



EXPLORING THE PHYSIOLOGY OF NIDRA: UNDERSTANDING STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT:

Sleep is crucial for maintaining overall health and wellbeing. It plays vital role in various physiological and cognitive functions. As per Ayurvedic sciences, *Nidra* is one among the three pillars of life and also *Adharaneeya vega*. *Nidra* is one which helps to attain longevity, memory, intelligence and freedom from disease, youthfulness, excellence of lustre, complexion, voice, optimum development of physique and sense organs. Inappropriate sleep causes disease that could be physical disease or psychosomatic disorder. As per *Mandukya Upanishad*, the states of consciousness are *Jagruta Avastha*, *Swapna Avastha*, *Sushupta Avastha* and *Thuriya* and through proper understanding of these states one can conclude the real definition of *Nidra* is *Sushupta Avastha*, which will help the body and mind to reset, repair and regenerate.

Keywords: *Nidra*. States of consciousness. *Sushupta Avastha*.

INTRODUCTION:

The holistic approach of Ayurveda describes about synchronization of physical body, senses perceived by sense organs, mind and soul. This synchronization is important to understand about *Nidra*. As per Ayurveda *Kapha* and *Tamas* are responsible for causation of *Nidra*, when mind and body get exhausted, even its functions get diminished temporarily, hence the coordination between sense organs and its objects is lost partially or fully, which is involuntary for few minutes to few hours. Factors such as mental status, dietary habits, external stimuli, suitable environment, some past experiences, even experience of past lives etc affects the sleep pattern. *Nidra* plays important role towards maintenance of health and prevention of diseases. There are different types of *Avastha* of *Nidra*; they are *Jagrata Avastha*, *Swapna Avastha*, *Sushupta Avastha* and *Thuriya*.

Table 1. Types of Nidra

Charaka^[4]	Sushruta^[5]	Dalhana^[6]	Ashtanga^[7]
<i>Tamobhava</i>	<i>Vashnavi</i>	<i>Tamsik</i>	<i>Kalasvabhawajanya</i>
<i>Shleshmasamudbhava</i>	<i>Tamasi</i>	<i>Swabhaviki</i>	<i>Aamayjanya</i>
<i>Manah sharirashramasambhava</i>	<i>Tamobhuyishta</i>	<i>Vaikariki</i>	<i>Chitta-khedajanya</i>
<i>Agantuki</i>	<i>Satvabhuyishta</i>		<i>Kaphajanya</i>
<i>Vyadhyanuvartini</i>	<i>Vaikariki</i>		<i>Aagantu</i>
<i>Ratri-swabhavaprabhava</i>			<i>Tamobhava</i>

Physiology of sleep

Due to *Kalasvabhava*, *Shrama* etc, *Manas* disassociates from *Indriya Vishayas* then the person falls asleep which is called as *Supti*,

Considering improper sleep as cause of disease, the proper regimens of sleep according to seasons and on daily basis is discussed addressing importance of *Nidra* in day today life.

Vyutpatti

Nidi Kutsāyām Nindralopaśca
(Shabdakalpadruma)

Medhyamāna saṃyogaḥ (Shabdakalpadruma)

The word *Nidra* is derived from the Sanskrit word root “*Nidi Kutsāyām*” by adding the suffix “*rak*”.

Definitions of nidra (sleep):

1. When the mind gets exhausted or becomes inactive and the sensory, motor organs also become inactive then the individual sleeps^[1].
2. Sleep occurs when the *Hridaya* the seat of *Chetana* is covered by *Tamas*^[2].
3. When the *Manovaha Strotas* get accumulated with *Shleshma* and the mind gets devoid of sense objects, organs, because of fatigue, then the individual falls asleep^[3].

where the body sleeps but not the *Paramatma* (soul). *Nirindriya Avastha* and *Mano Anavasthana* is *Nidra* and during this state the *Medhya*(memory) is in contact with *Manas*

causing Swapna(sleep with dreams) . Although the person is in rest, his *Indriyas* are not perceiving its objects, if the person gets dreams, then it is considered to be *Supti* (*Swapna*) and if the *Manovaha Srotasis* affected by *Doshas* then the person might get night mares or weird dreams which is again dealt in *Indriyasthana* hence the sleep with dreams shall not yield any benefits of *Nidra*. There are 7 types of dreams they are *Drishta*, *Shruta*, *Anubhuta*, *Prathita*, *Kalpita*, *Bhavika*, *Doshaja*. When *Indriyas* gets detached from *Manas*, even *Buddhi* and *Karmendriya* disassociates from *Manas* and this *Manas* is free from desires and dreams then this dreamless and deep sleep is called as *Sushupti* as there are no dreams one could infer that the body is at complete rest and its healing^[8].

