

## I Dreamt That I Couldn't Get To Sleep

*“When one sees eternity in things that pass away and infinity in finite things,  
then one has pure knowledge.”*

*Bhagavad Gita*

I think I finally figured out why a sage said, “Go west young man!” The reason is that going west is much easier on the body-clock than going east. I visit my family in Ireland each year. I fly from San Francisco to London and then from London to Cork, and for the first four or five days my body-clock is very much out of sorts. I toss and turn at night, but no matter how exhausted I am, sleep eludes me. Normally I am a great sleeper; 360 out of 365 nights of the year, I put my head on the pillow and it’s “lights out” immediately. If I didn’t prime my alarm clock, I’d sleep each day until 10 o’clock. But on my annual Irish trip, this blessing is interrupted. By the fifth or sixth night the problem has sorted itself out and Greenwich Mean Time and Seán time are re-aligned.

A few years ago I figured out that it must be the change in diet. It is a family tradition to meet me at the airport and whisk me home to a huge feast of Irish cream pastries and mugs of caffeine-laden, sugar-soaked, milk-saturated tea. Here in California I never drink tea that has caffeine, and I won’t look twice at the anemic efforts that get touted as creamy pastries. So I figured I had finally solved the problem. The next year, much to the family’s consternation I broke with this 30-year-long tradition and was content with merely salivating as I watched hordes of nieces and nephews, grand-nieces and grand-nephews, brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts demolish the mountains of creamy pastries and teapots of “real tea” that should have been mine. The result of my heroic asceticism was – five nights of sleeplessness. In the much-abused wisdom-belief that “Rome wasn’t built in a day” I decided to repeat my Herculean effort the next year, and this time the payoff was – five nights of sleeplessness. So this year I gave up my life of virtue and returned to my old criminal ways. As was to be expected, I spent the first five nights of my visit wondering how long it would take the first five nights of my visit to be over, so I could get some sleep.

The funny thing is I never have any problems coming west. I land in San Francisco airport after reversing the same journey, taking just as long to cover the 5,712 miles from Cork to London to San Francisco, stay up the remainder of the daylight hours, go to bed shortly after sundown and sleep the sleep of the just. My body-clock immediately adjusts.

One year I wanted to be in Ireland for my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday on October 8, so I left SFO around noon on Monday, October 2, and arrived in Cork on Tuesday October 3. A feast of dairy delights greeted my lightning-storm-in-Chicago-eight-hours-delayed arrival, and when I could no longer keep my eyes open, I went to bed, where I found it very easy to keep my eyes open, all night long until about 9 o'clock on October 4 when I finally dozed off. The night of October 4 was a repeat, and the night of October 5 was a three-peat; but the night of October 6 was the pits; I was going for the four-in-a-row, a famous feat of 1940s Cork hurling. By now I was really, really frustrated; I tossed and turned physically, then I calmed my body so that I could simply toss and turn mentally; decided one good turn deserves another and went back to tossing and turning mentally *and* physically. I was now getting cranky and irritated about not being able to sleep, only to wake up and realize that I had been *dreaming* about not being able to sleep! With this realization, I smiled wryly, put my head on the pillow again and promptly went back to sleep. When I woke up fully, around midday, I grabbed a pen and paper and started jotting down notes about dreaming, sleeping, waking, and how you'd know the difference.

And those ideas will form the basis of this chapter.

### **(A) Is this a dream?**

How do you know if you are awake or dreaming? You can be fooled, in either state, into thinking you're in the other. At night we are totally convinced that the encounter with the anaconda in Africa is really happening; and during the day, in traumatic events of which we are a part or to which we are merely witnesses, there is a surrealism that often gets expressed as, "I feel as if I am in a dream." Is this a learned phrase? I don't believe so; rather it is the best spontaneous articulation of the experiential quality of the event.

To wake up in the morning and say, "That was only a dream," does not mean that dreams are not real. Dreams are every bit as real as events in "waking" consciousness. They have exactly the same psychic feel to them while they are happening. They are simply arising in a different state of consciousness. In fact, all events in all states of consciousness are merely experiences arising within the awareness of the Witness. So for the "realist" or "materialist" or "reductionist," to say dismissively that, "it was *only* a dream" is to miss the truth.

Equally, those wannabe esotericists, who sit in a lotus position and proclaim, "life is an illusion," miss the truth. Life is real, though it is not the only reality, not the most important reality nor even the first reality. "Life," too, is simply an experience arising in the awareness of the witness.

