

Practice of Dreams

From the:

Exquisite Words of Master Nāropa

A Clear Explanation on How to Practice the Instructions of the
Profound Path of the Six Dharmas of Naropa

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3. Practice of Dreams

The third topic is that, by relying on the sambhogacakra at the throat, the impurities of the state of dreams of the habitual tendencies of confusion within confusion are purified, and anger is brought onto the path. This practice of dreams is the instruction that is the measure of the path. It says in the *Vajra Song of the Condensed Six Dharmas*:

At the time of the confusion of the experience of dreams
[Visualize] an *Om* syllable at the throat, endowed with rays of light.
Through the connection of the habitual tendencies of memories and longing,
If you dream of males, they are said to be male demons.
If you dream of females, they are said to be female demons.
If you dream of animals, know them to be nāgas.
If you dream of joy, the mind is caught in its sway.
If you dream of sorrow, the experience is unpleasant.
If you do not know the root of demons and mind,
The demons of discursive thoughts are inexhaustible.
The self-liberation of good and bad is the meaning of the teaching.
It is called the oral instruction of dreams.
Have you understood their nature, Lotsawa?

There are three parts to the practice: the preliminaries, main part, and conclusion.

3.1 Dream Preliminaries

As for the preliminaries, perform them in the same way explained for recognizing luminosity. Also, meditate on the Guru at your crown, and pray that you will be able to recognize dreaming while dreaming.

3.2 Main Dream Practice

The main dream practice has three parts: recognizing dreams, training, and training in the suchness of dreams.

3.2.1. Recognizing Dreams

This has two parts: recognizing dreams and going elsewhere if not recognizing dreams.

3.2.1.1. Recognizing Dreams

First, recognizing dreams has five key points. As for the key point of time, it is whenever it is easy to recognize dreams. Usually this is between the time of very early morning and when the sun gets warm.¹ As for the key point of intention, again and again think, "I will know that I am dreaming while I am dreaming!" As for the key point of the body, like luminosity practice use the posture of a sleeping lion or an upright posture, and wear light clothing. As for the key point of prāṇa, hold gentle united vase breathing as much as possible.

As for the key point of the object, visualize yourself as the deity. At your throat, in the center of a four petalled red lotus is a white *Oṃ*. In front is a blue *Aḥ*, on the right a yellow *Nu*, behind a red *Ta*, and on the left a green *Ra*. Visualize them all as brilliant, endowed with the feeling of bliss. If you do not appreciate visualizing the four syllables on the petals, it is also suitable to visualize only the *Oṃ* in the center. When falling asleep, focus awareness on the *Aḥ*. When sleep gathers a little, focus your mind on the *Nu*. When sleep gathers greatly, focus on the *Ta*. When sleep fully gathers, focus on the *Ra*. When going to sleep, focus your mind on the *Oṃ* and sleep.

If you do not recognize dreams through that, visualize Guru Vajradhara upon a lion throne, lotus, moon, and sun seat at your throat. At your Guru's throat is the lotus together with the syllables, radiating light, as before. Meditating that your Guru also says, "All phenomena are dreams," fall asleep.

If you do not recognize dreams through that as well, visualize yourself as the yidam deity. Focusing your awareness on a white bindu the size of a mustard seed, radiating light in the center of a moon in between your eyebrows, fall asleep. If you do not recognize dreams through that as well, above yourself visualize a white bindu and below yourself visualize a red bindu. Like rocks being gradually swept away by water in a river, many bindus gradually emanate from the two bindus. Visualizing that they surround you like a sphere with yourself in the middle, fall asleep. With all of these visualizations, it is very important to hold vase breathing.

3.2.1.2. Ritual of Going Elsewhere

Alternatively, if it is the case that you do not recognize dreams through all of these, there is the ritual of going elsewhere (*spog pa*). Go to a desolate valley alone, strip naked, cry out longingly with fierce disillusionment [with *saṃsāra*]. Visualize that your body is inside out with all your essential organs outside of you. At your throat in the center of a lotus, clearly visualize a black *Ma* syllable. Fall asleep without wavering from that, and you will certainly recognize dreams.

