

Sushupti

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Sushupti means deep, dreamless sleep. It is the third of the four classical states of consciousness: *jagrat*, waking; *svapna*, dreaming; *sushupti*, dreamless sleep; and *turiya*, the fourth state beyond dreamless sleep. To the ordinary waking mind, *sushupti* seems like blankness. One wakes and says, "I slept; I knew nothing." Theosophy asks whether this proves the absence of consciousness, or only the inability of the waking brain to remember what occurred on another plane.

H.P. Blavatsky teaches that dreamless sleep is one of the states of consciousness known in Oriental esotericism, and that in each such state a different portion of the mind comes into action. This means *sushupti* is not mere nothingness. The physical brain may be blank, but the deeper Ego may be functioning in another mode. What is empty to waking memory may be full to the soul.

Two distinctions help preserve the teaching. An absence of waking recollection is a fact about what the waking mind can report. It does not, by itself, settle the philosophical question of whether consciousness was wholly absent. Conversely, the Theosophical account of inward activity should not be treated as a verified report of a particular night's experience. It offers a framework for study. The individual student still needs honesty about what is remembered, inferred, or accepted provisionally from a teaching.

Professor Iyer gives this teaching a practical depth. He states that meaningful correlations between noumenal causes and disconnected events are sensed in *sushupti*, dreamless sleep. The lower mind may not understand these correlations, but something deeper can touch the hidden relations between causes, meanings, and events that waking thought ordinarily keeps apart.

The relation of the four states is also important. Dreaming continues through images and experiences that differ from ordinary waking perception. *Sushupti* denotes dreamless depth, where those familiar contents are no longer present to the same reporting mind. *Turiya* is spiritual wakefulness beyond that condition. The distinction does not imply that the states are sealed compartments or that consciousness simply travels through four places. Professor Iyer's account encourages inquiry into their continuity and their different degrees of awareness.

Still, *sushupti* must not be confused with enlightenment. Patanjali classifies sleep as one of the *chittavrittis*, the modifications of the mind-field. The mere temporary cessation of mental contents, as in sleep, does not liberate the immortal spirit. Unconscious withdrawal from *maya*

only makes bondage unconscious. Therefore *sushupti* is both a door into inward depth and not yet conscious spiritual mastery.

This is why the comparison with meditation must be made carefully. A mind can grow quiet through fatigue, or lose track of its thoughts, without attaining spiritual insight. In meditation, the intention is to develop steadiness and lucid attention within an ethical discipline. *Abhyasa* and *vairagya*, practice and detachment, address the tendencies that scatter or bind the mind. The ordinary fact of sleeping does not replace that work, although reflection on sleep can challenge the assumption that waking thought is the whole of consciousness.

Sushupti also has a cosmic analogue. Professor Iyer describes the long night of non-manifestation, when the objective universe has dissolved into *Karana* and the One Form of Existence is in causeless, dreamless sleep. Human dreamless sleep therefore mirrors, in miniature, the rhythm of *pralaya*: manifestation, withdrawal, hidden replenishment, and renewed emergence.

The cosmic analogy is an analogy of rhythm and withdrawal. The nightly suspension of outward activity and the dissolution of a manifested universe are not events of the same scale or kind. Their relation becomes useful when it teaches the mind to consider periods of latency as part of a larger continuity. A seed held in reserve is not yet a growing tree, yet its quiet condition cannot be understood merely as the absence of a tree. The image helps inquiry without proving the doctrine.

The compassionate side of the doctrine is striking. Professor Iyer says that every human being receives some benediction during deep, dreamless sleep, what Shakespeare called “the balm of hurt minds.” Each night, the hard surfaces of the waking personality are loosened. The brain rests. The senses withdraw. Something of the immortal nature may receive replenishment, even if the waking person cannot remember it.

The disciple, however, is asked to become more conscious of what is ordinarily unconscious. Through *tapas* and daily meditation, one may increase continuity of consciousness between waking and sleeping, between life and death. *Sushupti* hints at inner depth; *dhyana* makes inward withdrawal conscious; *turiya* crowns the process as spiritual wakefulness.

This has ordinary-life use. How one enters sleep matters. The thoughts carried into night, the motives entertained before rest, the resentments clung to, and the gratitude practiced or neglected help prepare the inner field. A gentle evening discipline can be simple: release the day, soften unfinished reactions, offer mistakes into learning, remember the welfare of others, and turn the mind toward the Spiritual Sun.

