

Introduction

Dream Yoga is based on the journals of my dream practices spanning the twenty-five year period from 1971 to 1996. From this account I have selected fifty dreams representative of my experiences. My journals began in 1971, inspired by my contact with Swami Sivananda Radha (Sylvia Hellman) whom you will meet throughout the story that follows. For she not only introduced me to dream yoga and encouraged my efforts, but in the symbolism of my dreams she became my inner guide, and it is this story that weaves like a thread through the fabric of my journals.

It was at Yasodhara Ashram, the yoga retreat and study center she had established in British Columbia, that I first met Swami Radha. Shortly after my arrival there I began participating in the ongoing dream study group that met weekly. Then in 1976, following my completion of her Yoga Teacher's Program, she requested I become involved as an instructor in the dream programs the ashram offered, an involvement that continued until my departure in 1982. In the subsequent years Swami Radha and I were in correspondence and I maintained the dream practices on my own.

Dream Yoga

In recording and working with my dreams I followed closely the methods Swami Radha had provided in our early contact. My own introduction had been entirely oral. She stressed an intuitive approach and instruction was provided as the situation evolved. As is common in the Eastern tradition, I had to rely to a great extent on my own resources. Many years later she presented her methods in more detail with the publication of *Realities of the Dreaming Mind* in 1994.⁽¹⁾ Here she combined the various facets that I had been introduced to

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separately, into a synthesis of Eastern and Western perspectives which she called dream yoga – a term derived from the dream yoga practices of the Eastern traditions.

There are three interrelated facets to the practice. First is the foundation of working with dreams and understanding personal symbolism. The approach here is similar to the dream interpretation methods used in many schools of modern psychology, though working with symbols is intrinsic to yogic practice as well. Secondly is an exploration of mind, perception and reality. This exploration is deeply rooted in the yogic tradition and here utilizes the nature of the dream experience to provide a counterpoint and perspective on our waking experience. It is a process of philosophical clarification and is in effect the theoretical aspect of dream yoga. Thirdly are the dream yoga practices, which have a long history in the Eastern traditions, and focus on bringing an awareness of a transpersonal symbol such as the light into both the dream state and the waking state.

I have outlined the foundation methods for dreamwork in chapter two to provide a framework. Additional information is included in the appendix. Much can also be extrapolated from my interpretative work and commentary on the many different dreams I have included. Only by placing dreams and symbols within the context of life experience do they become truly meaningful. Readers who would like a more detailed methodology should refer to *Realities of the Dreaming Mind*. Swami Radha's approach has much more in common with the Jungian than with the Freudian schools of modern psychology. In the literature on dreamwork from that time period, I found a similar interpretive approach in the dreamwork method described by the Jungian psychologist Robert Johnson in his book, *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth*.⁽²⁾ In terms of group dreamwork the *Experiential Dream Group* method described by Montague Ullman in *The Variety of Dream Experience* ⁽³⁾ has many parallels to the approach I was

introduced to. In dream yoga the primary intent of this facet of dreamwork is that through exploring our personal symbolism we can use our innate ability to spontaneously generate symbols and metaphors to help resolve personal problems and develop creative possibilities. It increases our awareness of the potentials that are inherent in the dream state.

The second facet, an exploration of mind, perception and reality, is to some extent a natural outgrowth of any longer term study of dreams. I explore this at various points throughout the book as the topic arises. The subjective nature of the dream state, the spontaneous creativity of the mind to create symbol and metaphor, as well as the often thought provoking experiences encountered in dreams, inevitably raise questions about the nature of our experience of reality. Today we see similar questions being raised though dream research, as for instance in Gordon Globus' *Dream Life, Wake Life*.⁽⁴⁾ This exploration is essentially an examination of human awareness and is an ongoing process of philosophical clarification. It is in effect the theoretical aspect of the dream yoga practices, as any process of exploration requires a balance of theory and practice.⁽⁵⁾

The third facet is the Eastern dream yoga practices. Both the second and third facets of dream yoga are rooted in the yogic traditions and are closely related – being the theory and practice respectively. Swami Radha was introduced to the practices by her Indian guru, Swami Sivananda, within the context of her mantra training, as she later did with me. The underlying principle is to bring an awareness of the mantra and visualizations into both the dream state and the waking state.

