

# THE EXPERIENCE OF DREAMING AND THE PRACTICE OF AWARENESS

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The dream experience is marked by a quality of mystery, a shroud of darkness. It begins with falling asleep and ends in forgetfulness. It is bounded by unknowing. In the face of this, dreams provoke an impulse to read meanings and impute significances. In ancient times, people solicited oracles, sorcerers, shamans, or wisemen in order to get beneath the surface of the dream. The biblical Joseph and the Sioux medicine man, Black Elk, were such people. Currently there are innumerable books, articles and workshops that offer advice. Cultures, tribes, and inquisitive individuals from every era have developed theories and convictions about the nature of dreams. Children, highly disturbed people, and many others find exotic powers and unexplainable coincidences in their dreams.

We might awaken tomorrow morning and recall a dream. It will have a "storyline" that is more or less coherent. There will be imagery, more or less sharp and distinct. It might leave us with a general impression that it is interesting, but impenetrable. We might soon say that it means either this or that, but we are in no way confident of the claim. We might have a number of techniques at our disposal to enter or reenter the hermetically-sealed dream experience, but they only seem to scratch the surface. The process of dream analysis is endless; we could go on exploring any particular dream with a variety of methods, adding interesting tidbits during different phases of our life, developing it further as with a photographic negative, and still never quite plumb the depth of it.

This situation is to no one's fault or credit. The dream experience draws our projections, both while we are in it and

afterwards. The inscrutable nature of the dream magnetizes us to find a hopeful or threatening origin. We turn away from the dream in fear or move towards the dream in fascination, but mostly, we circle the dream with speculations and theories. By now, we are the inheritors of a multitude of ideas, beliefs, theories and practices which claim to address our dream experience. From childhood to old age, we are constantly reworking our view of dreaming.

Yet all of these theories are of very little help when we come face to face with our own dreams. At worst, this variety of theories and conceptualizations has the tendency to alienate us from the experience of our own dreaming. What is missing from these is the possibility that we might bring some kind of discipline and method to living the actual dream experience. Alone with our own experience of dreaming, we can rely only on our own intelligence and our own precision of observation.

The meditation masters and scholars of the Buddhist tradition have always used the dream experience as a vehicle for understanding the Buddhist teachings. When the Buddhist practice of mindfulness-awareness meditation is applied to the experience of dreaming, it has been shown to greatly clarify the dream experience and its further meaning for our awake, active life. From this ground of meditation practice, teachings about dreams appear in all three developments of Buddhism—the vehicles of Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Each considers the dream experience to be important because of its ability to highlight how our minds function and don't function, and, ultimately, how to transmute insanity into sanity.<sup>1</sup>

All Buddhist teachings emphasize that we should first look directly and accurately at our own experience, which is the purpose of mixing mindfulness-awareness meditation practice with the dream experience. Then one becomes more precisely aware of smaller psychological moments, the chain-linking of states of mind. When we study dreaming in this way, we can proceed without theory or preconceptions, and

dreams become a luxurious field of study. This can occur because Buddhist meditation practice uncovers and sharpens an inherent cognitive ability to finely discriminate all mental and perceptual events.

The process of refining discrimination through the practice of mindfulness-awareness meditation begins during the day. Through this practice one has no choice but to become aware of the nature, characteristics, and consequences of daydreaming. Sigmund Freud pointed to the importance and desirability of such a practice in his own highly personal dream study. He said that the study of night dreams was only an oblique way to understand the nature of mind, and that the study of daydreams would be the most direct approach to understanding unconscious mental functioning.<sup>2</sup> That is exactly what the practice of meditation does.

#### INITIAL AWARENESS PRACTICE: THE INTENTION TO REMEMBER

We might forget last night's dream, but during the dream we often feel that something extraordinarily vivid and perhaps important is happening. That we forget the whole thing seems just as extraordinary. We would like to remember our dreams, even if only for the purpose of having material for study.

