

# Liberation Is Not Worth Losing Sleep Over

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Sandi:** In *mithya* (duality) there are three states: the waking state, the dream state and the deep-sleep state.

Can we say that these three states stand at the same level of apparent reality, meaning that in the apparent reality they are all three as “real” as the others?

**James:** Yes. They are all equally unreal. The teaching negates all three and shows that the only invariable factor in all states is you, existence/consciousness.

**Sandi:** If that is true, does that mean that:

1. Although the unenlightened *jiva* experiences the waking state as “real” and the dream state as “unreal” (although worth interpreting), actually the ideas and action of the waking *jiva* and the dreams of the dreaming *jiva* are at the same level of apparent reality; they both hold the same level of ignorance; they have exactly the same differentiation to *satya*.

**James:** Yes.

**Sandi:** 2. It makes no difference to *Isvara* whether or what a *jiva* does, thinks or dreams something.

**James:** Correct. *Isvara* is a principle, like gravity. Gravity doesn’t care if an object is small or huge.

**Sandi:** 3. Doing *karma yoga* will clean up ignorance and unfold the qualifications for the assimilation of Vedanta; these *sattvic* qualities should not only have an impact on the waking state, but also on the dream state and on the quality of the deep-sleep state (that last one is still a source of pain in the Sandi-*jiva*!).

**James:** *Karma yoga* won’t clean up ignorance. It is a kind of necessary ignorance or, you might say, a useful kind of relative knowledge. Only knowledge cleans ignorance. *Karma yoga* is therapy. It cleans up emotional stuff so that *jnana yoga* can remove the ignorance.

**Sandi:** I got it, and it is helpful to say that in *Maya* there is a kind of necessary ignorance, or a relative knowledge. This gives sense to *karma yoga* as a “therapy” because it confronts the *jiva* with its individual consciousness, its feeling of right discrimination between *dharmic* and non-*dharmic* actions. *Karma yoga* purifies the *jiva*-mind from all the stuff that stands in the way of proper understanding of the Vedanta-knowledge. *Karma yoga* is the inquiry process of the *jiva* on its way to self-

knowledge.

**James:** Okay, I see. The more *sattvic* the mind becomes the more disturbing dreams arise because *sattva* purifies the filter between the conscious and the unconscious mind, so there is very little repression. If you process the dreams in light of Vedanta, their content will become more *sattvic* over time. If the mind is *sattvic* and there is still a lot of *rajas*, sleep will be a source of pain.

**Sandi:** When you say that *sattva* purifies the filter between conscious and unconscious, do you mean that it makes the filter “slowly disappear”? The more *sattvic* the mind becomes, the more there is understanding about the equal unreality of both the waking state and the dream state, so that this filter has no reason to be anymore. It seems to be a process of understanding from duality to non-duality, wherein different barriers gradually drop, until existence is seen as only one *Maya*-entity that as a whole is seen as unreal.

**James:** What you say about *sattva* with reference to the waking and dream states is true, but it is not what I meant. I meant that there is a natural mechanism that filters out unnecessary causal-body content in the waking state. There are a lot of negative things – Shadow content – that can erupt unconsciously and disturb the mind, so the *tamasic* aspect of *Isvara* represses these negative impulses so that the mind can respond appropriately in the present in the waking state. As the mind gets less *tamasic*, and therefore more *sattvic*, the filter doesn’t necessarily do its job so well in the dream state, so the hidden stuff erupts into the dream like a volcano. The hidden stuff is psychological content that the *jiva* is not proud of, content that contradicts its good opinion of itself and that it doesn’t want to acknowledge, and definitely doesn’t want others to see. Psychosis is closely related to this filter. If it is damaged in some way, all manner of negative feelings explode into the subtle body, destabilizing it and causing serious problems in the person’s relationship with the world.

**Sandi:** Do I understand well that *karma yoga* will first clean up the emotional stuff of the conscious/waking state, and gradually also clean up the unconscious/dream-state stuff? The cleansing process being dependent on the amount of *rajas* still in play? Of course all this only makes sense from a *karma yoga* and *jiva* point of view because from the perspective of awareness, this is all unreal.

**James:** Yes. But there is no difference between the dream state and waking state from the *vasana* point of view. Everything is the same except the physical senses are suppressed. If you burn out a *vasana* in the waking state it doesn’t go back into the causal body, and therefore it won’t appear in the dream. But the accumulated *vasanas* in the causal body – which we call *samskaras*, and which amount to behavior patterns – will still produce *vasanas*, so they will still appear in dreams and the waking state. This is why you have to keep doing *karma yoga* if you want to get rid of bad habits.