So how do we escape from this dilemma of answering, "Am I awake or in a dream right now?" One way is by going into deep, dreamless sleep. This can be directly accessed, either from dreaming-sleep or from the "waking state," typically via a hypnogogic antechamber. The second way to escape this dilemma is to enter into "Samadhi," and this is mostly accessed via meditation, though it can happen spontaneously. The core of dreamless sleep and formless Samadhi is the experience of content-less consciousness.

Let me use an image to illustrate how dreams and waking perform differently. Imagine a railway station with a central platform that has tracks on both sides of it. One set of tracks is for the dream train and the other set for the wake train. As soon as you step aboard the dream train (i.e. you begin to dream), the train itself stops moving and all the

action takes place inside the train. When you get off this train (i.e. a dream ends and you wake up), the train itself moves and leaves the station. If you step aboard the dream train later that night (i.e. dream again) you are actually stepping into a brand-new train. It, too, grinds to a halt as soon as you enter, and now all of the new action takes place inside *this* train. So the essence of a dream train is that it stops as soon as you embark and moves off as soon as you disembark. Thus, the scenes, events and experiences are disjointed. There is no continuity among the dreams because they have happened *inside* the trains, and they were different trains, each with a *different* interior design. It's rather like going to a cinema that has five or six different theaters. You buy a ticket, popcorn, chocolate and a 64-ounce soda and head for the movie on your ticket. You get totally absorbed and climb aboard the roller-coaster of the plot, characters and emotions. When it is over, you go back to the concession stand load up on the goodies, have a quick look around to make sure no "official" is watching and then run into a second theater to watch a totally different movie, with different characters, plot, location and costumes. The only continuity between the movies is you and the butter stains on your trouser leg from the first bag of popcorn.

On the other side of the tracks is the wake train. When you climb aboard this train (i.e., wake up) it pulls out of the station. Now, the action takes place *outside*; you are looking through the windows as scenes and people and events rush by. When you get off this train (i.e., fall asleep) the action ceases, the train stops and remains in the station until you need it again. If you wake up during the night, or in the morning (i.e., step aboard this train again) everything is just as you left it. So the essence of the wake train is that it moves as soon as you embark and stops as soon as you disembark. Hence, there is continuity to the scenes and events.

### **(B) Lucid Dreaming, Lucid Waking**

Let me introduce this section with a little matrix (a window, for the mathematically challenged).

	<b>Dream</b>	<b>Wake</b>
<b>I think I'm awake</b>	<b>(Foolish) Normal dreaming</b>	<b>(Foolish) Normal waking</b>
<b>I know this is a dream</b>	<b>Lucid dreaming</b>	<b>Lucid waking</b>

Normal dreaming, or what might be called "foolish" dreaming happens when I'm in REM sleep watching a great movie while being convinced that I am actually awake and this is "really" happening. For most of us this is our dream experience 100 percent of the time. It is so "obvious" to us that we are "awake" and that this is "really happening" that we don't

feel the need to say or even think, “I am awake and this is really happening.” Yet morning after morning we open our eyes and declare, “that was merely a dream,” only to close our eyes again that night and go right back into the illusion.

Normal living, or what might be called “foolish” living happens when I am in alpha or beta brainwave mode, eyes open, driving my car to work after breakfast and thinking, “Now I am truly awake; this is the real thing, and last night was merely a dream.” Yet night after night we forget this credo and become, once more engrossed in the midnight matinee, only to hear the shrill sound of the alarm clock at six o’clock and slip right back into the illusion, that now, at last, once again I am truly awake and this is the real thing.

Lucid dreaming is the ability, during REM sleep, to watch the movie, and come to the realization, “I am dreaming!” This may result in (a) the dream ending, opening my eyes and coming “awake,” or (b) I may decide to allow the dream to proceed, go along for the ride and thoroughly enjoy it, or (c) even to “consciously” become the director of it. Since I now realize, “it is a dream,” whose plot, characters, location, script and costumes I myself have created, I am aware that I am quite safe to experiment even further, and so I push the dream into areas or topics of my choice. Some people experience this occasionally and quite spontaneously; but there are traditions which cultivate this ability e.g., Tibetan Buddhism. As you might expect from such a deep spiritual system as Buddhism, this is not meant to be merely a source of entertainment but an aid to impress upon the experiencer that all experiences in all states are simply arising in “witness consciousness” and that no state is more privileged than any other state, and that no experience is “more real” than any other.

Naturally, in the West, because of our fascination with and genius at figuring out the “how questions,” we have developed tests for lucid dreaming. In elegant experimentation done at Stanford, people with a self-reported ability to dream lucidly were rigged up to an electro-encephalograph and allowed to sleep. In order to prove their claim they agreed that when they became lucid during a dream they would raise a finger. Meanwhile, the researchers could verify from the brainwaves that the sleeper was actually in REM sleep.

