine personification of Nidrā Shakti Devī at the heart of all forms and methods of yoga nidrā.

Nidrā Shakti (the power of rest) is the active ingredient in all forms and methods of the practice of yoga nidrā. The nature of the experience of the practitioner during yoga nidrā is shaped largely by how the practice is facilitated, and rests upon facilitators' skills and capacities to invite practitioners into relationship with the potent active ingredient of yoga nidrā shakti, literally the power of sleep. The facilitator's capacity to do this depends in turn upon the nature of their own relationship with this power.

### **Some preparatory definitions**

For clarity of meaning around the terms used in this statement, please know that when the term yoga nidrā is mentioned, it may refer to one of three main categories, because there

are *three* different meanings to the term yoga nidrā: 1. a description of particular state/s of consciousness described in traditional yogic literature as yoganidrā; 2. a divine personification named Yoga Nidrā Devī /Yoga Nidrā Śakti [Shakti]; or, 3. recently developed practices of yoga nidrā as currently taught in contemporary yoga schools, institutions, and other organisations.

Each of these three different meanings of the term yoga nidrā has value and import. Sadly, in most recent writings about yoga nidrā, only the third meaning of the term [*contemporary practices of yoga nidrā as currently taught in transnational yoga schools, institutions, and other organisations*] is usually ever discussed. This limits our understanding of the experience of yoganidrā and the techniques used to enter that state, and dishonours by neglect the original indigenous sources of contemporary practices intended to invite us to experience the state of yoganidrā. It also dishonours by omission the goddess Yoga Nidrā Shakti who is the active ingredient of all forms of yoganidrā.

We have chosen neither to trademark, nor otherwise to own or brand the methods of yoga nidrā practice which we call Total Yoga Nidrā. We use this term as a descriptive, not a brand. The term 'Total' Yoga Nidrā indicates that we embrace the totality of the experience of *yoga nidra*, *yoganidrā* and *yoga nidrā shakti* as essentially interconnected and interdependent components. Total Yoga Nidrā is not a trademark, it is an accurate description of our inclusive, diverse and intuitive approach to the practice. Total Yoga Nidra is not a brand, it is an approach to practice that offers a spectrum of diverse liminal experiences and honours the rich and ancient hybrid histories of yoga nidrā.

Information in this statement is excerpted from *Nidra Shakti, An Encyclopaedia of Yoga Nidra* which we have been working on for the past eleven years. We felt that it is helpful in response to recent events to share relevant extracts from this encyclopaedia ahead of its planned publication.

### **A summary of hidden histories**

This statement, like the encyclopaedia from which it is excerpted, intends to firstly to re-contextualise experiences of yoganidrā, reclaiming and widening understanding of the ancient Indian histories and indigenous roots of contemporary yoga nidrā practices. Our intention is both to honour Yoga Nidrā Shakti (the divine personification of the power of sleep) and to affirm that there are multiple experiences of the states of consciousness of yoganidrā, which can be accessed by contemporary practices. We also intend to reveal with respect the roots of the practices that lead to these states. Yoga nidrā exists within a global context of many related wisdom practices, all of which respect and cultivate Nidrā Shakti, the power of sleep, dream and the places in between.

It is important to understand, contrary to popular opinion, that the practice of yoga nidrā was neither invented by, nor solely 'rediscovered' by Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923-2009). In fact, as we have discovered in our research over the past eleven years, Satyananda's book *Yoga Nidra* (1976), which is often claimed to be the first book on yoga nidra, was pre-dated by a French publication (Dennis Boyes, *Le Yoga du Sommeil Eveillé*,

1973) and was clearly also influenced by many practices developed over a century by an array of psychologists, therapists and hypnotists from around the world.

