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**DREAMS OF WONDER, DREAMS OF DECEPTION:
TENSION AND RESOLUTION BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND SHAMANISM IN
TIBETAN CULTURE**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**BY
ANGELA SUMEGI**

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To my husband, Zsolt Sumegi

**This talk is like stamping new coins. They pile up,
while the real work is done outside
by someone digging in the ground.**

Rumi

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ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Aṅguttara-Nikāya
AU	Aitareya Upanishad
AV	Atharva Veda (Saṃhitā)
BAU	Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka Upanishad
BC	Buddhacarita
CU	Chāndogya Upanishad
J	Jātaka
LV	Lalitavistara
MaU	Māṇḍūkya Upanishad
MN	Majjhima-Nikāya
MP	Manorathapūrāṇī
MV	Mahāvastu
NK	Nidāna-kathā
PraS	Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra
PTS	Pali Text Society
PU	Praśna Upanishad
RV	Rig Veda (Saṃhitā)
SB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
SU	Śvetāśvatara Upanishad

TU	Taittirīya Upanishad
VP	Vinaya-Piṭaka
Vsm	Visuddhimagga

ABSTRACT

This study explores the nature of dreams and dreaming in shamanism and Buddhism. It focuses on the specific case of Tibet where the indigenous layer of religious beliefs and practices has been dominated by Buddhism but continues to emerge as a vital presence in the religious world-view of Tibet. The three major divisions in this study are concerned with (1) the shamanic world-view and attitude towards dream, (2) the ancient Indian world-view and the Buddhist approach to dream, and (3) the use and meaning of dreams and dreaming in Tibetan culture.

With regard to Tibetan attitudes to dream, it will be shown that conflicting statements and views expressing, on the one hand, the value of dream as a vehicle of prophecy and knowledge and, on the other, dismissing the world of dream as the ultra-illusions of an illusory world were present in the Indian Buddhist tradition that entered Tibet. However, in the Tibetan context, dream comes to play a heightened role in Buddhist religious life as a method of authenticating spiritual status and as a path to liberation. The Tibetan attitude toward dream is shown to encompass earlier contradictions, but also to involve an additional tension arising out of the Buddhist competition with, and eventual hegemony over, indigenous religious systems that also use dream to transmit and validate knowledge and religious power. These tensions are reflected in conflicting statements over dream that appear in Tibetan literature. Resolution and harmony, however, are possible because of a concept of interdependency and interconnectedness that is fundamental to both shamanism

and Buddhism. I have proposed that the conflicting views on dream in Tibetan literature reflect a much more complex situation than is expressed in assigning the differing views to the categories of 'popular' and 'elite', and I have provided an alternate model for understanding the contradictory attitudes to dream in Tibetan Buddhism.

INTRODUCTION

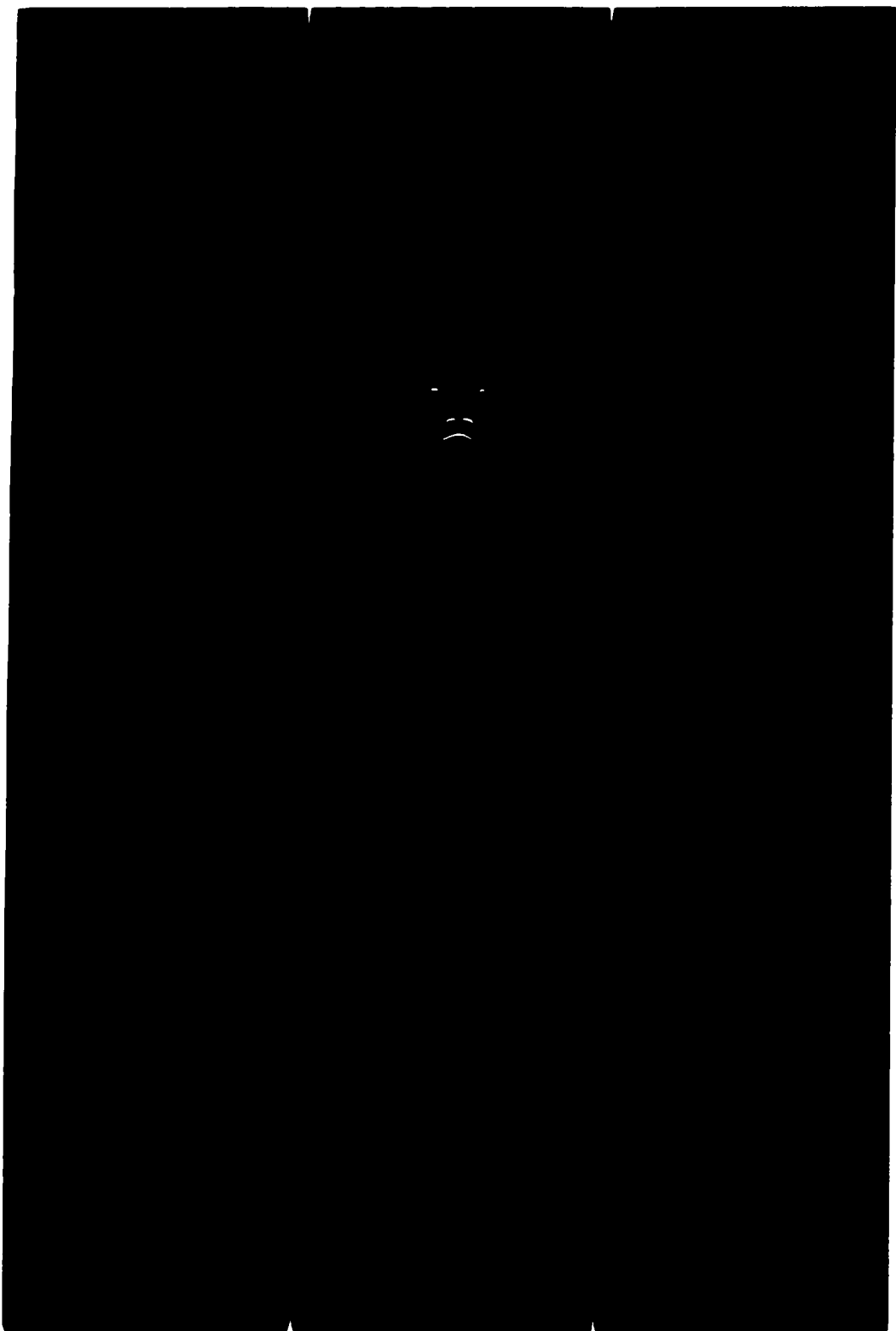
Illustration 1 shows a human figure bound and shackled, surrounded by horses and camels that are hobbled and on their knees.¹ The five psychic centres of the figure—head, throat, heart, navel, and reproductive centre—are marked with circles inside squares. An ‘X’ hangs over its head, and the face is of one in terror. On either side are Mongolian yurts and Chinese dwellings. This is an effigy called a *liṅga*, a symbolic human figure that in tantric Buddhist rituals is used to represent the ego or the passions to be subdued and eliminated. It is also used ritually to represent the “enemy of the doctrine” whose consciousness is to be compassionately ‘liberated’ and directed to a better rebirth.²

This effigy is one of the many illustrations of ritual objects, *maṇḍalas*, and *mantras* along with instructions for the performance of rituals that are related to the dreams and visions recorded in the Secret Biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama.³ Known as the ‘Great Fifth’, Ngawang Lobzang Gyamtso (1617-1682) was one of Tibet’s most powerful spiritual and political leaders; as the head of the dominant Gelugpa sect, he oversaw the transformation of Tibet into a Buddhist ecclesiastical state. It is with regard to the Dalai

1. Reproduced in Samten Gyaltsen Karmay, trans., *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama*, The Gold Manuscript in the Fournier Collection Musée Guimet, Paris (London: Serindia Publications, 1988), 125.

2. Ibid., 33.

3. Ibid., 14-34.



1. Ritual Effigy for Turning Away Invaders from the Borderlands

Lama as the state's chief embodiment of the Buddha's teaching that this image is of interest here. The entire picture resonates with shamanic themes of ritual magic and the exorcism of evil. In this case, the evils to be exorcised are invading armies, and the rite for which it was designed is to "[turn] away invaders from the borderlands."⁴ But what is to be made of this as a Buddhist dream related to Buddhist ritual? Does it represent a corruption of Buddhism, or irresolvable differences between shamanic and Buddhist themes that are simply carried forward in the tradition? Does it represent the conscious Buddhist appropriation of shamanic practices for the purposes of Buddhism, or the triumph of an indigenous world-view that has infiltrated an alien religion? What is the significance of tantric practice for understanding the interface between indigenous and Buddhist world-views? These are some of the questions that have driven the research for this study. I was struck by the incongruity of dream images like this one dedicated to practical ritual purposes, yet emerging from the mind of one steeped in the study of a philosophy that emphasizes the empty nature of self and ritual. My initial interest in the dream world of Tibetan Buddhism and the relationship between Buddhism and shamanism was stimulated by such paradoxes associated with dream in Tibetan culture. In his book of dreams, the Fifth Dalai Lama himself raises the question: "What is the use of chattering discourse on delusive visions?"⁵

This study compares the meaning and use of dreams and dreaming as exhibited in shamanic traditions with that found in the Buddhist culture of Tibet. Buddhism and shamanism—both of which are more accurately described in terms of networks of belief and practice rather than monolithic 'isms'—represent religious complexes whose fundamental

4. Ibid., 125.

5. Ibid., 29.

stances appear, if not opposed to each other, then at the very least oriented in quite different directions. Among the basic assumptions of a shamanic world-view are the following: that the universe consists of seen and unseen dimensions; that it is animated by spirit forces; that human suffering is a result of disharmony or negative interactions between humans and their animated environment; and that the goal of the shaman or religious specialist is to acquire the power residing in the unseen dimension of reality and mediate it for the practical benefit of the community. Among the basic assumptions of all Buddhist schools are these ideas: that the phenomenal universe arises and ceases according to the principles of causality and conditionality; that it is impermanent and without essence; and that human suffering is a result of ego-oriented desires and ignorance. The ultimate goal of the Buddhist *religieuse* is to acquire insight into the basic principles of existence so as to attain *nirvāṇa*—freedom from all ignorance and ego-oriented desires, the cessation of the endless cycle of rebirth and re-death that is *saṃsāra*. Whatever is done for the practical or mundane benefit of the community is carried out in the context of this ultimate goal. It will be the task of this study to examine the tensions and the resolutions that emerge in the encounter between these distinctive approaches to the world as manifested in their views on dream.

In relating shamanism and Buddhism, Geoffrey Samuel's study of Tibetan societies, *Civilized Shamans*, highlights the influence of the indigenous shamanic culture of Tibet on the development of Buddhist practices in Tibet. Samuel uses a broad definition of shamanism, but like Mircea Eliade's classic definition, "shamanism = *technique of ecstasy*,"⁶ his definition centres on the techniques of the shaman. He uses the term "shamanic" to refer to a category of practices:

6. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series, no. 76 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 4.

This category of practices may be briefly described as the regulation and transformation of human life and human society through the use (or purported use) of alternate states of consciousness by means of which specialist practitioners are held to communicate with a mode of reality alternative to, and more fundamental than, the world of everyday experience.⁷

It is well established that many shamanic traditions employ a mode of communication with the supernatural that involves a state of consciousness different from the ordinary waking state. However, the emphasis on technique and altered states of consciousness common to definitions of shamanism obscures a more fundamental characteristic that is central to this study. Shamanism may be described in terms of ritual techniques, healing methods, spirit beliefs, or ecstatic trance—all of which can be found in other religious models—but this study will argue that a specifically shamanic world-view is characterized by the absence of a soteriological basis for belief and practice. It should be understood that ‘absence of a soteriological basis’ means, in the context of this dissertation, ‘absence of a doctrine of, or belief in, *ultimate* salvation from the ills of the world *as the goal of religious life and behaviour*’. Shamanic activity, it will be argued, is oriented, both in this world and the next, towards serving individuals in a defined communal context in whatsoever practical ways they may demand. Shamanic activity is, in David N. Gellner’s typology of religion, social and instrumental,⁸ unconcerned with ultimate liberation, salvation, or deliverance from this world or any other. According to a shamanic world-view, to maintain harmony is to maintain a balance of power in the universe. For some cultures, evil and darkness have a place in the cosmos that must be upheld as fearlessly as light and

7. Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 8.

8. David N. Gellner, *The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism: Weberian Themes* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69-72.

goodness.⁹ For example, among the Warao Indians of Venezuela, the magic arrows of the dark-shaman seek out human victims to provide sustenance for the spirits of the underworld, and for the Warao, although everyone hopes that the victims are taken from another village, it is unthinkable that the shaman should be prevented from doing his work:

“One cannot imagine what would happen if our dark-shamans were to stop providing nourishment for the spirits of the west,” is a common reply to a field-worker’s query. “The world would probably come to an end. All children would die and so would the gods.”¹⁰

What are the dynamics, then, when such a world-view encounters a soteriologically-oriented vision of the universe that aims at vanquishing evil and achieving the ultimate good? This question will be considered in relation to another central characteristic of shamanic complexes, the use of dreams, and in relation to the main question that this study aims to answer—*what significance can be attributed to the contradictory attitudes evident in Tibetan Buddhism towards the phenomenon of dream?*

The response of Tibet’s great yogi Milarepa (1052-1135) to his student Gampopa, who had requested an interpretation of his dreams, is typical of the attitude toward dreams found in Tibetan biographies and religious literature. Milarepa’s reply begins with a stern admonition for his student over this interest in dreams:

Have you not read Sūtras and many Tantras?

9. Note that this does not necessarily imply a value-free system. Shamans are also described as foremost in the battle against evil. In his study of Otomí shamanism with the shaman Don Antonio, James Dow writes, “A shaman must firmly declare forever an alliance with the forces of good, with God, and then fight to uphold those forces.” James Dow, *The Shaman’s Touch: Otomí Indian Symbolic Healing* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986), 8.

10. Johannes Wilbert, “Eschatology in a Participatory Universe: Destinies of the Soul among the Warao Indians of Venezuela,” in *Death and the Afterlife in Pre-Columbian America: A Conference at Dumbarton Oaks, October 27th, 1973*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections), 174.

Dreams are unreal and deceptive, as was taught
 By Buddha Himself, in the Final Truth of Pāramitā.
 To collect, supply, and study them
 Will bring little profit.
 So Buddha used dream as one of the Eight Parables
 To show the illusory nature of all beings.
 Surely you remember these injunctions?
 And yet, your dreams were marvelous—
 Wondrous omens foretelling things to come.
 I, the Yogi, have mastered the art of dreams,
 And will explain their magic to you.¹¹

This passage reflects the conflicting views and attitudes toward dream and dream interpretation that run throughout the Tibetan tradition: dreams are unreal and deceptive, a profitless pursuit, yet they constitute a magical art to be mastered by the yogi, and their meaning is of value. In her comprehensive work on dream in Buddhist biography entitled *Dreaming in the Lotus*, Serinity Young attributes the contradictory approaches to dream found throughout Buddhist literature to the dichotomy between elite and popular views. In her explanation, both views regard dream as a valid and meaningful means of cognition, but the elite view held by literate scholar monks adds to the popular understanding the philosophic view of dream as a metaphor for the illusory nature of reality.¹² The model used by Young is popular in religious studies appearing in one form or another, especially in terms of the distinction between the 'great' literary tradition of a religion and the 'little' tradition of local folk practices. In this vein, Melford Spiro analysed Burmese religion in terms of the popular *apotropaic* and *kammatic* approaches aimed respectively at protection from danger and securing a good rebirth, versus the elite *nibbanic* approach primarily aimed

11. Garma C. C. Chang, trans., *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, vol.2 (Boulder: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1977), 483-484.

