

## iRest® Yoga Nidra Training: Levels I and II

In this section, we offer two in-depth personal reports on iRest® (Integrative Restoration) Yoga Nidra Training by two different people. Samantha Kinkaid comprehensively describes Levels I and II, and Gemma Adams elucidates the iRest® certification process.

### Introduction

Developed by Richard Miller, PhD (cofounder of IAYT), Integrative Restoration—iRest®—is a modern adaptation of classical Yoga Nidra. As a psychotherapist and Yoga scholar, Richard Miller has developed a 10-step secular protocol that is accessible and comprehensive in its therapeutic application to body, mind, and spirit.

With an extensive background in Buddhist meditation and training in energy practices and multiple Yoga traditions, I came to iRest for the nondual teachings and advanced Yoga practices, which constitute the underpinnings of its protocol. Of particular interest were its applications in the hospice arena—where I currently serve—as well as with individuals experiencing chronic conditions such as sleep issues, pain, and trauma. My personal interest stems from members of my family having debilitating chronic health conditions. Also, as a child I experienced and witnessed a number of traumatic events, suffering nightmares and night terrors for years until I taught myself how to lucid dream at age nine. This dream state, or, rather, conscious dream state, was my early training ground for the meditation practice that I started as a teenager and one I find I am again tapping into with iRest.

Any expectation or objective I may have had coming in for training was quickly dispelled as I came to understand the broad reach of this practice. Currently, iRest is being utilized widely in military settings, as well as homeless shelters, clinics, universities, correctional facilities, hospice settings, and chemical dependency units. Based on the research using iRest under the direction of Richard Miller, Yoga Nidra is listed as a Tier I approach for addressing pain management in military care.

The success in its reach is its relevancy and accessibility. We are put in touch with



Richard Miller leading a group iRest session.

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our authentic nature almost immediately in the protocol. And it is from this place that we are skillfully guided to learn and teach. It is elegant in its simplicity and sophisticated in its application. It is a whole-person approach to health and wellbeing.

### Level I: Basic iRest Training

The iRest Level I training I attended was composed of intensive weekend sessions given over a four-month period. This format is particularly suitable for working people although week-long trainings are also available. The weekend format was beneficial as it gave ample time to digest the comprehensive manual in between training weekends and we could begin integrating the practice into our lives.

The main focus of the Level I training was to introduce participants to the 10-step protocol and initial applications of iRest. Many of us know that typically Yoga Nidra is defined as “Yogic sleep” or “sleep of the Yogis.” Many of my new students come with expectations of a lengthy *savasana* (corpse pose). Although many choose to practice lying down, especially at first, some sit and some stand.

It is not a state-specific practice. Eventually it's integrated into whatever physical position you are in, moving or still, alone or with others. It becomes an active, intuitive way of life.

Richard's definition of *nidra*, “awake across all states of consciousness,” is initially taught through a development of awareness; one that is woven throughout the protocol. We learn to become sensitive to and then navigate the changing physical, emotional, and cognitive states in varying levels of relaxation and, in fact, sleep.

The protocol incorporates a three-part development of intention, including the Inner Resource; body-sensitivity training; breath awareness; systematic neutralization of negative sensations, emotions, and beliefs; intentional experience of joy; welcoming wholeness; developing awareness; and training participants to recognize wellbeing through all changing life circumstances. The Inner Resource is a somatic-based experience of wellbeing within; when we feel this it gives us a deep sense of inner connectedness and inner belonging where we feel secure, safe, and grounded. It's a core foundational aspect of the practice.

The clearly defined step-by-step process retains tremendous flexibility in its application

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without losing its integrity. Through direct inquiry we become our own best expert, our own best guide. With developed attention and awareness, we become a kinder, more compassionate facilitator for our own growth and discovery, and in turn better facilitators for our students' own work.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross said, "Consciously or not, we are all on a quest for answers." Our individual and collective exploration and evolution is part of this quest. The beauty of the iRest practice is that it lets everyone have their own questions and gives the grounding and support to find out their own answers. There is no imposition, no right or wrong way. It simply, yet skillfully, meets each individual right where they are regardless of culture, gender, religion, age, or ability.

This is a main difference between iRest and the Yoga Nidra originating in India. iRest students are not told what to sense, feel, visualize, or think. Participants are given the opportunity to come to their own conclusions through their direct experience. And it is this direct experience that we are made aware of throughout the protocol that keeps guiding us back to our authentic self.

