

Mindfulness-awareness and sleeping

An excerpt from SD 60.1e Delusion and Experience © Piya Tan, 2023b (forthcoming).

3.6.1 In the “clear awareness” (*sampajañña*) section of satipatthana, it is said that “**in sleeping, in waking** (*sutte jāgarite*), one is clearly aware of what one is doing.”¹ All aspects of sleeping are meant: reclining, falling asleep, actually sleeping, waking up and rising. Mindfulness with clear awareness fulfils a special role in relation to sleeping. Here is a description of how the Buddha himself is mindful and aware in this regard, as stated in **the Suppati Sutta** (S 4.7):

Then the Blessed One, having done walking meditation during much of the night in the open, the night being near dawn, having washed the feet and entered the hut, lay down on the right side in the lion’s posture, with one foot on the other foot, with mindfulness and awareness, having given attention to the perception of rising up again. (S 4.7)²

Falling asleep in this manner—says **the Muṭṭhasati Sutta** (A 5.210) and the Vinaya—improves the quality of one’s sleep and prevents bad dreams and nocturnal emissions.³

3.6.2 In such contexts of sleeping as the abovementioned, the task of mindfulness and awareness are clearly related to **time**, that is, both as moment (of falling asleep, of awaking) and duration (while asleep). As we know, there were in the Buddha’s time neither clocks nor watches to keep track of time, and monastics would not be able to rely on an alarm clock, for example, to ensure that they wake up early. Hence, they had to be mindful and aware of the time and their sleeping pattern.

As a rule, renunciants would not sleep through the night until sunrise. Thus, they had to condition themselves to rise early for their early-morning practice. Through mindfulness and awareness, they train themselves to perceive the proper time of rising. In this sense, mindfulness and awareness need to be continuously present while they sleep. In fact, when we notice how we time ourself in this manner with proper sleep, we do not need any extraordinary effort to rise on time.⁴

¹ M 10,8(7) (SD 13.3). “In being asleep, in being awake” *sutte jāgarite* (both loc of reference). Comy glosses *sutte* as *sayane*, “lying down, reclining.” For details, see SD 13.1 (3.6.2).

² *Atha kho bhagavā bahud eva rattiṃ abbhokāse caṅkamitvā rattiyaṃ paccusa, samayaṃ pāde pakkhāletvā vihāraṃ pavisitvā dakkhiṇena passena sīha, seyyaṃ kappesi pāde pādaṃ accādhāya sato sampajāno utṭhāna, saññaṃ manasi karitvā.* (S 4.7/1:107), SD 32.13; also **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,46/1:249), SD 49.4.

³ V 1:295,14-24; A 5.210/3:251 (SD 103.12).

⁴ Based on this, we can perhaps understand the nature of **lucid dreaming**, such as in Vajrayāna: N Norbu & M Katz, *Dream yoga and the practice of natural light*, Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1992; A Crescenzi & F Torricelli, “Tibetan literature on dreams: materials for a bibliography,” *The Tibet Journal* 22,1 1997:58-82; T Wangyal, *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*, Snow Lion, 1998. The application of mindfulness seems to allow us to actually be “present” in our own dreams, even to participate in it (T Stumbrys, D Erlacher, & P Malinowski, “Meta-awareness during day and night: the relationship between mindfulness and lucid dreaming,” *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 34,4 2015:415-433). A lucid dream prob occurs in some kind of subconscious state between the life-continuum (*bhavaṅga*) and the conscious state.

3.6.3 Analayo comments that “possessing mindfulness and awareness while asleep would presumably be a fairly relaxed modality of establishing these two qualities, otherwise one would not be able to fall asleep” (2019f:868). In waking life, we need a lucid level of mindfulness and awareness to discern any unwholesome state in our mind and to deflect it. The suttas are quite clear about this.

The (Dasaka) Sacitta Sutta (A 10.51) gives a short but remarkable teaching of practical “mind-reading” for oneself to detect unwholesome states in our mind, and overcome them, thus:

If, bhikshus, on reflecting, a monk⁵ knows thus:

- (1) ‘I dwell with much covetousness;
- (2) I dwell with much ill will in mind;
- (3) I dwell in the grip of much sloth and torpor;
- (4) I dwell with much restlessness;
- (5) I dwell with much doubt;
- (6) I dwell with much anger;
- (7) I dwell with a very defiled mind;
- (8) I dwell with a very agitated body;
- (9) I dwell very often lazy;
- (10) I dwell very often lacking in concentration’—
then, bhikshus, that monk should apply his utmost will, effort, energy, and
unrelenting mindfulness and clear awareness,
to the abandoning of the bad unwholesome states.

Bhikshus, just as one **whose clothes are ablaze, whose head is ablaze**,
desire, and effort, and industry, and perseverance, and persistence,
or mindfulness, or clear awareness, beyond measure,
would be made, to extinguish that blaze on his clothes or his head.⁶

⁵ “Monk” here is a synecdoche for anyone present at a teaching session: SD 4.9 (5.3); SD 13.1 (3.1.1).

⁶ *Seyyathā’pi āvuso āditta’celo vā āditta,sīso vā tass’eva celassa vā sīsassa vā nibbāpanāya adhimattarāṃ.*
This is a popular parable in the Aṅguttara, evoking the urgency of self-review and meditation: **Samādhi S 2** (A 4.93/2:93), SD 95.8; **(Chakka) Maraṇa-s-sati S 2** (A 6.20/3:307, 308); **(Aṭṭhaka) Maraṇa-s-sati S 2** (A 8.74/4:320 f), SD 48.6; **(Satthā) Sa,citta S** (A 10.51,4/2/5:93), SD 5.13; **(Sa,citta) Sariputta S** (A 10.52/5:95) = A 10.51; **Samatha S** (A 10.54/5:99 f), SD 83.8; **Parihāna S** (A 10.55,7.2/5:103 + 8.2/5:105), SD 43.5. The blazing head (*āditta,sīsa*) parable is mentioned in connection with working at the goal of renunciation, in Comys (MA 1:95; SA 1:48; ThaA 1:112; PmA 1:261). **Jātaka Nidāna** records a related parable of the burning house, as the

Even so, bhikshus, that monk *should apply his desire, and effort, and industry, and perseverance, and persistence, and mindfulness, and clear awareness, beyond measure, to the abandoning of the bad unwholesome states.* (A 10.51,4/5:93), SD 5.13

From this proactive passage, we can safely deduce that mindfulness and awareness in this context involve a constant monitoring of our mental state. When our mind is overcome by an unwholesome condition, we need resolute effort to free our mind. Even then, such an effort still needs some monitoring and enhancing to safeguard the mind from overdoing it.

R815 Inspiration 473

TAN Beng Sin ©2023

Bodhisattva reflects on his life, “The threefold existence (the sense-world, the form world, and the formless world) appeared to be like a burning house” (*tayo bhavā āditta,geha,sadisā khāyimsu*) (J 1:61).