Lucid waking or lucid living is the ability to realize during this alleged “waking state” of ours that it is, itself, merely another kind of “dreaming.” Once I get this, I am free to (a) now truly “wake up” to Witness Consciousness, (b) flow with “normal life” and enjoy it, while not falling into the illusion that it’s the only reality or (c) even “direct” it and push it where I want it to go, while still resisting the temptation to believe it’s ultimate reality.

The ability to say, “This is only a dream,” in any state, is the essence of Witness Consciousness, which is the awareness, the Self, in which all experiences and all other states of consciousness arise; whereas the conviction that allows me to say, “This is reality” of any other state I am experiencing is the illusion of identifying these states of consciousness or these experiences with Self. It’s the equivalent of saying “I am angry” and identifying a passing state (anger) with my essence (“I Am-ness). There are languages such as Swahili, Kalenjin and Hebrew in which there is no present tense of the verb “to be;” we have to get around it by a linguistic trick called, “predication without a verb.” The value of this lack of a present tense of the verb “to be” is that I cannot identify a passing state, such as anger, hunger, sadness etc. with the Self. Most languages however, make it possible or even connive to produce this confusion. We can then conflate whimsical emotions e.g., “I am really irritated,” or temporary ideation e.g., “I am fully convinced,” or a physical attribute e.g., “I am too fat” with core essence. Similarly, we tend to conflate experiences that arise in a state of consciousness with the Self. Hinduism reminds us,

*“I have a body, but I am not my body;  
I have emotions but I am not my emotions;  
I have ideas but I am not my ideas.”*

The only time I can truly say, “I am awake and this is reality,” is when the “I” is the Witnessing Awareness within which all states of consciousness and all experiences arise.

### **(C) Making the Maps**

A particular state of consciousness has hijacked the terms, “I am awake” and “This is reality.” It’s rather like the confusion generated by the term “real presence” in Catholic liturgical theology. By “real presence” Catholic theologians mean that, as a post-consecration wafer, Jesus Christ is truly present to an experience of communion. In popular thinking, however, the other liturgical divine presences are downgraded as “lesser realities”; so, for instance, the reality of an encounter with God in the community (“...where two or three are gathered together, there am I in their midst”) or in the scripture (“...the word of God”) is regarded as not of the same quality.

So, it is with the idea that ultimate reality and true awakening only occur between opening my eyes in bed in the morning and closing them in bed at night. This mistake is of the same order as regarding the Earth as the center of the solar system, or even of the universe; of seeing humans as the apex of creation, if one is a fundamentalist Christian, or as the apex of evolution if one is a materialistic, reductionistic scientist; or regarding humans as the only intelligent species in the cosmos; or regarding a particular race, culture, nation or religion as “chosen.” It is an error of the same magnitude as regarding the ego as the center or even the totality of the psyche, rather than merely exercising an executive role in a particular state of consciousness.

This was the huge psychic, spiritual and social adjustment to which Gautama Siddhartha pointed in choosing his name: “Buddha” means, “one who is awake.” This was the radical shift to Christ consciousness that Jesus of Nazareth advocated when he insisted that we “stay awake” e.g., the saying, “Blessed is that servant [ego] whom the master [Self] finds awake upon his return;” or again, “If the householder [Self] had known at what time the thief [ego-illusion] intended to break in and steal, he would have remained awake.”

To cut through the language confusion, I will simply refer to what happens between sunup and sundown as “day time consciousness,” because to call it the “waking state of consciousness” is chutzpah, hubris and grossly inaccurate. The term, “waking state of consciousness” needs to be reserved for that state of consciousness in which I identify with my God-Self, which is also *your* God-Self, the God-Self of the daffodil and the dinosaur, the God-Self of poodles and of poets.

Each state of consciousness has a different cartography, different laws, different time usages, different space-continuums and different kinds of causation. So we need to be multi-lingual; we need to be aux fait with these different levels of reality, and not hide our insecurity behind a compensatory superiority complex in which we arrogantly strut our daytime consciousness state as the only or real generator of truth and fact.

Any cartography of the other states created from any state other than the true waking state leads to poor maps. In particular, the maps that have been created during the daytime state have led to caricatures of the laws and terrain of those other states. It’s a bit like

looking at an early 16<sup>th</sup> century map of America; it is pitifully inexact by today's standards. It's as if I knew nothing of the United States of America except what I read in Charlie Brown or Doonesbury, and then set out to write the definitive history of this country on the basis of those comic strips.

