In your imagination, abiding at the clear light level of consciousness (without losing meditation), you visualize your subtle body departing from your gross body, and you imagine going to different places; then finally you return and the subtle body becomes reabsorbed in your normal form.

Once you are experienced at visualizing this during daytime practice, then when you fall asleep an analogous eightfold process occurs naturally and quickly. That’s the best method for enabling you to recognize the dreamless sleep state as the dreamless sleep state. But without deeper meditative experience of this in the daytime, it’s very difficult to realize this dissolution as you fall asleep.

Signs:

Stage One: earth into water

Let's get into meditative posture, nice and balanced and comfortable. Close your eyes. It's ideal in the Buddhist meditation to leave them half open so that you have a half curtain window so you don't make a duality between inside and outside. You don't pay attention to either the inside or the outside but you withdraw your mental attention away from your visual field. Then just observe your breathing inward and outward and try to count your breaths to ten. If you lose your count by being distracted by thinking, go back to one. Count on the inhales.

Now imagine that you are dying and you are losing sight and memory of your town, your house or room, the people with you. Also your body starts to go numb, your breathing becomes labored and you lose track of who's drawing breath. You forget to breathe. And then you enter first the realm of hallucination. You feel like a sort of fainting, melting sensation. There's a visual swirl all around you but not in your eyes, you're not seeing. It's sort of in back of your eyes, in the center of your brain behind the eyes. It's a swirling visionary state which is mirage like and illusion like. And you feel kind of a melting. This is the earth element dissolving into water. Don't be frightened. Just let yourself go limp.

Stage Two: water into fire

Stage Three: fire into air

Stage Four: air into consciousness

And then you feel a little warm, kind of a blush of inner heat. Everything seems to be smoky around you like there was a fire somewhere nearby. Don't be frightened of that because it's just the water element dissolving into the fire element. This cools and it's as if the embers are sort of sputtering or as if the blue green light of the fireflies, zillions of fire flies are swarming around you and within you really, because there is no in and out here and they are blinking their lights. Everything is blinking and swirling. And that is the fire element dissolving into the wind element. Then this swirling, flickering pale light solidifies and everything in your whole world becomes a single, still, candle flame. That is the wind element dissolving into consciousness or pure space.

Stage Five: consciousness into luminance

Stage Six: luminance into radiance

Stage Seven: radiance into imminence

Then this candle flame expands and expands and you feel your awareness expanding and expanding and it is no longer in a point but is now a vast realm or environment. And you enter into this state of luminance, into the infinite moonlit sky, white light everywhere and you as infinite, losing your sense of embodiment for the moment. Then this infinite white moonlit sky turns into an infinite sunlit sky, more reddish-orange, more hot and radiant. And you are that vastness of the sun. You feel more balanced in space. You resist retracting back into your body or trying to. When that stabilizes you then move deeper from the realm of radiance of sunlit sky into the realm of imminence, like a dark-lit sky. Everything is dark and you are very, very close to complete unawareness but still lucidly aware in the brilliant blackness, although now you're aware that you are content to be unaware in a more loose way.

Stage Eight: imminence into transparency

Finally you come to the clear light. Differentiated and interrelated things re-emerge within a sense of infinity of space, re-emerge to be experienced from all sides from within, not just from an observer's perspective. Everything is transparent like glass and completely mutually interdependent. You feel very, very calm and peaceful and extremely alert and aware in a multi-dimensional and multi-perspectival way. This is the most restful state in the universe, the most restorative, energizing, and liberating. It seems to be so subtle that it seems to be past in a split second. And since we do not feel balanced and content when we are not grasping onto any differentiation or any pattern or recognition, we revert right back into the dark light, and from there into the sun light, from there into the moon light, from there into the candle flame, from there into the firefly zone, from there into the smoke zone, from there into the hallucination zone and from there we go back into our ordinary bodies.

We dedicate the merit of this exploration to our eventual, complete conscious ability to traverse these stages. And we do this for the benefit of all beings.

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Once you are able to recognize the clear light of sleep as the clear light of sleep, that recognition can enable you to sustain that state for a longer period.

The main purpose of dream yoga in the context of tantric practice is to first recognize the dream state as dream state. Then, in the next stage of the practice you focus your attention on the heart center of your dream body and try to withdraw the vital energy into that center. That leads to an experience of the clear light of sleep, which arises when the dream state ceases.