- The heart resembles an inverted lotus bud. In the awakened state it opens, while during sleep it contracts. Sleep is a subtle state of rest, characterized by a lack of connection with the external environment. When darkness sets in, *Shleshma dosha* covers the *Manovaha Srotas* influences the *Indriyas*, and produces fatigue. It inhibits the activities of the sensory organs, thus produces sleep. The heart is the seat of consciousness according to Sushruta, when *Tamas*'s presence predominates, it produces sleep. *Tamas* is the cause of *Nidra*. *Satva* is the cause of *Bodhatvam*(awakening state). The process of

sleep and wake is a natural phenomenon and considered to be supreme. Even when a person is not fully asleep, the *Bhutatma* (Physical body) is considered to have fallen asleep. While all the sensory organs take rest, *Manas*(mind) continues to work. The sensory faculties experience a state of sleep at different levels. *Rajas* (motion, energy, and activity) when influences the mind. The mind gets awakened, the person starts perceiving the varied form, of both auspicious and inauspicious. Thus, the body is influenced by all the three *Doshas* at night^[9].

- *Nidra*, also known as Vishnu's Maya, disrupts all auspicious endeavours. A person of *Tamasic* disposition may sleep during both daylight and night time hours, while someone with a *Rajasic* temperament may sleep either during the day or at night. On the contrary, those with a *Sattvic* temperament find sleep evading them during the midnight hours. Those with decreased *Shleshma* and increased *Vayu* or experiencing physical and mental ailments may experience minimal sleep, and if they do, it tends to be of the *Vaikarika* type. During sleep, the soul, the master, encounters the consequences of past actions, influenced by the mind's association with *Rajas*. This connection arises from the remembrance of past lives by the individual soul (*Jivatma*). The *Jivatma* persists across lifetimes, even as the physical body perishes. The mind, formed from *Sarvadaiva*, is

responsible for dreams, particularly when influenced by *Rajas*. *Tamas* induces lethargy so body falls asleep, while *Rajas* prompts activity preventing the mind from falling asleep. *Tamas*, characterized by *Avarana* (covering), obscures the *Jivatma*, leading to the manifestation of dreams when the mind is veiled by *Rajas*^[10].

States of consciousness

Nidra is a condition in which “*Atma*” does not have any dream or desire for anything and that state is called “*Sushupti*”. The *Mandukya Upanishad* describes four states of consciousness, namely waking (*Jagrat*), dreaming (*Svapna*), and deep sleep (*Sushupti*), and 'the fourth' (*Thuriya*) the state of *Ekatma* (being one with Self, the oneness of Self). Beyond and underlying these three states. These four are A + U + M + "without an element" respectively.

Four quarters — Namely, *Viswa* (the waking state), *Tajasa* (dream state), *Prajna* (Sushupti or the state of dreamless sleep) and *Thuriya*^[11].

1. The first quarter (*Pada*) is *Vaiswanara* (the waking state) who is conscious of external objects and, which can be perceived through sense organs^[12].
2. The second quarter (*Pada*) is the *Tajasa* (the dream) who is unconscious of external objects but conscious of internal objects

and whose experience consists of subtle objects^[13].

3. The third quarter (*Pada*) is the *Prajna* (the deep sleep) in whom all experiences become unified or undifferentiated, who is verily, a mass of consciousness entire, who is full of bliss and who experiences bliss, and who is the path leading to the knowledge (of the two other states). That is the state of deep sleep wherein the sleeper does not desire any objects nor does he see any dream (*Sushupti*)^[14].
4. *Thuriya* (The fourth) is not that which is conscious of the internal (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the external (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass all sentiency, nor that which is simple consciousness, nor that which is insentient. It is unseen (by any sense organ), not related to anything, incomprehensible (by the mind), noninferable, unthinkable, indescribable, essentially of the nature of Consciousness constituting the Self alone, negation of all phenomena, the peaceful, all bliss and the nondual. This is what is known as the fourth (*Thuriya*). This is the *Atman* and it has to be realised^[15].

5. States of consciousness

Jagrata	Waking state	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Conscious oriented towards external sensory experiences, and engage in various activities and interactions.
Swapna	Dream state	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Absence of sensory perception.dreams are formed from mental impressions, memories, desires, and subconscious processes.
Sushupti	Deep sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is absence of sensory perception and mental activity, leading to a state of profound rest and relaxation.
Thuriya	The fourth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Devine state of pure consciousness, complete absence of sensory perception and mental activity, transcends the limitations of ordinary waking , dreaming and deep sleep states.It is characterised by pure awareness, devoid of any desires.

