

The Sankalpa in Yoga Nidra

Sankalpa Workshop One Transcript

- Defining Sankalpa
- Prana And Sankalpa
- Yoga Nidra and Sankalpa
- Mula Sankalpa
- Why Meditate On Death
- Death Meditation Yoga Nidra

Defining Sankalpa

We begin with a quote from Swami Satyananda:

"A resolve or sankalpa is made during the practice of yoga nidra. It should be something of immense importance to you. Resolves are short sentences of moral significance to be embedded in the subconscious such as 'I resolve to stop smoking.' In the state of yoga nidra passivity, this autosuggestion is very powerful. Such resolves can change your whole life. They will certainly come true if you repeat your resolve with enough conviction. By this method you can change old habits and cure certain mental illnesses. Sankalpas can have a spiritual objective like 'I shall become more aware.' Your sankalpa or resolve should be repeated several times during the practice." (Swami Satyananda Saraswati)

Swami Niranjan tells us: "Sankalpa is a process of training the mind to develop the will and to develop clarity of thought." (Swami Niranjan)

The sankalpa made during yoga nidra is more than just a resolution or positive affirmation. It can assist you in overcoming any weakness of your body or mind, to awaken tremendous inner strength and will power and empower you to live in congruence with your highest ideals and realize the purpose for which you have taken birth.

With the sankalpa we can refortify our strengths and counter support our weaknesses. Rather than saying, "I can't do it" or "I am not strong enough" you can create a self-empowering thought such as "I am strong! And I am growing stronger with every breath!" In this way you can

create a sankalpa to build great momentum in your inner resources. The psyche, mind, emotions and body all become aligned in pursuing and realizing your higher purpose.

This process involves an above average dedication to developing self-awareness. You must become aware to what you are thinking, to the internal dialogue, the self talk, and the various scripts you are running subconsciously. Many of these scripts are learned behaviors from our family and society. Developing sakshi bhava, the witness conscious, can greatly assist in this endeavor. We develop sakshi bhava especially during Antar Mouna, a meditation technique leading to inner silence. We will be soon begin a six month course on the six stages of Antar Mouna starting in May of 2021.

A spiritual journal can help you to take inventory of your thought patterns and mental contents. Daily self analysis, introspection and journaling are the complimentary tools to the sankalpa, which assists you in remaining focused, staying on track and making steady daily progress in the application of your determined resolve.

The sankalpa increases willpower, as well as the sensitivity and potentiality of the mind. In the beginning it helps to build strength in the structure of the mind, to fan the flames of inspiration and motivation, as well as to counteract any self-sabotaging limiting beliefs and negative self-talk. However, overtime it begins to take root in the subconscious mind and develops tremendous psychic force. Now the sankalpa is directing all your efforts, integrating all your mental faculties and sharpening the mind and intellect. Once all your inner resources are harmonized, integrated and spearheaded by the sankalpa - it is bound to manifest in your life to whatever extent you continue exerting yourself.

Gandhi said that happiness is when what we think, say and do are all in harmony. These various aspects of our being are usually dissipated, unfocused and oftentimes even in conflict with each other. As you go about developing self awareness you will begin to discover the repressed, suppressed and unconscious aspects of your personality. From awareness comes relaxation and the illumination of the unconscious mental patterns. Now they begin to lose their grip over you and you can have increasingly greater freedom from and influence over them. By cultivating awareness during yoga nidra and meditation we

are transitioning from unconscious reactivity to conscious self-control.

Now take this moment to refresh your meditation posture and turn your awareness within. Become aware to your body and your breath.

Quickly scan your awareness around your entire body, and envelope your body in awareness. Feel each and every limb, and every muscle.

Feel the points of contact between your body and the floor, and release any remaining muscular tension.

Now become aware of the breath. Just follow the soothing ebb and flow of each incoming and outgoing breath.

And now become aware to the various dimensions of your being. The body, the breath, the conscious mind and the subconscious mind.

Become aware to your physical body and your current state of muscular relaxation and/or tension.

Now become aware to the breath and the emotional dimension of your being. Notice your current state of emotional relaxation and/or tension.

