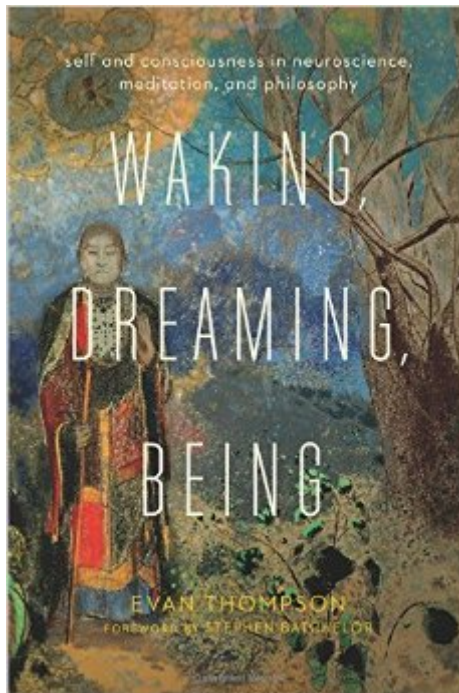


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Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self And Consciousness In Neuroscience, Meditation, And Philosophy



Synopsis

A renowned philosopher of the mind, also known for his groundbreaking work on Buddhism and cognitive science, Evan Thompson combines the latest neuroscience research on sleep, dreaming, and meditation with Indian and Western philosophy of the mind, casting new light on the self and its relation to the brain. Thompson shows how the self is a changing process, not a static thing. When we are awake we identify with our body, but if we let our mind wander or daydream, we project a mentally imagined self into the remembered past or anticipated future. As we fall asleep, the impression of being a bounded self distinct from the world dissolves, but the self reappears in the dream state. If we have a lucid dream, we no longer identify only with the self within the dream. Our sense of self now includes our dreaming self, the "I" as dreamer. Finally, as we meditate—either in the waking state or in a lucid dream—we can observe whatever images or thoughts arise and how we tend to identify with them as "me." We can also experience sheer awareness itself, distinct from the changing contents that make up our image of the self. Contemplative traditions say that we can learn to let go of the self, so that when we die we can witness its dissolution with equanimity. Thompson weaves together neuroscience, philosophy, and personal narrative to depict these transformations, adding uncommon depth to life's profound questions. Contemplative experience comes to illuminate scientific findings, and scientific evidence enriches the vast knowledge acquired by contemplatives.

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Customer Reviews

I have been a sceptic and non-believer since last 6 years and any reference to religion used to repel me. I came to believe that only Western philosophy, rooted in relentless questioning and never accepting blindly was the path to realization and truth. However, this book has opened my mind to an altogether different frame of thought. That Eastern thought (Hinduism, Buddhism) have so much depth and awareness of the Self and Consciousness never dawned upon me. I used to and still baulk at rituals and prayers, but Thompson has introduced me to the core thoughts of Eastern philosophy. Thompson has carefully examined different topics like sleep, death, consciousness, awareness, while subjecting them to neurological scrutiny. His own personal beliefs also are apparent many a times and he does an excellent job of introducing seemingly esoteric topics like lucid dreams and Near-death and Out-of-body experiences. The best two chapters are about Death and Self, wherein he examines what is it that happens when one dies (in traditional thought) versus when one leaves a body (in Eastern thought) and what "I" is composed of. He brings forth his own theory of 'Enactive approach to the Self' in understanding the Self. I can't recommend this book highly enough to anyone who is interested in knowing about Self and the convergence of Eastern-Western philosophies. ***** Update based on comments ***** I titled my review as "all atheists/agnostics must read this book" because many atheists (just like me) reject everything that has any semblance of being related to religion. Lot of practices (like Yoga, for example.

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