The dream yoga practices date back to at least the 11th century and probably much earlier. They are one of the teachings of Naropa, an Indian Buddhist yogi (1016-1100AD), and are recorded in Herbert Guenther's *The Life and Teaching of Naropa* – his translation and commentary on a 12th century Tibetan manuscript.⁽⁶⁾ The line of thought which Naropa represents is called mantrayana or tantra, an aspect of Mahayana Buddhism. It

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was through Guenther's work that I learned both the historical context and, more importantly, the philosophical foundations behind the dream practices. This became a more significant influence in the later years of my own practice.

A major emphasis in Guenther's commentary is his ongoing effort to bridge Western and Eastern thought. In discussing the problems of translation, in addition to the linguistic intricacies, he asserts that the main issue is the differences in thinking. He points to the objectifying tendency in Western philosophy where subject and object are essentially in opposition, whereas in the East they are in juxtaposition, engulfed by something which is neither subject nor object.(7)

Guenther often uses the term de-objectification in his discussion of many aspects of mantrayana thought and practice. The original texts use the analogy of our waking life being frozen and that it is necessary to 'unfreeze' this state. This topic is central to dream yoga and reveals the close relationship between the second and third facets of dream practice.

It was through Naropa's student, the Lama Marpa, that these teachings were brought into Tibet in the 11th century. Based on the availability of current publications, the dream yoga practices have been best preserved in the Tibetan schools, particularly in the early Nyingma and Kargu traditions. Naropa would have influenced these schools, although there are claims of earlier unverifiable sources. The two writers that came to my attention were *Namkhai Norbu (1992) (8)* and *Tenzin Wangyal (1998) (9)*. Their accounts came many years after I had begun my dream practices, but I found it very interesting to see both similarities and differences with the practices as I was taught. I address many of these issues as the topics arise through the book.

As both a convergence and balance to the first two facets, the dream yoga practices develop and reinforce a holistic self-image. While the foundation practices can tend to be psychological with their focus on personal symbolism, the exploration of mind and perception could become either

theoretical speculation or potentially unsettling as our idea of reality is transformed. It is essential that theory and practice are in balance and support each other. The dream yoga practices help to establish a transpersonal perspective, with a subtle yet profound effect on our self-identity. This is a gradual process and attitude is an important factor. The preliminary practices I introduce in chapter four, with more detail in chapters six and fourteen.

These three facets are closely related and to some extent form a progression, although aspects of all three are practiced concurrently. My journals reflect the gradual evolution of these practices in my life. Over the years I came to a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of myth, philosophy, and dream practice – between my inner images, my articulated vision, and my practice and application in daily life. The intent of this book is to give an account of my personal experience using dream yoga over an extended period of time.

A Dream Journal

The year after Swami Radha's death in 1995, I had an unusual series of dreams in which she was a central figure. These encouraged me to take a closer look at my twenty-five years of dream journals. When I began to review this body of work as a whole I found a story unfolding that was much more cohesive, though intriguingly enigmatic, than I had realized through my earlier efforts. The dreams themselves encouraged me to write about this experience. This is their story.

The first seeds of writing were sown in the late 1970's when Swami Radha suggested on several occasions that it was important to eventually write about my experiences so that there would be examples of how the yogic practices had influenced my life. She was then completing her first major book, *Kundalini Yoga for the West* (1978) (10) and recognized the need for diversity and examples of practical experience in a modern

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Western context, as yoga itself is diverse in the tools it offers to suit different temperaments.

When I spoke with her many years later in 1988, I had just purchased a computer and was beginning to organize my dreams in a database. She was very excited about this idea and encouraged me enthusiastically to continue with the project. It was a large undertaking as I had not only hundreds of dreams from previous years to enter and organize but was continuing to record and work with new material. Gradually the groundwork of my dream database took shape and by 1996 I had largely completed the project. Inspired by the coinciding series of dreams following Swami Radha's death, I then started reviewing my dream journal in greater depth.

I began by selecting and sorting dreams that had been particularly significant in my experience. These I organized chronologically, and the progression reflects both my deepening understanding of the dream yoga practices and my evolving personal development. The manuscript is autobiographical in nature since the dreams are woven so closely into the fabric of my experiences; my years at Yasodhara, my relationships, and the daily events of my life. Only by writing from my personal experience do the dreams take on a depth of meaning. And though the dreams are one person's, many of them deal with themes and symbols reflecting the transitions and gradual maturing that is common to our collective human experience. These I think will resonate with many readers and hopefully provide some insight into what a personal exploration of dreams, as I had learned to work with them, can develop into.

