

WONDRIUM

Topic
Better Living

Subtopic
Health & Nutrition

iRest

Integrative Restoration Yoga Nidra for Deep Relaxation

Guidebook

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iRest Institute



WONDRIUM

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In addition to her work as a teacher, trainer, and retreat leader, Ms. Birkholm has published several audio and video products. Her iRest Yoga Nidra CDs and Sivananda Yoga & iRest Yoga Nidra DVD are distributed worldwide. She lives in South Florida with her son, Santiago, and her yellow Labrador, Cleo. ●

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iRest:

Integrative Restoration Yoga Nidra for Deep Relaxation

Believe it or not, peace is present every moment of every day. Peace is our true nature. The potential to experience this peace is already here. But typically in day-to-day life, we just don't experience this part of ourselves because we have spent our lives looking at everything that is changing and everything that needs "fixing." Most of us were not taught how to stay connected to this peace amid the changing experiences of daily life. However, iRest is a practice that supports us in doing exactly this.

In this course, you will discover the beginnings of iRest, short for Integrative Restoration, which was the name first applied to this secular, research-based form of guided meditation developed by Dr. Richard Miller, a clinical psychologist, author, researcher, and yogic scholar. iRest stems from a 2,000-year-old form of meditation called Yoga Nidra, which is Sanskrit for the "yoga of sleep." The course will explore each of the 10 steps of the practice, uncovering why they're included in the iRest protocol and what effects they have on the body and mind.

During these 24 classes, you will explore iRest Yoga Nidra both as a practical tool you can use in day-to-day life and as a form of deep meditation. The course will alternate between theoretical and experiential classes. In the theory part of the course, you will learn about the science and philosophy behind each step, diving into how each affects the body, mind, and spirit. During the experiential portion of the course, you will have the chance

to practice what you learned, experiencing firsthand how to integrate the practice of iRest into your daily life. You are welcome to do any of the iRest practices as many times as you would like both during the course and after you finish the course. The goal is for the classes to help you understand and experience iRest Yoga Nidra in a way that it becomes uniquely your own and interwoven throughout your entire life.

In the last part of the course, you will discover the benefits of iRest for helping with sleep, healing trauma, relieving pain, and incorporating it into daily life. Each of these special classes has its own short iRest practice designed specifically for that topic. You will also dive into the science behind iRest Yoga Nidra and mindfulness, learning more about how modern science is catching up and proving the effects of this 2,000-year-old practice. ●

Class 1

Introducing iRest Yoga Nidra



Did you know that there is a form of mindfulness meditation that will benefit you even if you fall asleep while practicing it? In fact, that same form of meditation has been helping special operations troops improve their resiliency, executives manage stress, cancer patients cope with pain, and trauma survivors experience safety and healing. And many advanced meditators use this same practice as a way to reach deep states of meditation, and people around the world have used it to find peace amid the hustle and bustle of their daily lives. This form of meditation is iRest Yoga Nidra, or simply iRest, which is itself short for Integrative Restoration—the name first applied to this secular, research-based form of guided meditation.

Foundational Elements of iRest

- Peace is present every moment of every day. Peace is our true nature. The potential to experience this peace is already here. Typically in day-to-day life, we just don't experience this peace because we have spent our lives looking at everything that is changing—everything that needs fixing. Most of us were not taught how to stay connected to this peace amid the changing experiences of daily life.
- iRest is a practice that does exactly this. It guides us into a direct experience of this part of ourselves that is unchanging. Peace is the deep undercurrent of our lives that is always there, holding us in its steady embrace. iRest empowers us to feel that peace as our firsthand experience. It teaches us to live from this deep place of equanimity where our thoughts, words, and deeds naturally arise in each moment.
- iRest uncovers a natural way of living where every moment is paired with its perfect response. It empowers us to stay

connected to a state of unchanging equanimity, a state of stillness—or a state of awareness—even in the face of life's biggest challenges.


Welcoming

- iRest is based on the world-embracing view that invites us to welcome and explore whatever arises in both meditation and daily life as a part of our human experience. While some forms of meditation require us to shut out the outside world, the iRest practice gives us the opportunity to be proactive with sensations, emotions, and thoughts. We treat all of these as messengers that give us the opportunity to look at what wants to be seen and heard inside of ourselves and in the world.
- We suffer in life when we want reality to be different than what it actually is. Our attachment to life being a certain way is the very root of our suffering. Welcoming what arises empowers us to be engaged with life on life's terms. It liberates us from having to constantly “fix” and change our circumstances.
- Welcoming does not, however, mean that we may not seek a different outcome to a situation; it just means that our peace is not dependent on it. Welcoming sets us free to live from a peaceful state of equanimity, no matter what is happening in day-to-day life.
- You don't have to be the Dalai Lama to experience the peace that is present in every moment. iRest is being practiced all over the world by many different types of people, including special operations soldiers, business executives, prisoners, and kindergarten children. The same iRest practice can meet all of these diverse people exactly where they are and give them what they need in that moment.

- Because iRest has proven so effective for so many different people, it is being clinically researched for a wide variety of purposes, including insomnia, chronic pain, depression, anxiety, substance abuse dependencies, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Science of Stress

- Research has shown that the same iRest practices that are used to heal people who have experienced unimaginable trauma are also having tremendous efficacy with corporate executives and people in high-stress jobs, such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers. Studies are finding that experiences of prolonged stress affect our bodies and minds in much the same way as experiencing a trauma.
- Stress is something that everyone experiences on a daily basis. And though we have physiological mechanisms for coping with stress, these mechanisms evolved in an ancient environment very different from our world today. In other words, the stresses that we face in the modern world are quite unlike those our earliest ancestors faced. And they've multiplied exponentially over the last century or so.
- Family, work, financial obligations, social obligations, 24-hour news cycles, endless emails, texts, traffic, and countless other demands provide a constant stream of stress for 21st-century men and women. Given all the stressors that we confront these days, what is it about iRest that can help us live calmer, healthier, more meaningful lives?
- Let's begin with the concept of de-stressing. We teach our children how to take tests and play in competitive sports, but we don't spend much time teaching them how to de-stress.

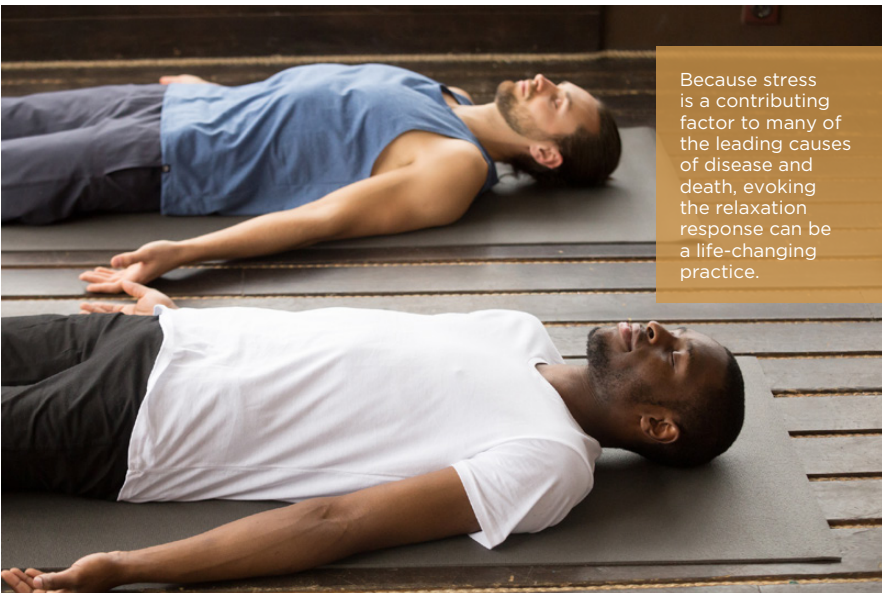


A Harvard study reports that more than a quarter of all Americans live in a state of extreme stress. And the rest of society is not lagging far behind.

As a result, most adults live in a constant cycle of stress with few effective coping strategies. To make matters worse, the majority of people cope with stress through drinking, drugs, overeating, shopping, and other behaviors that can actually intensify the stress.

- But if these behaviors are counterproductive, what does it mean to de-stress ourselves? De-stressing requires evoking the relaxation response. The University of Michigan defines the relaxation response as the “ability to make your body release chemicals and brain signals that make your muscles and organs slow down and [increase] blood flow to the brain.”

- To understand this more fully, let's review some basic biology. The human nervous system is comprised of various subsystems, one of which is the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which controls involuntary functions, such as your heartbeat. The ANS is further broken down into two main divisions: the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS).
- The SNS is primarily responsible for activating the fight-or-flight response. Among other things, this involves speeding up the heart and contracting blood vessels. When you're stressed, the SNS is turned on. The PNS, by contrast, acts to slow your heart rate and is generally involved in the response associated with rest, sleep, and digestion.
- When we talk about the relaxation response, we're referring to a process that shifts the body from the SNS's fight-or-flight response into the equilibrium and homeostasis of the PNS. This shift can happen automatically, but we can also train our bodies to evoke the relaxation response even when we're faced with stressful conditions. Clinical research is showing that iRest is a highly effective tool for activating the relaxation response.
- The following are three important ways—but, of course, not the only ways—that stress affects the body:
 1. Stress actually changes the shape and functioning of the brain. These effects are especially noticeable in three parts of the brain: the amygdala (which is heavily involved in emotions like fear and anger), the hippocampus (which is crucial to memory formation), and the prefrontal cortex (which is the driver of higher-level thinking). At the most basic level, stress causes the amygdala to grow, the hippocampus to shrink, and the prefrontal cortex to



Because stress is a contributing factor to many of the leading causes of disease and death, evoking the relaxation response can be a life-changing practice.

go offline. But initial research is indicating that evoking the relaxation response causes the exact opposite to occur in the brain—meaning that we have more ability to stay emotionally balanced, focused, and conduct higher thought processes.

2. Stress accelerates the aging process by shortening the length of telomeres, which are located at the end of our chromosomes, which contain our genetic information. And thanks to the Nobel Prize-winning research of Elizabeth Blackburn, we now know that the length of telomeres has a direct correlation with our aging process. A telomere is like the plastic tip at the end of a shoelace. The longer it is, the more likely it is to protect your chromosomes; the shorter it is, the more the aging process accelerates. Mindfulness practices like iRest are



Investing time in evoking the relaxation response using practices like meditation may actually keep your brain younger longer. A study at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard University found that the cortical thickness of meditators from the ages of 40 to 50 was similar to that of nonmeditators aged 20 to 30.

one of the leading ways to lengthen telomeres and ward off the aging process.

3. Stress can upregulate, or turn on, stress genes. These are genes that can affect such diseases as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and mental illness. Dr. Herbert Benson's research at Harvard has begun to show that practicing just 20 minutes a day of an activity that evokes the relaxation response can start downregulating, or turning off, stress genes.

iRest Basics

- iRest is a go-to tool that is used to evoke the relaxation response because it is incredibly simple and at the same time highly effective. You don't have to do anything to experience

this meditation. It is typically practiced lying down. People receive many benefits of the practice, even if they fall asleep. In fact, many people practice with the intention to fall asleep at night.

- iRest follows a 10-step guided meditation protocol that provides a comprehensive path through the meditation process. You can think of the protocol as a filing system for your mind that guides you through an experience of your body, your breath, and any feelings, emotions, and beliefs that may be present. It then gently leads you into deeper states of mindful awareness and stillness.
- Each step utilizes a variety of techniques that can evoke the relaxation response. The end product is an increase in the body's ability to stay resilient, or to bounce back quickly from challenging circumstances. Resiliency is like a muscle: The more we practice evoking the relaxation response, the stronger our resiliency muscle becomes.

10 Stages of the iRest Protocol

Step 1: Inner Resource

- ◇ *Cultivate an inner resource, or an internal place of safety, comfort, and well-being.* Using an inner resource connects us with an inner sense of security that can help us feel more comfortable as we move into deeper states of rest and relaxation. The inner resource is an internal place of peace that is always carried with you. The meditation practice helps you define it, grow it, and expand it.
- ◇ Even though most of us are not living in a place of immediate danger, the inner resource is important

because the body and mind need to feel safe for the relaxation response to occur. Our brains are instinctually hardwired to be constantly scanning for potential danger. On a neurological level, the inner resource lets the brain know that you are secure.

Step 2: Intention

- ◇ *Set an intention for your practice.* The Sanskrit word for intention is *sankalpa*, which can be translated as “that which brings you into harmony.” As you set your intention for the meditation, you can think about what would bring you into harmony on that given day.
- ◇ Perhaps it is to work with a difficult emotion, such as anger or fear. If you have an important decision to make, bring that question in as your intention so you can see the answer that arises when you’re not actively thinking about it. You can also make your intention a prayer for yourself or someone else. Setting an intention begins to bring the mind into a more focused state.

Step 3: Heartfelt Desire

- ◇ *Identify your heartfelt desire.* Think of your heartfelt desire as a long-term intention. What do you truly want more than anything else in life? What is your heart’s deepest desire? The answer may be something specific, or it may be a general phrase, such as “I am healthy, happy, and peaceful.”
- ◇ Your heartfelt desire can be used proactively as a way to point to “true north.” When choices arise, you can ask yourself, Does this support what I ultimately want for my life? Once you know where you want to go, your actions

will naturally begin to coalesce around bringing that goal into fruition.

Step 4: Body Sensing

- ◇ *Bring your attention to the physical body.* We systematically rotate our attention through the physical body using patterns that correspond with the sensory and motor cortices in the brain. Depending on the practice, we also use progressive relaxation techniques. Body sensing is designed to decrease heart and respiratory rates, reduce the level of alpha brain waves, and evoke a state of deep rest.
- ◇ Practitioners are invited to explore physical sensation, rather than implying that their bodies should “relax.” Tension may feel like a physical experience, but it is directly connected to stress in the mind. In other words, mental stress creates tension in the body. Meditation teaches us to be aware of the constant ongoing circuit between the body and mind. If every time we get stressed our shoulders and back start hurting, that can be an immediate signal that we need to take a step back and start evoking the relaxation response. Maintaining awareness keeps us present, attuned, and objective in the face of whatever stress may arise.

Step 5: Breath Sensing

- ◇ *Turn your attention to the breath.* At times, we observe the natural flow of the breath. Other times, we use a variety of breath sensing and mindfulness breathing techniques.
- ◇ The fascinating thing about the breath is that it is the only function of the ANS that we can directly influence.

Mindfulness breathing techniques are also one of the most effective ways to evoke the relaxation response. Our bodies have been breathing themselves every moment of our lives, yet we can also use the breath as a proactive tool to shift the body from the SNS to the PNS.

Step 6: Exploring Feelings and Emotions

- ◇ *Bring your attention to feelings and emotions that may be present in the body, as well as to their opposites.* For example, if happiness arises during the practice, you also will spend time feeling sadness. Experiencing opposites of emotions is an essential practice for cultivating resiliency. Spending time sitting with opposites of emotions teaches us to become aware of emotions when they first occur, as well as to identify the whole range of associated experiences that may be present.
- ◇ As we become adults from children, we learn to suppress and hide our emotions. If we can learn to become aware of the initial whispers of suffering, it is much easier to bring the situation back into balance. If we don't listen to these subtle hints, they keep turning up the volume until we do listen. Suddenly, discomfort becomes irritation, which becomes frustration, which becomes anger, which becomes rage.

Step 7: Intellect: Beliefs, Images, and Memories

- ◇ *Bring your attention to your beliefs, images, and memories.* In much the same way that we work with emotions, we also work with any beliefs that may be present. Opposite beliefs—such as “I am strong” and “I am weak”—arise as two sides of the same coin. We give them both equal voices to be felt, seen, and heard.

- ◇ This practice engages the world as a part of the meditation experience. It doesn't keep anything out. Meditation is not an escape from reality. This world-embracing view can be a profound paradigm shift when we realize that there is nothing we need to escape to "find" peace. It's already here.

Step 8: Joy, Equanimity, and Well-Being

- ◇ *Explore the experience of uncaused joy, equanimity, and well-being.* Welcoming life, just as it is, makes space for an experience of peace to naturally unfold.
- ◇ This equanimity is not dependent on anything that is happening in or around us. It is a state of well-being that exists from connecting with a place of stillness within ourselves.

Step 9: Witnessing the I-Thought, Being, and Awareness

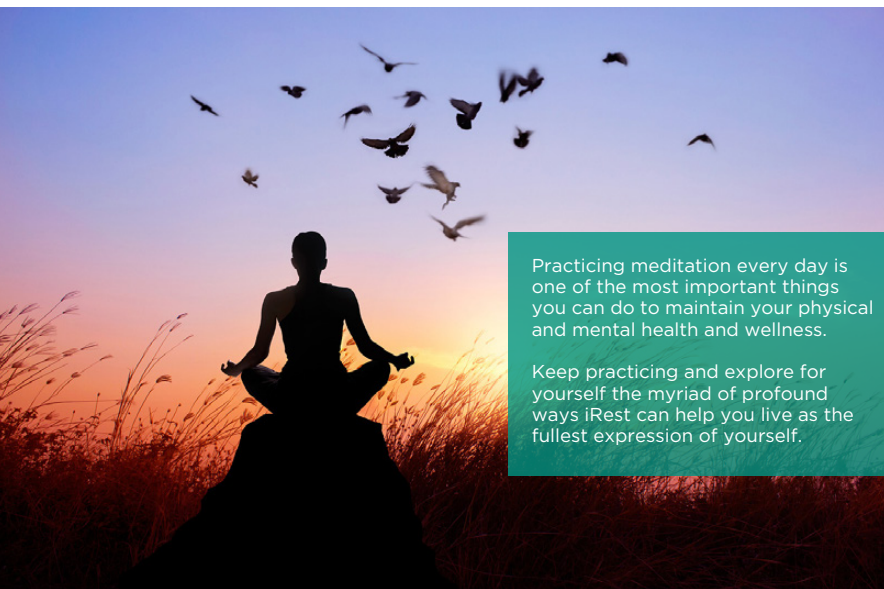
- ◇ *Explore the I-thought and the experience of being aware.* In the midst of all the pleasure and the pain of life, there is also something else present. When we turn the thought "I am happy" or "I am sad" around on itself and ask, Who is aware of this?, we immediately step back into the part of ourselves that is the observer. We feel the happiness or the sadness, but we recognize that we are not it, but we are the observer of it. This change in perspective gives us the opportunity to not be quite so fused with the emotion. The emotion loses its hold on us.
- ◇ When we feel ourselves as pure awareness, we experience the peace that is always here; we have more resilience and can access equanimity amid the changing conditions of life. Peace is present every moment of every day. Peace

is our true nature. It is untouched by anything that has ever happened in life or anything that ever will. iRest gives us an opportunity to have a direct experience of this peace.



Step 10: Integration into the World

- ◇ *Reintegrate into the world.* Finding peace during meditation is one thing; living from a place of peace amid the challenges that we face at home and at work is quite another. The more adept you become at navigating challenging situations during meditation, the easier it will be to keep your peace when stressful feelings arise.
- ◇ As we ease out of our practice, we set an intention to carry a feeling of peace with us throughout the day.



Practicing meditation every day is one of the most important things you can do to maintain your physical and mental health and wellness.

Keep practicing and explore for yourself the myriad of profound ways iRest can help you live as the fullest expression of yourself.

Suggested Reading

Bremner, “Traumatic Stress.”

Epel, et al., “Can Meditation Slow Rate of Cellular Aging?”

Harvard Health Publishing, “Understanding the Stress Response.”

Lentz, et al., “Human Nervous System.”

Mitchel, “Dr. Herbert Benson’s Relaxation Response.”

Class 2

iRest Foundations:
Philosophy and Practice



This class will take a closer look at the foundations of iRest from both the philosophical and practical perspectives. This is an important class because it lays the foundation that will support you through the rest of the course.

Roots of iRest

- For centuries, people have tried to understand consciousness and how the mind optimally functions. Indeed, the entire practice of yoga is the exploration of this concept. The Sanskrit word *yoga* comes from the Indo-European root *yuj*, which is often translated as “union.” The English word “yoke” can ultimately be traced to the same root. And the “union,” or “yoking,” that the word *yoga* refers to is the practice of uniting the body, mind, and spirit so we can experience peace amid the changing experiences of daily life.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Have you figured out the way for your body and mind to optimally function?
- Are you able to remain focused, present, and aware throughout your entire day?
- Are you able to maintain a peaceful state of mind amid the changing experiences of daily life, including challenging emotions and experiences, such as stress and pain?

If you answered “no” to any of these questions, then you will most likely benefit from this course. And even if you answered “yes,” there is still a tremendous amount you can get out of this course.

- iRest has roots in a particular form of yoga called Yoga Nidra. *Nidra* is a Sanskrit word that is often translated as “sleep.” In this context, *Yoga Nidra* is often translated as “the sleep of the yogi.” *Nidra* can also be translated as “across all states of consciousness.” With this translation, we get to a deeper understanding of what the purpose of Yoga Nidra actually is, which is to maintain awareness amid all states of consciousness. Ultimately, we want to be resting in a state of stillness consciously, whether we are in the waking, sleep, or deep sleep states.
- The origins of Yoga Nidra go all the way back to a collection of verses known as the *Samkhya-karika*, the earliest known text of the Samkhya school of Hindu philosophy. The *Samkhya-karika* laid out the foundation of the teachings, which then found new life in another seminal text called Patanjali’s *Yoga-sutras*—a collection of 196 sutras, or aphorisms, laying out a pathway to experience peace in the moment. Samkhya lays the foundation, and then Patanjali sets out the experiments to give us access to a firsthand experience of the teachings.



Patanjali, a teacher who lived around 400 AD, authored the Hindu classic *Yoga-sutras*, in which he maps out ways we can suffer less, function better, and live as the highest expression of ourselves.

- One of the principles Patanjali affirms in his teachings is *pratyahara*, which is the Sanskrit term for a one-pointed state of mind. iRest is a modern form of Yoga Nidra guided meditation. By guiding the practitioner through the meditation, the teacher is supporting the mind in becoming one-pointed, or focused.
- If you have ever tried to do a silent meditation, you know how challenging it is to get the mind to focus. Silent meditation can

be an extremely challenging and often frustrating practice for the busy mind. This is one of the reasons why Yoga Nidra is so effective. Because it is a guided meditation, it gives the mind a gentle handhold so it doesn't wander all over the place. It provides an opportunity to practice *pratyahara*, or this one-pointed state of mind.

- Classical Yoga Nidra often includes the visualization of specific images, such as sacred symbols. iRest Yoga Nidra, on the other hand, guides you through the meditative experience but gives you the invitation to observe whatever arises. iRest is offered as an invitation for the mind to focus on what is present, rather than imposing that your mind should focus on a specific thing.
- Learning to focus the mind can improve nearly every aspect of life, from really listening to family members about how their day went to getting a big project done at work. Cultivating this one-pointed state of mind also has the potential to unfold into *dharana*, which is Sanskrit for a state of deep concentration.
- This can occur during meditation and during daily life when we experience the flow state, which occurs when our body and mind become fully absorbed by an experience. You probably have felt this when you have found yourself completely engaged with a project or in a state of deep connection with another person. It is in this flow state that we are able to perform at an optimal level. It's what highly successful athletes cultivate to perform to the height of their abilities.
- There is a reason we love these moments of flow. They bring us completely into the present moment, where we feel the full intensity of our experience—the full intensity of being. But we don't have to reserve that pure experience of being for the big game or a random moment of creative inspiration. We

can actually have it throughout our daily lives. This is exactly why we practice iRest.

- The key is learning to listen deeply—not just with our ears, but really with all five of our senses open and engaged so we are feeling each moment with our entire bodies. When we do this, we get out of the thinking mind and into feeling. We open the door to experience being. The practice of iRest offers us an invitation at every stage of the 10-step practice to do exactly this. At its core, iRest is a practice of deep listening.
- iRest helps us to be fully present throughout our lives. We engage with the world in a new way. We find connection where we may have been in conflict before. A sense of uncaused joy begins to arise, even amid difficult and painful experiences, because we feel present and in harmony with life.
- While this may initially sound esoteric or perhaps unattainable, in actual practice, through iRest, it is entirely possible. Learning to be fully present from moment to moment can transform the quality of your attention and every aspect of your life.

One of the amazing things about iRest is that while it can change your life in profound ways, it is also one of the simplest things to practice. iRest may be the easiest form of meditation. There is nothing you have to do during the practice of iRest—nothing you have to achieve—and there is no wrong way to practice iRest.



How Often and When to Practice iRest

- How much should you practice iRest? That depends on how much you want to get out of it. A daily practice is recommended. You might initially think you don't have enough time to do this, but in reality, we make time for what is most important to us. If you don't have enough time, perhaps it is because you haven't placed a high enough value on what you stand to gain.
- You are investing time and money into this experience, so why not get the most out of it by committing to a month of daily practice? By then, it will become a habit, and hopefully you'll find yourself wanting to make time each day because you are experiencing the benefits.
- If we really want to cultivate equanimity and resiliency in our daily lives, we have to invest time toward that goal. It's like building a muscle: You don't just lift weights once and suddenly start having the muscles of a professional athlete. You have to build consistently over time.
- What time of day should you practice iRest? People practice iRest at all hours of the day. Some people enjoy practicing in the morning and find they're more aware and peaceful throughout the day after having practiced. A morning practice allows you to enter the day in an authentic way because you've come in touch with how you are feeling before outside stimuli influence your mind otherwise. It also cultivates a feeling of peace that can hold you as you move through your day.
- iRest is also a great way to feel refreshed during that late afternoon low-energy time when you might reach for a cup of coffee. You will be amazed at how much more clear

and productive you feel after a short 15-minute practice in the afternoon.

- Many people enjoy practicing at night as a way to process the day and ease themselves into a deep night's rest. iRest is also the perfect thing to do if you find yourself waking up in the middle of the night.

Class 19 of this course is on how to use iRest for sleep. If this is a topic that interests you, make sure to visit that class.

- Many people also use iRest for specific reasons, such as to help alleviate pain or to work through a challenging emotion. In these situations, practice both while you are in the midst of these challenging experiences as well as during times when they aren't as present. Both will support you through the experience.

There are classes at the end of this course on using iRest for pain (**Class 20**) and trauma (**Class 22**), so be sure to check them out if these points are of interest to you.

- Experiment with different times of day and find what works best for you. If you need a reminder, set an alarm on your phone or create a consistent habit, such as practicing every night before bed. The more you practice, the easier it will be to maintain aware, present, and peaceful states in waking life.
- Keep in mind that iRest can be practiced with family members as well. It's a great way to connect and relax.

Setting Up Your Space

- How do you set up your practice space? It's important to create the right environment so you can avoid distraction and get the most out of the experience.


- Most people enjoy practicing iRest lying down, although you are welcome to practice sitting up, standing, or in any position you find comfortable. Be sure your body is warm, but not hot, and perhaps covered with a blanket depending on your temperature preferences.
- You may want to place an eye pillow or a soft cloth over your eyes to relax the eye muscles. If you're lying down, it may also help to elevate your head or back on a pillow or bolster. Ideally, the chin should be tucked just slightly lower than the forehead. If you have lower back discomfort, try rolling up a blanket to put under your knees or placing a bolster beneath your knees. This can help take the pressure off of your lower back.
- If you are practicing iRest with the intention to fall asleep at night, it is fine to practice iRest in your bed. If you have an intention to explore meditation or process an emotion, it's best to choose a location you don't associate with sleep, which increases the likelihood that you'll remain present throughout the practice.
- When you begin your practice, be sure to turn off or silence your phone. Also make sure you've eliminated as many distractions as possible. If other people are home, you might want to let them know you are going to practice. Close the door so you are less likely to get distracted by outside noises. If at any point during the practice you do become distracted, feel comfortable knowing that you can welcome the distraction as a part of the experience.
- It's also important to practice iRest in different locations. Try a hammock outside in the backyard or while you are sitting on an airplane.

Types of iRest Practice

- Besides creating an optimal practice space, it's worth reflecting on the various types of iRest practice. As you will experience during this course, there are both general iRest practices and more targeted practices. Look at your intention when selecting a class for the day. There are practices that focus more on the body, the breath, emotions, beliefs, joy, or awareness; there are practices specifically designed to focus on pain, sleep, or trauma.
- There are also many different lengths to iRest practices—from five minutes to 45 minutes. Try lots of different practices and also feel free to come back to practices that feel like they really work for you.

What to Expect

- During iRest Yoga Nidra, many people feel like they are in a place between asleep and awake, similar to the state you're in right before you wake up in the morning. You may hear the voice leading you through a practice but may not necessarily comprehend everything that is being said. That's perfectly fine.
- During other iRest practices, you may feel wide awake and be 100 percent attentive to everything that is being shared. Other times, you may fall completely asleep. Another possibility can be an experience of stillness that may first feel like you are asleep, but then you realize that you are aware of it, so some part of you is actually awake, even when the body falls asleep.



Awareness is always present, whether you are awake or asleep—whether you are aware of it or not.