As with anything else, our ability to remember dreams depends on the degree of intention brought to it. Creating an environment of openness and friendliness to the dream experience begins with the intention to remember. Anyone reading these words is already interested in the phenomenon of dreaming, is perhaps recalling the textures of dreaming, and has begun an intention to recall the next dream. Intention has arisen and there will be consequences of that, but if we do not attend to our dreams at all, then everything will very likely be a blackout.

## BRINGING AWARENESS TO TRANSITIONS

There are many transitional events that can be discriminated in the three processes: falling into sleep, passing from sleep to dream, and awakening from a dream. The yogic tradition of Buddhist mind-training and discipline addresses the stages of each of these transitions for purposes of further practice and understanding. We will not be discussing those at this point of our observations. The yogic practices of dream observation (i.e. the “Dream Yoga” of Naropa), constitute a “high-tech psychology” that most of us are not up to. We have more basic work to do. But at least we could appreciate the point of view expressed by that psychology: that is, there is much that we can do to stretch our awareness, and it begins with mindful attentiveness to ordinary moments of life.

In addition to rousing the intention to remember dreams, it is also important to note the manner in which we fall asleep. To the degree that we go to sleep mindlessly, we will recall dreams very sparingly. It is not necessary that we just throw ourselves into bed and hope for the best. We could at least be heedful of what is happening. And we could wake up with a similar intention.

Our patterns of going to sleep caricature in general our patterns of ignoring, of falling into unconsciousness, or becoming oblivious. We tend to consider going to sleep as our privilege to suddenly, precipitously, break off, drop out, and leave it all behind. With that attitude, sleep becomes our secret cave or pleasure dome. We feel that sleeping is our due rest from the world, an inalienable right to be unconscious.

We have a great variety of ways of going to sleep; some of them are elaborate and stereotyped, others are merely attempts at stupefaction. Falling asleep is often permeated with rituals: some cannot sleep without eating beforehand; others cannot sleep if they do eat. There are those who cannot sleep without alcohol or drugs, or without exercise or masturbation. Others are unable to sleep without being still

beforehand. The number of conditions and conventions that we elaborate in order to make ourselves comfortable and numb are endless. We may think we have escaped our conventional, waking mind through such practices, but when we examine our dreams, we find that we have not left all that much behind.

As well as detailing various stages of falling into sleep, the Buddhist tradition also describes several phases of waking up from a dream. For our purposes, the basic point, once again, is that there should be some effort put into noticing the details of experience. In Buddhist monastic training, monks are instructed to notice the first mental content upon awakening, even the very first moment before thoughts arise. The practice of mindfulness-awareness meditation makes that possible. At the very least, we could respect those observations and bring them to bear on how we go about resting, sleeping, dreaming, and waking up.

The transitions we have been discussing are quite gross. They are exaggerations of what is taking place in our active, waking life; the whole sequence of sleeping, dreaming, waking, goes on moment-to-moment. In waking life the transitions are more subtle, but not beyond our level of precision when under the microscope of meditation practice. Noticing them is not all that difficult. To the extent that we are aware and accurate about our experience during the day, we can be precise about our experience while dreaming.

It could be said that the discipline of treating and healing people depends on that level of maturity of observation. In terms of what is known as "Contemplative Psychotherapy," a thorough understanding of the stages, both of falling asleep and of waking up, are pivotal to unwinding psychopathological states, and to the specialized practices of psychological medicine.

## CONVICTION IN THE "REALITY" OF THE DREAM

No one needs to tell us what a nightmare is. We know that literal, physical annihilation is in its atmosphere. We also know that in the instant we awaken we might not be sure if we are alive or dead. We have been in mortal danger and it needs no interpretation. The nightmare is a challenge to our whole way of living and being. We do not know what hit us. And we are very vulnerable, during a nightmare, to illnesses of all sorts, as we are during any state of intense fear. In Tibetan medicine, for example, ". . . one is never supposed to startle a youngster for it is exactly in such a moment of suspended consciousness, as in a trance due to fear, that the invading force can enter; this can also happen when the child is asleep."<sup>3</sup> It is said that sometimes a person's hair turns gray during the night, and ancient Greek physicians claimed that the nightmare was the cause of this. There is no dream more vivid and intensely real.