The development of contemporary methods of yoga nidrā rests upon the work of people such as Chicagoan psychiatrist Edmund Jacobson (1888-1983; author of *You Must Relax*, 1934, and creator of Progressive Muscle Relaxation), Massachusetts relaxationist Annie Payson Call (1853-1940; author of *Power through Repose*, 1891), and the Scottish surgeons and medical hypnotists James Braid (1795-1860; author of *Neurypnology or the Rationale of Nervous Sleep*, 1843) and James Esdaile (1808 – 1859; author of *Mesmerism in India, and the Practical Application in Surgery and Medicine*, 1846), who all developed various forms of proprioceptive and hypnotic relaxation techniques from 1846 through to the 1960s. The yoga nidrā techniques presented by Swami Satyananda and Swami Rama (1924 – 1996, Founder of the Himalayan Institute) are all clearly influenced by this work. But because there are no references to this body of research in the presentations of the yoga nidrā practices promoted by the organisations they founded, few followers of these Swamis' methods appreciate the wider context of their practices. Most practitioners are led to believe erroneously that their own tradition is the sole guardian/discoverer or re-discoverer of the practice of yoga nidrā.

Ignorance of the truly complex hybrid history and development of yoga nidrā has led to a fiercely protective proprietorial attitude within the major yoga nidrā organisations, and we believe that revealing the hidden histories of the practice may do much to offset the ownership claims and rigid controlling of the practice by such organisations. Scholarly work on the history of yoga nidrā by Mark Singleton (2005: *Salvation through Relaxation: Proprioceptive Therapy and its Relationship to Yoga*, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 20:3, 289-304, (<https://doi.org/10.1080/13537900500249780> 2005) and Jason Birch (<https://www.theluminescent.org/2015/01/yoganidra.html>) helpfully present evidence of this genuinely hybrid history, and reveal its roots in ancient Indian texts.

The earliest history of yoga nidrā does not begin, as most yoga nidrā organisations claim, in the Upanisads or the Tantras. In fact the origins of the practice of yoga nidrā can be traced back to the *Mārkandeya Purana* (circa 250 CE), where the very first textual reference to yoga nidrā describes the power of the goddess Yoga Nidrā Shakti Devī, who is praised in the *Durga Māhātmyam* (circa 550 CE). The power of sleep (nidrā shakti) is also honoured in other texts from the Shakta (goddess worshipping) traditions of India, and in the epic *Mahābhārata* (circa 3rd century BCE), where the goddess yoga nidrā is seen to be an all-powerful force whom nobody can deny. These written references to the power of the deep feminine manifesting in Yoga Nidrā Shakti are predated by ancient indigenous practices and wisdoms which were transmitted orally, often through matrilineal lineages of goddess worship.

Reaching beyond India, experiences of yoganidrā-like states of consciousness are connected to a global network of indigenous wisdom rituals and ceremonies that all use words and sounds to invite practitioners to inhabit liminal states of awareness, including lucid dream, conscious sleep and trance. Such practices include the Dreamtime practices of Aboriginal Australian peoples, the lucid dream techniques and meditations of the 'dream warriors' of the Mexican Toltec tradition, the healing dream incubation practices of Ancient Greece, and

the ancestor-connection practices of African spirituality, including Egyptian dream work and Xhosa Sangoma trance work, amongst others.

This rich global indigenous history, and the deep roots of the Indian tradition of worship of the goddess Nidrā Shakti as a powerful manifestation of the deep feminine, are rarely honoured or even mentioned by those who train teachers of yoga nidrā within the main yoga nidrā organisations. Instead, either through ignorance or wilful denial, simplified histories are told that valorise the founders of these organisations and omit to include the power of the goddess, the ancient Indian roots, or the indigenous practices at the roots of yoga nidrā. These simplified histories privilege the power of those founders of the schools who present edited versions of how yoga nidrā developed by centring their own roles in the process of ‘discovery’ or ‘re-invention’ of a practices that they then trademark and commodify.

When we do not understand the richness and roots of a tradition it is easy to believe the rigid and limited versions of the ‘ownership’ or ‘discovery’ stories that those who have colonised and commodified the practice choose to tell. There is a direct relation between mis-representing history and the abuse of the power inherent in the practice whose history is being retold. It is a classic technique of colonisation to re-write the history of the peoples and practices that the coloniser seeks to own. To reveal the real complexity of these histories is a way to liberate the truth. This is why we have devoted much of the past eleven years to uncovering the forgotten histories of yoga nidrā, of which we have presented only a brief summary above.

