

A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON LUCID DREAMING

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Within the Buddhist tantric tradition there is great emphasis on using the dream state of being for developmental ends. There exist a special practice called Dream Yoga, which in the West has been presented in one of the "Six Doctrines of Naropa". The Dream Yoga is a high meditation practice which is performed by the adept within the so called lucid dream state.

However, working directly and consciously in the lucid dream state is not accessible to very many people as the dream yoga methods are very strong and direct methods for development. I have committed myself to developing ways of dealing with dreams, which on the one hand is a training towards the actual dream yoga practice -- the practicing within the lucid dream state -- and on the other hand can fruitfully be used to more effectively confront and dissolve problematic psychological structures than by dealing with these in the ordinary waking state. Therefore, in my way of dealing with dreams it is appropriate to talk about different levels of purposes: 1) a surface level of psychological observance, and 2) a more subtle level of spiritual observance.

The psychological observance level is the practice level concerned mainly with changing our general psychological structures with the purpose of decreasing our everyday problems in relation to self and others. In contrast, the spiritual observance level, is a practice level mainly concerned with changing our existential existence with the purpose of decreasing the distance between, and thus unite, our rational and non-rational abilities or our feminine and masculine energies or our body and mind or substance and consciousness. By healing the gaps and finally uniting subject and object we break the dualistic determination and encagement of our existence. This is done by entering into the nature of existence, the essential nature of the universe.

It should be noted that the distinguishing these two practice levels is provisional. The two levels follow each other sequentially. One must solve one's major problems on a psychological level before being able to successfully enter the more subtle spiritual level where changing one's existential structures in relation to reality occurs.

One of the main concerns on a psychological level is to obtain a balance between our ordinary coarse, rational contact with and/or interpretation of reality and a non-rational relation with reality. This balance can be obtained, and has traditionally

within Buddhism been obtained, from two alternately used angles: 1) one can use methods to awaken and train the non-rational contact, whereby the coarse rational contact naturally will be softened, and become less rigid and projective and thus more open and clear, 2) or one can use methods to directly reduce the coarse, rationally created reality. In the second to touch upon and be able to perceive and appreciate a more direct and non-manipulated relationship with reality, a step which in itself will further a non-rational contact with reality.

During the process of establishing a balance between our ordinary, coarse rational and the non-rational contact with reality our psychological problems change as they are part and parcel of the coarse rational creations. In dealing with dreams, in the dream state in particular, we initially train the non-rational way of contacting reality, using our dream body/mind abilities. With this basis we deal with the dream object -- and later again with the dream subject -- in different ways, slowly breaking the coarse rational beliefs as well as many other layers of our dualistic way of existence.

Before I talk about the way I work with dreams, I will briefly be concerned with the creation and dynamism of our ordinary way of being, i.e. the ordinary course, rational way in which we contact reality. The foundation of the Buddhist psychology of perception/cognition, characterized by "the five skandhas" is useful. This system describes our psycho/physical dynamic being from the perspective of the meeting of subject and object, in other words it is a detailed breaking down of the moments of perception. We also need to concern ourselves with the question of why the dream state is particularly useful for our purposes: that is, the nature of the dream state. Finally, I will present how I find it useful to deal with dreams within the dream state and within the imaginary dream state -- methods based on the traditional dream yoga practice.

The Coarse Rational Way of Contracting Reality Illucidated Through a Presentation of the Five Skandhas

The first skandha relates the corporality of the object in terms of the qualities of form/color, sound, smell, taste and tactility, and, the corporality of the subject, in terms of our body and especially in terms of the physical sense organs and faculties. The first moment of contact or perception of the object/reality, within the ordinary waking state, is through the functional dynamism of the first skandha, our physical body, i.e. our five senses individually contact with the related qualities of the object. From the senses the sense impressions go to the five respective sense consciousnesses. Neither the senses nor the sense consciousnesses have intellectual abilities.