A personal example might be useful. In a dream, I was walking on the point of a rugged coastline with a large group of others. Suddenly a disturbance arose out of the ocean, like a swiftly moving tornado, and going straight upwards. It was shiny black, and as it arched over towards us it was clear that it would destroy those who did not run from it. People ran around in panic and, at first, I hesitated between running and staying still. But I stayed and watched it continually as it moved like a thunderbolt into my forehead. During all this, I experienced intense fear. On awakening, I did not know whether I was alive or dead, but that confusion lasted only a moment. I knew that what I had just lived through was an experience of fear that was greater than any I had ever experienced before. Also, I had never before looked so one-pointedly into the face of that fear. Those were not "interpretations" upon waking up; they were the raw experiences of the dream.

As "real" as it may seem, the nightmare is still a dream that relies on the same patterns of image formation and transfiguration as other dreams which may be playful, interesting, seductive, or straightforward. The nightmare is the extreme dream, and at the same time it highlights the fundamental issue of dreaming; that is, the intense degree to which we can have full conviction in what is merely created by the play of the mind.

While dreaming, we are basically functioning without our bodies, which are somewhat paralyzed. We have only meager connection with the outside world. In such a situation, mind is free to become involved with pure projection. Living, in effect, in this purely mental world, we take everything that happens there to be quite real. Even when the imagery is unclear, its cloudiness and uncertainty are themselves extremely vivid.

Strictly speaking, the relationship between what is taking place in the dream world and in the outside world is not completely separate. Whatever sensations arise from the body or the environment are magnetized into the dream. For example, obnoxious or awakening stimuli may be represented in the dream as threats, and a drama of paranoia is created.

The quick development of a sense of conviction seems to be a peculiar attribute of the human condition, and it leads to an enormous number of mistakes. How does one tell the difference between the dream and what is happening at this moment? No matter what situation confronts us, but particularly when the situation is vivid, we might say, "I have seen things like this in my dreams." The play of color, light and shadow, strange pictures on the wall, unknown people, an absence of background noise: we have seen things like this in our dreams and believed them to be our most intimate and real experiences.

Afterwards, we awaken and say, "That was only a dream. It never really happened at all." But something did happen. We are left with a memory of the dream which is only its

fragile outer shell. Even when we attend to the dream-memory we find it dissolving in air right in front of us. The pieces of a compound image begin to fly apart, and it is difficult to recapture what we believed in during the dream. Memory is fickle in the way it reembodies, or “re-members,” the dream. Memory seems to change day-by-day, even minute-by-minute. If we look closely at our memory formation of the dream, we find that it is not as coherent as we originally thought, that it is in fact a mere collection of bits and pieces of events, more or less loosely strung together.

Beyond that, when we examine any one particular image of the dream, it becomes obvious that it too is a composite image, a jig-saw puzzle of parts of one thing and another. The psychoanalytic method described in Freud’s exercises of “dream analysis” makes this perfectly clear. Overlay, condensation, substitution, and a variety of other automatic and built-in mental manipulations all had a part in creating the image we had taken to be complete, irreducible, and real. It occurs in the same way as does a mirage. A composite figure arises, achieves a degree of conviction, becomes an independent entity, and is reacted to. The same chain of events is activated in the creation of any delusional entity.

What we took for reality was a patch-work of fragments. We might ask, “How could I have been taken in like that?” From the viewpoint of meditation experience, and from the examination of the structure of daydreaming, it can be seen that most of our experience occurs that way. We are frequently taken in. The mechanism that forms the dream is what we live with and think with all the time. The tendency to form a storyline that strings the dream together is the same tendency that goes on at every moment. Consider this example: driving down a main street; the sudden flashing of brake lights from the truck in front; the screech of a dog; the wail of a police siren. In an instant we have an idea of what happened and, then, we feel bad about it. But when we look around we might find that the dog is two streets away, and the siren is from an unrelated ambulance.