12. Serinity Young, *Dreaming in the Lotus: Buddhist Dream Narrative, Imagery, & Practice* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1999), 16-17.

at liberation from rebirth.¹³ With regard to religion in Thailand, Stanley J. Tambiah points to the differentiation between the “rationalist” mode of religious discourse associated with the ideologically normative State Buddhism and the “tantric” mode associated with forest monks who satisfy the lay population by using their spiritual charisma for practical ends such as blessing amulets and performing rituals of healing.¹⁴ Tambiah, however, strongly critiques the tendency among anthropologists to perceive two levels in religion—“higher Literary” and “lower Popular”—since such poles can be shown to consist of “highly miscellaneous, varied and non-contemporaneous elements.”¹⁵ He notes,

The dichotomies may in fact coexist as strands. In one case, one strand may be more dominant than the other. In another case, each may express itself in different communication contexts. In all cases, each is capable of moving from one dominant phase to the other dominant phase, according to the intensity and salience of contextual circumstances.¹⁶

The most recent study of the various popular and elite strands that constitute Tibetan Buddhism is Samuel’s *Civilized Shamans* in which he uses the terms “clerical” and “shamanic” to refer to two fundamentally differing yet interdependent approaches to religious activity in Tibetan culture. In his view,

The tension is between the visionary and yogic side of Buddhism, with its recurrent struggle to recreate and maintain the shamanic vision, and the

13. Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 12.

14. Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *The Buddhist saints of the forest and the cult of amulets: a study in charisma, hagiography, sectarianism, and millennial Buddhism* (Cambridge, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 307. See also 258-273.

15. Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit cults in North-East Thailand* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 370-371.

16. Tambiah, *Buddhist saints of the forest*, 307.

clerical and scholarly side, with its orientation towards the development of the Buddhist community as part of the wider hierarchical social order.¹⁷

Samuel further analyses Tibetan religious activity in terms of three spheres or orientations:

1. *Pragmatic*. The realm of this-worldly concerns, conceived of in terms of interactions with local gods and spirits and carried out by a variety of ritual practitioners, foremost among them being the lamas, who employ the techniques of tantric practice for this purpose.
2. *Karma-oriented*. The sphere of death and rebirth, past and future lives, again seen in terms of *karma* and the 'ideology of merit' and mediated by Buddhist monks and lamas. This is the primary realm of 'clerical Buddhism'.
3. *Bodhi-oriented*. The pursuit of Enlightenment, here seen as having a strongly social or altruistic component and carried out through tantric practice.¹⁸

These categories are variations on a theme that has been prominent in religious studies since Max Weber's analysis of the priest/prophet distinction and his three-fold typology of religious activity as rational, traditional, and charismatic.¹⁹ In his study of the canonicity of Nyingma *tantras*, Robert Mayer suggests that the Buddhist 'Middle Way' is a synthesis of the shamanic and the clerical—the individualistic and social forms of religion that "have typically remained distinctively visible yet inseparably interdependent in all subsequent Buddhist teaching."²⁰ Mayer's position is that historically, Buddhism has been concerned with maintaining the balance between these conflicting yet complementary currents, and he

17. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 373.

18. *Ibid.*, 31.

19. For a review of the literature on this subject, see Robert Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis* (Oxford: Kiscadale Publications, 1996), 22-36.

20. *Ibid.*, 36.

concludes, "it is often in pursuit of this that tensions have inevitably and constantly occurred."²¹ With regard to Tibetan religion, Figure 1 illustrates the popular/elite model.²²

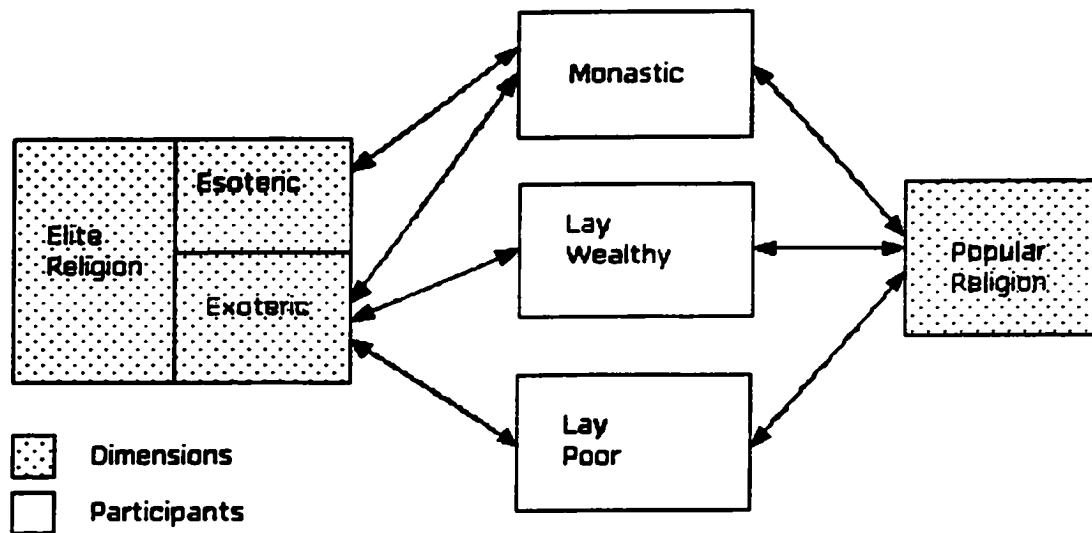


Figure 1. Elite and Popular Dimensions in Tibetan Religion

The scholars who employ these categories are well aware that in the living tradition there is a great amount of overlap between them. For example, although the model above shows that the esoteric side of the elite religion is associated only with the monastic establishment, in fact, esoteric teachings are quite freely available to interested lay persons, and there are many stories of poor lay people whose esoteric practices become known or rumoured only upon their death, indicated by signs such as dying in meditation and remaining for many days in the meditation posture, or by the body shriveling to nothing leaving only hair and nails. Similarly, with regard to the meaning and use of dream, this

21. Ibid., 40.

22. Reproduced in Richard H. Robinson and Willard L. Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*, 3d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982), 145.

model is more academic than actual. Although the popular view of dream highly values the practical benefits and knowledge provided by dream, it would be misleading to think that it is only the elite who *in addition* hold the philosophic view of dream as illusion. As Young herself confirms, these are categories that are difficult to disentangle in the literary tradition of Buddhist biographies.²³ In the oral tradition of contemporary lay Tibetans, this is also the case. Without exception, in all my conversations with lay Tibetans it was emphasized from the outset that dreams are the product of mental confusion, therefore insignificant and not to be dwelt upon—the same advice that most lamas will dispense if questioned about the nature of one's dreams. However, the caveat notwithstanding, the evidence is that dreams and their meaning hold a place of utmost importance in Tibetan thought, from the man in the village to the highest religious leader. In addition, dreams have been recorded and studied throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhism and continue to wield influence over the actions of the highest contemporary Tibetan spiritual leaders. The popular view of dream, then, is one that gives precedence to the elite approach, and the monastic elite at the highest level employs the popular approach. In other words, whether or not one assigns the categories of popular and elite to the understanding of dream in Tibetan Buddhism, the overlap is so great that it would seem these categories are not entirely useful in exploring the underlying causes and significances of the tensions involved in Tibetan attitudes to dream. For the purposes of this study, a more fruitful approach can be found in the typology put forward by Gellner emphasizing purpose or function. In his discussion of theories of ritual, he proposes that religion in general and rituals in particular can be analysed in terms of their primary purpose: soteriological, concerned with ultimate liberation from the ills of the world; social,

23. Young, *Dreaming in the Lotus*, 182, n. 53.

concerned with the solidarity of the group; and instrumental, “the attempt to make specific things happen within the world.”²⁴ With regard to the social dimension, shamanic activity generally serves the practical needs of individuals belonging to a specific group or community. Although Buddhism, in its emphasis on withdrawal and renunciation of the world, is often cast in an antagonistic role towards society, nevertheless, the ultimate goal of liberation in the Mahāyāna Buddhism of Tibet is inseparable from its social context in terms of the universal salvation of sentient beings.²⁵ Therefore, it can be said that the social aspect is shared by both types of tradition, even if the community of those to be served is understood quite differently. Shamanic practices and the rituals of Tibetan Buddhism also equally fulfill the practical, instrumental needs of their communities. The third category of soteriology is then left to be considered. The very first teaching of the Buddha delineated a path to liberation. Is there a doctrine of salvation to be found in shamanic ritual complexes? This is another area as it relates to dream that will be explored in the following pages.

The thesis put forward in this study is that the conflicting elements in the Tibetan approach to dream are the result of two main factors, (1) the continuation and elaboration of Indian Buddhist views of dream; and (2) the response to a complex situation arising from the need of Buddhism to maintain its soteriological high ground over the autochthonous world-view, while at the same time proving its efficacy in shamanic terms of power and, more problematically, authenticating its own spiritual knowledge and superiority through the same methods used by shamans—through dreams and visions. This study will argue that in

24. Gellner, *Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism*, 70.

25. The Bodhisattva Vow, which is the foundation of the Mahāyāna/Vajrayāna Buddhist approach to salvation, ties the liberation of the individual to the liberation of *all* beings. The *bodhisattva* vows to postpone his or her own complete liberation from suffering until all beings attain that very same state.

Tibetan Buddhism, visionary experiences are perceived as a primary vehicle for the measurement, attainment, and transmission of spiritual knowledge. However, without the orientation toward the Buddhist goal of liberation, dreams and visions are perceived as merely deceptive appearances or illusions. This qualification does not obtain in the shamanic world-view where dream consciousness is regarded simply as an alternate modality through which a person lives and acts, one that is particularly used by the shaman in mediating between the various dimensions of reality. Further, it will be shown that in Buddhist dream interpretation, the personal moral character of the dreamer, to a large extent, determines the positive or negative interpretation of the dream. Again, this is not a major factor in shamanism where moral considerations are of lesser import than considerations relating to the balance of power that creates harmony or disharmony for the community and the universe. Personal characteristics in a shamanic world-view relate more to the issue of whether one is an effective dreamer or not (this can apply to whole groups or to individuals), as illustrated in the words of a Netsilingmiut woman who shared the beliefs of her people with the explorer Knud Rasmussen:

That is all I can tell you, about the world, both the one I know and the one I do not know. If only I could dream I would know more; for people who can dream hear and see many things. We believe in dreams, and we believe that people can live a life apart from real life, a life they can go through in their sleep.²⁶

The present study will argue that in Tibetan Buddhist culture, there is an encounter between a shamanic understanding of the importance and use of dream, grounded in the physical world of action and interaction between dimensions of reality, and Buddhist teaching on the

26. Knud Rasmussen, *The Netsilik Eskimos: Social Life and Spiritual Culture*, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24, vol. 8, no. 1 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1931), 213.

realization of the impermanent, essenceless nature of mind and phenomena. In this encounter, the dominance of the Buddhist soteriological perspective is maintained by denigrating the 'ultimate' status of dreams. Buddhist authority at every point minimizes the importance of dreams. Despite that attitude, however, the Buddhist understanding of dreams and visions as omens and portents of the future or as a mode of communication between human and non-human beings, is reinforced by the shamanic presence and becomes the property of Buddhist religious leaders to whom the community turns for advice and ritual intervention.

One avenue of exploration for this thesis lies in the Tibetan appropriation of the core Buddhist teaching on cause and effect. The Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) is *tenpar drelwar jungwa*, contracted to form the word *tendrel* and meaning 'arising in mutual connection'.²⁷ As Samuel has pointed out, there is a subtle change of emphasis that is important for the way this word came to be used in the Tibetan context. The Sanskrit word emphasizes the notion of dependency; in other words, phenomena do not arise independently but dependent on the causes and conditions that come together to produce an effect. This principle is played out in a series of twelve links or interconnections that constitute the Buddhist understanding of the way in which the psycho-physical person and the corresponding cosmic environment arise and continue.²⁸ It is this notion of cosmic and personal interconnectedness that is emphasized in the Tibetan word

27. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 448.

28. The twelve links are ignorance, karmic formations, consciousness, name and form, the six sense fields, contact, sensation, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, old age, and death.

tendrel and which carries the idea of ‘connections that are not visible on the surface’.²⁹ This word in Tibetan, then, is both the technical translation of a key term in Buddhist philosophy as well as a word used to mean ‘omen’ or ‘auspice’. The basic Buddhist concept of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) allows, therefore, for an approach to the practical use of omens that does not do violence to fundamental assumptions of Buddhism. Nevertheless, there is a defence to be maintained against the degradation of the soteriological aim. It is this defence that is apparent in the superior hierarchical position that Buddhism claims against all forms of shamanism.

In the encounter between the Gurung Shamans and Tibetan Buddhists recorded by Stan Royal Mumford in *Himalayan Dialogue*, the author points out that the primary difference acknowledged by both communities is the Buddhist emphasis on merit and demerit as the determining factors of one’s future. He also notes that the shamans are willing to entertain Buddhist notions that blood sacrifice may lead to negative results. Such flexibility accords with a shamanic emphasis on the efficacy of ritual. From the Buddhist side, the lay population is attracted by the efficacy and drama of shamanic rites, but their spiritual leaders maintain the superiority of the Buddhist soteriological aim.³⁰ As Samuel makes clear, the tantric lamas took over the role of the shaman in Tibetan society, providing a superior set of techniques for manipulating and balancing the powers operative in nature and society.³¹ In this dynamic, the shamanic approach based on practical concerns and

29. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 448.

30. For a full discussion on these points, see Stan Royal Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), especially chapters nine and ten.

31. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 563-564.

efficacy appears open to whatever might further those concerns, but continues to present an ideological counterpoint to Buddhism in its lack of concern for meritorious action and an extra-worldly spiritual goal.

As will be shown, in both shamanic and Tibetan Buddhist practice, visionary and dream experiences are not only the strongest manifestation of spiritual attainment, but constitute a method of transmission of spiritual knowledge that authenticates the spiritual efficacy of the person in their respective traditions. In Buddhism, however, in order to validate the knowledge they transmit, dreams must be shown to serve a soteriological purpose. In shamanism, dreams are simply reality as it is. Further, Buddhism teaches that things are not as they are perceived, and the delusion of mistaking things for what they are not keeps people in bondage; therefore, one must strive to come to know things, including dreams, as they truly are in order to be free of ignorance and delusion. In a shamanic world-view, on the other hand, things are sometimes what they appear to be (a fox may simply be an ordinary fox) and sometimes not (a fox may be a spirit helper or a shaman in disguise). The shaman is one who knows the nature of both visible and invisible worlds and who has the power to manipulate and affect them.

Methodology and Resources

In general, the disciplinary approach of this thesis can be broadly described as Anthropology of Religion, the meeting of two disciplines, Anthropology and Religious Studies. Into this confluence of what is observed in the field and what is read in the texts flows a multiplicity of streams—philosophy, philology, ethnography, and history, to name a few. The significance of this particular interdisciplinary approach is exemplified in the phrase ‘living religious tradition’—the study of past traditions (oral and written) as played

out in living communities whose practices and beliefs constitute the ongoing flow of religious meaning. A variety of methods were used in the research for this thesis, including informal and unstructured conversations and interviews with lay and monastic Tibetans, participant observation, and textual analysis of shamanic and Buddhist records.

