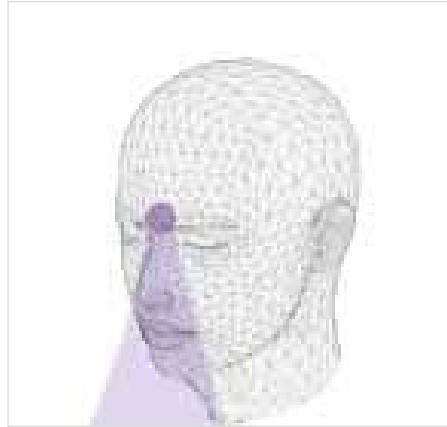


Samadhi in Sleep: The Art of Falling Asleep Consciously



Meditative Sleep: The Art of Falling Asleep

Sleep is not only a time of rest or a period of suspension, but an important dimension of our existence. We spend one-third of our life in sleep, but this time is wasted from an evolutionary standpoint unless we transform our perception of sleep, respect it, and take steps towards integrating it with our consciousness. Not only can a deeper attunement with sleep help make our subconscious more conscious, but it can also contribute to adjusting and improving the quality of our sleep, bringing it closer to a meditative state.

What actually happens when we fall asleep? For one, the observer is switched off. To be more precise, our sensory and conscious external attention is turned off. This is why we are not aware of our environment and cannot experience conscious thinking when we are sleeping. In addition to external attention being turned off during sleep, pure attention is also suspended because it requires our conscious intention in order to function, and conscious intention is absent during sleep as well.

As we fall asleep, all of the dimensions of pure me are gradually being let go of. They fall asleep too, like a row of streetlamps going dark one by one; once pure attention starts falling asleep, so too does the recognition of pure me. The last pure me to fall asleep is pure conscious me, because of its direct link with conscious me. Conscious me is the final part of our identity to fall asleep, and the quality of how it relaxes and lets go will determine the quality of our sleep.



Falling asleep is an art that every meditator is required to master. Falling asleep by spacing out into daydreams and then losing consciousness is not the right approach for a person on the path. Rather, falling asleep has to be done meditatively, as if we were diving into the inner self. Specifically, we need to embody the identity of conscious me as we let go of waking consciousness, because conscious me is the last bastion of our alertness, and the one who protects us from drifting into the subconscious mind. In addition, in order to not interfere with the process of falling asleep itself, we have to embody conscious me while surrendering into pure conscious me. Falling asleep in this way, through pure conscious me (or fundamental me if it is realized), is the only correct and conscious means of crossing the sleep-threshold. As conscious me surrenders, melting into pure conscious me, it retains – right up until the last moment – a gentle alertness as the watcher of the thought-threshold, continuing to let go of any subconscious thoughts that arise. In this way, we do not fall asleep by drifting into daydreaming, but rather through our pure subjectivity.

Practicing embodying conscious me at the threshold of sleep can be of great assistance in deepening our consciousness and activating pure conscious me more deeply. It can be particularly beneficial for those students who experience conscious me but have a hard time realizing their pure conscious me. In falling asleep, the observer loses its control over our consciousness, and this makes it an ideal opportunity to allow one to practice more gently and to open oneself to the pure subjectivity of the soul. It is best to do this practice both in bed, when falling asleep naturally, and in sitting meditation, where we can simulate falling asleep, coming as close as possible to the sleep-threshold while still retaining basic alertness. We need to learn how to remain conscious so that the watcher of the thought-threshold continues to be present, but in such an inconspicuous way that it does not create excessive alertness.

So to reach the sleep-threshold, we need to be completely relaxed, letting go through pure conscious me into sleep. The first thing we notice is that our breathing changes. We begin to breathe deeply from the belly. This breathing is different from our usual breathing because it is only the body that is breathing, while the conscious mind has become relaxed and disconnected from the breathing process. Our exhalation becomes deeper, and there is a pause at the end of it, so that only when the body is starved of oxygen do we inhale again. This allows the diaphragm to fully expand. The most pronounced characteristic of such breathing is the pause after exhalation, as if the body were waiting for the right moment before inhaling.



For this practice to be effective, the mind has to be calm and one needs to have access to conscious me; otherwise, it will just cause daydreaming and be of no benefit. Since most students who are actively engaged in this teaching have established fundamental consciousness (pure consciousness and conscious me) to differing degrees, it would aid them to incorporate the sleep-threshold practice into their meditation on a daily basis. In addition, falling asleep at night should be treated with the same seriousness and reverence as meditation; one should create a sacred space, let go of all worldly concerns, say a prayer to the divine, and go to sleep in a meditative way, with conscious me embodied and relaxing into pure conscious me, which continues to retain some alertness up until the moment of falling asleep.