Immediately after the sense contact, the second skandha, the basic feeling which differentiates attraction from rejection sets in. The middle part of the "wheel of existence" refers respectively to lack of intrinsic awareness and to this basic feeling differentiating attraction and rejection.

The third moment of perception can roughly be described as the "taking in" of the sense-impressions by consciousness (which belong to the sixth sense consciousness, the aggregate pertaining to notion/conceptualization). In the ordinary waking state the sense-impressions are not just "taken in" but, especially within our modern, Western, highly materialistic cultures, the sense-impressions are almost simultaneously "taken over" by a consciousness dominated by a coarse-rational approach. This leaves the person with very little if any conscious awareness of the pure sense-impressions. The coarse-rational consciousness refers to the consciousness which establishes that the perceived object is in accordance with the stored image, and with the name/connotations of similar, already perceived, objects. All this is created within a certain complex cultural/individual view of reality.

The image we create of an object has first been singled out of it's natural interconnectedness with the whole and given a name. This image, when it is first created, will most often come between oneself and future similar objects' "perceived". Therefore, instead of actually perceiving the object, in the ordinary waking state, we mainly perceive our already created image of a similar object, and seldom meet the object more intimately than that.

The naming/language part in itself is most useful. However, in the coarse rational approach the name/language has a tendency to take over reality, i.e. we denote the language more meaning than reality itself -- ontologically we exchange reality with the map of reality. Due to the prejudiced creation of the coarse rational way of contacting reality, which we automatically and more or less subconsciously superimpose on the actual sense perception of the object in focus, we create our own reality, which in general is alienated from and most often not incomparable to reality as such.

Following the "taken in/taking over" of the sense-impressions by consciousness, feelings based on the coarse rational interpretation, arise to a more coarse level of pleasant/unpleasant feeling evaluation. Pleasant feelings arise when the object in focus seems to nourish and/or protect our image of ourself, and unpleasant feelings arise when our image of ourself is endangered. The coarse-rational contact gives the direction for the feeling/evaluation of oneself and the feeling/evaluation increases one's belief in the coarse-rational perception/cognition. In general, the feeling/evaluation has the last word in reality proof and in decisions.

When the feeling/evaluation of oneself in relation to the object thus arises, it enhances the further building of a coarse-rational interpretation of the object/reality. For instance, if one first evaluates the object as good/supportive of

oneself, one naturally approaches it and contacts more or less solely it's "good" sides. If, however, one first evaluates the object as negative, confronting, or undermining for oneself, one's interpretation and contact is skewed toward it's negative aspects. How trivial this description may sound, but it has a great impact on our perception/cognition of reality.

Due to the dynamism between the coarse-rational contact/interpretation and the feeling/evaluation of the object/reality, the different emotions accordingly arise. Here we enter the domain of the fourth skandha, the skandha pertaining, among other things, to mentation/emotion. When the emotions have first arisen, often that which we so passionately "love" and "hate" does not actually exist as such, apart from own self-created image of the object/reality.

The fifth skandha, the aggregate pertaining to our basic, very subtle consciousness energy refers to the main essence of being. The *rnam-shes* is underlying and gives energy to any psychological/mental function. That is, any kind of perception depends on the *rnam-shes*; the sensing, the coarse-rational perception/cognition, the feeling/evaluation, the emotions etc. If we take away all the above mentioned psychological/mental functions of the first four skandhas, the *rnam-shes* such is still maintained, continuing in and throughout all other states of being. Any of our mental/physical acts pertaining to the first four skandhas leaves *bag-chags*, imprints, in our basic psycho/physical energy of the *rnam-shes*. These are carried through into any other states of being, for instance into the dream state of being, from where they again emerge, being part of the manifest dream.

The coarse rational/emotional, perception/cognition of reality is thus, as pointed out above, not "pure", but gives us a projected view of reality, which always is mixed up with our beliefs, fears and self-protective tendencies, emotional states etc.

