

RECOGNIZING YOUR DREAMS, PRACTICE TRANSFORMING ILLUSION INTO LUMINOSITY

In order to make the time we spend dreaming more meaningful, we must first recognize that we are dreaming. That is the initial exercise. The next step is called transforming the dream; the third is known as multiplying. The fourth practice is to unify the dream with the clear light. Recognizing, transforming, multiplying and unifying the dream with the luminosity of the true nature; these four outline the essential applications of dream yoga.

You can do these practices at any time, but normally you will begin before going to sleep at night. Start by aligning your motivation with the bodhicitta and the awareness of natural purity. These two are the foundation and structure of the whole path. Without these, your practice will fall apart, even if you've already grown a little. Bodhicitta aspiration and awareness of purity are indispensable.

Feel a deep love and compassion for all sentient beings, including yourself. Really open your heart to everyone. If you have any trouble with this, remember that you're doing this practice for all beings, and that everybody needs love in order to awaken their Buddha nature. Think deeply about the many good reasons to generate compassion for everyone. Then work on applying it in the present moment by changing your attitude.

Awareness of purity could be called a deep sense of appreciation and reverence toward all the buddhas, bodhisattvas and lineage masters, as well as a good feeling about yourself and sincere gratitude for your life situation. All of this is really important. In this disposition, begin the dream yoga practice.

Relax your mind, let go of all conceptions except those associated with bodhicitta, and after a while you even let go of these until you have reached the sphere of the true nature, the infinite state. Relax your mind as long as you can in the openness of the true nature, free of any mental fabrication or disturbance by mundane thoughts. Eliminate any trace of hope or fear, abandon analysis, discrimination, let go of any emotions such as anger, jealousy or attachment. Just release everything, let it go in all directions and dissolve; simply remain in the pristine awareness of the present moment.

Secondly, think, "Tonight, I'm definitely going to recognize the dream as a dream." Develop a strong determination and encourage yourself to recognize any dreams you have this evening. Feel into the supportive presence of the Buddha, Guru Rinpoche and the blessings of the bodhisattvas, all helping you to see the dream as a dream.

What we are at present is a type of dream. Our sense of self is like a dream. There's not really any way to make a fundamental distinction between this whole vision before us now and what we will dream tonight. We are in a waking dream and tonight we will experience a sleeping dream. In this way, everything is a dream. Think about this deeply, because it's really true! Perceptions in the waking state are

a reflection of your mind and mental events. This is also true of perceptions in dreams. So what is the difference between the waking state and the dream state? Consider the possibility that there is no basic difference. We're already in the dream state. At night, your dream self is lying in a dream bed under dream blankets in a dream house. All of these visions are dreams, the buddhas are dream beings, conceptions induce dreamlike states, day dreams, night dreams, they are all dreams. Contemplate this point deeply, because it is very important.

Buddha Shakyamuni often told his disciples to regard all phenomena as dreams. He used many examples, like an echo, a city in the clouds or a rainbow to illustrate the illusory nature of the phenomenal world. Dreams represent just one type of illusion. The whole universe arises and dissolves like a mirage. Everything about us, even the most enlightened qualities, are also dreamlike phenomena. There's nothing that is not encompassed within the dream of illusory being; so in going to sleep, you're just passing from one dream state to another.

With this understanding, lie down to sleep. It is suggested that you lie on your right side with your right hand underneath your right cheek. Keep your left leg on top of the right leg, with your left arm placed along the left side of your body. This is the same posture which was assumed by Buddha Shakyamuni as he prepared to enter mahaparinirvana. It is known as the lion posture.

First you must generate compassion and love for all dream-like beings. Then combine this with an awareness of the essential purity of all things. The third step is to make a very strong resolution to recognize that you are dreaming. In fact, affirm your intention to realize that everything, including yourself, is a dream and that what happens during sleep is but another dream. Intensify your determination toward this end and then concentrate. Various techniques may be used to support concentration, such as visualizing the bodies of the buddhas, seed syllables or ritual objects.

One of the primary methods used to stabilize concentration during the transition from waking to sleeping is to visualize a red lotus in the speech center. Imagine a very fat, red lotus with four petals which is in the process of blooming. The petals have not yet opened, but are not completely closed either. In the center of them is a bright light. Concentrating on the light is sufficient. If you can manage another visualization, picture a small white triangle at your third eye, inside of which sits a tiny Vajrasattva.