- It's important to remember there's no need to change anything about your experience. iRest is a practice of deep listening, so be open to whatever occurs. You want to listen with openness, without prejudging what may arise. If you find yourself drawn to stay with one experience, remain with it for as long as you feel appropriate. You can pick back up with the guided practice at any time. What's important is to welcome your experience just as it is.
- During the practice, you will be invited to observe sensation in the body, the breath, feelings, emotions, images, beliefs, and the state of awareness. When we observe and welcome all that is present, we may find ourselves resting in being—in this deep experience of unwavering peace.
- Keep in mind that you want to be very proactive with sensations and emotions during iRest. Sometimes you will perceive immediate changes in a sensation, emotion, or experience; other times the process is more gradual. Be patient and curious.

- Remember that there is nothing you have to do, or achieve, during the practice of iRest Yoga Nidra. Each practice is unique.

Is It Okay to Fall Asleep?

- During iRest, you are invited to lie down and get cozy before you practice. Is it okay to fall asleep? The answer depends on the reason you are practicing. If you are practicing iRest with the intention of falling asleep at night, then falling asleep while you practice is certainly okay. However, if you are practicing iRest as a path to explore deep states of meditation or to work with a challenging emotion, falling asleep may not serve you in this goal.
- Even if you are not practicing to fall asleep, sometimes sleep might be what is best for you. Most people today live with some level of sleep deprivation, so know that if you do fall asleep during the practice, you aren't failing. It's perfectly okay and may be exactly what you need.
- However, if you find yourself often drifting off to sleep when you would like to stay awake, try to tune into the sound of the voice leading you through the practice to bring you back into the moment. If you are using the practice to feel your way through challenging emotions, you may want to stay more awake and aware to be present with your experience. You may also want to practice propped up with cushions or in a chair to increase the likelihood that you will stay awake.
- In general, let your experience be what it is. We have different needs throughout our life, and iRest can serve us through all of these.

If You Cannot Relax

- If you find you cannot relax during the practice, do not worry. Just welcome that and be with what is. Often the very things that are preventing you from relaxing deeply are desperately trying to make themselves known. We want to meet, greet, welcome, and respond to whatever arises. So often these experiences that challenge us are just looking to be seen, felt, and heard.
- Welcome anything that arises as part of your experience instead of pushing whatever it is away or trying to keep it out of your mind. And whether or not relaxation ever comes, welcome and accept your surroundings and yourself just as they are.
- Also, it is important to know that it might not be the right time for meditation, and your time might be better spent going for a walk or doing a task around the house. Meditation is not meant to torture yourself, so do what feels right in the moment.

Suggested Reading

Saraswati, “Definitions of Yoga.”

Satchidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*.

The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, “Samkhya.”

Class 3

Creating an Inner Resource




In this class, you will learn how to cultivate an inner resource, an internal experience of well-being. Connecting with your inner resource is an essential part of your iRest practice because it creates a transition between whatever is happening in your outside life and the practice. Opening every practice by connecting with an inner resource cultivates a sense of internal safety or easefulness—a knowing that you are secure so you can be set free to explore what is present during the meditation. An inner resource also provides a safe haven that you can return to at any time both during the iRest practice and in daily life if you start to feel upset or out of balance. The more you define, grow, and expand your inner resource in your life, the more it will help anchor you to a sense of well-being during those inevitable moments in life when times get tough.

Benefits of Developing an Inner Resource

- Thankfully, most of us are not living in immediate danger. That said, we all have fears that cause very real reactions in the body and mind. Every day holds stressors that may cause fear, insecurity, anxiety, and tension. It's important to look at what may trigger us to fall away from a feeling of well-being so we can directly address how to use our inner resource to bring us back.
- Triggers that cause you to lose your peace might include hearing a siren while driving, receiving a call from the doctor with your test results, and even watching the news. Behind each of these triggers is an underlying fear. These fears can show up in our emotions, beliefs, and day-to-day thought patterns. Think about all of the fears that shape our reality—fear of experiencing a challenging emotion, fear of failure, fear of judgement, fear of betrayal, fear of being seen as our

true selves. All of these fears can take us away from a sense of well-being.

- There are biochemical reasons why certain things trigger a fear response in our bodies and minds. Fears are born from past experiences that are stored as memories in the brain. Our brains have evolved over thousands of years to scan for potential threats. Once we've experienced something that threatens our sense of well-being in any way, such as a car accident or a challenging work experience, that experience creates an impression in the brain.
- When we find ourselves in a similar situation, that impression, when triggered, sounds an alarm in our system that alerts us to the presence of potential threats. A cascade of feelings, emotions, thoughts, and beliefs unfold. This response is a natural part of how the brain functions; it is how we have evolved and survived as a species.
- Yet, despite the evolutionary value of this response, we do need to recognize a potential pitfall. The impressions created in our brains over time shape our current experience of reality. And when we are living from a place of fear instead of a place of well-being, it can affect our sense of self-worth, confidence, motivation, and ability to take action in the world. These impressions kick us out of our sense of well-being and make us feel insecure—even threatened.
- Living from a fear-based paradigm can leave us shut down from our body, our emotions, the people in our lives, and the world around us. Living from a place of fear causes us to miss opportunities—and even turn and run in the opposite direction of what we truly want in life.



According to a University of Cincinnati study in which participants wrote down their fears over an extended period of time, about 85 percent of their fears never ended up coming true. And for the 15 percent of fears that did come true, researchers found that 79 percent of the participants were able to handle the fear better than expected or learned something from the experience of the fear coming to fruition.

- This happens all the time when people avoid asking for a promotion or don't let that special person know how they feel. These situations require us to be vulnerable and to step into the ring with things that may make us feel uncomfortable. However, it's hard for us to step into the ring when we aren't feeling a sense of well-being. This is why there is benefit to developing an inner resource.
- Just as feeling unsafe is in many ways learned over time through our varied experiences, learning to feel safe comes from an internal experience that is practiced over time. Our experience of well-being can be external, such as not being in harm's way or always having enough money to pay your bills, but crucially, it can also be internal, such as having positive thoughts and affirmations or an inner resource that helps cultivate feelings of safety or relaxation at a moment's notice.
- There are tools we can use to empower ourselves—tools that help us access an internal place of safety and well-being

that is not dependent on the outside world. We can actually create a sense of security and easefulness within ourselves—from a source that's always accessible, always present.

- The benefits of accessing this inner resource are immense. When we feel safe and secure in life, we're able to be creative, inspired, energized, and much more alive. We live life closer to a full expression of our true selves. A solid sense of well-being allows us to stay connected to what is real and true in our lives. Being deeply connected to our inner resource helps us observe when we go away from our inner truth. It makes us more likely to stay peaceful and happy, even in the midst of adversity.

Establishing Your Inner Resource

- Before beginning your iRest practice, it's important to establish an inner resource—a haven of inner peace, safety, stillness, and serenity. It's a felt sense of well-being—a multilevel, multisensorial experience deeply rooted in the body.
- For some people, just hearing the words “Tap into an inner resource, an internal experience of well-being” will naturally evoke a feeling of easefulness throughout the body and mind. However, if that experience of inner resource does not arise naturally for you, it may be helpful to think about a real or imaginary place that evokes a feeling of well-being. This can be a place in nature, a favorite childhood place, or perhaps a place in your home where you feel secure and peaceful.
- Your inner resource can also be accompanied by people or animals—perhaps a spiritual figure you connect with, a beloved family member, or a favorite pet. This place can also include objects you love, such as a favorite stuffed animal,

picture, or sacred object. Other people prefer an imaginary inner resource, such as floating on a cloud or being seated in the heart of God.

- Honor what arises for you and know that what feels safe to you may evoke the opposite response in someone else, and that's perfectly okay. No one can tell you where or how you feel a sense of well-being.
- Once you've established your inner resource, it's important to feel it as a heartfelt, embodied experience. Open up your five senses—notice any sounds, smells, tastes, images, or textures. Use as many sensory modalities as possible when assembling this inner sense of well-being. This makes each sense a tool you can use to connect with your inner resource at a moment's notice. What your inner resource looks like, smells like, tastes like, sounds like, and feels like is completely up to you; what's important is that when you focus on your inner resource, it evokes the feeling of being secure and at ease throughout your body and mind.
- As you access your inner resource, pay close attention to the psychological and emotional sensations that are present. Beyond the five senses, connecting with your inner resource can also be accompanied by feelings of peace, love, serenity, and safety. As you spend more time developing your inner resource, it evolves from being something specific into a general sense of being or well-being. Images may fade and get replaced with an abstract feeling of peace, relaxation, warmth, and ease.
- Over time, your inner resource may shift and change. Avoid locking onto a specific place or image with the intent that the visualization will be your inner resource forever. Instead, allow your inner resource to shift and change naturally, as

you become accustomed to resting in a heartfelt sense of well-being.

- ◉ Additionally, as time passes, you may find that you don't need any imagery or memories to evoke this feeling of well-being. It is often said that at first, you remember your inner resource, and then eventually, it remembers you.
- ◉ Establishing an inner resource becomes particularly important when using iRest Yoga Nidra to heal from traumatic situations or events that have left you with unresolved beliefs, emotions, and memories. Your inner resource is a powerful tool for moving through the healing process.
- ◉ It can take a long time to cultivate your inner resource. For some people, imagining and sensorially experiencing something that provides a felt sense of well-being is unfamiliar. In that case, explore different options for cultivating your inner resource. This experience may start by just feeling okay, and then perhaps easeful, and then maybe secure—and maybe, eventually, a whole-bodied experience of well-being.

It is said that wellness can be measured by the space between our contradictions. Connecting with your personal core values can help evoke an experience of well-being by helping you focus on what is most important to you.

- ◉ An alternative to focusing on a specific image may include feeling into a general sense of well-being or into qualities about yourself that make you feel well and provide you a sense of safety. For example, you may want to sit with your core values, which may include times when you have been

trustworthy, patient, compassionate, or truthful, and let that connect you with a sense of well-being.

- As you establish your inner resource and develop it over time, it's important to remember that your inner resource is not an escape. It shouldn't be used to prevent yourself from feeling or experiencing something within your life. Instead, your inner resource is a means of coming back to a feeling of peace that is always within you. When you return to this peace, you return to security, safety, and groundedness, where you can experience everything in life, just as it is, without it disturbing your peace.

Using Your Inner Resource during iRest

- It's important to take time at the beginning of every iRest Yoga Nidra practice to recall and nourish your inner resource so you can evoke it at a moment's notice. Your inner resource should be vivid enough that it can immediately encounter and neutralize even the strongest reaction or emotion you may experience during an iRest practice.
- If during a practice you begin to feel overwhelmed by an emotion, memory, or belief that's arising in your awareness, you can immediately return to your inner resource and rest there until you've gained a sense of security, confidence, and safety. Once you feel secure and grounded, you can then return to the practice and continue with whatever is arising.
- You will also discover while practicing iRest that the inner resource is used at the beginning and end of the practice as a transition into and out of meditation. Peace can be hard to access in the midst of ever-changing circumstances, some of which are less than peaceful. Our inner resource provides the

bridge between accessing the ever-present peace inside all of us and bringing it into our meditation and day-to-day lives.

- Once you identify your inner resource and begin to develop it into a fully felt experience, you will be asked to set it aside as you continue with the next stage of the iRest Yoga Nidra practice. But you can always revisit your inner resource at a moment's notice, whenever you feel unsafe or seek a sense of well-being and ease.
- By incorporating this step into your iRest practice and your daily life, you're creating a sense of safety within yourself that helps you deal with the circumstances of life. As difficult situations arise in your life, you will be able to handle them with grace and ease, knowing you have an inner resource that will support your security and well-being.

This class ends by guiding you through a short meditation that is designed specifically to help you start to develop your inner resource.

Identifying Your Inner Resource

Keep this worksheet and add to it as more details come to mind. Your inner resource will evolve over time. The more details you add and the more you use it, the more helpful it will be.

1. Bring to mind places, people, activities, and objects that make you feel secure, at ease, calm, happy, nourished, and safe. Write these down: _____

2. Choose one from above that feels particularly strong for you and write it down: _____

3. Add as much detail as possible:

Visual image: _____

Smells, touch, taste, sounds: _____

Feelings or emotions: _____

Words or phrases: _____

Body sensations or energetic experiences: _____

Suggested Reading

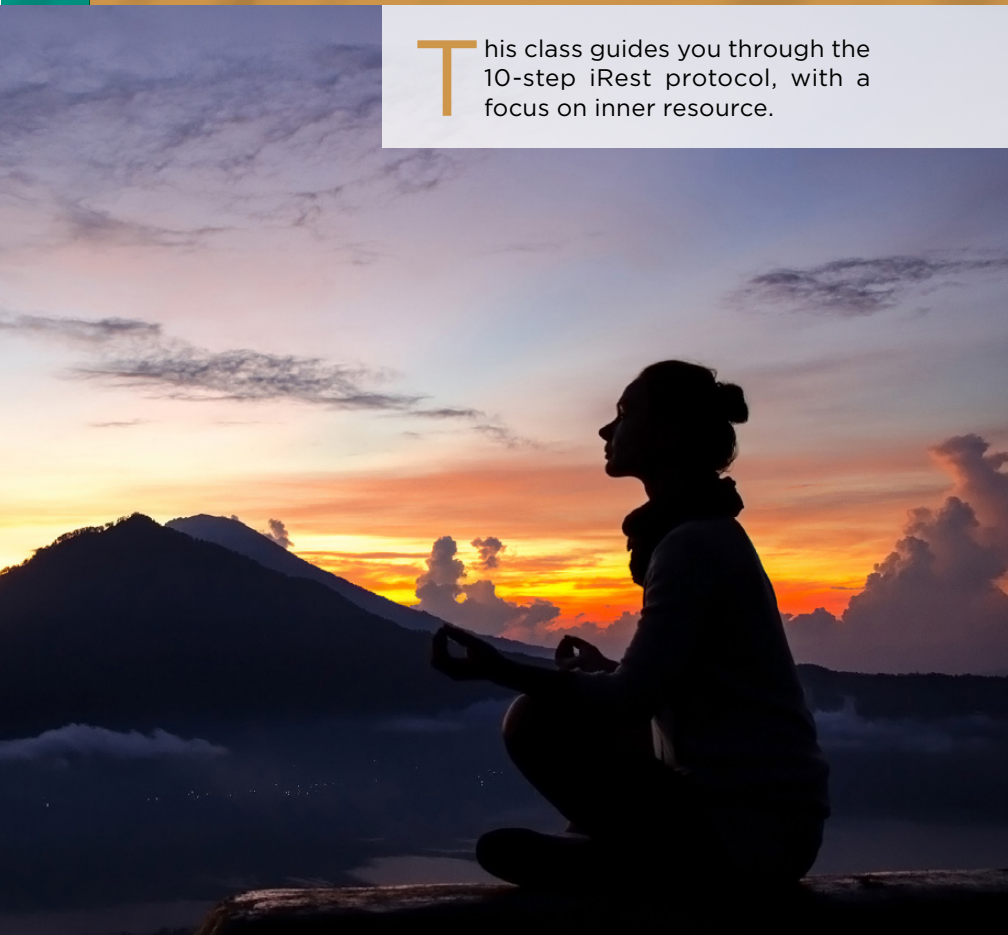
Goewey, “85 Percent of What We Worry about Never Happens.”

Goudreau, “A Harvard Psychologist Says People Judge You Based on 2 Criteria When They First Meet You.”

Class 4

iRest Practice: Inner Resource

This class guides you through the 10-step iRest protocol, with a focus on inner resource.



Class 5

The Power of Intention
and Heartfelt Desire



This class focuses on the power of two components of iRest: intention and heartfelt desire. One of the main tools that we can use to live as our best selves, however that's defined, is to understand the importance of intention. Through setting intentions, both in our practice of iRest and in our daily lives, we move one step closer to reconnecting with our true selves and living the life we want most. In this class, you will learn about the power of intention and the various ways it's included in iRest Yoga Nidra. You will also learn about the general benefits of intention setting—not only for practicing iRest, but also for helping you flourish in all aspects of your daily life.

Intention and Heartfelt Desire

- The Sanskrit word for intention is *sankalpa*. Although the simplest translation of *sankalpa* is intention, a deeper investigation into the nature of the word reveals profound meanings that can help us understand what setting an intention is all about. We may say that we have an intention to do an action or achieve something, but what is really behind that?
- One definition for intention is “that which brings you into harmony.” If you want to take an action or achieve something, there is an underlying desire to bring life into harmony in one way or another. When we discuss setting an intention, we mean adopting a heartfelt attitude that will bring your body and mind into harmony.
- Another translation of *sankalpa* is “that which is born from the heart.” This reveals another aspect of what intention means. While our brains may have a long list of all the things we think we “want” or “need” to be happy, our hearts may

The Power of Thoughts

When we think about the power of intention, we have to remember that our thoughts are creating our reality. iRest teachers often use an equation that comes from yogic philosophy:

thoughts › actions › habits › character › destiny

Every action we make in life starts with a thought. Over time, our actions become our habits, and our habits shape our character. Eventually, our character determines our destiny.

You can see the power of intention when you consider this equation. Our thoughts are creating our reality every moment of every day. Setting an intention is a powerful way to plant the seeds of what you would like to see happening in your life. Every one of us can use this equation to tap into the power of intention.

tell a different tale. What is it that wants to take life through you? What action, if taken, will bring your unique expression of self to life in the world? Your intention is what brings your heart into harmony.

- There are two parts of a *sankalpa*: intention and heartfelt desire.
- ◇ At the beginning of every iRest Yoga Nidra practice, one of the first steps is to set an intention for the practice. This is a short-term intention for that particular practice. For example, it may be to work with a challenging emotion. It may be a question about life that you're trying to find an answer to. You may set an intention to have a deep and restorative night's rest. It may be a prayer for yourself or someone else. This intention may be the same for several practices, or it may change from practice to practice.

- ◇ The second part of the *sankalpa* corresponds with the third step of iRest Yoga Nidra: identifying your heartfelt desire. This wholehearted intention is also known as *sankalpa bhavana* in Sanskrit. It translates to “heartfelt attitude that is held with the entire body and mind.” It is a heartfelt attitude, vow, prayer, or healing intention that we hold about ourselves, our loved ones, or the world. We feel it in every cell of our being.
- It’s easiest to think of your heartfelt desire as a long-term intention for your life. What do you truly want more than anything else in life? What is your heart’s deepest desire? Your answer may be something specific, or it may be something broader. It also may be a general expression of love, gratitude, well-being, healing, or health. But whatever it is, it’s the deepest longing of your heart.
- Your heartfelt desire may differ from your intention when you begin your iRest practice. While your intention can focus on isolated aspects of your life, such as being angry about sitting in traffic or having to make a big decision at work, your heartfelt desire is your heart’s deepest resolution that it wishes to express.

Intention and Heartfelt Desire in iRest Yoga Nidra

- Because your heartfelt desire is such a deep resolution, it can be used proactively in your daily life as a way to point to “true north.” When choices arise, you can ask yourself whether a particular choice supports what you ultimately want for your life. Once you know where you want to go, your actions will naturally begin to coalesce around bringing that goal into fruition.

- Similar to your intention, your heartfelt desire helps focus your mind and prevents it from becoming distracted and attaching to random thoughts during the practice of iRest. This focus, in turn, allows you to go into deeper states of self-inquiry.
- By setting an intention at the beginning of whatever endeavor you face—whether it's in an iRest practice or a project at work—you're creating a mental guidepost that will serve as a single point of focus while you take steps toward achieving your goal. The more you affirm your intention, the more it will bring you back into balance if your mind starts to wander or you get distracted.
- Once you set your heartfelt desire, you have an important touchstone. When situations or choices arise in life, you can ask yourself this question: Does this support my *sankalpa*, or does it take me away from it? We can lose half of our lives in the things that arise from day to day, such as getting lost on social media instead of spending time with a loved one. We can give our lives away in these types of choices. If you aren't achieving what you want to achieve, it's important to ask yourself, Why not?
- Even though distraction binds our attention day in and day out, self-inquiry developed through iRest Yoga Nidra frees our attention so it's available for what we truly want in life. Through self-inquiry, we're able to recognize the conditioned habits and misperceptions that keep us bound in dissatisfaction and suffering—all of the things that keep us from living our heartfelt desire with energy and clarity.
- Our attention is easily eaten up by distractions, especially when we enter into a meditative state like that during iRest

Yoga Nidra. The mind has a tendency to constantly move in many different directions, never resting for more than a few milliseconds on a single object.

- But through the practice of iRest Yoga Nidra, the mind is able to regain its natural ability to remain undistracted, allowing it to focus on the practice. Soon the mind learns not to fight with changing thoughts, but to simply notice them without latching onto any one thought. And all of this is initiated through the power of setting an intention.

The Difference between Heartfelt Desires and Goals

It is important to differentiate between our heartfelt desires and our goals. Your heartfelt desire may include some aspect of a goal, but in essence, a heartfelt desire is more of a global experience or direction in life, whereas a goal may be extremely specific. For example, your goal might be that you want to buy your dream home, whereas your heartfelt desire may be “I have a secure, happy, and peaceful home life.”

You may have heard the saying “You don’t get what you want in life; you get what you are.” While the achievement of the goal may be the symbol of success, we need to identify that happiness doesn’t come from having the house of your dreams. You may end up getting the house of your dreams, but you also may be living there in a totally destructive relationship.

Happiness comes from our state of being. Ultimately for change to occur, it must come from who we fundamentally are, not just from the outward manifestations of it. If you actively embody your heartfelt desire while you live in that beautiful home, you carry that state of being with you through all the things you do in life, even if you move to a new home or go on a trip. Your definition of “home” then becomes a way of life.

- These initial steps of iRest Yoga Nidra create a vital moment in the practice. When you set an intention for your practice, you lay a foundation that will help develop and sustain your attention as well as enable yourself to recognize the moment when your mind begins to attach itself to a rising thought, image, or emotion. By not setting an intention, this moment goes unrecognized, and your mind will repeat its habit of fusing with the objects of your attention or falling asleep.
- Mindfulness practices are grounded in the ability to observe the fluctuations of the mind, whether during the meditation practice itself or while going about daily life.

Setting Your Intention

- Before beginning your day or your practice of iRest, it sometimes helps to think about what would bring you into harmony on that given day. For example, it might help to work with a difficult emotion, such as anger or fear. Or if you have an important decision to make, you can set that question as your intention so as to allow the answer to arise when you're not actively thinking about it. You can also make your intention a prayer for yourself, someone else, or the world.
- It's also crucial to remember that you can always go into the practice with a clean slate. iRest is a practice of deep listening. You start every practice with an intention so you can really listen for the answer of what wants to be seen, felt, and heard.
- Your intention can change from practice to practice, day to day, so don't feel like you have to keep the same intention forever. However, if you do choose to return to the same intention every practice, that's fine, too. What's important is

you set an intention at the beginning of your practice. Then, keep returning to your intention throughout your practice, as well as throughout your day, as a reminder of what will bring you into harmony.

- Examples of intentions include the following:
 - ◇ I am alert and awake and practicing iRest Yoga Nidra.
 - ◇ I will sleep deeply the whole night through and awaken refreshed.
 - ◇ I hear this wisdom that my traumatic experiences are sharing with me.
 - ◇ I am free of suffering, including mental and physical pain.
- Your intention can also be a question that you are looking for an answer to in your life—such as, How should I respond to that thing my spouse said to me that hurt my feelings?—or even in business, such as, How can I best help my client through this difficult situation? You can also use your intention for creative purposes by asking something like, What wants to take life through me? What's important is that you keep your wording positive, concise, and specific when choosing your intention.

Identifying Your Heartfelt Desire

- Identifying your heartfelt desire is similar to setting your intention. When practicing iRest Yoga Nidra, you will usually be guided to ask yourself, What is it that I want more than anything in life? Listen deeply for the answer. What makes your heart beat? What gets you out of bed every

Why Do We Affirm Our Intentions in the Present Tense?

Once you set your intention and heartfelt desire, you will notice during iRest Yoga Nidra practices that you're asked to affirm your intentions in the present tense. If you phrase your intentions for the future—for example, “I want to be healthy” or “I will be peaceful”—you strive for something that you are always pushing into the future. When the future arrives, it will be *now*.

Therefore, it's important to phrase your intentions in the present tense: “I am healthy and peaceful.” Even if the statement doesn't feel true yet, the affirmation alone sets the wheels in motion for it to become true.

morning? Once the answer arises, you want to place it in the present tense.

- Examples of heartfelt desires include the following:
 - ◇ I am happy, healthy, and complete, just as I am.
 - ◇ I forgive others and myself with my whole heart and soul.
 - ◇ I am a compassionate, loving, and kind individual.
 - ◇ I am pure being.
- Again, the key is to keep your wording positive and to be concise and specific.
- As you identify your heartfelt desire, it's important to experience it using all five senses so your brain accesses and processes it as fully as possible. You want to really feel it with your whole body. No matter how beautiful or poetic the words are that you use to phrase your heartfelt desire,



your unconscious mind processes information concretely, not abstractly. So, it's crucial to feel your heartfelt desire as an active concept.

- For example, if your heartfelt desire is “I am a compassionate human being,” you can envision yourself being compassionate in specific situations. You may want to include past situations where you were extremely compassionate or picture yourself acting with compassion in a challenging situation. This will help cultivate these qualities in your day-to-day life.
- Each time you repeat your heartfelt desire, you're planting a seed deep within yourself that will work to bring about the change you want to see in your life.

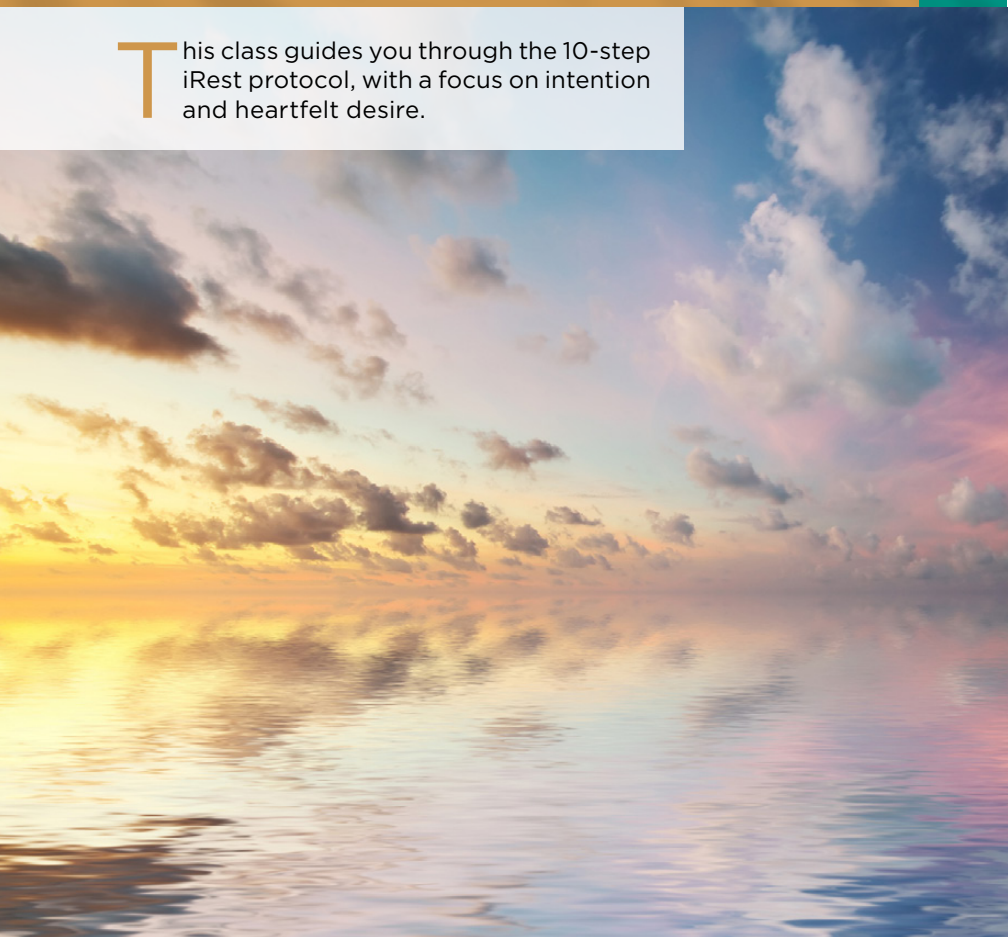
Suggested Reading

Yogapedia, “Definition: What Does *Sankalpa* Mean?”

Class 6

iRest Practice: Intention

This class guides you through the 10-step iRest protocol, with a focus on intention and heartfelt desire.



Class 7

Learning to Listen
to Your Body



This class is all about body sensing and learning to listen to the body. Body sensing is something that you learn to practice during iRest, but ultimately it is something you should be doing all day, every day, as a means of staying fully present and aware throughout your life.

Body Sensing

- Our bodies are a whole symphony of experience, where each sensation resonates in different parts of the body and in different ways. Every moment of every day, there are countless sensations occurring in our body that go into the symphony of experience we feel from moment to moment. Every part of our body is constantly sending signals in a variety of ways—everything from the temperature of our bodies, to the feeling we get when we walk past a person who makes us nervous, to the grumbling in our bellies that lets us know we're hungry.
- Yet, even though our bodies are constantly sharing information with us, we tend to feel and acknowledge only a small fraction of that information. What's more, incessant distractions from the outside world are disconnecting us from our bodies. When life gets busy or we fill our lives with distractions, we move further and further away from the ability to stay tuned into our own personal symphony of experience.
- Stress and trauma shift us into a state of mind where we are not really present in our bodies. When someone asks how we are, we give a robotic answer instead of really inquiring into what is present in that moment. Especially in the case

of trauma, our body may feel like the scene of a crime where something challenging occurred. It may not feel safe to be present in our body, so we disassociate. We stop feeling. Often people who have experienced trauma report feeling outside of themselves.