When in the beginning of this paper, the importance of first obtaining a balance between the coarse-rational and the non-rational relation with reality was stressed. I referred to "a state of being in relation with reality", which is not so corrupted by the coarse-rational/emotional approach, but is in closer connection to the basic psycho/physical energy of the *rnam-shes*. That is, closer to the actual nature of being.

In order to diminish and break the coarse rational creations, we have to use an appropriate kind of consciousness, which works in a different manner. For our purpose we have different natural states: the deep meditation state, the dream/bardo state or deep sleep/death state of being.

Why the Dream State Is Particularly Useful for Psychological As Well As Spiritual Observances

The dream state is useful for our purposes due to it's different manner of functioning, it's different nature. In psychologically changing ourselves it is stronger

and more effective to work with our difficulties from a level of being. This transgresses the coarse, rational domination and also transgresses the limited contact with reality we ordinarily have, due to our bondage within the rough physical body. If we want to progress in spiritual direction, change ourselves existentially, change the relation between subject and object towards their unity, then one must transgress both the coarse, rational domination and the limitations and bondage of the physical body.

As we have just shown our ordinary perception/cognition has a limited relationship to the object/reality. This is manifest in different ways. First of all, the perceptive/cognitive process of our ordinary waking state is strongly dispersed. The actual perception through the five distinct senses, though they can have direct contact with the five object qualities correlating with the senses, have no unity in themselves and no intellectual abilities. Further, the coarse, rational consciousness, belonging to the sixth sense consciousness, has no direct perceptive tools by itself, but has to rely on the sense impressions of the five physical senses and the five sense consciousnesses. This has a strong tendency to create its own individual reality, which might differ radically from the ordinary "surface reality" as such. Secondly, the perception/cognition is bound within the physical body and limited accordingly, i.e. it is space and time limited.

In the dream state, as well as in the deep meditation state, perception and cognition are united. The sense-impressions are not functionally distinct. They are not dependant on the physical sense organs, but operate directly from within the sixth sense consciousness, i.e. the fifth sense consciousnesses and the sixth sense consciousness operate naturally in union in the dream/meditation states of being - implying a natural basis for uniting body/mind and subject/object. This doesn't mean that the dream state and the deep meditation state are purely mental states. In general, within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, body and consciousness always need to work together. A body doesn't work without a consciousness, and a consciousness doesn't work without a body.

In the dream state and deep meditation state, we also do have/are a body. However, the dreambody and the body in the deep meditation state, often named the subtle body, are not of physical nature, but are energy bodies, and have therefore the ability to go beyond the limitations and bondage of the physical body, and beyond the space and time fixations.

An energy body can be characterized as the basic energy of our physical body, which is in close connection with the basic mental energy of the *rnam-shes*. In the ordinary waking state we naturally also have/are an energy body, but we are normally not aware of it. In general, we only use our rough physical body with our coarse rational consciousness. In such a state our physical and mental aspects of being are strongly separated.

In any Tantric meditation we try to awaken and train the energy body -- for example, through awakening the energy in the chakras etc. In the Six Doctrines of

Naropa there is a specific Tantric practice where you train the *sgyu-lus*, translated to "the illusionary body". The illusionary body is a very subtle energy body, which can be established through deep meditation. Through the *sgyu-lus* practice one can leave the rough physical body, enabling one to use the subtle body without interference. However, it takes a long time and is very difficult to be able to awaken and train the *sgyu-lus* from the waking state of being. In general, when we try to awaken and train our energy body from the waking state, the physical body constantly interferes. It is very difficult not to take notice of the physical body as we are used to identifying with and greatly caring about it.

However, in the dream state we have already parted from the rough physical body and we naturally have an energy body (the dream body) and because this state is much more closely connected with our ordinary state and our life situation in general, the Tantrics are often using the dream state in order to develop and practice the subtle body.

However, though our more subtle abilities are naturally awakened in the dream state, we are ordinarily, in this state, still dominated by our normal, coarse, rational and dualistic views and beliefs of separation between body and consciousness. So in order to be aware of and be able to use the abilities of the dream state, we need to train our dream body and dream consciousness. The training to which we will now turn.