Figure 1 : STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS^[16]

DISCUSSION

Nidra, Ahara and Brahmacharya are considered essential for maintaining overall understand the real definition of Nidra so as to produce the desired benefits. Although Nidra doesn't merely occur due to the influence of Kapha and Tamas but the other attributes like Satva, Rajas, Doshas, Manas etc also have their contribution. During the day the person is in awake state that is Jagrata Avastha, where the person is aware of external environment, perceives all the sense objects and even the mind is active delivering its functions. During this awaken stage the heart which resemble to inverted lotus is said to be active conducting its functions.During night when the natural urge of sleep appears, Tamo Guna covers the Hridaya (which is the seat of manas), Sleshma dosha obstructs the Manovaha Srotas and as the body, mind, Karmendriya, Jnanendriya gets fatigued due to continuous activity, the mind disassociates with its sensory

health and wellbeing. Each plays a crucial role in the balance and harmony of the body and mind. Let's perception and even the mind does not perform its functions (imagination, thought process, analysis, interpretation). When this manas is free from desires, and when and doshas and other factors like Satwa, Rajas and Tamas are in a balanced state, when the person is devoid physical and mental illness then the person falls asleep and there are no dreams this Avastha is called as Sushupti^[17], at this stage itself the person falls asleep but not the Atma. This stage is said to be called as Nidra, which is the best form of consciousness for which the simile has been stated as Bhutadhatri ^[18] "that which nourishes the whole body" and at this stage the body and mind is in complete rest which facilitates the body to rejuvenate, heal, repair, detoxify and it also brings about the benefits such as longevity, youthfulness, immunity,

excellence in complexion and voice, optimum development of physique and sense organs. As achieving this *Sushupti Avastha* in a pure form is not possible as it is stated that ‘Achieving this stage of *Nidra* is like a “*Yogis achieving their siddhi*”(reaching the utmost target which is beyond the normal human maturity)”^[19]. Hence here comes the concept of dreams. *Tamo Guna* is cause of sleep and *Satva* is cause of awakening due to these regulating factors the sleep and wake cycle continues, during sleep the body is inactive but predominance of *Rajo Guna* inhibits the disassociation of *Manas* from its functions and results in formation of dreams (*Swapna*). During sleep, the soul, encounters the consequences of past actions, influenced by the mind's association with *Rajas*. This connection arises from the remembrance of past lives by the individual soul (*Jivatma*). The *Jivatma* persists across lifetimes, even as the physical body perishes. The mind, formed from *Sarvadaiva*, is responsible for dreams, particularly when influenced by *Rajas*. seven types of *Swapna* (dreams) which are 1) *Drishta* 2) *Shruta* 3) *Anubhuta* 4) *Prarthita* 5) *Kalpita* 6) *Bhavika* & 7) *Doshaja*^[20] out of which only two types of *Swapna* have significant role in the prognosis of disease (*Arista Lakshana*) those are *Bhavika* and *Doshaja*, the other five are the dreams which are result of previous visual experiences, auditory experiences, experience by *Indriyas*, strong desires,

imagination. Analysis of dreams helps in determination of psychosomatic constitution (*Prakruti*) of the person. Hence the sleep with dreams cannot be stated as the unhealthy one but it doesn't fetch the complete benefits of *Nidra*. Quality and pattern of sleep is governed by *Satva rajas and Tamas*. The cause of sleep is *Tamoguna* but if it is in excess then it is abnormal then person might fall asleep whole day and night. If there is predominance of *Rajo Guna* then there is no fixed time of onset of sleep due to *Chala* property of *Rajo Guna* sleep might come during night and sometimes during day along with dreams. The person with *Satva Guna* predominance sleeps at midnight. Those with decreased *Shleshma* and increased *Vayu* or experiencing physical and mental ailments may experience minimal sleep, and if they do, it tends to be of the *Vaikarika* type^[21]. The syllable “Aum” symbolize the four states of consciousness. “A” represents the waking state, “U” represents the dreaming state, “M” represents the deep sleep state and the silence that follows represents *Thuriya*, the transcendent fourth state. *Thuriya* is not something to be attained but rather realized through spiritual insight and self-awareness. It is the goal of spiritual practice and highest state of consciousness. “Thuriya” refers to the fourth state of consciousness beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. It is often translated as “the fourth”, indicating a state of

pure consciousness or transcendental awareness, devoid of any mental modifications or fluctuations. The significance of *Thuriya* lies in its portrayal as the ultimate reality, the substratum of all other states of consciousness. In *Thuriya*, one realizes the unity of the individual self (*Atman*) with the

universal consciousness (*Brahman*), transcending the limitations of time, space, and causation. Understanding the realizing *Thuriya* is considered crucial in the spiritual journey as it leads to self-realization and liberation (*Moksha*) from the cycle of birth and death.