Nothing has happened. A drama, in an instant, was created. We do that in our dreams to an extreme, and we do that continually in waking life. We tie together fragments of perceptions and images, link them together into a dream drama, and then feel attraction, repulsion, or indifference. The images disperse and we forget. Then the process starts over again. Daydreams occur the same way.

Looking at dreams in this way, dreaming can be seen to have no particular "purpose." It is simply the style in which a sleeper thinks and, as in ordinary waking consciousness, it tends to string together the events of our life, but with its own imagery and particular logic. We simply enter a so-called altered state of consciousness, and a different style of cognition is put into play, one that immediately translates thoughts into images, and hopes and fears into dramas.

In dreams, writes Jorge Luis Borges:

. . . images represent the sensations we think they cause: we do not feel horror because we are threatened by a Sphinx; we dream of a Sphinx in order to explain the horror we feel. If this is so, how could a mere chronicle of the shapes of that night's dream communicate the bewilderment, the exaltation, the alarm, the menace, and the jubilation that wove it together?<sup>4</sup>

For the most part, with all our psychological sophistication, we have no doubt that the truth is before our eyes when a dream is actually going on. Ryoken, a monk of the Zen Buddhist tradition, put it this way:

An evening dream—everything must  
have been an illusion;  
I cannot explain clearly even one part of  
what I saw.  
Yet in the dream it seemed as if  
truth were in front of my eyes.  
This morning, awake, is it not the same  
dream?<sup>5</sup>

And the Tibetan Buddhist physician/teacher, Gampopa, stated in a similar vein:

When one wakes up after a dream one should think: "What is the difference between last night's dream and what appears NOW?"—There is no difference!<sup>6</sup>

### UNCERTAINTY AND CONVICTION IN VARIOUS STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

There are many states of mind, and altered states of consciousness, that exaggerate our tendency to quickly evolve a belief and trust in a convincing appearance, which is in fact only a conglomeration, an illusion, and a confabulation. It is the same confabulation that one sees during the memory loss of early senility and chronic, organic, mental diseases of all sorts; upon recovery from seizure blackouts and acute psychosis; and at the end of acting on a post-hypnotic suggestion; where, in an instant, a story is elaborated that justifies and explains an otherwise incomprehensible action.

What we call complete conviction in the dream is one phenomenon, but underneath that there is a wavering question of whether or not anything is really happening. Events change in an instant, scenarios switch without warning, faces transform in front of our eyes. An uncertainty is always there—a question—and that questioning is part of any vivid, perceptual experience. The same is true of daydreaming, but more subtly.

Uncertainty is a fundamental mark of the dream. It is the question of whether this is real or not, whether anything is happening or not, whether we are getting anywhere or not, whether the situation is pleasurable or threatening. This sense of uncertainty and hesitancy can be very vivid during the dream experience. In fact, it imprints every image of the dream. Before any sense of conviction is fully elaborated, there is uncertainty. This sense of question or of wonder

could be looked at directly, both in the dream and in the daydream.

Daydreams are images formed from discursive and wandering mind, toward which we begin to have feelings. Then we become interested in them, have a dialogue with them, try to move them about to make them more convenient and at best pleasurable. And the daydream also evokes a sense of conviction, though usually not as intense as the night dream. However, in the midst of an erotic daydream one may become aroused, even orgasmic, as conviction intensifies. On looking at daydream formation as it actually occurs, one finds that the issue of conviction is at the center of both kinds of dreaming. In both, there is an illusory trust.

