

Yogic Sleep and Meditation States During Holotropic Breathwork

By Kylea Taylor



Kylea Taylor, M.S., M.F.T. is a California licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (MFC #34901) and is a senior trainer for the Grof Transpersonal Training at www.holotropic.com. She is the author of *The Breathwork Experience* and *The Ethics of Caring* and Editor of *Practicing Holotropic Breathwork: A Decade of Articles from The Inner Door*. She is the President of Hanford Mead Publishers, Inc. which has just published the new book, *SoulCollage* by Seena B. Frost. Kylea has a private practice in Santa Cruz, California, USA. www.soulcollage.com / www.hanfordmead.com.

Sometimes people will arrive at the group sharing with either no mandala, or a beautiful mandala, and a report that they have no idea what happened.

"I must have fallen asleep," they offer, wistfully, after hearing the vivid stories of the other participants. There is usually a belying radiance about them, and upon further probing, they usually do report a feeling of serenity and a sense that "something" happened $\frac{3}{4}$ they just don't know what.

My theory is that such people are experiencing one of the meditation states which have been described by very specific Sanskrit terms for thousands of years. I have begun to include a reference to these states in the Introductory Talk along with the descriptions of other possible holotropic experiences. I usually say something quite simple, such as:

"Sometimes the inner wisdom decides that the conscious, censoring mind needs to be turned off in order for some kind of healing to occur below the level of consciousness. People often think they have fallen asleep, but it is practically impossible to breathe heavily for an hour and then fall into ordinary sleep. When we have observed people during a "sleep" episode, we have noticed that their breathing pattern is unlike normal sleep. Yogis have identified many meditation states with

Sanskrit terms to differentiate them from ordinary sleep. It is not necessary to have a dramatic experience or even to remember one's experience to have had a profound and healing experience."

When participants are reminded about this after having such an experience, it usually provides sufficient reassurance for people that "something Happened" and that their own experience was an important one.

Some people, however, want to know even more about the yogic sleep/meditational states. Whether or not they have conscious memory of their experiences, some of the information below may be of interest to some Holotropic Breathwork participants.

Tandra

Yogic Drowsiness is experienced in meditation and is different from a tired drowsiness. When prana, life energy, begins to be released, the body becomes further relaxed and loose. Yawns come in quick succession. This often appears to be happening in Holotropic Breathwork as people cross the threshold between ordinary and nonordinary consciousness and need to be reminded by their Sitters to breathe. The increased prana drives the external organs or limbs to perform numerous movements. After the external organs become fatigued and inactive, the prana begins to do subtle work in the internal organs.

Yoga Nidra

This means Yogic Sleep. After the external organs have moved and become fatigued, the prana becomes stabilized and generates a state called Yoga Nidra. This is a state which may be experienced in meditation or during the night or in a nap as part of sleep, but is not ordinary sleep. The mind is deeply introverted. If it is a very deep state, there are no thoughts or dreams. If it is not so deep, there are dreams, but the mind remains more focused than in ordinary dreams. In a Yoga Nidra dream there is concentration on detail in the dream and the "action" of the dream moves very slowly and vividly. It does not flit from one scene or topic to another. In deep Yogic Sleep after the release of prana, the mind is not attached to the body or to prana and can rest deeply. Its main characteristic is very slow breathing. It may be so slow, it seems to have stopped, but it does not fully stop. This state comes on slowly and leaves slowly.

Murcha

This means Swoon. Ordinary swoon is a physical disorder. Yogic swoon occurs when the prana tries to move up through the body and hits a blockage. As meditation (or Breathwork) practice continues, the energy passages through the body are gradually cleansed and the Swoon state no longer occurs. A high degree of spiritual concentration is required before anyone experiences Swoon. There are two kinds. One is Videhalaya, in which there is no physical awareness, only identification with the astral body. The other is Prakritilaya, in which there is no physical or astral awareness but only identification with the usual body. In both there are no thoughts, dualities, and desires. The breathing process in Murcha comes to a sudden halt, not gradually as in Yoga Nidra. And the person returns to consciousness suddenly as well. All ordinary thoughts, dualities, and desires return as well, when the swoon passes.

Jada Samadhi

In this state the body remains static and the mind becomes unconscious. It is closer to swoon than samadhi. The body is locked into one position if sitting, whereas in Murcha it would fall down if sitting. The mind is even more concentrated than in Yoga Nidra.

Sabija Samadhi

This is a very high level of meditation where there is no loss of consciousness, and there is very slow breathing. The mind and the prana still exist.

Nirbija Samadhi

This is the highest level of meditation where the mind and the prana dissolve and there is only Consciousness. The breath may stop completely.

Reference

Kripalanada, S. (1977.) Science of Meditation. Bombay, India: New Karnodaya Press.

Copyright © 1991 by Kylea Taylor