- And what does the body do when we don't pay attention? It starts turning up the volume on things—such as physical pain, fear, or anger—until we do listen. Often physical pain is closely tied to unprocessed emotional pain. What may feel like a migraine headache may be deeply rooted to a challenging relationship or a work conflict. Sensation is our body's messenger system that is constantly inviting us to feel—if and only if we listen. Likewise, the body also sends positive signals, such as pleasure, taste, smell, or sound. Often we start to notice these things when we slow down enough to really be present in the moment.
- During the practice of iRest, we take time to turn our attention away from the outside world and toward our internal experience. We spend a lot of time becoming aware of sensations that are occurring in the body, feeling what is present with openness and curiosity.
- We explore the symphony of experience, noticing how each area of our body feels from moment to moment. We may feel something or nothing at all. Parts of the body may feel relaxed, or maybe tense. We don't impose an experience or try to fix or change anything. We simply observe changing physical sensations from moment to moment.

This class includes some tension and relaxation exercises that are designed to help you feel how sensation is constantly changing.

- Doing iRest Yoga Nidra or other body sensing activities allows us to listen closer to the messages that our body may be sending at any given moment.
- Much of our wellness is derived from being able to sense when things are both right and wrong in the body. If we have a cut, we sense the pain associated with an open wound and take actions to heal it. If we feel amazing after a yoga class, that is a good sign we will want to practice more. When we ignore sensations in the body, we block off one of the most important aspects of the human experience. Our physical sensations are exquisite messengers.

The Six *Koshas*

- After establishing your inner resource, intention, and heartfelt desire at the start of your iRest practice, you turn your attention to the physical body, which in Sanskrit is known as the *annamaya kosha*. While the definition of *kosha* is “sheath” or “veil,” you can think of *koshas* as layers of consciousness. They are what differentiates you from your neighbor, partner, children, and coworkers. They are the ways in which we identify as a human—as a separate “I” that is different and distinct.
- *Koshas* describe the way we have been moving through our lives for as long as we’ve been on this beautiful earth. Your *koshas* represent the part of you that is born, lives, and dies. And they closely correspond with the 10 steps of iRest.

- The six sheaths, or *koshas*, are as follows:



- iRest invites us to explore all six of these *koshas*, and to welcome what is present. By experiencing everything that is changing in life, we open the door to experience that which is unchanging. We refer to that as awareness. Through meditation, we cultivate the conditions to become aware of this stillness amid all of the changing sensations of daily life.
- Thinking schematically, we can imagine a series of concentric circles that surround a human body. The first *kosha*—the physical body—relates to body sensing, which is at the center of the circles. With each subsequent *kosha*, the circles become larger and expand away from the physical body.
- From body sensing, we move to the next circle—breath sensing—then into the circle of our feelings and emotions,

then into beliefs, then into joy, before ending at witnessing awareness and pure awareness prior to reintegration into waking life.

- The iRest protocol walks us through all of these circles, or layers of consciousness, and invites us to explore and to welcome what is present in each:
 - ◇ The physical body—*annamaya kosha*—is the most obvious layer of consciousness. It's very real, and we see the *annamaya koshas* of people walking around all day.
 - ◇ The next layer is the breath, or *pranamaya kosha*. We can feel the breath, and we can see it on a cold day, but it is certainly subtler than the body.
 - ◇ In the *manomaya kosha*, we experience feelings and emotions. This is the place where we connect with how our body interacts with the outside world.
 - ◇ From emotions, we then move out into the *vijnanamaya kosha*. This is where we process the information taken in by the rest of the body as thoughts, memories, and beliefs.

The first four *koshas* are what form our identity. They create our sense of being a distinct, separate individual. It's the part of us that has a name, a form, a history, and all of the feelings, emotions, and beliefs that come along with it.

- ◇ The next layer of consciousness is the *anandamaya kosha*. *Ananda* is the Sanskrit word for “bliss.” It is the joy of being alive—joy that doesn't even need a reason.

- ◇ The sixth and final *kosha*, the *asmitamaya kosha*, invites us to look at who exactly is doing all of this observing. It invites us to look at the I-thought. Who is the “I” that you are referring to when you identify yourself? Can you find that “I” when you go to look for it? This slowly unfolds into the experience of witnessing awareness, where awareness starts to flood in. This is the experience of being able to feel peaceful in the moment, no matter what the body or mind is experiencing. This may also unfold into an experience of pure awareness: the experience of complete stillness—the fullness of emptiness.

Annamaya Kosha

- *Annamaya kosha*, or the physical sheath, can more literally be called the food sheath. After all, the word *anna* translates to “food” in Sanskrit. All of our physical aspects in life come and go and are continually consumed by other aspects of external reality, just like food. Thus, the first *kosha* is called the sheath of food.
- The body is the most obvious aspect of who we are. If you look down at your body, there’s no denying it’s there, taking up space. And there’s no denying the physical sensations we experience in the body—whether we’re always aware of them or not. Because the *annamaya kosha* is visible and a recognizable part of the self, most of us identify ourselves with our physical form.
- As we typically experience our bodies, they feel very dense—solid. But when we look deeper at physical matter, we learn that it’s just made up of molecules and atoms vibrating in space. There are many different frequencies on which our molecules and atoms can vibrate, and vibrational frequency

plays an important role in our physical reality because it's how energy is expressed through our physical form.

- So, while we experience the body as solid, it is really just condensed energy, and the electrical impulse of how that energy expresses itself is referred to as sensation.

Body Sensing during iRest

- During iRest, you're invited to systematically rotate attention through the physical body and notice different vibrations, or sensations, that are happening throughout each part of the body.
- In this process, you're asked to pay attention to the naturally arising phenomena in the body-mind. You should neither invent, nor deny, anything that arises. During iRest, we never tell the body to "relax." Relaxation may occur as a part of the experience, but that is not the goal. We are simply welcoming each moment—each part individually and collectively—of this symphony of human experience.
- Sensation itself is neither good nor bad. Those two characteristics, among many others, are what we use to judge sensation based on our personal preferences. You might like the sensation of having your back rubbed but not like the sensation of being pinched on the arm. Both of these sensations, in themselves, are neutral; it is you who attaches the connotation of good or bad to each of them. Remember that sensations are simply messengers.
- When we feel into any sensation long enough, we realize it's energy that may be stuck or free-flowing. Interestingly, when we feel into the "stuck," or painful places in our body, and



Pain is a sensation that all of us are familiar with in one form or another. And while almost all of us associate pain as a negative experience, we have to remember that pain is a messenger trying to tell us that something needs to be seen, felt, or heard.

When we pay attention to pain, our experience may change. When we ignore it, the pain will grow louder and louder until we finally listen.

when we dive deep and try to pinpoint exactly where the pain or tension is radiating from, we often will not be able to find it. As we get close to where we think the pain is coming from, it very often disappears, even if only for a moment.

- No matter what technique we use, the simple act of body sensing allows us to grow to appreciate our bodies as a rich source of feedback that is always pointing back to the inherent ground of physical, psychological, and spiritual well-

A distorted picture of the human body known as the cortical homunculus man brings to life how the brain processes sensations in different parts of the body. The face, hands, and lips are more sensitive than other parts of the body, so they are assigned more nerve endings in the sensory cortex in the brain and are therefore disproportionately larger in the image.

This specific mapping of the sensory cortex of the brain is the reason why we rotate our attention through the body in a specific order during iRest. Proper rotation of attention through the body induces flows of energy within the natural circuits of the brain's sensory and motor cortices. Different flows of energy can have different effects on our bodies.



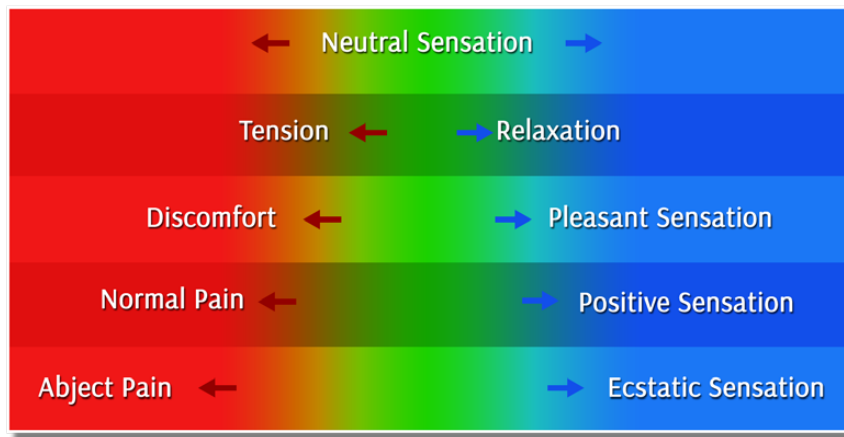
being. The practice of iRest Yoga Nidra attunes us to the subtle energetic resonances that make up the physical body.

Benefits of Body Sensing

- There are many benefits of being attuned to the physical body. Body sensing generally has the outcome of decreasing heart and respiratory rates, reducing the level of alpha brain waves, and evoking a state of deep rest. It also allows us to explore the body more deeply, heighten sensory awareness, increase sensitivity to messages the body and mind constantly send, and uncover pointers to our true nature.
- When we take time to focus on and feel into different body parts, we allow ourselves to receive all of the messages our body is trying to send. And when we listen to these messages, we can act on them and begin to fully experience life.
- When you relearn to experience your body as subtle, radiant vibration, you regain access to a vast array of sensations that provide important feedback relating to your current state of physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being.
- iRest Yoga Nidra reawakens our capacity to listen and welcome these messengers of sensation as harbingers of information. And when you can acknowledge and welcome the body's subtle cues, you can respond and take appropriate action long before your body becomes sick, or before you experience extreme pain, or perhaps before you enter into the wrong relationship or job.
- When we block off the sensations in our body, that's when we begin to miss intuitive cues, such as when we can and cannot trust people. That sinking feeling in your stomach

when you're approached by someone at night on your way to the car is your body telling you to watch out.

- This is just one example of a subtle cue that many of us ignore from moment to moment. But they're so important in helping us decide what actions to take in our daily lives. iRest is a way for us to bring awareness to our ever-changing sensations and learn to listen to the subtle messages they're sending.
- We want to cultivate the ability to pay attention to our ever-changing physical sensations. Meditation and mindfulness teach us to be aware of the constant, ongoing circuit between the body and mind. If every time we get stressed our shoulders and back start hurting, that can be an immediate signal that we need to take a step back and start evoking the relaxation response: Take some deep breaths, do a little yoga, lie down for a 10-minute iRest. Maintaining awareness of the physical sensations the body sends us keeps us present, attuned, and objective in the face of whatever stress may arise.



- Whispers of pain or tension are very important messengers that shouldn't be ignored. If you think of pleasure and pain along a spectrum, then slight tension can quickly move to more serious levels of discomfort, then to normal pain, and eventually to all-consuming, abject pain.
- We prevent ourselves from reaching the level of abject, or even normal, pain by feeling into the whispers that our body sends us when we're experiencing even slight discomfort and asking, What action are you asking me to take? A sensation that may feel like nothing can easily and quickly grow into a much more serious problem when not addressed in a timely manner.
- We also want to learn to become aware of moments when we are experiencing the sensations on the right end of the spectrum. For example, you may start to notice that you are feeling relaxed. And then you observe that that feels pleasant, or good. It may even start to transform into really positive feelings of pleasure that may even eventually evolve into an ecstatic experience. We want to listen to our bodies and learn from them so that we can learn which actions our body wants more of and which may need some love and attention.

Suggested Reading

Bharati, "Five Sheaths or Koshas of Yoga."

Chang, "The Relationship between Disease and Energy Frequency."

"Matter, Elements, and Atoms," *Khan Academy*.

Montgomery, "The Body in the Mind."

"The Five Koshas," *Rae Indigo Yoga* (blog).

Tippett, "How Trauma Lodges in the Body."

Class 8

iRest Practice: Body Sensing

This class guides you through the 10-step iRest protocol, with a focus on body sensing.



Class 9

Exploring the Power
of the Breath



In this class, you will discover what our breath has to tell us about our health, wellness, and peace of mind. You will explore both the yogic and scientific perspectives on the breath—perspectives that turn out to be surprisingly similar. Then, you will learn how the practice of iRest Yoga Nidra integrates breath sensing practices—all of which can be used in your daily life as well. You can use the breath to live a healthier, more peaceful life.

The Breath, or *Prana*

- Our breath has a major impact in our lives and can positively or negatively affect nearly everything we do. It is the first thing we do when we are born and the last thing we do when we die. It gives us life every moment of every day.

According to Patricia Gerbarg, coauthor of *The Healing Power of Breath*, five to six breaths per minute is the proven amount to help a person feel his or her best. But many people breathe much faster than that, averaging between 14 and 20 breaths per minute.

- It is also the only function of the autonomic nervous system that we can directly control. That means we can actually change our physical and mental experience by learning to control the breath. The breath can transform how we do what we do.
- Using the breath to your advantage is a clinically proven way to bring about changes in the body that is easy to do, costs nothing, is portable, and has no negative side effects. Why not learn more about it?

Exceptional athletes, actors, business leaders, and special operations teams use the breath to become even more exceptional at what they do. In *Tools of Titans*, author Timothy Ferriss interviews various types of people about the tools and practices they use to keep themselves optimally functioning, and the breath is mentioned many times.

- Breath sensing is one of the 10 steps in the iRest protocol, and it's great for using in everyday life, too. Cultivating awareness of the breath can help you stay calm and peaceful amid ever-changing circumstances in your daily life.
- No matter who you are, where you live, or the nature of your life's circumstances, everyone has to breathe. But the quality of our breath and how we use it in our daily lives can vary wildly from one person to the next. And according to the Power of Breath Institute, when combined with the stresses of overly busy lives, our breath can become constricted, preventing us from thriving and even causing illness in the body and an agitated mind.
- From both a yogic and a scientific perspective, we see how our breath reflects our minds and how our minds reflect our breath. If the mind is agitated, the breath tends to be irregular and shallow. If the mind is relaxed, the breath tends to be deeper, smoother, and steadier.
- In the Western world, we generally take the word “breath” to mean an anatomical function. But for yogis and those in Eastern cultures, the words for breath—such as *prana* in Sanskrit or *qi* in Chinese medicine—have much broader connotations. Instead of viewing the breath as just this thing we unconsciously do to bring oxygen into our bodies, Eastern cultures view the breath as the energy that brings our bodies



Pay attention to your breath the next time you feel stressed and notice where you are breathing: Is it in your lungs, the belly, the middle of the chest, or the top of the chest near the clavicle? Also notice the pattern and the tempo of the breath.

Then, notice your breath at the end of an iRest practice or during a time when you feel particularly relaxed. You can also observe what happens to the breath when you exercise.

We have a lot to learn by becoming aware of our breathing patterns, as well as how we can effect changes in the body and mind by regulating the breath.

to life. The Sanskrit word *prana* can be translated as “life force,” “vital energy,” or “that which gives you life.” We see this also in many native cultures.

- The root of the word *prana* is *pran*, which means “to animate.” It is interesting if we think about this in terms of what we learned in the previous class on the *annamaya kosha*, the physical body, which is known as the food sheath. The body needs the breath to animate it, or give it life. You can stop eating or drinking for a while, but if you stop breathing, it’s lights out pretty quick. Breathing is the steady rhythm that carries us through life.
- There is an entire science around how to use the breath for health, healing, improving meditation, and increasing

energy. This science is called *pranayama*, which is commonly translated as “breath control” but can also be translated as “support of life” or “expansion of life.”

- It's believed that through conscious, daily practice, *prana* can be cultivated in the body, creating energy that we can move throughout the body as desired for various purposes—whether it is to be more energized and clear for a big meeting or to still the thoughts in preparation for deep meditation.
- There is a clear connection made in yogic philosophy between your physical and mental wellness and the flow of *prana*. If you're tired, you need more *prana*. If you're sick, there's *prana* that's not moving through the body correctly. If you have tension or pain in the body, it is believed that the energy is getting stuck or not moving. If your mind is agitated or depressed, it indicates that your *prana* is out of balance.
- Conversely, if your mind is crisp and clear, *prana* is balanced. If your body is healthy, strong, and energized, *prana* is abundant. *Prana* can bring enthusiasm, joy, and peacefulness.
- One of the main reasons that yogis use breathing exercises is to prepare for meditation practice. Deep, rhythmic breathing is the perfect preparation to calm and still the mind for meditation.
- Whatever your circumstances or belief system, your breath, or *prana*, can have an effect on your physical and mental state. Understanding the breath gives us the tools we need to find safety, security, and calmness in any circumstance that arises.

The Science of the Breath

- The breath affects the nervous system. One way it does this is through the vagus nerve, which is the longest cranial nerve in the body and the most widely distributed. It contains motor and sensory fibers as well as somatic and visceral afferent fibers. This means that the vagus nerve has branches that connect to cardiac, pulmonary, digestive, and muscular systems in the body, just to name a few.
- The vagus nerve also serves as the bridge between the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), also known as the rest-and-digest system, and the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), also known as the fight-or-flight system. Both of these systems are part of the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which both regulates, and can be influenced by, the breath.
- Picture the vagus nerve as the air traffic controller in the body. It's the job of the vagus nerve to make sure the body is responding appropriately to everything happening in our lives. It regulates bodily functions and keeps the two branches of the ANS in balance, creating homeostasis in the body.
- People who have strong vagus nerve activity have an easier time moving from a stressed state to a relaxed one, so researchers sometimes use the phrase “vagal tone” to refer to the relative strength and responsiveness of the nerve. People with high vagal tone are considered to be more resilient physically and mentally when faced with stress; the opposite holds true for those with low vagal tone.
- Because the vagus nerve both sends and receives signals between the brain and the body, and because it's both influenced and impacted by respiration, we can increase our vagal tone through breathing exercises. Through slow, deep,

intentional breathing with long exhalations, we increase our vagal tone and elicit the relaxation response almost immediately. With the relaxation response turned on, our PNS takes control and sends signals to the rest of the body to relax.

- Research shows that faster breathing rates send signals through the vagus nerve to the brain stem, triggering the SNS. This means stress hormones are released, muscles tighten, and heart rate, blood pressure, and anxiety begin to increase. Your body essentially prepares to defend itself.
- But slower breathing rates have the opposite effect: Signals are sent to the brain stem through the vagus nerve, triggering the PNS. Relaxation and mental clarity begin to take over, and the body doesn't release stress hormones. Instead, the blood pressure, heart rate, and anxiety levels begin to decrease, leaving you feeling calm and at ease.

Dr. Roger Cole, an Iyengar yoga instructor and physiology researcher, says the breath is a physical health practice, a mental health practice, and meditation all in one.

By breathing mindfully, we have the power to lower everyday stress levels and improve a variety of health factors.



- The breath and the vagus nerve are involved in a feedback loop. If we want to calm the vagus nerve, we can also look at other ways to calm the breath. Thinking about our inner resource—that inner place of safety, security, and ease—can help slow down our breathing. Practicing yoga or going for a walk can also cause our breath to get into a certain rhythm, creating a sense of relaxation in the body. Moving meditations, such as tai chi, can also help calm the mind, which in turn will help slow down the breath.

Breath Sensing and iRest

- During every iRest practice, you will go through a breath sensing exercise because it's the fifth step of the 10-step iRest protocol, also known as the *pranamaya kosha*. When we connect with the breath during the fifth step, we become aware of the sensation of the breath and energy throughout the body, as well as how we can use the breath to affect physical and mental states. The breath can also be a gateway to experiencing awareness.
- Often during the breath sensing segment of an iRest practice, you will be invited to count your breaths. Counting is a form of mindfulness one-pointed training: When we spend time focusing only on counting our breath, we're training ourselves to focus on a single task for as long as necessary to finish a goal.
- Whether you're trying to finish a project at work, bring an end to a physical ailment, or awaken to your true nature, being able to remain undistracted and focused for as long as your undertaking requires is the key to being successful in your endeavor.

- There are dozens of breathing exercises that we can use to affect changes in our bodies and minds. You will notice a variety of techniques during the iRest practices, including breath noting, breath counting, Ferris wheel breath, whole body breathing, alternate nostril breathing, and many more.

It is important to experiment to discover what effects each breath has on you, so this class ends by guiding you through a few different breathing exercises that will give you firsthand knowledge not only of how to do them, but also of how they affect your body.

These are exercises that you will use during the iRest practices in this course. They are also practices you can use in your daily life—for insomnia, relaxation, and preparation for meditation.

Ferris Wheel Breath

Ferris wheel breath is one of the most calming breaths. You can use it to prepare for meditation or to help alleviate effects of insomnia, hypervigilance, panic attacks, and anxiety. Whether you are in your car, at your place of work, or at home, this breath is always available to you.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

Research shows that alternate nostril breathing strengthens the respiratory system while evoking the relaxation response. It's a calming breath that can be used at the beginning of a yoga practice, before you go to bed, when you find yourself in a difficult situation, or when you prepare for meditation.

Science shows that we breathe dominantly through one nostril throughout the day and that the nostril dominance changes every few hours throughout the day. Each nostril is correlated to a different hemisphere in the brain. This practice helps balance the breath in both nostrils while also balancing the autonomic nervous system at the same time. The technique

operates on similar principles to those that have been well researched with certain forms of trauma therapy. When we cross the right-left brain barrier, it helps the brain and body integrate information and process emotions. It's a calming practice that has been clinically shown to combat anxiety and stress.

The next time you're faced with a difficult situation, pause and try a few rounds of one of these breathing exercises. Observe the effect it has on your body and on your mind when you do. You can continue the breathing exercise until you feel ready to deal with the situation in a calm manner or until you feel safe, secure, and at ease.

Suggested Reading

Benson and Klipper, *The Relaxation Response*.

Brown and Gerbarg, "Sudarshan Kriya Yogic Breathing in the Treatment of Stress, Anxiety, and Depression."

——, *The Healing Power of the Breath*.

Bullock, "Tapping into the Power of the Vagus Nerve."

"Definition of Breath," Google Search.

Ferriss, *Tools of Titans*.

Frawley, "Understanding Prana."

Harvard Health Publishing, "Understanding the Stress Response."

Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health, "Why Yoga Works."

Levine, "The Science of Breathing."

Paul, "Rhythm of Breathing Affects Memory and Fear."

Power of Breath Institute, powerofbreath.com/.

Saraswati, “The Five Koshas.”

Sircus, “Function of the Vagus Nerve.”

Telles, et al., “Hemisphere Specific EEG Related to Alternate Nostril Yoga Breathing.”

Tewflk, “Vagus Nerve Anatomy.”

Class 10

iRest Practice: Breath Sensing


This class guides you through the 10-step iRest protocol, with a focus on breath sensing.



Class 11

Feelings and Emotions
as Messengers



 ur feelings and emotions, like our body and breath, are exquisite messengers that provide us with information on how the body and mind are experiencing the world at any given moment. And when we consciously bring our attention to our emotions and feelings, we're practicing one part of the 10-step iRest Yoga Nidra protocol.

Feelings versus Emotions

- When we talk about feelings, we're talking about how our body experiences the world and how we put labels on it. Feelings are things like hot and cold, comfort and discomfort, heavy and light. Because our bodies are covered with billions of nerve endings, we're constantly experiencing feelings, but we may not be fully aware of them. Just like sensations, our feelings are ever-present and ever-changing. From one moment to the next, there can be any number of feelings arising in the body.

There is a short exercise in this class that invites you to explore what feelings and emotions are present at the moment and helps you differentiate between the two.

After the exercise, consider how many different sensations you became aware of when you were doing the exercise. The amazing thing is that whatever you felt was also present before you became aware of it; your attention was perhaps just not fully on the various feelings and emotions that were occurring.

- Whether we're aware of it or not, our bodies are constantly experiencing the world, and when we're aware of those experiences, the mind uses labels to help us identify them. When we talk about feelings and emotions, we're talking

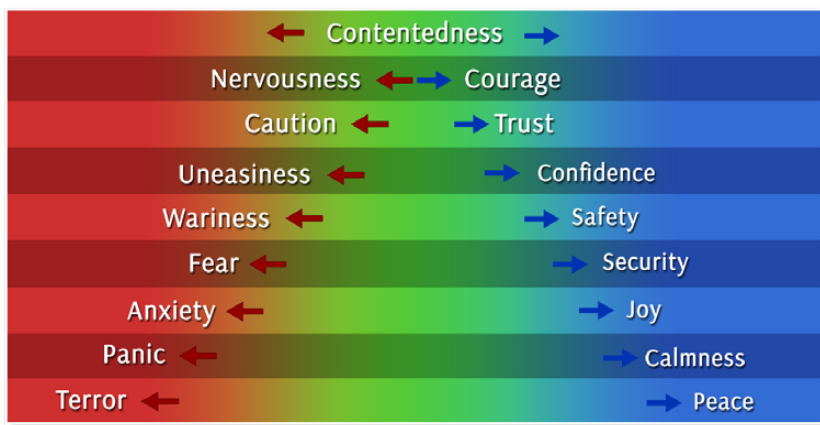
about how we relate to our experiences and how the mind labels our reactions to life.

- Emotions are things like happiness and sadness, calmness and anger, fatigue and invigoration. Throughout the day, we experience a gamut of emotions, some of which we're not even aware, much like our feelings.
- We begin to understand the power of the mind-body connection when we become aware of the fact that we can experience emotions somatically and feelings psychologically. Every time you have a thought, no matter what it is, your body reacts by secreting hormones that impact your nervous system. Being aware of this mind-body connection, and being able to identify where we feel emotions in the body, is a great life skill.
- According to Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, even when something happens to us emotionally, our body still processes the event. Think about it: When you experience the emotion of anger, don't you also experience it somewhere in your body? Or think about a moment when you've been overjoyed. Did you also experience sensations in the body that made you feel overjoyed physically?
- The same can be said about our physical experiences. When you accidentally hit your elbow on a table, what emotion arises in relation to that event? When you taste something delicious, is there a particular emotion that comes to mind at the same time?
- Our emotions and feelings are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong; they simply provide information regarding the ever-changing circumstances of our lives. iRest is a tool we can use to become more aware of our emotions and feelings

and better understand the messages they're sending. And when we become more aware of these messages, we're able to integrate them into our experience and take steps that will lead us closer to our true nature.

- When we're proactive in listening to and working with our emotions, we are cultivating awareness. And awareness helps us avoid identifying or fusing with these ever-changing feelings and emotions. We humans tend to identify with the emotions we experience by anthropomorphizing them. We say, "I'm happy," "I'm sad," "I'm angry," or "I'm frustrated," allowing each emotion to step inside of our bodies and come to life as if it's its own being.
- In reality, we are not any of our emotions. Our emotions are messengers sending us information about our experiences. When we learn to observe them, emotions can also point us back to the part of ourselves that is unchanging, which can bring peace and stability amid the changing experiences of daily life.
- Working with our emotions allows us to understand what actions they're asking us to take that will create harmony in our lives. The more we listen to our emotions and what they're asking, the less we identify and fuse with them. Instead of saying, "I am angry right now," we can say, "Anger is present right now." We stop immediately fusing with our emotions when they arise and begin to treat them as messengers.
- The good news is that we practice working with our emotions every time we practice iRest, which can help us cultivate the ability to see emotions as messengers. We can also begin to proactively work with our emotions in our daily lives.

- When emotions arise in awareness, they're accompanied by sensations in the body. Often there's a sensate dimension to our experiences, and iRest is one way to identify that dimension and become aware of the messages being sent, as well as how to respond in the moment in a way that allows you to keep your peace and stability.
- With each opportunity we have to cultivate this practice of witnessing, we increase our chances of really being fully and completely present in our lives.



- There is a wide spectrum of emotions we can experience throughout a single day. Take the emotion of contentedness as an example. On the continuum of that emotion, if contentedness sits in the middle, what emotions would be on either side of it?
- On one side, you might have such emotions as nervousness, leading to anxiety, leading all the way to terror as one of the extreme ends of the contentedness emotional continuum. On the other side, you might see a range of emotions, from courage going to confidence, leading all the way

to peace as the other extreme end of the contentedness emotional continuum.

- This is just one continuum for one emotion. Each emotion has its own continuum, its own extremes, and its own gamut of deeper emotions associated with it. These continuums can be different for every person.
- For hundreds of years, scientists and philosophers have posited that there is a core group of emotions—including joy, anger, sadness, fear, disgust, and surprise. But these handful of emotions are limiting and often don't capture the nuances of every situation we find ourselves in.

Dr. Tiffany Watt Smith points out that nostalgia comes in many different flavors: a type of sadness, a kind of wistfulness, a longing for something lost, and a pleasurable savoring of past moments. Each of these emotions can describe nostalgia, yet they're all slightly different from one another and can evoke different sensations in the body.

