

Soar Beyond Waking, Dream and Deep Sleep Part One

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Throughout all embodiments in the soul's journey towards the Absolute Self, the three familiar states of waking, dream and deep sleep continue to alternate. Bound by ignorance, one must experience those three states of consciousness until the attainment of Liberation, when they go beyond the three. Until then, according to Vedanta, all experiences of the soul—pleasure and pain, gain and loss, birth and death—can be classified in these three states. Therefore, waking, dream and deep sleep have profound implications in Yoga philosophy.

Let us explore these states one by one, beginning with the waking state. You consider yourself awake when you operate through your senses, when you use your mind, when your physical body is active, and when you come into contact with the objects in the world of time and space. However, from a profounder point of view, a person is truly awake only when he has developed aspiration for

Self-realization. Otherwise, he just lives on, creating illusions and entanglements, as if half asleep.

When you become tired, physically and mentally, and want to sleep, you retire from waking realities. The process of sleep is mysterious. *Tamas* is the *guna* or mode of the mind that causes inertia, and when it begins to operate, it makes your body heavy. Wherever you are, you feel as if you need to let go all the weight of your body. Your head begins to droop, and you enter either into dream or deep sleep.

Entry into dream can be best described by the analogy of projecting images on a screen. Suppose images are continually being projected. If the lights are on in the room, the images will not be seen. But as the lights are dimmed, the images will slowly appear until they become well enough defined for the observer to totally enjoy the projection.

It is similar with dream. The causal plane of the mind is continually projecting impressions and

images based on numerous karmas of the past. In the waking state, however, the intellect, which is the source of light in the mind, is constantly screening those projections. But as the light of the intellect is withdrawn with the coming of sleep, those images that had no meaning when the intellect was bright now become visible and alive on the mental screen.

It is the intellect—the power that organizes and evaluates things, that coordinates thoughts—that weaves the web of our waking reality. However, even the reality that we normally experience when awake is a relative reality; even our waking experiences are not absolute realities. Simply because we touch a table and feel it is solid, or simply because we are bumped when we walk into a wall does not mean that either the table or the wall is real. In dream, if you try to go through a wall it may break your head. While you are in dream, the experiences you have become very real. It is only when you wake up that you realize that your experience was not real, but illusory. Similarly, as I will explain later, waking experiences are as illusory to one who is enlightened as dream experiences are to a person who is awake in the normal sense.

A parable is told of a great king, Janaka, who once had a strange dream. In his dream he experienced that he was defeated and that his enemies drove him out of his kingdom. He had no refuge anywhere, and no one gave him any sustenance. So he became like an ordinary beggar, lost somewhere in the street. Feeling terribly hungry, he began to beg for food, but no one gave him any. When someone did eventually give him food, another person came along and threw it away. And so he felt completely miserable. Within just one dream, one who was the emperor of emperors had such a humiliating experience!

When he woke up, Janaka was ashamed to tell that dream to anyone. However, wanting to know the message behind the dream, he presented a question to his ministers and attendants. He said,

“Tell me, what is real, this or that?” But he didn’t explain what he meant thereby. And so, no one understood him until a Sage named Ashtavakra stepped forward and said, “O King, neither this nor that.” It is true that the waking state is more real than the dream, but from the absolute point of view, both belong to the realm of illusion. Why this is so requires deep reflection.

You must understand that experiences of pleasure and pain are due to the operation of karma, which has been created through many lives and exists in your unconscious in the form of subtle impressions known as *vasanas*. As that karma operates, it brings about conditions of pleasure and pain in your waking life. Karma also operates in the same way in your dream experiences. A karma that is more defined and well-developed will operate in your waking state, while that which is not so well-defined or developed will operate in your dream state. But without karma there is no experience, whether in waking or in dream.