As you lie there, focus on these forms. Let them become smaller and smaller, subtler and subtler, relax and let yourself go deeper and deeper. Then, the instant you think of it, Vajrasattva sends out a great white light from your third eye which covers your body. He then takes a seat in front of you. Go to sleep concentrating on that. Unless you've entered the alaya, sooner or later you will begin to dream. If you're able to fall asleep without disturbing your concentration, you will easily be able to recognize that you are dreaming. Usually, when you recognize that you're dreaming, you also wake up. Learn to maintain this recognition while continuing to sleep and dream.

Dream practice is important to do regularly, with joyful effort. If we can recognize the dream as a dream, we can recognize the truth of any situation, even if we have died. Often people don't recognize that they've died, but I will say more about this when we get to the fifth bardo.

After you recognize the dream as a dream, and can maintain that awareness without waking, continue to observe the dream. This prepares you for the second step in dream yoga, which is to transform the contents of the dream. Now you're going to play around and have some fun. Here is where you can practice gymnastics. If you wish, you can free fall from thirty-seven thousand feet, touch the earth and not hurt a thing before quickly jumping back to your starting point again!

In the reality of the dream you can transform anything, including yourself. If you want to be a lion, you'll immediately experience yourself as a lion and know how that feels. You can also be transformed into a mountain, a tree, the earth, water, a man or woman, a child, or any of the beings in the six realms. You're not bound by physical circumstances. You can be free and independent and do whatever you like. There are no barriers here. You can be anything. Go beyond the limits of your hopes or fears. For instance, we tend to distance ourselves from what we don't like; but in the dream, we can creatively restructure phenomena, beings and events to penetrate our fixed assumptions and remove our preconceptions, revealing the deeper truth beyond the boundaries and limitations of dualistic systems and traditions. This is an exercise in openness and freedom and is known as transforming.

The third aspect of dream yoga is called multiplying. Here, you're opening more opportunities and expanding qualities. In the transforming practice, you change things, but stick to a single manifestation. This time you try to multiply aspects of the dream, such as your self, millions of times. You might take a hundred forms, or become ten different things at once. You could be various gods, a few buddhas, a naga, three bodhisattvas, a dozen human beings, many types of animals and a grove of trees, all at the same time. You can multiply yourself in millions of forms. Increase the variety and open yourself to the way that you embody the whole cosmic system. Understand that this is all you. The inconceivable vastness of our nature is what is revealed by this practice.

If you accomplish this, you can tour the pure lands and visit all five of the dhyanī buddhas at once, making offerings, receiving teachings and returning from all five directions simultaneously. While you are meditating in the pure land of Ratnasambhava, listening to teachings, making offerings, multiplying yourself and the offerings by thousands, you are also doing the same in the western pure land of Buddha Amitabha, as well as in the north in the presence of Amoghasiddhi and in the center, where Buddha Vairocana turns the wheel of the dharma in his pure land. You can visit them one by one or be with them all and receive their teachings simultaneously. In the dream bardo, mind is faster than the space shuttle or even the speed of light. You can be anywhere in a moment. There are many different pure lands where sentient beings can go and receive teachings, realize various benefits, and return. This is really true.

All the great Nyingma tertons have gone to the pure land of Guru Padmasambhava in their dream state. Many also meet Guru Rinpoche and his wisdom dakini, Yeshe Ts'ogyal, face-to-face in the waking world, but this often happens in dreams too. Typically, a terton return from one of these dreams and write a beautiful guidebook on the route he took, how he was received, who he contacted and other details. Sometimes the vision features a few weeks or a month's worth of experience, but in our time they inevitably return the very next morning.

For example, Tsasum Lingpa, one of the renowned Nyingma tertons, had a dream while he was camped on a mountain in the center of Tibet. He had no tent or sleeping bag. He was just sleeping on the mountain when five dakinis came and said, "Let's go now, you have to come."

So he asked, "Where to?"

"To see your parents," they replied as they held out a big shawl. "Sit here, we'll carry you."

Tsasum Lingpa replied, "I don't want to go now. I'd rather stay here."

But the dakinis told him, "You have to come. Now's the time, so let's go." They practically had to force him. Each dakini held a corner of the shawl and carried him off into the sky.