An evening review can therefore remain modest. We might recall one moment when attention failed, identify a repair that belongs to tomorrow, and let the review end. Repeating accusations against ourselves or others only keeps the day's agitation active. A quiet remembrance of shared life gives the mind another direction. This is an application of self-study and benevolent intention, not a method for guaranteeing a dreamless state or controlling what happens during sleep.

Sushupti also teaches humility. The waking personality imagines itself to be the knower and controller, yet every night it disappears. Still, life continues and the soul abides. This should soften the tyranny of the waking "I." It also deepens compassion, because every human being is nightly carried into depths unknown to outward conduct.

Human Solidarity is deepened by remembering that the visible personality does not disclose the whole person. Someone met in irritability or exhaustion has an inward life that we cannot read from a single encounter. This does not excuse harmful conduct. It asks us to respond to the conduct while leaving room for capacities and struggles that remain unseen. The doctrine of a deeper Ego supports reverence for that hidden dimension of our common humanity.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception may begin in the household. A person's need for rest belongs within the shared life of the family, alongside the needs of those who depend on them. Arranging a quieter period, sharing an unfinished duty, or lowering unnecessary demands can become an act of consideration. We need not know another's inner state to honour the conditions that allow renewal. The cosmic teaching thus suggests a humane question: how can our arrangements make room for the rhythms of the lives around us?

The morning offers a corresponding opportunity. Before rebuilding the previous day's judgments, one can return to a clear intention for the day ahead. An unresolved matter may still need action, but its treatment need not repeat yesterday's agitation. This small renewal gives the study of continuity an ethical expression. The value lies in the quality of the ensuing act, rather than in a claim to remember an invisible experience.

Sushupti is therefore not the end of the path, but a sacred sign. It teaches that silence is not always emptiness, darkness is not always absence, and forgetting is not always loss. The sacred darkness of dreamless sleep reminds us that consciousness is vaster than the waking self, and that the hidden benediction of night may become, through meditation and service, the awakened luminosity of the day.

Glossary

Abhyasa — Steady, repeated practice; the effort to maintain a chosen state of attention.

Buddhi — Spiritual intuition or wisdom; the principle through which higher discernment illumines mind.

Chittavritti — A modification or movement of the mind-field; *chittavrittis* is the plural.

Daimon — An inward spiritual guide or divine intelligence in the philosophical usage of the passage.

Dhyana — Sustained meditation or contemplation.

Jagrat — The ordinary waking state of consciousness.

Karana — Cause or causal ground; used of the state into which manifestation is withdrawn.

Klesha — An affliction that binds consciousness; *kleshas* is the plural.

Maya — Illusion or conditioned appearance; the tendency to take the relative as final reality.

Pralaya — Dissolution or a period of non-manifestation.

Sushupti — Deep, dreamless sleep, distinguished from *turiya* or spiritual wakefulness.

Svapna — The dreaming state; also written *swapna*.

Tapas — The concentrated effort of contemplation, self-discipline, and purification.

Turiya — The fourth state of spiritual wakefulness, beyond waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep.

Vairagya — Detachment or dispassion, joined to discriminative understanding.

Yogin — A practitioner of yoga; *yogins* and *yogi* are related forms.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer — “Evolution and Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 128.

“Through daily meditation upon the Spiritual Sun, *Buddhi* is aroused and sheds its light upon the noumenal meaning of experience, the internal relations in human consciousness which are connected with the external conditions of material evolution. Hermetic wisdom bridges the gap between ideation, image and form, between universal Spirit and differentiated matter, between the cosmic and the human, between the abstract and the concrete.”

Meditation thought: Consider an experience in relation to a wider pattern. Keep an inferred meaning distinct from a fact you can directly establish.

2. R.N. Iyer — “Evolution and Consciousness”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 128.

“Meaningful correlations between noumenal causes and disconnected events are sensed in *sushupti*, dreamless sleep. *Dhyana* or meditation dissolves the boundaries of the separative self

and prepares the awakened individual to attain unbroken continuity of consciousness. The process of evolution is reversed, the illusory succession of events is shattered by insight, and spiritual wakefulness (*turiya*) is eventually experienced."

Meditation thought: Distinguish inward depth from lucid continuity. Let the teaching give meditation a direction without making sleep itself a claim to attainment.

3. R.N. Iyer — "Consciousness and Existence", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 43.

"During the long night of non-manifestation, when the previous objective universe has dissolved into that *Karana* and is held in solution in space, which is filled with the unconscious pulsation of the Great Breath, the One Form of Existence is in causeless, dreamless sleep."