In comparing shamanic and Buddhist attitudes to dream, this study necessarily engages in the comparison of what Rik Pinxten terms “root principles,” that is to say, underlying sensitivities based on a specific cultural past,

Explicitly or subliminally active as a basic perspective on life and the world (ideology, cosmology), or as a feeling about which way of approaching a problem is right and which way will ‘cause trouble’ or is out of step with tradition (morality, knowledge).³²

Pinxten proposes that to successfully compare any particular aspect of a culture with another, one needs first to identify the root principle or principles at work associated with the specific topic to be compared. Hence this study is concerned with exploring dream as it is situated in the overall world-views of shamanism and Buddhism. In this context, ‘world-views’ is used as a term of convenience to designate a complex array of beliefs and attitudes that manifest in specific rituals, narratives, and other cultural behaviours. Concerning the comparative stance in the field of religious studies, Jonathan Z. Smith’s reminder is relevant:

Comparison does not necessarily tell us how things ‘are’. . . like models and metaphors, comparison tells us how things might be conceived, how they might be ‘redescribed’. . . Comparison . . . is an active, at times even a playful, enterprise of deconstruction and reconstitution which, kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate

32. Rik Pinxten, *When the Day Breaks: Essays in Anthropology and Philosophy* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1997), 91.

the relations between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary.³³

This study, then, is an enterprise in the “redescription” of what dreams and dreaming mean in the complex interface between Buddhism and the indigenous shamanic Tibetan culture it came to dominate.

I do not aim here to tackle the methodological difficulties of definitively separating out the shamanic elements from the Buddhist elements in Tibetan Buddhism. That Tibetan Buddhism represents the outcome of an encounter between an indigenous shamanic complex and a foreign religion is accepted as given. The purpose of this study is to show what significance that encounter might have had on the Tibetan attitude to dreams and why. The issue of whether or not the dreams examined were actual dreams dreamed by actual people is irrelevant to this study. What is of interest is that they were so recorded and reported. The following pages, then, are less concerned with analysis of the dreamers or their dreams and more concerned with offering some insight into the world-views of the people who value those dreamers and who interpret, preserve, and pass on their dreams.

Among the models that have influenced the writing of this thesis is the model of dialogic interaction developed by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin and used by Mumford in his ethnographic study of the lama-shaman encounter in the villages of the Gyasumdo valley in the Nepal Himālayas. In Bakhtin’s view, reality is always actively experienced, not merely passively perceived; reality is further experienced from a particular position with that position conceived in kinetic terms as an event or situation, the event of being—a self, a culture, a world-view.

33. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990), 52-53.

There is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue, there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogues later course, when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival.³⁴

Bakhtin's idea of the open-ended nature of dialogue and the renewal of dialogue through time is evident in the underlay and overlay of Buddhist and autochthonous in Tibetan religion. For example, Robert Mayer comments on the double nature of this process in which pre-Buddhist elements are reconstructed in Buddhist terms and then 'incorporated' into Buddhism and, conversely, post-Buddhist 'indigenous' practices are generated by the requirements of the dominant tantric system which then 'converts' them.³⁵ Working with Tibetan and shamanic communities on the Nepal-Tibet border, Mumford's ethnographic exploration using Bakhtin's ideas as a framework lead him to the conclusion that cultural meaning is not to be found within social groups, persons, or linguistic terms, but emerges in the process of dialogue between them, where 'between' refers not only to contemporary participants in the communication, but also to older and newer layers of tradition or culture, the inter-illumination of each by each. He concludes "the shaman and the lama can be viewed as two historical layers of tradition that have become opposed as rival models of

34. Mikhail Bakhtin quoted in *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, by Michael Holoquist (New York: Routledge, 1990), 39.

35. Mayer gives as an example of the first the incorporation into a mainstream Buddhist *sādhana* of the indigenous juniper offering ritual that had already been reconstructed in Buddhist terms; as an example of the second, he gives the local, 'indigenous' *nenjorm-pow* tradition of Bhutan that has been shown to be both post-Buddhist and Buddhist-generated. Mayer, *Ancient Tantra Collection*, 3, n. 3.

hierarchy and retribution.”³⁶ However, Mumford further proposes that there is a third layer emerging between them in which the cultural identity of each is decentred by the perspectives of the other. In terms of Tibetan Buddhism, he sees this as “an enlightenment project involving reflexive dialogue with the shamanic layer.”³⁷ It is the “reflexive dialogue with the shamanic layer” that this study aims to explore with regard to dream.

There are three main sections to this dissertation. Section one, chapters one and two, establishes what is meant in this study by a shamanic world-view and discusses the shamanic approach to, and use of, dream. Section two, chapters three and four, is concerned with the ancient Indian background to Buddhist ideas on dream and the Indian Buddhist views of dream theory and interpretation. Section three, chapters five and six, focuses on the Tibetan Buddhist approach to dream and dreaming, showing both the continuity of ancient Indian ideas transmitted through Indian Buddhism to Tibet and the ways in which the shamanic presence in Tibetan religion interacts with those views.

For the comparison between shamanic and Buddhist attitudes to dream, this study focuses on a range of ethnographic material with emphasis on the tribal religious complexes in the regions of Siberia, Central Asia, the Himālayas, and the Arctic. With regard to the Tibetan tradition of dream symbolism and interpretation, material has been drawn from the *rgyud bzhi*, the *Four Treatises* on which Tibetan medical theory and practice is based, from literary sources such as “The Mirror of Omens,” a seventeenth century compilation of the folk beliefs of the people of the Kham region, and from biographies and hagiographies. For the Indian background, the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and Indian Buddhist texts from both

36. Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 245.

37. *Ibid.*, 245.

Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions have been consulted for their approach to dream. Information has also been drawn from informal conversations and unstructured interviews on dreams and dream interpretation held with approximately twenty to twenty five elderly lay Tibetans (primarily from the Kham region of eastern Tibet) and Tibetan monastics from the refugee camp and the associated Nyingma monastery at Byla Kuppe, Karnataka, India during the spring of 1998 and 2000. Informal interviews were also conducted with highly regarded Tibetan religious authorities such as the former head of the Nyingma School, Pema Norbu Rinpoche, and his representative in the West, Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso Rinpoche at the Palyul Ling International Centre in McDonough, New York during the summers of 1998 through 2002. As well, I have made use of the comments of Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, from an unaired taped interview. My participant observation of both Tibetan culture as it was transplanted to the refugee camps at Byla Kuppe and shamanic aspects of Hindu culture began during five years of living and studying in Mysore, Karnataka, India during the 1980s and has been reinforced by several return visits since then.

In the process of adding to knowledge, there are at least two approaches that one can take, one can either seek out a new mountain to climb or seek new ways to climb a mountain. This study is an exercise in the latter. In the experiences of human beings, dreams are a shared constant; the why, the how, the meanings of dreams, has been debated and explored by experts, theorists, and ordinary people of every period in recorded human history. In the modern era, the attention that Sigmund Freud brought to dream re-established in Western thought the meaningful connection between sleeping and waking states and opened a floodgate of interest and theory. Ironically, as Anthony Shafton points out, “Freud generated a paradigm shift which is now so much a part of how we understand things that

Freud's own shortcomings stand out against the background which he himself created."³⁸ That background has been filled with the theories of subsequent Western dream interpreters and the application of psychoanalytic and socio-cultural dream theories to tribal and traditional cultures. Relatively little work, however, has been done in the area of investigating what the dream experiences of shamanic cultures mean in their own terms. Barbara Tedlock is prominent among anthropologists who propose that the emphasis in anthropological investigation should shift from dream content analysis to dreaming as a "psychodynamic communicative process"³⁹ to be studied within the dream interpretation and classification systems of the cultures themselves. With regard to Tibetan culture, the tensions that are apparent in Tibetan Buddhism toward dream have been routinely assigned to divisions between the categories of popular and elite religion. This study questions the usefulness of these categories and provides an alternate model for the understanding of dream in Tibetan culture.

38. Anthony Shafton, *Dream Reader: Contemporary Approaches to the Understanding of Dreams* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 71-72.

39. Barbara Tedlock, "Dreaming and Dream Research," in *Dreaming: Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations*, ed. Barbara Tedlock (Cambridge, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 30.

SECTION ONE: DREAM IN SHAMANIC CULTURES

CHAPTER 1

A SHAMANIC WORLD-VIEW

What is shamanism? Is shamanism to be defined as the techniques of shamans, or does it refer to an entire religion and world-view? Urgunge Onon, the Daur Mongol elder whose memories inform Caroline Humphrey's book *Shamans and Elders* gives an answer that reveals from the perspective of an insider how far from the mark such questions might be:

I don't know what you're talking about [he replied], this is maybe a very technical question you are asking me, because I have no idea what you're asking me.¹

Taking Urgunge Onon's candid response into consideration, I have chosen not to enter into an extensive discussion of the various definitions of shamanism that have been the subject of much debate among anthropologists, ethnographers, and religious theorists.² The term 'shamanism' in this study refers broadly to the traditional religious views and activity of the indigenous, pre-Buddhistic peoples of Tibet and those of the surrounding regions including Mongolia, Siberia, Nepal, Ladakh, Uzbekistan as well as other related cultures whose

1. Caroline Humphrey with Urgunge Onon, *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Daur Mongols* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 48.

2. For recent discussion on definitions of shamanism, see Vladimir Nikolaevic Basilov, "Cosmos as Everyday Reality in Shamanism: An attempt to Formulate a More Precise Definition of Shamanism," in *Shamanic Cosmos: From India to the North Pole Star*, eds. Romano Mastromattei and Antonio Rigopoulos, Venetian Academy of Indian Studies Series, no. 1 (Venice: Venetian Academy of Indian Studies, 1999), 17-39.

cosmologies and world-views in Humphrey's words, "'call for' the shaman."³ To present a comparative examination of Buddhist and shamanic approaches to dream, however, there is a need to delineate, without getting entangled in definitions, at least some broad parameters of the terms 'shamanism' and 'shamanic'. Michel Perrin's general guidelines for distinguishing a shamanistic system work well here. He identifies three basic characteristics by which shamanism can be recognized. The first is "a dualistic conception of the person and of the world": this indicates the double nature of the person consisting of body and separable soul or souls, as well as the double nature of the external environment which consists of 'this' world of materiality and the 'other' world of the spirit. The second is "a type of communication," meaning that shamans can establish direct communication with the other world at will, both by bringing the spirits into this world or by sending their souls into the other world. Finally, shamanism involves "a social function," indicating that the shaman acts in response to social demand.⁴ More specifically, the framework presented by the Russian ethnologist Vladimir N. Basilov in his article "Cosmos as Everyday Reality in Shamanism" is pertinent to the kind of shamanism found in the Tibet culture area (Map 1). The following features outlined by Basilov, therefore, will be accepted as constituting fundamental aspects of shamanism as it relates to this study:

1. The universe and all its parts are interconnected and imbued with spirit forces that can interact with human beings for good or for ill.
2. Human beings have no innate superiority over nature and participate in the complex interactions of the universe in the same way as all other beings.
3. The cosmos is constituted of various levels or dimensions of existence other than the visible world of humans, dimensions that are permeable and

3. Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 51.

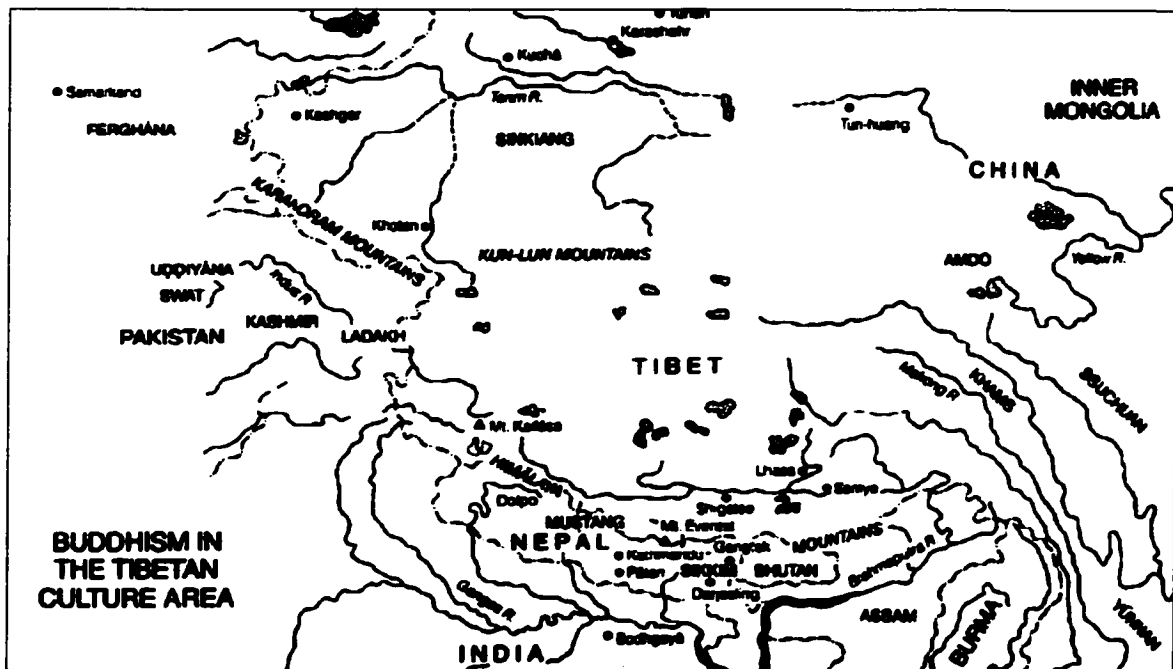
4. Michel Perrin, "Intellectual Coherence and Constraining Function of Shamanism," *Shaman* 3, no. 2, (1995):160-162.

accessible by humans. The other places or states of existence are occasionally accessed spontaneously by ordinary people and regularly visited by certain qualified and specially endowed persons (the shamans).

4. The shaman's initiation and activity takes place in the world of spirits. With the help of certain spirit forces, the shaman is able to exercise power and control over nature, humans, and other spirits.
5. The shaman communicates with the spirits via states of consciousness alternate to the ordinary waking state—these can range from states of ecstasy and possession to states of dream, waking vision, meditative absorption or contemplation.⁵

To this could be added:

6. The universe is viewed not merely in terms of symbols (things representing other things), but in terms of unseen interconnections and homologies by virtue of which knowledgeable and skillful people are capable of manipulating the apparent nature of things.
7. There is a belief in the efficacy of ritual carried out by qualified persons, with or without accompanying ecstatic states.



Map 1. Reproduced from Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*

5. Adapted from Basilov, "Cosmos as Everyday Reality," 25-37.

In looking specifically at dreams and dreaming, it will be shown that they are vital components of the religious practices and beliefs of Tibet and the surrounding cultures; however, dream and religion alike are expressions of an overall world outlook that both supports them and is supported by them. Therefore, it is necessary to begin with a more detailed exploration of a shamanic world-view in order to understand the meaning of dream in shamanism. The material covered in this chapter and the next will establish the basis for examining the relationship between shamanic and Buddhist uses and interpretations of dream in Tibetan culture.