We hope that as more people become aware of the nature of the hybrid histories and development of yoga nidrā, less people will believe the simplified origin stories of those who have trademarked standardised forms of the practice, and less people will accept the limited and rigid training systems that are rooted in ignorance of the hidden histories of yoga nidrā.

### **Programmed rigidity and fear vs intuitive responsiveness and kindness**

In the thirty years we have been sharing yoga nidrā, and training others to facilitate this practice, we have observed that facilitators who are trained to replicate authoritarian practices out of fear (and/or ignorance of any other approaches to yoga nidrā) tend to disempower the practitioners with whom they share yoga nidrā. Facilitators who are trained in a vacuum of ignorance of other methods and/or historic or indigenous means to experience the states of yoganidrā, also tend to disempower the practitioners with whom they share yoga nidrā. This happens because the facilitators have been instructed always to utilise the same scripts, phrases and formats developed by their guru or the founder of their school and, in trusting ignorance of any ‘other ways’, are thus fearful of departing from the strict edicts that ‘this’ way of sharing yoga nidrā is the correct and only way. Ignorance of the hybridity and diversity of the history of yoga nidrā contributes to fearful adherence to a single method of practice.

All this can create rigidity in the methods of facilitating yoga nidrā, a kind of bossy formality and/or prescriptiveness that is rooted in the certainty that there is only one way to do yoga nidrā: the way in which that individual facilitator has been trained. Such rigidity permits no

room to honour the indigenous roots of the practice as every human's birthright, and limits both the intuitive creativity of the facilitator within the practice, and the practice of kindly responsiveness to the needs of the people for whom the practice is being facilitated. This can trigger trauma and fear in practitioners listening to yoga nidrā scripts. We believe that rigid hierarchies of control and oppression, the mis-telling of the histories of yoga nidrā, and the silencing of dissent within yoga organisations all contribute to the rigid limitations of traditional and contemporary trademarked methods of sharing yoga nidrā.

In contrast, yoga nidrā facilitators who are empowered to connect to their own intuitive and creative capacities are more likely to give practitioners agency to access their own intuitive healing resonances. The openness and trust necessary to empower facilitators to develop their own personal intuitive and creative relationship with yoga nidrā, and in turn to share this with the practitioners for whom they facilitate the practice, cannot thrive in environments where there are coverups, control and the denial of abusive histories. Closed, secretive and controlling institutional structures cannot tolerate the openness and transparency that is necessary to enable facilitators to cultivate trust in their own intuitive capacities to share the beneficial aspects of yoga nidrā.

### **Recent and historic abuses, silencing and unethical conduct**

There are proven historic and recent instances of sexual violence, sexual harassment, systemic bullying, and emotional and financial abuse by prominent teachers in all of the major yoga nidrā teaching organisations. We believe it is important for everyone who is putting their trust in the teachers and trainers of yoga nidrā to be fully informed about the nature of the behaviours of those who founded or lead the organisations with whom they are training and practising.

There is a very broad spectrum of behaviour that constitutes unethical action. Our intention here is to highlight all such actions, in so far as they are connected to the sharing of yoga nidra. The spectrum of unethical acts extends from the most egregious and violent harm to students to the denial of agency to teachers by requests that they do not deviate from given scripts. We also regard as unethical actions which might be considered by some to be acceptable 'standard US corporate practice', for example the signing of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs). We believe that transparency is the foundation of trust. We observe a lack of transparency in yoga nidra organisations whose prominent teachers or founders have committed unethical acts, because these organisations choose not to share information about those acts. As independent teachers and trainers of yoga nidra we note that information about the unethical acts committed by the teachers and founders of all the leading yoga nidra organisations is not prominent in the self-presentations of yoga nidra teaching organisations to the wider world, for example on their websites and in their social media postings. This is why we feel a duty to draw attention to this information here.