Meditation thought: Contemplate withdrawal as part of a larger rhythm. The analogy invites inquiry into latency; it does not equate a night's sleep with cosmic dissolution.

4. R.N. Iyer — "Gods, Monads and Atoms", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 283.

"The second hall is the hall of learning, in which there are beautiful flowers, although under every flower a serpent is coiled. It is the psychical realm. People enter it when they take drugs. Some enter it without any adventitious aids just because they are psychically sensitive, mentally passive, or given to protracted daydreaming. It is also a state of consciousness into which all men enter during sleep, when the brain of the physical body is less active and more rested."

Meditation thought: Keep the psychic realm and dreamless depth distinct. A striking image or altered condition does not establish spiritual knowledge.

5. R.N. Iyer — "Gods, Monads and Atoms", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume I, p. 284.

"This realm is treacherous because unless there are criteria, unless as an individuating, thinking being one is able to sift and select, weigh, accept and give meaning to images and events, one is lost. One is liable to be misled. At its highest level great mystics enter into trance states that are extremely beautiful, and yet, when they come out of those states they can mistranslate."

Meditation thought: Bring discernment to the interpretation of an inward experience. Beauty and vividness alone cannot certify its meaning.

6. R.N. Iyer — "The Eye of Shiva", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, pp. 206–207.

"If watchful and vigilant travellers should grow weary along the way and pause to rest for a few moments under the empyrean – where there are no boundaries – they can collect themselves and draw within, experiencing an exhilarating sense of release from the clamour and cacophony of the age. When they are withdrawn from the noises of the world and repose in inward silence, they may experience moments of serene self-forgetfulness and even communion with the *daimon*."

Meditation thought: Allow a quiet interval to loosen unnecessary agitation. Return from it with attention available for the life around you.

7. R.N. Iyer — “The Eye of Shiva”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 207.

“Through the immense strength of vision of the immortal soul, every human being receives some benediction during deep, dreamless sleep, what Shakespeare called ‘the balm of hurt minds.’”

Meditation thought: Receive the image of benediction with gratitude. Let it encourage respect for the inward life that another person cannot display to you.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Samadhi Pada”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 271.

“Given this delusive condition, the mere temporary cessation of modifications, such as occurs in sleep, will not help to liberate man’s immortal spirit. As *maya* is pervasive illusion, humanity as it knows itself is a part of it. Ignorant or involuntary withdrawal from its action only makes it unconscious, and this is why sleep is classed as one of the *chittavrittis*.”

Meditation thought: Do not confuse an absence of remembered thoughts with liberation. Ask what makes attention more honest and more awake.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Samadhi Pada”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 271.

“Patanjali taught that deliverance can only come through *abhyasa*, assiduous practice, and *vairagya*, dispassionate detachment. *Abhyasa* is the active opposite of passive sleep, and *vairagya* frees one from all attachments, including the *kleshas*, which induce misconceptions. Together, these two mirror in the world of change that which is changeless beyond it.”

Meditation thought: Join steadiness of practice with detachment from a demanded result. Both qualities help protect inquiry from impatience.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Spiritual Perception”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 145.

“Through *tapas* and daily meditation one may appreciate the feasibility of increasing continuity of consciousness between waking and sleeping, between life and death, bridging all the pairs of opposites and transcending the succession of time. One may then come to comprehend that the Third Eye has retreated from without inwardly because an earlier phase of the logic of evolution extruded it from within without.”

Meditation thought: Begin with a continuity you can practice: remember a worthy intention through a change of circumstances.

11. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Volume I, p. 47.

“Dreamless sleep is one of the seven states of consciousness known in Oriental esotericism. In each of these states a different portion of the mind comes into action; or as a Vedantin would express it, the individual is conscious in a different plane of his being.”

Meditation thought: Distinguish the limits of waking recollection from the teaching about other modes of consciousness. Leave room for what has not been directly known.

12. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment I, notes on the four states, p. 4.

“The three states of consciousness, which are *Jagrat*, the waking; *Swapna*, the dreaming; and *Sushupti*, the deep sleeping state. These three *Yogi* conditions, lead to the fourth, or — The *Turiya*, that beyond the dreamless state, the one above all, a state of high spiritual consciousness.”

Meditation thought: Keep dreamless sleep and the fourth state clearly distinguished. Let that distinction sharpen study and temper premature conclusions.