

~ *Can't Sleep?* ~

Meditation for Restless Nights

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What if we try our best to sleep well at night? Maybe we get some advice for what to do on the behavioral level, like not drinking caffeine. Also, you can do some kind of exercise, relax, let the room temperature cool down, and then let your mind be — but still you cannot sleep. In the night you are awake, and then you are thinking about the past and future. There is a lot of overthinking. Then what should we do? This is something many people ask me about.

Of course, we do not have one solution for everything. But the important thing is how we connect with the problem of not being able to sleep.

The first important thing is that there is some kind of trigger that is feeding this restlessness, feeding the feeling that you cannot sleep. What is that feeling? It is that we are looking for sleep. We really crave sleep. “I need sleep! No sleep is no good. Tomorrow I will be tired.” Then maybe we roll to the right side, to the left side . . . Then what happens? Sleep disappears. The more we look for sleep, the more it runs away.

That is what we call the “monkey mind.” Normally, when we say, “No pizza, no pizza,” then pizza comes, right? Then we say, “I need this. I need to feel this. I need to get this.” Then it feels like it is running away from us.

Similarly, now you are craving sleep a lot, and the feeling of sleep runs away — the sleepiness, everything. Even if we sleep a little bit, then we wake up again. And then we sleep a little bit. “Good, good, I am sleeping.” Then we wake up again.

So what should we do? Of course I think we should consider all the techniques at the behavioral level: doing a little exercise, letting the room cool down a little, and not doing very strong concentration work before sleeping. I think that is important. After that, we just let our mind and body be together and do not care about sleep, do not look for sleep.

Sometimes meditators have this practice when they go to the mountains. Sometimes it is very cold, and at a high altitude, and they cannot sleep well. So what we do is let go of that craving for sleep. Instead, we rest — just resting with the mind and body together.

How do we rest the mind and body together? Can you raise your hand like this? When you raise your hand and relax a little bit, you feel the gravity. And you might feel a little relaxation. So feel the gravity in the body, and just relax. Relax. Scan your whole body a little. Relax your head. Relax your chest, stomach, feet . . . Scan from head to feet a little — head to feet, not feet to head, but from your head down, head to feet.

Then feel your body as very heavy. Your entire body. Maybe as if you gain twenty or fifty more units of heaviness — not in terms of size, but in terms of heaviness. Just feel heavy.

Then, let go of the sleep. Even if you cannot sleep, it is okay. What you want is just to relax.

When we relax and do not look for sleep, even if we do not sleep, there is a similar benefit to sleeping. Maybe you sleep a little bit lightly. Sometimes, if you look for sleep a lot, what happens is that even when sleep comes, you do not feel it. You feel like last night you did not sleep at all. But if your partner is there, your partner is hearing your snoring.

From your partner's perspective, you sleep here and there a lot. But from your own perspective, you do not feel you slept at all. Why? Craving. We expect. We really want to have *deep* sleep. "I need sleep!" So we cannot. Even though we are sleeping, we do not feel rested. Therefore, let go of all this craving. Just feel the body. Feel the gravity.

And then tell yourself, “I am just going to rest. Whether I sleep or not, I do not care.”

Sometimes people who sleep three or four hours, like these meditators in the mountains, get good energy, and it is good for their meditation in the daytime. So you can try it. Why not?

Sometimes just giving yourself time is important — six to eight hours to be without a smartphone, without watching television, without concentration. Give yourself time. And within that time, tell yourself, “I just want to rest. If sleep comes or not, it does not matter. I do not care. I just want to rest my body and mind together.” That has a lot of benefit. For me, this practice really helps a lot.

Thank you.