**Sandi:** I do admit that there must be a lot of *rajas* operating in the Sandi-*jiva*, yet it is only since self-inquiry became such an important part of my life that the deep-

sleep state has moved from a pain to a real pathology. The burning desire for understanding literally became a “burning to ashes” desire, meaning that the self-inquiring Sandi could no longer find an “off” button, not even at night. Already as a child I could stay awake hours at night, days in a row, trying to understand, reflect and analyse existential matters... I felt like not “losing time to sleep,” because there is still so much to understand and to be joyful for!

**James:** It was the same with me for the same reason when I was young. I stayed up all night reading books under the covers with a flashlight so my parents couldn't see that I wasn't sleeping. Life was so exciting I didn't want to miss it. But I eventually developed *tamasic* habits, and that ensured that I could sleep. I can sleep anywhere at any time now.

**Sandi:** For years I practised all kind of techniques of *hatha yoga*, healthy food and meditation... and guess what, also these made me feel so happy, joyful and energised... read: sleepless! And now that Vedanta came in to answer all the existential questions and to turn the individual love into a self-love, it creates not only a tremendous motivation to go on and on, but also an indescribable joy, a joy too big to be contained in this tiny body... Combining this with some *rajas* energy, it really creates a kind of “Big Bang.” 😊

**James:** So cool! But – upside/downside.

**Sandi:** Since a couple of years, after a heart stroke due to sleeplessness, I was put on medication. In the beginning this felt like a relief. I finally discovered what it was to experience deep sleep for a longer period of time (six hours or longer). After some time, there was some guilt about taking these chemicals. This guilt is now fading, since it helps me to sleep well, work well and study Vedanta in a more peaceful way. If some day my inquiry process brings me to the point of letting go completely of those medicines, it will happen; if not, then not! I remain alert for the potential side effects and for not increasing the doses.

**James:** Probably, as long as you keep a good diet and take liver-cleansing herbs, you can get away with the drugs without too many side effects. The other option is to give up the desire for *moksa*. It is a desire after all, and if you understand the value of Vedanta and you can do inquiry leisurely, you can “get there” just as fast. To people who had this problem, my *guru* used to say, “Hasten slowly.” You are the self with or without your *gunas*, so what difference does it make if you do slowly or fast? So you can change your idea of *moksa* from an event, something you are going to attain by hard work, and see yourself as already free. We call it taking a stand in awareness. If you take a stand in awareness you don't have to do anything special. You know that desire is unreal, so you don't act on it unnecessarily. You know that you have nothing to gain by action.

It seems your *jiva* is obsessive. Obsession is a good quality if it is motivated by noble values – which yours is – but nothing, including *moksa*, is worth losing sleep over. Of course if this kind of *rajas* has been with you since childhood, it is going to take some time to overcome it. You will have to do some serious inquiry into it to discover what negative ideas are supporting it. *Rajas* can function like *tamas* – in

some ways they are identical twins. An incessant stream of thoughts can hide the truth as well as a dark cloud.

**Sandi:** You ask me if I feel guilty about my dreams. Well, no, because I rarely remember any dream. Before the start-up of the medication, I was either in waking state (reflection, prayer, devotion, love and action) or shortly in deep sleep. I rarely had dreams to remember and if I had, they were rarely nightmares but rather positive and loving dreams. And since the start-up of the medication, I've had very few dreams.

**James:** Good.

**Sandi:** But in the last few weeks it all changed, I do have dreams again, which I remember. And all the dreams and my day-thoughts come down to one subject: I feel extremely lonely, intolerant and somehow excluded when I'm surrounded by my close family and relatives, I feel extremely in "one-ness" when I'm doing my favourite activities (teaching, coaching, studying Vedanta, *yoga*, sport...) or when I travel alone.

I experienced how unconscious dreams and conscious thoughts always come back with the same kind of message: it's time to change your lifestyle (or mindset) now!

And there is nothing to feel guilty about... it just scares a little bit...

Actually, it was the constant similarity between the thoughts and the dreams in the last few weeks that brought me to the questioning of the equal unreality of both.

**James:** I understand the situation now. It is a common problem for spiritual types. The spiritual solution of course is to see your family as the self and/or realize that the feeling when you are around them is *mithya*, unreal. I suppose this puts the doer into a quandary: Should I move out and live alone or should I maintain the householder lifestyle? I think you mentioned this in a previous email.

**Sandi:** 4. It makes no sense anymore to wake up from a nightmare and say, "Lucky this was only a dream!," because the waking state is as much unreal as the dream is!