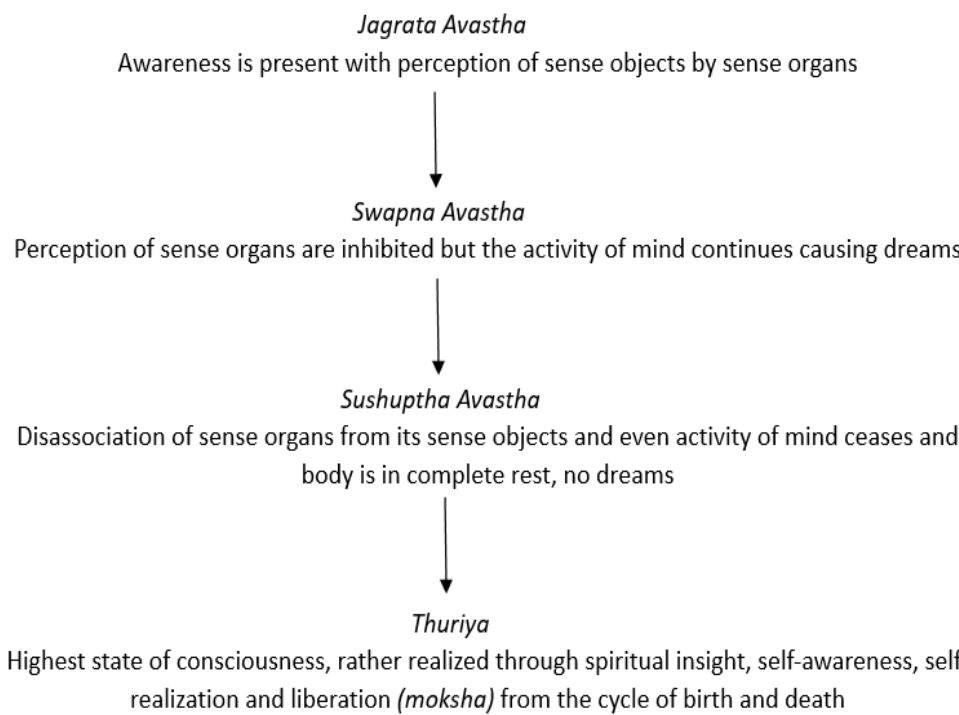


Figure 2: Flow chart representing the States of Consciousness ^[22]

CONCLUSION

The importance of *Nidra* cannot be overstated in the quest for good health and well-being. Ayurveda recognises sleep as one of the three pillars of health alongside *Ahara* and *Brahmacharaya*. Adequate and quality sleep is essential for the proper functioning of body and mind. During sleep, the body undergoes repair, rejuvenation and detoxification processes. Furthermore, *Nidra* is closely linked to mental health and emotional

wellbeing. Natural sleep (sleeping at night) is the best form of sleep. This is also known as *Bhutadhatri*, or “that which nurses all the living beings. As wholesome diet is essential for the maintenance of the body, even sleep is having equal importance. The syllable “Aum” symbolize the four states of consciousness. “A” represents the waking state (*Jagrat avastha*) where awareness is present with perception of sense objects by sense organs, “U” represents the dreaming state (*Swapna*

Avastha) where perception of sense organs are inhibited but the activity of mind continues causing dreams, “M” represents the deep sleep state (*Sushuptha Avastha*) disassociation of sense organs from its sense objects and even activity of mind ceases and body is in complete rest, no dreams and the silence that follows represents *Thuriya* which is the highest state of consciousness, rather realized through spiritual insight, self-awareness, self-realization and liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of birth and death, here different states of consciousness is explained The word *Nidra* which has been discussed in several texts is to be understood as “*Sushupti Avastha*”(deep sleep). In deep sleep, one experiences a temporary cessation of suffering, as the individual consciousness merges with the undifferentiated consciousness. The worries, anxieties, and concerns of the waking and the dreaming states are temporarily absent, offering a state of peace and tranquillity.

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