- During your iRest practice, you'll be invited to sense what feelings and emotions are present and where you feel them in the body. Sometimes an emotion will be present and sometimes not. The key is training yourself to sense your emotions early on so they don't get all the way out to the extremes. And as you learn to sense your emotions and observe them, you also learn how to welcome whatever is present.

Welcoming Emotions

- We are the ones who attach connotations to our sensations, feelings, and emotions. In reality, our emotions are neither

good nor bad but exquisite messengers sent to help bring us back into harmony.

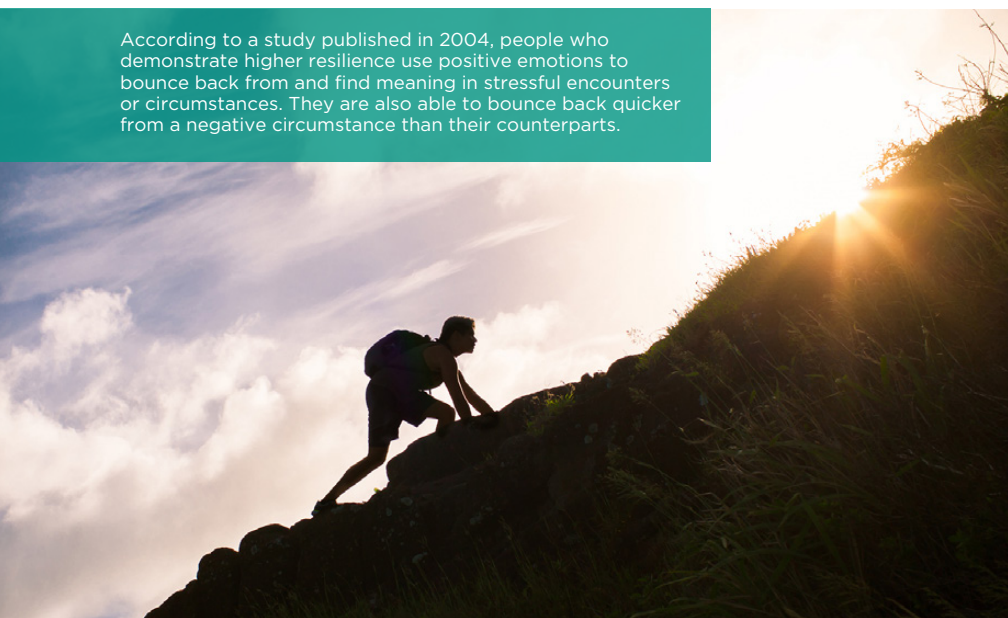
- Feeling anger, for example, is neither good nor bad; anger is a messenger that often tells us that our expectations are different from reality. If you expected to be promoted to a managerial role at work but were passed over for someone else, anger may be one of the emotions that arises from that experience.
- When we resist and refuse to welcome our emotions, we prevent ourselves from coming into harmony. You may tell yourself that feeling angry over not getting that promotion at work is bad and refuse to welcome it fully into your being.
- But when you welcome whatever emotions are present, you learn to release identification with your emotions and simply be with what is, no matter the circumstances. If you welcome this anger over your lost promotion into your awareness, you'll eventually no longer feel anger consume you; you'll simply notice that anger is present in this situation.
- Welcoming takes practice and isn't always easy. We may have an initial response to an experience, but then it may start to transform. iRest teaches us techniques to help us welcome emotions into our awareness.
- The first part of welcoming is witnessing what is present. When we ask ourselves what is present, we begin to notice what is arising. As we notice an emotion arising, there is a moment where we shift from reaction to witnessing. Inherent in this is a sense of welcoming. We are allowing it to be present in awareness.

- The first instinct may be to block it out to prevent ourselves from experiencing it, but allowing ourselves to really listen to and feel what is present, as well as where we feel this sensation in our bodies, is what welcoming is all about.
- As we welcome feelings or emotions, we may begin to anthropomorphize what is present. We may begin to observe what shape our feelings or emotions take—if it's a particular color, if it has any texture or features, and how large or small it is. It may call up some image of a person, place, or previous memory or experience.
- Once the shape of your emotion is clear, imagine yourself sitting a comfortable distance away from it and asking it the following questions:
 - ◇ What do you want?
 - ◇ What do you need?
 - ◇ What action are you asking me to take in the world?
- Asking each of these questions helps you really listen to your emotion—to listen for the message it's trying to give you. Wants are often different from needs, and both of them may be totally different from the action your emotion is trying to get you to take to help bring you closer to harmony.
- These questions provide us perspective on our emotions. Instead of fusing with every emotion, we gain a better understanding of the deeper messages within each emotion we experience.

Working with Opposite Emotions

- Once we learn how to welcome our emotions, we can learn to be proactive with them as well. One of the most effective ways to do this is by practicing feeling opposite emotions.
- When it comes to our emotions, we only know an emotion because we have also known its opposite. We know what sadness is because we have also known happiness. These opposites inform one another and send messages about how we're relating to our experience in that moment. When we spend time identifying opposite emotions and feeling into each, we learn how to welcome those opposites at any time in our lives.
- Every time we practice feeling into opposites during iRest, we increase our ability to do the same in our everyday lives. Feeling into opposite emotions builds our ability to stay on track instead of being derailed by negative emotions or situations when they arise.

According to a study published in 2004, people who demonstrate higher resilience use positive emotions to bounce back from and find meaning in stressful encounters or circumstances. They are also able to bounce back quicker from a negative circumstance than their counterparts.



- Opposite emotions may be different from person to person. For some people, the opposite of happiness is anger, while for others, the opposite of happiness is sadness. It really doesn't matter what the opposites are; what's important is learning how to feel into one emotion and then its opposite. When you practice iRest, you will have the opportunity to learn how to do this.
- During iRest, you are invited to notice if there's a particular emotion present. Or you may be invited to work with a specific emotion. In either case, you'll be asked to first identify and welcome that emotion and notice where you feel it in the body. Sensations may or may not be present.
- Once you notice where you feel that emotion in the body and what sensations are related to it, you'll then be invited to feel into the opposite of that emotion. As you do this, you identify what the opposite is and begin to welcome it in your body, noticing the physical and mental changes that happen along the way. This may come easily at first, or it may take practice. Again, there's no right or wrong experience here, so whatever you feel is perfect just as it is in that moment.
- Many times, you'll then be invited to feel back and forth into each emotion, noticing the somatic and psychological differences between them. The moving back and forth between opposites may be easy for you, or it may be very difficult. With practice, you'll become more familiar with feeling into opposite emotions at will.
- As the founder of iRest, Dr. Richard Miller, points out, when we observe, identify, and respond to—instead of just reacting to—our emotions, we build up our emotional resiliency and the ability to navigate life successfully.

- On a neurological level, when we work with opposites, we are giving ourselves the chance to practice feeling emotions and linking them with their opposite. The next time sadness arises in our lives, we will know that happiness is also present, and vice versa.
- In addition, we are working to find stability amid changing emotional states by feeling them both separately and then at the same time. We cultivate awareness when we alternate between the two and also increase our ability to notice emotions when they occur. We become more finely attuned to our constantly changing emotional states and increase our ability to stay connected to awareness, no matter what happens in daily life.

Building Resiliency

- When we practice feeling into opposite emotions during iRest, what we're really doing is practicing how to observe an emotion that is present, identify where we feel it in the body, and respond to the message it's trying to send us. Then, when this emotion arises in our daily life, instead of being hijacked by it, we can simply observe it and use the information it's sending to help form our response and maintain our inner peace.
- Every time we feel into opposites in iRest and do it in real life, we're building up our emotional resiliency. We're training ourselves to welcome and experience emotions for what they are, rather than viewing them as our enemies. When we allow our emotions to be seen, heard, and felt, we don't just gain the information we need to survive—we gain the information we need to thrive.

- When you develop this skill set, the next time you find yourself in an intense emotional moment, you'll be able to identify the emotion, observe what's present in the body, and use that information to make your next decision.
- Proactively experiencing both good and bad emotions can help lessen the power of negative experiences the next time we encounter them. It can also help us see challenging emotions as important messengers. Negative emotions give us clues about our surroundings and aid in our survival and well-being.
- When we close ourselves off from certain emotions, we set ourselves up to becoming hijacked by our emotions. According to a study done at Florida State University, suppressing thoughts and feelings can actually increase our stress response. Our stress response and our resilience are inverse to one another: As our stress response goes up, our resilience goes down.
- By cultivating both positive and negative emotions during iRest, we're opening ourselves up to the wide range of emotional responses available to us. And while this may feel painful at times, what it's really doing is building up our resiliency to life's circumstances and lessening the chance of our emotions hijacking us in the future. This can be thought of as practicing feeling emotions, and it can improve our ability to meet, greet, welcome, and respond to whatever situation arises in life.

This class ends by guiding you through a short meditation to integrate some of the principles that you have learned in this class.

Suggested Reading

Bunn, “Is What You Are Feeling a Flashback?”

Burton, “What Are Basic Emotions?”

Humphreys, “Unthinkable.”

Kashdan, *The Upside of Your Dark Side*.

LaFata, “7 Negative Emotions That Actually Have Really Positive Effects on Your Life.”

Lilienfeld and Arkowitz, “Can Positive Thinking Be Negative?”

Miller, “Learn to Listen to Your Emotions.”

——, “Transform Negative Thoughts with Meditation.”

Tippett, “How Trauma Lodges in the Body.”

Tugade and Fredrickson, “Resilient Individuals Use Positive Emotions to Bounce Back from Negative Emotional Experiences.”

Class 12

iRest Practice: Feelings and Emotions

This class guides you through the 10-step iRest protocol, with a focus on feelings and emotions.



Class 13

Finding Deeper Wisdom
in Your Beliefs



In this class, you will discover some proactive tools for what to do when you feel limited by your thoughts. You will explore the fundamentals of cognition as well as the law of opposites, the law of awareness, and other tools that you can use to shift how you experience cognitions in your life. You will also learn about the *kanchukas*, which are the five thoughts that can be found at the root of all suffering.

Even though we have very little control over our automatic thoughts, they are integral to the way we experience the world. Our cognitions—which contain our thoughts, beliefs, memories, and personal stories—fundamentally shape our reality. When our conscious or subconscious expectations are not met, our cognitions can make us feel stuck in uncomfortable body sensations and difficult feelings, such as sadness, fear, and frustration. And when these cognitions are attacked, ignored, or suppressed, they can keep us separated from the deep state of peace that is always present in true nature. According to yogic thought, this separation from our true nature is the root of all suffering.

iRest teaches us that we don't have to be victims of our own mind. During iRest, we learn to welcome every cognition that life presents us with. We learn to see all cognitions—both positive and negative—as part of a spectrum, and we learn to move back and forth between opposite cognitions until we are comfortable being with either side without attachment or resistance. Through learning how to notice and accept all of our cognitions without judgment, we are able to integrate them as a part of our experience, rather than staying attached to our beliefs about how we think life “should” be. When we do this, suffering is alleviated.

Our thoughts become our actions, which then become our habits, which become our character, which then becomes our destiny. This means that through our thoughts, we are planting the seeds that will grow into our ultimate destiny.

The Fundamentals of Cognition

- Every day, tens of thousands of thoughts pass through each of our minds. These thoughts paint a picture of how we perceive the world. Our thoughts are a combination of many factors—our upbringing, life experiences, social circles, emotions, physical needs, and so on. Just like our emotions, our cognitions vary across a broad spectrum, from pleasant thoughts and memories to unpleasant ones.
- In reality, our thoughts, just like our emotions, are transient. But it can be easy to lose sight of that reality when you consider how the brain interprets the information it receives. There is a direct connection between our experiences, feelings, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Our experiences cause feelings and emotions, which spark thoughts about ourselves and the world. These thoughts, in turn, can reinforce those feelings and emotions we have about ourselves.
- Over time, the thoughts we continually reaffirm become automatic responses, and these automatic responses become our paradigm. In other words, over time, we develop a belief system—an established way of interpreting both ourselves and the world around us. And our brain naturally tries to interpret incoming information so that it fits within our already-existing belief system.
- When our brain is not open to contradictory information, it will either dismiss it or alter it so that it fits with our belief system; this is why it is so common to feel trapped by our thoughts.
- The way that the brain keeps patterns and streamlines information has been integral to our evolution as a species, but when our cognitions become so fixed that we self-identify with our beliefs about how the world “should” be,

we open the doors for our suffering—or we open our minds to the potentiality that it is possible to shift and evolve our belief system.

- Opportunities to challenge our beliefs are precious chances to explore the ways in which our beliefs can both lift us up and hold us back. In iRest, we learn to not take our thoughts or beliefs as fact; we take them as transient messengers that are vying for our attention.
- The *vijnanamaya kosha*, also known as the sheath of intellect, is the stage of iRest in which we welcome and inquire into all of the cognitions that we experience. These cognitions include the thoughts, beliefs, images, memories, scenes, and entire stories that play in our mind.
- Just like emotions and feelings, cognitions can have powerful effects on the body and mind. They can trap us, free us, blind us, or help us to see. Our mind naturally tries to attach itself to each cognition we have; this is a manifestation of our ego-I, or our perceived separation from awareness. It is this perceived separation that results in our expectations for how the world should or should not be, which is how we become trapped by the beliefs that lead to suffering.
- By giving yourself the time to observe your cognitions with openness and curiosity, you are creating space for their messages to be heard, breaking you free from the suffering and limitations of a mind that identifies with its thoughts.

The Laws of Opposites and Awareness

- According to the law of opposites, every feeling, emotion, and cognition we experience sits on a spectrum between

opposites. For example, we might consider “I am weak” and “I am strong” to be two opposite beliefs. If we were to place “I am weak” on one end of a line and “I am strong” on the other end of that same line, we could fill in the space between those beliefs with other beliefs, such as “I get by,” “I manage okay,” or “I endure.”

- Also keep in mind that it is possible to have opposite beliefs in different areas of life; for example, you might feel strong in your job but weak when you think about a relationship that you have with someone you love.
- Opposites of experience also inform each other. How would we recognize good without evil? How would we recognize darkness without light? The truth is that we wouldn't be able to recognize either of these if we didn't know their opposite.
- That's why, in some ways, opposites are really never separate. They provide contrast so we can see both sides for what they are. Together, they create the spectrum of human experience. Whenever one thought, emotion, or feeling arises, there is a conscious or unconscious experience of an opposite that naturally coexists. You know what happy feels like because you also know what it feels like to be sad.
- As is the case with feelings and emotions, some of the beliefs along each belief spectrum are easier to sit with than others. But it is often the thoughts and beliefs that are more difficult to sit with that serve as the gatekeepers to the alleviation of our suffering.
- We are so often conditioned to suppress and ignore the thoughts we don't want to have and cling to the thoughts we do want to have that we don't receive the messages that our experience is trying to give to us. To receive these

messages, we need to welcome all of our thoughts—both comfortable and uncomfortable—so that we can inquire into their underlying messages for us.

- Why is it so hard to welcome the full spectrum of our experience? From a very young age, many of us are conditioned to think that there are “good” thoughts, emotions, and feelings and “bad” ones. When we find a thought, emotion, or feeling aversive, we tend to avoid it, which actually makes us stuck in it. We are stuck because we are so preoccupied by trying to avoid the experience—or by desiring its opposite—that we don’t listen to the message it has to offer.
- To reach a state of true equanimity and peace, we need to welcome and listen to the messengers from both ends of the spectrum. Part of the reason iRest is so effective at helping people find healing is because it respects the transformative power opposites play in sustaining and resolving suffering. iRest helps us to recognize that suffering is alleviated not by trying to avoid an experience, but by welcoming each experience and its opposite.
- By honoring this natural connection and flow between opposites, we are also acknowledging the fact that our beliefs, like our emotions and feelings, are transient, which can release our brain from the trap of its own belief system.
- According to the law of awareness, each thought, emotion, and feeling moves through the process of birth, growth, maturity, decay, and death. By objectively welcoming our beliefs, rather than attaching to or avoiding them, we invite our beliefs to move through this process, which prevents the suffering that comes from getting stuck in a belief or thought pattern.

- It is only when we welcome all of life's messengers, the perceived good and bad, that we are able to transcend pairs of opposites. By welcoming and simply observing what's arising, we recognize that we always know the perfect response for every situation.
- When we neither latch on to nor resist opposites, those opposites resolve themselves and reveal the right action for us to take. By practicing experiencing opposites of cognition, we learn how to identify, hear, and reflect on them, instead of allowing them to rule our every action.

Inoculation and Immunization

- One of our great desires in life is to feel happy—even joyful. While it's clear that joy is great for us physically, mentally, and spiritually, expecting that we should only feel this emotion at all times is not realistic.
- Because every experience is on a spectrum and is dependent on its opposite, we all will experience both sides of the spectrum at different times. Mild to moderate doses of unpleasant experiences are also beneficial, as they can strengthen our ability to welcome and endure them.
- When we regularly experience mild unpleasant or negative events, we increase our resiliency to them and decrease the likelihood of becoming derailed by a difficult circumstance. Just as vaccines are used to boost our immunities against disease, experiencing mild negative events allows us to practice bouncing back from uncomfortable thoughts and emotions.

- Mild negative events, in a sense, inoculate us, or provide us with a small dose of an adverse experience so that we are able to resist succumbing to more severe adverse experiences in the future.
- Our daily lives are often filled with mild negative events, such as getting cut off on your drive to the grocery store or dropping all of your mail on a wet driveway. Experiencing moderately stressful events such as these every day can help prevent feelings of being overwhelmed during and after events that are highly stressful. And by looking at our stressful experiences as exercises to help boost our resiliency, they become easier to welcome as part of our lived experience.
- Research has found that experiencing regular and random bouts of joy throughout our day can also help build our resilience to negative events. Meditation and iRest can help us feel a sense of joy throughout the body, and if you have time in your day, you can always stop and practice. But there are many other things you can do to welcome joy into your life randomly, such as laughing out loud when you hear or see something funny, spending time with loved ones or a pet, and exercising outside.
- The more we experience feeling grateful and joyful, the more these emotions will start to arise naturally. As these feelings of joy and gratefulness start to arise more naturally, they can serve as an added immunization, or protection, against adverse experiences and how we choose to interpret them.

The Five *Kanchukas*, or Pointer Sisters

- There is a concept from yoga philosophy that can help us understand the different types of thoughts we may encounter

and how they limit us. *Kanchukas*, also known as “limitations” or “coverings,” is the word used in ancient texts to teach the five different types of messengers that we come across when we are separate from awareness. In fact, every time we find ourselves in suffering, yoga philosophy tells us that we can find one of the *kanchukas* at play.

- The *kanchukas* can be referred to as the Pointer Sisters—a term coined by iRest founder Dr. Richard Miller—because each one can help point us toward awareness during times when we may be holding expectations for ourselves and the world around us. Each Pointer Sister is a messenger that corresponds to a simple question we can ask ourselves, which will help us return to awareness and, in turn, ease our suffering. The five *kanchukas*, or Pointer Sisters, are as follows:

1. *I am a powerless, limited doer.* This belief surfaces when we feel as though we have to do something or overcome something to feel happy and complete. Some examples of these thoughts might be that your life is out of control or that your project at work needs to be successful. It can also show up as a feeling that you need to be everywhere at once or when you consider all of the issues facing society that you would love to help with.
2. *I am confused and limited in knowledge.* This belief comes about when we think we need to gain knowledge to be happy and whole. Examples include times when you think that you're not very smart or that you should have known better than to do a particular thing.
3. *I am lacking and incomplete.* This comes from the idea that there is something we need to feel happy and complete.

Examples of this include the thought that you're not good enough or that you need a child to feel complete.

4. *I am time-bound and aging.* This belief stems from worry that we need more time to get done what needs to get done to be happy and peaceful. There is an important concept called time poverty facing many people in society today that is very much a manifestation of this. Time can suddenly become our most precious commodity. Some examples of this belief are thinking that you're so busy you don't have enough time to do what you need to do or that you're too old to do something.
 5. *I am contracted and limited in space.* This messenger lets us know that we are feeling constricted and constrained. It can show up when we feel we are limited to just being this body—a body that may be sick or tired.
- The Pointer Sisters are valuable tools that can help us uncover the deeper wisdom in our beliefs. For every “I'm not good enough” belief, there is another belief at the opposite end of the spectrum: “My true nature is perfect, whole, and complete.”
 - The concept of Pointer Sisters really gets to the heart of why the concept of welcoming is so important in iRest: What we resist persists. The Pointer Sisters simplify the vast range of feelings, emotions, and beliefs we have into five main cognitions that are at the root of all suffering.
 - By getting at and welcoming the root of our difficult thoughts, feelings, and emotions, it makes us aware and accepting of our whole experience so that we are not held captive by a lack of awareness or a desire to change our experience. This awareness provides us with the ability to be proactive so that

instead of being weighed down by our thoughts and beliefs, we can use them as messengers to direct us toward creating the life we truly want to lead.

We humans tend to identify very personally with our experiences—a tendency that is captured by the language we use to explain those experiences: “I” am sad, “I” should have known better, “I” am peaceful. This notion of “I” can take hold of everything we do and encourages separation from our true nature.

The course will dive deeper into this in class 17 on the *asmitamaya kosha*, which will discuss witnessing our experiences from awareness rather than identifying with them directly. But for now, enjoy this opportunity to inquire deeply into your opposite beliefs and to explore the five *kanchukas* as pointers to your true nature.

Class 14

iRest Practice: Beliefs

This class guides you through the 10-step iRest protocol, with a focus on beliefs.



Class 15

Discovering Uncaused Joy

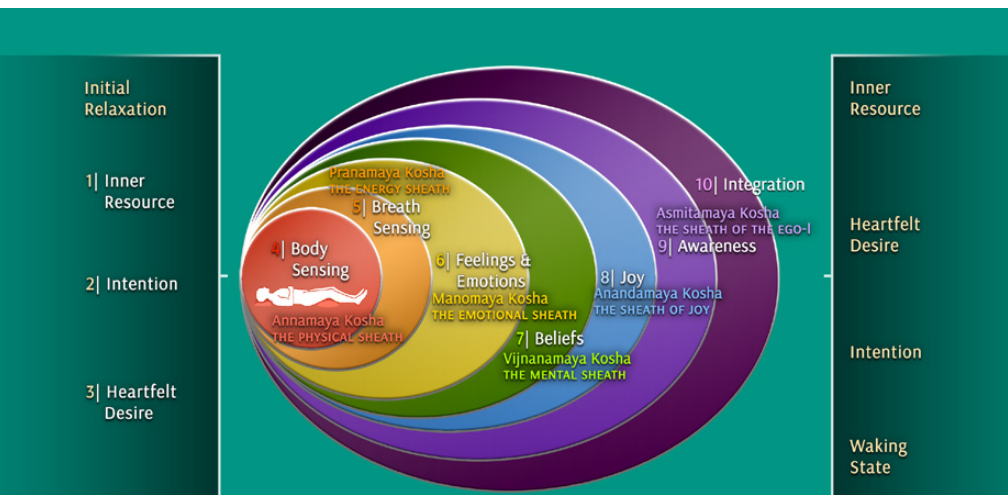


This class is all about discovering uncaused joy—that deep feeling of connection and presence that exists independent of anything else. But to fully understand joy, we first need to understand why we suffer.

Why Do We Suffer?

- We spend the majority of our lives trying to alleviate suffering in one way or another. Do you know why we suffer in life?
- We suffer when we expect reality to be different than what it is. We suffer amid our preferences—our likes and dislikes. We suffer when we grasp for happiness in external objects. We suffer when we are attached to a certain outcome. We suffer when we don't understand the true meaning of an experience. We suffer when we lose touch with who we truly are.
- When reality doesn't meet our expectations, we feel all of the expressions of suffering: loss, anger, sadness, fear, pain, and frustration. Joy and equanimity can feel even further from our reach.
- Suffering is a part of the human experience. We suffer when we have a bad day at work, when we lose a loved one, when we gain 10 pounds, and for millions of other reasons.
- But what if we stopped resisting? What if we truly welcomed everything about our lives, including the challenges? What if our peace was not dependent on our lives meeting all of our expectations? How would we feel? We would feel joyful, blissful, and content in the moment.

- The truth is that equanimity and joy are always present in our lives. We may feel like they're not because suffering clouds our vision and occupies our mind. This happens when we believe our peace and happiness are dependent on our circumstances. Dependent joy is joy that is derived from some object.
- Independent joy and equanimity are not dependent on any one thing. They are a state of well-being that exists from welcoming the full spectrum of human experience and connecting with a place of stillness within ourselves.
- It's during the *anandamaya kosha* stage of iRest that we discover and learn to live as joyous equanimity that exists independent of objects. During this stage of iRest, we're invited to awaken to the realization that joy and equanimity are always present, no matter the current circumstances in our lives.
- The six *koshas*, or sheaths, can be imagined as concentric circles radiating out from the human body, and as we reach the *anandamaya kosha*, we're in the fifth circle—out toward the edge.



- When we look more deeply at *anandamaya kosha*, we want to think about it from two directions.
- If we are really welcoming our entire experience at each of the *koshas*, everything in our lives feels seen and heard. All of the layers of consciousness, the body, the breath, feelings and emotions, and beliefs have been felt and experienced. When we fully welcome our human experience, bliss starts to naturally arise. As we start getting closer to awareness, we're getting closer to our true nature—to that unchanging peace. And you can feel it. It starts to pervade your experience, and it feels blissful.
- We can also look at bliss from another direction. When we begin to feel our physical reality once more at the end of a meditation when we return from deep stillness, it often comes bathed in an experience of bliss. This bliss may begin to pervade our waking experience. When we take these deep dives into awareness during iRest, we are saturating ourselves

Bliss and joy are natural expressions of living in a place of peace, and the practice of iRest prepares you on every level to experience this bliss.



in that stillness and wholeness. When we do this, we are turning up the volume on the stillness and peacefulness so that it is louder than all the noise that usually clouds our consciousness.

The Science behind Joy

- Why is it important to feel joy? Why is this something we want to cultivate? There are many layers to that answer, but let's start with the physiological layer—the science behind joy. What does research tell us about the benefits of joy? In a nutshell, science has revealed that, on a physiological level, feeling joy is good for us.
- You can think of joy as vitamin J because it is like a super vitamin that can affect our entire physiology. Even small amounts of joy can positively affect our respiratory, muscular, cardiovascular, endocrine, central nervous, and immune systems.
- When we experience joy, our body releases endorphins, which are often responsible for a feeling of well-being. And while we're busy feeling well, experiencing joy continues to increase the activity of natural killer cells in our body that help destroy things like viruses and cancer cells.
- As we experience joy, our levels of T cells and immunoglobulin A antibodies elevate, boosting our immune system, making it easier for our bodies to fight off infections and illnesses. Joy also increases the production of B cells, which secrete antibodies that help us fight off infections.
- And when we experience joy in the form of laughter, we get a nice little workout that stimulates blood circulation by increasing heart and diaphragm activity, leaving us feeling relaxed and calm even after our joy subsides.

- According to research conducted by Drs. Lee Berk and Stanley Tan, laughter-induced joy can lower blood pressure, produce a state of well-being, increase positive emotions, increase muscle flexion and relaxation, reduce pain, stimulate natural healing processes, strengthen the immune system, lower stress, decrease dopamine levels, increase cardiac function, and cleanse the lungs. And the best part is that experiencing joy has been found to have no negative side effects.
- Another researcher, Richard Davidson, contends that happiness isn't just a vague, ineffable feeling; it's a physical state of the brain—one that we can induce deliberately through meditation. Davidson and others are finding that when subjects display positive emotions, such as happiness, joy, or enthusiasm, there are dramatic increases in electrical activity in the left frontal gyrus of the left prefrontal cortex of the brain.
- Interestingly, the same thing happens on the right side of the brain when subjects experience negative emotions, such as sadness, worry, or anxiety. People experiencing depression and intense anxiety often have the highest levels of activation in the right prefrontal areas.
- When the ratio of activity is greater on the right side than on the left, people are highly likely to succumb to clinical depression or develop an anxiety disorder. But when the levels of activity are higher in the left prefrontal areas, people tend to be in a better frame of mind. And most people will show small but positive increases in activity on the left side

The evidence is clear: There are strong physiological reasons for cultivating joy in our lives.

of the brain when they're asked to recall a pleasant memory or when watching heartwarming or amusing movie scenes.

Cultivating Joy

- There are many different ways to cultivate joy in our lives. Some are very purposeful while others are more of a way of life.
- Psychologist Martin Seligman discovered an easy way to do this that produces lasting effects in the body and the mind. He found that when people took the time every day to write down three things—known as the Three Blessings—that went well and why, they were more likely to be less depressed and happier.
- This practice cultivates positive patterns in the brain. When we spend time focusing on our wins for the day, as well as why these things went well, we are more prone to feel like positive things will again happen tomorrow.
- In addition, we strengthen our brain's ability to repeat the pattern that resulted in the positive outcome. Focusing on what went well in our day also cultivates a feeling of gratitude, which opens us up to a feeling of abundance instead of lack. We feel what is right with our lives instead of just what is wrong with it.
- Dr. Richard Miller, the founder of iRest, has another technique for cultivating joy. He recommends doing a Day's Review before going to sleep at night:
 - ◇ Find a quiet moment toward the end of your day—perhaps before you go to bed or in the moments before you fall asleep at night—reflect on your entire day, and identify events or situations that feel “unfinished” to you.


