

The Timeless Times

A periodic e-report containing a finely crafted collection of yoga nidra+ research, offerings, and free guides from featured community teachers and facilitators.



Evolving towards a more trauma-sensitive yoga nidra practice

The majority of Canadians will experience at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, with approximately 9.2% developing posttraumatic stress disorder while an even greater proportion suffers subclinical manifestations.¹ In either case, trauma can lead to a myriad of debilitating symptoms such as hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, distressing intrusive memories, persistent negative mood, distorted thoughts and beliefs, avoidance patterns, dissociation, disembodiment, and social dysfunction and detachment.² Although trauma-focused psychotherapy is considered the gold standard treatment, almost half of all patients do not respond effectively.³ As a result, many affected individuals seek out alternative interventions,⁴ with yoga nidra being one modality of recent growing interest.^{5,6}

Research has demonstrated that yoga nidra is a valuable tool for alleviating symptoms of trauma. For instance, enhancements in relaxation, sleep quality, distress tolerance, emotion-regulation, mental clarity, mindfulness, body awareness, interpersonal health, and social connectedness were keenly reported following iRest yoga nidra interventions (~4-10 weeks) for veterans,⁷⁻⁹ women with histories of interpersonal and sexual violence,^{9,10} and homeless adults.¹¹ Further studies found significant clinical improvements following programs involving other lineages of yoga nidra practice in combination with mindful movement, breathing exercises, and psychoeducation (6-16 weeks) for various military groups.¹²⁻¹⁴

Yet, despite mounting evidence that yoga nidra practice can assist trauma recovery, the

ways that it had historically been shared was paradoxically traumatizing for many. To elaborate, multiple world-renowned teachers who developed popular yoga nidra lineages inflicted extreme sexual violence unto numerous students.¹⁵ Unfortunately, yoga nidra's dark past has not completely cleaned itself from the present day, as accounts of teacher-student abuse continue to bleed through yoga nidra settings.¹⁵ This lamentable reality underscores the need for our communities to consciously stand up and reclaim yoga nidra as a powerful resource for healing and liberation.*

To aid in this collective shift, I have taken rigorous steps to ensure my yoga nidra classes are trauma-sensitive. This initiative came without hesitation, not only to resist the existing structural harm but because it simply makes sense. As suggested earlier, trauma exposure is universal to the human condition and I have yet to teach a student who wasn't carrying the burdens of at least a few tough memories—whether it be from systemic oppression, pandemic-related tragedy, occupational stressors, interpersonal issues, health crises, and so forth. Whenever a student allows me to guide them through the deeply subtle and complex layers of their psyche, I do not take this lightly and understand my responsibilities to them.

Below is a brief summary of trauma-sensitive yoga nidra methods I utilize, informed by professional training, clinical research, personal experience, and a year's worth of critical discussions with global yoga nidra leaders. Each method is justified by

general and trauma-sensitive rationales (TSR), highlighting both their widespread and specialized merits. They are used as a foundational base which I can adapt according to context, e.g. intention-specific classes or personalized sessions where student feedback takes priority. By no means are these fixed rules; ultimately, it is my hope to stimulate ongoing reflection, exploration, and dialogue with yoga nidra teachers and students alike to catalyze the ongoing ethical evolution of this art.

General Principles

- **Comfortable physical environment.** At my home studio, I offer privacy, minimal distractions, adequate room, overall cleanliness, consistent sound (i.e. silence or simple music), and soft lighting. Within broader community spaces, I creatively work with what is available (e.g. incorporating disturbing sounds into meditative practices). Although students gradually learn to rest amidst less controlled settings,¹⁶ these measures set up a calm stage for training.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated hypervigilance.¹⁷

- **Supportive social environment.** I strive to hold safe practice spaces grounded in kindness, respect, and inclusion. In a purely pragmatic sense, this is crucial because rest is unlikely to occur within unwelcoming environments.²⁰

