

SLEEP

ARTHUR GILLIOM

To sleep is to lose the feeling of consciousness and even existence. Feeling, sensation, and thought may be so dulled in slumber that the state of the mind and body may be actually much the same as in death.

There are many classifications of sleep — resting, napping, dozing, drowsing, reposing, and slumber — all according to the completeness of relaxation of the body and mind. But let us consider deep slumber, perhaps the most interesting and mystifying because of its close resemblance to death. Almost beyond human understanding, the conditions attending deep sleep may even offer a clue as to the real nature of death. Perhaps there is some secret meaning suggested by the state of the body and mind during deep slumber.

If we observe an exhausted person who has just lapsed into a heavy slumber, to all appearances he is quite lifeless. His blood pressure drops, the tempo of his breathing and pulse slows down, and except to the close observer, he looks for all the world like a dead man. Now let us look inside. We will have to use our own personal observations and recollections in this phase. As the person relaxes to

rest his tired muscles and strained nerves, his mind gradually becomes less and less conscious of surroundings. Now it slowly loses its grasp on all reality until it starts to glide into complete oblivion. During this phenomenon the mind may be pictured as a ball rolling downhill into the pit of unconsciousness. When it finally gets there, no conception of time, proportion, or existence is present. Scientists tell us that dreams, rapid mental images of past experiences or imagined circumstances, occur only in light sleep.

Deep sleep, then, is marked by an almost complete cessation of life and certainly a perfect loss of sense perception as far as the mind is concerned. Might we even say that the mind has ceased to live for the time being? Then what a striking similarity of the state of the mind in deep sleep to the conditions surrounding death! Deep slumber is one of the most pleasurable and gratifying experiences in the human life. Why this is true does not concern us so deeply as a much more tantalizing challenge. If the mind exists in much the same circumstances in death and deep sleep, can death be anything then but an eternal state of pleasure?