The dreams included in the book I have edited enough to improve their readability. Some are segments from longer dream sequences. In doing this I have made every effort to maintain the integrity of their message. To maintain a distinction between my waking life and dream experiences, I have used single names only in referring to the individuals occurring in my dreams. For

instance with Swami Radha, I call her ‘Radha’ when she is a character in my dreams.

To avoid the tendency of the conscious mind to edit these images from the dream state, most of the dreams were recorded when I first awoke. The descriptions were often fragmented like the dream events themselves. Also the dreams span a period of many years and inevitably even the process of writing the dream down was influenced by my concepts and understanding at the time they were recorded. So there is a distinction to be made between dreaming and the recorded dream, they occur in two very different states of consciousness that we might call dream-life and wake-life. The recorded dream is only a description of the dreaming experience.

I had been keeping a dream journal for seventeen years when I first started using my computer to assist in recording, organization and retrieval. The methodology and structure evolved as I progressed, as I was not aware of any examples I could follow. An outline of the methods I used in the development and application of the database is included in the appendix to help those who are interested in applying these in their own dream work. Of course the computer is only a tool and other approaches are equally valid. The important thing is recording, organizing and reviewing your dream material.

One feature I included in the database was a classification system so that I could trace the larger patterns and themes in my dreams. This process expanded my awareness of the importance of looking at dreams over time. Further reflection and the perspective of distance, revealed themes and meanings that were often not apparent. Also it showed me that even though I may not have understood many of the dreams at the time, keeping a journal alone had been valuable. There was continuity to my personal dream-myth that I had been aware of, but in a fragmented way. I found in the writings of the psychologist Carl Jung, an early influence in my dreamwork, parallels to my own experience. Jung recognized that the basic themes and ideas in

dreams could be much better recognized in a series of dreams.(11) He also noted that by watching dreams over a long period of time it was possible to observe a hidden regulating or directing tendency at work creating a slow process of psychic growth. This he termed the process of individuation.(12)

Dream Selection

The process of selecting dreams from my twenty-five years of journals deserves comment, as there were inevitably a lot of factors to consider. I began organizing the material for this book by reviewing my dreams with the help of my database, then selecting and sorting those that had been particularly significant. These extraordinary dreams stood out in my journals either because of their vivid impact, or because they reflected such poignant themes. They provided the framework. In particular, dreams at times of transition in my life stood out clearly; they provided guidance and assurance in times when there was much uncertainty. These I organized chronologically, but more importantly around themes and topics that have been central to my own development and reflections.

Like a thread running through this tapestry was the presence of 'Radha', the inner guru of my dreams. The presence of the mentor-figure, who brings the gift of insight, is an important feature in dreams. In myth this figure is represented by the deity, in any of its various cultural forms, or sometimes simply by the light. Whether personalized in the mentor, or mythologized in the deity, these figures represent our inner potentials.

The dream as oracle, a common theme in folklore and history (though commonly attributed to a deity or outside agent), is reflected in the spontaneously creative ability of dreams to inform ourselves. This same creative ability is seen in dreams that characterize a response to questions or issues that are strongly in mind. This process of 'dream incubation' also has a

significant historical context, and has received attention from other writers such as Stanley Krippner and Joseph Dillard's *Dreamworking*.⁽¹³⁾ I found it a common occurrence with new students coming to dream class – the anticipation frequently generated significant dreams even in students who had limited experience of dream recall. Accordingly dreams that demonstrated this ability were an important factor in my selection.

The mentor-figure is just one aspect of what I called 'mythological motifs' – the presence of mythical figures and themes. This is similar to what Carl Jung referred to as 'archetypes'. I attempted to trace these motifs using my classification system. Dreams containing these motifs were often outstanding. They were particularly frequent in dreams that I termed 'extraordinary', and often a significant contributing factor in what made them extraordinary.

Another significant factor was the presence of repetitious themes. Repetitive dreams are not infrequent based on my experience in dream groups. Repetition in dream content and dream themes is usually a means of focusing attention on an issue and I used this as both a selection criteria and as an organizational tool in developing chapters.