If one is able to discriminate all the transitions between waking, sleeping, dreaming, and awaking, one sees that there are a great number of so-called "states of consciousness," a separate state of consciousness for every phase of mental alertness or torpor. Each state accompanies a different depth of sleep or clarity of awareness.<sup>7</sup> Mental activity has been observed in every one of the different states, no matter how "deep" or "light" the level of sleep. In each, the form of the mental activity is different. Most states of consciousness are occupied by thought formations that are strung together to form a kind of thinking which is particular to that state. Each state has its own logic, its own way of chain-linking thoughts and imagery. The content of each state attempts to continue, in its own logic, the themes that arose in the preceding state.

There are many "hypnagogic states," those transitions between waking and sleeping, which progressively manifest the translation of discursive thinking into sensory images. And many "hypnopompic states," which are the successive fading of imagery and retranslation into discursive thinking. There are sleep-talking and sleep-walking. There is the somnambulism that escalates into "fugue states." Automatic writing or composing occur in still different states. There are "multiple personalities" and so-called "dissociated states" of all kinds.<sup>8</sup> There are states related to organic or neurological

disorders of a great variety: anything on the continuum from slight concussion to opaque coma. There are seizure states that seem to be able to mimic just about any other state of consciousness. There are also those states which both precede and follow a seizure. In each of these, there occurs a degree of conviction that the current state is real and awake. It is the same conviction that gathers in the night dream and in the daydream.

There are many varieties of chemical intoxicants which have been used since prehistoric time to provoke specific states of consciousness. And then there are the modern synthetic chemicals and medicines. In the state that is often produced by the intoxicants *Datura*, or Jimson Weed, and Ketamine, one may be utterly convinced of living in and relating to two worlds at once, or alternating between the two, believing each to be as real as the other. Many psychotic states of delusion are similar. Hallucinatory states, in spite of differing intensities, reveal the same dream-like conviction.

As well, there are many altered states of consciousness described by various spiritual traditions. Each tradition looks at these states of consciousness in a different way. For example, in the provocative writings and demonstrations of Meher Baba, eight “states of consciousness” are discriminated, from the completely “god intoxicated” to the simply insane.<sup>9</sup>

Other traditions speak of “trance” states and “absorption” states, within which there are different levels of clarity. There are states of mind that are called “trance ecstasies”: the trance-dancing in Bali and many other places, and trance-talking of many kinds. There are many “yogic” practices to train the mind for progressively further clarifications of consciousness. There are also states of consciousness associated with the ubiquitous practices of shamanistic healing. When the Sioux Indian medicine man performs the healing ceremony called *yuwipi* and, in the dark, exerts a seemingly superhuman effort directed toward healing—during which he speaks and gives advice with uncanny accuracy and unforgettable

brilliance—there is little doubt that different states of consciousness are being worked with. At least four states of consciousness are described within the Black Elk tradition, during which one could be skilled and disciplined enough to heal.

In all of these seemingly infinite possibilities of different states of being, one finds a gathering sense of conviction, the same arising of conviction that gathers within the night dream. The same process of dreaming pervades all these various states of consciousness: whether awake or asleep, spiritual or pathological. This dream process, which includes and goes beyond the formation of the night dream, is the neutral foundation on which all states of mind are based.

## REORIENTATION AND DISORIENTATION

The phases of sleeping, dreaming and waking are the ever-recycling activities of our life. They are our natural history of being alive. In order to dream, we have to sleep. We initiate falling asleep by ignoring things, shutting off the world, closing down and switching out. Then, we begin to lose touch with our body and cut loose from much of our perceptual apparatus. And in the dream we begin to reconstitute ourselves once again.

It has been said that sleeping and falling into dream is similar to the process of dying.<sup>10</sup> According to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, in the process of dying, we lose our body and perceptual capacities. The subtle elements of the body begin to dissolve and the experience is of earth turning into water, water turning into fire, fire turning into air, and air dissolving into space. Eventually, the process of taking rebirth means giving rise to a form, becoming embodied. Likewise, a powerful habit of reorientation is triggered both on entering the dream and also in the process of awakening out of the dream.