How I Find It Useful To Deal With Dreams Within the Dream State and Within the Imaginary State of Being -- Methods Based on the Traditional Dream Yoga Practice

Stage One

The first stage is "holding the dream". This stage involves the training to both remember dreams and go consciously into the dream state. That is, having lucid dreams, knowing the dream is a dream while dreaming.

For psychological reasons it is very important to remember one's dreams. In the waking state we reject the repressed conflicts and fears, which we find difficult to deal with. However, these conflicts and fears, among all acts pertaining to the first four skandhas, leave imprints, *bag-chags*, in our basic psycho/physical energy of the *rnam-shes*, and reappear in the manifest dream in order to be lived through in this level of being. I find that to live through psychological difficulties is the natural psychological function of the dream.

However, when the dream state is at rest and the will power created, the adept should move into the active energy in order to 1) create a clear dream (a dream which is clearly remembered in details afterwards, leaving a strong impression on the adept) or in order to 2) consciously be aware in the dream state, knowing the dream is a

dream, i.e. having a lucid dream. But if the adept gets too much into active energy, he/she will wake up. He/she therefore needs to hold a fine balance between the non-active and the active energy, using the chakra energy of type 3 above, in order to stay in the lucid dream, neither waking up nor falling back into the ordinary dream flow.

Stage Two

The second stage is "mastering the dream". In this stage, knowing the dream is a dream while dreaming, the adept develops his/her own power of using his/her dream body with volition. This enables him/her to deal actively with the dream object in a way, which is similar to the way we deal with it while awake.

The first step of obtaining the power of mastering his/her dream body, is to consciously be the dream body, as ordinarily we are being our physical bodies. Being the dreambody still requires the adept to train how to use it. He/she needs to get all the senses to work properly and to be able to move the dream body at will.

Next the adept trains the use of his/her willpower through the dream body in order to further investigate that which captures his/her interest. When this step is mastered he/she has the ability to acknowledge disturbing psychological structures emerging in the dream, and further he/she has the ability to work directly in the dream state with them.

In this context, I will mention some methods the adept can use to work directly with fear when confronted with negative aspects in the dream scene (the dream object), and discuss how/why these methods work. The adept is advised never to flee the negativity, but to either fight it, or better still, to let the negativity destroy him/herself. In other words, unite with the negativity. In order to understand how these methods work, we must understand the dynamic between the negativity and the subject being confronted by it. Here we have to reach back to the basic psychology presented earlier under the third skandha, where we found that pleasant feelings arise in contact with the object, when the object seems to nourish and/or protect our image of ourself, and unpleasant feelings arise, when our image of ourself is endangered. Thus, within my interpretation and experience the negativity frightening the adept in the dream is a picture/representation of the adept's fear of having his/her self-image destroyed.

If the adept flees the negativity he/she misses the opportunity to work with his/her self-image and with the fear of having it destroyed. Instead, through this action he/she manifests his/her self-image even further. Secondly, if the adept fights that which will destroy his/her self-image, he/she creates a feeling of being protected in him/herself, and he/she will therefore feel stronger both in the dream, and also, it seems, in the waking state reality. Thirdly, the adept can let the negativity destroy him/herself in the dream, i.e. he/she can unite with the negativity. When the

negativity destroys the dream subject, it destroys that which the adept identifies with and therefore wants/needs to protect, his/her self-image. However, when this is destroyed the adept goes beyond this image of him/herself and reaches a more authentic layer of his/her being. No longer identifying with the image, there is nothing to maintain the game of fear and negativity, which is why there no longer is any fear or negativity. The adept has united him/herself with his/her fear and negativity. Through this act, it seems to me, he/she has solved the underlying psychological problems.