Now become aware to your mind. Notice your current state of mental relaxation and/or tension.

And finally become aware of your underlying state of mind. What mode is the mind currently in? Are you tranquil and serene, or is the mind dissipated or agitated? Notice your underlying mental state.

And now remember your purpose and intention for taking this course. Remember the core reason you enrolled in this training, and notice the impact it has on your state of mind, your thoughts, breath and body.

Notice the momentum and motivation that naturally arises as you focus on your intention.

The body comes into harmony and unison with the breath, the emotions and the thoughts.

(pause)

Now slowly and gently begin to stretch and open your eyes.

Take the next three minutes to journal or continue reflecting on any insights you gained from this meditation.

Prana and Sankalpa

Prana is chief among the body, mind and senses. When the prana is dissipated, the mind is dissipated and the body is weak. Conversely when the prana is concentrated the mind is concentrated and the body is strong. The sankalpa is a tool for focusing the prana so it become like a laser beam. In this way you can work tirelessly with renewed strength and vigor, achieving the productivity of four people or more.

Prana literally means constant motion, and when we develop the power of resolve and will with the sankalpa our prana sets the mind and body in the constant motion of working towards realizing our life purpose.

In this way you also conserve prana, which is not being wasted on counterproductive distractions. Therefore, sankalpa is one of the most important tools in yoga and should be utilized during every yogic technique, not just during yoga nidra. You should be aware to the underlying purpose and intention for each practice of yoga. For example, the sankalpa of the gayatri mantra is to enlighten the intellect, wisdom. The sankalpa of the mahamrtyunjaya mantra is for health and victory over death. The sankalpa of the thirty two names of Durga is happiness, and so on. Every mantra, every asana, every pranayama, mudra, bandha, shatkarma, dharana and kriya all have their corresponding sankalpa. When you remain aware of your underlying intention every action is optimized and bears the desired fruit.

By remaining aware of your intention during every act helps to stay focused, grounded and to enjoy a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in life.

When you are ill, distressed or suffering our prana can be gathered and amplified by refocusing on your sankalpa. This can be of particular benefit because during such times of low energy our mental state needs

a base support for recovery and optimism. Optimism requires inner strength, and the sankalpa is the root support of unlimited inner strength. The road to recovery and self therapy is often long and full of obstacles, however the sankalpa affords great inner momentum and reenergizes you by reminding you of what you are trying to achieve, the bigger picture and what your ultimate destiny is.

The sankalpa is a way of focusing on a point in the future and bringing about your destiny. Swami Sivananda has told us, 'from a thought comes an action, from an action comes a tendency, from a tendency comes a habit, from your habits comes your character and from your character comes your destiny. Therefore if you can change a thought, you can change your destiny!'

Another definition of the word sankalpa is 'thought', with vikalpa meaning 'imagination'. If you can harness the power of thought you can control your destiny. However a large part of the initial efforts involves becoming thoughtless, without sankalpa, and to experience inner silence. Only when we can still the mire of thoughts revolving around endless desires can our root sankalpa be discerned. This is another reason why Antar Mouna is such an incredibly important yogic meditation form. You already have a root sankalpa, in order to discern it we must learn to first silence the mind and become receptive.

- Yoga Nidra and Sankalpa

Yoga nidra has many uses and applications. Perhaps the highest utility of yoga nidra is to realize your root resolve and core life purpose.

Lets discuss the stages of yoga nidra and how the sankalpa plays a critical role in the practice.

During our Yoga Nidra Teachers Training we discuss the following eight steps to yoga nidra. If you are interested in learning how to facilitate yoga nidra and write your own scripts the next teachers training is starting the first week of April. Here are the eight steps to yoga nidra:

1. **Preparation:** Yoga nidra is performed in the posture of shavasana, with the eyes closed. In this stage, initial relaxation of the body and mind is induced by the awareness of stillness,

comfort, posture, position, breath, and listening to the external sounds with the attitude of a witness.