As for the key point for recognizing dreams easily, meditate, feeling that whatever activities you do during the day are dreams. Clearly visualizing a white *Oṃ* in the center of a lotus at your throat, do vajra recitation all the time with an *Oṃ* on inhaling, an *Aḥ* on abiding, and a *Hūṃ* upon exhaling. Understand that through this, *prāṇa* and mind are gathered at the throat, and thus dreams will be easily recognized. Furthermore, when you know with certainty in all the dreams, "This is a dream," that is recognition. Additionally, recognizing all dreams whatever they may be is smooth recognition (*'jam zin*). Recognizing dreams [only] at the time of fear, panic, and so forth is rough recognition (*rtsub zin*).

3.2.2. Dream Training

This has two parts: dispelling obstacles and the main practice of dream training.

3.2.2.1. Dispelling Obstacles

If you momentarily recognize dreams, but that recognition is lost by not being able to make it last, you have not achieved stability. As for loss by waking, if passing into sleep for a moment you begin to dream but wake up right away, at the time of recognizing dreams make the intention that you will not wake up. If you have already woken, do not open your eyes, but focus your mind back on the dream. Furthermore, abandon any conditions that lead to waking.

As for loss by confusion, if you recognize dreams but again become confused, at the beginning of sleep make the intention that you will not be confused. Also, do many short sessions of sleep. Visualize that the *Oṃ* in the center of the lotus at the throat is [instead] a blue *Hūṃ*, blazing with five colored light that has the essence of the five wisdoms.

As for loss by forgetfulness, if dreams are unclear or you forget, it is an obscuration due to deep sleep. Thus, wash, clean up, and wear light clothes. In between your eyebrows visualize a white bindu and so forth.

As for loss by emptiness, this is when sleep does not come because of an intention that is too intense, or sleep comes but there are no dreams. Relax your intention and visualize a black bindu at the tip of the jewel of your vajra [or pistil of your lotus].

As for loss by laziness, this is when dreams are at first briefly recognized, but through making no effort, they are forgotten and later they are not recognized. Cultivate renunciation, disillusionment, devotion, and practice with fierce effort. Furthermore, whatever obstacles arise, pierce them with the arrows of awareness.

3.2.2.2. Main Practice of Dream Training

This has six parts: emanating, transforming, abandoning fear, training in illusions, training in pure realms, and mixing with appearances of the daytime.

3.2.2.2.1. Emanating in Dreams

At the time of recognizing dreams, feeling in the way that suits you, "This is a dream," emanate kings, brāhmins, lions, tigers, and whatever else you want. Most importantly, train and learn to emanate your yidam deity's form from as big as Mount Meru to as small as a mustard seed.

3.2.2.2.2. Transforming Dreams

Transform the entire vessel and inhabitants, animate and inanimate universe, so that things that do not exist do exist. For example, transform earth into water, water into fire, humans into animals and other things, and gods into goddesses. Furthermore, learn to transform one into many, many into one, and so on. Most importantly, learn to transform the basis of the outer earth, rocks, mountains, houses, and so forth into an immeasurable palace together with transforming the basis of all sentient beings of the six realms into deities and so forth.

3.2.2.2.3. Abandoning Fear

In dreams, no matter what terrifying appearances of earth, water, fire, wind, cliffs, armies, and other harmful things arise, firmly plant in the ground the mindset, "Since this is a dream, I do not need to be afraid." Leap over water and fire. Seize winds by the hand. Fly off cliffs and so on. Crush all hesitations directly!

3.2.2.2.4. Training in Illusions

All phenomena are like dreams. Since dreams themselves are also like an illusion, resolve that nothing whatsoever truly exists. Thus, emanate and transform, as previously explained.

3.2.2.2.5. Training in Pure Realms

Since these are dreams, anything can happen. Therefore, intend to travel to the southern pure realm, "Flawless and Perfectly Built," and to listen to dharma teachings from Avalokiteśvara. Then, travel there. In this way, going to whatever pure realm you desire and receiving teachings from the Buddhas residing there, make efforts to train in pure realms.

3.2.2.2.6. Mixing with Appearances of the Daytime

Practice all the daytime spiritual practices of caṇḍalī, luminosity, illusory body, and so forth in your dreams.

3.2.3. Meditating on the Suchness of Dreams

Third is meditating on the suchness of dreams. It is generally taught that all phenomena are like dreams, non-existent by their very nature. Dreams themselves are said to be dreams, because of their inherent non-existence. They are appearing while non-existent, empty while appearing, and [these two are] unified while empty. Meditate so that you gain certainty that this is the way all phenomena abide. In that way, it is necessary to do all the dream practices while having constant awareness, remembering that you are dreaming within a dream in the way previously explained.