Having obtained the ability of "mastering the dream" it is possible for the adept to do many different and possibly unusual things within the dream. If, for instance, the adept wants to understand certain things, it could be within the sciences or within philosophy, psychology, the arts, he/she can -- through various methods -- contact or tune into "energy-lines" of the knowledge he/she wants to acquire. The dream state gives special possibilities to do so, due to its special nature of a stronger unity between body/mind and subject/object.

Stage Three

The third stage is "changing the dream". Above I mentioned that the core point in the dream yoga was to break or go beyond our dualistic way of existence. In this stage the adept is supposed to start directly breaking some of our strongest beliefs: the belief of solidness and absoluteness of the object, and the belief of our separateness from the object, the belief of time linearity and space fixation. Thus, in order to change the dream object the adept has to train him/herself to go the will power of his/her dream body/mind, contacting his/her basic structuring energy, through which he/she can contact the dream object of the same energy level. On this very subtle structuring level of being there is a correspondence between the energy of the subject and the object, through which the direct contact is possible. Through this direct energy contact the adept can change the object, and/or can create objects at will.

In order to train to go into this subtle structuring level of being, the adept is traditionally instructed to use different deity-meditations in the dream state. However, to use these certain initiations are required. When the adept can tune into this subtle structuring energy of the subject and the object, and use it for changing the object, he/she is breaking the ordinary natural laws of separateness. After obtaining this ability the adept is able by his/her will power and unity abilities to transgress ordinary space and time limitations.

When the adept was working with the dream object, he/she had to work from his/her more rational/active chakra energy side, still keeping a balance in order not to awake from the dream state. But approaching the training of the unity abilities of subject/object the adept is advised to work more through the non-rational, non-active, feminine energy side.

As I have mentioned before, different levels of imprints, *bag-chags*, of more or less problematic observances, give rise to the main part of the dream. Having sufficiently mastered the dream the adept naturally and spontaneously does seem to know which method to use in successfully dealing with the dream appearances, and through these with the underlying *bag-chags*. These needed to come out, that is to be lived or worked through. After having mastered the methods of changing the dream appearances, the adept can now change the unwanted, unpleasant dream situation or his/her dream being. This act seems to have a direct healing impact on the underlying psychological difficulties associated with his/her waking life.

Stage Four

The fourth and last stage of the dream yoga is to "merge with the unity of the subtle body/mind". Here the adept is no longer working with the dream object/appearances. He/she now works directly through the unity of the subtle feminine and masculine energies of his/her dream subject, going beyond the dream appearances. From this state of being, which is closely connected with the above mentioned state of "the illusionary body", the adept works directly with his/her relationship to the waking state reality, also breaking the ordinary natural laws of the reality of the waking state.

However, as mentioned in the beginning, it is not so easy to traverse the step of knowing the dream is a dream, to be able to create lucid dreams at will, or to go consciously into the dream state of being.

Dream Reliving

Instead of working directly in the dream state, I have found it useful for the adept to work with the same methods in the imaginary-dream state of being. The imaginary-dream state is a deeply relaxed state from which the adept enters a prior recalled dream, with which he/she wishes to work. It is much more effective to work with the dream from the dream state than to work with the recalled dream from the imaginary dream-state. The dream state is more subtle than the imaginary-dream state. The imaginary-dream state is more easily influenced by the view of the coarse, rational consciousness. However, psychologically speaking, if the adept is able to enter the imaginary state and not be disturbed or influenced by the coarse, rational view then it seems fruitful for him/her to apply the dream yoga methods in the imaginary dream state.

For advancement on the spiritual levels, i.e., existentially changing the dualistic way of existence, breaking the natural laws, it is, of course, difficult to work from the imaginary dream level due to the possible interference of the ordinary coarse rational dualistic view. However, some progress takes place when the methods are properly

used.

In general, it should be clear, that any practice towards awakening and developing the subtle energies of body/mind, whether through the imaginary dream state, training the imaginary dream state, training the chakra energies etc., has a great impact on the abilities of the adept in creating clear dreams, and in furthering his/her dream power necessary for creating lucid dreams at will, and for working directly with the dream appearances in the dream.

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