

Integrative Restoration (iRest®)

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By *Ena Burrud, E-RYT500, C-IAYT*

Since our first fire-pit gatherings, the human experience has been a popular discussion. We have expressed our stories through cave drawings, dance and war. We realized purpose through hard won spoils and loss. We have regaled and reflected on our adventures. But, we are not unscathed. After battles and narrow escapes, we shook at the scrape of a tool on a stone or is it a tiger? We experienced fearful visions and performed ceremonies to repel them and other plagues.

These rituals, however, did not always work. The concept of *healing* arises, not only the mending of a broken leg, but also the tending of a wounded mind.

The Vedas, dating back over 3500 years to the Indus Valley, contain hymns and rites to appease deities, but they also describe the human experience as yoga. The literal translation from the Sanskrit for yoga is *union* and refers to relationship. Yoga became a cultural philosophy that is the basis for eastern thought and eventually Hinduism and Buddhism. No matter what our belief system theologically, the psychological practices of yoga are still used in clinical settings today.

The primary relationship in yoga is the one we experience within. Yoga explains that we have the ‘seer’ or true Self and the ‘seen’ or everything else. The latter is fleeting, *impermanent phenomenon*. When we close our eyes, there are pictures in the mind. A part of us watches and a part of us is creating these transient visuals. Watch them shift, although they can seem lasting. If we have just experienced a near miss driving, those visuals may persist during the day or as nightmares. Though the event may leave only a few days or weeks of these mental replays, after a trauma, these imprints are deeper and interfere with regular daily activity. Our bodies and minds are stressed because of them and we may become sick or depressed due to exhaustion. This is the case in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD.

The Wall Street Journal, July 7 2016, cites that veterans are committing suicide at a rate of 20 per day. PTSD symptoms include flashbacks, anxiety attacks, depression, anger, insomnia, digestive issues and difficulty bonding. VA doctors prescribe medications, but they produce side-effects which may require additional pharmaceuticals. Psychotherapy is helpful, yet newer trauma studies from leaders in the field such as Bessel Van der Kolk and Peter Levine show that the body also holds after-effects. Cortisol and adrenaline patterns rushed into the nerves and muscles during the trauma and may continue as intensely in subsequent, less stressful situations. Trauma is said to “re-hardwire” the brain. We become hyper-vigilant. Studies prove that healing trauma requires a whole body approach. The evidence-based therapy used today called Integrative Restoration®, iRest for short, is one such form. We turn to yoga to understand its system.

The Vedas outline the methodology of the *pancha kosha*, or five sheaths, of the human body. These layers store processed and unprocessed information of our experiences. Each layer is accessible independently through iRest for our investigation and therapeutic work. Commonly depicted as five concentric circles, the outer layer is our coarsest and each layer moving inward is a more subtle aspect of our functions. The first is the food body, *annamaya*. It contains our physical sensations. The second is the energy body, *pranamaya*. It contains the breath and nervous system functions. The third is the mental body, *manomaya*. It contains emotions and thoughts. The fourth is wisdom body, *vijnanamaya*. It contains our beliefs, symbols and visuals. The fifth is the bliss body, *anandamaya*. It is our unconditioned contentment, ever-present yet not often felt.

In a group iRest setting, we are asked to lay back or sit up using props like a blanket or bolster beneath the knees, eyes opened or closed. The facilitator then guides the group or individual through the ten steps of iRest. The brain enters a relaxed and creative state called *theta wave*, which fires up neurology that may have been “off-line” due to dissociation, a trauma symptom that numbs feelings, emotional and physical. iRest turns those receptors on again. During trauma, the brain fires only what is needed to survive and puts away questions and emotions in the moment. The unprocessed material remains. We may be reactive and agitated and it is driven in part by this material.

The facilitator will ask that we recall a memory of being very safe, perhaps from childhood. It need only be a few seconds long. This is sometimes challenging in PTSD. We may then create a safe place with your imagination. Some people see a lake in the forest or take a walk along the beach. Using the five senses, we deepen the experience ... hear the wind in the trees, smell the pine, feel the leaves underfoot and the temperature in the air. This awakens nerve endings which may have lain dormant for years. We will then be guided through parts of the body, lightly focusing on the part cued. This soothes the psyche and demonstrates the skill of moving the focus around. We redirect from symptoms to the present moment’s peace in iRest. This reawakens neural pathways returning the body to its natural blueprint.

Once deeply relaxed, you will visit each *kosha* to experience whatever arises. In the food body we may be asked if there is a sensation present. Moving through each layer, you become aware of the impermanence of each phenomenon. When in the breath and nervous system layer, you may be cued to feel the breath only on the right side of the body, then the left. Shallow breathing may show up. Welcome it. Watch it shift. In the emotional layer, what mood or emotion is present? Where does it reside in the body? Locate it. Follow the sensations as they move. No emotion stays very long. Sensations related to a thought or emotion may have a pattern that disrupts the breath. Stay with it. Let these experiences rise and fall. We return to a sense of safety, less worry softening all the systems. We believe in ourselves again, because we feel calm.

That belief in ourselves squarely places us in the wisdom layer. We may find there are erroneous beliefs as well, like I am NOT safe, or worthy. In war, moral codes may have been transgressed for a greater cause. We “feel” into it. We take time to examine the things we did not have time for during the trauma and then later, going to work or driving kids to soccer. The power of our confusion and pain diminishes.

Developed by Richard Miller, PhD, yogi and clinical psychologist for over 40 years, the US military adopted the protocol in 2006. But, this work has reached across many populations, not just vets. There are many more aspects to the practice; this article scratches the surface. The human existence is full of stories told to heal and commune. But trauma can be re-experienced in the telling. Some of our story may be struggling to be released, yet is still unrefined. iRest brings back the steady voice of the story teller. After all, these events are defining moments. But, we are not defined by them. We are so much more and the wholeness of our lives is awaiting our return.

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A yogi for two decades, Ena Burrud, E-RYT500, C-IAYT has taught since 2000 in Southern California and Colorado. In 2007, she opened Treetop Yoga in Fort Collins, and in 2010 earned her Yoga Therapy certificate rebranding the business Treetop Yoga Therapy, a full time private practice. Ena is faculty for basic and advanced trainings, and in 2014, completed her iRest® certificate, a military adopted protocol for PTSD. Since then she has been Paralympic grant-funded and referred vets by the VA for regular group and private services. She can be reached at <http://www.treetopyogatherapy.com>.