A compilation of evidence including links to court papers, statements and investigations conducted into abuses perpetrated by Swami Satyananda of Satyananda Yoga (previously known as the Bihar School of Yoga), Swami Rama of the Himalayan Institute, and Amrit Desai of the Amrit Yoga Institute, are all presented here

<https://yonishakti.co/the-movement>

in a document prepared for Yoni Shakti the Movement for the eradication of abuse of women in yoga (YSTM).

We at YTSM and at the Yoga Nidra Network have been shocked by recent revelations of sexual harassment of a female student and employee by Richard Miller, and by the use of no-disclosure agreements (NDA's) by the iRest yoga nidrā institute (IRI). We draw your attention to statements by IRI relating to these issues, which can be found here:

[https://pdfhost.io/v/c2RdarPHU\\_Richard\\_Miller\\_Statementpdf.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3mLm3UdZIAMvRo0PvBqmKwfX-xxSFpv3Q\\_RtZdRRgU3FvNp9ltZoAfrg](https://pdfhost.io/v/c2RdarPHU_Richard_Miller_Statementpdf.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3mLm3UdZIAMvRo0PvBqmKwfX-xxSFpv3Q_RtZdRRgU3FvNp9ltZoAfrg)).

and here:

[https://pdfhost.io/v/WKKSzNHxD\\_iRest\\_Institute\\_Statementpdf.pdf?fbclid=IwAR24Gr43ieZctyNteGOZUR\\_BUzqTBVWjZCEeWzb-1aBCgQvI9SUnAn98BQo](https://pdfhost.io/v/WKKSzNHxD_iRest_Institute_Statementpdf.pdf?fbclid=IwAR24Gr43ieZctyNteGOZUR_BUzqTBVWjZCEeWzb-1aBCgQvI9SUnAn98BQo)

Richard Miller's personal account of his sexual harassment of the female student and employee, and the purpose of the non-disclosure agreement (NDA) she signed after leaving iRest can be found here:

[https://pdfhost.io/v/c2RdarPHU\\_Richard\\_Miller\\_Statementpdf.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3mLm3UdZIAMvRo0PvBqmKwfX-xxSFpv3Q\\_RtZdRRgU3FvNp9ltZoAfrg](https://pdfhost.io/v/c2RdarPHU_Richard_Miller_Statementpdf.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3mLm3UdZIAMvRo0PvBqmKwfX-xxSFpv3Q_RtZdRRgU3FvNp9ltZoAfrg)

Following our first publication of this statement, Richard Miller instructed us to remove the entire post immediately. We refused to remove the whole post, on the basis that only ten per cent of this statement relates directly to iRest. Instead we redacted those portions of the statement that discussed the details of the sexual harassment and the NDA signed when the victim of the harassment ended her employment at iRest. Richard Miller has contacted us to point out that these two incidents are separate: the sexual harassment occurred in late 2012 and the NDA, which was intended to protect iRest's trademarked teachings, was signed when the victim of the harassment left her IRI job in mid-2013. Seven years later the former employee's request to be released from the NDA was denied by IRI.

We salute the bravery of the victim in speaking out about her experiences. When we first learnt about what had happened, we reached out to her to offer support and to understand the situation from her point of view. Her perspectives on what happened at IRI differ from the official IRI statements. It is correct to observe that there was sexual harassment and that the victim of that harassment later signed a non-disclosure agreement that disallowed her from training teachers in yoga nidra. It is also accurate to note she welcomed Richard Miller's resignation and has voiced a sense of optimism about the IRI Board's current response which she regards as a move towards healing and proper restoration:

<https://www.irest.org/blog/statement-irest-institute-board-directors> Both the Yoga Nidra Network and Yoni Shakti the Movement to eradicate abuse of women in yoga (YSTM) welcome these recent announcements from IRI.