- ◇ Then, using your creativity, imagine yourself redoing these unfinished moments and how you'd like them to unfold.
 - ◇ Replay the scenes in your head until you feel a sense of contentment with the new moments you've created.
 - ◇ As you do this, don't only imagine, but deeply feel these new scenarios in your body, heart, and mind.
 - ◇ Once you've cultivated the sense of completion, carry it into sleep with you.
 - ◇ It may surprise you how easily the next day unfolds when you regularly practice this simple exercise every evening.
- Another technique for cultivating joy is iRest. Part of the 10-step iRest protocol includes bringing to mind a positive memory or event that invites the feeling of joy into your body. Every time we practice iRest, we give ourselves the opportunity to experience joy. When we welcome joy and equanimity into the body and the mind and experience them fully, it's like giving ourselves a little immunization. But the beauty of iRest is that its effects go beyond the physiological and psychological states of happiness.
 - When we work with the *anandamaya kosha* in iRest, we often start by feeling dependent joy—joy that is connected to something in our lives. For example, you may bring to mind the feeling of joyful love connected with someone or something special in your life.
 - Once that feeling of joyful love arises, you can release the memory or person or experience and just stay with the feeling itself. This can evolve into a feeling of universal, endless love that is our true nature and is always in infinite abundance—

love that doesn't need a reason or a destination, just love for the sake of love.

- Another option is to begin by connecting with a sense of gratitude. The more we open to gratitude, the more our hearts open and joy starts to flood in. Gratitude shifts our attention toward what is abundant and plentiful in our lives. This naturally unfolds the seeds of joy.
- We can also cultivate joy by connecting with our inner resource. It can be a bridge into feeling well-being, which often unfolds into joy. When we exist in a state of well-being, joy often arises as a natural by-product. Joy is a natural expression of wellness.
- Joy can arise from connecting with our intention, feeling sensation in our body, connecting fully with the breath, and being in deep connection with an emotion or belief. Tension and conflict occurs when we lose connection with ourselves, other people, and even nature. When we connect fully, we find joy in the depths of that connection. Often, the deeper the connection, the deeper the joy.

The entire iRest practice is an opportunity to cultivate connection with ourselves and the world. And the result of this connection is joy.

- Joy is our natural state of being when we are connected and present. When we are fully present and fully connected to a moment, there is a natural joy that arises, even if that experience is a painful one. Joy can arise just from being connected to an experience as it happens—from opening up and welcoming sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and sight. Joy can arise from allowing ourselves to really experience



Connecting with positive experiences is not the only way to cultivate joy. Being fully present, even with challenging experiences, can also cause the experience of bliss to arise. Many people share that joy was present during extremely stressful or even traumatic moments of their lives.

the entirety of a moment, be it a positive or challenging one. We suffer when we disconnect. We find harmony when we connect completely.

- There is a joy that arises in the midst of intensity—which is, after all, a form of feeling something fully. It arises not in spite of that intensity, but because of it.
- In addition to the deep connection present during intense moments, joy arises as a result of really feeling and welcoming sorrow, pain, and suffering. The people who are truly the happiest are often the people who have suffered the most. It's an interesting paradox. It's as if the depths to which we have suffered liberates our capacity to experience joy. Feeling into the depths of our experience liberates our true nature.

- In iRest, we welcome the totality of our human experience so fully that a deep connection with life itself unfolds. We welcome the profound realization that we know what joy is because we also know what sorrow is. This realization liberates us from the limiting notion that life needs to be free from adversity for joy to be present.
- The deeper we have allowed ourselves to experience the sorrows of life, the more we open ourselves up to experience peace and joy. They are intrinsically linked.
- Joy is a natural expression of our soul. Joy is awareness coming out to dance with life itself. Joy is a celebration of life meeting life, in all of its flavors and colors. Joy is a celebration of what is.

This class ends with a short meditation that focuses on the experience of cultivating joy.

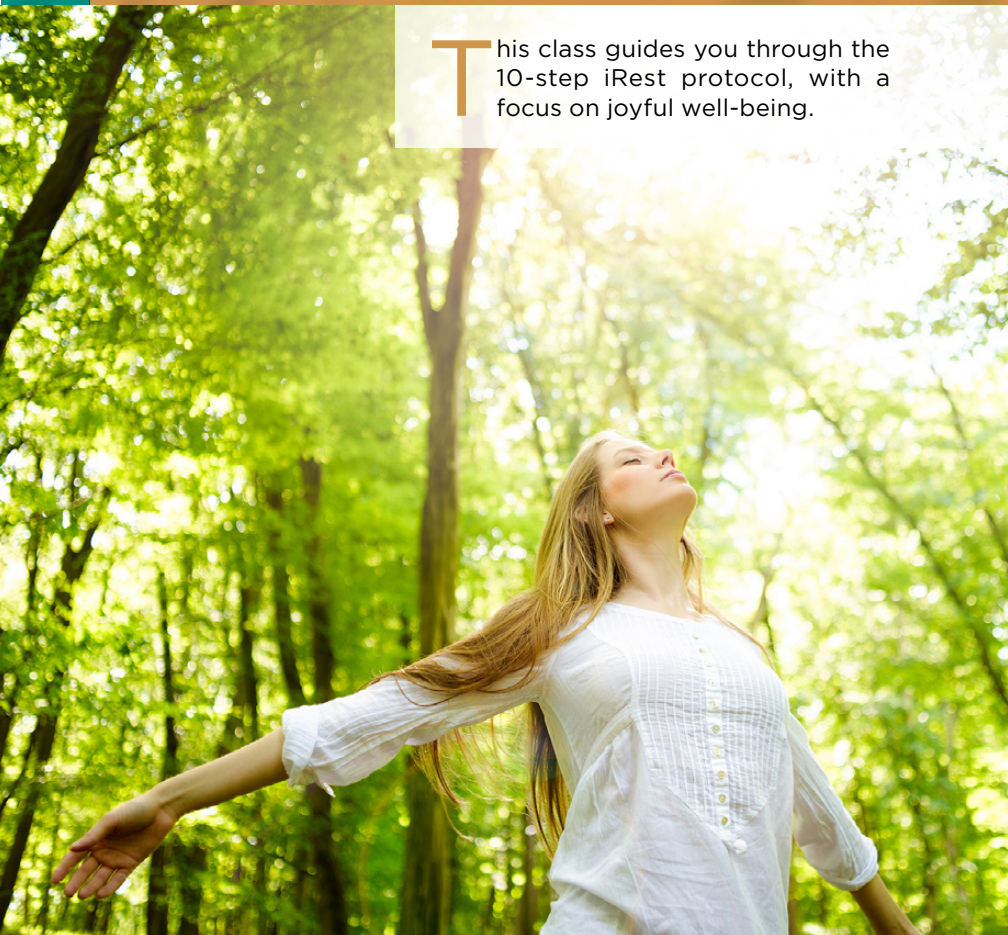
Suggested Reading

Lemonick, “Health.”

Class 16

iRest Practice: Joyful Well-Being

This class guides you through the 10-step iRest protocol, with a focus on joyful well-being.



Class 17

Cultivating Awareness



This class focuses on the step in the iRest protocol that is the entire point of practicing iRest: awareness and recognizing our true nature.

The Experience of Awareness

- Throughout this course, you have been invited to witness the changing experiences of life with a sense of openness and curiosity. You've been invited to welcome sensations, the breath, feelings, emotions, and beliefs. You've been invited to observe while also deeply feeling what is present, giving a voice to the whole spectrum of human experience that is present at any given moment. You've been invited to step back into witnessing awareness—to see yourself as the observer of these changing experiences. You've been invited to experience pure awareness and bring that up to the surface.
- Throughout the practice portions of this course, you have experienced awareness, either knowingly or unknowingly. In fact, you are experiencing awareness in every moment of life. Awareness can feel like a very subtle experience, so we tend to notice the objects in the foreground over the deep experience of stillness that is also present.
- You also experience awareness every night when you go to sleep. In fact, experiencing awareness may at first feel like sleep because that is what we are used to experiencing. You may have been experiencing awareness and interpreting it as sleep, but if you feel into it, you will notice that something else is also present.

- As you move through this experience, though, you start to feel that something is awake—something is aware, in the midst of this human experience. That presence starts to announce itself in a whole new way. You may feel the presence of awareness after an iRest when you feel tangibly different than you did before the practice. You may feel that you have “gone” somewhere, perhaps even to sleep, but as you remember this experience, you can report that you were “aware” of what was happening. As you feel into that which is aware, you then touch this impersonal, neutral sense of awareness itself.
- iRest is, in many ways, a formula for experiencing your unchanging true nature, called awareness. It is a process of contrasting everything that is changing with everything that is unchanging.
- As you move beyond joy and bliss and into the ninth step in iRest—the exploration of the *asmitamaya kosha*—you begin to really turn the observer on itself and feel into the I-thought. Who is aware that you are awake? Who is aware that you are asleep? The *asmitamaya kosha* invites you to feel into the I-thought itself, to explore what is still creating a sense of separation.
- When you actually go to look for who “I” is, can you find it? Can you pinpoint it? In actuality, the I-thought contains the same spaciousness you find when you feel into pain or tension in the body or a challenging emotion. The more you sit with something, it will start to lose its solidity.
- You move into the following questions:
 - ◇ Who is aware of this body?

- ◇ Who is aware of this breath?
- ◇ Who is aware of this mind?
- If you dive in and really try to find the “I,” you won’t be able to.
- That being said, you have awoken every day of your life and attached to the “I.” And you need the I-thought—and the identity and context that comes with it—to exist in the world. But you don’t want to stop there and think that this body and mind is all there is. There is something more.

Awareness and iRest

- In the ninth stage of the iRest 10-step protocol, we move from fusion with objects in awareness to the realization that “I am the one who is aware.” We then turn to the part of ourselves that we are referring to as “I” and investigate how it is still creating separation. We ask, Who am I talking about when I refer to “I”? We explore the I-thought with openness and curiosity, just as we did for the body, breath, emotions, and thoughts.
- When we move into witnessing awareness, we’re offered the opportunity to investigate and solve the lingering misperception that prevents us from fully embodying enlightenment and deep connection in every aspect of our daily lives.
- In his teachings, the Buddha recognized that the I-thought is the last vestige of the ego to go. Even sometimes after we have an experience of awareness, the I-thought tries to catch ahold of it and say, “I had a spiritual experience.” We

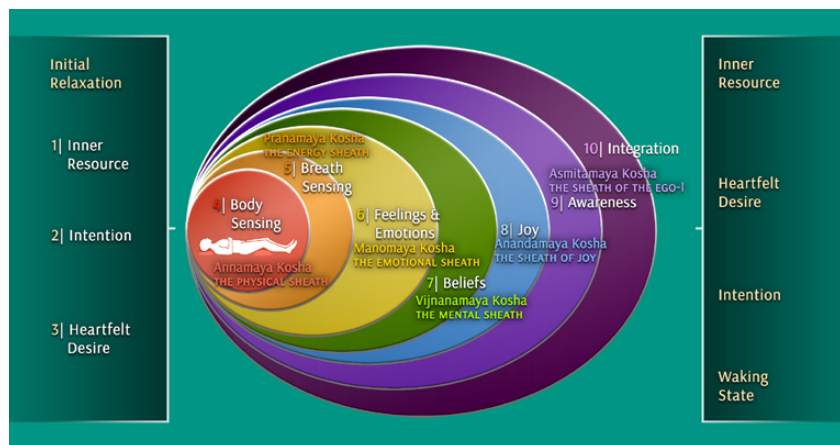


see how that experience of “I” wants to reach out and grab our experiences and own them.

- To move beyond this habit, we start using nouns as verbs during iRest: We move from “I am in a state of being,” to just “being.” You don’t have to put the “I” on top of it; the “I” doesn’t have to get involved. We actually separate ourselves from an experience—we create disconnection—when we stick an “I” on it.
- Of course, the term “I” is a useful tool that helps us differentiate our unique self from everyone else. But in the realm of meditation, it can be what prevents us from experiencing our true nature. We want to get to the point where we don’t entirely get rid of the I-thought, but we just see through it to acknowledge that we are more than just this ego “I.” Eventually, we want to come to a place where the experience of “I” as a separate, distinct being does not exist.

- And our ability to reach this place can have a meaningful and very practical impact on our daily lives. When we step back into an objective state of awareness, we deepen our ability to experience resiliency and equanimity in any circumstance. In the midst of all of the pleasure and the pain of life, there is also something else present. And that is the stillness, the peace, that we abide in—the peace that most of us just don't notice because we are so conditioned to experiencing the physical body, breath, and mind.
- iRest gives us the opportunity to have a direct experience of this peace. Instead of identifying with every feeling, emotion, belief, thought, or memory that passes through the body and mind, we disidentify because we know that we are more than these experiences.
- When we practice iRest, we start to recognize the underlying “something” that is always present—our true nature. When we move past the I-thought, which holds the belief that we are separate, we experience that place within all of us where peace exists.
- It's through iRest that we're given the opportunity to have a direct experience of this peace. We prepare the body physically and mentally in the first step through the eighth step to welcome and experience this truth. Even if we only get a taste of this peace—our true nature—it's enough to keep us coming back to the practice to experience it again.
- When we practice iRest and incorporate the teachings into our daily lives, we acknowledge that while something is present, it is a changing experience that is occurring on a backdrop of unchanging awareness. We learn to become aware of experiences from a witnessing state of awareness,

where we feel what is present while also staying connected to our true nature, which is unchanging pure awareness—pure being.



- Recall the image of the *koshas* as a series of concentric circles radiating out from the body. As you have moved through these classes and practices, you've moved from the *annamaya kosha*, the physical sheath, all the way out to the *asmitamaya kosha*, or sheath of the ego-I, where the focus is on awareness.
- Now let's get to the place where we can explore how we can move from awareness back into life. We want to start not just moving from the body out through the layers of consciousness to experience awareness; we also want to be able to move from awareness back in through the mind, the breath, and the body—to saturate all of the other layers of consciousness with that peace and stillness.
- When we are able to move from our iRest practice back in through the body, we bring the fragrance of awareness back

with us. That stillness, wholeness, and oneness comes back with us. We begin to be able to observe how a thought arises, unfolds, and dissolves. We are able to watch how emotions arise, unfold, and dissolve, all on this backdrop of peace and stillness.

- When we stay connected to this deep experience of awareness, then we can dance with difficult experiences all day because we are connected to our true self. We feel the peace more than we feel the challenge. It gives us the courage and the power to embrace things that are challenging. We start to realize that we have more energy than ever before. We're more creative and connected and loving.
- The reason is that we are operating from a place that doesn't need an "I" to experience it. This is the ultimate empowerment. When we are connected to that peace, that's when we find deeper levels of courage and strength that help us rise in the moment as the highest expression of ourselves rather than as an expression of our lower nature. "Doing" is still required, but "doing" can arise from that state of peace.
- One of the things we do during iRest is contrast that which is changing in life with that which is unchanging—awareness. We go between the two and try to find them both amid each other. We try to find that amid the "doing," we can also feel "being awareness," and amid the stillness of "being awareness," creation is arising out of it and then dissolving back into it.
- We move from fusion with the object to the notion that "I am the one who is aware." When you first turn to witnessing awareness—the I-thought—there is still a sense of separation. We want to keep feeling into that and exploring it. Through the exploration of this I-thought, eventually we will come to a

place where the “I” is not and all that is left is the subtle, yet undeniable, stillness of awareness.

Continuum of Awareness

- One way of thinking about this exploration is that we are moving along a continuum of awareness during the ninth step of iRest. Defining this continuum will help us better understand the *asmitamaya kosha* and help us navigate what can at first feel like very subtle layers of experience.
- There are six levels, or phases, on the continuum of awareness. The deeper you go in your meditation practice, the more distinct these levels of awareness will become.

This may be a section of the course that you want to come back to as your meditation practice deepens.



The continuum of awareness provides an important orientation and road map as you explore deep consciousness.

- 1. Self as Separate:** When we first enter the ninth step of iRest and explore awareness, we are still fused with the I-thought and with the belief that the self is separate from awareness. Our sense of “I” still feels solid and real. During this state, we may be feeling awareness strongly, but we still have a distinct sense that “I” am the one who is experiencing

it. Our surroundings and foreground movements may still feel very separate and distinct at this phase. For example, we may say, “I am angry,” and the “I” demonstrates how we are fused with an experience of anger.

2. *Witness*: In this phase, we become the witness of the experience. Now “I am angry” becomes “Anger is present.” We still feel that we are the witness of the experience we are having; the I-thought is still there, but we are aware of it.
3. *Witnessing Presence*: In this phase, we shift from being the witness to “being witnessing”—a very subtle but very profound shift. It’s a shift where you move from feeling like you are the witnessing “eyes” of an experience to a more global sense of “being witnessing presence.” It feels like you are dropping back from an active role of witnessing to just allowing witnessing to occur. In this state, the subjective self starts to dissolve and you start to feel a sense of nonlocal vibration. During this phase of witnessing presence, where the subjective self dissolves, we recognize our transparent “I-ness.” It’s still there, but it’s getting more transparent. What’s really happening is that the “I” is getting saturated with awareness and then you’re just witnessing “anger.”
4. *Being*: In this phase, our foreground surroundings start to melt away. It’s almost like you start to feel everything as just energy—as just sensation. The energy or sensation is moving. Witnessing is still a little present, but it’s really getting flooded now with awareness. An increasingly transparent experience of “I” unfolds into an experience of knowing ourselves as spacious, timeless, perfect, complete, and whole.

5. *Awareness*: As our meditation unfolds, we may ask, Who is aware? And then when we turn around and look, there is no one to be aware. The experience of “I” at this point may dissolve entirely as we find no “I” at all. The I-thought becomes completely empty.
6. *Pure Awareness*: During this phase, there is no “I” there to experience awareness. All sense of self dissolves. We then experience vast emptiness—pure awareness, pure being, and pure consciousness. This is our true nature. It feels full of absolutely everything yet empty. To even taste this once, you will never forget it. At the same time, this may feel very familiar, or ordinary. This may sound esoteric, but this experience can be very real and palpable. It is important to have an orientation to these deeper levels of consciousness.

iRest takes us beyond our belief that we are a separate self. By practicing iRest, we are introduced to our transcendental and unlimited true nature. We are called to inspect and witness all that we take ourselves to be and to see the I-thought for what it is and how it works.

- As we question and push the boundaries of consciousness, we start to discover and explore some of the essential attributes of awareness. We learn that awareness is spacious openness; is infinite and extends everywhere without center or periphery; touches and pervades everything, everywhere; is untouched and unconditioned by all objects; and is a vast field of welcoming that neither refuses nor attaches to anything.
- The experience of awareness can be described as falling into effortless being. This can be disorienting, as we experience this profound spaciousness, but through iRest, we learn to

become more comfortable with experiencing our spacious consciousness that is beyond limitation. It can also be the most amazing thing you've ever experienced in your life—to feel that total wholeness and stillness as who you truly are.

- In the early stages of iRest, we create structure to help guide us through the body, breath, and mind. But when we enter the deeper states of meditation, we rest in the truth of this moment without thinking. The naturalness of meditation becomes apparent as we rest in the immediacy of the timeless now. We understand that meditation isn't something we do; rather, it's a natural unfolding process that has no need of the ego-I.

Awareness is not something you have to achieve. Awareness is already there. We exist in this stillness every moment of every day.

- Just as we move through the continuum of awareness as we dive deep into meditation, we also move the opposite direction as we come out of meditation. The moments when we come out of a meditation, much like the moments when we come out of sleep each morning, are a nice time to watch what brings you back to waking life. Watch the first thought that brings you into creation. Watch the moment when the world wakes up in you, in awareness. Watch the moment that the I-thought reappears. There is a lot of potency there. You can watch where the *kanchukas* start to come back—all of the places where we may start to separate from awareness.
- We start to “put back on the clothes” of being a body with a breath and a mind. But can we bring awareness back with us? It is doing so anyway, as awareness is always here; it isn't something that comes and goes. However, we can begin to notice that awareness is always present.

- As life comes back, we may have a conversation or eat a meal, but can we stay in the state of connectivity where we don't have to become separate—where we can stay connected to our true selves and everything around us? Can we be fully present and connected as we eat, sleep, work, and play? Can we live from this place of awareness?
- Ultimately, we can practice iRest every moment of every day. It is possible to let every thought, word, and deed become an expression of awareness. This is living in true connection, in harmony with life itself.

Class 18

iRest Practice: Awareness and Peace

This class guides you through the 10-step iRest protocol, with a focus on awareness and peace.



Class 19

Using iRest for Sleep



The next few classes take a more specific look at some of the reasons people practice iRest. This class's topic is sleep, which is important for physical and mental well-being. With all of the modern-day distractions at our fingertips, we sometimes neglect our sleep and don't take it as seriously as we should. We spend a third of our lives sleeping, so it's important that we do it right.

Getting Enough Quality Sleep

- Hundreds of studies show that getting enough quality sleep has a direct effect on many aspects of your mental and physical health, quality of life, and safety. Among other things, research has shown that sleep is crucial to healthy brain function. As you sleep, your brain forms new pathways to help you remember information and prepare for the next day—increasing your problem-solving skills, attention span, decision-making skills, and creativity.

Facts about Sleep

- Humans are the only mammals that willingly delay sleep. We force ourselves to stay up to work or guzzle coffee to keep ourselves from dozing off in the middle of the day.
- Research has shown that sleep is just as important as diet and exercise when it comes to overall well-being.
- In general, most healthy adults need seven to nine hours of sleep per night. This varies from person to person, but eight hours per night is a good benchmark.

- People who are sleep deficient are less productive, take longer to finish tasks, have a slower reaction time, and make more mistakes. Even a loss of one to two hours of sleep a night over several nights can have the same effect on your performance as if you haven't slept at all for a few days.
- Even beyond brain function, sleep is the repairman that shows up every night to help your body recover, heal, and maintain a healthy hormone balance—which directly affects proper growth and immune system health.
- Our body is trained to sleep from the moment we're born. On average, newborns sleep between 14 and 17 hours a day. As we grow, we need less sleep than when we were infants, but getting quality sleep becomes even more important as we take on greater responsibility in our lives.
- As we grow up, we establish consistent sleep patterns and rhythms that support our physical and cognitive well-being. But when we experience trauma, stay up too late too many nights in a row, drink alcohol or coffee close to bedtime, or practice poor sleep hygiene, we get off track and disrupt our sleep rhythms.
- There are different ways to get back on track with your sleep patterns, but one of the most effective ways to do so is with iRest Yoga Nidra. *Yoga Nidra* is often translated from Sanskrit as “the sleep of the yogi,” but its definition expands beyond sleep. A deeper investigation into the Sanskrit reveals another definition: “awareness amid all stages of consciousness” or “union amid all stages of consciousness.”
- During iRest, you will often feel like you are in a place between asleep and awake, where you hear the sound of the instructor's voice but aren't necessarily holding onto everything being

said. In other words, you are maintaining awareness amid various stages of consciousness, including sleep.

- While exploring consciousness can become a fascinating adventure, there is also research that shows practicing Yoga Nidra promotes the regulation of hormones, the stabilization of glucose levels, and the alleviation of stress. Researchers have even found that a 30-minute practice of iRest is equivalent to two hours of regular sleep.
- When you practice iRest, you begin by sensing the body and breath, which triggers the relaxation response. This then triggers the brain to move into the alpha state, which releases serotonin and helps you feel calm. As you continue through the practice of iRest, you go through different brain wave states, which is believed to be part of the reason why Yoga Nidra is effective in helping people sleep.
- Accessing these different brain wave states, especially the delta state, gives the body the chance to restore and heal itself. In sleep research, delta brain waves are typically observed in people during deep, dreamless sleep.

Turning Your Bedroom into a Sanctuary for Sleep

- While using iRest Yoga Nidra is an effective way to help you fall asleep and stay asleep, there are other things you can do to ensure you have excellent sleep hygiene.
- ◆ *Prepare your bed for sleeping.* If you don't have one already, invest in a high-quality, comfortable bed. Use sheets and blankets that are comforting and the right temperature for your body to feel relaxed. Use your bed for sleep and sex only; you can maybe do some pre-

bedtime reading, but avoid working in bed. Keep pets off the bed if they are disturbing to your sleep. Some initial research shows that using weighted blankets can be helpful for sleep.

- ◇ *Adjust the atmosphere of your bedroom.* Make sure the room is dark. The darker your room is, the more likely you are to go to sleep. Look for any ambient light that may sneak into the room from windows or doors and do your best to eliminate it, either with blackout curtains or by placing a towel under the crack at the bottom of your bedroom door. Even dim lights can trick the brain into thinking it's dawn or daytime. Place black tape over any lights from your security system or smoke detector. Also focus on the temperature of your room. This will depend on your preferences, but most people find that having the room between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit is comfortable for sleep.
- ◇ *Remove clutter from your bedroom.* If your room is cluttered, it is more likely that your mind will feel cluttered. Keep your room simple, making sure everything in it lifts you up or relaxes you.
- ◇ *Remove your phone from your bedroom.* One research study found that 63 percent of smartphone users between the ages of 18 and 29 sleep with smartphones in their beds; another found that 72 percent of Americans keep their phones within five feet of them at all times. If you aren't going to reclaim your life from cell phone addiction, at least start by reclaiming your sleep. Buy an old-fashioned alarm clock or get a Bluetooth speaker and hook it up to your phone so you can still hear your alarm in the morning even if the phone is in another room. There are many reasons why this is important: You are less likely



Some public health officials are concerned about the possible health effects of cell phone radiation exposure, and removing your phone from your bedroom is an effective way to reduce that exposure. This is also why some people turn off their Wi-Fi at night.

to stay up late surfing social media or playing games, less likely to check your phone if you wake up in the middle of the night, and less likely to hear sounds from your phone.

- ◇ *Eliminate all screen time—smartphones, tablets, laptops, and other devices—at least 30 minutes before you go to bed.* Two hours before bed is recommended, though this can be challenging for people. Many studies show that blue light has the effect of energizing us and telling our brain it's daytime when it's actually nighttime.
- ◇ *Control your intake of caffeinated drinks.* Caffeine is one of the biggest triggers for insomnia. While many people turn to caffeine because they haven't slept well, it also may be the cause of the insomnia. To start, stop drinking caffeine from coffee, tea, or energy drinks after noon. Make sure you drink plenty of water during the day to flush out your system. Fatigue can also be caused by dehydration,

which caffeine can cause. Often caffeine addiction is a self-perpetuating cycle. If you still can't sleep after cutting postnoon caffeine, stop drinking caffeine altogether. If you still like a warm drink, try an herbal tea, such as fresh lemongrass and mint. Before bedtime, it may help relax you to have a sage or chamomile tea.

- ◇ *Prepare your body for sleep.* Before you go to bed, it may help to do some light stretching and deep breathing as well as an iRest to help your body transition into your rest-and-digest system.
- ◇ *Prepare your mind for sleep.* You need to be careful about what you put into your mind before you go to bed. Stay away from having conversations that fire up your mind. If you are going to read before sleep, make sure it is something light or calming. If you tend to have a lot of thoughts before you go to sleep, keep a notepad by your bedside table for your brilliant ideas or things you have to remember to do tomorrow. Write them down, and then forget about them.
- ◇ *Establish a habit of going to bed at the same time every night, even if you're not sleepy at that time.* Keeping a steady bedtime helps train your mind to go to sleep and helps get you back into a sleep rhythm. Our bodies like patterns. If you start going to bed and waking up at the

People who are the best sleepers tend to also have healthy patterns in other parts of their lives. For example, eating at the same time every day is good for the body because the body naturally starts to secrete digestive fluids at that time. The same is true for sleep.



Sleep can help people live longer, improve memory, help with anxiety and depression, and much more.

same time, your body will acclimate to that pattern and will naturally start falling into that biorhythm. It may take a little time to find a pattern that works for you, but eventually you'll find how your body wants to naturally rest. If you can't go to bed at the same time every day, make sure you give yourself eight hours of sleep every night.

- Many of these items we don't do on a regular basis, but they can all have a huge impact on the quality of your sleep.

Breath Work, Inner Resource, and iRest

- Two important techniques that can help you ease into a restful night's sleep are breath work and your inner resource.
- Breath work can help calm the mind and activate the parasympathetic nervous system. While deep breathing

can be helpful, not all breathing practices are good for a prebedtime routine. In fact, some breathing practices are designed to energize the body, which is counterproductive to going to sleep.

- So, if you're going to do breath work before you go to sleep, start by lying on your back in your bed, making sure all of your covers and pillows are in a comfortable position. Then, begin breathing up and down through the entire body. Imagine, as you inhale, drawing the breath in through the soles of the feet, up through the entire body, and out the crown of the head; as you exhale, breathe down the body and right out the soles of the feet.
- Try to make each exhale longer than your inhale. Studies show that exhaling longer than inhaling strokes the vagus nerve, telling the body to turn on the rest-and-digest functions in the body. With each breath, feel as though you're bringing a deep state of calm and restoration to the mind.
- Another technique for easing into a good night's sleep is your inner resource—which serves as a place of groundedness, security, and ease during your iRest practice and in daily life, but it's also a great resource to use when falling asleep.
- As you snuggle under your covers and prepare to fall asleep, it can be helpful to bring to mind your inner resource. Because your inner resource is a real or imaginary place, person, or thing that evokes peace, calmness, and security in the body and mind, it can be a great way to transition into a restful night's sleep. When you lie back on your pillow, bring to mind your inner resource and experience it with all five senses. As you do, notice the calming effect it has on your body and if it helps you become drowsy.