**James:** Yes, indeed. If the mind is very *sattvic* you will be aware that the dream is a dream in the dream. *Moksa* is knowing that the waking state is a dream.

**Sandi:** This confirms the understanding and feels so good! Although the *jiva* is still a *jiva*, it still needs to work out its *karma* and follow its *dharma*. So whether knowledge about the unreality of the waking state is there or not, *maya* and the *gunas* still operate, and *vasanas* (fear and desire) still propel to actions.

**James:** Yes.

**Sandi:** 5. Since existence is *sat-chit-ananda*, this knowledge and bliss are always present in the three states; only the experience of existence, knowledge and bliss are different in the three states.

**James:** Yes. Experience is caused by the *upadhis*, the three states.

**Sandi:** Where I get stuck: When a *jiva* does, thinks or dreams something, does it add equally to the *vasana* load of the subtle body?

**James:** It depends on the nature of the thought and the degree of attachment to it. You have many thoughts every day that are not important to you. They don't create *vasanas*. Only thoughts that you deliberately think and thoughts with which you consciously identify create *vasanas*.

**Sandi:** Well, I guess what I have written about the sleepless Sandi is like such a bone for the dog. There is some work to do to "unidentify" with it. The scare that comes up proves that there is some more knowledge-assimilation to do!

**James:** Well, you are already identified with Sandi to some degree, so it seems like you are ready to practice *jnana yoga*, which involves identifying as the self. The stage after *karma yoga* is *jnana yoga*. It assumes that your *karma* no longer places unnecessary demands on you, so you can stay with the "I am the self," idea which implies forgoing unnecessary activities and associations. I don't know what your relationship to the people in whose company you feel lonely and intolerant actually is, whether it would be advisable to move on and live the alone life of a *sanyassi* – which makes your heart sing – or not. It is not my business. It is up to you.

But the whole thing should also be viewed through the love filter. Can you learn to love that lonely, intolerant, little person within? Can you love the people whose presence brings out this unhappy feeling? You need to be careful not to focus on what is wrong with Sandi but what is right with her. Believing one's feelings of inadequacy is not wise. Yes, they are there but when that feeling comes up, ask yourself, "Is it true?" You will discover that it isn't.

**Sandi:** If a *jiva* leads a seemingly *sattvic*, *karma-yoga* life, but in its dreams commits or experiences crimes, violence or cheating, how will that impact on the *vasanas*?

**James:** Those events are *vasanas* expressing in the dream state. They are the result of repression, unacknowledged and unconverted *rajas* and *tamas*. The dreams will continue until the issues they bring to your attention are addressed.

**Sandi:** And what would be the difference with a *jiva* who commits violence in a waking state, but dreams peacefully?

**James:** Expressing violence in the waking state works it out temporarily, perhaps, so

there is no need for *Isvara* to call the *jiva's* attention to it in the dream. But usually violent people also have some violent dreams. People are always a mixture of the *gunas*, so to the degree that a *guna* predominates, to that degree the *guna* will manifest in the dream state.

**Sandi:** It seems to me that the second case has a bigger ignorance problem than the first one, and has therefore a heavier *vasana* load. It seems that *rajas* and *tamas* are influencing the impact on the *vasana* load too.

**James:** Yes, from the spiritual point of view. But people with heavy *rajas/tamas* usually don't know they are ignorant according to our definition.

**Sandi:** That's true, and that makes it sometimes difficult to associate with these people. That's where compassion and love comes in, that's where right discrimination comes in. That's why *Isvara* brings me food for reflection now, through thoughts and dreams...☺

So could we say that: from a *jiva* and *karma-yoga* (cause-and-effect) point of view, a non-violent action ranks higher than a non-violent thought or non-violent dream. But from the perspective of awareness, all actions, thoughts or dreams are equally unreal.

**James:** If you value peace of mind, then non-violent waking and dream experiences are more valuable than violent ones. If you don't value peace of mind, then no.

**Sandi:** Could you fine-tune my thought process, so that I get back on track?

**James:** Do you feel guilty because you have violent dreams? If you do, take the dreams in the *karma yoga* spirit. They are *Isvara* calling attention to something that you need to investigate and resolve.

**Sandi:** I believe that my whole life is seen with a *karma yoga* spirit since I met you. I just feel hugely grateful for the process that is going on since a very long time now, I feel grateful for all the intermediate steps on the way to understanding, but my *sadhana* only became sharp, clear and conscious since my first attendance of your seminar. I now see existence with the adapted glasses you gave me! Thanks to *Isvara*, thanks to the self for being, thanks to all the *jivas* for their "doing," thanks to the *karmic* laws.

**James:** God is great!