

Praise for *The Book of Rest*

‘There’s something quietly wonderful and radically rebellious about this book. Beneath the deceptively simple sentences there’s deep wisdom here that doesn’t quite knock you over with ‘aha!’ moments but sort of works its way into you, until it feels part of you...I think this could be the new *A New Earth*.’

— James Wallman, author of *Time And How To Spend It* and *Stuffocation*

‘*The Book of Rest* is a beautifully written and masterful guidebook that eloquently shows us how to recognize and embody lasting peace and well-being and awaken to our essential wholeness amidst the challenges of our everyday lives. James Reeves and Gabrielle Brown’s heartfelt gentleness and masterful wisdom shine through in the teachings they reveal in this seminal work. Both profound and practical *The Book of Rest* is a treasure and pleasure to read for all who wish to embrace a clear path to embodying their full potential as authentically alive human beings. A must-read!’

— Richard Miller, PhD. Founder, iRest Institute and developer of iRest Yoga Nidra Meditation

‘*The Book of Rest* invites you to experience how the state of true, deep rest is always available, for anyone, at any time. Beautifully written and very accessible. I love it.’

— Esther Ekhart, founder of EkhartYoga.com

‘I’m a 43-year-old MD of a large insolvency practice, I have 120 staff and earn enough. Like many people who are in the kind of position I am in, I’m also very stressed. I developed what was a

possibly unhealthy relationship with self-help books some years ago: I was always trying to meditate and be mindful, but it was only with your book that I reached 'that place'. That place between the breath in meditation, that place that only you could try and describe, that wonderful, wonderful place. I can't believe the simplicity and beauty of the method.'

— Danny Morris, reader

'I'm someone who tends towards anxiety and is easily overwhelmed, mostly by my own inner dialogue. For years I've perfected the art of escaping – at times through sugar, at times through binge-scrolling online, and at times, ironically, through yoga. After years of struggling with uncomfortable feelings and sensations in my body, of being depleted by my own reactivity to the world around me and within me, and by trying with every ounce of myself to control everything and make everything perfect because then I would find peace, I can say that I've relaxed my effort more than ever. Things that used to deeply trigger me now don't. I want to congratulate both of you for this beautiful work. You speak so many truths in this book; you speak of how simple, albeit not easy, it is to unveil the peace and freedom we are all longing for.'

— Sarah Maar, reader

'You provide a really wonderful space for just being, and nurturing the self, which is so very needed after the pandemic has left us reeling emotionally and facing many challenges, internal and external. I am a psychotherapist by profession and I find the psychological depth to the practices you are offering really excellent. The invitation to welcome and to be curious about difficult feelings is so very helpful. It is helping me personally and enriching me professionally too.'

— Femke Molekamp, reader

James Reeves and Gabrielle Brown are founders of Restful Being, a yoga and meditation school focused on the extraordinary power of rest to help people uncover their innate sense of steady, spacious calm. James is a world-leading trainer in yoga nidra, a transformative state of deep rest. He has been teaching yoga and meditation since 2005, working globally, online and even on-site at the Oscars. Gabrielle is primarily a writer and editor with over two decades' experience in communications and publishing. She has been practising yoga since she was a teenager and qualified to teach in 2013.

Thank you

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James: To my father, for your desire to understand the deeper meaning of life, and my mother, for living it with discreet beauty. My brother, Simon, for his big heart, and his partner Wayne, for his quiet strength. To Jayson, Justin and all my friends who have provided laughter and lightness to balance introversion and intensity. To my beloved teacher, Richard Miller, for living these teachings with such grace and kindness, and the broader iRest community for your examples of how to be damn good human beings.

Gabrielle: Thanks to my mother, Marie-France, who introduced me not only to yoga but also to James. My father, Robin, who has always encouraged me to see how fundamental the written word is in understanding and augmenting our experience of being human. My siblings, Thomas, Scott and Sophie – my comrades in life. Filkins Book Club for over a decade of good company and making me read things I didn't think I wanted to read. To all my yoga and meditation teachers for helping me feel comfortable in body and mind, and to Beth, Jude, and Jess for always being there.

THE BOOK OF REST

*How to find calm
in a chaotic world*

JAMES REEVES AND GABRIELLE BROWN



ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES

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For Poppy and Luca. You are perfect.



Introduction

We're going to take you on a journey to your most rested self.

We're going to show you that whatever you have going on in your life right now, part of you is always at rest. Part of you is completely calm, completely balanced, completely satisfied and completely shatterproof.

This is a journey that anyone can go on. You don't need to know anything. You don't need to do anything in preparation. You don't need any kit. You don't need any skills. You don't need a particular body, diet or mindset. You don't need any particular kind of anything to take this journey.