Turiya: Awakened Sleep

The concept of 'turiya' has been part of the Hindu path of enlightenment for a very long time. The term 'turiya' translates literally as 'the fourth', and refers to the fourth state of consciousness beyond ordinary waking, dreaming sleep, and dreamless sleep. It has been used to signify the underlying base, or substratum, of consciousness which transcends sleep and dreaming. Although it is a very important concept, turiya has been used inaccurately and misunderstood, and is often translated simply as 'pure consciousness'. The implication is that the realization of pure consciousness, or even mere awareness, should transcend sleep and waking. But this is simply far from the truth, and the genuine realization of turiya among masters and seekers is very rare.

Even when our pure consciousness is awakened, it is still confined to the waking state; it is not the fourth state because it does not transcend waking and sleep. The realization of pure consciousness is what we could call a 'conscious waking state', and it is not turiya. Unfortunately, this is not explained at all in Indian mysticism. Turiya indicates a realization that is beyond the waking state, but we should understand that the waking state itself is not necessarily synonymous with ignorance (even though this is indeed the case for most people). Our spiritual awakening takes place in the waking state as well, for that is the state in which we evolve, realize our true self, and even attain unity with the transcendent I am. Enlightenment happens in waking consciousness, and, initially at least, it does not extend into sleep. In fact, even turiya is initially realized in the waking state, although it does indicate a dimension of self-actualization that inherently transcends the boundaries of the waking dimension.



Sleep-threshold and Turiya

To enter the sleep-threshold consciously is to discover a world within a world, a reality in its own right that exists beyond and independently of the manifested world. There are inner waking states that lie beyond the waking state of the manifested world in which we are used to living. The difference is that such waking states are no longer linked to universal subconsciousness, as this earthly one is. Rather, such states are based in universal intelligence and in the consciousness of pure subjectivity. In this sense, it is incorrect to say that turiya is beyond the waking state as such; it is beyond the waking state of our world. From a higher perspective, turiya is the true waking state of the absolute reality. It is the absolute waking state.

Abiding at the sleep-threshold while in turiya is like temporarily dying to the physical body and becoming one with the divine. The experience cannot even be imagined by those who live in the confinement and limitations of the waking state. In it, one comes to realize that the sleep-threshold is not about sleep anymore, but about waking to a new dimension of universal love.

Turiya is a state of samadhi, but it is not static: it is an entirely new way of living on the other side of the now. Not all those who achieve turiya actualize this possibility, because many fail to see that turiya is not really a state at all, but a mysterious gateway to another world. And in order for this door and the passage beyond it to open up, one has to continue to be sufficiently awake and retain one's dynamic intelligence within turiya itself. This is what the meaning of 'going beyond turiya' (also called 'turiyatita') truly is. Although turiya appears to be the final step in our inner journey, it is only so from the standpoint of this waking dimension.

The Myth of Consciousness in Sleep

The concept of retaining awareness during sleep is present in many traditions. For instance, it is part of so-called 'dream yoga' in Tibetan Buddhism. In Dzogchen, there is a practice in which one tries to bring the awareness of the Tibetan letter 'A', or the written character of this symbol, into sleep as a means of activating sleep-awareness. Many practitioners and masters of this tradition forcefully attempt to apply this practice in vain, instead of just getting a good night of sleep. They also try to bring lucidity to the deep sleep state through practices like yoga nidra, which is impossible when one has only achieved limited awareness. Conversely, it is no more



challenging to retain turiya in deep sleep than to do so in the dreaming state. Once it is attained, it remains present.

Practices of bringing awareness to sleep usually have nothing to do with turiya. They are more to do with lucid dreaming, which is part of the dreaming sleep state rather than the fourth state. It is questionable that any benefit is derived from lucid dreaming, and it may well have harmful effects through interfering with our natural sleep. To benefit from a proper deep sleep, part of our brain has to be shut down in order to allow us to experience profound rest, as well as for important subconscious healing processes to take place. Practices that interfere with this are playing with fire. We should be careful of trying practices without understanding the consequences they could have. It is easy to upset the delicate balance of consciousness by imposing artificial awareness on the sleep state. Bringing the self-referencing observer into sleep, which is what lucid dreaming is, is of no spiritual benefit. It is best to let the observer retire during our sleeping time. It is impossible to bring true consciousness into the deep sleep state if one has not realized turiya in the waking state.