- In addition to these two techniques, iRest is a great way to fall asleep and stay asleep. When choosing an iRest practice for this purpose, you may need to shop around to find the right one. There are practices of different length on CD and in other recorded formats.
- The difference with practices oriented to sleep is that the instructor doesn't bring you back to wakefulness at the end of the practice; instead, the instructor leaves you asleep. Once you find a practice you like, stick with that same meditation for a little while. This helps create a rhythm in the body and trains your mind to know that when it hears this particular iRest practice, it's time for sleep.
- If you wake up in the middle of the night and have a difficult time falling back asleep, you can use an iRest practice for sleep to help you fall asleep once more. A short iRest practice—maybe 10 to 15 minutes in length—is usually all it takes to help the mind calm down again.
- If you wake up multiple times throughout the night, try doing an iRest practice every time; this trains your mind to go back to sleep every time you wake up before your alarm. Use iRest for as long as you need help in getting a restful night's sleep. Keep in mind that it may have taken decades to cultivate poor sleep habits, and it may take a bit of time to retrain yourself to sleep. Stick with it. Every time you wake up, do an iRest or use the other tools you've learned in this class.

This class ends with a brief iRest practice that is specifically designed to help you fall asleep. If you are going to do this practice and have to be awake afterward, you might want to set an alarm.

Suggested Reading

Brody, “Your Brain on Yoga Nidra.”

Bullock, “Tapping into the Power of the Vagus Nerve.”

Hill, “How ‘Yoga Nidra’ Works.”

Huffington, “Arianna Huffington’s 12 Secrets to Your Best Sleep, Ever.”

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, “Why Is Sleep Important?”

National Sleep Foundation, “25 Random Facts about Sleep.”

Class 20

Using iRest for Pain Relief



This class is focused on using iRest to relieve pain—something that has been addressed throughout the course but will be explored more in depth in this class.

Finding Relief from Pain

- Pain can make you feel like you've been hijacked from your body or that your body is not a place where you want to live. But pain is not an enemy trying to remove you from your body; instead, it's a messenger trying to get you to pay attention to what's going on in your body—and in your mind.
- We've all experienced pain, but even with all our scientific understanding of specialized nerves and brain activity, it's notoriously difficult to pinpoint exactly what pain is. Eastern traditions of medicine offer a model of pain that has steadily gained the attention of Western practitioners.
- According to this model, pain is energy that gets stuck in the body due to physical (and sometimes mental) illness or injury. When energy isn't moving through the body properly, it gets stuck in one area, condensing sensation and creating the effect that we know as pain.
- When we think of pain, we often think of physical pain in the body, but pain can also be mental. Emotional pain comes from losing a job, hearing hurtful words directed at us, or experiencing trauma of any kind. When we experience emotional pain, often it's stored in the body and presents a physical sensation as well as a mental one.
- Stress is a great example of this: When we're feeling stressed, we may experience that stress as tension in our neck or pain

in our jaw. We may not realize it, but emotional pain and physical pain exist together and are often intertwined.

- No matter what causes the pain we experience in our lives, it's important to approach finding pain relief from multiple angles. Pain is a multifaceted experience that doesn't have a single "cure." Pain in the body has an effect on the mind. Emotional pain often has a corresponding physical sensation in the body. So, when we come at this issue from a mental and physical standpoint, we discover real relief from our pain.
- iRest is one of the tools we can use to help us find pain relief. Through iRest, we're able to come back into conversation with our body and actually listen to what it's trying to tell us. After all, pain is a messenger that is sharing something that may need to be seen or heard. Pain provides us the information to understand what the body needs or wants or what actions it's asking us to take.

If you have a headache, you are receiving a message that something is off in the body. It may be that you need to drink more water, or perhaps there's tension in your neck muscles that is causing a constriction of blood in your brain. This headache may also be telling you that you didn't get enough sleep, drank too much alcohol, or are experiencing high levels of stress.

That one headache could be sending you a plethora of messages or just one. If you listen to your body and ask the headache what it needs, what it wants, and what actions to take in the world—and then take those actions—you may find a start to relieving that headache.



- Research shows that using mindfulness can help people learn how to self-regulate their pain and learn to detach from their experience of pain. One well-known study looked at 51 patients who had experienced no improvement in their chronic pain from traditional medical care. But after just 10 weeks of mindfulness meditation, 65 percent of these patients saw a reduction of their pain by more than 33 percent. Another study, conducted at Wake Forest University in 2011, indicated that meditation can reduce pain intensity ratings by as much as 40 percent.

Exploring Pain Step by Step through iRest

- Understanding the connection between body and mind and understanding that we need to approach pain from multiple angles, we can explore pain step by step through iRest. Each of the 10 steps of the iRest protocol allows us to acknowledge and come into conversation with our pain.
- When we begin the practice by feeling into our inner resource, we evoke a sense of safety, security, and ease in the body despite our pain. We prove to ourselves that our body can indeed be a safe place to live, even in the midst of our pain.
- Setting our intention of “I am free from physical pain” or “My body and mind feel healthy and strong” brings us into the mindset of living a life without pain. And as we feel into our heartfelt desire, we may discover that it’s “to be free from suffering.”
- Once you set your intention and heartfelt desire, you’ll notice during iRest Yoga Nidra practices that you’re asked to affirm your intentions in the present tense. If you phrase your intentions for the future—for example, “I want to be healthy” or “I will be pain-free”—you strive for something that you are

always pushing into the future. When the future arrives, it will be *now*. Therefore, it's important to phrase your intentions in the present tense: "I am free from physical pain." Even if the statement doesn't feel true yet, the affirmation alone sets the wheels in motion for it to become true.

- After the first three steps of iRest, we then move into sensing the physical body. As you can probably attest to, when we experience physical pain, our first response is to change or fix it. It's an unpleasant sensation, after all, and most of us aren't keen to continue experiencing it. But iRest doesn't ask us to change or fix our pain; instead, we're invited to listen to our pain and ask, What do you want? What do you need? What action do you want me to take?
- This is a radically different way to approach our pain. As we move through the body sensing portion of iRest, we eliminate the stories we attach to our pain and open ourselves to exploring the quality and depths of our pain in the body.
- There are many ways we do this during an iRest practice. For example, we feel into areas where there is pain in the body and then feel into areas where there is no pain in the body. Feeling into these opposites is very important; it calls our awareness to the fact that pain is a changing experience. One part of our bodies may be in pain, but there are many other parts that have no pain. We also explore that there is a spectrum of pain. There may be places where the sensation of pain is most tuned up, and that may ease as we move farther away from it.
- As we feel into the intensity of the pain, we may be asked to try to pinpoint exactly where in the body the pain is radiating from. But often we find that it's very hard to determine where

the pain is actually coming from. As soon as we get close, we'll often find that the pain has moved.

- Pain itself has a very elusive quality about it, and this can actually be a very liberating experience. Pain is a constantly changing sensation on the backdrop of awareness, the part of you that is always pain-free. Your pain may be present in what seems like every moment of your life, yet it is constantly moving—constantly changing—and that realization can give you hope that your pain could move out of your body entirely with practice.
- After body sensing, we move into the breath sensing step of iRest, which can be one of the most beneficial for pain relief. Pain can be viewed as energy that is stuck in the body, and when we apply breath to an experience of pain, we're giving that stuck energy fluidity and the chance to break up and start moving again. Using the breath on our pain will help us discover that our pain is fluid and that we can move and explore energy. The breath can help us feel very proactive in our experience of pain.
- The feelings and emotions step of iRest is another powerful step because emotional pain and physical pain are often intertwined. The death of a loved one may cause you deep emotional pain as well as physical pain in your heart or chest. Our physical pain and emotional pain are interconnected, and when we experience one, we often experience the other. Also, sometimes when we listen to physical pain, we are surprised that all sorts of emotions come up. That all becomes material we can work with in the practice.
- Moving into the cognition and imagery step of iRest invites us to bring our awareness to our beliefs about pain. Often people will say, "I can't do this because of my physical pain."

This belief is incredibly limiting and reduces a whole person down to the scope of his or her pain. We will always have beliefs about pain and what we can tolerate in our bodies. But what happens when we address those opposites of belief? Instead of telling ourselves, “No one can help me,” why don’t we feel into the belief that “I am being helped and healing”?

- After addressing our beliefs, we then move into the joy step of the iRest protocol, where we’re invited to locate uncaused joy in our bodies and life. It may sound impossible to feel joy while also experiencing intense, prolonged pain. But when we take an experience of pain and wrap it up in love and light, our eyes begin to open to all the beautiful, wonderful, and pain-free aspects of our life. Yes, our pain is present and is sending us messages, but those messages don’t eliminate all of the other things in our lives that bring us joy. We also take time to love the parts of ourselves that we sometimes want to fix or change. We send ourselves nourishment instead of judgment.
- During the ninth step of iRest, we’re invited to step back into an objective state of awareness, and as we do so, we deepen our ability to experience resiliency and equanimity despite our pain. We start to recognize the underlying “something” that is always present—our true nature.
- When we move past the I-thought—which holds the belief that we are separate, that joy and peace are conditional, and that our pain is more than our peace—we experience that place within all of us where an eternal state of peace exists.
- This is a freeing experience, as it allows us to realize that our pain is but one small event in our life and it is not greater than our peace. It brings our pain into perspective and helps us see clearly that while our pain is present, there is so much more to ourselves than just our pain.

- During this stage, we're guided to contrast what is changing with what is unchanging. Our pain is ever-changing; our underlying peace is not. This part of iRest can be referred to as falling into effortless being. Through iRest, we learn to become more comfortable with experiencing our spacious consciousness that is devoid of our pain.
- At the end of the practice, we're guided back into the present moment—back into our daily life, where our pain may still be present, or maybe not. Sometimes awareness feels “louder” than the pain may have felt at the beginning of the practice.
- Throughout the practice of iRest, we have approached our pain from multiple angles and have welcomed the messages it's sending. Instead of avoiding or trying to fix our pain, we have come into conversation with it and welcomed it into our body. And even if pain is still there when we come back into the present moment, the habit of practicing iRest reminds us and allows us to experience our underlying peace that is greater than our pain.

This class ends with a short iRest practice for pain relief. You can explore physical or emotional pain for this practice—or perhaps both simultaneously.

Suggested Reading

Kabat-Zinn, “An Outpatient Program in Behavioral Medicine for Chronic Pain Patients Based on the Practice of Mindfulness Meditation.”

Class 21

Using iRest for Stress
Management



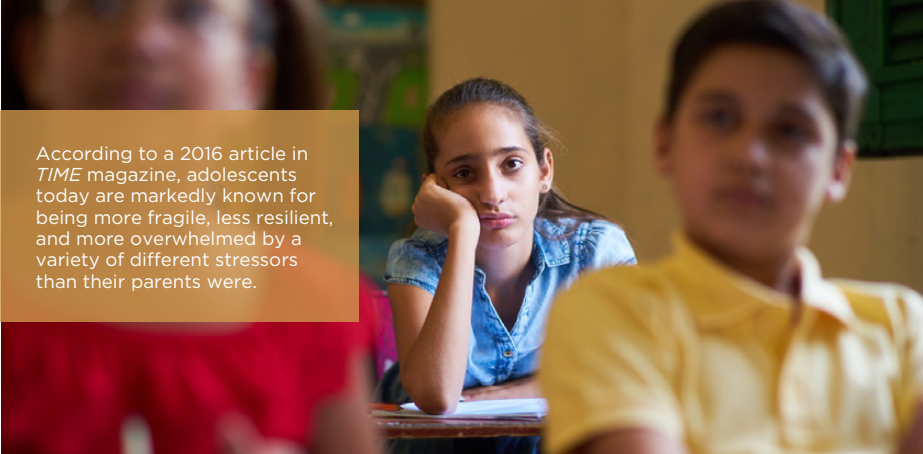
Stress is a universal experience. In fact, according to the American Psychological Association, nearly 25 percent of Americans experience high stress and 50 percent experience moderate levels of stress. While all of us aren't experiencing high stress in our lives every day, it's fair to say we all experience some form of stress on an average day.

How Stress Affects Us

- Stress, which has positive and negative effects on the body and mind, affects our lives in many different ways.
 - ◇ In relation to our jobs, too much stress can have a negative impact on performance and affect the overall environment in an office or in a business.
 - ◇ Stress can also affect people's perception of time, making those experiencing high stress feel as though there simply isn't enough time in the day to accomplish everything on their list.
 - ◇ Our home lives can serve as a dumping ground for stress as well as a cause of stress when relationships between family members are tenuous.
 - ◇ Our finances are a significant source of stress, with nearly 72 percent of Americans reporting that they feel stressed about money.
- Stress manifests itself in many different ways and targets the weakest part of our physiology and character. If you're prone to headaches, stress can bring them on. If you're not a very

patient person, stress is going to make you even less patient and understanding.

- While stress affects every person differently, it has a major effect on society as a whole. This can be seen on nearly any street in a busy metropolitan city. People rush to get to their destinations, are impatient and unfocused, and can even be unkind in their reactions to others around them due to the stress they're experiencing as individuals.
- Stress, like time, doesn't discriminate between the different phases of your life. Older adults generally have less resilience to stress, and their physical stress response is not as effective as it was when they were younger. Their stress is also different from their younger years, often brought on by the loss of loved ones, too much time on their hands, sleep problems, loss of physical abilities, and changes in relationships with children or grandchildren.
- On the other end of the spectrum, children are extremely vulnerable to stress. In fact, research suggests that the stress hormone cortisol can be incredibly damaging to a child's development. Too much cortisol experienced for prolonged periods of time can lead to lower IQs and cognitive damage.



According to a 2016 article in *TIME* magazine, adolescents today are markedly known for being more fragile, less resilient, and more overwhelmed by a variety of different stressors than their parents were.

- Stress is intertwined with many big challenges in life, including chronic pain, anxiety, depression, health issues, insomnia, and trauma. But daily life is filled with stressful situations as well—from one-time occurrences to ongoing experiences. And even if these everyday stressors might seem small in comparison with, for example, having to deal with cancer, their cumulative effect can be physically and emotionally debilitating.

How We React to Stress

- The body reacts in various ways when faced with stressful situations. Stress upregulates genes that can contribute to heart disease and diabetes. Stress can gradually lead to changes in the human brain, such as growing the amygdala and shrinking the hippocampus. And stress can even shorten telomeres and increase the aging process. What can we do about all these negative impacts?
- It's helpful to picture our reaction to stress as a process. First, when we experience a stressful situation—whether it's a car accident or a big test—our mind and body recognize the stressful event. Second, our sympathetic nervous system turns on, creating changes in the body and mind in reaction to the stressful event.
- We begin to feel more emotionally reactive. Our prefrontal cortex also starts to go offline, making it harder for us to make decisions, think through our actions, and have higher-level thought processes. Certain events also trigger a cascade of stress hormones in the body that cause our breathing and heartbeat to quicken, our muscles to tighten, and our sweat to accumulate.


- All of these reactions are part of the fight-or-flight response that is triggered when the sympathetic nervous system comes online. These physiological and hormonal changes in the body happen almost instantaneously and are ancient responses designed to protect us from external threats to our safety.
- While stress can be an individual experience, it can also be very contagious. A single stressed person can cause others in his or her sphere of influence—for example, at home or at work—to also feel stressed. And stress can spread through entire offices, communities, and even countries.
- Once we understand the stress response as a process, we can begin to manage the process rather than simply being controlled by it. For example, in the moments when we're feeling stressed or experiencing secondhand stress from others, we must remember that there is a certain amount of stress that we can control.
- For example, we can try to fix the problems in the office that may be causing the stress or seek therapy for relationship issues. We can also turn off the TV when we begin feeling upset over the news or politics. We can also realize that stress can be useful in certain situations.
- But we can make the biggest impact on our experience of stress by preparing ourselves to respond to it. While it is often important to regulate stressful circumstances in our lives, ultimately the most important thing we can do is boost our resiliency so that we have healthy responses to stressful situations.
- We can actually increase how often we evoke the relaxation response in our bodies, especially when we practice

consistently over time. And we can even weave it into our experiences throughout our day so we're less emotionally reactive and more connected to our inner sense of well-being and peace. When we learn to not take stressful situations personally, we increase our resilience and our ability to bounce back from stressful situations.

- We know that stress manifests differently in everyone in part because different people can be exposed to the same type of stress but have very different reactions to it. And just as stress can be contagious, so can our ability to neutralize and even reverse stress. We actually have the ability to become a source of connection, strength, and resiliency in a stressful situation instead of another source of stress.
- We all face stress in our lives, sometimes even extreme stress. Many of us have negative associations with stress. We hear the word “stress” and think it’s something we need to eliminate from our lives entirely. But some stress is actually good for us. It plays a critical role in protecting us from outside threats. A certain level of stress keeps us alert, motivated, and ready to avoid danger.
- This type of stress is actually promoted within the US military. When our service members deploy, it’s crucial they stay alert and ready for whatever dangers they may face. That’s why, throughout training, they’re subjected to many different types of stressful situations; it prepares them to handle stress while on the job and to be effective at completing missions. That is also why more of our troops are practicing iRest.

Stress and iRest

- iRest addresses stress in multiple ways. As you're led through the practice, you're invited to proactively engage with feelings, emotions, and beliefs that may be contributing to your sense of stress and anxiety. You are also invited to not suppress anything, but to fully welcome what is present with openness and curiosity.
- iRest also helps you stay connected with awareness. This enables you to feel your underlying sense of wholeness despite your difficult circumstances. In addition, by cultivating an inner resource, which serves as the foundation for your practice, you remind yourself of the feeling of safety and well-being that's always there, within yourself, even if it has been momentarily overshadowed by your stress.
- iRest also helps you develop the capacity to welcome all sensations in the body. By rotating your attention through your body and welcoming whatever is present, you're naturally lessening the effects of stress and helping yourself stay connected to the full spectrum of your present-moment experience.
- iRest goes beyond helping us feel physically less stressed. One of the main reasons iRest works so well at reducing stress is because it helps us stay in connection with ourselves and other people. It does this by teaching us to really feel what is present from moment to moment. The more connected you are to yourself, the more connected you are able to be with other people. iRest helps cultivate a deeper intuition that helps us stay attuned to ourselves and the people in our lives.
- People who are stressed but have strong levels of social support in their lives receive a boost of the hormone



People have used iRest to heal broken relationships, improve marriages, become more effective in the workplace, and stay truly connected to their children.

oxytocin when they seek connection during periods of stress. Sometimes called the love hormone, oxytocin helps them feel less anxious, more confident in their ability to cope, and more drawn to others around them.

- Through iRest, we learn to face each stressful situation and ask, What is present? Where do I feel it in my body? What action are you asking me to take in the world right now? In this way, we become very intuitive and connected to life around us.
- Practicing iRest sets us up to be prepared for more stress. The reality of life is that we will experience different degrees of stress. It's inevitable. The beauty in this knowledge is we can meet, greet, and welcome those experiences when they arise, knowing we have our iRest practice and a deeper sense of awareness supporting us along the way. Instead of fleeing from our problems, we learn to embrace them and find our peace and meaning in the midst of them.
- This is where post-traumatic growth begins to happen. When we embrace challenges as valuable opportunities to learn and

evolve, we set ourselves on a path for healing and integration of our traumatic experiences.

- There are always things we can do to improve our abilities to experience and deal with stress. iRest serves as a tool to support you on your journey in life, and no matter where you are on that journey, iRest will be available to you in the midst of any circumstance.

This class ends with a practice specifically designed for stress relief.

Suggested Reading

Agrell, “How Job Stress Affects Home Life.”

Alkubaisi, “How Can Stress Affect Your Work Performance? Quantitative Field Study on Qatari Banking Sector.”

Bethune, “Money Stress Weighs on Americans’ Health.”

Chavez, “Effects of Stress and Relaxation on Time Perception.”

Cleveland Clinic, “What Is Stress? Symptoms, Signs & More.”

Eastman-Mueller, et al., “iRest Yoga-Nidra on the College Campus.”

Harvard Health Publishing, “How Stress Affects Seniors, and How to Manage It.”

——, “Understanding the Stress Response.”

Mills, et al., “Social Impact of Stress.”

National Institute of Mental Health, “5 Things You Should Know about Stress.”

Pellissier, “Stress and Your Child’s Brain.”

Schrobsdorff, “Teen Depression and Anxiety.”

Soltes, “iRest Meditation.”

Stress Management Society, “How It Affects Us.”

Class 22

Using iRest for
Healing Trauma



In this class, you will learn some of the basics on how trauma affects the body and mind and how you can use iRest to integrate your experience and counteract the effects of trauma. You will explore the meaning that you can find within your adversity and discover some ways you can carry these principles into your day-to-day life.

If you have experienced a trauma, it's very important to have a support system in place and know that there are resources available that can support you in your healing process. Talk therapy, physical therapy, and other forms of treatment may be required to support you on your journey, in addition to iRest.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- According to Mayo Clinic, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is defined as a mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event—either experiencing it or witnessing it. Terrifying events can range from sexual abuse to wartime experiences to car accidents.
- Symptoms of PTSD can include flashbacks, nightmares, and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event, and can start within one month of the event. Symptoms are usually placed into four categories: intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions.
- PTSD, much like time, does not discriminate among age, class, social status, or gender. Anyone who experiences a traumatic event can develop PTSD from it. But, much like stress, it can present differently in people. Some people

may have constant flashbacks, while others may develop severe anxiety. For children younger than six, reenacting the event is also a common symptom. What is true for anyone experiencing PTSD is if it's left unchecked, it can begin to dominate daily life.

- When we receive the diagnosis of PTSD, it can make us feel as though we're damaged or broken. In reality, post-traumatic stress disorder side effects are the body's normal biochemical response to going through a traumatic experience. It's a natural part of the healing process.
- Often when we go through a traumatic experience, we get stuck in the moment of time in which the trauma occurred. This is the body and mind's attempt to process a traumatic experience. Every time we have a traumatic experience, big or small, our brains create a "groove" that provides us with information on the situation that will hopefully protect us in the future. But this groove is where many of us get stuck after experiencing a trauma. iRest can help us transform deep grooves.

The topic of the previous class is the ways in which stress affects the body. Stress caused by trauma operates in much the same way, only often even more intensively.

The research demonstrates that practicing iRest or using other relaxation tools will change the way your body works, giving it optimal conditions to experience health and wellness. Practicing iRest also changes the way your mind works, allowing you to find greater peace in the moment while also discovering that you're better able to handle challenging memories and emotional experiences.

Trauma and iRest

- Often after we experience a trauma, we can feel detached from our bodies, or not fully present in our bodies. The trauma can make the body feel like the scene of a crime. It can be a place where it doesn't feel safe to hang out due to the physical or emotional pain that is present. This is a natural response after going through a traumatic experience.
- iRest can help us feel safe enough to return to feeling sensation in the physical body. It can also help evoke feelings of pleasure and comfort, which allow us to invite sensation back into the body. It gives us the support necessary to navigate challenging experiences while being aware of them. iRest guides us to come back home to the body and to a sense of health, pleasure, and joy in our lives, bodies, and minds.
- One of the ways iRest initiates the relaxation response is by including breathing exercises in every practice. This is incredibly beneficial for trauma victims. Breathing practices are simple and make short work of moving us out of the sympathetic nervous system and into the parasympathetic nervous system—and ultimately into a calmer state of mind.
- Breath is also a powerful practice that survivors of trauma can take out of the practice and back into daily life. Our breathing, when combined with specific exercises, can serve to ground us in the present moment. With a single conscious inhale and exhale, we're already drawing our focus to the sensation of air moving in and out of our bodies. This reminds our body and our mind that our traumatic event has passed and that we are no longer living that event.

- iRest also helps us cultivate a state of witnessing awareness. When we go through a traumatic experience, we often fuse with that experience. This is a normal part of processing traumatic events. But if we stay fused with our traumatic experience, we can never integrate it and grow from it.
- When we use tools like iRest to cultivate the relaxation response and access the state of witnessing awareness, we come to realize that the traumatic events are not who we are. Over time and with consistent practice, we start to slowly extract ourselves from the traumatic experience and eventually learn to observe ourselves in relation to the event.
- Through iRest, we learn to feel that deep sense of stillness, peace, and presence that is independent of what is occurring in our everyday lives. This is not to help us forget or erase the traumatic memory or event; in fact, our traumas often contain some of the most valuable life lessons we can ever receive. But we cannot find the lessons if we fuse with the trauma and keep reliving the experience. In finding our spaciousness, we learn to allow ourselves to experience and feel traumatic events fully and look at our experiences from an objective perspective.
- Another way of saying this is that the practice of iRest helps us learn to feel safe. Instead of using unhealthy methodologies—such as drugs, medication, alcohol, and excessive eating, working, or shopping—to deal with trauma, we begin to care for ourselves deeply so we can cultivate a sense of security, safety, and ease within ourselves. We learn to access a part of ourselves that is always present and untouched by our traumatic experiences.
- Suppressing our feelings, emotions, and thoughts related to the traumatic event will only work for so long; as humans,

we need a process to help us learn to be present with our traumatic experiences and allow them to be seen, felt, and heard.

- That said, the practice of iRest never forces you to look at or work with anything you're not ready for. Instead, iRest evokes a sense of safety and security in your body and mind, allowing whatever is ready to be seen to naturally arise.
- As you practice iRest, over time you may discover your experience and memories about your traumatic event begin to soften—they become lighter and lighter. Eventually, you might no longer be afraid of your experience and might begin to find peace in the midst of it. The memory of the event will probably never go away, but you can find peace in the moment as well as when you think back to the traumatic time in your life.

There is tremendous meaning in traumatic experiences. Our problems are not the problem. Our problems are our path.



- We are now actively trying to shift the way we perceive and treat trauma in our society. Instead of looking at post-traumatic stress as a *disorder* and the people who have it as broken or damaged in some way, we are looking at how we can facilitate post-traumatic *growth*.
- This movement centers on the belief that when we are supported in our journeys, trauma can be a powerful experience of self-transformation. Through trauma, we can discover our wisdom and truth and become empowered to bring those gifts to life in the world. iRest is a tool that helps us navigate this journey.
- As Swami Sivananda said, “Inside of your biggest weakness resides your greatest strength.” We just need tools, connection, and support to guide us along the way. The practice of iRest is a form of support for you on your journey. There have been times in all of our lives when we have wanted to run away or hide. iRest supports us in looking at every problem as an opportunity and really listening for the answer.
- Practicing iRest also better prepares us to deal with potential future trauma. The reality is we will experience different degrees of trauma throughout our lives. The beauty in this knowledge is that we can meet, greet, welcome, and respond to those experiences when they arise, knowing we have our iRest practice and a deeper sense of awareness supporting us along the way. Instead of fleeing from our problems, we learn to embrace them and find our peace and meaning in the midst of them.
- To know that we can welcome life on life’s terms gives us back our power. We don’t have to fix and change ourselves or the world around us to be peaceful and happy in life. Instead, we

can embrace the journey with the wisdom that every moment is truly paired with its perfect response.

This class ends with a short iRest practice designed to foster healing and growth in anyone suffering from trauma.

Trauma Resources

- **If you or someone you know feels unsafe in your relationship**, you can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-7233. You can learn more about what abuse looks like in relationships here: <http://www.thehotline.org>.
- **If you or someone you know are looking for support following sexual assault**, you can call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at (800) 656-4673. You can learn more about sexual assault here: <https://www.rainn.org/>.
- **If you or someone you know is involved in human trafficking**, you can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at (888) 373-7888, or learn more here: <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/>.
- **If you or someone you know has suicidal thoughts or intention**, you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255, or learn more here: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>.
- **If you or someone you know is looking for substance abuse treatment or mental health services**, you can call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at (877) 726-4727, or learn more at <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help>.

- **If you or someone you know has or might have an eating disorder**, you can call the National Eating Disorders Association's Helpline at (800) 931-2237, or learn more at <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>.

Tools for Finding a Therapist

- **To find a therapist for post-traumatic stress disorder**, visit this web page: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/treatment/therapy-med/finding-a-therapist.asp>.
- **To find a therapist who uses the Pacifica mental health app**, visit this web page: <https://www.thinkpacifica.com/find-a-therapist/>.
- **“How to Find the Right Therapist”** by Marissa Miller: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/17/smarter-living/how-to-find-the-right-therapist.html>.

Class 23

The Science behind
iRest Yoga Nidra



The practice of Yoga Nidra has been used in Eastern traditions for more than 2,000 years, and the oldest forms of meditation itself date back more than 3,500 years, but it hasn't been until recently that science has caught up and recognized the effectiveness and benefits of meditative practices. This class is devoted to the research that supports the practice of iRest—specifically what the research says about how and why meditation is so healing.