You only need you. Exactly as you are, right now, however you are.

You're already ready.

Whether you're sleep deprived, stressed, ill, agitated or even just grappling with a nagging feeling that something isn't quite right, you are still, deep within yourself, just as OK as absolutely everyone else alive right now. At the very depths of your being, there is no resistance, tension or tiredness. There is no judgement, pain or fear. This is the very essence of who you are.

But we know this might not be a possibility you can entertain right now.

At no point on this journey do you have to 'get your head' around anything or force yourself into taking on a particular attitude. This is a book of gentle enquiry and incidental experience. It should require little effort other than the act of reading itself.

On the surface of things, the subject of rest might appear to be about taking a nap or getting more sleep or perhaps even kicking back with a glass of wine, but while these are some of our most favourite things to do and can benefit us in many ways, they can also distract us from the true experience of rest.

In the same way, although we are teachers of yoga and meditation and practise them often, these techniques are not in themselves always restful or always peaceful. Methods like these are intended to help us find a sense of space within our lives, but for many people they instead end up becoming something else we are *adding* to our experience. They become loaded with more actions, goals, frustrations and desires. . . this is not restful.

Perhaps you've tried yoga or meditation or other practices that you thought would leave you feeling more rested; perhaps you haven't.

It doesn't matter. Our aim is not to train you in any of these but instead take you straight to the heart of the very thing they attempt to point towards: the constant unchanging awareness that lies at the heart of your existence.

We're going to demonstrate that rest, and being restful, is something that is always there within you, rather than something you must weave into your experience.

How can we show you how to do nothing?

Being able to recognise and allow true rest is vital to us feeling whole, authentic and balanced. When we stop, we are able to experience the stillness that exists between and beyond our thoughts and self-narrative. Very often, we catch only a glimpse of this stillness, but this is all we need to see to know that it is there and, ultimately, if you're willing to go all the way with us here, that it is who we really are.

Many self-help books provide the tools to go off and change your life. We hope you will read *this* book and, in the experience alone, see that the calm that you think will come when you've got it all worked out is already here. You're just too busy *trying* to see it, to see it.

We will constantly urge you to do nothing. We will repeatedly reassure you that you, the world and the people around you have everything to gain from you doing nothing.

— *Rest needs you to do nothing.*

You will have had many moments of ‘doing nothing’ in your life before now, but what’s different is that you might not have turned your attention to this act of stopping before or how you felt during those moments. You might not even have noticed that you had stopped or thought about what that stopping *was*.

As we turn our attention to rest, we can explore what it’s like, and we will likely discover (or uncover) a place where everything can be welcomed, without condition, judgement or objective. A place where we are *always* welcome. How often does that happen in life?

ASK YOURSELF

If you can, take a moment right now to stop reading and do nothing. Ask if the stopping requires anything of you. What did you have to do to stop?

Rest might seem ungraspable, but it is always here

This restful quality we’re pointing to is hard to pin down. The challenge is that it isn’t a thing. It’s no-thing. *Nothing*.

It's not something that you *do*; it's something that's always the case. You cannot get hold of it, you cannot *grasp* this restfulness because it's here right now, behind and around all your thoughts.

It's near impossible to imagine something that has no qualities. Something that by definition is necessarily indescribable. Therefore, our task now is to take you beyond your thoughts, beyond your imaginings, and into the experience of rest itself. Everything we present and any practices we have set out here are based on experience, very intentionally, to mirror this non-thing.

— *No-thing is best met by
nothing.*

Being restful towards rest

In truth, rest is not something that can be guaranteed. You can be led to the door of rest, but nothing can open that door. The fact is, the door will open itself and, as long as you're allowing, you will fall into the stillness beyond. Some find it easy to access this 'quietness', while others find it harder to get past distractions. You might stumble upon it while a-top the number 7 bus and yet find it elusive when you formally set out to do nothing.

Falling into this feeling of stillness can happen to anybody, at any time, but there are gentle approaches that might make you more

prone to fall, or to more easily stumble into it. Knowing and reconnecting with this deepest quality of who you are can be a happy accident, springing out of nowhere, but we hope it might also be helped along with the suggestions in this book.

Are some people better at resting than others?

Because rest is a matter of doing nothing, anyone can rest as long as they are willing to let go of the idea that they must ‘do’ something to make it happen, or that they must somehow *make* themselves more ‘peaceful’. People who have been practising yoga, meditation or mindfulness for a number of years have not somehow banked any more ‘inner peace’ than Mrs Jones whose preferred relaxation technique is hitting the local bingo hall, they simply may know how to access it more readily. They are no more (or less) at peace at their core than you are, even as you read this and perhaps even believe that you’ve never been at rest in your life.