We also have concerns that this new statement serves partly to erase public awareness of the reasons that prompted IRI's response. The upbeat board of directors' announcement centres the 'growth and development' of the iRest brand, marginalises the harm that led to it, and replaces the previously published apology. New initiatives in institutional accountability are identified by the IRI board as a positive step forward in the global growth of iRest as a brand. The directors present the recent changes to the iRest institute as a

natural evolution of the IRI's growth towards wisdom and accountability, when in fact they are a reaction to the considerable public attention which has been drawn both to the sexual harassment and to the use of NDAs by IRI.

The new initiatives at iRest position the institution as an 'ethically informed' organisation of integrity that is willing to listen. This is a very welcome move. We are hopeful that real accountability is possible. And we shall watch with interest to see what long term changes this will bring within the iRest community and its methods of teaching, training and brand promotion. Meanwhile the current landing page of the iRest website makes no mention of any of the recent revelations and its presentation of its director and founder neither refers to his resignation nor does it mention the reasons for it:

<https://www.irest.org/about-irest-institute>

On the spectrum of unethical actions, what has happened at iRest is very far distant from the behaviours of the late Swami Satyananda and other abusers within Satyananda Yoga (previously known as the Bihar School or Yoga), or the abuses and improprieties of which Swami Rama and Amrit Desai were convicted. But it is important to recognise that in all of these organisations, the people at the top prioritise the promotion of their brand above the individuals within the organisation who may threaten the success of the trademarked form of yoga nidra which the organisation is seeking to promote.

We continue to present thoughtful critique of all structures of power whose fundamental dynamics perpetuate and hide abuses in yoga and yoga nidrā by silencing or sidelining those whose testimony may threaten the status of institutions and prominent teachers. It is clear to us that all of the prominent teachers and founders of all the major yoga nidra organisations remained in power, supported by the hierarchies they have created, whilst the people who were victims of their harassment and abuses are positioned at the margins of power, where their voices are barely heard. We feel a duty to amplify these voices in the interests of sharing truth with transparency.

### **Reassurance and transparency**

We know that many people within the iRest organisation may feel dismayed and upset by recent revelations. IRI has promoted the iRest brand as a global protocol for trauma-informed practice of yoga nidrā. We feel for those survivors and victims of trauma for whom Richard Miller's practice of iRest has been a comfort and support in their own processes of living with trauma. For these vulnerable people especially, the news of the sexual harassment and the use of an NDA may have been very disturbing.

As people who have weathered the storms of a trusted yoga teaching organisation being revealed to have hidden abuse and protected perpetrators, we commiserate particularly with those teachers and trainers within the iRest community who are endeavouring now to make sense of the paradox of a trusted teacher/trainer/mentor who offers a profoundly valuable practice whilst at the same time behaving unethically.

In 2014, when the revelations of the sexual abuse of young women and children within Satyananda ashrams was revealed by the [Australian Royal Commission of Enquiry into Institutional Child](#), we looked to Richard Miller for wise leadership as an elder in the yoga nidrā field. Today, we stand in support of the woman he harassed, and those within the iRest organisation who may be feeling shocked, disappointed and betrayed.

We seek to offer reassurance and support to all yoga nidra facilitators and practitioners through this statement. As long-term practitioners, facilitators, and students of the art and science of yoga nidrā, we believe that yoga nidrā is too precious a tool to leave in the hands of organisations and individuals whose primary concern is the promotion of their own trademarked brand of a practice that belongs to everyone.

We at the Yoga Nidra Network are working hard to publish a complete history of the development of yoga nidrā and to make available, in the form of an encyclopaedia, a comprehensive resource for all who seek to understand of the roots, powers and possibilities of yoga nidrā to use it for the benefit of many. We believe that the nature of safe and effective facilitation depends upon the teaching methods of the organisation that trains facilitators.

We have already made public our ethical framework and operating principles. Both the operating statement and the short and long ethical statements here <https://www.yoganidranetwork.org/operating-ethics/>. We also continue to extend a welcome to all facilitators of all forms of yoga nidrā in our monthly 'Open Circles' where we share practice and open discussion. We sincerely hope that our previous efforts and this statement of reassurance and reminder of the need for ethical sharing of yoga nidrā may be of value and support to the independent yoga nidrā teachers around the world. We at the Yoga Nidra Network affirm that we are endeavouring to uphold the highest ethical standards in relation to the facilitation of yoga nidrā and the manner of treating all our colleagues, students and trainees.