Yet, the bulk of our map-making is done by people who really think that the daytime state is the state of reality and of wakefulness. Not only does this give us poor maps of the other states, it gives us poor maps of the daytime state itself. It gives a two-dimensional, flatland rendition of a multi-dimensional reality. And any attempt to map the other states from there leads to pathetic, childish stick figures. If we want accurate maps of all the states, including the daytime state, we must look at those cartographers who have done their map-making from the truly awake state or God-state; the avatars and mystics.

#### **(D) The United States of Consciousness**

A sampling of states of consciousness is the following: daytime state, of which I have written; dream state which we experience five or six times during the night; deep sleep, which has its own sub-states, readily discernible on an EEG; the hypnotic state, which researchers claim is a state unto itself; and, according to the avatars, four states of mysticism. The first of these is Nature Mysticism, a state in which a unitive experience, an ecstatic sense of union with nature, pervades consciousness. Then comes Deity Mysticism, a state in which the same results as in nature mysticism are achieved by devotion to a divine figure, or the incarnated version of a divinity e.g., Jesus within Christianity. Thirdly, comes Formless Mysticism, a state in which all content, imagery, sensation and ideation cease, and there is union with Source. Some avatars claim, however, that this is merely the penultimate stage. They speak of a fourth state, called Non-dual Mysticism, in which identity is *held* at the level of content-less, unitive source while it is simultaneously incarnated and *lived* in these spacesuits of ours. It is walking the spiritual path with "both of God's legs," the transcendent, ineffable origin and the immanent, manifested journey.

However, all incarnations end; all manifestation ceases; whatever is born will grow, change and die. Only that which is "prior" to manifestation, what is unborn and uncreated, does *not* die. So finally, when we are done with all incarnating and all manifesting, the "game of God" folds back into what "preceded" form. The good news is that we practice this process nightly. Dreamless sleep is a return to the content-less consciousness which we can also experience through other advanced way stations on this spiritual safari. The first of these advanced way stations is a deep meditative, radically transformative experience that goes by many names e.g., Samadhi, Kensho, Ananda and is experienced in the middle of the clutter and noise of incarnation. It shifts perception so completely that it results in the creation of very different maps of the human experiment.

And the second of these advanced way stations is death. Interestingly, in the Hindu tradition, where "Samadhi" literally means, "with the Lord," the name given to death is, "Maha Samadhi," where Maha" means "Great." Death, then, is seen as the great union with God. It's the reason why death and sleep are sometimes confused and often used metaphorically of each other. The term, "he fell into his final sleep" is not just a euphemism for the trauma of death, it is a recognition that it is a condition which the soul experiences nightly. "To die, to sleep no more" said Shakespeare; before he went on to talk about

Hamlet’s fears, “For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause.”

In one beautiful story, Jesus is urged by Jairus, a synagogue official, to come and heal his 12-year-old daughter, who is seriously ill. By the time he arrives, the child has expired and the mourners are bending to their keening with gusto. He reprimands them and says, “Be gone! The child is not dead, she is sleeping.” and then proceeds to “wake” her and present her to her recently bereaved and now-rerieved parents. So death and sleep are not just cruel or evasive word tricks to deny or vilify a human experience; rather they are real experiences, one embraced nightly and the other at the end of each incarnation. Sleep is a series of practice laps for death, while death is a more radical and transformative rendition of the sleep.

In fact, death is a very profound state of consciousness or more accurately death is a collective term for many states of consciousness, all the way from the confused states of some newly-departed, to the fear-based addictive clinging-to-Earth states of others of the newly-departed, to the recognition and embrace of the white light of many more, to the gentle but thorough life-review in the presence of a heavenly mentor, to the healing-space state of consciousness in which “departed” souls recuperate from the vicissitude of incarnation, to the de-briefing with the higher Self (the atman of my returning jiva) and with the soul-group, to the next, enthusiastic phase of ongoing disincarnate evolution, to the taking of the bodhisattva vow, to total “extinction” of union-with-Source. All of these stages involve different states of consciousness, states from which our daytime maps of incarnated “reality” are pitifully inexact.

For grins, I want to do a simple three by five matrix (for the mathematically-challenged, a 15-paned window). In it, I want to briefly indicate how three of the bodies (gross, astral and mental) behave in five of the states of consciousness (daytime, dream, sleep, meditation and death.) Obviously, it is a rather simplistic model of a much more complex reality.