2. **Initial Sankalpa:** When the body and mind are relaxed, then the practitioner is instructed to take a resolve according to his or her own wish. The sankalpa should be short, clear and positive. The practitioner repeats the selected sankalpa three times mentally, with full determination, conviction and confidence.
3. **Body scan:** In the third stage, the awareness is rotated around the different body parts in a systematic and organized manner. The practitioner is instructed to remain aware, to listen to the instructions and to move the mind very rapidly according to the instructions without making any physical movements. The rotation of awareness in yoga nidra follows a definite sequence: right side of the body, beginning with the right hand thumb and ending with the little toe of the right foot; left side of the body, from the left hand thumb to the little toe of the left foot; back of the body, from the heels to the back of the head; and lastly the front of the body, from the forehead and individual facial features to the legs.
4. **Breath awareness:** In this stage, one simply becomes aware of the natural breath without making an attempt to change the flow of the breath. One may become aware of the breath by watching it in the nostrils, chest, and abdomen, or in the passage between the navel and the throat. The practitioner becomes aware of each incoming and outgoing breath by counting them mentally.
5. **Polar opposite feelings and sensations:** In this stage, the physical or emotional sensations are recalled, intensified and experienced fully. Usually this is practised with pairs of opposite feelings or sensations like heat and cold, heaviness and lightness, pain and pleasure, love and hate, and so on.
6. **Visualization:** In the stage of visualization, the awareness is taken to the dark space in front of the closed eyes, referred to as *chidakasha* in yogic terminology. The practitioner is then instructed to visualize some objects, stories or situations in the chidakasha.
7. **Psychic Symbol:** The visualization practice culminates into a single vision, object or thought. This is the psychic symbol, which acts as a vehicle for awareness to be sustained while descending into the deepest stages of yoga nidra.

8. **Final Sankalpa:** Once again the sankalpa, taken in stage two, is repeated mentally three times in this stage with full dedication, faith and optimism.
9. **Ending the practice:** Before ending the session of yoga nidra, slowly the awareness is externalized by asking the practitioner to become aware of the external sounds, objects and persons. They are asked then to slowly move the body parts and to stretch the body. (source: yogamag.net)

I would be surprised if there was one person in this workshop who was not familiar with yoga nidra. You know, there is this little channel on YouTube, I'm sure you've heard of it!

(Let's take a deeper look at this practice with a quote from the originator of the modern form of the technique, Swami Satyananda. The following is an excerpt from a speech given in Paris, France on September 14th, 1980.

"I want to share some ideas about yoga nidra with you because I feel that it is important that we try to understand yoga nidra in a greater perspective. Although I have been calling yoga nidra psychic sleep, I have come to believe that it is more than that.

"The consciousness assumes different forms during waking, dreaming and sleeping. In the raja yoga of Patanjali we call these forms vrittis or patterns of consciousness. The formation of consciousness is called awareness. Sleep is one type of awareness; memory is another. Similarly, yoga nidra is a very important form of awareness.

"In the raja yoga of Patanjali there is a state called pratyahara when mind and mental awareness are dissociated from the sensory channels. The perfection of pratyahara leads to concentration and then to meditation. Yoga nidra is one aspect or form of pratyahara. When one practises yoga nidra he is not asleep. His consciousness is functioning in a certain state of awareness.

"When you practise yoga nidra you must remember that you are trying to evolve a most dynamic state of consciousness. This deeper state of your mind is dissipated during the waking and dreaming states. You have that dynamism even now but the tendencies of the mind are

dissipated. There are a lot of distractions through the sensory channels, and we are unable to attain a profound state of consciousness.

"This profound state of consciousness is such that even the sense of self-awareness is completely consumed. When you are concentrating you know you are concentrating, but when you are in yoga nidra there comes a moment when you do not know that you are in yoga nidra. When the mind dissociates itself from the sensory channels it becomes very powerful, but then it needs training. The involuntary systems of the brain have to be properly trained. Otherwise there is practically no difference between ordinary sleep and yoga nidra.

"In the last 25 or 30 years that I have been working on yoga nidra with different people, I have come to the conclusion that the human mind should be made receptive first. Receptivity of the mind can be awakened only when the dissipations are annihilated. When you practise yoga nidra you are able to awaken this receptivity by awakening the emotional structure of the mind.