Suppose a negative karma is fructifying that is to bring about the breaking of your leg in your waking state. Now also suppose you have created a counterforce, a good karma, by prayer, repetition of mantra, meditation and devotion to God. Then, one day, it so happens that you are relaxed and are lulled into sleep. But instead of having a pleasant sleep, you have a very negative dream—all

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of a sudden you find yourself in an accident: you break your leg and you are miserable. But then, when you wake up you realize it was all unreal, and you wonder, “Why did I have such a negative experience? I didn’t go to sleep with a negative mind; I offered prayers.” You must understand that your prayers do not create negative vibrations; they reduce the negative. But even while the process of reduction goes on, you may still continue experiencing negative situations due to your negative karmas. When a karma is reduced, you experience it in dream; when it is not reduced, you experience it in waking state.

Types of Dreams

According to Vedanta, the study of dream is much more profound than what the present science of psychology has discovered so far. For example, many leading psychologists—Freud, for example—viewed that all dreams are expressions of a wish-fulfillment. And all dreams, all wishes, are somehow tied to the sex-urge. To some extent there are certain dreams that result from wish-fulfillment. A student, for example, must go to school in order to appear at an examination, but for some reason his mind is sluggish and he sleeps. During his sleep he dreams that he has gotten up,

has gone to school and has written the examination. Although that type of wish-fulfilling dream does occur in the human mind, there is much more to be understood in dream analysis.

Even psychologists themselves, such as Carl Jung and Stekel, contradicted these views of Freud. Carl Jung brought out another understanding—that in the human mind there are two aspects: one being a vast unconscious that contains impressions of innumerable ages of the whole human race (the collective unconscious), and the other aspect containing impressions of your own normal personality. And so, when there are strange experiences in dream that do not relate to your personality, but rather to certain symbols and various stories relating to the human race, Jung explains that they result from the collective unconscious. Therefore, dream is not always merely wish-fulfillment.

According to yogic analysis, dreams can be of many types. There are dreams based merely on the subtle operation of karmas, which, of course, is the general reality behind all dreams. But some dreams are prophetic dreams, and foretell conditions or events to come. Certain dreams can be telepathic, through which you receive a message from someone, such as a friend or relative somewhere who is in trouble. And some dreams are highly symbolic, and need to be interpreted in order to understand what they mean.

There are also dreams that are caused by ordinary abnormalities in the functions of the body. If there is a little disturbance in the body—indigestion, headache, fever—you may be led through many dreams that have very little significance, because so many images are cast on your mental sheath from your unconscious. This process goes on constantly, and since the light of intellect is dim, all those images come alive and go on rolling according to your physical condition.

Ignorance dominates all your experiences in waking, dream, and deep sleep. Through the yogic process, however, you tear the veil of ignorance and realize, “I am not confined to waking, dream or deep sleep. I am the transcendental Self.”



For example, if you are predominately phlegmatic, if your body has a lot of phlegm and mucous, in your dream you may have experiences of wading through water. Or you may dream of rain and clouds. If you have a bilious condition in your body, your dream may bring about fire.

Sometimes dreams may arise due to some simple external influence on your body. For example, someone may be talking nearby. Prior to sleep you were hearing the sound and understanding the meaning, but as you drift into dream, the first thing to go is the meaning, and now you just hear the sound. Then the sound becomes further and further distorted, and if the people are talking loudly to themselves, you may dream that there is a big war going on. Similarly, if there is some external object pressing on your foot, in your dream you may feel as if a rock has fallen and has hit your foot. And so, the impulses from the external world are exaggerated during dream.

There is another type of dream which yogis promote. Yogis train their unconscious and subconscious by the practice of concentration and meditation, by prayer and by various other disciplines. Some yogis try to develop the *siddhi* (psychic power) called “*dream siddhi*.” When there are certain problems that cannot be resolved in waking life, they pray, “O God, reveal the answer in dream.” Those who have developed this *siddhi* receive the guidance of Sages or greater personalities.

Finally, some dreams are supernatural dreams—people who are highly advanced, who have practiced meditation and have entered into *samadhi* (super-consciousness), often begin to enter into another plane where they begin to contact spiritual guides, Sages, Saints and Deities. After their dream-experience, there is a greater enlightenment.