Uma has also established a campaign to eradicate abuse of women in yoga and to reclaim yoga as a tool for freedom, justice and planetary healing. <https://yonishakti.co/the-movement> Yoni Shakti the Movement (YSTM) stands in support of victims of abuse and harassment within the yoga world. YSTM amplifies truth-tellers, agitates for justice and reparations for survivors, and continues to offer an online community space for survivors, teachers and practitioners to voice their responses to this recent revelation, as well as to amplify all efforts to reclaim yoga as a tool for justice and freedom. YSTM holds a space for all voices to be heard, especially those brave whistle-blowers (such as the recent survivor of sexual harassment within IRI), who speak deeply inconvenient truths that those who value their proximity to power often wish to silence. Sadly we feel that at this moment the two campaigns are intersecting.

We position this statement in defence of yoga nidrā at the intersection of Uma's campaigning work to eradicate the abuse of women in yoga, and our joint work with the collective of teachers at the Yoga Nidra Network to widen access to trauma-informed and creatively empowering yoga nidrā practices and facilitation training. We at the Yoga Nidra Network (YNN), and at YSTM recall the responses to revelation of the Satyananda ashram

abuses in 2014. At that time we issued this statement declaring our independence from the Satyananda yoga lineage and its teachings of yoga nidra: <https://www.yoganidranetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Total-Yoga-Nidra-and-Swami-Satyananda.pdf>

We are concerned now, as we were in 2014, that the marvellous practice of yoga nidrā might be widely associated with the many harmful behaviours of those who claim to own it.

As yoga nidra becomes increasingly popular world-wide and the most well-known brands of yoga nidra methods reach a large global market, we feel urgently called now to issue this statement in defence of Yoga Nidra. We write in our capacity as teachers who are neither affiliated to nor aligned with the iRest Institute, Satyananda Yoga, The Himalayan Institute, Amrit Yoga Nidra, nor indeed any other of the major organisations who own yoga nidrā trademarks. We feel it is important to separate out the practice of yoga nidrā from the organisations which promote it as their brand, and who have their own histories of unethical behaviours, of which the most recent revelations at the iRest Institute (IRI) is simply the latest in many other instances in other institutes and ashrams. We ask, in relation to all of these abuses and harassments, historic and recent, when will it be that it is not the victims who surrender privileges, but the perpetrators? When will perpetrators show accountability by relinquishing the privileges which empowered them to abuse? This will only happen when we continue to amplify the voices of survivors revealing the truth, so that perpetrators, and their protectors and enablers, are no longer able to silence victims.

One of the casualties of these abuses and the silencing of victims is the relationship of practitioners with the practices they have learnt from their teachers. When we have put trust in the teachers who have taught us certain practices, our trusting relationship with the practice itself can be damaged by revelations of the teachers' abuses.

### **A beneficial practice rests on relationships of trust**

As teachers and trainers of yoga nidrā facilitators, and as the co-founders of the Yoga Nidra Network, we wish to affirm the intrinsic value of the practice of yoga nidrā to so many, and to encourage those for whom the practice is a precious resource, to recognise that our experiences of this practice itself do not inevitably need to be tarnished by the manipulative behaviours of those who promote a particular trademarked form of yoga nidrā.

Does it matter that founders and lead teachers of all the main contemporary yoga nidrā organisations are abusers and/or perpetrators of violence and/or harassment?

If we are to be able to separate the manipulative behaviours of the abusers from the practice with which their name is associated, then transparency about the past is vital. We believe that this kind of behaviour should not be hidden away or buried in the back end of websites or other people's investigations. Yoga nidrā is a practice that often invites for us to encounter with shadows from our own past which may arise in our practice. We call upon all the organisations which share yoga nidrā to practice what they preach, and to undertake to make clear public statements to clarify their responses to the previously proven cases of abuse, harassment, and financial exploitations.