Within the dream theater, we desperately scramble to find a new body—sometimes *any* body—and a world to live in. Then, we want everything to turn out all right. But when it does not turn out all right we begin to feel we are in trouble; perhaps we panic, become lost in fear, and find ourselves entering a nightmare. At that point we are working directly with fear. There are important possibilities in working directly with fear, even when it approaches terror. Either one is overwhelmed, or one can recognize moments of brilliance and wakefulness.

As we begin the process of awakening, the dream life is dying, and we hope to get out of it and resume our good old bodies, whatever we think they are. The waking up is a “coming to.” We might say, “Where have I *been?*” And then, as if trying to step back into old clothes, “Where have I *been?*” Sometimes we wake up from one dream only to find ourself in another dream, and then maybe still another. Finally, “This is *my* bed, *my* room; *my* view of the mountains that I always see in the morning; *my* breath, *my* fingers and toes.” Then, as in the usual formula of discursive thinking, “mine” becomes “I.” The process is made into a complete reorientation by the statement, “I want.” With that assertion, what happened beforehand begins to fade and dissolve. We might try to remember it, and we might only end up with the memory that we lost it, or not even that.<sup>11</sup>

Occasionally, there is a vague sense of loss and of wanting to get back into the dream, but more likely we are simply relieved to find ourselves again. No matter how much we might dislike or think poorly of our bodies, it is a welcome relief to reenter them. At times that relief may not last long before there is a tendency to want to be somewhere else. And so it goes, on and on, day and night: wake, sleep, dream; wake, sleep, dream.

We might find this whole process fascinating for a while, but when we watch it over and over again, realizing how much of our life’s energy and space is taken up with remembering and reorienting, it becomes tedious, even painful.

We might recognize a virtual addiction to dreaming-up ourselves.

There are many circumstances in which we “forget ourselves” or in which the habit of re-forming is interfered with. These are generally thought of as “disorienting” experiences. At such times we might say, “I’m not myself anymore. I have lost myself.” There might occur a dreadful fear of not becoming one’s self again.<sup>12</sup> This can happen with brain insults of one kind or another: from mild concussion, penetrating brain wound, or senile dementia.<sup>13</sup> This also occurs with certain anaesthetic inductions. Various forms of an inability to get back to oneself are seen during some so-called “conversion” experiences and during some episodes of psychosis. And the same fear may occur very dramatically while going into and coming out of hallucinogenic intoxication.<sup>14</sup>

The dream experience points out that the mechanisms, which allow for the sense of self to fall apart and to reassemble, are deeply ingrained in our functioning. They are a set of functions which are built into the chassis of the organism. The dream experience allows us to see that the falling apart of a self and the re-forming of it are not necessarily pathological events; they are ordinary phenomena. The solidity of any particular self, or any particular world where the self might dwell—along with the concepts, convictions and emotions that support it—are fragile and in a continual state of flux. Thus the mere habitual idea of a self does not impart reality to the existence of that idea.

From this point of view, the origin of the sense of conviction comes to light. It does not come from anywhere; it has no basis in reality. It is a convention: a process of reorienting, a series of mental reflexes ending in a belief in a seemingly-unshakeable sense of self. The solid sense of self immediately breeds what we call a “conviction of reality.” They are inseparable. Freud expressed it this way:

During sleep I took the dream-images as real owing to my mental habit (which cannot be put to sleep) of assuming the existence of an external world with which I contrast my own ego.<sup>15</sup>

Our sense of conviction itself is a reinforcing feeling of relief, a momentary resting place, before it all is once more so easily shattered.

The superficial content of the dream drama continues, especially in early dreams of the night, to expand and reinforce a secure sense of self. This was a most important demonstration made by Freud. That is, the dream is directed by an underlying desire to secure an undiminished sense of self. That desire orchestrates the dream, by means of a predictable series of habitual patterns and styles, in an attempt to rescue a sense of self, which during the preceding day has been injured, insulted, or merely brought into question.

## WAKEFULNESS WITHIN DREAMING

No strict and simple demarcation can be made between waking and dreaming, and no complete surety can be felt that the supposed wakefulness of the present moment is not pervaded by dreaming. However, the reverse is also true.