The pre-Buddhist religious background of Tibet is difficult to determine with any great accuracy. Record-keeping and writing came to Tibet from India along with Buddhism only in the seventh century C.E. Among the best sources for the culture of early Tibet are the documents discovered during expeditions in 1907 and 1908 by Sir Aurel Stein and Professor Paul Pelliot to the Buddhist cave temples of Dunhuang on the famed 'silk route' from India to the Far East. This material, written in a variety of languages, includes secular and religious records and dates from the seventh to the tenth centuries C.E., a period during which Tibetan imperialism brought the Tibetan people into contact with the courts, rulers, and people of surrounding areas where Buddhism had already made significant in-roads, areas now known as China, India, Nepal, Mongolia, and Turkistan. The Dunhuang texts tell of the activities of the Tibetan royal court, their interactions with surrounding nations, and the legends of the origins of the people and their kings. In constructing a picture of the pre-Buddhist world-view of Tibet,⁶ I will refer to translations of the Dunhuang material in the

6. For a discussion of the early literature of Tibet, see David L. Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Inc., Publishers, 1968), 74-78.

works of scholars such as R. A. Stein, David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson. Buddhist and Bon texts will also be consulted for echoes of the indigenous folk religion and to note affinities with the shamanic beliefs and practices of neighbouring regions. Specific themes to be addressed are the world of the spirits, the understanding of 'soul', and the relationship between heaven and earth in early origin myths.

A Word on Bon

The present-day religion known as Bon has presented scholars with great challenges in deciphering its relationship both to Buddhism and to the pre-Buddhistic shamanism of Tibet. Per Kværne outlines the following three general ways in which Bon has been identified or understood: (1) as the shamanic religion of early Tibet, polemicized by Tibetan historians as pagan; (2) as the organized religion of today which appeared around the tenth century and is barely distinguishable from the Buddhist traditions of Tibet (this form of Bon was regarded by early scholars such as Helmut Hoffman as developing out of the original shamanic religion under the influence of Buddhism); (3) as referring to the practitioners and wide range of practices of magic and divination that characterize Tibet's folk religion.⁷

Contemporary scholarship by Snellgrove and Kværne has established the living tradition of Bon as neither merely a 'copy' of Buddhism nor a continuation of a pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet called Bon, but a soteriologically-oriented spiritual tradition in its own right. The tradition, along with Tibetan Buddhism, draws on the same complex matrix consisting of the foundations of Tibetan culture and world-view intermingled with ideas and

7. Per Kværne, *The Bon Religion of Tibet: The Iconography of a Living Tradition* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), 9-10.

imagery from the peoples of India, China, and the Near East. Snellgrove gives a succinct summing up of the confusions that have proliferated with regard to Bon and Buddhism:

Western scholars have been misled to some extent by the non-*bonpo* Buddhists of Tibet (the *chos-pa*), who have identified the BON which they knew as their only serious rival in later centuries as the same rival against which the first Buddhists had to fight in Tibet, while the (later) *bonpos* have merely added to the confusion by assuming that they were not only the original rivals of the *chos-pa*, but that they already possessed in the earlier period all the developed (Buddhist) teachings which they had in fact only gradually incorporated in the course of the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. *Bon* (meaning 'priest who invokes') is one thing, and *bonpo* meaning 'follower of BON ("Tibetan religion")' is another. The early Buddhists certainly came into conflict with the *Bon* ('priests who invoke') who were active in Tibet long before Buddhist doctrines were introduced, but their real long-term rivals were the *bonpos* who were busy constituting their BON ("Tibetan religion") while the Buddhists (*chos-pa*) were busy constituting their CHOS (*Dharma*). The development of BON and CHOS were parallel processes, and both *bonpos* and *chos-pas* were using the same literary language within the same cultural surroundings.⁸

Snellgrove's distinction between *Bon* as pre-Buddhist priest and *bonpo* as follower of the organized BON religion notwithstanding, the term '*bonpo*' and variations of it continue to refer to a type of village sorcerer or shaman. This meaning can be found both in Tibetan literature such as Patrul Rinpoché's *Words of my Perfect Teacher*, and in contemporary village life of groups such as the Tamangs of Nepal for whom there are three ritual specialists—the Buddhist lama, the earth-priest or *lambu*, and the shaman or *bombo*.⁹

In order to understand more fully the early practices and beliefs of Tibet, this study will take into consideration material from Bon texts as well as from Buddhist writings and Tibetan

8. David L. Snellgrove, trans., *The Nine Ways of Bon: Excerpts from gZi-brjid* (Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1980), 21.

9. Patrul Rinpoché. (*KUNZANG LAMA 'I SHELUNG*) *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Translated by The Padmakara Translation Group. Foreword by the Dalai Lama. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994). See also David H. Holmberg, *Order in Paradox: Myth, Ritual, and Exchange among Nepal's Tamang* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

folk-lore. What is known of *bon* as it relates to pre-Buddhist Tibet will be further discussed in the section on spirits below.

Why?

I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon to protect his flocks, replied: "I'd be a damn' fool if I didn't!"¹⁰

The Welsh shepherd's answer reflects a world-view shared by small-scale tribal and traditional peoples around the world: an understanding of the world as 'being' and of living in the world as constituted of relationships between 'beings'. Justification is irrelevant since this is simply the way things are; one does what the relationship requires one to do. It is a stance that the Arctic Iglulik people studied by Knud Rasmussen in the 1920s would immediately recognize. Rasmussen collected stories and statements about Iglulik customs, taboos, and cultural life from his informants. However, he reports that he could get no response to his question as to the 'why?' of things, and offers the following commentary from Aua, the Iglulik spokesman, who took Rasmussen outside into the blizzard and asked his own series of 'why' questions:

Why this constant succession of blizzards and all this needless hardship for men seeking food for themselves and those they care for? Why? Why?

In the hut of a neighbour, he asked:

Why should it be cold and comfortless in here? Kuglo has been out hunting all day, and if he had got a seal, as he deserved . . . The place would be warm and bright and cheerful, the children would come out from under their rugs and enjoy life. Why should it not be so? Why?

Finally, Aua took Rasmussen to the home of his sick sister and asked:

10. Dylan Thomas, Note to *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas, 1934-1952* (New York: James Laughlin, 1953).

Why must people be ill and suffer pain? We are all afraid of illness. Here is this old sister of mine; as far as anyone can see, she has done no evil. She has lived through a long life and given birth to healthy children, and now she must suffer before her days end. Why? Why?¹¹

Needless to say, Rasmussen, in turn, had no answers for Aua's questions as to why things are the way they are. For the Iglulik, as for the Welsh shepherd, tradition and the elements of his culture belong as profoundly to the given of existence as life and death.¹² It is this given that forms the general world-view of a culture and is that which must be investigated in order to understand any specific aspect of that culture.

The World of the Spirits: World as Being

With regard to the shamanic world-view, Peter T. Furst comments:

In general shamanism expresses a philosophy of life that holds all beings—human, animal, or plant—to be qualitatively equivalent: all phenomena of nature, including human beings, plants, animals, rocks, rain, thunder, lightening, stars and planets, and even tools, are animate, imbued with a life essence or soul or, in the case of human beings, more than one soul. . . . The origin of life is held to lie in transformation rather than . . . creation ex nihilo.

... Shamanism, then, in a very real sense is an ecological belief system.¹³

Such an "ecological belief system" is overwhelmingly apparent in Tibetan culture, where the land itself—the mountains, valleys, rivers, plains, lakes, rocks, and trees—rises up as helpful

11. Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24, vol. 7, no. 1 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1929), 55. Quoted slightly differently in Sam Gill, *Native American Religions: An Introduction*, ed. Frederick J. Streng, The Religious Life of Man Series (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982), 55-56.

12. Similarly, in response to my own questions as to why a certain ritual procedure was the way it was, a Tibetan lama told me, "There is no reason; that is the way it is written in the text."

13. Peter T. Furst, "An Overview of Shamanism," in *Ancient Traditions: Shamanism in Central Asia and the Americas*, eds. Gary Seaman and Jane S. Day (Niwot, Colo.: University Press of Colorado; Denver: Denver Museum of Natural History, 1994), 2-3.

gods or angry demons to benefit or interfere in the life of humans. The Buddhist conquest of Tibet was a conquest of the land, a transformation of the spirits of the land. The earliest historical dating there is for the presence of Buddhism in Tibet is the reign of King Songsten Gampo (ca. 614-650 C.E.). Tradition holds that he built twelve 'boundary and limb-binding' Buddhist temples at the four corners of three concentric squares spreading outwards from Central Tibet, each one acting as a great nail to pin down and subjugate the demoness that represented the untamed land of Tibet.¹⁴ The great temple of Jokhang in Lhasa stands over her heart; others pin her hips, shoulders, elbows, feet and hands (Figure 2). In present-day Bhutan, the temples of Kyichu Lhakang in Paro and Jambey Lhakang in Bumthang hold down her left foot and left knee respectively.¹⁵

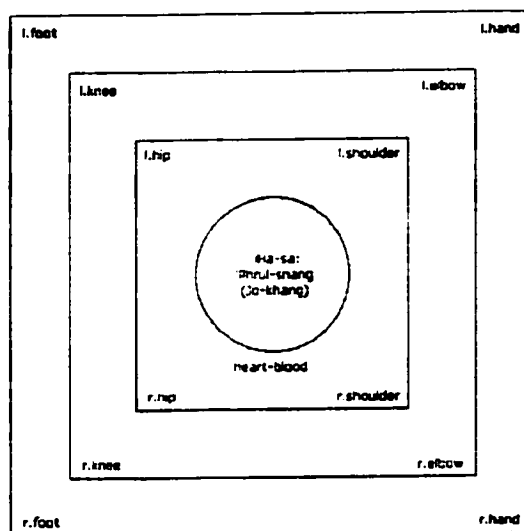


Figure 2. Ideal Schema of the Twelve Demon-Suppressing Temples

14. Janet Gyatso, "Down with the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet," *Tibet Journal* 12, no. 4 (1987): 38-53.

15. See Michael Aris, *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1979), 15-16.

In the Tibetan world, the most prominent feature of ordinary religious life is the belief in various types and classes of gods or *lha*. The Tibetan word is a broad and inclusive one: in popular terminology, it refers not only to the heaven-dwelling gods of the Buddhist cosmology, but equally to the local gods of a particular place, the gods associated with nature, the ghosts of certain people, as well as the meditational divinities who form the focus of Buddhist tantric practice—in other words, the entire world of spirits, worldly or enlightened. There are numerous classifications of these spirits in groups, from three to three hundred and sixty.¹⁶ A Bon text recounts their origins from a primeval egg:

The egg burst open and the outer shell
Became the realms of evil spirits and parasites (gandharvas).
The inner tegument of the egg
Became the eighty-one evil portents
And the three hundred and sixty injuries.
The white of the egg spilled on the ground
And became the 404 kinds of disease.
The center of the egg
Became the 360 classes of evil spirits.¹⁷

According to one analysis that uses the triune division of the cosmos common throughout the cultures of Central Asia, three classes of spirits populate three zones: (1) sky or heaven where the *lha* (benevolent gods) dwell; (2) the earth and its atmosphere where the aggressive *nyen* and *tsen* deities predominate on mountain tops and in rocks, as well as the capricious *sa-dag*, the 'earth-lords' or 'soil-owners'; and (3) the subterranean worlds beneath the earth and in the depths of lakes and rivers where the dangerous water-serpent spirits, the *lu*, live. There is a great deal of overlap and confusion with regard to such classifications

16. Robert B. Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet: Patterns and Function* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 24.

17. Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, 71.

since the same deities may appear in different forms in different categories or be duplicated in more than one category. Samuel lists a common grouping of ten:

1. the *lu*—spirits of lakes and rivers
2. the *nyen*—spirits of trees and forests
3. the *sadag*—spirits of the soil
4. the *tсен*—spirits of rocks and mountains
5. the *gyelpo*—spirits of kings or lamas who have failed in their vows
6. the *dūd*—malevolent spirits
7. the *mamo*—fierce female spirits
8. the *sa*—spirits of the planets
9. the *nödjin*—guardian spirits of the riches of the earth
10. the *lha*—benevolent spirits¹⁸

Popular religious activity is primarily defensive and centred around propitiating those spirits who are both powerful and unreliable in their dealings with humans. To speak of the most prominent among those that are believed to cause trouble are the *lu*, a class of water spirits who appear as snakes and which correspond to the *nāgas* of Indian mythology. Their presence creates anxiety among Tibetans with regard to activities, such as fishing, boating, or rafting timber, that disturb their dwelling places;¹⁹ they are believed to send leprosy when angered. Roaming the earth are the *nyen* who are associated with trees and are said to linger around the mountains and valleys. They are believed responsible for sending the sickness of plague when they are disturbed. Related to them are the *tсен*, powerful red spirits who are

18. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 162-163.

19. Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet*, 79.

believed to be the spirits of monks who violated their vows, and the *gyelpo*, the spirits of evil kings and lamas. They inhabit rocks and mountains and, having been converted and dominated by Buddhism, are propitiated as protectors of temples, monasteries, and households.²⁰

Among the Tibetans, the most prevalent of the spirits to be propitiated are the class of the *sadag*, 'masters of the earth', 'lords of the soil', whose jealous, irritable nature rules the practical religious life of Tibet and demands recompense for every intrusion on the environment, especially through building or digging, or polluting the hearth through the careless boiling over of a pot. Robert B. Ekvall's novel *Tents Against the Sky* is based on his study of pastoral nomadic Tibetan life and describes the dangers of setting up of a new tent and household hearth:

The yak hair cloth, though fine enough to keep out much of rain and snow, allowed sunlight to filter through. Down the middle, from front to back, the foot-wide smoke vent let in a long bar of light that marked the center of the floor space. The clay hearth was to be set up in that beam. . . . First, however, the old monk must again make their peace with the unseen world. The hearthstone spirits are involved at the building of a new hearth. Strange, jealous creatures, they swarm at the rising of the smoke in a new tent, and take proprietary though at times perverse interest in the new hearth. Because of their displeasure, children die or are born dead. Their spiteful blows bring blindness, strange swellings, and the swift rotting of anthrax, the "earth poison".²¹

In the present day diaspora Tibetan community of Dharamsala, the very same anxieties can be observed. Sudhir Kakar relates the story of a young monk who had falls on the hillside and bruising his face and cutting his palms and elbows. He washes off the blood in a stream where a couple of hippies are also washing clothes and dishes. The next day, his

20. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 162-163.

21. Robert B. Ekvall, *Tents Against the Sky* (New York: Farrar Straus & Young, 1954), 117.

face swells so grotesquely that he cannot perform his duties in the monastery. Upon consulting a lama specialist, he is asked if he washed off the blood in a stream; on hearing that this was so, the lama pronounces that it is a spirit attack from the angered *lu* deity of the stream. As a remedy, the monk takes offerings to the stream and addresses the *lu* in all the languages he knows, Tibetan, Hindi, and English (since he does not know to which community this *lu* belongs), earnestly apologizing and requesting forgiveness. The swelling soon recedes, and life returns to normal.

As to the question of why the *lu* did not attack the hippies, the monk had several answers: first, they were washing clothes which is external dirt—blood is internal impurity and much more distasteful to the *lu*; second, their *lung-ta* (personal energy) could have been higher than the monk's; finally, they probably did not believe in the *lu* and knowing this, the *lu* did not waste time in attacking them, but turned on the one who feared him.²² The story, apart from showing the continuity of ancient Tibetan beliefs reveals that from within the tradition, it is instinctively understood that reality is a function of the view that one holds. One might say that the shaman does not manipulate reality so much as he manipulates his audience's view of reality.

