

Exploring Tibetan Dream Yoga: Dr Nida Chenagtsang at Menla

[Dr Nida]: Are you dreaming? Yeah, are you sure? Oh, I'm late in the dream. Thank you. We're just grateful to have you. We can do it. Well... No, like the people. Thank you. It's working. Thank you. Now you are in the emptiness, I think. Okay. All right. Are you dreaming? How are you, Brandon? Thank you. Yeah.

During the daytime, whether eating, dressing, walking, sitting, or sleeping—at any given moment of life—imagine: "I am sleeping. And I'm dreaming". Say it: "I am dreaming, I am dreaming". How many times did you say it? Ten times, right? Good.

So then we practiced those five sensory experiences in the dream. Seeing in the dream. "I am seeing in a dream, I am seeing in a dream, I am seeing in a dream". Repeat that: "I am seeing in a dream". Ten times. And then... hello, thank you... "I am hearing in a dream, I am hearing in a dream". Repeat that. "I am hearing in a dream". Even if you hear noise or music, say: "I am hearing in a dream". Okay, let's skip the other ones... there are chocolates here... no, don't give them to me, give them to the group. Let's skip taste and smell for now; that's okay.

Then Laurie was suggesting feeling, right? "I am feeling in the dream, I am feeling in the dream". What do you feel? The belly? My chair? Happiness? Okay, "I am feeling happiness in the dream". What else do you feel? Numb? It's a little bit too early for that, but never mind—it's a dream.

Then we have different emotions in the dream. What is a very disturbing emotion in the dream? Fear, right? Say it, please: "I am scared in a dream". And what else... sadness? "I am sad in a dream". Say it loudly. You are sad, but it's in a dream. "I am sad in a dream, I am sad in a dream, I am sad in a dream". Are you confused? "I am confused in a dream". Thank you.

You see, the problem is that there is bad news, but the good news is: it's a dream. Do you understand? This is a very important thing. Confusion is bad news, sadness is bad news, fear is a big problem—but the good news is that it's a dream. It's the afternoon and it's a dream. "Fear in a dream, fear in a dream". Somehow, sometimes you can really switch it if your emotion is seen as being in a dream. Suddenly, everything becomes big and light.

I am going to teach you... because the difference when you feel fear or sadness in a very realistic way is that it is heavy. I call it "concrete". Like cement, you know. Something heavy. And this makes us stuck; our mind gets stuck with fear and sadness. In the dream, you want to catch the bus and you miss it. You want to climb the rocks and you can't climb. You want to open the car door and you can't find the key. Do you understand? There are many of these frustrations in the dream. But when you believe in this as a solid reality, everything becomes so heavy, really like concrete. When you believe in this reality, everything is so solid and conflictive; that's why it's heavy. But when you say it's a dream, everything becomes new, like light. It's a feeling of illusion, do you understand? It's something in the brain, in your mind, where you can shift something.

That's why this mantra of dream yoga is very important: "I am dreaming, I am dreaming, I am dreaming". It is important to say that and to do this practice if your mind is stable. But this practice can be dangerous for some people too—especially people who are highly sensitive or having symptoms of psychosis. If you say "it is a dream, I'm in a dream" and you mix up what is a dream and what is reality, it can be dangerous. There has to be a borderline, a boundary. If you lose that borderline, it's risky.

That's why I said this morning that if we perform the practice of dream yoga and the Six Yogas, it's important that we have "strong roots". Do you remember the roots? It's important to be well-rooted. It means psychologically stable and mentally okay. We have emotions, ups and downs, but we are stable. If you go too much into the illusion world—the dream is an illusion, life is an illusion—and you go too far inside, your head can be messed up. So be careful with that part. Does anyone have psychosis? Okay, you're out! No, just kidding. You can watch, but don't listen. Do you have earplugs? Use them now.

Someone was asking about a friend who is not grounded after using mushrooms and marijuana. Yes, there are many problems caused by substances today. Many people have magic mushroom experiences and then somehow cannot come out of them. That's why, in general, the use of substances is dangerous. Some people say "I only did it once," but the problem is sensitivity. We have 72,000 channels ("nadis"), and some people's channels are very sensitive. If your channels are too sensitive and you take substances, it's very easy to have side effects, and one of the main ones is psychosis. You see things, hear things, and feel energy around you. That's why if your channels are too open or sensitive, substances are not good. Some people have strong channels; they might have visions or take "journeys," but they come back and are okay. However, if they overdo it, they can also cause damage. Some researchers say these substances can damage our brain functions, similar to what the Tibetan tradition says: substances damage our

channels because they are too sensitive. I hope the younger generation understands that there are other ways to experience things, like dream yoga or sleep yoga. Instead of depending on substances, there are many fine steps in yoga or meditation.