Components of Mindfulness

- Consciousness is composed of attention and awareness. Think of awareness as the backdrop of our experience. Attention is activated when we notice a particular experience. Once an experience, or stimulus, grabs our attention, it is only a matter of milliseconds before we have a cognitive or emotional response to that stimulus.

Multiple research studies have demonstrated iRest's effectiveness in pain management, stress management, sleep, and the treatment of substance abuse and trauma. Importantly, these studies have included participants from many different populations, including veterans, college students, survivors of intimate partner violence, and people experiencing homelessness.

Because we know that iRest is effective for a wide range of people encountering all kinds of challenges, it has been accepted by the Department of Defense, business leaders, athletes, trauma survivors, and many other groups.

- Much of the time, our response to something that catches our attention is an automatic response, and our automatic

responses are largely a function of our upbringing, environment, past experiences, and other factors that have shaped our belief system. This can result in biases, judgments, and having difficulty seeing beyond our belief system.

- Mindfulness practices help us break free from the trap of our automatic responses. Mindfulness is the ability to observe our experience in the present moment without judgment. In other words, it's our ability to shift our consciousness—by shifting our attention back to awareness itself.
- iRest is a form of mindfulness. Every experience, including our body sensations, feelings, emotions, and thoughts, is perceived as part of our consciousness.
- Mindfulness practices—like iRest—can be broken down into a number of components that work together to create positive changes in the body and mind: intention, focused attention, body awareness, awareness of emotions and thoughts, and disidentification from the self. All of these components are found in the practice of iRest, and they can help us understand the mechanisms underlying the physical and mental benefits of iRest.

Intention

- ◇ The first component of mindfulness involves setting an intention, which serves as a reminder of why you are practicing. While many other forms of meditation and mindfulness acknowledge the purpose of setting an intention in theory, not all forms invite practitioners to specifically set an intention at the beginning of each practice.

- ◇ iRest recognizes the importance of purposefully stating an intention, as evidenced by the fact that the first few steps of iRest involve both setting your intention, or short-term focus for the practice, and bringing to mind your heartfelt desire, or your long-term focus for your life.
- ◇ This two-step intention-setting process opens doors not only for resolution in your day-to-day life, but also for keeping those short-term developments in line with what you consider to be the more overarching purpose of your life.
- ◇ Research shows that meditators' intentions tend to evolve over time and typically follow the same pattern of evolution, starting with a focus on self-regulation for beginning meditators, then transitioning to a focus on self-exploration, and finally transitioning to an intention set on self-liberation.
- ◇ By actively setting intentions in each practice of iRest, this evolution can be more readily observed by the meditator. Noticing this evolution helps us recognize our own growth and track whether we're moving closer to our true self.

Focused Attention

- ◇ The next component of mindfulness is engaging in focused attention, which can be found in every stage of iRest—which starts with focused attention on an inner resource, an intention, and a heartfelt desire and then transitions to focused attention on body sensations, the breath, feelings, emotions, thoughts, joy, and awareness itself throughout the duration of the practice.

- ◇ By focusing attention, meditation practitioners learn how to become aware of the various components of consciousness in each moment and how to shift between a broad observation of our overall experience and sharply focused attention on a particular thought, image, or emotion.
- ◇ Many scientific fields have acknowledged that the ability to focus attention can play a crucial role in the processes of healing and change. For example, neuroscience research shows that the anterior cingulate cortex of the brain—which is said to have a role in a person's ability to control difficult emotions—becomes distinctly activated during the focused attention that occurs during meditation and that the more experienced a meditator is, the more activation is noted. By creating more activation in the anterior cingulate cortex during iRest, we facilitate our ability to control difficult emotions—which, in turn, can prevent or alleviate our reliance on unhealthy coping mechanisms.
- ◇ Not only does iRest provide space for its practitioners to set focused attention on their experience, but it also prescribes an attention that is self-compassionate throughout the practice, such as by providing frequent reminders to welcome experiences with openness, curiosity, and kindness and by reminding practitioners that whatever they experience is perfect.
- ◇ This guidance is to protect the quality of attention that we give to our experiences. When all experiences are welcomed, it helps prevent the practitioner from only searching for positive experiences or ignoring or being critical of unpleasant experiences.
- ◇ This compassionate attention is vital to the ability to have a nonjudgmental awareness of body sensations,

thoughts, and emotions, which is key to ultimate healing. Nonjudgmental attention to all of our experiences allows us to create more connection with ourselves, which results in better self-regulation, which then manifests as improvement in our overall health.

Body Awareness

- ◇ The next aspect of mindfulness is body awareness, which comes from really paying attention to the sensations that are felt in the body at all times. In reality, there are thousands of sensations occurring in our bodies each moment that don't automatically capture our attention. Meditators from a collection of research studies report that after they start meditating, they begin to notice a wider range of body sensations.
- ◇ This connection between mind and body is vitally important, and if we strengthen it, we can really listen and respond to the messages that our body is trying to send to us. iRest is layered with opportunities for practicing body awareness, not only through noticing our breath and body sensations, but also by paying attention to where in our body we feel various emotions and thoughts.
- ◇ Research shows that the insula—a part of the brain involved in a number of functions, such as compassion, self-awareness, and social emotions—lights up during activities that involve body awareness. Studies also reveal that the actual gray matter measured in that area increases as the capacity for body awareness increases, as measured in people who meditate.
- ◇ Additionally, the practice of mindfulness has been shown to increase gray matter in the temporoparietal junction,

which is a part of the brain responsible for helping us differentiate between self and other. Increased gray matter in this area, therefore, also suggests increased awareness of our physical self.

- ◇ This heightened physical awareness offers many potential benefits to our health. For example, it can help us learn to listen to the whispers of pain before injury and illness manifest in our bodies. It can make us more aware of our body's cravings. This can be especially helpful in situations like trying to lose weight or resisting cravings involved with addictions.
- ◇ It can also help us learn to observe situations where codependence may be present, helping us notice when we are “borrowing” our happiness and self-identity from other people or objects. It can also help us feel sincere empathy and compassion for others. These practices change how we perceive and interact in the world.

Awareness of Emotions and Thoughts

- ◇ The next component of mindfulness is having an awareness of our emotions and thoughts. When we can step back and observe our emotional states, as is the case during iRest, we are less controlled by them, which in turn makes us less likely to respond to our emotional states with the automatic behaviors that we develop over time.
- ◇ This opens the door to a much wider range of controlled responses and allows us to respond to even very strong thoughts and emotions with greater balance and perspective. Over time, this will make our responses to mental and emotional stimuli less automatic.

- ◇ When we learn to observe our responses, we take a more proactive approach to life. Instead of just numbly navigating life on autopilot and letting the outside world dictate how we feel about ourselves, we learn to observe our responses rather than identify with ever-changing emotional states. We also learn that we are more than these changing states of consciousness, which can be a profound liberation if you have spent your entire life feeling hijacked by emotions.
- ◇ In iRest, experiencing our thoughts is not limited to the mind. Practitioners are also invited to feel into where in the body they notice sensations that stem from their thoughts. Through the process of paying objective attention to our thoughts, over time we will experience them as sensations to be noticed, rather than statements of fact that we identify with. Research shows that when we are able to view our thoughts as transient bits of information and the emotions they cause as reactions to those thoughts, our thoughts become less attached to biases, helping us become more open-minded people.
- ◇ Research on emotional regulation in the brain provides some interesting findings. It shows an increased ability in the prefrontal control systems and hippocampus to soften the alarm of the emotional parts of our brain, such as the amygdala. One thought is that by bringing welcoming attention to our emotional reactions, we expose ourselves to the reaction itself. This increases our tolerance for the feelings associated with that particular reaction. In turn, this results in the extinction of the messenger over time.
- ◇ iRest ensures the safety of this process through its utilization of an inner resource—a safe haven for practitioners to

return to during times when the experience of a particular thought or emotion becomes overwhelming.

- ◇ Studies on mindfulness meditation have shown that as meditators' self-reported stress decreases, the amount of gray matter found in their amygdala also decreases. This means that the less stressed these meditators are, the less reactive their amygdala appears to be as well.

Disidentification from the Self

- ◇ The last component of mindfulness is the ability to disidentify from the self. In separating ourselves from our experience, we are able to view our experience without the constraints imposed by our own thoughts and feelings, which accordingly changes the experience itself. What was once a perception clouded by our own personal attachment to the outcome is now a perception defined by a sense of clarity, openness, and objectivity.
- ◇ This is what separates the I-thought from what is being experienced. It is the difference between thinking "I am anxious" and thinking "Anxiety is present." Disidentification provides space for greater perspective and equanimity. This process essentially shifts the perspective of self from that which is being observed to that which is observing.
- ◇ The process of disidentification does not mean that we disconnect from our experience, but rather that we experience life without any identification or attachment to the outcome. This enables us to experience life more fully, as our experience is less limited by our own attachment or aversion to each experience.



The default mode of the brain involves processes that are concerned with self-reference. MRI studies comparing the brain at rest and during meditation show that meditation results in a decrease in this kind of default-mode activity, which translates as less identification with the self during meditation.

Studies on experienced meditators have also shown that meditators' brains seem to have more control over their self-referential default state—both at rest and during meditation—than the brains of nonmeditators.

All of this suggests that mindfulness practices result in changes in how one perceives the self and others. Deep, lasting, authentic connection with ourselves and the world around us is the natural by-product.

Benefits of Mindfulness

- To give you a more comprehensive picture of what makes mindfulness practices so healing, let's examine why the components of mindfulness are beneficial.

Self-Regulation and Flexibility

- ◇ Through iRest, practitioners can significantly improve both their self-regulation and their emotional, behavioral, and cognitive flexibility. Research has shown that our beliefs can distort our interpretation of new information.

iRest facilitates our ability to separate ourselves from our typical identification with our beliefs, which results in more flexibility in how we respond to our environment.

- ◇ Our openness to our experience also results in less rumination on our experiences and much less rigidity in our views and behaviors. As a result, iRest helps us become more tolerant, connected, and compassionate human beings.
- ◇ Multiple measures have shown that increased mindfulness improves self-regulation in three key ways: It fosters understanding and acceptance of emotions, supports the ability to prevent and shorten “bad moods,” and enables us to be less reactive to emotionally charging experiences.
- ◇ This happens because mindfulness increases activation in our prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for higher-level cognitive functioning. Increased activation in the prefrontal cortex seems to reduce the response of the amygdala, which controls our emotional reactions, especially fear.
- ◇ The increased activation in our prefrontal cortex is thought to come from observing and labeling our experiences, rather than purely reacting to the physical sensations caused by the emotions and thoughts we don’t like to have.
- ◇ Awareness and flexibility surrounding our own experience also have been shown to improve our relationships with others, as we are able to connect more accurately and deeply with the people in our lives when our encounters are not clouded by prejudgments or set beliefs about who they are or how they perceive us.

Insight and Values Clarification

- ◇ iRest also provides opportunities to develop deeper insight into ourselves and our core values as a person. iRest embodies the concept of integrative awareness, a concept that is a goal of several therapeutic orientations, such as psychodynamic theory and cognitive behavioral theory.
- ◇ Integrative awareness is the ability to welcome everything about our experience, both internally and externally. Insight is a by-product of this process, during which our thoughts and feelings become just that—thoughts and feelings—or transient pieces of our experience, rather than being taken more rigidly as fact.
- ◇ The process of paying attention to our experience of emotions and thoughts can also facilitate the process of finding meaning in or lessons from the events in our life. Neurologically, this process is found to take place in various regions of the prefrontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex.
- ◇ By learning nonreactivity, we lessen the strength of our habitual reactions, and this gives us more control and freedom over our responses. In other words, mindfulness lets us move from a place where painful experiences hold us hostage to a place where we see these experiences as opportunities for growth.
- ◇ This more objective view of our experiences also translates as more objectivity in determining our true values. By being able to step back and observe our beliefs, we can take charge and determine which values are the most important to us, rather than living by values

that may have been imposed on us by our environment and culture.

- ◇ Studies show that the more people engage in mindfulness, the more they report to live by the values that are the truest to them. This results in more freedom and choice in our presence in this world. The more we engage in mindfulness-based practices, like iRest, the more we are able to engage in self-regulated behavior that is guided not by habits or automatic responses, but by our values.

Positive Outlook

- ◇ The practice of iRest also helps cultivate a more positive outlook. The mindful nonattachment that comes from iRest provides us with nourishing equanimity, stability, and unwavering happiness that is not dependent on any outer experience. This nonattachment does not mean that we are disconnected from life. Instead, the opposite is true: It brings us even more in contact with life by liberating us from our limiting belief systems and allowing us to fully engage in all the experiences that life has to offer.
- ◇ More and more psychologists are looking into meditation as a way to foster positive states in the brain. Research has shown that more activity in the left area of the frontal brain correlates with a more positive baseline in how one experiences the world. More negative baselines are correlated with a lower left-to-right ratio in frontal brain activity.
- ◇ Based on studies of Buddhist monks, it appears that the brains of meditators have more activation in the left frontal area, both when stimulated by an image that elicits an emotional response and at rest.

Mental and Physical Health Benefits

- ◇ iRest has proven to offer many mental and physical health benefits. Studies have shown a reduction in stress, anxiety, neuroticism, trauma symptoms, and depressive symptoms as well as an increase in positive outlook, life satisfaction, executive functioning, extroversion, and general well-being.
- ◇ And this is not just about your disposition. Studies have also shown that mindfulness practices can reduce physical symptoms that come from stress, cancer, and other physically adverse experiences. Other research shows that the practice of mindfulness results in less emotional volatility, the ability to withstand negative stimuli for longer periods of time, and the ability to recover from emotionally charging experiences more quickly.
- ◇ All of these improvements in personal stamina and resiliency serve as preventative measures for our overall health. The less we are stressed, the more bodily resources we have available to stay in good health.
- ◇ The more we are aware of our body's response to emotions, the more we are able to regulate those emotions. This ability is crucial in treating certain mental health disorders. And because mindfulness practices strengthen the function of the anterior cingulate cortex, there's evidence that they may help with attention disorders, such as ADHD.
- ◇ Current research also shows a significant correlation between self-compassion and mindfulness—a correlation that can probably be traced to the fact that practices like iRest create a welcoming environment for all experiences.

The practice of self-compassion offers even more benefits to our physical and mental health.

- ◇ Meditation also encourages the relaxation response, which is the response that occurs when we take the time to quiet our minds. The relaxation response is our ability to counteract both stress and our brain's fight-or-flight alarm system, which we can do while engaging in practices like iRest. These practices cause our brain to signal to our body that it is time to slow down, and they also encourage more blood flow to the brain.
- ◇ During every iRest practice, you are invited to check in with your inner resource, which evokes feelings of well-being, ease, tranquility, and equanimity. Every time you do this, your brain releases oxytocin and activates the parasympathetic nervous system, telling your body to switch into rest-and-digest mode, promoting even more relaxation.
- ◇ Research shows that practicing Yoga Nidra also promotes the regulation of hormones and the stabilization of glucose levels. And a 30-minute practice of iRest is equivalent to two hours of regular sleep. iRest guides you through different brain wave states, which is believed to be part of the reason why Yoga Nidra is effective in helping people sleep. Accessing these different brain wave states gives the body the chance to restore and heal itself.
- ◇ Another benefit of meditation is captured in the book *The Telomere Effect*, written by Nobel Prize winner Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn and Dr. Elissa Epel. Telomeres are the protective caps on the ends of our DNA, which the authors compare to the plastic tips on shoelaces. Longer telomeres are correlated with longer life spans; smaller ones are correlated with risk for chronic illness.

- ◇ Our telomeres can be shortened by chronic stress, but there are ways in which we can reduce the shortening of our telomeres and sometimes even increase their length. Participating in mind-body exercises, such as meditation, is a technique documented in the book as being effective in the preservation of our telomeres, leading to better health and longevity.
- ◇ iRest encompasses all of these benefits for body and mind in one practice. iRest truly provides a wealth of mindfulness, relaxation, and healing—all of which contribute to our ability to live a healthy and peaceful life.

This class provides just the tip of the iceberg on the research that has been done on meditation, so if you are hungry for more, take the initiative to dive deeper into the science of these practices on your own.

Suggested Reading

Almendrala, “A Military Pilot Study Could Change the Way We Treat Pain.”

Brody, “Your Brain on Yoga Nidra.”

Ferguson, et al., “The Paraventricular Nucleus of the Hypothalamus a Potential Target for Integrative Treatment of Autonomic Dysfunction.”

Hill, “How ‘Yoga Nidra’ Works.”

Jeraci, “5 Benefits of Yoga Nidra.”

Miller, “Learn to Listen to Your Body.”

US Department of Veterans Affairs, “Symptoms of PTSD.”

Class 24

iRest Yoga Nidra for
Everyday Life



As this course comes to an end, it is important to understand how you can bring iRest into your daily life. As you have learned, iRest can help with a myriad of conditions, such as depression, PTSD, trauma, chronic pain, and insomnia. iRest can also transform all of the activities that make up the content of your daily life—home, work, play, and more. And because you can incorporate iRest into every moment of your life, it's truly a practice that will help you live as the fullest expression of yourself.

The Final iRest Step

- During the final step of the iRest protocol, we bridge our “formal” iRest practice with the rest of our lives. The tenth step of iRest, known as *sahaj*, is the return to life. In Sanskrit, *sahaj* means “natural state”—and the purpose of the tenth step is to help us take our natural state, the true nature that our practice has helped us connect with, back into our daily lives.
- As we move out of the ninth step of iRest, *asmitamaya kosha*, and into integration with the world, we bring something with us: a connection with awareness. During *sahaj*, we create the opportunity to come back to life in deep connection with our true nature—with that stillness, that wholeness, that deep peace.
- At the end of each iRest practice, you are invited to make an intention to stay connected to awareness so that every thought, word, and deed arises as an expression of awareness. *Sahaj* occurs when you come back to life permeated with this deep connection to your true self.
- As we “put back on the clothes” of being in a body with a breath and a mind, certain qualities of being come back with us. They are the “fragrance” of awareness. These qualities

are known in Sanskrit as the *brahmavihāras*, which can be translated as “the abode of the divine nature.”

- Put into plainer English, the *brahmavihāras* are virtues, or attitudes, that we connect with during meditation. And when we live these virtues fully in our everyday life, they promote social harmony in our real-world interactions with other people.
- Traditionally, Buddhists recognize four *brahmavihāras*: *metta*, which means “loving-kindness”; *karuna*, which means “compassion”; *mudita*, or “sympathetic joy”; and *upekkha*, which means “equanimity.” Collectively, these qualities of heart and mind provide us with the ideal way of living as social creatures in a rough-and-tumble world.
- From the standpoint of iRest, it’s important to note that the *brahmavihāras* are the natural expression of living from your true nature. They are the connection between the you that has a name, a body, a breath, and a mind—a lifetime filled with thoughts and memories—and the you that is pure being, untouched by anything that has ever happened in life, or anything that ever will. They are the expression of your true nature as you interact with other people in everyday life.
- When we come out of our iRest practice and return to waking life, the ultimate goal is to not go away from our iRest practice, but to bring it with us—to live fully and completely alive, in deep connection with awareness. And if you stay connected to awareness, then you’ll find that the feeling of awareness, the *brahmavihāras*, arise naturally as you move into your daily life.
- Within the *brahmavihāras*—the traditional four overarching states of mind—we can identify many other virtues, or essential qualities of being, that might arise in everyday life.

Among these essential qualities are selflessness, integrity, patience, and forgiveness.

- When someone connects with pure awareness and lives connected to it in every moment of every day, he or she is living the *brahmavihāras*. Each of these virtues is a natural quality of our self. The virtues represent who we truly are.
- As humans, we're hopefully evolving toward these qualities, and many of us seek them throughout our entire lives. But iRest helps us realize that we don't have to seek them—that they're already present in each of us as part of our true nature. They arise as natural reflections of our true self.
- iRest is a portal through which we can knowingly come to know ourselves. Ultimately, at the end of an iRest practice, we want to come back with awareness present as we feel our physical body, emotions, beliefs, and thoughts. We feel physical sensations and are more present than ever before with that full symphony of physical experience.
- At the same time, we feel connected to that part of ourselves that is unchanging. Emotions may arise, unfold, and dissolve. We allow them to. We let ourselves feel them fully. Yet we stay anchored to that deep stillness that permeates every moment. The I-thought may arise, but we don't identify with it as "all there is."
- During the *sahaj* step of iRest, our gender, age, marital status, family history, race, and profession may arise once more. They may be present and important, of course, but we know that our true self is untouched by any of it.
- This is one of the most incredible parts of the practice. As you integrate with your everyday world, you may notice that

you are more present and aware after you practice iRest. You may feel more loving and connected. You may notice your senses and body more. Colors may look brighter; tastes may seem richer. You may feel a sense of calm, or joy, just for being alive.

- But it's important to note that this heightened awareness—and the feeling of peace you may experience while practicing iRest—will often go away if you don't maintain a consistent practice.

Consistent iRest Practice and Meditation Retreats

- Every time we practice iRest, we saturate ourselves in awareness, creating the conditions for the *brahmavihāras* to arise as we interact with colleagues, our families, and the world at large. Until we experience that final liberation, however, we need the connection created by consistent practice. The more we practice, the deeper the connection becomes.
- As you grow steadier in your practice, you may want to think about going on a meditation retreat, at least once a year. There are many different types of meditation retreats to choose from, but you'll want to find one that has at least some silent portions, as well as structured daily meditation. There are several meditations like this offered through the iRest Institute, which you can learn more about on their website.
- We all need quiet time to devote to self-study and reconnecting with who we truly are. Spending time just being with yourself, where you don't have to do anything or be anyone, is crucial for staying connected to awareness in your everyday life.
- In life, we always want to have enough energy. We want to feel like it just flows from us. Energy is like water; you don't want

to have to go without. You don't want to have to dig deep into that well to find the last shreds of energy. It is important to fill yourself up, both through consistent practice and through those deep immersions into retreat where you really solidify your connection with a deep ground of peacefulness.

- Retreats and consistent iRest are what keep us in touch with that inner peace. And this, in turn, helps us carry the “fragrance” of peace and awareness into our ordinary lives—our jobs, conversations, weekly trips to the grocery store—not just every now and then, but on a daily basis.

Bridging iRest Practice with Daily Life

- Embodied awakening happens when you bridge your practice with your daily life. No matter what you do in life, whether you're a yoga teacher or a lawyer, you can bring that state of connection or stillness with you in whatever you do.
- For example, a customer service representative who spends most of her day on the phone can show compassion for angry customers calling in with issues. She can also be kind with her words and with her thoughts toward those same customers who may call her names or scream at her.
- Many people integrate their iRest practice with their everyday lives in a wide array of life situations. By embodying the virtues of peace, compassion, and awareness, they illustrate how the *brahmavihāras* are always present, even in the most challenging circumstances, and that we embody them at any moment in our lives.
- The *brahmavihāras* are rooted in a spiritual tradition, but they are equally down-to-earth principles that reflect the most

essential human values. The qualities that we associate with the *brahmavihāras* are profound in their simplicity.

- For example, kindness is how we make love manifest in our life, yet it's internal as much as it's external. If we find we're being unkind to others, we should look inward and discover where we're still judging ourselves—where we're being hard on ourselves. Once we've reflected on ourselves and the unkindness within, we then turn back to our iRest practice to learn how we can use it to reconnect with kindness and use it as a reflection of ourselves in daily life.
- In reality, we all have things that make us lose our peace. When you feel kindness seeping out of your actions in your daily life, remember your iRest meditation and ask, How can I come back to the practice and reconnect?
- Our iRest practice serves not only as a way for us to connect to our true nature and live it in our daily life, but it also serves as a portal to help us figure out where we're losing our connection to ourselves and to the people in our lives.
- The breath serves as a great metaphor to picture this concept. The deep inhale is our meditation practice, where we soak up and saturate ourselves in awareness and the essential qualities of being that make up who we truly are. The deep exhale is our life, where we breathe all that we learned and discovered during the inhale out into the world. We cannot have one without the other. Many people around the world are only exhaling, never coming back to the inhale, learning what they can and then returning to daily life.
- By using our practice as a way to inform our actions and to work through the trials and tribulations of daily life, we stay connected with our true nature and our dharma. This

is how we alleviate suffering in the world. The more we stay connected to awareness, the more we will live and share these gifts in the world in our own unique ways.

- Ultimately, we can do this anywhere. No matter where you live, who you are, what you do for a living, or anything else, you always have the practice of iRest available to you. When we are fortunate enough to have a deep connection with ourselves, we will find ourselves naturally creating a more peaceful, balanced, and joyful world.
- We will naturally work to alleviate the suffering of both ourselves and others. We will find that relationships become deeper and more fulfilling. Loving-kindness and compassion will arise through our thoughts, words, and deeds. We will feel more connected to our mission and purpose in life. Health arises as we stay fully connected to our body, mind, and spirit. We become the fullest expression of our true selves. It is possible.

This class ends with a final iRest practice.

Please feel free to reach out through www.mollybirkholm.com or on social media to share your experiences with this course.

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The Integrative Restoration Institute

An Introduction to iRest® Yoga Nidra Meditation

WORKBOOK



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The iRest Institute® is a nonprofit, educational and research organization dedicated to the alleviation, resolution and prevention of suffering. Our programs promote self-regulation, resiliency and stress reduction while restoring the body and mind to their natural functioning.

We provide professional workshops and trainings in Integrative Restoration® - iRest® Yoga Nidra Meditation, offer spiritual retreats, and collaborate with public and private institutions and researchers. iRest and the various teachings offered through the iRest Institute are evidence based, mind-body approaches to health, healing and well-being. Our programs, such as iRest, are the result of over forty-seven years of observation, research and hands-on development by Dr. Richard Miller and associates.

Research indicates that iRest effectively alleviates PTSD, anxiety, insomnia, chronic pain, depression and chemical dependency. IRI trained teachers have successfully delivered the iRest Program to active duty military and combat veterans, chronic pain sufferers, the homeless, the incarcerated, survivors of human trafficking, healthcare providers, and other special interest groups.

Research reveals that mindfulness-based practices, such as iRest, are analogous to neural training regimens, targeting core body, mind, and brain skills and functionings that are important for success, resiliency, and well-being in daily life. These practices are especially effective as they target brain plasticity in the areas of sensory, motor, and limbic and prefrontal cortical functioning. Thus, iRest is an ideal intervention for reshaping neural pathways critical to fostering emotional self-regulation, ethical decision-making, resiliency, enhancement of cognitive and emotional skills, development of empathy and well-being, as well as improving overall physical and mental health.

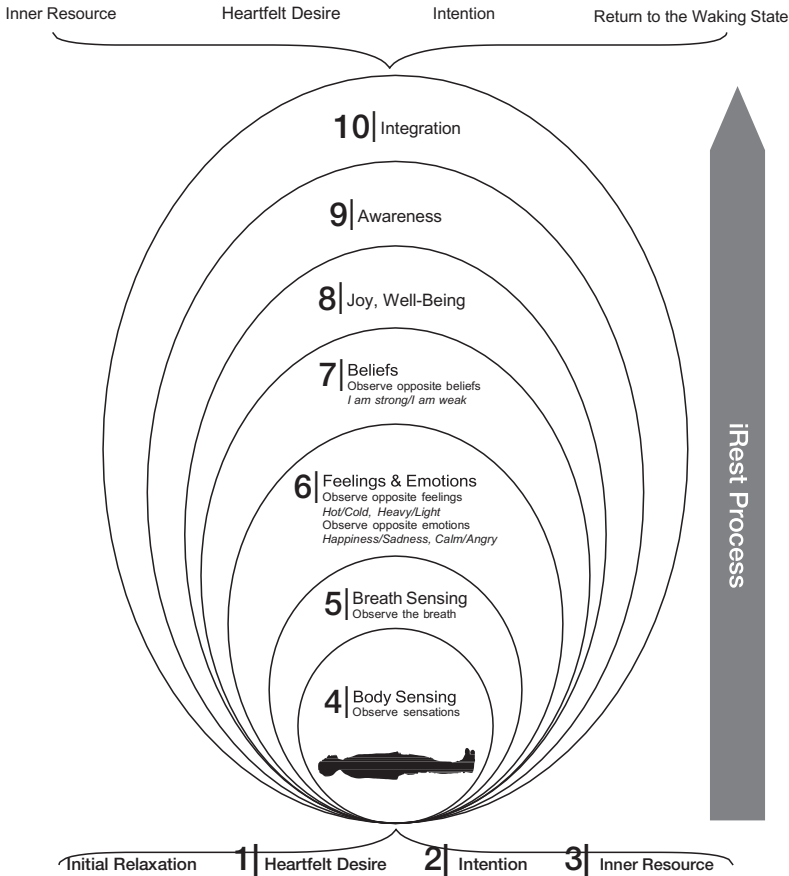
Steps of iRest

While resting at ease, **iRest** guides you through a series of inquiries inviting you to welcome opposites of sensation, breath, emotions, beliefs, images, and memories that naturally arise within your awareness. As you engage each experience, you proactively explore actions you can responsively take with respect to what you are experiencing. You also experience yourself as the observer, or witnessing awareness, that is an unchanging presence in which your every changing experience is unfolding.

iRest Step	Purpose	Ask Yourself...
Initial Relaxation	Experiencing the present moment.	What would make you most comfortable and at ease during this practice?
Heartfelt Desire	Feeling life living you while being in touch with what it is that you truly want in life.	What is it that you want more than anything else in life? What gives your life a sense of value, purpose, and meaning?
Intention	Establishing why you want to practice iRest today, and tomorrow.	What would most help you realize your hearts deepest desire?
Inner Resource	Finding an inner felt-sense where you feel secure, to which you can return at any time during iRest, or whenever you feel the need to take a momentary time out.	Is there a place within your body that gives you the felt sense of being secure, safe, calm, at ease, and/or relaxed? Where and how do you experience this?
BodySensing	Welcoming and being present with what you are experiencing in your body. Learning to feel, welcome, observe, and respond to sensation.	Allowing attention to wander through your body, what physical sensations, if any, are present for you? How and where do you experience them?
BreathSensing	Tuning into the natural rhythm of the breath. Learning to observe and actively engage the breath.	What is your breath like? Calm, deep, and relaxed, or tense, shallow, and forced?
Opposite Feelings	Observing feelings that are present: comfort/ discomfort, warm/ cool, etc.	What feelings (hot / cold, heaviness / lightness, etc.) are present for you?
Opposite Emotions	Observing and proactively engaging emotions such as fear/ courage, anger/peace, sadness/ joy, etc.	What emotions (calm / angry, happy / sad, etc.) are present for you? And how and where do you experience them in your body?
Opposite Cognitions	Observing and proactively engaging thoughts, beliefs, images, memories that are present.	What beliefs ('I am strong' / 'I am weak', etc.) are present for you? And how and where do you experience them in your body?
Joy & Well-Being	Experiencing and engaging feelings of pleasure, happiness, joy, love, bliss, and well-being.	Can you experience the felt-sense of inner joy, or well-being within your body? How and where in your body do you experience this?
Awareness	Witnessing Awareness: Your ability to witness or observe what's present. Your ability to be unchanging witnessing presence, that is/ always in peace and ease.	Inquiring: What is aware of your body, breath, feelings, emotions, and thoughts? Can you experience an innate sense of peace and well-being, no matter your circumstance?
Integration	Integrate the tools of iRest into your daily life.	In this, and every moment, I remember and experience my innate sense of well-being and peace.