And so, according to Vedanta, the study of dream has many implications,

but there is a greater purpose in life than simply trying to understand the dream phenomenon. That purpose is how to attain Liberation. And in order to do so you must go beyond dream.

Vedantic philosophy gives profound insight into what actually happens when you fall asleep, move into dream, and then, finally, enter into deep sleep. No matter how careful and vigilant you are, you will never be able to witness the exact moment of your entry into sleep.

As sleep begins to overpower you, there is a wave of inertia that courses through your whole body. First your senses are withdrawn from the objects, and then the soul, along with the mind and senses, enters into the *Sushumna*, the central mystic channel that corresponds to the spinal column.

Through this central channel the soul moves towards the throat. If it stays at the throat level, dreams arise, for the individual soul is considered to have its seat in the throat during the experience of dream. That is why you may be shouting very clearly in dream, but people around you in the waking world hear only gluttural sounds. After resting at the throat center in the dream state, the individual soul then moves on to the heart center, at which time deep sleep occurs.



As the Self you become the underlying reality behind all. That innermost Self in human beings, the real Self, the true identity, is beyond waking, dream, and deep sleep. And that Self is always there in your heart.

The Mystery of Deep Sleep

Now let's examine the deep sleep state. Deep sleep is the most desirable experience in one's daily life. The world is a form of pressure in one's consciousness, and during sleep this world is shut out. The world consists of the triad of "seer," "seen," and "sight"—subject, object, and the interaction between the two. This triad is what is known as the world-process, and consciousness becomes burdened by this world-process. No matter how delightful the world is, you become tired of it.

If you cannot sleep, you will be miserable. You may be very wealthy, you may have all the things you want, and yet, if you cannot go to sleep, you feel miserable. You cannot continue to stay in this world, no matter how delightful it is. You may have the most wonderful guest in your home, and yet you will say, "Now I am going to retire. You also should retire. Let's go to sleep."

In the domain of deep sleep nothing exists. Time, space and causation are all transcended. The world disappears and yet you do not feel sad about it; rather, day by day you experience how wonderful it is to enter into this realm of pure peace. You do not need to study philosophy to prepare yourself for that sweet experience.

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Suppose, however, that someone, for some reason, never had that experience of deep sleep. And suppose you were to tell him, "Look, there is a state in which all that you see will not exist. You will have no tea, no coffee, no chats, no magazines, no letters, no telephones. You will not even know who you are." Would he want to go there? Chances are he would not. He would not know what it would be like and would consider it a miserable state. But then, nature has so arranged things that everyone does indeed experience deep sleep day by day, and eagerly desires to enter into that state—a state in which this world disappears.

In sleep you go into a state over which you have no conscious control. Even your ego does not exist there. When you are in deep sleep, someone nearby can say whatever he likes about you and it does not matter. You are completely unconcerned how you appear. Ego is inoperative.

To better understand the temporary absence of ego in deep sleep, let us consider the following example. Suppose you go to a palace on a horse. Although the horse can take you to the threshold, he cannot go inside. As the doors are opened, the horse may get a sniff of the wonderful atmosphere of that great palace, but nothing more than that. And then the rider goes inside and chats with the king. When he comes out, again the doors open, and again the horse has a sniff. Later many horses may ask what his experience was, but all the horse can say is, "Well, I experienced nothing; but it was so wonderful."

Consider ego like a horse that goes along with your soul to the very threshold of the mysterious domain of sleep, which is actually the realm of *Brahman*, the Divine Self. Ego goes to the threshold, but not further. The soul enters into that state and the world disappears in a blissful experience. But from ego's point of view, all that it gets is a little sniff, because it wasn't really there. So when you wake up and someone asks you how it was, you say you had a sound and profoundly restful sleep and that it was so wonderful. "Did you know anything?" "Nothing at all."