Much importance has been given by New Age spirituality to dream and dream states. Unfortunately, dreams are often interpreted today in ways that are deeply life-restricting and life-damaging. Modern psychologists seem almost to suggest that man can live without sleep, but not without dream!

And yet, the word ‘dream’ means that which is not true. The whole purpose of yoga is to work towards a state of dreamlessness or sushupti – a state where you are so aware that you are incapable of dreaming.

Dream in the yogic view does not merely refer to dreaming when asleep, or awake. Instead, one’s very psychological framework is regarded as a dream. Your thought process may feel intensely real and seductively lifelike – even more than reality – but it has no existential basis. So your whole experience of life is, in a sense, a dream. The word ‘maya’ means that you are not seeing life as it is.

Dreams often have tremendous power in people’s lives because they have never really touched reality. What they call ‘life’ is simply what they think and feel. A single unpleasant thought can depress them for the entire day! So, the whole purpose of yoga is always to move from your self-created mental hallucination towards a condition of dreamlessness.

Academically, however, it is possible to classify dreams into four kinds. Ninety per cent of dreams are just suppressed, unfilled desires finding an outlet in your dreams. Much of human desire is unconscious, on the level of body, memory and imagination. These are desires, suppressed by civilisation and culture which work themselves out in your dream. When you desire consciously, rather than unconsciously, however, you are free of dreams altogether.

The second type of dream gives you an oblique indication of what could be happening with your body, mind and immediate life situation. It could give you a glimpse of what could be coming next, and is generally regarded as prescient or clairvoyant vision. For example, if you dream of a stream that is dammed, it might simply be that you are subconsciously aware of the fact that your arteries are blocked! This is, of course, purely hypothetical. Dreams can mean many different things to different people; the meaning depends on the specific context.

The third kind is determined by the individual’s karmic structure. Very few people are capable of very deep sleep. But if you do enter that kind of relaxed, childlike sleep, the content of your karmic structure that is not in the bank of conscious memory could find reflection in your mind. You may see scenes from the past, or even from a previous lifetime, in your dream.

The fourth type of dream occurs when you have a thought that is so powerful that it crystallises into a physical reality. Several seekers on the path of devotion have experienced this. Many mystics like Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Meherabai, for instance, were utterly crazy. But for these passionate devotees, deities like Kali and Krishna were not the product of their imagination; they had actually come alive in their experience. If your projections become so powerful that they manifest themselves, it means you are very close to your liberation. This is why devotion is seen as such a powerful tool to the divine.

There is also a fifth kind of dream. But there is no logical way to express it, so we can leave it aside for now. In any case, as a guru, I brush all dreams aside as irrelevant. It does not matter if you saw God or the Devil, or if you divined the future in your dream. The only relevant question is, in what way has it transformed you? That is the only question that really counts.

The reason a live spiritual master is considered such a transformative possibility is because being in his presence can cut through the psychological and deliver you to another dimension altogether. If you could simply be with a master, you have the possibility of actually waking up from your self-created reality into life itself. Otherwise, thinking or talking about God has no significance whatsoever. It simply means you are having a spiritual dream!

Sadhguru, a yogi, is a visionary, humanitarian and a prominent spiritual leader (www.ishafoundation.org)