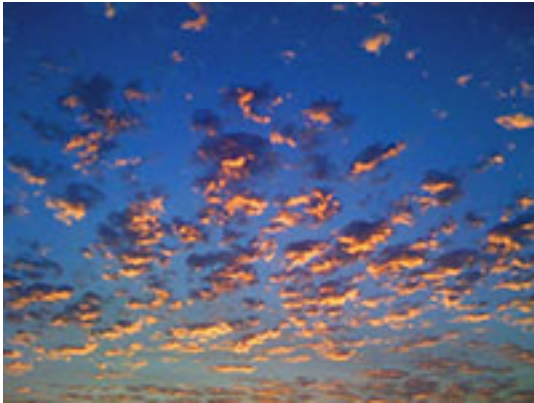




Distinctions Between Dream and Sleep Yoga

From *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep* by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

Sleep yoga is the focus of Ligmincha's upcoming two-week summer retreat beginning June 19 at Serenity Ridge. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche will be teaching on "Sleep of Clear Light: The Sleep Yoga Practice From the Bon Mother Tantra." [Learn more about the retreat.](#)



The normal process of sleep occurs as consciousness withdraws from the senses and the mind loses itself in distraction, thinning out in mental images and thoughts until it dissolves in darkness. Unconsciousness then lasts until dreams arise. When they do, the sense of self is reconstituted through dualistic relationship with the images of the dream until the next period of unconsciousness occurs. Alternating periods of unconsciousness and dream make up a normal night of sleep.

Sleep is dark to us because we lose consciousness in it. It seems to be empty of experience because we identify with the gross mind, which ceases to function during sleep. The period in which our identities collapse we call "falling asleep." We are conscious in dream because the moving mind is active, giving rise to a dream ego with which we identify. In sleep, however, the subjective self does not arise.



Salgye Du Dalma, the guardian of sleep

Although we define sleep as unconsciousness, the darkness and the experiential blankness are not the essence of sleep. For the pure awareness that is our basis there is no sleep. When not afflicted with obscurations, dreams, or thoughts, the moving mind dissolves into the nature of mind; then, rather than the sleep of ignorance, clarity, peacefulness, and bliss arise. When we develop the ability to abide in that awareness we find that sleep is luminous. This luminosity is the clear light. It is our true nature.

As explained in previous chapters, dreams arise from karmic traces. I used the analogy of light being projected through film to make movies, where the karmic traces are the photographs, awareness is the light that illuminates them, and the dreams are projected on the base (kunzhi). Dream yoga develops lucidity in relationship to the dream images. But in sleep yoga there is no film and no projection. Sleep yoga is imageless. The practice is the direct recognition of awareness by awareness, light illuminating itself. It is luminosity without images of any kind. Later, when stability in the clear light is developed, even dream images will not distract the practitioner, and the dream period of sleep will also occur in the clear light. These dreams are then called clear light dreams, which are different than dreams of clarity. In clear light dreams, the clear light is not obscured.

We lose the real sense of the clear light as soon as we conceptualize it or try to imagine it. There is neither subject nor object in the clear light. If there is any identification with a subject, then there is no entry into the clear light. Actually, nothing “enters” the clear light: the clear light is the base recognizing itself. There is neither “you” nor “it.” Using dualistic language to describe the non-dual necessarily results in paradox. The only way to know the clear light is to know it directly.

(Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's book, *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*, is available from Ligmincha's [Tibet Shop](#) .)