Not infrequently a mix of these factors was present in a given dream. I ended up choosing dreams that I felt were the best examples to illustrate a given topic. Inevitably there was a lot of material I had to leave out. Maintaining a line of thought in the seemingly chaotic montage of my dreams was sometimes a challenge, yet more often I was struck by how cohesive the underlying themes were when viewed with perspective.

Accordingly my focus is on the themes and patterns that developed in my journal over time, rather than a detailed exploration of individual dreams. This approach more clearly reveals the broader role that dreams play in self-development. The dreams speak for themselves and I have let them be the

center and the organizer with enough commentary and history to bring out their meaning and context.

Dreams and Self-Development

Globally and historically, dreams and myth have been primary vehicles in the evolution of cultures and human consciousness. Today we have the unprecedented opportunity to benefit from the remarkable meeting of cultures and ideas that is taking place. Throughout history we can witness the vitalizing effect cultural interplay has yielded, yet never on such a global scale. At the same time we are at a precarious point in modern life as we irrevocably move away from our traditional lifeways, and the intuitive connectedness that is often a natural part of those lifeways. The mythologies that inspired, built and anchored our cultures and civilizations are adrift, so an understanding of our inner symbols and dreams becomes a vital tool. As Stanley Krippner and David Feinstein write in *The Mythic Path*, the myths and rituals guiding an individual's maturation are no longer cultural strongholds that remain stable for generations. Myth making today has become the domain and responsibility of each person.(14)

My explorations of Eastern philosophy and practice, together with my readings in comparative mythology, gave me both perspective on my cultural context and created an ongoing dynamic in my understanding. At the same time my dream practice gave life and expression to my inner symbolism. In their own seemingly chaotic way, like a kind of archaic language, dreams provide a window on our inner lives and access to a wealth of potentials.

It is often difficult to maintain perspective with the process of self-development, self-awareness develops gradually. The idea of some kind of flash of enlightenment is largely an illusion. We may have flashes of insight into certain attributes of our lives but the application of those insights is almost always a

gradual process. Here is where dreams, and particularly the review process, can provide invaluable insight and help overcome discouragement.

Based on my experience it would seem that dream-life is operating in a different time frame or perhaps outside of time altogether as we experience it. In our waking lives we tend, by choice or necessity, to get enveloped in the concerns of daily life. As I look at my dream record over a period of twenty-five years the concerns are broader – the larger themes of life and self-development are dominant. My dreams seem vitally concerned with clarifying my inner mythology and philosophy. As a personal history they provide a sketch as valid, or perhaps more valid, than a record of daily events.

In this sense we all have both an outer and an inner story. Yet we tend to place emphasis on our outer-objective experiences, giving little attention to the profound influence of our inner-subjective states. Our dreams are often viewed as fragmentary and illusive, and we assume that the stream of events of our outer lives has some ultimate continuity and defacto reality. From a yogic point of view, this belief in a substantial self as the center of existence is considered the underlying problem. Yoga recognizes the need to function from a more holistic perspective.

The mantrayana affirms the underlying unity of reality and declares that there are three facets to existence – the three intermediate states. In short form these are life, death, and dream. Each of these states has both challenges and strengths. Life is our experience as differentiated awareness, in the world of facts. In death we return to the undifferentiated ground of being, the all-encompassing radiant light. The dream state is one of potentialities, awareness unbounded by objects, and reveals the non-objective nature of existence. The dream techniques are meant to make us realize our potentials and possibilities. The texts state that through the dream state we can best transform bewilderment, the root cause of suffering, so that we

are no longer divided against ourselves. Our most basic level of bewilderment is the confusion and unresolved problems we experience in daily life, and reflecting on the symbols of our dreams is the starting point in clarification. Dreaming reveals the symbolic-subjective nature of experience. Lucid dreaming further expands the possibilities of awareness. And finally it is through the dream state that we can most readily experience our identity with the all-encompassing radiant light, and in this manner lose our fear of death. Dream yoga is a practice used to achieve this.

One of the early commentators on the mantrayana, the venerable Gampopa, a student of Milarepa, expressly states that the purpose of this existential phenomenon is to awaken to Buddhahood – to our essential nature in the all-encompassing radiant light which permeates all existence.⁽¹⁵⁾