A few months ago, I was in Estonia, a very small country. I spoke with someone from a psychiatric hospital who told me about teenagers hospitalized because of substances. Innocent kids think it's natural and no big deal, but having psychiatric disorders from one use is very heavy. Also, if we go too far into spiritual practices without balance, we get into trouble. If someone is already experiencing psychosis or confusion, and there's no borderline between conventional reality and dream reality, it's better not to go too far into the dream world. If you're confused, don't do too much dream yoga. Don't do any kind of Shamatha (calm abiding) meditation or relaxation for a while; sometimes it takes years to recover. I had a patient in Poland with severe bipolar disorder who started meditating at a Buddhist center, which triggered his symptoms. His father had good intentions but pushed him into it, and he had a very strong reaction, ending up in a psychiatric hospital for months. I told him: "Meditation is not about going to a center and sitting with many people". Meditation is about yourself. The Tibetan word for meditation is "Gom". I often joke that it sounds like "Go Home" in English. You have to go back to your home, not disturb others at the center. You have to go home to know yourself better. That process of knowing yourself is meditation.

Yesterday I mentioned that there are three gates: the gate of the body, the gate of the speech, and the gate of the mind. You choose which gate is easier for you. If the body gate is easy, focus on physical yoga, prostrations, walking meditation, and circumambulation. If you prefer chanting and singing, use the speech gate. If you're more mental, use the mind gate. But for those with mental issues, the mind gate is not easy because they don't know how to manage their mind. In some way, we all have "bipolar symptoms": sometimes up, sometimes down. Before an espresso you feel down, after it you feel high—the "espresso bipolar". You get something and you're happy, you lose something and you're unhappy. Life is up and down, but normally we know how to control it and keep a balanced state. Once we lose that control, when the "up" is too high or the "down" is too low, it becomes a disorder or an imbalance. If you have these imbalances, you should choose the right type of meditation, which usually means the simplest one. For those whose "head or heart is messed up," it's better to focus on the physical level: physical yoga or even sports. Some people have "yoga-phobia": they hear the word and have a panic attack. To them, just say "do sports" or exercise; it's the same in the end. If you've lost your balance mentally, find something else like music or physical activity. Once rebalanced, there is a chance to return to dream yoga and the idea of illusion, but you need preparation. I told my Polish patient: "Please don't go back to any

Buddhist centers to do spiritual practices". He said he liked the philosophy, and I told him: "You can find philosophy in your kitchen". In the kitchen: if you eat well, you get health (causality). In the bedroom: the Buddha said to sleep well to have better energy. Spiritual practice is about integration into ordinary life. We are conditioned to think we must go to centers for meditation or yoga, but it is about digesting this in our own lives.

Someone mentioned developing patience by looking back at a dream from the past. Great! You learned the lesson from the dream. How do we manage dreams we wake up from because of sadness or fear before they finished? In dream yoga, the question is how to "master" your dreams. If you had a nice dream and woke up, try to keep sleeping while thinking about that dream, returning to the story, and repeating: "I am dreaming, I am repeating my dream". If you fall asleep then, you can continue that dream. You can even continue an unfinished dream from ten years ago once you master it. That's the key: if you are unable to master the dream, you remain the victim of your own dreams. We create the dream and then carry bad feelings and fear. One part of dream yoga training is how to work with fear to liberate it.

Again, if anyone is experiencing psychosis or hallucinations out of control, do not practice dream yoga. Or if practicing makes you too "inside" the illusion and you cannot come back to this reality, stop. This reality remains reality until your dream yoga practice becomes stable and rooted. Once stable, you can live in "two realities": conventional reality and dream reality, without confusion between the two. You know when you are in a dream and when you are awake, but there is a meeting point where you are not confused. If you have too much confusion, step back. I'll give you a mantra: OM ANUTTARA (representing the five syllables and elements). It's good to have the feeling that everything is an illusion. Otherwise, what is the problem with life? We are too serious. We make everything heavy, serious, and solid. But the nature of ourselves and our mind is not solid; it is fluid. It needs to flow. Our body is also fluid—70% to 80% liquid. Blood needs to circulate, lymphatic fluid needs to move. If blood flow stops, we have a heart attack and die. We should not get stuck.

If we think things too seriously or heavily, we get stuck. Like traumas: our mind gets stuck with traumas or stupid things. I call it "mental constipation". You know physical constipation: the colon is lazy and poop stagnates because it's solid and there's no flow. It causes gas, pain, and discomfort. In the same way, we get mental constipation. What can get stuck in your mind? It's the same thing: poop. One is visible stinky shit, and the other is invisible stinky shit. And this shit will manifest in the dream. Bad stories and experiences repeat in the dream. Why bring that shit into the brain and the dream?

Regarding contact with situations that trigger ethical dilemmas, it is important to be flexible. Be flexible, but it must be a "skillful flexibility". Sometimes being flexible can be stupid too. That's why in Buddhism we always talk about Wisdom. There are two Tibetan words: "Jhana" (Wisdom) and "Sherab" (Intelligence). We must use intelligence. In Tibetan Buddhism, we have the three main Buddhas (Rig Sum Gonpo), the three protectors: Avalokiteshvara (Compassion and Love), Vajrapani (Power, Force, Energy), and Manjushri (Wisdom).