"If I tell you that this is right and that is wrong, you will agree with me, but that is intellectual agreement. In spite of the fact that you agree with me, you may not be able to implement this in your daily life.

"Once I was in an Indian village. I met a man who was a thief and robber, a hardened criminal. We were talking and talking and finally he was convinced that he was not doing the right thing. He even came to the point of feeling that he was a sinner and I believed that I had performed a miracle and had been successful in converting him! When I returned to that village after five years he was found to be the same man, for I had convinced only his intellect, not his self!

"I then lived in that village for a period of six months, because at that time I stayed at every place for long periods. I used to teach yoga nidra in a school to the children and teachers. Fortunately, or unfortunately, he also joined the yoga nidra. He did not know that he was in a lion's den. I don't know how many sessions of yoga nidra he attended, but he left his profession shortly after.

"Intellectual conviction is one aspect of human life and we are all intellectually convinced about good and bad. But we have to also be

receptive emotionally to everything that we need to assimilate, and this is possible only when the dissipations and distractions of the mind are withdrawn. When the mind is flowing on one smooth level, the fluctuations and the waves in the mind are calmed. Then whatever is impressed upon the mind, that becomes the corrective, that becomes the destiny, that becomes the directive."

-Swami Satyananda (1980)

Benefits of yoga nidra

The practice of yoga nidra has endless benefits. However the sankalpa is what empowers you to achieve excellence and super human results in your yoga sadhana.

The sankalpa repeated mentally during yoga nidra is perhaps the most effective method for mental retraining and self-empowerment. Swami Satyananda (1998) says, "anything in life can fail you, but not the sankalpa made during yoga nidra".

It is when the mind is inactive that the sankalpa is taken and sowed in the subconscious mind. Although more difficult to access, the subconscious mind is very obedient and acts out the commands implanted during autosuggestion with greater power.

The sankalpa used during yoga nidra trains the subconscious mind and then the conscious mind follows it spontaneously. It is when the practitioner is most deeply relaxed and ready to absorb it that the sankalpa has the greatest impact.

It must be remembered that the sankalpa should be planted with strong willpower and feeling by repeating it with enthusiasm, strong faith and conviction. It should be repeated twice during yoga nidra, once in the beginning and then again at the end during the deepest stage of relaxation after the visualization and psychic symbol. Swami Satyananda (1998) says, "the sankalpa taken at the beginning of yoga nidra is like sowing a seed, and the sankalpa at the end is like irrigating it. So, the resolve taken in yoga nidra always brings result, if it is taken sincerely". The second time you repeat the sankalpa is an echo of the first, which reverberates all throughout your inner state of being,

enlivening and encouraging you. Therefore, never allow the sankalpa to become mundane nor lose its power; repeat it with feeling and fan the flames of your resolution into a blazing fire of limitless inspiration.

Again take this time to refresh your meditation posture.

Close your eyes and introvert your awareness. Withdraw the senses and become aware - to your physical body, the breath and your state of mind. Observe your current waking state from the detached perspective of the silent witness within.

Quickly scan your awareness around your body. As you become aware of your body, you become relaxed. Relaxation is a natural outcome of awareness.

Now releasing the body totally and becoming aware of the breath. Watch the muscles of respiration expanding and contracting within the abdomen and chest.

Be a passive witness to the soothing sensations of the easy breath.

And now bring your awareness to chidakash, the mental space in front of your closed eyes and see a vision of how you plan to utilize this new found understanding of your creative potential in your life.

See a mental image of yourself fully aware of your root purpose, with the tremendous momentum of sankalpa shakti, the power of resolve, filling your entire being!

Allow yourself to breath in to this inner vision with total awareness, confidence and strength.

Become aware that you are now becoming aware of your mula sankalpa,

Remain silent, still and aware!

(pause)

Now take a deep breath in, and sigh with the exhalation releasing the body and returning your awareness to the waking state of

consciousness, the five senses and the elements of nature they perceive, as well as your body - seated in meditation.

Whenever you are ready, begin to stretch, move and open your eyes to end this practice.