In many traditions, sleep has been considered as an 'enemy' of consciousness. Seekers have either tried to artificially force awareness into sleep or to fight sleep itself. For instance, it was common among Zen monks to go without sleep for long time or refrain from lying down for many months or even years. In Korea, there are still monasteries where monks are not allowed to lie down during their three-month yearly retreats. Such practices are not only useless but also very harmful; in reality, the more one is tired, the more unconscious one becomes. It is much wiser to befriend sleep and fall in love with the amazing process of falling asleep. To fall asleep in a conscious way is to fall asleep into the consciousness of our creator. By changing our relationship with sleep, this normally spiritually wasted time becomes the time of our deepest meditation.

Dreaming or Not Dreaming

It is often asked whether an enlightened person still dreams or not. For instance, although it has not been claimed that Buddha retained consciousness in sleep, it has been said that his sleep was very peaceful, which can be another way to describe turiya. It is possible to cease dreaming, but only if one disciplines the mind to such an extent that there are also almost no thoughts during one's waking day. Some masters of the traditional schools were reported to not dream anymore, while others (including Ramana Maharishi) said that they continued to dream. Certainly, the



awakening of consciousness combined with the integration and purification of the mind results in fewer dreams, but the experience of some dream activity is still natural.

This issue is similar to the question of whether a realized being still needs to think. Even though someone who has awakened will naturally have more control over the mind during their waking hours, thinking is part of our holistic consciousness and should not entirely suppressed. The view that the mind is completely negative is an ignorant one. The appeal of such views stems from the fact that the cessation of thinking has often been the only way most people have experienced some level of peace. But true peace is beyond both thinking and not thinking. This is why early Zen teachings viewed the practice of suppressing thoughts as being unnatural and ignorant. Dreaming during the lighter stages of sleep is a pictorial representation of the thoughts and perceptions we have in the waking state, but without the presence of the conscious observer. In fact, since most people are not conscious anyway, their waking state could be considered to be quite similar to their dream state – they live in a waking dream.

As noted before, not only is conscious external attention turned off in sleep (though the mind's subconscious external attention is present as a part of dreaming), so too is pure attention. This is why we cannot be aware of the pure me of consciousness, being, and heart during sleep. Contemplating the sleep state is helpful in understanding why conscious me is called 'essential me'. Conscious me is the part of our identity which retains consciousness the longest; even after all of the dimensions of pure me have been switched off, conscious me continues to be conscious of itself. Conscious me is the last one to fall asleep.

Samadhi in Sleep

For most people, sleep is a kind of unconscious samadhi, because there is no conscious experiencer of it. To understand what turiya is, we must first modify our perception of what it means to transition from consciousness into sleep. It would be incorrect to think that turiya is the same as retaining our normal consciousness in sleep; in turiya, one is conscious, but not in an ordinary sense. What does it mean to be conscious? To be truly conscious, we must be in a dynamic relationship with our subjectivity through pure attention. In other words, pure attention must retain the dynamic quality of relating to the substance of me (as well as to the transcendent I am), for which our conscious intention is required. Virtually all spiritual states, with the exception



of primordial samadhi, require the waking state in order to be experienced, because dynamic pure attention closes down during sleep.

Normally, dynamic pure attention (which is the second level of pure attention; that is activated when the first level of pure attention has already been integrated with bare attention) is deactivated when we fall asleep. By going to sleep through the fully realized immanent I am, however, pure attention remains awake. This gives rise to the experience of samadhi in sleep. When dynamic pure attention (which is, in fact, the spirit of recognition) reaches samadhi in immanent I am, the intrinsic recognition of primordial I is fully established, and this manifests a higher level of primordial bare attention within immanent I am. This manifests a permanent state of self-recognition, which is thus retained even during the deep sleep state.

So here, the continuity of primordial I is not dissolved in sleep. However, neither is it self-aware, because self-awareness requires a level of duality between pure attention and me, as well as the presence of intelligence. There is no duality between pure attention and primordial bare attention in the primordial I because pure attention is in samadhi in the immanent I am. Additionally, in turiya, primordial I is in samadhi in primordial I am. Primordial I am is the highest dimension of god. It is the god that exists timelessly at the root of all dimensions of both I am and me. So samadhi in sleep is, in fact, a twofold samadhi: pure attention is in samadhi in the immanent I am of essence-me, giving rise to primordial I, and that primordial I is in samadhi in primordial I am. The concept of turiya will be more deeply explored in the next article, entitled "Turiya: The Absolute Waking State."

How do we know that we are in samadhi in sleep if we are not self-aware during this time? During samadhi in sleep, we know without knowing, which means without the need for reflection that we know. It is upon waking or in an intermediate state between deep sleep and waking that we have the additional recognition and confirmation from our intelligence that there had been an unbroken continuity of the primordial I while we were in deep sleep.

Blessings,
Anadi