To return to the view of spirits, it is accepted that from the primordial time of Tibet's first inhabitants, enmity has been created between humans and the lords of the earth. Stein quotes a *bonpo* text called "Collection of the Nagas" (*Klu-bum*):

Formerly, . . . these were the reasons for disputes and hatred. As (the elect) pulled up stones that are sacred . . . and used them for building castles, he earned the hatred of the lord of stones (*gtod*). As he cut down the sacred trees with the axe, in order to build houses, he earned the hatred of the lord of trees (*gnyan*). As he shaved the sacred bushes (or sacred grasses) with his sickle, in

22. Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors: A Psychological Inquiry into India and Its Healing Traditions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 111-113.

order to make huts out of them, he earned the hatred of the lord of bushes (*gzed* . . .) as he dug the sacred soil . . . to build castles on the soil, he earned the hatred of the lord of the *tshon*, the lord of the place and of the soil . . . through making stūpas, pagodas and “oppressions” in the center of the place, disputes resulted with the masters of the place, the deities of the subsoil (*klu*) and the land (*gmyan*) . . .²³

As this passage indicates, spiritually meritorious Buddhist acts of constructing *stūpas* or temples were thought to be no less immune to the anger of the *sadag* than secular activities of house building or drawing water. Tibetan Buddhist rituals, even those not specifically related to exorcism or protection from evil, commonly begin with the propitiation and domination of the local deities in words such as the following:

This tormā [offering cake], within a precious jeweled container,
Instantly becomes amrita [nectar]: OM AH HUNG
Suddenly the spirits of the place assemble
As a gathering of local spirits, spirits of the land and harmful spirits.
Gather here and partake of this offering tormā
So that I may accomplish the Secret Mantra in this place,
Do not act malicious or jealous.
Befriend those beings of virtue and establish conducive conditions.
All negative entities and classes of obstructors, go elsewhere.
If perhaps you do not listen and intend to cause harm,
You will be destroyed by the radiation of Wrathful Wisdom Beings.
Therefore, listen to this command.²⁴

There is an even stronger statement coming from the practitioner who has identified with the enlightened deity:

I am the great and powerful Wrathful One.
Listen to me, obstructors and deceivers.

23. R. A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, trans. J. E. Stapleton Driver (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 244-245.

24. *The General Sadhana Format for Meditational Deity Generation*, 9-10, a Nyingma practice text in the possession of the author, compiled from the Nam Chö (Sky Dharma) cycle of the Tertön Migyur Dorje, under the direction of His Holiness The Third Drubwang Pedma Norbu Rinpoché, distributed through Mirror Wisdom Publications, Greenbrae, Calif.

Do not transgress my command,
 If you do transgress my command ,
 With my proud, wrathful mind,
 I will annihilate you into particles of dust.
 Now, get out!²⁵

As the above makes clear, every step of practical or religious life could potentially anger the local deities and bring about misfortune or illness. The purpose of ritual and ritual specialists in this world-view was both reactive and pro-active: reactive in that they were to discern who among these spirits had been angered and to carry out the required recompense, and pro-active in that they were to make offerings to the spirits in order to ensure harmony and protection. A Mongolian myth tells of the origin of powerful tutelary deities, male and female, from the souls of dead ancestors, and with them the spread of evil, necessitating propitiatory rites. The legend speaks of the deities, 'the Black Idol' (*Ongghot*) and 'the very old Grandmother' (*Edzi*) as possessing the first shamans, a boy and a girl; through their mediumship, the people are told:

"We can protect all of you if you become pious and make sacrifices offering the primes of tea, milk-wine brandy and water!". . . Thereafter they fashioned images, making the body from the fur of a one-year old black lamb and the eyes from blackberries and calling them "Tutelary Spirit Edzi" and "the Dark Tutelary Spirit" they made offerings to them . . ."²⁶

Similarly, in the Tibetan tradition, one of the most popular ways of deflecting the attacks of malevolent spirits was through making offerings, especially ransom-offerings. A Bon text records:

For all living beings, afflicted with attacks by the eight kinds of sprite, by hating and consuming gods and demons, you must perform the "Exchange" Rite of transposing two equal things. Prepare the ritual devices and ritual

25. Ibid., 11-12.

26. Walther Heissig, "A Mongolian Source to the Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism in the 17th Century," *Anthropos* 48, nos. 3-4 (1953):506.

items, the right-sized figurine as ransom for the (patient's) body, the sky symbol, the tree symbol, the arrow, distaff, and the ritual stakes, the male figure, the female figure, the rock-plant *mtshe* [Ephedra], and mustard-seed, (a model of) the house and its wealth, the things one desires. If they are exchanged as equal things, the ransom will be good. If they are transposed as equivalents, they will be chosen as payment.²⁷

The spirit is not only offered a ransom but actively trapped and thrown away in a ritual device called *nam-mkha*, meaning 'sky', which is constructed of sticks across which coloured wool is stretched in a criss-cross manner. These rituals were known under the heading of the 'religion of the gods' or the 'customs/conventions related to the gods' (*lha-chos*) and were carried out by various kinds of priests especially those called *bon* ('invoker') and *shen* ('sacrificer').²⁸ Tibetan historians and many Western scholars identify the pre-Buddhist 'shamans' of Tibet as *bon*, but the *bon* were only one of a number of religious and ritual specialists at work in the Tibetan world whose activities and dress accord with familiar shamanic customs. The records of a Chinese ambassador to the Tibetan court in 821 C.E. say that at the palace entrance "priests with feathered headdresses and girdles of tiger-skin beat drums."²⁹ The earliest evidence from Dunhuang texts indicate that the *bon* and the *shen* were different kinds of ritual experts officiating at the animal sacrifice funeral rituals of the early kings³⁰ and further recounts the rivalry between them.³¹ On the origins of Bon in Tibet, Kväerne makes the point that Buddhist (*chos-pa*) texts indicate that *bonpo* were invited to Tibet from the Indo-Iranian frontier districts, from the west and northwest, areas where

27. Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, 37.

28. Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 59.

29. *Ibid.*, 64.

30. *Ibid.*, 52.

31. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 237.

Hindu Śaivite and tantric practices were prominent.³² Those *bonpo* are described very much like Indian tantric yogins:

At that time, from the country called Gurnavatra on the border between India and sTag-gzig, came a heretic, a bon-po by name of 'A-ža. He flew in the sky and uttered prophecies. On wood he skinned the hide; on stone he ripped open the quartered parts. With meat and wine he performed offerings to the demons incessantly.³³

Kværne concludes with Snellgrove that Tibetan historians have not distinguished between the *bonpo* that came from outside bringing tantric yogic practices and the indigenous ritual specialists of Tibet also called *bonpo*.³⁴ In general, the *bon* were known for their blue dress, magical practices, exorcism of demons, and their small drums by means of which they flew in the sky. Stein comments that in the Dunhuang documents, 'bonpo' is translated into Chinese simply as 'sorcerer' (*shih-kung*).³⁵ Such descriptions of the Bon practitioners link them with the indigenous sorcerers and ritualists of neighbouring regions: Joseph F. Rock notes that the *lü-bu* (exorcist-sorcerers) of the Na-khi tribe of southwest China are also distinguished by a blue gown.³⁶ Within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the function and description of the *sung-ma* (the protector deities, 'guardians of the faith', as well as the oracle priests who embody them) reveals their connection with pre-Buddhist shamanic

32. Per Kværne, "Aspects of the Origin of the Buddhist Tradition in Tibet," *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 19 (1972): 33.

33. Eric Haarh, *The Yar-lun Dynasty*, 101-102; quoted in Kværne, "The Buddhist Tradition in Tibet," 33.

34. Kværne, "Buddhist Tradition in Tibet," 34.

35. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 230.

36. Joseph F. Rock, "Contributions to the Shamanism of the Tibetan-Chinese Borderland," *Anthropos* 54 (1959): 798.

rituals of possession and divination. Like the *lū-bu* and other shamans, the *sung-ma* are identified by their behaviour that resembles an insane or possessed person. Among the Nakh, the *lū-bu* dances madly to the temple where, if he is a genuine *lū-bu*, one of the red scarves hung around the image of the deity will fall on his head; without that sign of approval from the spirits, he is simply regarded as mentally unbalanced.³⁷ The Tibetan practice is similar in principle; the *sung-ma* starts out acting in a bizarre manner and is tested, in this case, by means of divination in the form of barley dough pellets containing various questions. If he reaches for the right pellet, then he is bound with a scarf and further questioned. If the answers are satisfactory, he is then declared to be the new seat of the protector deity. If he reaches for the wrong pellet, he is turned out as simply mad.³⁸

Other types of pre-Buddhist religious practitioners identified by Tibetan historians are the storytellers who recited the legendary myths of origins and heroic exploits, and the singers whose songs entertained with sayings, riddles, and the genealogies of clans and kingdoms. These singers and storytellers represented what was called the 'religion of men' or the 'customs/conventions of men' (*mi-chos*). The 'religion of men' was said to comprise nine parts: (1) reciting the manner in which the world came into being; (2) relating the fashion in which living beings appeared; (3) relating the divisions of the earth; (4) telling the genealogy of the rulers; (5) telling the genealogies of the subjects; (6) telling the way in which the (Buddhist) doctrine was born; (7) relating the tribes (or villages) of each ruler; (8) recounting the families of father and mother; and (9) singing songs of joy with symbolic allusions. Along with the priests whose rituals were necessary for dealing with spirits, the

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 813.

story-tellers and singers are said to have 'protected the kingdom' through their religious function of relating sacred history, the origins of social institutions, and the wisdom of the elders.³⁹ When Buddhism took over from the indigenous priests as the 'religion of the gods', it did not displace the importance of those functionaries who preserved the 'religion of men'. The importance of reciting histories and genealogies as an integral aspect of a shaman's healing ritual, along with the spells and incantations that bind spirits, can be seen in the oral texts of shamans from the Jājarkoṭ District of Western Nepal recorded by Gregory G. Maskarinec:

Nepalese shamans distinguish two types of material in their oral repertoires. Their first category consists of public recitals, long narratives that tell stories of the origin of the world, its inhabitants, and its afflictions. . . .

Other texts are designated by shamans as "mantars," concise, intense formulas by which, shamans insist, their intervention effectively takes place.⁴⁰

In the following excerpt from a Nepali shaman recital, the shaman recounts the negotiations with animals that result in chickens being the suitable sacrificial animal for the ritual. The song petitions the elephant, horse, buffalo, cow, goat, sheep, and pig, who all refuse to "go in place of man." It concludes:

. . . "In the Demon Kingdom,
the Demon Queen has an old cock, an old hen,
well, having summoned them, bring them here," he said.

.
"If man will grant our sacred promise, then we will go,"
said the old cock, the old hen.

"So, just what is your sacred promise?" he asked.

"Well, we want to stay in the corner by the door,
if we're allowed to defecate on clean floors, then we will go,
if we're allowed to upset filled pots, then we will go,

39. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 191-193.

40. Gregory G. Maskarinec, *Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts*, ed. Michael Witzel, Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 55 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), vii.

if we're allowed to peck around the hearth, then we will go,
 if . . . we're allowed to scratch for food, then we will go,
 until midday is our promised time,
 for all this, in place of man,
 for untimely deaths, untimely crises,
 with our blood we will satisfy the Time of Death, the Messenger of
 Death, . . .⁴¹

The search for one to “go in place of man” is reflected in the Tibetan ritual of ransom or exchange in which symbols replace blood sacrifice. The passage above also indicates that, in the shamanic world-view, ontological status is granted to the most mundane realities. In this particular case, it is precisely because chickens and their activities belong to a primordial cosmic process that they can assist the one who understands and knows the workings of the cosmos to intervene and reorder the process. In this context, Maskarinec's comments regarding the preliminary recitations of a shamanic seance are worth noting:

Imposing these texts on circumstantial reality manipulates states that have distinct ontological status, ranging from the mundane to the metaphysical, from mere illusion to the deepest levels of the utterly aural. All of these states are temporarily bound together to form a pattern susceptible to a shaman's intervention. Without such manipulations, no shamanic event can possibly have effective results.⁴²

Shamanic manipulations, whether internally of states of consciousness or externally of the natural world, are dependent on a detailed knowledge of the origin and history of the spirits as well as the complex associations and interactions between the spirits themselves. For example, intimate knowledge of animal spirits and their relationship with the environment is a standard element of shamanic knowledge. A Bon poem announces the following retinue for the spirits of the middle region of earth:

41. Ibid., 13-15.

42. Ibid., 392.

The kLu [lu] kings are in all streams
 The gNyan [nyen] kings are in trees and stones,
 The Masters of the Earth are in the five kinds of earth:
 There, it is said, are the Masters of the Earth, the kLu and the gNyan.
 What kind of company is theirs?
 Scorpions with long stings,
 Ants with notched waists,
 Golden frogs,
 Turquoise-coloured tadpoles,
 Mussel-white butterflies,
 These are their company.⁴³

In the Tibetan epic tradition, like the shaman's helping spirits, animals also appear as protective gods. The hero Gesar of Ling was born with a white eagle, red tiger, blue snake, bird-girl, black snake with nine heads, white crow, three iron hawks, a red copper bitch, and a blue she-wolf⁴⁴ Knowledge of the origin of the spirits is also crucial to shamanic practice. According to the tradition of the Mongolian Buryats, the origin of spirits that reside in natural phenomena is related to the souls of the dead:

The souls of shamans and shamanesses who died long ago become the Lords, Ongghot, that is protective spirits and demons, of these mountains, streams, lakes, brooks and forests, and they are both helpful and harmful to living beings.⁴⁵

It is also said:

The souls of shamans and shamanesses who have died before and also the souls of other dead people become Ongghot. They call forth illness and death on the living. The souls of other dead people however become demons (čidkür) which bring evil to the living.⁴⁶

43. B. Laufer, "An Expiatory Poem of the Bonpo," *Memoranda of the Vienna Academy* (1900): 32; quoted in Helmut Hoffman, *The Religions of Tibet*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961), 18.

44. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 229.

45. Walther Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, trans. Geoffrey Samuel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 14.

46. Ibid.

Walther Heissig interprets these statements to mean that in Mongolian shamanism, “all powers and forces . . . were thought to be the souls of former living beings, originally only those of Shamans.”⁴⁷ The relationship between the souls of people and the spirits that reside in natural phenomena is, however, not so clearly defined in shamanic cultures. Humphrey notes in her study of the Daur Mongols that they use different verbs to make a practical distinction between animate and inanimate existence.⁴⁸ However, the terms ‘animate’ and ‘inanimate’ can be misleading when applied to shamanic thinking. For example, Ob Ugrians, like the Daur Mongolians, make a distinction between things ‘with a soul’ and things ‘without a soul’; however, they also believe that the shadow-soul, the ‘big soul,’ resides in people and animals, but equally in things ‘without a soul’, inanimate objects.⁴⁹ In other words, for the Daur, ‘inanimate’ is not quite as lifeless as the English word implies. Furthermore, Daur songs of worship that call on the natural world make it clear that the worshipper calls on persons:

Stiffly projecting standing mountain masters
 Noisily rushing flowing water masters
 Spread-out standing mountain masters
 Disheveled growing grass and tree masters (we) ask blessing from (you)
 Flowing water masters
 Whirling river-bend masters
 Airily blowing wind masters
 Lying down stone masters we ask blessing from (you).⁵⁰

In the lists of Mongolian *tingri* (animate heavenly beings), there can be found gods of the winds, of lightning, of steam and thunder, as well as gods of the entrance and gods of the

47. Heissig “Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism,” 508.

48. Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 57

49. V. N. Chernetsov, “Concepts of the Soul Among the Ob Ugrians,” in *Studies in Siberian Shamanism*, ed. Henry N. Michael, Arctic Institute of North America Anthropology of the North: Translations from Russian Sources, no. 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 7.

50. Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 53.

door. The question of animate and inanimate then proves to be rather complex. In support of the idea that the Mongols worshipped natural objects in themselves, without the need for enlivening spirits, Humphrey relates a story in which a man, who had recently moved to a barren stony place thought that the single beautiful tree growing there was worthy to be worshipped. Moving some large stones to the foot of the tree, he started to worship it. She makes the point that this tree was not outstanding in any magical way, nor did it contain a spirit; however, she also notes that subsequent to being established as a sacred tree, it was regarded as having an *ejin* (genius).⁵¹ Humphrey's story reflects a long-standing tradition of the Mongols regarding sacred trees and groves. The same idea is expressed in Jeremiah Curtin's record of stories told to him during his travels in southern Siberia published in 1909:

It has happened at times during past centuries that a Shaman seeing a beautiful tree or a fine clump of trees has thought that a Burkan or the spirit of a dead Shaman if passing by there would surely like to stop and have a smoke; hence he has declared that tree or that clump of trees to be sacred, and no man would be so foolhardy as to meddle with trees which they know have been given to the Burkans and spirits.⁵²

In such a world-view, where ritual leads, spirit power follows.

In a world of 'beings', humans and their environment belong to an ecological whole in which relationships between 'persons' is the dominant mode of existence. The creative transformation that is at the heart of shamanic ritual emerges from this view of the organic nature of being. The transformation of person to animal or from ordinary tree to sacred tree is not merely the process of one thing becoming another, but an unceasing unfolding that is

51. Ibid., 59; 74, n.93.

52. Jeremiah Curtin, *A Journey in Southern Siberia* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1909), 117.

the very nature of things. As rain unfolds into the trees and trees into the wood and the sacrificial animal into the fire and the chants of the shaman into the smoke and the sky, so ritual unfolds into reality.

Gods Outside (*lha*) and Gods Inside (*la*)

Concomitant with the ancient Tibetan belief in a plurality of gods or spirits inhabiting and enlivening the world around them was their understanding of the human person as the dwelling place of spirits or souls that enlivened the body. The popular conception of 'soul' in Tibet is captured in the word '*la*'. *La* can be thought of as the essence of a thing, that which is its inherent strength, power, and vitality. The *la* has left the body when someone falls unconscious or is extremely ill or suffers a severe fright. According to Giuseppe Tucci, the *la* "has a definite shape" and is "a mobile soul, which can take its residence anywhere, in a tree, a rock, an animal, but nevertheless remains linked most closely with the life of the person concerned."⁵³ The *la* can fall into the clutches of a demon or a god of some kind, in which case a complicated ceremony to recover it is carried out, whereby the god or demon is invited to accept in place of the soul a white lamb, and the soul itself is offered the right thigh-bone of a sheep for its support until it returns to its rightful place.⁵⁴ Ferdinand D. Lessings's study of a Buddhist 'soul calling' text gives some of the details of this ritual to ransom the soul. Lessing notes that despite the Buddhist philosophical problems with the concept of 'soul', the word used for soul in the text is the materialistic *la*. Among the

53. Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, trans. Geoffrey Samuel (Bombay: Allied Publishers Private Ltd., 1980), 191-192.

54. Not only animals or symbolic substitutes are used for ransom: on occasion a human ransom called "substitute in flesh, substitute in bone" can be offered to the demon who would then direct the misfortune towards that person instead. *Ibid.*, 191.

numerous shamanic symbols included in the ritual (which is both for calling the soul and for divining if the soul has returned), are a dough figure to represent the person suffering from soul loss, decorated wooden tablets resembling arrows, the leg of a sheep called the 'soul-leg', in the knee joint of which is placed a turquoise called the 'soul-turquoise', esoteric symbols and letters deriving from Indian and Chinese tradition, and five colours representing the five elements. The homologies are directly expressed in the ritual text:

The scriptures say: "Long life is inherent in the arrow, the soul is inherent in the turquoise, and the . . . five elements are inherent in the five colours."⁵⁵

The intermediate, unsupported time between the *la* being released by the demon and returning to its dwelling place in the body is considered fraught with danger, and the *la* at this juncture is told "not to go astray (*yo*), not to stumble, not to disintegrate (*nub*), not to break apart (*chag*), not to wander about."⁵⁶ The *la*, therefore, is not only materially conceived but always requires a support. During Tibetan divination rites when the celebrant is 'possessed' by a deity, he holds hidden under his knee a white stone called the 'soul-stone' where the *la* can reside safely while the person's body is inhabited by the god.⁵⁷ Most commonly, the support or 'seat' of the soul is the body, but at the same time, the *la* is also thought to reside in external objects such as trees, mountains, lakes, and stones. One Tibetan custom is to plant a tree at the birth of a child; that tree then becomes the *la-shing*, the soul-tree of the child. Stein details the different seats of the soul found in one Tibetan family:

In a certain family, nine sons have as many soul-horses (*bla-rta*), soul-oxen (*bla-glang*) and soul-birds (*bla-bya*), all born the same year as these sons. In

55. Ferdinand D. Lessing, "Calling the Soul: A Lamaist ritual," *Semitic and Oriental Studies* 11 (1951): 270.

56. Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, 191.

57. *Ibid.*, 203, 209.

addition there are nine soul-trees (*bla-shing*) and nine soul-lakes (*bla-mtsho*). As long as their lineages last they remain 'alive', but as soon as one line dies out the corresponding tree and lake dry up.⁵⁸

La is also a collective concept: the soul of a group, a community, or a particular region is understood to have its support in some feature of the environment. The Daur Mongol tradition refers to a group of twelve *duwalang* trees whose flourishing or diminishing reflected the health of the community.⁵⁹ Similarly, the Sherpas of Nepal look to the fullness and purity of a lake called Womi Ts'o as a sign of their own community's strength.⁶⁰ The Evenk shamans each had their own *turu* (literally, 'support' or 'prop') in the form of a larch tree that was considered the seat not only of the life force of the shaman, but of the entire clan.⁶¹ Some people and groups have more than one external seat of the soul. In the Tibetan epic of Gesar of Ling, the Hor people have their life force in a piece of iron or a white stone, but they also have a soul-tree (*la-shing*) and a soul-fish (*la-nya*). For an enemy to defeat them, all these seats would have to be destroyed. The seat of the soul is, of course, kept secret and the hero of the legend defeats the demon or, conversely, is damaged when the secret hiding place of the *la* is discovered.⁶²

Another linguistic term closely associated with the idea of soul or essence of life is *srog*, meaning 'life force'. It is connected with blood; the 'vein of life', the aorta, is *srog-tsa*; to be lifeless or inanimate is *srog-med*. The life force has its seat in the heart and is carried

58. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 227.

59. Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 97.

60. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 186.

61. A.F. Anisimov, "Cosmological Concepts of the Peoples of the North," in *Studies in Siberian Shamanism*, ed. Michael, 182.

62. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 228.

on the breath. This life force energy is that which gives a person great determination and personal charisma epitomized in epic heroes like Gesar of Ling. The word for such personal energy is *lung-ta*, meaning wind-horse. It can have the simple connotation of luck or fortune, but when it is strong or high, then one rides it like a horse. Robin Kornman gives other phrases for this energy that is carried by the life force soul, such as “field of power” because it radiates around superior warriors, or “aura of merit” because it is associated with one’s karmic store of life-energy.⁶³ Demons are said to take away the breath and life (*srog*) of beings. Like the *la*, the *srog* can also take up residence outside the body. The *la* and the *srog* can be ransomed from the dangers of gods or demons; they can also be ransomed from death, or if it has left the body, the life force can be re-called in various rituals of ‘calling the soul’.

Similar notions of the materiality, mobility, and residence of the soul are found among Siberian tribes such as the Khanty and Mansi. In V. N. Chernetsov’s study of the Ob Ugrian concept of soul, he is told that the soul of the dead person can feel cold, hunger, even become drunk on too much liquor. Chernetsov’s informants speak of many souls—four for a woman and five for a man (compare the Tibetan idea below of five or six spirits born with a child). In an unsystematized way, the descriptions and functions of these ‘souls’ overlap and intermingle. The following is summarized from Chernetsov’s article, “Soul Among the Ob Ugrians.”

The shadow soul or grave soul, the ‘big soul’, is the most materially conceived. It haunts the burial place and can appear to the living in dreams. The destruction of the body as the support of the invisible dimension of being, the soul, does not mean the extinction of the

63. Robin Kornman, “Gesar of Ling,” in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 42.

soul. Upon death, the Ob Ugrians believe that the shadow soul continues its existence in the vicinity of the grave;⁶⁴ the same idea is present in the ancient Dunhuang texts that refer to a soul-house or a dais for the soul set up within the tomb.⁶⁵ Among the Ob Ugrians, sleep (and death) is understood to be a function of the departure of the second type of soul that wanders about during sleep. This soul lives on the crown of the head or in the hair or clothing and appears as a bird or insect. In its wanderings, this soul can visit the world of the dead, but this is considered an evil omen; to dream of eating and drinking with dead relatives is a sign of one's own impending death. If a person cannot fall asleep, the explanation is given that there may be another stronger soul nearby that does not allow the first to leave the body. Somewhat contradictory is the notion of the third soul, called the 'dreaming soul' that lives outside the person in the forest in the form of a wood grouse and *comes* to the person during sleep. The Ob Ugrian language also reflects this dichotomy in two expressions for sleep, one having the sense of 'departing' into sleep and the other of being 'overtaken' by sleep. The fourth soul is the 'little soul', related to breath and the reincarnating spirit that moves the mind. If it is temporarily separated from the person, he or she feels tired or afraid. Tattoos of the soul in the form of a bird are made on the shoulders to protect the person from soul-loss. Regarding this complex variety of soul concepts, rather than thinking in terms of different

64. To show the great range of ideas of soul, however, it must be noted that the shadow-soul itself dies! The soul that lingers around the graveyard exists only so long as the body exists. When the body is completely decayed, it transforms into a small beetle and upon the death of that form, "the person finally disappears without trace." Chertnetsov, "Soul Among the Ob Ugrians," 13. This is so far from the understanding of the term 'soul' as it is used in Western religious traditions or in Eastern traditions such as Hinduism that the word itself seems useless as a way of referring to what shamanic cultures conceive of as 'soul'.

65. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 227.

souls, as Chernetsov and others describe them (e.g., grave soul, life soul, breath soul, and dreaming soul), it might be more helpful in understanding a shamanic world-view to think in terms of various manifestations of the dimensions of being that constitute a person. In a sense the 'souls' are 'persons' who act in different ways and fulfill different functions with regard to a variety of states or conditions: related to the flow of blood or breath, in waking, in sleeping, in death, or in reincarnation. In the same way that physical and mental aspects of a person are definable yet completely interrelated, so the separate spirit energies of a person have their own characteristics, their own persona, yet cannot be entirely separated one from the other.

As has been shown, in the popular Tibetan world-view, the soul is understood as being associated with the internal dimension of a person as well as residing externally in the environment. This brings it into close proximation to the idea of the *lha*, the god or spirit dwelling in trees, rocks, rivers, and so forth. Further overlapping of these ideas is to be found in the belief that a person has five or six protective gods (*gowé lha*) that are 'born with', or take up residence in, the child at birth. Although the lists are various and conflicting, they agree that the gods come to be associated with the child at birth and that they reside in the different parts of the body. The 'god of life' (*srog-lha*) resides in the heart; the 'man's god' (*p'o-lha*) responsible for male fortune and descendants, in the right armpit; the 'woman's god' (*mo-lha*) responsible for female fortune and descendants, in the left armpit; the 'god who protects against enemies' (*dgra-lha*), at the right shoulder; and the 'god of the country or locality' (*yul-lha*), at the crown of the head.⁶⁶ Protective gods can also appear as animals. All these gods born with a person are propitiated and requested to protect

66. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 187.

and keep from harm the person's *srog* (life force), *la* (soul), and *mdangs* (the rosy cheeks and glowing complexion of health and happiness).⁶⁷ At the same time, they are themselves identified as internal aspects of the person's life force or soul, and similar pronunciation ('la' versus 'lha') makes them even more conflated.

In grappling with the ideas of internal and external souls, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty's image of the Möbius strip is useful.⁶⁸ The intertwining of concepts such as *la* and *lha* represent not so much confusion of terms or even overlapping of ideas as it suggests the inversion of things upon themselves, worlds within worlds where the innermost proves to be the outermost and vice versa. Soul-trees (*la-shing*) are god-trees (*lha-shing*); the god of the locality (*yul-lha*) has his seat on a mountain, but also on the crown of one's head. The 'man's god' with his seat in the body is worshipped externally in a pile of stones on the roof of the house, and, likewise, the 'woman's god' is worshipped in the central pillar of the house. The household god of the earth, like the sacred mountains, is called 'Pillar of the Sky, Fixing Peg of the Earth'.⁶⁹ In this world-view, the structure of the universe, the human body, the house or tent, and the local environment form a continuous surface folding in upon itself so that macrocosm and microcosm become neither reflections nor representations of each other, but the very same surface. This surface is at one moment the house ladder made of a single notched tree trunk connecting the floors from top to bottom and, in the same moment,

67. Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, 193.

68. A Möbius strip is formed by joining the ends of a rectangle after twisting one end through one hundred and eighty degrees to create one continuous surface. Doniger O'Flaherty uses this image to great effect in explaining how the elements in the Hindu mythological universe fold in upon themselves forever. *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 240-245.

69. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 210.

the primordial pillar of the sky that connects the sky to earth, the rainbow rope that stretches from the head of each human being to the eternal heavens. In such a universe the shaman is a master manipulator who can bring into focus for himself and his audience that portion of the whole that he wishes to display, but he can only fulfill his function as a shaman because of the given characteristics of his world-view.

The Cult of the Mountains and the Theme of Divine Descent

In his wide-ranging study on shamanism, Mircea Eliade emphasizes the role of the mountain in central and north Asian cultures as a cosmic link between the planes of earth and sky:

The Mongols and the Kalmyk picture it with three or four stories; the Siberian Tatars with seven; in his mystical journey the Yakut shaman, too, climbs a mountain with seven stories. Its summit is in the Pole Star, in the "Navel of the Sky." The Buryat say that the Pole Star is fastened to its summit.⁷⁰

The origin of great beings such as ancestor kings and shamans are also associated with the mountain and the sky that it pierces. In the Mongolian shaman origin myth previously mentioned, a son petitions his father who has "advanced very far in the perfection of the erroneous and sinister knowledge": "show a mind compassionate to all creatures because you have become so skillful in your power."⁷¹ The father agrees that if the son buries him in the right place and performs worship that he will help. The son subsequently takes the corpse to the Red Cliff mountain and worships him as "Protecting Genius of the Ancestor" with offerings of tea, water, and milk-wine brandy. The spirit of the dead father allies himself with the "masters of the place" and grows more and more powerful, capable of

70. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, 266.