Those of us who actively engage in formal relaxation techniques (or whatever you want to call them) are simply those of us who sought out or discovered a particular process that helped us to stop, or that helped us to believe that all we had to do was stop. Once we experienced the benefits of stopping, and then falling into that stillness, we continued to stop and do nothing as often as life allowed.

A popular assumption that we regularly come across is that because we teach yoga we are inherently calm, whereas the opposite is just

as (or perhaps more) likely to be true. Look at any yoga teacher's website and read through their bio and you'll typically see a story that begins with a person who, at a particularly low and stressful point in their lives, when all else failed, found yoga to be the only thing that helped bring them back to a place of physical and mental OK-ness. You rarely read a bio that speaks of a blissful childhood, harmonious adolescence, super-chilled career path and a sudden realisation of, 'I really ought to share my naturally easy-going demeanour with the world.'

We 'teachers of rest' were at one time likely to have been extremely *restless* – perhaps even addicted to restlessness – and then, by various routes and accidental happenings, we discovered our innate restfulness.

You might find the techniques and processes in this book help lead you to the door of your innate stillness, or you might find you can feel your way towards it more instinctively. The rested self doesn't care how you find it. All practices are a path to rest, but they are not rest in themselves (and although there are many paths to rest, none of them is necessary to you feeling rested).

We are aware that we are in danger of shooting ourselves in the foot by declaring that you do not need to understand complicated yoga, meditation or mindfulness techniques to feel rested. Although we earn a living helping people to feel rested, much of our work is about helping shake off the idea that we must study, practise, understand, master or refine anything to find peace within ourselves. Ours is a business that can sometimes seem mysterious and indeed mystic – full of methods and teachings that only a few

special gurus have mastered and are able to share. While we know that there are some beings out there with certainly unusual and perhaps even magical abilities, they do not somehow bestow upon their followers a more special kind of peace than you are capable of finding by other means – either with somebody’s help, or by simply sitting alone by yourself.

We don’t mean to pitch *The Wizard of Oz* as a life handbook, but the story’s message is relevant to the above point. All the while Dorothy seeks a guru (the Wizard) to show her the way home, she already has everything she needs about her person to find the way home herself. Indeed, the Wizard is an illusion, or at least a human no different to Dorothy. However, that’s not to say the Wizard didn’t help Dorothy uncover this fact. She first had to see that her beliefs were nothing more than an illusion before she could tap (three times) into her own inner knowing.

Rest, yoga and yoga nidra

While yoga as a largely physical practice has now become an established part of our culture in the West, the ‘rest’ aspect of this ancient tradition, known as yoga nidra, has recently started to attract interest as a standalone practice. As much as we can assure you that you do not need to develop particular skills or have access to a guru to find rest, if there is one undertaking that might offer some kind of fast track to rest (in that it takes you by the hand and leads you, without you perhaps even realising it), then yoga nidra is our winning contender, and we have included a number

of self-enquiry practices in this book that take inspiration from the yoga nidra techniques we share in our classes and training courses.

Like many yogis, our journey started with an interest in the physical aspect of the practice and all the tangible benefits it can bring, though in time we realised something far more interesting was unveiling itself. For most of us, a yoga practice means working through a series of asanas (postures), and we feel secure in the knowledge that we are ‘doing’ something and that we will therefore likely see results. Certainly we start to see physical changes, and this is pleasing, but because when we are working ourselves into the postures we use our breath to help sustain our position and, especially in postures that require balance, we find our minds quieten as we focus on remaining steady and still, we might also notice a subtle sense of calm reveals itself to us – one that perhaps stays with us even after our practice. However, many of us become distracted by the movement aspect of yoga and continue our ‘yoga journey’ by aiming to become stronger, spend longer in headstands, be able to touch the floor without bending our knees, etc. Although that glimpse of calm pops in and out of the practice and our life beyond, almost saying, ‘Hey, I’m here! You don’t need to spend five minutes upside down to see me!’, we plough on, developing that back bend into something that looks quite spectacular and has everyone applauding our commitment to. . . to our backbend, perhaps.

A ‘physical’ yoga practice can lead you to the contrastingly still aspect of your experience, but this ‘restful awareness’ can equally be uncovered with very subtle explorations of the body and breath,

and by enquiring into your feelings, emotions, thoughts and beliefs as a means to discover what lies *beyond* them. A class in which students are simply welcomed to allow whatever they are feeling – physical and emotional – to be present, just as it is, can be as ‘enlightening’ as several years of refining sequences of sophisticated physical postures.