Take the next 4 minutes to write in your meditation journal.

Four minutes of journaling begins now.

The Mula Sankalpa

You and I all have so many various desires. Many of these are desires attributed to our human nature; they are part of the operating system of the human organism. Other desires are learned behaviors from our family and society. Still others are the result of our own past experiences - our likes and dislikes.

However, according to Tantra we exist because we desire! We have each come here into a physical body to both laugh and cry, to gain and to lose, to live and to die, for a reason. That reason is desire. However, this desire is the core desire at the root level of your being. Truth is that it can be very difficult to directly perceive your core life purpose and existential desire. More often than not it reveals itself to you, when you are ready or during an extreme high or low moment in life.

A few experiences do tend to bring our life purpose into perspective, such as death. A near death experience, or experiencing the loss of a loved one can suddenly remind us of our own mortality.

When we see a corpse during a funeral there should be the awareness that this too is the fate of my body, this too is the ultimate destination of this physical husk for my soul.

This is why we meditate on death. To bring our own mortality into perspective, thus rousing us from our slumber and helping us to focus on those things that matter more than the others... that matter the most. When death comes it does not make a reservation. Whatever was left undone remains undone. Whatever was left unsaid remains unsaid. Whatever remains to be experienced remains so. There is no chance to

tie up loose ends. When the prana leaves our body with our last exhalation that's it! Hari Om Tat Sat!

Of course when we truly meditate on death we realize it is only an illusion, even the body continues to nourish other forms of life and merely changes shape and form. And if we believe what our gurus have told us, what has been said by the wise, the elders and the scriptures such as Sri Bhagavad Gita, then we can trust our souls are immortal, as well.

To realize this eternal Oneness to which we ultimately belong is the purpose for the guided death meditation found on the mother channel, Tripura Mandala, however; today we will be meditating on death to help us wake up to our existential desire, the life purpose, or mula sankalpa.

We will now take a ten-minute intermission and then return for yoga nidra. Please be ready for yoga nidra at that time.

Hari Om!

Guided Visualization:

Sankalpa: Silently say to yourself, 'I am ready to perceive my core life purpose' three times with feeling!

See yourself walking down the stone streets of an ancient city besides the banks of a sacred river.

You are slowly making your way towards the ghats at the banks of the river, winding through a maze of alleys and passageways.

You finally come out through a temple located directly beside the wide river, flowing like a goddess. You see temple goers waving lights to the river, and setting little banana leaf boats with a single candle flame within to drift in Her gentle rapids.

There is a large procession of people singing and adoring the river goddess, and then you notice a large fire off to one side a little ways away from everyone else. As you approach the blazing flames you notice

it is a funeral pyre, with the corpse inside being returned to the five elements through fire.

A natural curiosity draws you nearer and nearer, and upon approaching you see the body being burned inside is actually your own.

You are watching from outside yourself, at a distance of 4 to 5 meters away - looking at your own body being reduced to ashes.

This is not someone else's body. It is your own. But it is not you. You are standing outside your body watching it slowly burn. See your limbs, your torso, your face and hair. All being purified by Agnidev, the sacred fire.

You may notice some family members standing by watching and reacting. The date is today. The final moment has come now.

Remain a witness to all thoughts and emotions.

In the beginning there may be some emotional response to things you may have wanted to tell your loved ones.

Remain a detached observer to all visions you see in your mind's eye, and push a bit deeper beyond the surface level reaction and see the true longing your soul still has to complete the real reason you took birth.

You now have lost all fear of death. You know you had this body to achieve something great, and not to give in to the illusion of mortal fear.

You were born for greatness, and that greatness is a quality of your own soul. It is nothing you have to gain. It is simply who you are and what you came here to do.

(pause)

Feel yourself back in your body. But do not move an inch! Know that you are still alive. Still healthy, full of life and limitless inner strength! You still have the opportunity to fulfill the reason for which you have come.

Silently say to yourself, 'I am ready to perceive my core life purpose' three times with feeling!

Now begin to extrovert your awareness back to your body, the waking state and the five senses. Create a mental image of your surrounding environment.