We believe that institutional coverups, and failures to make open admission of previous abuses utterly compromise the capacity of the teachers within those organisations to cultivate relationships of trust and openness with their own trainers and with their students and clients. Particularly in the case of the practice of yoga nidrā, which rests upon the capacity to trust the guidance and invitations of the facilitator of the practice, the issue of trust and honesty is paramount.

### **What can we do about any of this?**

#### **Actions in defence of yoga nidrā**

In Defence of yoga nidrā, we invite practitioners and teachers and trainers to inform themselves about the true histories of yoga nidrā and related methods, and to acknowledge the indigenous roots of practices that have become trademarked and ‘owned’ by powerful organisations.

In Defence of Yoga Nidrā, we invite those of you who may have been trained by organisations who have trademarked the practice, to ask questions about the origin and creation stories you may have been told about yoga nidrā. Those of you who train yoga nidrā teachers, we invite you to share good information to clarify understanding and to question the erroneous histories that privilege the owners of the trademarked forms of yoga nidrā as ‘discoverers or ‘originators’ of a practice that has its roots in indigenous practices worldwide, and in the ancient histories of spiritual practice in India

In Defence of Yoga Nidrā, we invite those of you who may be students or associates of organisations with histories of abuses to call these institutions to account: ask their leaders to make clear statements about previous unethical behaviours. Do this so that all who come to receive teachings in the future may be able to do so fully informed about the actions of the past. It is only with transparency that current and future students may be fully reassured that the administration and teachers have addressed any institutional and systemic power structures that permitted the abuses to have occurred in the first place. Honesty is the basis for relationships of trust that are at the heart of the experience of yoga nidra.

In Defence of Yoga Nidrā, we invite those of you who work within these organisations to model honesty and transparency when students ask about the backgrounds of prominent teachers and founders. Tell the truth.

In Defence of Yoga Nidrā, we invite those of you who are members of these organisations, or who have been trained by these organisations, to request that their websites signpost previous unethical behaviours so that new students and clients do not stumble upon this information years later, after they already have invested trust in teachers and practices promoted by organisations that have hidden abuses and unethical actions in their histories.

In Defence of Yoga Nidrā, we invite practitioners and teachers of yoga nidrā to free ourselves from the need to protect and promote trademarked versions of a practice that truly belongs to everybody. We celebrate and honour the many independent providers of yoga nidrā

trainings and practices that are often marginalised in the commercial marketplace by the promotional power of the major brands and trademarks. We encourage practitioners and teachers to explore those independent providers that neither owe allegiance to any major trademarks, nor seek to own the practice that belongs to us all.

In Defence of Yoga Nidrā, we invite those of us who practice yoga nidrā to retain a positive relationship to a yoga (nidrā) practice, even if we may lose trust in the integrity of those who have taught it to us. The practice is still everybody's treasure, regardless of whoever first shared it with us.

We encourage practitioners to continue to be nourished and supported by making yoga nidrā their own, and/or cultivating alternate, perhaps self-guided, approaches to the technique. Such individually responsive ways to practice yoga nidrā may help practitioners to facilitate or renew their continued connection to the technique's capacity for nurture and healing. This is too important a resource with which to lose contact in these uncertain and challenging times, when yoga nidrā may be exactly the most needed and helpful practice to support resilience.

As post-lineage, independent trainers of Total Yoga Nidra facilitators for the Yoga Nidra Network, we offer this statement as part of our collective efforts to ensure that the precious practice of yoga nidrā is not adversely impacted by the actions of prominent teachers or their organisations. We present this statement on behalf of The Yoga Nidra Network and in association with Yoni Shakti The Movement to eradicate the abuse of women in yoga and to reclaim yoga as a tool for planetary healing and justice.

Thank you for reading.  
With sincerity and respect from

Nirlipta Tuli CIAYT MA, Co-Founder of the Yoga Nidra Network  
Uma Dinsmore-Tuli CIAYT PhD, Founder of Yoni Shakti the Movement to Eradicate Abuse of Women in Yoga and Co-Founder of the Yoga Nidra Network