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated social detachment, which is notably prominent in students dealing with chronic systemic maltreatment and exclusion.²⁰

- **Personal autonomy.** I empower students to make assertive choices about how they would like to engage with their practice. From start to finish, students can determine their resting posture, remain still or move, have their eyes closed or opened, and accept, decline, or adapt any of my meditative instructions. This invitational facilitation style grants them opportunities to set boundaries and take charge of their experience.^{17,18}

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated helplessness.^{17,18,21}

- **Healthy physical boundaries.** I refrain from offering physical assists during yoga nidra practice in favour of protecting its introspective elements from external disruptions. In contexts where consent, equality, respect, trust, and safety are established, I may offer Ayurvedic head massage or postural adjustments *preceding*.

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated aversion, compulsivity, and dysfunctional boundaries regarding physical touch.^{17-20,22,23}

- **Mindful awareness.** Rather than imposing contrived feelings of relaxation and bliss, I endorse welcoming one's true inner experience with openhearted acceptance. Among many other benefits, this quality of awareness supports emotional processing and authentic self-inquiry.^{5,16,24} To ensure enough time for this to occur, I pace my instructions leisurely with punctuated periods of silence.

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated avoidance patterns, e.g. persistent emotional suppression.^{5,16,17,24}

- **Gentle pacing.** I encourage students to pace themselves compassionately if any difficult inner experiences arise. For example, students can intermittently switch their attention to something pleasant, such as the sensation of blankets or their inner resource.† They can also take a break from practice altogether and engage with a different self-care activity. This helps maintain an overarching sense of safety,⁵ which is essential for effective emotional processing.²⁵

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated intrusive distressing memories and intense negative emotions, which can often emerge at an overwhelming rate.^{17,25}

Specific Yoga Nidra Elements

- **Ample settling and externalization.** I allot adequate attention towards grounding techniques to establish awareness of the

current time, place, and circumstances. This helps students awaken to the present reality while mental projections like worries and ruminations quietly flow in the backdrop.^{16,26} Furthermore, this provides a secure container to explore specific timelines or even timelessness within the practice.

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated dissociation, which involves feeling severed from one's surroundings.¹⁷

- **Sleep permission.** I usually do not make students vow to stay awake. Instead, I let the intelligence of their bodies decide what states of consciousness will serve them best throughout the practice. For those who rarely experience restful sleep (and there are many),²⁷ completely going offline is not only immensely therapeutic but also a stepping stone towards experiencing the traditional conscious yoga nidra states.

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated insomnia.⁵

- **Uplifting sankalpa or nirvikalpa.** I invite the use of self-chosen sankalpas (intentions) or suggest ones that typically support healing and liberation. I also offer the option of nirvikalpa (without intention), as simply resting in the Heart space is sufficient for accessing one's inherent wisdom and wholeness.¹⁵ Both methods ratify a sense of self-trust and coherence.^{5,15}

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated low self-efficacy.^{5,28}

- **Ample rotation of consciousness and breath awareness.** I provide a generous amount of space for students to feel their bodies and the movement of breath/ energy within. This cultivates body awareness and energetic attunement, both of which are crucial prerequisites for emotion-regulation.^{5,16,29}

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated deficits in interoception (the ability to correctly detect body sensations).^{17,19,29}

- **Conscientious pairs of opposites.** I prefer allowing students to choose their own uniquely appropriate opposites of sensations, emotions, thoughts, and beliefs

to explore. If I am offering specific opposites, I emphasize the physical sensorial experiences of them, as this is usually more tolerable than meeting them mentally.^{5,17,30}

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated overwhelm from intense negative emotions, thoughts, and beliefs about one's self, others, and the world.^{17,30}

- **Conscientious visualizations in chidakasha.** I prefer allowing students to observe their naturally arising mental projections rather than imposing my own. I may also suggest general frameworks and let students construct the details themselves, e.g. something they are grateful for. This hands-off approach encourages the mind to grow aware of and process its contents as well as unearth its intrinsic creativity. If I am offering specific visualizations, I stick with conservative images from the natural world.

