

# Sankalpas, yoga nidra and using our unconscious to help us transform our lives



By Eve Menezes Cunningham

**S**ankalpas are intentions, or resolves (like 'I am peaceful') reaffirmed at the start and finish of yoga nidras. This is because yoga nidra helps us create unconscious changes from a deep state of relaxation.

Julie Lusk, author of *Yoga Nidra for Complete Relaxation and Stress Relief* writes, 'Our day to day frame of consciousness (beta brain waves) makes it extremely difficult to make and maintain these good intentions because they crash into our long-term conditioning, habits and social pressures.' But during yoga nidra, we move through alpha, delta and theta frequencies. 'The level reached at the end of practice is very receptive to change. When we implant a sankalpa in the subconscious mind, useless thoughts and behaviours *can* be weeded out, and the conditions are created for significant and transformative change to take root and grow.'

This state along with the repetition (using the same sankalpa over time) can create new neural connections. By allowing your sankalpa to emerge from your heart (rather than going with something someone else suggests) you're working with your whole self.

During many of the yoga nidras I teach, there's space to future pace and imagine life as it will be when your sankalpa comes true. Similar to affirmations, we're stating our intentions in the positive – it's like a wellformed outcome condensed into a power phrase which can support you not just during yoga nidras when you have the capacity to affect greater change but *any* time you need a boost.

'A sankalpa speaks to the larger story of our lives, our dharma, our overriding purpose for being here,' says Lisa Lister, author of *Code Red: Know Your Flow, Unlock Your Monthly Super Powers and Create a Bloody Amazing Life. Period.*

Also a SHE Flow yoga teacher and reproductive health and wellness practitioner, Lisa adds, 'Your sankalpa becomes a statement and intention you can call upon to remind you of your true nature and to guide your choices.'

'My sankalpa is something I whisper to myself in prayer each morning to show my commitment to support the womb-deep truth of who I am and what I'm here to do in the world.'

Ideally, we keep the same sankalpa until it has manifested. Obviously, if your priorities change, it's perfectly fine for it to evolve but it's something that takes

root over time so if you're changing it, do it consciously rather than just giving up on yourself.

Lisa says hers never changes: 'It's been the same since I began my yogic practice over six years ago: "I am an instrument of SHE, use me, show me how to be of service to you."

'When I sit down to write and think that there are no words, when I host a workshop and feel nervous to be in front of people, when I teach yoga, when I get feelings of not being good enough, I take a deep breath and repeat my sankalpa. It brings me into laser sharp focus as to why I'm here and helps me to trust in my own power.'

One of my favourite yoga teachers, Emma Turnbull of Goddess Yoga in Essex says, 'I was introduced to yoga nidra and sankalpa at a challenging time in my life.'

**Sankalpas are intentions reaffirmed at the start and finish of yoga nidras**



## By allowing your sankalpa to emerge from your heart you're working with your whole self

My young daughter had suddenly started having seizures and had been diagnosed with epilepsy.

Initially my sankalpa was 'I am calm and present'. Without a doubt, I know the practice of Yoga Nidra and sankalpa helped me tap into an inner strength that I needed. I often wonder what would have happened had I not been serendipitously introduced to them at this time.

'When it comes to formulating a sankalpa, the advice I give my students is to sit and write as many resolutions that you have, stated in the present tense. For example, "I am healthy", "I am successful", "I resolve to practice yoga daily", "I am a talented dancer".

'Write down all your hopes, dreams and goals, your heart's prayers. Then sit and review your list, what you will often find is that you can sum up all of your resolves with one carefully planned deeper sankalpa that covers all of them.

'One example is a student of mine who wanted to leave her day job and make her art work into her business. She used the method above and formulated the sankalpa, "My business and spirituality are successfully combined". Within six months of using her sankalpa regularly, her art business had really started to grow and continues to do so. She now works full time as an artist.'

'A person's sankalpa is their life path,' says Rich Lister. He is a yoga teacher, Ayurvedic therapist and 'Coach of Awesome' who specialises in yoga nidra.

'Yoga nidra is used by organisations like the United States Marine Corps to help treat PTSD, and in hospices throughout the world to help with chronic pain and stress related problems.

'One study showed a 20 per cent decrease in perceived stress in patients undergoing chemotherapy after one course of yoga nidra. (\*1) The use of a "brand" of yoga nidra called I-rest has been used with good effect to treat PTSD. The applications of yoga nidra are huge, from stress relief to chronic pain management, to symptom control of chronic medical conditions such as MS.

'Part of what sets yoga nidra apart from "regular" meditation is its

structure. In most forms of yoga nidra, the sankalpa forms an anchor to the heart's truest desire. Sankalpa in yoga nidra can change from practice to practice, as you set the intent for that practice.

'In yogic philosophy, a sankalpa is your life purpose, what you are here to do. But if you don't yet know your sankalpa, it's not the end of the world. You've got the rest of your life to figure it out. Within the practice of yoga nidra, the sankalpa is the anchor of the practice. It provides a safe place for the client's psyche to return to if it gets in any way distressed.

'Einstein used this method when he came up with the theory of relativity, confusing the rational, leaving space for the zone of genius to come through.

'Studies using EEG and MRI during yoga nidra, show that the brain drops into alpha and then theta brain waves during the practice. Utilising these brain wave patterns and the associated brain states allows the real change.

'Yoga nidra is carried out in a yoga class type environments all over the country every day, with a few dedicated yoga nidra classes dotted around. It is used by psychotherapists in Harley street to help their clients, and by complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practitioners all around the country. The best bit is that yoga nidra can be done at home with your phone.

'The applications of yoga nidra go far beyond the mat, and right into mainstream mental health care. Care that has the potential to greatly help your clients, remove phobias, stress, anxiety and PTSD. I'd recommend attending a class or downloading a Yoga Nidra to experience it yourself, and then you can make your own decision.

'The sankalpa is not set in stone, and can evolve as you do. So as you accomplish one part of your sankalpa, it might refine. For instance, your sankalpa could start with "Help people feel better" then evolve to "Helping people feel healthy". My current personal sankalpa is "To help and heal", but I expect it to evolve, and refine.' ●

### Types of sankalpas

Julie Lusk describes four main types of sankalpas:

- *A virtue or quality* – mine is 'I welcome peace, love, joy and purpose' because I'm greedy and want lots of virtues. It also came up for me repeatedly and I've learned to trust my intuition
- *A change in behaviour* – for example, 'I eat healthy, nourishing, delicious food'
- *A specific intention* – for the coming year or so
- *Something meaningful* – to support your life direction.

### Free yoga nidra download

To try Rich's yoga nidra from the comfort of your own home, and for a free download that takes less than 15 minutes, email me at [eve@feelbettereveryday.co.uk](mailto:eve@feelbettereveryday.co.uk). Please put 'Rapport / free yoga nidra' in the subject heading.



### References

(\*1) K Kumar, 'A study on the impact on stress and anxiety through yoga nidra'.

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