

Sleeping, Dreaming and Waking

In the Direct Path teaching, the word 'consciousness' is used to signify the indivisible, unchanging, eternal background to, and substance of, all experience. (Rupert also uses the word 'awareness' as a synonym for 'consciousness'.) It follows that there are no 'states of consciousness', and in particular, no 'levels of consciousness', or 'states of unconsciousness'. This is different from the concept of 'consciousness' and 'higher levels of consciousness' commonly used in the traditional spiritual paths that many of us have previously followed. As Dr Francis Roles realised towards the end of his life, this distinction is very important. In his last meeting before he died he said: '*We have had everything upside down and back-to-front. There is only one consciousness. The levels are levels of impediment to that consciousness. Everything is that consciousness. That is what we have to feel and know.*'

Rather than thinking in terms of 'impediments', Rupert uses the analogy of a camera lens and describes sleeping, dreaming and waking as a progressive 'focusing of consciousness':

Consciousness never enters a state or becomes anything other than itself. It simply seems to contract and relax, or, more accurately, to focus and defocus like a camera lens. The states of waking, dreaming and sleeping, and any other states that may be experienced, are varying degrees of this focusing and defocusing. When a camera is fully unfocused nothing is seen through it, but as the lens is progressively focused, objects begin to emerge from the unmodulated image, bringing into focus what was already present but could not be seen. ...

However, there are no clear lines between any of these states. They are a continuum, appearing in consciousness, known by consciousness and made of consciousness ...

As a result of the narrowing of its focus, consciousness seems to become increasingly obscured from itself as the forms of the finite mind become more distinct with the emergence of the waking state ...

In the waking state, the separation and otherness of forms, their 'not-consciousness-ness', is at its most persuasive, so persuasive in fact, that they seem to be made out of an entirely different substance. 'Matter' is the name thought gives to that substance, defining it as everything outside of and other than consciousness. ...

Moving in the other direction, we do not find a clear line between the waking and dream states. The transition from waking to dreaming is a gradual softening or relaxation of the focus of attention. As a result of this softening of focus, the field of possibilities in the dream state is larger than it is in the waking state. Consciousness still needs to localise itself as a body in order to experience the dreamed world, and it is for this reason that we always experience the dreamed world from the perspective of a body in the dream. But in the dream state this self-localisation is looser than it is in the waking state. The world that the dreamed subject experiences is correspondingly less clearly defined and hence there are more possibilities of experience. ...

Just as previously inaccessible regions of the broader medium of mind percolate into our experience in the waking state as it either relaxes naturally as we fall asleep or is induced to by meditation, so in time, the peace that lies at the heart of consciousness itself begins to infiltrate the mind, permeating it with its tranquillity and contentment and gradually dissolving out of it the residues of unease, conflict and separation. This is usually felt in the waking state first, but as the peace of our true nature penetrates more deeply into the medium of mind, in time the

dreaming and deep sleep states are affected.

[Rupert Spira: *The Nature of Consciousness*, ch13 – There Are No States of Consciousness]

The exploration of sleeping, dreaming and waking is one of Atmananda Krishnamenon's 'lines of enquiry' that have the potential to lead us to an understanding of our true nature. Here is Rupert's explanation of how this works:

Upon waking from the dream we discover that the 'individual person' who seemed to be the experiencer *of* the dream was in fact experienced *within* the dream.

However, upon waking we transfer the status of experiencer from the 'individual person' who seemed to be present in the *dream* to the 'individual person' who now seems to be present in the *waking state*.

In this way we repeat the mistake and fail to take advantage of the dream experience, which enables us to see that the 'individual person' is in fact an image and a thought in Consciousness, both in the dream *and* in the waking state.

It is for this reason that the waking state is sometimes referred to as the waking dream. The appearance of the separate entity in the waking state is essentially the same as that in the dream state.

In both cases it has no Reality of its own. In both cases its Reality is Consciousness.

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To understand the illusion of the waking state we can take the point of view of the dream state.

To understand the illusion of the dream state we can take the point of view of deep sleep.

And to understand the illusion of deep sleep we take the point of view of Consciousness.

That is why the transitions from the waking state to the dream state and from the dream state to deep sleep, and vice versa, are considered in some spiritual traditions to be such significant opportunities for awakening.

In these transitions, that which is illusory in each state is laid bare. By the same token, that which is real in each state, that which does not disappear during the transition, is revealed.

[Rupert Spira: *The Transparency of Things: The True Dreamer*]

This exploration takes time. Here is some practical advice from Atmananda Krishnamenon for making use of the transition from waking to sleeping when we go to bed each night:

Know that you are going to sleep. Let that thought be as vague as possible. Then empty your mind of all intruding thoughts, taking care not to strain the mind in the least. Having understood from the Guru that your real nature alone shines in its own glory in deep sleep, if you relax into deep sleep as already suggested, the deep sleep shall no longer be a state, but your real nature, even beyond *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

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Sleep involuntarily and you will be taken to the ignorant man's deep sleep.

Sleep voluntarily and you will be taken to *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

Sleep knowingly and you will be taken right to your real nature (your natural state) beyond all *samadhi*.

[Atmananda Krishnamenon, *Spiritual Discourses*: 599 How to Sleep Knowingly, (plus Appendix)]

Jean Klein gave this advice about using the transition from sleeping to waking when we wake up in the morning:

Be aware in the morning that before the body wakes up there's another kind of waking up. Then you feel the body waking up in this already awakenedness. See how the body appears to you in this moment. You will feel how the old conditioned body tries to come back, the old thoughts, feelings, habits and so on. Go to the tactile sensation. It may first appear in the hands. Evoke this tactility, and you will feel a letting go. Sense it. It is enough.

[Jean Klein: *The Book of Listening, Volume 9: The Approach on the Body Level*]

As Rupert explains, our experience of sleeping, dreaming and waking gradually changes as our understanding deepens and we abide more and more as our true self of pure, unlimited consciousness:

If we think that the waking and dreaming states comprise a multiplicity and diversity of separate objects and selves, we will consider deep sleep a blank, empty nothing. But if we understand and feel during the waking state that what appears to be a multiplicity and diversity of objects is in fact the single, indivisible, eternal, infinite screen of awareness, then we will no longer superimpose 'nothing' onto deep sleep. Deep sleep will be experienced as the 'uncolouring' but not the absence of awareness. The waking and dreaming states are a self-colouring of awareness; in deep sleep awareness remains wide awake but ceases to colour itself with the activity of mind. As our experience of the 'somethingness' of the waking state dissolves, so the 'nothingness' of deep sleep subsides in proportion.

Deep sleep is not a new experience that we have upon falling asleep. It is simply the revelation of the ever-present background of all experience. It is the uncolouring of awareness. The peace that is experienced in deep sleep is not something that is just available to us for three or four hours at night. It is continuously available. ...

Meditation is the art of falling asleep whilst remaining awake, thereby accessing the peace that is eternally present in the background of all experience, irrespective of its content. It is not necessary to turn the movie off to see the screen.

[Rupert Spira: *The Nature of Consciousness*, ch16 – The Memory of our Eternity]

Contemplation

There are three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping only from the point of view of thought. For Awareness, there are not three states; there is only the ever-present reality of itself.

[Rupert Spira]