71. Heissig, "Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism," 503-505.

bringing hail, lightening bolts, and all kinds of great evil. When the mother dies, she is also buried and worshipped in the same way; her spirit also becomes extremely powerful and a bringer of sickness and evil called “the very old Grandmother.” The people become very fearful and invoke the deities to be compassionate, not to attack infants and children, but only cattle or if they wish, to possess a man or a woman. The two tutelary deities, therefore, at this time take possession of a man and a woman who enter into ecstasy, exorcize the evil forces, and mounting into the air, they fly off to the burial place at the Red Cliff where they find their drums and headdresses made of the feathers of the Yellow Bird. They return to the tents of the people beating their drums and saying:

For the aid of all creatures
Carrying the golden drums,
For the purpose of saving all creatures of this world
Have we descended from *Ataya Tngri*.⁷²

Thus the first shamans come to the people. In this instance, it should be noted that “saving all creatures of this world” does not mean salvation in any ultimate sense of the word, but refers to practical aid, as recorded in the initiatory vow of a Buryat shaman: “Going to this and that people I aid against human sickness and pain by exorcizing in various manners!”⁷³

Early Tibetan belief in local nature gods was conjoined with legends of the divine origin of their first king as descended from a mountain and identified with the mountain. The gods of rocks and mountains are the most powerful and feared of the Tibetan pantheon of spirits. Mountain-gods are called *tšen*, meaning ‘Mighty’, and belong to a category of

72. Ibid., 505. *Ataya Tngri* is among the oldest of the ancient Mongolian deities (*tngri*s) and is often identified with the supreme *tngri*, *Köke Mongke Tngri* (Blue Eternal Heaven). Ibid., 504, n.149.

73. Ibid., 507.

‘hero-gods’ that hark back to the beginnings of Tibetan military and political power.

According to Tucci,

The attire and the mounts of these gods indicate unmistakably the pastoral and warlike nature of the corresponding social strata; the *numina* of this type ride on antelopes, yaks, wild asses (*rkyang*), wild dogs; they wear armour, often a copper helmet or a felt hat (*phying zhwa*), with bird feathers on the hat and a mirror in their hand. This latter of course belongs among the essential items of equipment of the shaman.⁷⁴

In their book *A Cultural History of Tibet*, Snellgrove and Richardson postulate the origins of the Tibetan peoples in pastoral and nomadic non-Chinese tribes of eastern central Asia.⁷⁵ Each tribe probably had its own sacred mountain which was considered to be the seat or throne of the tribe’s protective deity. The enduring importance and strong feeling in the hearts of Tibetans regarding the overseeing mountain god for a particular group or village is carried into the present day by the words of Thubten Norbu, eldest brother of the Dalai Lama. The last words of the autobiography of this man, who was the reincarnated Abbot of one of the greatest Buddhist monasteries in Tibet, do not speak of the philosophy of the Buddha, but of the spirit protectors of Tibet: “As my plane winged its way towards the West I looked back for a long time at the peaks of the Himalayas, the throne of our gods, the gods of my lost country Tibet.”⁷⁶ Earlier, Thubten Norbu speaks of Kye, the mountain god of his village who is depicted as a horseman in the temple at the edge of the village:

From our roof you could see far into the fruitful countryside below. It was dominated by the great “house-mountain” Kyeri. The sight of this majestic

74. Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, 167.

75. Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 21.

76. Thubten Jigme Norbu as told to Heinrich Harrer, *Tibet is my Country*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1960), 264.

glacier mountain, which was the throne of our protective deity Kye, always made our hearts beat higher. . . .⁷⁷

And he describes the worship of Kyeri:

The temple which stood surrounded by shady trees on the outskirts of our village was dedicated to Kyeri . . . In the centre was a statue of our protective deity in the guise of a horseman. . . .

Behind the temple was a small eminence on which a stone altar had been erected, and here the inhabitants of Tengster would burn incense in honour of our protective deity and to beg him to grant peace and prosperity to our village. . . .

On a small hill not far from Tengster there was a labtse, that is to say, a heap of stones dedicated to the protective deity of the village. . . . Here you offered up white quartz, coins, turquoises and corals, and prayed for rain, or for sun, or for a good harvest, or for protection from bad weather.⁷⁸

This reverence and worship of the mountain and its presiding deity is echoed in songs from the eighth and ninth centuries, found among the Dunhuang documents, which chronicle the arrival of the first Tibetan king who descended from the sky onto the sacred mountain of Yar-lha-sham-po, the protective mountain of the Yarlung Valley tribe:

He came from the heights of the heavens,
 Descendant of the Six Lords, the Ancestral Gods
 Who dwell above the mid-heaven,
 Three elder brothers and three younger,
 Seven in all with the 'Seventh Enthroned One' . . .
 The Mighty Enthroned One *Nyag-khri*,
 Son of the 'Seventh Enthroned One',
 Came as lord-protector on the face of the earth,
 Came as rain which covers the face of the earth.

.....
 O King, whose religion is equalled by none,
 Who is saluted by worshipping cranes,
 And who takes the light as his cloak!

.....
 Of all trees the pine is the tallest,
 Of all rivers the Yarlung the bluest,

77. Norbu as told to Harrer, *Tibet is my Country*, 24.

78. Ibid., 52-53.

And *Yar-lha-sham-po* is god supreme!⁷⁹

Among the Mongols, the cult of the mountains was also pre-eminent. Foremost among their sacred mountains was Burkhan Galdun whose worship was promoted by the great Genghis Khan in these words:

Through Burkhan Galdun my life,
Otherwise worth no more than filth, is protected.
I have experienced great anguish!
Each morning I will worship
Burkhan Galdun through offerings,
Every day I will pray to him!
Let my children and my children's children keep it in
mind!⁸⁰

Heissig notes that the reverence for such mountains was so great that in ordinary speech the name of the mountain was taboo and euphemisms such as 'the beautiful' (*qayrirqan*), 'the holy' (*boyda*), or 'the high' (*öndür*), were used.⁸¹

According to legend, the descent of the first divine king of Tibet from the sky was by means of what was called the *mu* rope or *mu* ladder.⁸² This is the Tibetan version of the primordial connecting rope or ladder between earth and heaven that appears in so many shamanic myths.⁸³ Although the earliest version of the legends of Tibet's first king dates to

79. Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 24-25.

80. E. Haenisch, ed., *Manghol un niuca tob ca'an (Yüan ch'ao pi shi). Geheime Geshichte der Mongolen. Aus der chinesischen Transkription . . . im mongolischen Wortlaut wiederhergestellt*, 2d. ed. (Leipzig, 1962), Text No. 23, 18, para. 103; quoted in Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, 103.

81. Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, 102.

82. 'Mu' also refers to a class of heavenly spirits and a particular clan of Bon priests.

83. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, 110-112, 428-431.

the fourteenth century,⁸⁴ the legends reflect a world-view that likely stretches back to the prehistory of the Tibetan region. King Nyatri Tsenpo, the 'Neck-Enthroned Mighty One', is said to have descended from the summit of Mount Yar-lha-sham-po to be greeted by twelve tribal chieftans or sages who acclaimed him as their king and hoisted him onto a palanquin on their necks. In some versions, the mountain is identified or pictured as a ladder—a tree trunk with seven or nine notches cut into it, each notch representing a level of the heaven worlds. Among the Evenks, it is also believed that seven or nine heavens are located between the upper world and the source of the sacred river that connects the three worlds.⁸⁵ The Tibetan world-view maintained the tripartite division familiar to several central and inner Asian societies: the gods *lha* inhabited the upper world, the *tsen* dominated the middle world, and the *lu* (serpent deities) ruled the under world. The kings were all called *tsen* (Mighty One), establishing their connection with the sacred mountains.

The first king and his six descendants whose tombs were in the sky were known as the 'Seven Heavenly Thrones'.⁸⁶ These first divine kings were said to have their home in the sky where they returned each night. Upon death they returned permanently to their home in the sky.⁸⁷ They did this by means of the *mu* rope or 'sky-cord' that attached to the crown of the head. A Bon chronicle says,

All had on the crown of their head a *mu* rope of light, a distant (or taut) rope, pale yellow (or brown) in colour. At the time of their death they dissolved

84. Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 23.

85. G. M. Vasilevich, "Early Concepts about the Universe among the Evenks (Materials)," in *Studies in Siberian Shamanism*, ed. Michael, 72.

86. George N. Roerich, trans., *The Blue Annals*, 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 36.

87. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 42-43.

(like a rainbow) starting from their feet, and melted into the *mu* rope at the top of their head. The *mu* rope of light, in its turn, melted into the sky.⁸⁸

A Mongolian source of the legend reports:

When it was time to transmigrate, they dissolved upwards, starting from the feet, and, by the road of light called Rope-of-Holiness which came out of their head, they left by becoming a rainbow in the sky. Their corpse was thus made an *onggon* (saint, ancestor and burial mound) in the country of the gods.⁸⁹

Stein notes that the manner in which the body dissolves into light beginning with the feet relates to the Tibetan belief that the soul or *la* circulates monthly through the body in a very specific manner from feet to crown: on the thirtieth and first of the month, it resides in the sole of the foot (left for men and right for women), and on successive days it rises higher and higher with the waxing moon to arrive at the crown of the head on the fifteenth, the full moon day.⁹⁰

The rope or cord that guides the soul to its destination appears in many shamanic cultures. The Tungus tie a rope between trees to represent the path of the spirits as well as communication between humans and spirits.⁹¹ Similarly, the Buryats, in their initiation ceremonies tie red and blue ribbons between trees to symbolize the "rainbow" road of the spirits.⁹² The ribbons stretch from the top of the tree that emerges from the smoke-hole of the

88. Ibid., 224.

89. Ibid., 225.

90. Ibid., 226. Similarly, in the Tibetan Buddhist practice of visualizing (generating) oneself as the deity, at the time of dissolving the visualization into light, the dissolution takes place from bottom to top.

91. Sergei M. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental complex of the Tungus* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1935) 352.

92. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, 118.

yurt to a birch tree outside. It is believed that their ancient shamans were powerful enough to walk on those silk strings. This was called “walking on the rainbow.”⁹³ In Nepal, the death rites of the Gurung shamans involve hoisting a long white banner carried on the heads of the women to show the soul the way to the ancestors.⁹⁴ The relationship between the crown of the head and the sky prominent in the Tibetan account is underscored by the words of Urgunge, the Daur Mongol who was the primary informant for Caroline Humphrey’s study of Mongolian shamanism. When asked about the relationship between a person and *tengger* (sky/heaven) he replied to the effect that “each individual has a ‘small *tengger*’ (*ushken tengger* (not the same as ‘soul’) in the crown of their head. This is a small, sacred, and invisible space which has the same nature as ‘great *tengger*’ (*shih tengger*) though it is inside us.”⁹⁵

Mortality finally came to the kings of Tibet when the sixth successor after Nyatri Tsenpo, brandishing his sword in battle, accidentally severed his *mu* rope. Thereafter the kings were buried in earthly tombs, but the *mu* rope continued to be the subject of rituals of protection or rituals of attack. Dunhuang funerary texts record promises that “the sky’s *mu* rope having been stretched out will not be cut” or threats to “cut from afar the white *mu* rope.”⁹⁶ The theme of the cutting of the rainbow rope also finds expression in the myths of the Buryats. In one story, two shamans were traveling to and fro on the rainbow when the celestial gods noticed and became angry: “How did those black beetles of the earth dare to

93. Curtin, *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, 108-109.

94. Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 182.

95. Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 80-81.

96. *Ibid.*, 212.

come up here on the rainbow, and think of going back on it?" So saying, they cut the rainbow. The stronger of the two shamans, however, was able to turn himself into a yellow spotted eagle and carry his companion to safety.⁹⁷

The idea of the spirit or soul ascending to the sky by means of a rope of rainbow light from the top of the head also found a place in later Tibetan Buddhist rituals called *phowa* where consciousness, departing from the body through the crown of the head, is transferred to a Buddha paradise. The rainbow path of the early kings can also be recognized in the Tibetan Buddhist belief that certain meditation practices result in the physical body dissolving at death into a body of rainbow light (*'ja'lus*). As Tucci notes, "The connection between heaven and earth is a primeval article of faith for the Tibetan . . ."⁹⁸ Their religious rituals both indigenous and Buddhist bear witness to this emphasis and, as will be shown later, the dream path (*mi lam*) becomes a preeminent method of reestablishing the direct communication between the gods of the celestial realms and humans on earth.

To sum up, this chapter has shown that Tibetan culture shares the world-view common to shamanic religious complexes, that all aspects of the world can be understood as 'being' and that human life is a study in the ecology and interactions of 'beings'. Like everything else in the universe, the human person is, in microcosm, also to be understood in participatory and dynamic terms, constituted of the interactions of 'soul-beings'. To use O'Flaherty's analogy, the internal and external aspects of a shamanic world-view can be described in terms of a Möbius strip, where inside and outside appear separate due to a trick in the folding of the paper, but when it is all unraveled the continuum is revealed. Finally, in

97. Curtin, *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, 109.

98. Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, 246.

the imagery of heights, mountains, Eternal Blue sky, and the rainbow path, shamanic traditions pay homage to the ancestors who link heaven and earth, life and death.

CHAPTER 2

DREAMS AND SHAMANISMS

The nature and role of dream and dreaming in traditional and tribal cultures, especially among Arctic and Central Asian peoples, has remained largely in the shadow of the more dramatic and overt elements of their shamanic practice and ritual—the darkened séances that feature ecstatic dancing, singing, drumming, and trances in which the shaman speaks with the voices of the visiting spirits or enacts a journey to another world. Like the implements of the shaman (clothes, drums, rattles, etc.) or their songs, myths, and stories, rituals are outward manifestations of the shamanic complex that a researcher can hope to elucidate clearly and with some confidence of accuracy. However, it is in the shadowy area of personal dreams and in the seemingly passive state of sleep that it will be shown the nature of the shaman is forged; from there, he or she emerges into public life with the power to confirm the cosmos and draw the community into a dynamic of protection, healing, and destruction of opposing forces. The aim of this chapter is to examine the use and significance of dreaming in a range of shamanic cultures,¹ and to show that shamanic power is inextricably linked with the shaman's capacity for working with the states of sleep and dream. Finally, this chapter intends to demonstrate that dreaming is the very foundation of shamanic activity.

1. Dream as it relates specifically to Tibetan culture will be the focus of chapters 5 and 6.

Shamanism and Altered States of Mind

Although Eliade's early definition of shamanism as "techniques of ecstasy" has since been strongly debated, there are few researchers who would entirely omit the aspect of trance or altered states of mind from a description of shamanism. Samuel's broad definition is suitable as a starting point for discussion on this issue:

The regulation and transformation of human life and human society through the use (or purported use) of alternate states of consciousness by means of which specialist practitioners are held to communicate with a mode of reality alternative to, and more fundamental than, the world of everyday experience.²

In her paper on Siberian shaman techniques, Anna-Leena Siikala compares shamanic forms of trance with specific features of altered states of consciousness (ASC). She defines ASC as "forms of behaviour deviating from what is normal in the wakeful state and possessing a specific cultural significance, typical features being an altered grasp of reality and the self-concept, with the intensity of change ranging from slight modifications to a complete loss of consciousness."³ For the purposes of this thesis, it is the range of deviation from the waking state that is of interest. In his study on altered states of mind, Brian Inglis argues that the states of ecstasy, trance, and possession commonly associated with shamanism can be understood as part of a larger complex of mental states. At one extreme of this continuum is possession, a state "in which the individual's normal self seems to be displaced, leaving him rapt, or paralyzed, or hysterical, or psychotic, or taken over by another personality."⁴ At the

2. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 8.

3. Anna-Leena Siikala, "The Siberian Shaman's Technique of Ecstasy" in *Studies on Shamanism* by Anna-Leena Siikala and Mihály Hoppál (Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1998), 26-27.