Often referred to as ‘sleep yoga’ (though this isn’t a particularly accurate term), yoga nidra is very much a process of surrendering. There is nothing to ‘do’ in a yoga nidra class other than be still and follow the teacher’s words as they use various techniques to guide you into being somewhere between awake and asleep (if you’ve ever dozed on a beach, slipping in and out of waking-dreams all the while aware of the sound of seagulls and children playing around you then you’ll know this state). We’ve had students describe yoga nidra as ‘meditation by stealth’, because by its very nature, you don’t have to *do* anything and yet you find yourself doing something amazing.

For many, a yoga nidra class – or any ‘not-doing class’, for there is not necessarily any reason to label it – presents a terrifying prospect. The thought of lying down in a room for an hour with absolutely nothing required other than that you be present with yourself can be an incredibly uncomfortable proposition. You can’t hide from yourself, you might have to listen to yourself and you might see aspects of yourself that you have perhaps been distracting yourself from with other practices or exercises. This doesn’t sound restful, but you cannot rest without stopping, and when we first stop, we may initially be bombarded with inner noise, not inner peace. This is all part of the journey to rest.

We've had students who, when they first attended a rest-based class, expressed concern that it wouldn't be enough for them. Their worry was that the focus on effortlessness and lack of physical exertion meant there couldn't possibly be any benefits. But such classes offer many people a rare chance to welcome their inner noise, and be present with themselves in a way that is deeply transformative, leaving you feeling more rested and refreshed than we would argue any form of exercise could.

That said, regardless of our respect and love for the practice, we did not want this book to be a yoga nidra handbook, because we want you to know, and wish to prove to you, that you do not need anything – not even yoga nidra – to rest. Yoga nidra has certainly been a core vehicle in helping us uncover our already-rested nature, but we know we can throw it away and our rested nature will still be there. Practising yoga nidra might help you connect with your innate stillness, but that stillness already exists within you. That stillness is yours.

How to approach our self-enquiry practices

Rest is the most natural state of simply 'being'. It happens to us when we stop and it reminds us that there is more to us than our thinking, doing and feeling experiences – rest allows us to uncover our awareness. The self-enquiries in this book are intended to help you slip into your own awareness, without effort. For this reason, they should be approached with a degree of lightness. There is no right or wrong way to undertake them.

You can think of them as experiments, without any expected outcome. You will likely face challenges, such as meeting incessant chatter of your mind or a particularly eccentric or nagging self-narrative, and while we understand this might be disconcerting we will, throughout the course of this journey, illustrate how to ‘do nothing’ about such apparent obstacles to your rest. (We are aware there is a contradiction here, in that we are going to show you how to do something so that you can ultimately do nothing. . .)

The enquiries might be useful in helping you to understand rest in the context of your body, mind and that which lies beyond, but we want you to know these are experiments in showing you what you already have; they are not methods to be mastered or skills to be sharpened. They can be employed by anyone and there is no reason why their ‘results’ shouldn’t be as profound as techniques practised by experienced yogi or meditators (or witches, wizards, Munchkins, etc.).

They are exercises in observation, but they might just enable you to allow rest to come when you start feeling that tension between *wanting* to make rest happen and knowing that the more you try to rest, the further away you are from actually resting (if you’ve ever grappled with insomnia then you will be familiar with this challenge). Ultimately, our advice is that as you set about an enquiry, you let everything unfold just as it wishes. This is your new mantra. . . to let go of immediately.

Our purpose in this book is to demonstrate, time and again, that you already know how to find rest. You just have to trust that it is

there and that any apparent obstacles to you being able to connect with it are completely normal.

A busy mind does not mean you are less able to connect with your innate peace, a period of turmoil does not diminish its presence, and nor does a week of pasta and Chianti in Tuscany or a best-forgotten experience in Vegas (definitely not).

We will constantly remind you that it is not us nor anyone nor anything else that is able to apply rest into your experience of life. There is no magic to this, no superpowers required. Rest is not something that can be transferred from one person to another, or from anything onto you.

We know, though, that no amount of us telling you that the very essence of your being is always at peace, always OK and completely shatterproof will convince you of this fact. In order for you to believe us you will have to experience it for yourself.

In order to take this journey with us you have to be prepared to let go of the urge to make anything happen. You have to trust that you do not need to understand, work out or work through anything. *You* do not need to change, because you already are everything you will ever be: beneath everything, you are complete and unconditionally contented.

— *To go on this journey with us
you must be willing to do only
one thing: nothing.*

Absolutely nothing.

And you must absolutely not try to rest.

Trying, is not resting. Resting is doing nothing. It is *being*.

So, let's try this. Let's stop, let everything go (including any attempt to let things go), and begin.