

At the End of the Day

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

Finally we are in bed and we want to enter into a deep sleep. Hopefully we have cleared a lot of the day's debris with an evening sitting, the metta practice and our end of day recollection. And we have prepared for bed in a mindful and calm way. So there we are, ready to 'disappear'. But even now we can be disturbed by memories, images and thinking. They may be negative – sadnesses, irritations, anxieties and so on. Or they may be positive – thinking around planning, achieving, romance and so on. We must keep up that effort to be focused and yet relaxed. Sometimes the word concentration is used, but this I feel brings with it tension by way of association with school or work. Focused here means one-pointed. The thinking mind steadied on one object. The obvious one is the breath. Again the breath may have become associated with striving in our meditation. But here to develop the calmness for sleep we need rather to feel the breath just for the purpose of contacting neutral feelings. We need to cultivate a taste for the neutral, the unexciting and begin to see this is our default position. Once this has been cultivated we can contact it easily throughout the day. To help us do this we can recall a time or place where we have felt calm and peaceful, on a beach, in a park, in our garden. And then contacting the feeling of tranquillity in the body we can sense it in the gentleness of the breath. This is a way of developing samatha, serenity. Another way is to practice metta. It is best to choose someone whom we feel grateful towards and have no or tiny bad feelings towards. If we find it easy, we can also direct metta towards ourselves, alternating between the two. Keep the phrases short and simple. 'May you be safe, well and happy.' In this way we develop a mental state saturated with loving feelings. Good, restful sleep is one of the benefits of metta practice that the Buddha pointed to. Another way is to offer metta to the body. Start from the head and go down the body blessing all the parts. After you reach the toes, start again from the top of the head. Coming up the body can lift energy. Keep the blessing simple. 'May you be healthy and strong'. You may find this creates exquisite gentle feelings. The cellular life enjoys a good watering of metta. This can be very powerful if you feel very restless. If you do feel restless, try putting yourself into a comfortable position and refuse to move and scan the body with metta. We sleep in one and three-quarter hour waves, passing through four levels. The first three and a half hours are the most important since it is only here that we sleep at the deepest level. Most articles I've read seem to say seven or eight hours is enough. If we live meditative lives, this is quite sufficient and you may find yourself sometimes waking completely refreshed after five or six hours. Finally make a firm determination to wake after seven or eight hours. You may be surprised to find you wake up on time. Even so don't forget to put the alarm on!

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.