

# Yoga, Consciousness, and Conscious Sleep

By David Schmit, PhD

Consciousness. We all have it. We often hear about it. What exactly is it? Philosophers tell us it is the part of us that is self-aware. We are aware that we are conscious, which is a signal feature of our humanity. The religiously-minded tie consciousness to the soul, that immaterial part of our being traditionally connected to the supreme spirit or God.

Consciousness is also one of the greatest of scientific enigmas. As you read this, numerous research laboratories around the world are trying to figure out how the material “stuff” of our brain – the neurons and such – creates something as phenomenal as the human experience of self-consciousness. While the hardcore scientifically-minded researchers presume consciousness is mere neural activity in the brain, other groups of investigators study the equally intriguing phenomena that the experience of consciousness can change, as in altered states of consciousness. This line of inquiry is closer to the tradition of yoga, which centers consciousness at the core of our being and then maps out the different ways it manifests.

Yoga, as a set of practices, is in key respects, about the exploration and deepening of our experience of consciousness. When we complete a yoga class, quite often we experience our bodies and minds differently – and more pleasantly – because our consciousness has been altered. Not surprising that cultivating our capacity for consciousness is not only linked to yogic states of joy and liberation but also promotes a number of health benefits.

With this knowledge of consciousness in hand, my wife Julie and I have created the Becoming Whole class offered at Tula Yoga and Wellness. The class works with the human capacity for consciousness and then some! Through some light yoga, meditation, and a guided, music-infused experience, we practice the old yogic method of chetan nidra – or conscious sleep – as a means to explore some of the remarkable experiences of consciousness that lies within each of us. A sense of

wholeness and rejuvenation awaits. We invite you to come to our Becoming Whole class! No experience necessary. Join us!