TSR: This primarily aims to address trauma-associated triggers, where distressing intrusive memories can be exacerbated by certain stimuli (e.g. visualizations) that are related to the traumatic event(s).^{2,17}

To conclude, I wish to affirm my conviction that integrating trauma-sensitive yoga nidra methods can greatly enhance one's practice. Although they can be construed as overly cautious accommodations that hinder meditative inquiry, it actually does the exact opposite; when students feel safe and empowered, they are able to explore their practice more freely in ways that make sense for them.^{17,18} So I invite you to rest well with trauma-sensitive yoga nidra, with an abundance of offerings here to assist you...

Offerings

Co-Creative Nidra: Collective Intentional Rest - Listen deeply to your Heart's intuitive wisdom and let me know what yoga nidra themes would serve you best—I'll deliver a practice that nurtures what is being called for. Join me on the **2nd Sunday of every month from 2:00pm - 2:30pm (ET) online via Zoom** free of charge!

Nidra Restore: Yoga for Sleep - Join me on **Thursdays** from **8:00pm - 9:00pm (ET)** online via **Zoom** for some trauma-sensitive guidance through yoga nidra-based gentle mindful movement, soothing breathwork, mantra and sound, and guided relaxation. Throughout class, we gradually release physical, emotional, and mental burdens in preparation for a peaceful night's sleep. Two 6-week sessions are offered this season from **September 23rd - October 28th, 2021** and **November 4th - December 9th, 2021**—join me on the next round for a sliding scale fee of **\$75 - \$135!**



Therapeutic Yoga + Nidra: Personalized Meditative Care - Seeking some more customized guidance? Enjoy a private, semi-private, or private group session with me, offered both **in-studio at The Nidra Nest** and **online via Zoom**. With the tools of yoga, I can help you tap into your innate resilience and playfully surf the waves of life's stressors. *If you are currently experiencing symptoms of trauma, please be aware that yoga is a complementary wellness tool that may assist but not replace conventional treatments such as trauma-focused psychotherapy. Although traumatic memories may resolve as a natural*

byproduct of practice, I do not facilitate trauma processing directly (e.g. through exposure or talk therapy). First and foremost consult with a mental health professional about whether meditative practices are suitable to include in your recovery plan. Feel free to **connect with me** for further inquiries.

Taking Back the Night (2020) - **Anytime, anywhere**, my voice is here to coax you through your much needed time outs. This **on-demand collection of yoga nidra guides** were specially created for survivors of sexual violence, and support a felt-sense of inner safety and trust, reconnection to your body's intuitive wisdom, soothing remedies for physical and emotional pain, healthy relationships with yourself and others, and restful sleep to reclaim your night. Help yourself to a free download, and if you do find these practices beneficial, I would be grateful in accepting a contribution.



Free Nidra Guides

iRest Yoga Nidra for Restoration by Sheila Singh is a beautifully poetic trauma-sensitive guide that softly unveils a felt-sense of grounded presence, security, acceptance, and release. Sheila is an experienced iRest yoga nidra teacher and supervisor plus soon-to-be clinical mental health counsellor and somatic experiencing practitioner. As I experienced a heartbreaking resurgence of race-based stress injuries earlier this year, I was highly fortunate to discover refuge with Sheila and her practice community. The burdens always feel a little lighter as she holds space for everyone to be felt, seen, and heard, and then echoes back a responsive yoga nidra in return. You may connect with her lovely therapeutic offerings at www.sheilasinh.com.

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*[Yoni Shakti: The Movement](#) is a public awareness and education campaign working to eradicate abuse of women in yoga and reclaim yoga as a powerful resource for healing and liberation. I invite you to consider joining me in supporting this important cause.

†An inner resource is a reliable felt-sense of safety within the body. A couple examples of how it can be accessed include visualizing a calm place or loved one.