As he flew over India, he looked down and wondered, "Which mountain is that? What is the name of that river?" His description is similar to what we experience when we travel by plane. Upon arrival, he had an audience with Yeshe Ts'ogyal and Guru Padmasambhava. Tsasum Lingpa mentioned that Yeshe Ts'ogyal was very kind to him. He attended a big ceremony with Guru Padmasambhava and many other realized beings. Yeshe Ts'ogyal had Tsasum Lingpa sit near her and this made him feel very happy. At the end, when they said he must return, he insisted that he didn't want to leave. Guru Padmasambhava told him that he should go now, but that he would be able to come back later. He had already been there about three weeks when Yeshe Ts'ogyal walked him to the gate where the four dakinis awaited his return. She told him that she would never be apart from him, and after giving him more instructions, said goodbye. When the dakinis dropped him off, he was back on the mountain, the sun was shining over his head and he was sitting straight up. This type of vision was not unique to Tsasum Lingpa; many tertons have given similar accounts and details of what they saw in these pure lands.

Another great terton, named Dro-'dul/Dud-'dul/Chögyur Lingpa, was also carried off into the sky by dakinis. When he arrived at Guru Padmasambhava's pure land, he could also see that it had four doors. His party approached the eastern gate and had begun to open it when a great dakini appeared. She threw something in front of them that made everything go totally dark, so they couldn't enter. Then the dakini guides led him to the southern gate. As it opened, the same great dakini appeared again and threw something black which completely blocked the door. They went to the western and northern gates and the same thing happened. So Chögyur Lingpa asked the gate keeper dakini, "Why are you so mean?"

She said, "I'm not mean, but you were very cruel to me!"

The tertön replied, "I don't remember doing anything like this to you."

So she explained, "We were both there when Jetsun Lingpa was giving teachings. I was the ugly old lady you were so mean to. Do you remember now? That's why I won't let you see Guru Padmasambhava."

Dro-'dul/Dud-'dul/Chögyur Lingpa said, "Forgive me. I was wrong, and apologize for my rudeness. I'm very sorry; that was inconsiderate of me." With that, she opened the gate wide.

What I've said today is very brief, but many tertöns have given elaborate descriptions. For example, after the dakinis brought Tsasum Lingpa to the palace, they all opened the main gate together. He describes the color of the door and all of the things he saw when he walked in, beautiful gardens, an emanation of Guru Padmasambhava, some lamas, and many other specific details.

Everyone of the great tertöns kept thorough records of their experiences. If you're able to maintain awareness during the dream, you can do as these masters did. Such visions will arise naturally. The great tertöns don't actually have to do the practices we're explaining here because they're always aware of the dream-like nature of existence; these events reflect that understanding through the specific details of what they experience.

The fourth step is to unify the dream with the clear light, the luminosity aspect of the true nature. That is the most important of these exercises. Learn to maintain this understanding throughout the dream state. Whether you simply recognize the dream or go on to multiply and transform it, it is essential to maintain this unified awareness.

Clear light or primordial luminosity has many different aspects, but the most important is the complete absence of clinging and freedom from attachment. The best way to do dream yoga is to not cling to the dream, not be attached to recognizing the dream, not hold onto the results of multiplying or transforming, and in general, to not cling to any of these practices. If you don't cling, dreams themselves take on a radiant, transformed quality, becoming almost transparent to the clear light. In this way, dreams become an emanation of the five wisdoms. This is called unifying the dream with the clear light or merging the dream with the luminosity of the true nature.

DON'T SLEEP LIKE AN ANIMAL

In the fifth line, Guru Padmasambhava is again encouraging us to develop a pure intention, to become proficient in sustaining mindfulness and relaxed alertness in the bardo of dreams. We are admonished to take up the practice that mingles dreams and the waking state, to unify the night's perceptions with the day's perceptions. Through the exercises of recognizing, multiplying, transforming and

unifying the dream with the clear light, we learn to be free of all grasping and clinging to unreal phenomena. Form is a dream, feeling is a dream, touch, sound and taste are dreams; the mental state is also dreamlike. Samsara and nirvana are dreams, and enlightenment is a great dream. Therefore Guru Padmasambhava urges us to mingle the dream and waking realities. In truth, they are already mingled. There is ultimately no difference between them. As the Buddha instructed Subhuti in the Prajnaparamita teachings, "See all phenomena as dreams."