3.3. Concluding Introduction and Furthering Experience

It is taught that all phenomena are like a dream. In this understanding of knowing the nature of dreams, anything can be done. Knowing the non-existent nature of all phenomena, a single instant may be revealed as a hundred aeons and so forth. Everything abides within this unmistakable character. As for this character, since it is the non-existent nature of all things, by realizing the significance of being like a dream, one is introduced [to the nature of phenomena], and experience is furthered.

The main purpose of doing the practice of dreams is for the present. If stability in the practice of luminosity is attained, at the time of death as soon as the luminosity of death arises through an existing stable pattern of familiarity in the luminosity of the present, one evenly abides in the state of luminosity like meeting a person one already knows. Through this, one is liberated without needing to travel through the bardo.

However, when those who have not attained stability in the luminosity of the present recognize the luminosity of death, they are not able to evenly remain in it. Then, by the movement of the winds of discursive thoughts, appearances of confusion arise, and they must travel in the bardo. For the purpose of emerging as an illusory enlightened form in the bardo at that time, enter luminosity, and so forth. If the luminosity of deep sleep has not been recognized, it is necessary to train to enter and emerge within dreams from this point onward.

Therefore, first, make the intention, "Once I have stably recognized dreams, since it is the bardo of dreams, I will not hand my power over to confusion and will train in entering luminosity-emptiness and emerging as the illusion-like form of the deity." Then, as was explained previously in the section on luminosity, visualize yourself as the deity, and practice the yoga of holding entirely or final dissolution. Through this, enter luminosity-emptiness, and from that state emerge in the illusion-like form of the deity by means of the five manifestations of enlightenment, four vajras, three rituals, or instantly.ⁱⁱ Then, train in becoming as large as Mount Meru, as small as a mustard seed, emanating many from one, gathering many into one, and so forth.

Furthermore, at the time of practicing the teachings on the bardo, it is extremely important to practice in dreams once you have recognized dreams. It is the method of practice that delivers the bardo into the palm of your hand.

Through practicing in this way, the habitual patterns of the confusion within confusion of the periods of waking, dreaming, and so forth are purified. You will not need to rely on the theoretical knowledge of scriptures and reasoning that say the nature of all phenomena is uncompounded and like a dream. Instead, by directly tasting the experience of the example [of all phenomena being like a dream], you will realize the intended meaning of the example. Ultimately, through realizing that all phenomena subsumed in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are like an illusion beyond bondage, liberation, rejecting, or accepting, the realization of the actual way things abide will arise. When the actual way that things abide is realized, Buddhahood is not desired. Nevertheless it arises, because it is impossible for it not to. When you realize the basis of dreams, it is impossible that you will not realize all phenomena to be an illusion. Realize that this too is just like the basis of the illusory body!

ⁱ At the end of the very early morning (*tho rangs*) the sky is just becoming barely light with the sun well below the horizon. Next comes the period of day break (*nam lang*s), which goes up to actual sunrise. Then, there is the period of sunrise (*nyi shar*). Then, when the sun is warm (*nyi dros*) refers to the hours after the sun is well above the horizon. Each of these is one part of the twelve periods of the day, and therefore each represents a period of about two hours that varies depending on the season. Thus, very early morning is roughly 2 a.m. to 4 a.m., day break 4 a.m. to 6 a.m., sunrise 6 a.m. to 8 a.m., and the sun is warm from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Therefore, the period in between very early morning and when the sun is warm is roughly the four hour period between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m.

ⁱⁱ These ways of emerging are the use of different sets of stages to generate the deity or to do it instantly. The five manifestations of enlightenment (*mngon byang lnga*) are emptiness, the sun and moon seat, the seed syllable, the hand implements, and the fully complete enlightened form. The four vajras (*rdo rje bzhi*) are meditating on emptiness, the sun and moon seat, the seed syllable, and emanating and gathering back light, by which the complete form of the deity is generated. The three rituals (*cho ga gsum*) are to visualize the seed syllable on the seat of a lotus, sun, and so forth, the hand implement, and the complete transformation of this into the complete form of the deity.