The training included talks from Richard Miller, experiential sessions, practice sessions, demonstrations, engaging and insightful dialogue, and movement sessions. The attendees, ranging in age from 30 to 60, were Yoga Alliance® Registered Yoga teachers, mindfulness practitioners, experienced students of Yoga and meditation, and licensed mental health professionals with a Yoga or meditation practice. The Level I training, however, is open to everyone, and veterans, caregivers, nurses, spiritual seekers, and lay people alike all participate in the trainings.

## Level II: Advanced iRest Training

The Level II training provided the opportunity to dive more deeply into the protocol and its application and delivery to individuals and groups. Specific populations, such as soldiers and veterans with PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) or TBI (traumatic brain injury) and those experiencing chemical dependency issues and chronic health conditions were discussed in detail. Participants shared their successes and challenges of teaching to these populations.

Each day, we practiced giving and receiving iRest sessions with greater focus being spent on the one-on-one work with individuals (dyads) and on our own self-inquiry. Questions and responses were discussed with greater sensitivity as more subtle terrain was being explored.

Further information was also presented on the psychological and psychospiritual aspects of the practice. There were also discussion periods devoted to exploring professional standards and expectations in delivering iRest to various populations in a variety of settings. Ethical guidelines were reviewed and considered, and Donna Farhi's book, *Teaching Yoga: Exploring the Teacher-Student Relationship*, was given as suggested reading for all iRest students. (It is one of the required readings for those going on to become Certified iRest® Teachers.)

The principles of *Samkyha*, Patanjali, *Advaita*, and Kashmiri nondualism underlying iRest were discussed in greater detail, and we learned how each approach forms an aspect of a comprehensive map of meditation that supports each individual's experience of self-inquiry.

Although it has taken its roots from ancient teachings, iRest is completely secular. Richard stresses that at the end of a practice—whether you have a Christian, Buddhist, atheist, Hindu, Pagan, or Muslim in the room—everyone should feel like you spoke directly to them.

Delivery of the protocol, as it is applied to groups and individuals, was honed through daily practice. And movement sessions, chanting, Sanskrit study, and beautiful live music complemented the dynamic week-long training.

The humility, simplicity, and generosity with which the material was presented by Richard and IRI (Integrative Restoration Institute) senior teachers, as well as the training locations and the manuals, underscored the incredible detail, dedication, and effort that has clearly gone into the development of this practice and the trainings.

Some of my clients, a number of whom are dealing with depression, chronic pain, phobias, and insomnia, have experienced substantial improvement in their condition—increased clarity, development of coping skills, greater confidence in themselves and their ability to be present with what they are experiencing, more compassion and joy

naturally arising, and reduction of symptoms.

I don't want to make iRest sound like a cure-all. It's not some airy-fairy new age "take you out of your body and launch you into the cosmos" practice that promises miracles. It's practical, it's useful. Yes, it leads to heightened awareness with the capital A for some, but it also helps real people with real concerns live better and more fulfilling lives. It meets us, all of us, right where we are. That's a pretty important point. It doesn't try to change or fix you, because—if you're like me and have meditated a while—you come to realize there really isn't anything wrong with you.

Accessibility is one of the most important elements in what I experience and convey in my teaching. I feel the best teachings are applicable, relevant, and helpful to all. In actuality, it doesn't take 30 years of practice to have an understanding that is right for you, wherever you are on your path. It is a journey after all. Moment by moment as we meet ourselves, iRest teaches its practitioners to meet each individual where they are, just as they are. Learning to skillfully welcome, detangle, and nourish each and every moment makes this extraordinary human journey a fully alive and rich experience. This practice breaks people free from their conditioning. It unblocks the body, mind, and emotions enabling a clearer experience of authenticity, freedom and peace. It's a practice for everyday use that ultimately make us more compassionate, kind, relaxed, and healthier human beings.

Integrative Restoration Institute has iRest trainings in its hometown of San Rafael as well as at Kripalu, Yoga Works, Yoga Yoga, and other locations in the United States and Canada. Visit [irest.us](http://irest.us) for more information. **VTI**



Samantha Kinkaid, MFA, RYT, is dedicated to providing integrative mindfulness practices to at-risk communities, youth, and end-of-life care.

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