----- <b>Bodies</b> -----			
	<u>Gross</u>	<u>Astral</u>	<u>Mental</u>
States	<u>Daytime:</u> Active	<u>Active</u>	<u>Active</u>
	<u>Dream:</u> Inactive	<u>Active</u>	<u>Active</u>
of	<u>Sleep:</u> Inactive	<u>Inactive</u>	<u>Inactive</u>
Consciousness	<u>Meditation:</u> Less	<u>Less</u>	<u>Less</u>
	<u>Active</u>	<u>Active</u>	<u>Active</u>
	<u>Death:</u> Inactive	<u>Active</u>	<u>Active</u>

Of course the spectrum from “active” to “less active” to “inactive” has an infinite number of possibilities. So, even the gross body which appears to be totally inactive after death is actually orchestrating the re-distribution of its own molecular structure to the surrounding eco-system, through its “Shiva intelligence.” Also, the “less active” category in meditation for all three bodies goes all the way from a formless mystical state in which all three bodies are “inactive,” to beginner mediators for whom all three bodies will continue to

be rather active. And in “death,” of course, depending on the evolutionary stage of an individual soul, the astral body will shift significantly to positive emotions, while the mental body will have the power and the clarity to manifest outcomes immediately, without the buffer zone of confusing, competing agendas.

And finally to lighten up this analytical discussion, I want to end with a piece I wrote in July 1997. It gives a creative experiential flavor to what happens when we shift gears and shift states of consciousness. I named it after a real, mystical location in County Cork, Ireland.

### **Tobairín na Súil**

Loch Oighin, some six miles from Skibereen is, at 50 meters, the deepest lake in Ireland. Divers come from all over the world to sample its stratified flora and fauna. It is actually a sea-lake. A tiny opening in the rocks connects it to the Atlantic and the tides hissingly pour through it in great water torrents. When the tide is flowing, the sea level becomes higher than the lake level, because the ocean is attempting to squeeze itself into the lake through the small aperture. Eventually, of course, lake and sea reach the same level, but very soon the tide begins to ebb and then you have the same phenomenon in reverse. The water in the lake is not able to flow out as quickly as the sea level is falling, so there is another spectacular “waterfall” tumbling in the opposite direction. The lake level never quite catches up on this leg of the cycle. By low tide there is a discrepancy between the level of the lake and that of the ocean.

The lake contains fish and octopi that are not seen again in European waters until you go as far south as Portugal. It is altogether an extraordinary sight. I went there on July 27, 1997, with my father. I thought it as magic a place as I would see in my travels - but I was wrong! On our way back, my father remembered that there was a holy well nearby and, eventually, we found it. In fact, there are two holy wells, within 400 meters of each other. One was by the side of a little boreen and was gaudy, whitewashed and bedecked with rosary beads and holy pictures. The other was a little way into the woods. It was dark, unadorned and utterly mystical. The surface of this well only had the circumference of a large dinner plate, and it was only as deep as your average kitchen pot. It was surrounded by a few rickety flagstones and overhung by an oak tree. It was absolutely still there, with a tree-studded hill rising behind it - and I knew as soon as I saw it that I was in a “Caol Áit” (a “thin place” - the Irish name for a location where the veil separating the invisibly-sacred and visibly-secular orders of reality is diaphanous.)

I knelt on one of the rickety flag stones, peering into the well. A small hand-painted notice said “*Tobairín na súil*” which means “The little well of the eyes.” It obviously had a reputation for healing diseases of the eye. I knelt there for perhaps 15 minutes, transfixed. I didn’t know whether I was looking down or looking up. In the tiny pool, I could see the reflection of the branches of the oak tree, of the white fluffy clouds, and of the azure-blue sky far above my head. By changing my focus I could see mud and some fallen leaves at the bottom of the well. By refocusing again, I could look down through the well, through the center of the earth, out the other side of the globe and see the branches of an oak tree in the antipodes; I could see the fluffy clouds and the azure-blue of southern skies.

I refocused again and saw back into time - a time before Christianity had been invented, the time of Fionn MacCumhaill and the Fianna of Ireland. I saw Oisín and Niamh Chinn Óir, hopelessly in love, chasing each other in the waters of Tír na nÓg and then

uniting in the cosmic bliss of soul mates, where bodies blend, hearts harmonize, minds merge, and there is only the oneness of Spirit loving itself.

And I prayed. I prayed for the gift of vision. I splashed the water on my eyes, and asked that I might have the ability to see beyond the veil, and bring back wisdom; that I might recognize “Caol Áiteanna” whether I encountered them in physical locations or in the person of another.

If ever I meet a woman I want to marry, that is where I would want to exchange vows. If ever I wanted to conceive a child that is where I would want it to happen. If I needed to be ordained a priest over again, that is where I would want the ceremony to take place.

I asked that I might recognize that each one of us is “the Word made flesh”.