Just as much as our waking life can be blatantly exposed as having qualities of the dream, so can our dream-life or delusion-life be seen to be marked by qualities of wakefulness. Such a recognition is very important to the practice of psychotherapy, and especially in work with highly disturbed people. A therapist's skill and ease at connecting with a patient's lucidness is the key to the process of recovery. It requires a continual awareness of another person's pinpoint of wakefulness, in spite of whatever other mental confusion is happening. Even during the deepest stages of surgical anaesthesia, a quality of wakefulness is noted.<sup>16</sup> Wakefulness



threads through the life of dream as it does through the life of hallucination and delusion.

One's awareness during the dream experience could be expanded. In fact, many different traditions have pointed to the same wakeful nature of dream-life. It has been described in a variety of ways in different cultures, and with varying degrees of maturity. For example, awareness during dreams was hinted at by Freud, worked with and developed by the Marquis d'Hervey de St. Dennis, and fully explored by the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Freud attempted to describe a continuously functioning awareness that is always capable of discriminating that one is dreaming while the dream is occurring: "I am driven to conclude that *throughout our whole sleeping state we know just as certainly that we are dreaming as we know that we are sleeping.*"<sup>17</sup> Here, he hinted at an unconditional awareness that functions during the dream, but he did not explore this any further.

The Marquis d'Hervey de Saint Dennis was an independent scholar and dream psychologist who, in the 1850's, developed virtuoso dream practices intended to unveil and utilize awareness while dreaming.<sup>18</sup>

The Tibetan Buddhist tradition of cultivating dream awareness began with the Indian Buddhist tantric practitioners during the first centuries A.D., but its roots go back for several thousands of years before that to the Indian Aryurvedic and Tibetan Bon medical traditions. There arose an exceptionally developed view of what awareness is, of meditative precision and practices within the experience of dreaming, and a singular intention directed toward the study and practice of dream awareness. The awareness that is uncovered in the dream is one that is continuous throughout every state of mind or consciousness. It is inherently present and available, and is considered to be the essence of whatever is called "mind."

By relating to awareness in one's dreams, one can further recognize the awareness, or lack of it, throughout every state of being, one's own and others. In the Tibetan medical tradition, these practices contribute to psychological and psychosomatic health. The purpose of developing a discipline to acknowledge and relate to awareness in dreaming is not as an empty exercise of mind control or personal accomplishment; rather, it is for purposes of healing and for treatment. Beyond that, the purpose of such a discipline is to enable one to direct the course of the dream drama towards a situation of health and sanity. Once again, this is not meant as mere virtuosity, but a way of understanding in general how to transmute all the various forms of insanity into sanity. From beginning to end, Buddhist interest in and use of dreams is intended to promote the health and well-being of oneself and others.

## DREAMS AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

When we awaken from a dream, eventually someone is there. And that person requires attention, whether it is to wash, or urinate, or to have breakfast. We join the daytime stream of events that has continued from the day before. It is like entering into a new dream stream, but with motor and sensory apparatus now available. The same experience of the hollowness or emptiness of the dream phenomena could be recognized throughout the day, and that emptiness is the basis for what is called Contemplative Psychotherapy. In fact, it could be said that the heart of Contemplative Psychotherapy is to apply the realization of emptiness to caring for the health of others. In the Buddhist medical and healing traditions, which have inspired Contemplative Psychotherapy, genuinely compassionate action arises only out of emptiness, a freedom from being attached to the display of perceptions and emotions as solidly real, even in the midst of their brilliance and vividness.

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We could develop a kindness toward dream phenomena, no matter how provocative the content may be; that is, we could have a compassionate attitude towards our own dreams. This could begin with the mere intention and discipline of remembering our dreams. Such an intention can grow so that an attitude of kindness pervades the dream experience, and can be extended to all the multiplying personalities and shifting situations of the dream drama. The personalities of the dream drama cannot be related to in a way different than that in which we treat ourselves. When we do this, we find that we could extend that same attitude toward other people and their experience of dreaming.

