

Sleep Interruption & A Good Night's Rest ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Sleep interruption on the meditative path is actually, I would say, not uncommon, particularly
00:00:14 at retreats, but it can also sort of spread into daily life.
00:00:21 We can look upon the meditative path as a journey from the surface of consciousness
00:00:29 to the source of consciousness.
00:00:32 Another way we can look upon it is that we are sort of pouring concentration, clarity,
00:00:40 and equanimity from the surface down into the depths.
00:00:45 Actually those two metaphors refer to exactly the same thing.
00:00:49 If we take the second metaphor, that here we are on the surface and we're sort of shining
00:00:54 the flashlight of mindfulness on the surface of consciousness, and some photons are trickling
00:01:00 down into the depths, giving the depths what they need to rewire themselves.
00:01:09 If we take that metaphor, then it's not surprising that there should be some interruption in
00:01:19 or some impact on sleep.
00:01:23 Sometimes as the result of meditating, a person may find that they sleep deeper and better
00:01:31 than they ever dreamed possible.
00:01:35 Other times there can be exactly the opposite effect.
00:01:39 There's consciousness inside the sleep.
00:01:41 You don't really, you may have difficulty falling asleep or there's still awareness
00:01:48 going on during the sleep and so forth.
00:01:51 I should say that the long-term effects will be to sleep both deep and consciously.
00:02:02 So if in the short term you find that you're not sleeping deeply because some consciousness
00:02:09 is coming in there, then there's no need to freak out.
00:02:15 There's a very senior vipassana master named S.N.
00:02:20 Goenka who teaches in the U Ba Khin lineage of Burmese vipassana.
00:02:27 He gives some very good advice to students about what to do if you have any disturbance
00:02:33 in your sleep patterns.
00:02:35 He says do two things.
00:02:38 First, continue to lie down with the body very still so that the body physically gets
00:02:46 rest.
00:02:47 In other words, don't flail around, don't get up, actually don't even get up and sit
00:02:52 and meditate.
00:02:54 Make sure the body gets well rested by being lying down and still.
00:02:58 That's guideline number one.
00:03:02 Guideline number two, make sure that consciousness gets rested by maintaining a continuous meditation
00:03:10 technique.
00:03:12 So those are the guidelines I give to people if they get disturbances in their sleep due
00:03:18 to the practice.
00:03:19 As I say, it's not inevitably the case that you're going to get disturbances like that.

00:03:25 Meditative practice may make you sleep deeper than you ever dreamed possible.

00:03:31 But on occasion, it could have the opposite effect.

00:03:33 In fact, the guidelines of keep the body still and relaxed and keep consciousness engaged

00:03:40 in a meditation technique, I apply not just to the effects of meditation in disturbing

00:03:47 sleep, but it's my general guideline for anybody that's having insomnia or difficulty sleeping

00:03:56 for whatever the reason may be, including emotional turmoil or physical pain or just

00:04:04 some sort of sleep disorder.

00:04:06 I say part of the negative cycle that people get into is they have difficulty getting to

00:04:14 sleep or staying asleep.

00:04:17 And then they're freaking out because, well, if I don't get a good night's sleep, I'm going

00:04:21 to have a crummy day.

00:04:24 And then the worry over that further agitates and prevents them from getting sleep.

00:04:32 So how to break that vicious cycle is a cognitive reframing.

00:04:37 Instead of the notion, I've got to get a good night's sleep, you entertain the notion, I've

00:04:44 got to get a good night's rest, which may or may not involve actually losing consciousness.

00:04:52 It's possible to get a good night's rest without losing consciousness at all.

00:04:58 And in fact, in very experienced meditators, that's indeed what happens.

00:05:02 I had one Taiwanese master that I lived with for about a year in southern Taiwan in the

00:05:09 city of Tainan, and he attempted never to lose consciousness at night.

00:05:15 He would sit for four hours from eight to twelve, and then he would lie down for four

00:05:23 hours from twelve to four.

00:05:27 During that period when he would lie down, he would maintain a mudra like this, which

00:05:32 would be a biofeedback device.

00:05:34 If he lost consciousness, it would collapse and wake him up.

00:05:38 And he attempted every single night to spend the entire night conscious, but deeply, deeply

00:05:44 resting.

00:05:45 And I've trained people with chronic pain and whatever who can't get to sleep really

00:05:52 ever very well, I train them to get deep rest, keep the body still, keep a technique going.

00:06:03 So if the disturbance in sleep happens for any reason, either because these photons are

00:06:09 trickling down, causing the unconscious to rewire itself, and so you have weird dreams

00:06:16 or difficulty sleeping, or just whatever the cause may be that's disturbing the sleep in

00:06:26 terms of dreams or not falling asleep, so what you do is you simply keep the body still

00:06:36 and keep your technique going.

00:06:38 And as the result of that, you will train yourself to get deep rest, good rest.

00:06:46 And in very experienced meditators, yes, it is true, the difference between waking and

00:06:53 sleeping sort of goes away.

00:06:56 In other words, like the Christian mystics used to say in the Middle Ages, ego dormio

00:07:02 sed cor meum vigalet, I sleep but my heart waketh.

00:07:08 You have the depth of sleep but there's consciousness there and that is a very fulfilling state

00:07:17 of consciousness to put it mildly.