It's not just that the Buddha said this so we have to believe it. We can refer to our own experience. All these external activities are no different from dreams. They are so very much the same that no absolute distinction can be made between them, even when you consider it logically. For example, tonight we are in West Palm Beach. I'm talking and you're listening, but before this, where were you? Where are the parents we had when we were young? Where is the old school? What kinds of friends did you have? What did you talk about? What did you do? All of these are just memories now. We can't bring any of that right here except through remembering it. Last night's dream is just like those memories because we cannot produce it here in a tangible way. Think about memories, which are conventionally held to be real, because they correspond with our past experiences in the waking state, and dreams, which are usually considered to be unreal. Investigate closely and I don't think you'll find any difference between dreams and memories except in your imagination.

Consider how our physiology changes. As a new born, you're not very heavy. Maybe you weigh six or seven pounds and are about a foot long. You'll never be that small again. It is as if that happened in a dream.

As for myself, I was born in Tibet, and grew up there. I remember many events vividly, but they are all just memories. Tibet has completely changed since then. If I go back, I won't see anything that is the same. When I was a little older, I crossed the Himalayas and suffered various hardships until I finally arrived in India, where I lived for many years. Now all that has passed and another chapter of the dream is complete. Presently, I'm in the United States working on a new chapter. You could say that in this life, I've already been born three times. This is just a personal example, but basically, that is how things are.

When we carefully observe phenomena, they are all dream-like, but very often we don't look that close; we gloss over the surface and cling to dualistic tendencies, reinforcing old habit patterns. In truth, even this moment is changing, moving, evanescent. There is nothing solid or permanent about any of this. What is past, can never come back to the present. Everything is moving, nothing stays the same, just like in our dreams. For that reason Buddha compared the nature of all phenomena to a mirage, a magician's illusion, a bubble in a stream, a flash of lightning, etc. This evanescence does not merely apply to things that happened long ago, but even to this morning's activities which exist only in memories. It's all gone now. That was just another dream sequence that we went through to get to this dream. This is the reality of the big dream.

As practitioners of the Vajrayana, our minds must be redirected. Continuous

joyful effort is required to perform more positive activities, to gain more understanding, to develop wisdom, loving-kindness and compassion. The more we involve ourselves with this effort, the easier it is to transcend negative feelings and reactive emotion. Those who apply themselves in this way develop an uninterrupted insight into the body of enlightenment, the speech of enlightenment and the mind of wisdom, or the emanation-display of enlightenment. They see these three aspects of the Buddha all the time and have a deep understanding of their interplay. This same insight can also continue at night, in the dream state. This means you have established mind in the sphere of wisdom, beautified by love and compassion, for twenty-four hours a day.

Empowered by an understanding of the dream bardo, we can accomplish profound results and benefit all of the dream-like beings in samsara because we know we aren't truly limited by conventional strictures and boundaries. If you generate tremendous vitality, courage and commitment, liberating knowledge will manifest both in and out of dreams, transforming and benefiting everyone.

Since all phenomena are of an illusory nature, we are able to actualize the ultimate result. If things were really concrete and solid, we could never grow or develop. But because everything is dream-like, it is possible for us to discover and reveal all of the beautiful qualities of enlightenment, and radiate blessings like sunlight to all beings. With this understanding, we can use dreaming to benefit others. To not know very much about the dream-like nature of existence and seek the original nature within the purview of ego-clinging is an exercise in futility.

That is a brief teaching on dream yoga.

BARDO OF MEDITATION

sam-ten bardo

There are many types of meditation. You have all heard about *shamatha*, *vipasanna*, creation stage meditation involving visualization, and the *rtsa-rlung* meditations of the completion stage. All of these help the mind become more gentle, peaceful and single-pointed so it is not disturbed by thoughts. As in the dream yoga, every form of meditation must be based on the bodhicitta motivation and awareness of original purity. These two are always essential. Bodhicitta is the foundation and awareness of original purity is the inner structure of every practice.

WHEN THE CONCENTRATION BARDO IS DAWNING UPON ME, ABANDONING ALL KINDS OF WANDERING AND DELUDED THOUGHTS

Watch out for distractions, such as wandering or discursive thoughts. These are a great hindrance to meditation. Maintain a comfortable posture, keeping your spine straight, and let meditation deepen into a calm and clear state. Stay one-pointed, do not be distracted by conceptions, and continue maintaining the mind this way, whatever you're meditating on. And that is basically it. As Guru Padma-sambhava said, 'No distractions, no grasping and free of all aspects.' These three qualities are essential to every form of meditation.