Let us use the experience of "possession" as an analogy. In most ancient medical traditions, demonic influence is said to be a contributing cause to a variety of illnesses, especially to severe mental disturbances. Dreams themselves have frequently been thought of as the interventions of either demonic or healing influences, as in ancient Greek medicine. Highly disturbed people in every age and culture have spontaneously entertained the idea that they are inhabited, used and abused. The Tibetan medical tradition details many therapeutic approaches of relating to a person's experience of possession. But the basic principle is that the demonic influence should be treated compassionately and intelligently by the physician. That is, there is no possibility of healing unless the possessing element is also healed. Treating the patient and treating the powerful occupants of delusion are inseparable.

Hearing another person's dream involves the same attitude of kindness. Often we find that at first we are interested, but then we become impatient. We might want to say something clever or offer advice, even before the dream is thoroughly disclosed. We may find ourselves stalking the dream, or looming over the dream. By doing such things, we could create an atmosphere that turns the dream-telling experience into one of hesitation or embarrassment. To listen properly,

we need to curtail the desire to “help,” and become aware of the possibility of aggression within that desire.

While listening to a dream, we might make the dreamer’s interests our own:

And now I must ask the reader to make my interests his own for quite a while, and to plunge, along with me, into the minutest details of my life; for a transference of this kind is peremptorily demanded by our interest in the hidden meaning of dreams.<sup>19</sup>

That is the way Freud introduced a discussion of the first dream he submitted to analysis. He requested the reader or listener not merely to abandon preconception and judgment about the dream, but also to *become* the dreamer, or at least to feel for the dreamer. One could appreciate both the predicament faced during the dream drama and the conditions of the life and way of being that gave rise to such a dream. This amounts to joining the dreamer in his or her confusion about what is real or not real, a confusion which we all have experienced.

If one merely listens to the retelling of dreams over and over again, one hears the unmistakable continuity of personal predicaments between waking life and dreaming. The dream becomes a metaphor for predicaments occurring in the world of waking activity. Sometimes it seems the metaphor was created by a poet, and sometimes by a mentally retarded person. Such metaphors frequently become a useful part of the shared language that gradually accumulates between a patient and therapist.

Anyone’s natural curiosity about the nature of their mind is easily stimulated when communicating about dreams. A discussion of dreams in the therapeutic situation informs us about the process of illusion formation, of mistaken perception, and of conviction in delusion. These are the same issues and problems that we share with people whose minds are disturbed.

The purpose of using dreams therapeutically is to come to a greater respect for the mental powers that shape the dream and to recognize that mind needs to be protected. When a young child awakens during the night in what is called a "night terror" and appears inconsolable, there may be nothing to do but hold him. But when the child begins to calm down, we might go with him into the bedroom and look under the bed, in the closet, or out the window. The aspect of courage we lend to the child is the same that we might lend to and cultivate in anyone. The more one experiences the emptiness of the hallucinatory character of dreams, that much more one is able to communicate the means for others to protect themselves from mismanaging their projections.

## NOTES

1. This presentation of the Buddhist psychology of dreaming relies on the personal instructions of the Vajracarya, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche; and the doctors, Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, Trogawa Rinpoche and Yeshe Donden. The Mahayana viewpoints that are being expressed have been presented by Thrangu Rinpoche in *The Open Door of Emptiness*, translated by Shakya Dorje, Kathmandu, Nepal: Lhundrub Teng, 1983, and by Asanga in *On Knowing Reality*, translated by Janice Dean Willis, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
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11. For further explanation, see Bettelheim, Bruno, *The Empty Fortress*, New York: The Free Press, 1967; and Tendzin, Osel, *Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand*, Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 1982.
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17. Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 571.
18. de Saint Dennis, Hervey, *Les Reves et les Moyens de les Diriger, Observations Pratiques*. Paris: Amyot, 1867.
19. Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 105.