What Happens During iRest

During iRest, we observe, welcome, and engage various aspects of our waking existence, starting with the most gross form, the physical body, and then moving on through more subtle layers, such as the breath, feelings, emotions, thoughts, joy, and awareness. As we welcome everything that is present in the body and mind, our emotions and thoughts begin to grow calmer. In the process, we discover and connect to the aspect of ourselves that is always peaceful and at ease.



Identifying Your Resolutions

Resolutions are comprised of three aspects: 1) Your deepest Heartfelt Desire, 2) Intention(s), and 3) Inner Resource. These three, together, form clear definitive commitments, or vows, that you are absolutely determined and committed to accomplish. They also give value, purpose, and meaning to your life, and take you to your goal. Once put into action, nothing can stop them. They entail full and committed determination that focuses all your mental and energetic resources.

Identifying Your Heartfelt Desire

Your Heartfelt Desire is the feeling of life living you. It's also the spontaneous vow that arises from life itself, that upholds and supports your deepest truth and universal law. Your Heartfelt Desire is the highest order by which you live your life. It is based on natural law and the natural order of things. It is your heart's innate desire or purpose; your personal calling, life philosophy, or value by which you live your life. It is "life" living its highest purpose through you as its unique expression. Social harmony and human happiness require that we live in a discerning manner appropriate to the requirements of the natural order of the universe. Living your Heartfelt Desire leads to:

- Meaning, purpose, value, and action
- Joy, resiliency, peace, and unchanging well-being
- Freedom from suffering, fear, and anxiety

Example: *"I live my life as an authentic, loving, and compassionate human being."*

The View

Imagine yourself sitting in a comfortable chair years from now while reflecting upon the life you've lived. Imagine special friends who love you are gathered around you.

- Looking back, what are you happy about? Consider different parts of your life, such as experiences with friends and family, work and career, good times and bad times, personal and spiritual development, creativity, health, self-expression, and service.
- What is the heartfelt code you've lived your life by?
- What have been the central guiding values and principles of your life?
- What are you glad that you stood for?
- What has been important in your life?
- What do you feel grateful for?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- What qualities of your life make you glad that you have lived and have made you feel at peace with yourself and the life you've lived?
- What are your closest friends saying to you about how you lived your life?
- Looking back, what would you say to yourself as the age you are today?

Looking back, ask yourself as to overarching themes that sum up the code by which you've lived your life; i.e., authenticity, spontaneity, truthfulness, non-harming, compassion, kindness, love, gratitude, equanimity, joy, service, psychological or spiritual integration. During your life, is there one fundamental principle or theme that has been your guiding star?

Find words that evoke the feeling of your Heartfelt Desire that is the basis for what your life stands for.

Positive, present tense language is best. For example, instead of saying, "I will find love," say, *"I am love itself, expressing itself in every moment in my every thought, action and deed"*. Instead of saying, *"I will be authentic and truthful"*, say, *"I am authentic and truthful in every moment."*

Positive words stimulate the approach networks of your brain. An explicit, consciously held Heartfelt Desire is corrective to your brain's tendency to continually scan for threats.

Affirming your intention as a present tense reality tells your brain that this is the "new normal", rather than an intention of "something" that's implicitly "out there," off in the distance and out of reach.

Your Heartfelt Desire is effective if it is deeply and emotionally felt in your body, kept in conscious awareness, and taken seriously.

Write down your Heartfelt Desire. Find imagery for your Heartfelt Intention.

Feel your Heartfelt Desire in your body, and imagine it sinking in and down as your lived-experience, becoming increasingly embedded at deeper levels of your body and mind.

Bring it to mind from time to time, and see how it matures over time.

Weave a renewal of commitment to your life's Heartfelt Desire into your meditation and other daily practices.

Identifying Your Intention

Your Heartfelt Desire is supported by your Intention(s), which are fulfilled through specific commitments and agreements with yourself. Your Heartfelt Desire, Intention(s), commitments, and agreements line up together to nourish positive ends that create a virtuous, effective and happy life.

Intentions *for* your practice might be such things as:

- To reduce stress
- For health or healing
- To work with a specific emotion or belief
- To nourish joy in your life
- To open fully to your Essential Nature

Intentions *from* your practice might be for such things as:

- To practice iRest every morning, to set a tone of ease and well-being for the day
- To practice iRest every evening to enhance restful sleep and well-being
- To write down reflections daily regarding commitments with food/exercise/emotions/beliefs
- To schedule time daily for recreation, play and fun
- To feel and assert the ground of Being and well-being throughout the day

To clarify your Intentions, write a list of the major categories of your life, i.e., Health, Spirituality, Love, Pleasure, Relationship, Childrearing, Friendships, Career, Creative Expression, Finances, etc. Create categories that mean something to you. Consider how important each category is to you.

Recall the view from your chair, as you look back from old age to this present moment: what priorities were important that gave focus and purpose to your life? Open to the longings in your heart: what are they saying to you?

Make a list of the major areas or aims of your life, in order of greatest priority and intention. Number them, with #1 being the most important. Ask yourself: *"If I could have my highest intentions fulfilled, which would they be?"* What would a typical day be like if you really lived according to your highest intention(s)?

Whenever you think about living this way, pay attention to the rewards you'd experience and let them sink in, gradually nourishing your body and mind into embodying them.

Translate your Heartfelt Desire and incremental Intentions into specific commitments, or agreements with yourself. The body-mind doesn't process abstract ideas, so give your intentions concrete, emotional-laden words that effectively mobilize them.

For example, if your top priority is to live in authentic and loving relationships, consider committing to things like:

- I speak and act from love, kindness and truth; never from anger.
- I say something kind and loving each day to those most close to me.
- I engage in and express loving kindness, truth, joy, and equanimity every day.
- I am authentic and truthful in my every thought, action, and deed.

Imagine what your life would be like if you actively lived your Intention(s). Feel the rewards that come from living your Heartfelt Desire, and Intention(s): happiness, peace of mind, equanimity, a clear conscience, harmonious relationships, the realization of your most important goals, psychological and spiritual well-being, health and resiliency of body and mind, etc. Translate your desires and priorities into specific and genuine commitments. Say "Yes" to life!

Examples of Heartfelt Desire

- I'm living my life with purpose, meaning and value.
- I express truth in every moment with love, compassion and kindness.
- I live creatively and courageously with boundless joy and enthusiasm.
- I receive clear inner guidance and express it in the world with heartfelt faith.
- I live a life of balance & harmony.

Examples of Intentions

- I set a specific time daily to acknowledge what I love in my life.
- I set daily priorities each day, so that I am organized and work effectively and efficiently.
- I determine the markers for success in my career and evaluate them regularly.
- I eat for health and energy.
- I meditate daily. My meditation enriches every aspect of my life.
- My partner and I check in regularly regarding our relationship.
- My thought, speech and actions are congruent.
- I use my iRest practice to proactively work with my challenging emotions and thoughts.
- I feel my Inner Resource of well-being throughout my day.

Identifying Your Inner Resource

Your Inner Resource provides you with an internalized felt-sense that you can return to at a moment's notice—an inner sanctuary, safe-haven or internalized space of unchanging and unbreakable well-being, restful stillness, peace, serenity, safety, security, groundedness, relaxation, ease and equanimity. Your Inner Resource is unique and something that you forever draw strength and solace from.

The Inner Resource is a felt-sense in your body that helps you feel relaxed and in control of your experience. It can be evoked through multi-sensorial images, thoughts, feelings, emotions and sensations that you experience with your entire heartfelt body and mind. Whatever images, thoughts or sensations you associate with your Inner Resource, the most important aspect is that it evokes the feeling of being safe, secure and at ease throughout your body and mind.

It is important to feel your Inner Resource as your heartfelt, embodied experience. At first, use as many sensory modalities as possible when assembling your inner resource, as this helps create the Inner Resource as an effective tool that you can call upon at a moment's notice through any of your sensorial channels. For instance, if you use a visual image to evoke the felt-sense of your Inner Resource, associate it with other sensory modalities including sensations, feelings, emotions, thoughts, words, sounds, smells, and tastes. Then, when you visualize the image, it should trigger a cascade of these associated sensory experiences.

Most important to keep in mind is that the Inner Resource is a "felt-sense" in your body, that's ultimately independent of an image. The ultimate Inner Resource is your felt-sense of "being" and "awareness" as being and awareness are always present, no matter your circumstance.

Take time to embody your Inner Resource at various intervals throughout your day. For instance, pair your Inner Resource with every emotion, thought, and experience you have. This way you 'generalize' your Inner Resource with every experience, and in turn, it will naturally arise under your every situation and circumstance.

During iRest, or at any time day or night, should you begin to feel overwhelmed by an overpowering emotion, reaction, belief or memory, return to your Inner Resource. You rest here until you have regained a sense of calm, safety, security and confidence. You can then continue to face and resolve life's challenges, or residues of reaction, pain, suffering or confusion while being established in a felt-sense of calm, security and well-being.

BodySensing

What is BodySensing? During BodySensing, you rotate your attention throughout your physical body and observe physical sensations that are present. In some places, you may feel comfort or pleasure, in other places you may feel discomfort or pain, while in other areas of the body you may feel nothing at all. During BodySensing, as in all phases of iRest, you aren't trying to "change" or "fix" anything. You're simply observing and experiencing what's present. If sensation is especially strong, you are learning to simply observe it, as it is. During iRest, you learn to welcome and allow everything to arise just as it is. You have no intention to fix, change, fight with, or "go beyond" anything that arises. Even when resistance does arise, that too, is welcomed to be here. When you allow something to rise without resistance, it bubbles up and dissolves, just like bubbles rising to the surface of a lake. iRest draws its strength from the understanding that everything you welcome into and allow to arise in awareness, you go beyond.

Why do we practice BodySensing? BodySensing is soothing to the nervous system and helpful for focusing attention, bringing deep relaxation and the feeling of well-being to both the body and the mind. As such, it is a form of mindfulness training. It helps develop your mind's ability to remain undistracted for longer and longer periods of time, which helps concentration and one-pointedness of attention.

There are literally trillions of things occurring in our body at any given moment and yet we rarely take time to 'check-in' with how we are feeling. Our body is constantly sending us "messengers" that inform us to how we are feeling, and what we need to do. You may feel pleasure in one area of your body while feeling pain in another area of your body. Imagine yourself getting a shoulder massage. Your shoulders may be feeling very good while at the same time you have pain in your knee. Pleasure and pain can be present at the same time. Sometimes the body "turns up the volume" to get us to notice something. If you grab a hot pan off the stove, you may quickly jerk your hand away, "Ouch, that is hot!" Our body is constantly sending us information as messengers, many of which we miss because we haven't taken the time to see how our body is feeling. Eventually, it may have to shout by providing severe physical or mental symptoms, such as chronic pain or depression.

The good news is that the practice of iRest reawakens our innate capacity for hearing even the subtlest cues the body is sending. When we can acknowledge, and welcome the body's subtle cues, we will be able to respond and take appropriate action long before our body becomes sick. This is one of the many advantages to practicing iRest.

Why do we spend more time on certain areas of the body than others? Certain parts of our body have more nerves endings, and therefore more sensation than others. The mouth, for example, is packed with nerves. The entire head (including the ears, nose and eyes), the hands and the feet are all filled with nerves, so we spend more time here, than in places like the shins or forearms, where there are fewer nerves endings. The way we rotate our attention through the body is important too. It relates to where and how the brain perceives certain areas through the motor and sensory cortex. There is a science behind the iRest process!

What do we have to do during BodySensing? Nothing at all! Just observe and experience what is present without censoring or trying to change what you come upon. Consider BodySensing as a time to 'check in' with your body, getting to know it in new ways. You may be surprised what you find. There is a symphony of sensations constantly occurring when we take the time to notice. Most of all: Enjoy!

BreathSensing

What is BreathSensing? BreathSensing is a form of mindfulness training that helps you become aware of how your body is breathing. BreathSensing also makes you aware of movements of sensation and energy that are coursing through your body and sensitizes you to the deeper “messengers” of information your body and mind are relaying to you.

During BreathSensing you learn to observe how the breath affects your body and how the body affects your breathing. When the body is tense, the breath normally becomes short, irregular, and shallow. When the body is relaxed, the breath becomes easy and rhythmic. In addition, BreathSensing develops your mind’s ability to remain undistracted for longer periods of time. The practice of BreathSensing is soothing to the nervous system, nourishes heart rate variability and well-being, and is helpful for focusing attention. All that it requires is that you simply notice your breathing while being aware of the sensations you’re feeling as you breathe.

Much like BodySensing, BreathSensing helps free up tensions that are stored in the body, especially around the area of the pelvis, abdomen, and diaphragm. This enables you to gain access to information that will help you process and integrate feelings, emotions, beliefs, and images from past experiences. By doing so, you can feel more relaxed, compassionate, loving and caring towards yourself and others.

Feelings and Emotions

Feelings and Emotions are Messengers. Feelings such as comfort, discomfort, hot, cold, dull or sharp, as well as emotions such as anger, fear, joy, sadness, disgust, shame, and excitement, are exquisite messengers that provide us with a rich source of information on how we need to respond to the world around and within ourselves. If we reach out to touch a hot stove, pain comes as a warning that we are in danger of burning our hand. If we have an expectation that is thwarted, irritation arises to alert us that we need to reexamine the reality of the situation. In themselves feelings and emotions are neither good nor bad, nor right or wrong. They simply provide information.

Our first task, then, is to acknowledge and welcome the legitimacy and necessity of our feelings and emotions as messengers. We need to welcome them and understand their purpose if we are to be healthy, happy, and well-adjusted human beings.

Our second task is to become proficient at recognizing the variety of feelings and emotions we may experience in life. We need to be sensitive to the entire range of feelings and emotions, and have the attitude that they each are to be welcomed and understood rather than repressed, denied or even, in some cases, expressed. iRest is a process that helps us recognize, welcome, understand, work with, and move beyond our feelings and emotions rather than becoming caught up and hopelessly mired down in them.

Witnessing. iRest sharpens our ability to witness feelings and emotions as they arise. Witnessing is a neutral stance wherein we place no judgments upon what we experience. Instead, we observe what passes in front of us as a neutral witness of all that arises internally, as feelings and emotions. Witnessing allows us to see the larger picture that so often escapes us when we only become embroiled in emotional reaction.

As we become established in witnessing we realize that all feelings and emotions are transitory in nature. They are constantly changing. To the degree we identify with, and react to our emotions, we become slaves to them. As we develop the capacity to welcome and be with all our emotions, without repressing or reactively expressing what we feel, as if by magic emotions shift and change. Only then can we clearly recognize our appropriate response to each situation in our life.

By our willingness to meet, greet, welcome, and experience our emotions, we go beyond them. In fact, the word 'experience' means "to go through something fully, leaving no trace behind."

Identifying Opposites of Feeling

To personalize your practice, fill in this worksheet before beginning iRest. Choose two feelings and their opposites that are relevant for you.

Feeling	and its	Opposite

Feeling	and its	Opposite

Examples of Feelings and their Opposites

These are examples to help you locate feelings that are relevant and meaningful to you. There is no need to limit yourself to just this list when you make your choices.

Alert – Sleepy

Cold – Hot

Hard – Soft

Comfortable – Uncomfortable

Constricted – Spacious

Deep – Superficial

Dry – Wet

Dull – Sharp

Floating – Sinking

Heavy – Light

Lethargic – Awake

Loose – Tight

Numb – Sensitive

Painful – Pleasurable

Prickly – Soft

Relaxed – Tense

Spacious – Restricted

Thick – Thin

Identifying Opposites of Emotion

To personalize your practice, fill in this worksheet before beginning iRest. Choose two emotions and their opposites that are relevant for you.

Emotion	and its	Opposite
Emotion	and its	Opposite

Examples of Emotions and their Opposites

These are examples to help you locate emotions that are relevant and meaningful to you. There is no need to limit yourself to just this list when you make your choices.

Aggressive – Passive	Loving – Hateful
Approving – Disapproving	Peaceful – Enraged
Assured – Perplexed	Potent – Impotent
Boisterous – Mellow	Powerful – Helpless
Calm – Agitated	Proud – Ashamed
Composed – Worried	Responsive – Apathetic
Confident – Insecure	Safe – Threatened
Cooperative – Competitive	Safe – Abandoned
Delighted – Disgusted	Satisfied – Frustrated
Domineering – Meek	Secure – Apprehensive
Empathetic – Indifferent	Sensitive – Numb
Fearless – Frightened	Tender – Violent
Flexible – Rigid	Tolerant – Contemptuous
Generous – Resentful	Trusting – Suspicious
Grateful – Ungrateful	Unafraid – Anxious
Happy – Sad	Unreserved – Shy
Helpful – Uncooperative	Vital – Exhausted
Innocent – Guilty	Vulnerable – Invulnerable
Interested – Bored	

Cognitions: Thoughts, Beliefs, Images

Welcoming Cognitions. During iRest we learn to welcome our cognitions — thoughts, beliefs, images, and memories — as messengers that are designed to help us respond, rather than react to our life circumstances. Thoughts are neither good or bad, right or wrong. They simply provide information. To the degree that we react to our thoughts, we are held hostage by them. To the degree we can witness, experience and be with them, we are able to respond appropriately to each situation we encounter.

The Law of Opposites. When any thought arises, its converse always co-arises. Opposites are never separate. They are complimentary polarities arising within a unified field of our awareness. Opposites and awareness are not separate. As well, we are not separate from anything that arises in awareness.

iRest is an approach for healing the misperception of separation, and the suffering and conflict that ensues when we believe in separation. The power of iRest, with its focus on transcending opposites, is based on the insight that without healing the root belief in our being separate from all of life, suffering can never be completely dispelled.

When we experience only one-half of a pair of opposites, for instance grief versus joy, or shame versus potency, we remain stuck in our experience. By helping us experience opposites of our beliefs, iRest enables us to heal our mistaken beliefs, the primary one being our belief in separation. Psychological integration takes place when we cease trying to rid ourselves of our experience and instead open to the full experience of each opposite we experience.

During iRest, each movement of cognition is paired with its opposite, as a way of assisting their full disclosure into awareness. As opposites emerge, welcoming replaces refusing, psychological integration unfolds, and well-being unfolds amidst the changing and turbulent circumstances of life. As integration deepens we learn to sustain equanimity even during conflict.

Pairing Opposites. During iRest we bring to light and explore negative and positive beliefs, which divide and limit us when we refuse to listen to them as messengers. When you locate a belief, iRest asks you to pair it with its opposite. *“I’m unlovable”* might be paired with *“I love and value myself.”* *“I’m not good enough”* might be paired with, *“I’m always doing the best that I know how.”*

During iRest we intentionally bring in disquieting thoughts, memories, and images to recover our innate capacity to be with what life brings to our table. We cannot stop the tumultuous waves of turmoil, difficulty and confusion, but we can learn to surf them. The practice of iRest is our surfboard, instructor and surfing lesson all rolled into one.

Identifying Opposites of Cognition

Choose a belief that feels significant for you. You may select from the examples below if you like. Write down the belief and its opposite, and the feeling associated with each. We will use these in practice.

Thought or Belief:

Feeling or emotion of this thought or belief:

Opposite Thought or Belief:

Feeling or emotion of this opposite thought or belief:

Examples of Thoughts and Beliefs and their Opposites

I am safe and secure.	I am always in danger.
I can stand on my own two feet.	I can't support myself.
I am powerful.	I am helpless.
I make good decisions for myself.	I can't trust myself.
I am successful.	I am a failure.
I am connected to others.	I am alone.
I am good and worthy.	I am bad and unworthy.
What I say is worth listening to.	Nobody wants to listen to me.
I know what I want.	I am confused.
I can trust my sense of reality.	I can't trust my sense of reality.
I am lovable.	I am unlovable.
I am creative.	I am all dried up.
I follow through with my decisions.	I can't bring about any change.

Foundation Practices

Meeting, Greeting, Welcoming and Proactively Engaging Sensations, Emotions, and Cognitions

1. Noting
 - a. Welcome what is arising (sensation, emotion, thought, belief, image, memory)
 - b. Where/how do you experience this in your body?
 - c. Peel off the conceptual label
 - d. Be with it non-verbally, non-conceptually, as sensation
 - e. Note if the emotion has a texture, color, age, etc. that co-arises with it
 - f. Interweave In your Inner Resource of unchanging well-being and Being
2. Welcome Opposites
 - a. If this had an opposite, what might it be, and where/how do you experience this in your body?
 - b. Alternate between opposites (take your time)
 - c. Experience, somatically, both opposites as the same time
 - d. Interweave Inner Resource into each opposite
3. Take perspective
 - a. Be a witness to what's arising
 - b. Interweave in your Inner Resource as you experience yourself as a witness
4. Anthropomorphize What's Arising
 - a. What does this (sensation, emotion, belief) look like if it walked into the room?
 - b. Welcome it in for tea and conversation
 - c. Inquire: "How do I feel about "this..."
"How does "this..." feel about me"
5. Pro-Active Engagement: Ask it:
 - a. What do you want?
 - b. What do you need?
 - c. What action are you asking me to take?
 - d. Interweave in your Inner Resource
6. Awareness
 - a. Allow the witness to dissolve into being witnessing
 - b. Allow witnessing to dissolve into Being
 - c. Allow Being to dissolve into Awareness
 - d. Interweave in your Inner Resource

Remember: Interweave in your Inner Resource at any time along the way, pairing it with every activity, circumstance, action, emotion and thought you have, all day long, every day.

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Searching for Something. For most people joy, happiness, peace, well-being, and equanimity are relative experiences, coming and going, depending upon the changing conditions of life. Changing conditions may include our state of health, family, interpersonal and professional relationships, job and other life-related circumstances. We are taught that joy is dependent upon our possession of some object: be it money, a lover, a house, chocolate, or...you name it. Our search for an object, circumstance, or experience that will bring us lasting happiness always misses the mark. Ironically, it is our search for happiness that takes us away from the inherent peace, well-being and joy that are always already present within us.

Discovering Unchanging Inner Joy. iRest reveals that joy is always present, although sometimes hidden behind the veil of our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. True joy exists independent of all objects, beliefs, images, and memories. Through iRest, we can go beyond the mind and discover the inner joy and well-being that is already ours, no matter what is happening in our outside life. During the 'Joy' portion of iRest, we invite you to elicit a feeling of joy using a spectrum of emotions. You might begin by attempting to feel an inner smile, gradually working up through feelings of pleasure, happiness, joy, well-being, and even bliss.

Remember, there doesn't have to be a reason for you to feel joy. There is joy already inside of you, waiting to be welcomed to the forefront of your awareness. If you find it difficult to access feelings of joy, you can begin by recalling a time when you felt pleasurable, content, or simply a sense of OK-ness. Or, you can imagine what it would feel like to feel joyful. Eventually, it will come!

Joy is Good Medicine. We all know moments of happiness, joy, well-being, and equanimity, even if those moments are few, fleeting, and far between. It is common knowledge that joy raises our spirits and relieves stress. Scientific research reveals that joy keeps us healthy and helps heal disease. So, the next time you find yourself smiling, or even laughing, know that you are doing your body, mind, and health a tremendous favor!

Joy, even small amounts of it, affects our entire physiology, including the respiratory system, cardiovascular system, muscular system, central nervous system, endocrine system, and immune system. Joy releases endorphins, serotonin, GABA, and oxytocin, the body's natural painkillers and "feel good" hormones, which are responsible for our feeling of well-being.

The understanding that joy is a potent healing force is not new. In ancient Greece, hospitals were built near amphitheaters where patients could attend comedies to facilitate their healing. Modern medicine is now catching up. Scientific research reveals the healing power of joy, demonstrating that joy can change the shape of the brain and how it functions. So, experience joy within, it's healing you and those around you!

Integration

The last step of iRest emphasizes the Integration of iRest into all moments of your daily life. While core principles of iRest are learned, and practiced during individual sessions, or at home with an audio recording, iRest is most effective when it's integrated into every moment of your life. As you complete your practice, you reaffirm your Intention, Heartfelt Desire and Inner Resource. And, if you are so inspired, you also affirm intentions that will help to further actualize your heartfelt desire and Inner Resource during future practices, or in your daily life.

Moment-to-moment, as you go about your day and night, the practice of iRest invites you to affirm your Intention to feel and respond to the call of your inner self, and to apply the various tools of iRest when you're walking, talking, interacting, working, playing, or resting. When you find yourself at ease, or navigating stressful situations, dealing with cravings, or difficult emotions, thoughts, memories, persons, or circumstances, feel yourself spontaneously remembering and practicing BodySensing and BreathSensing, or welcoming emotions, thoughts, joy, and well-being into your body, or stepping back into experiencing yourself as the spacious openness of awareness. Feel how every moment — every sensation, emotion, thought, and experience — is a foreground movement arising within your awareness. Awareness is a constant and unchanging background of peace, stillness, and well-being.

Affirm your Intention throughout the day that your body and mind spontaneously remember the feeling of your Inner Resource of unchanging well-being and peace that comes from resting in and as awareness. Affirm your Intention to apply the practices of iRest moment-to-moment throughout your life, so that your life becomes one of peace, harmony, and well-being, whatever you are doing and with whomever you are interacting.

iRest Worksheet

Step One: Setting Your Intention(s)

Write down a statement that describes your intention for your practice of iRest Meditation, or for actualizing your Heartfelt Desire. Examples: *"I remain alert and present throughout my practice,"* or *"I understand and work with my core belief."* *"I feel unchanging being and awareness in every moment."*

Step Two: Setting Your Heartfelt Desire

Write down a positive statement about yourself, another or the world. Write it as a statement of fact. Rather than saying, *"May I be healed,"* or *"May I be awake,"* state, *"I am whole, healed and healthy in this and every moment,"* or *"I am timeless Awareness, expressing itself in every moment."*

Step Three: Inner Resource

Describe the felt-sense in your body of feeling secure, at home, relaxed, and at peace.

Step Four and Five: BodySensing and BreathSensing

Step Six: Sheath of Feelings & Emotions

A. **Feelings:** Choose a feeling that holds meaning for you. Then, choose its opposite.

Feeling 1 _____ and its opposite _____

Feeling 2 _____ and its opposite _____

B. **Emotions:** Choose an emotion and its opposite.

Emotion 1 _____ and its opposite _____

Emotion 2 _____ and its opposite _____

Step Seven: Cognitions: Beliefs, Images, Core Aspects of Essential Nature

A. **Beliefs:** Choose a core belief that holds meaning for you. Then, choose its opposite.

Belief 1 _____ and its opposite _____

Belief 2 _____ and its opposite _____

B. **Imagery:** Choose an image that holds meaning for you. Then, choose its opposite.

Image 1 _____ and its opposite _____

Image 2 _____ and its opposite _____

C. **Core Aspect of Essential Nature:** Choose an expression of Essential Nature (examples: love, compassion, kindness, joy, equanimity, potency, authenticity, etc.).

Inner Strength 1 _____

Inner Strength 2 _____

In the end, we realize how simple life is when we accept this moment, and our response to this moment, just as it is, without pretending to be other than who we are. This is grace in action and the culmination of iRest.

- Richard Miller, PhD



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