4. Brian Inglis, *Trance: A Natural History of Altered States of Mind* (London: Grafton Books, 1989), 267.

other end of the continuum is sleep and in between, a range of conditions "in which consciousness is maintained, but the subliminal mind makes itself felt . . ." ⁵ The continuum proposed by Inglis is supported by the world-views of shamanic cultures where sleep and dream are intimately related to ecstatic states of possession, waking visions, and various hallucinations, as well as the visions or mental panorama induced in both the shaman and the audience through songs and chants. Regarding the North American Dene approach to dream, Marie-Françoise Guédon notes:

Dans les divers dialectes septentrionaux, les Dénés utilisent les mêmes termes pour désigner les rêves, les visions ou les apparitions spontanées et les impressions obtenues durant les états de trances volontaires. ⁶

Inglis further highlights the work of ethnologist and psychiatrist Margaret J. Field who equates trance with the psychological state of mental dissociation. ⁷ She further links the mind of trance with dreaming, saying that "it is not unreasonable to grant the disassociated mind an extended awareness similar to that of the dreaming mind." ⁸ However, whereas trance and mental dissociation are generally thought to be extraordinary states, not necessarily experienced by everyone, dreaming is a state common to all. Indeed, Mihály Hoppál draws attention to a number of aspects of everyday life that take on particular significance for shamans: (1) sleeping, related to the opening or closing act of shamanic

5. Ibid.

6. Marie-Françoise Guédon, "La pratique du rêve chez les Dénés septentrionaux," *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 18, no. 2 (1994): 76.

7. "Dissociation. Mental mechanism whereby a split-off part of the personality temporarily possesses the entire field of consciousness and behaviour." Margaret J. Field, *Search for Security: An ethno-psychiatric study of Rural Ghana* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1960), 19.

8. Ibid., 58.

ecstasy; (2) yawning, related to the taking in of helping spirits; (3) dreaming, related to acquiring knowledge; and (4) fasting, related to the preparation for trance.⁹ Altered states of consciousness, then, can be said to include what might be considered 'ordinary' or 'normal' states of sleep or dream which are not only the preserve of shamans.

Humphrey notes that among the Daur, there are two types of shamanizing (contacting the spirits): one involves an ecstatic state—"shuddering, 'falling unconscious', making inarticulate noises, foaming at the mouth, etc . . ."¹⁰—and is called "mounted shamanizing"; the other type of shamanizing takes place in a state of seemingly ordinary consciousness and is termed "on foot shamanizing."¹¹ Humphrey, therefore, does not define 'trance' as a mental state at all, but as a "conventional set of behaviours" that signal the shaman's activity of communicating with the spirits. From either perspective, though (trance as dissociated mental state or trance as conventional behaviour), it is clear that the activity of contacting the spirits frequently takes place through states of consciousness common to all people. Among such peoples as the Chuckchee, where every family has a drum, most people in the community, even children, to one degree or another, 'shamanize'.¹² Nevertheless, as will be shown below, there is a difference to be noted between the shaman's 'trance sleep' or dream and that of an ordinary person. The specialist's (shaman's) use of these states is

9. Mihály Hoppál, "Shamanism: System of Beliefs," in *Studies on Shamanism*, by Siikala and Hoppál, 129-130.

10. Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 31.

11. *Ibid.*, 70, n. 58.

12. W. Bogoras, "The Chuckchee—Religion," in *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History*, ed. Franz Boas, vol. 11, part 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill Ltd., 1909; reprinted from *The Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, ed. Franz Boas, vol. 7, part 2), 413. Humphrey also indicates that this is the case among the Daur. *Shamans and Elders*, 30.

characterized by the degree of power or control that he or she has over them, and the auxiliary shamanic knowledge gained through training.

The poles of the continuum as outlined by Inglis are brought together in the association of sleep with the varying states of unconsciousness, or apparent unconsciousness, that are part of shamanic séances or the state of possession. In a Sami (Lapp) séance, the shaman falls down like a person in a dead sleep. Bo Sommarström cites a description of this provided by an early Christian priest among the Lapps:

As if he had been possessed by falling sickness (epilepsy), so there does not seem to remain any breath in him and no sign of life, but it seems as if the soul has left the body. Then there must be guardians there to attend to the prone, lifeless body so that it will not be touched even lightly by anything; if this happens, it is believed that the body will not return to life. When the spirit finally returns, the body wakes up as from a deep sleep, and is able to answer all submitted questions, even when the asked-for subject dwelt at a distance of a few thousand miles.¹³

Similarly, an Italian bishop observing the trances of Hungarian sorcerers wrote in 1648:

Whenever a sorcerer wishes to learn about the future, he will mark out a certain place where he stands for a while muttering . . . eyes rolling . . . countenance distorted . . . arms and legs flailing around and his entire body shaking. Then he throws himself down and remains there seemingly lifeless for three or four hours . . . Eventually, as though emerging from a dream, he relates this as the future.¹⁴

From a foreign observer's perspective, then, at one stage the active trance state appears to revert to a state of sleep or unconsciousness during which the shaman is thought to be acting

13. Bo Sommarström, "The Sāmi Shaman's Drum and the Holographic Paradigm Discussion," in *Shamanism Past and Present: Part 1*, eds. Mihály Hoppál and Otto von Sadovsky (Budapest: Ethnographic Institute Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1989), 127-128.

14. Pál Péter Domokos, *A moldvai magyarság* (Csikszereda, 1931); quoted in Mihály Hoppál, "The Role of Shamanism in Hungarian Ethnic Identity," in *Studies on Shamanism*, by Siikala and Hoppál, 169.

in the spirit world. Among the Tungus, Sergei M. Shirokogoroff notes that it is standard procedure before a séance for the shaman to fall “asleep”; however, Shirokogoroff interprets this state as a conventional mechanism for entering into trance, recognized as such by the audience, and not a real “sincere” sleep.¹⁵ His evidence shows that the requisite “sleep” can be simply a ritualized aspect of the shaman’s performance; nevertheless, from within the tradition, it is clear that ordinary sleep is utilized as a method of entering into an altered state of consciousness (either trance or dream) in which the shaman acts. For example, the Tungus believe that the battles fought between shamans take place during sleep and dream. The story of a shaman who wishes to engage his rival is told like this:

One night the shaman was hunting on the salt-marsh; sitting there, he saw in the night some glittering fire. As soon as he noticed it, he pulled out his knife. The fire descended lower. Then he remained sitting quietly. Thereafter he returned home, reported the happening and said: “So *Sanyuni* [name of another shaman] has come! Keep quiet and let me fall asleep.” Then he fell asleep and became a shaman¹⁶; while he was sleeping, he began to follow the aggressor-shaman and reached *Sanyuni*’s wigwam. *Sanyuni* was sitting at the entrance. He sat down and began to scold *Sanyuni*: “You see, I nearly caught you when you were asleep. You are a bad man. Why did you go in the form of fire?” *Sanyuni* was sitting silent with his head hung down. When the shaman ceased to speak, *Sanyuni* told him: “From now on I shall never do so.”¹⁷

The above passage is illuminating for its use of sleep in a double context: that of shamanic sleep, powerful and magical, and that of ordinary sleep, the sleep of unconsciousness and powerlessness. The shaman first uses the ordinary state of sleep to access his shamanic powers. In a shamanic dream state, he follows his rival secretly and points out how easily he

15. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, 313, 340.

16. Shirokogoroff notes that to ‘become a shaman’ means to assume one of the spirits’ forms that allows him to travel a long way. *Ibid.*, 371.

17. *Ibid.*

could have caught him in the powerless state of ordinary sleep. The distinction is a crucial one, and will emerge again in a later discussion of Tibetan dream yoga; one can sleep the dull sleep of animals or use the state of sleep to access limitless powers.

The interpretation of all types of visions, dreams, and sleep are dependent on the shamanic world-view of spirits and souls that inhabit the cosmos and the person. In ordinary sleep, the dream soul wanders away from the body and can be caught by roaming demons. Through his sleep and dream visions, the shaman communicates with the spirits, and, as has been demonstrated in Chapter 1 in the identification of Na-khi sorcerers and Tibetan oracles, hallucinations and ecstasy are indications of soul loss that can be either a sign of insanity or the descent of the protector spirits.

Dreams and Sleep, Spirit and Soul

Well over a century ago, Edward B. Tylor highlighted the connections between states of sleep, dream, ecstasy, sickness, or unconsciousness and concepts of an animating soul or souls that can leave the body for extended periods of time.¹⁸ Someone who is unconscious is, in the Australian aborigine phrase, 'without soul' (*wilyamarraba*).¹⁹ Sickness is another sign that the soul has separated from the body. If demon spirits catch hold of the soul during its wanderings, then sickness can be the result. Rituals of calling back an errant soul are prevalent among many tribal peoples. Among some Tungus tribes, there are complicated methods of calling back the soul that has departed due to fear (especially regarding children); these methods depend on where the child was frightened (indoors or outdoors), the age of

18. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, 3d rev. ed. (London: John Murray, 1891).

19. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 436.

the child, and the degree of fright. The ease with which the soul can separate from the body also leads to much concern with methods of keeping the soul in the body, such as the following listed by Shirokogoroff:

Avoiding sudden frightening when the soul "falls down", avoiding sudden awakening, for during the sleep the soul may be absent; carefulness in dealing with the spirits which may enter the body during the absence of the soul or may enter it and gradually push out the soul; recovery and reinstallation of the soul in the body. The chief worry is thus first, to avoid everything which may produce an emotion of "fear" and . . . avoid spirits which may take hold of the soul . . .²⁰

As described in Chapter 1, the Ob Ugrians and other central and inner Asian groups consider the soul to be a mobile entity that leaves the body temporarily during trance or sleep, or due to illness or fright. Tylor's survey of a wide range of tribal cultures further illustrates the near universal belief that sickness, dream, and trance states are brought about by the temporary departure of the soul or souls.²¹

In shamanic world-views, the functions and operations of life belong to the visible waking world; upon death, some aspect of a person joins the ancestors and the invisible spirit world. Trance, sleeping, and dreaming are states of consciousness associated with death, states in which the invisible world, with its geography and inhabitants, becomes available to the senses of living people. It is understood that when one is dreaming, falls sick, falls asleep, or falls into trance, it is a sign that some spirit or soul dimension has separated from the person, even while another spirit may join the person. Therefore, all forms of non-waking—unconsciousness, sleeping, dreaming, trance, or illness (which brings

20. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, 208.

21. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 436-444.

about lethargy, sleep, dreams, and semi-consciousness) are inherently dangerous states during which the person's soul wanders about in the spirit world and from which it must take care to return to the living. When he shamanizes, the Inuit *angakkoq* announces his living status to the spirits of the dead by saying, "I am still of flesh and blood."²²

Writing some fifty years after Tylor theorized that animistic views of the world are founded on the phenomenon of dream, the Freudian analyst Géza Róheim noted the fundamental role of dream in shamanic activity. He concludes in his work *The Gates of the Dream* that "the shamanistic trance is an imitation of the going to sleep and dreaming sequence."²³ Whether or not it is agreed that the trances of Siberian shamans are ritualized 'imitations' of sleeping and dreaming or real ecstatic altered states of mind, there is strong evidence that traditional interpretation places shamanic power and activity in the realm of sleep and dream. Such is the case in the story of the shaman and his rival quoted above. In a similar Buryat account, both the shaman and his horse go off to sleep and emerge into the dream world to do battle with the one who has destroyed the shaman's cattle.²⁴ The traditionally nocturnal setting for shamanic séances reinforces the association between sleep and trance. Among the Chukchee, shamanic activity takes place in the sleeping room, at night in perfect darkness.²⁵ This is not to say that sleep is the same as trance, but as shown above, they are fluid and interrelated states, both brought about by the temporary departure of the soul; therefore, they are related to death, the permanent loss of soul, and the power

22. Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik*, 129-131.

23. Géza Róheim, *The Gates of the Dream* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1952), 159.

24. Curtin, *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, 111-112.

25. Bogoras, "The Chukchee—Religion," 413.

that is associated with death and the spirit world. To sleep is to put oneself into spirit mode, so to speak. Allan, a 'big shaman' of the Australian Worora, gave the following explanation to Andreas Lommel. It is quoted in full because it speaks precisely to the relationship between sleep, dream, trance, and soul travel shared by many shamanic traditions around the world:

If a shaman speaks with the spirits of the dead, this takes place by his soul leaving him while he is asleep and wandering about the country. At sunset the shaman's soul meets somewhere the shadow of a dead ancestor. The shadow asks the soul whether it shall go with it. The shaman's soul answers yes. The shadow of the dead ancestor then becomes his helping spirit. Then they go on together, either at once into the kingdom of the dead or to a place in this world at which the spirits of the dead have gathered. The shaman's meeting with the spirits of the dead proceeds according to a ritual that has been exactly described. First the shaman covers his eyes with a leafy branch, in order not to see too many dead all at once, and sits down modestly among those present.

The spirits begin to sing and dance. The shaman must not take away the branch from in front of his eyes and watch the dances until the helping spirit that has brought him there tells him to. When the dance is over the spirits release the shaman's soul and his helping spirit brings it back to his body. When the shaman wakes his experiences with the spirits seem to him like a dream. From now on he thinks of nothing but the dances which he has seen and his soul keeps on going back to the spirits to learn more and more about the dances. His wife may then notice that his soul leaves his body every night, and she will say: Why do you always leave me?

But the shaman will tell her that he goes to the spirits to learn dances. Then he will first explain the dances to his wife and sing them to her, and after that he will teach them to everyone else. That is how the magnificent pantomimic dances of the aborigines come into being.²⁶

The themes touched upon here, central to the relationship between shamanism and dream, can also be found among the tribes of Siberia,²⁷ Central Asia, and the Arctic: sleep as a state

26. Andreas Lommel, "Shamanism in Australia," in *Shamanism Past and Present: Part 1*, eds. Hoppál and von Sadovsky, 33.

27. The relationship between Australian and Siberian shamanism is also born out by researchers who have noted strong similarities between the initiation dreams of Australian

in which the soul leaves the body; dead ancestors as guides and helping spirits; dream as a space/time dimension in which the soul meets up with others who inhabit the spirit world; dream knowledge shared with or taught to the tribe; and the necessity of permission and consensus. Compared to the experiences of the ordinary waking world, the experiences of the spirit world take place during sleep and can only be described, as Allan says, "like a dream." The following excerpt from the invocatory song of a Selkup shaman makes this point even more emphatically since the shaman directly interprets his trance state as "seeing a dream":

Yawning *aj jaa*
 I walk, seeing a dream
 - - -
 What spirit is that over yonder?
 Cunning, dark cunning,
 Cunning—I rejoice—it appeared,
 To me, a man of the forest.
 There, a smoky gust of fire
 There, on the peak of a mountain,
 There a maiden, with eyes attentive, speaks.²⁸

As well, in shamanic activity, the theme of permission and consensus between human beings and the spirit world is essential. In Allan's account, the shaman's soul must agree to follow the spirit before the ancestor can become a helping spirit. The following passage from Vilmos Diószegi's research among the Soyots of Siberia further demonstrates this idea. He is describing the ceremony in which a staff is prepared for a new shaman. The old shaman first selects the birch tree from which it is to be cut and asks the consent of the birch to be made into the staff. After the staff is carved the ceremony continues:

aboriginal shamans and those of Siberian shamans. See Benjamin Kilborne, "Dreams," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: MacMillan, 1987), 490.

28. A. J. Joki, "Notes on Selkup Shamanism," in *Shamanism in Siberia*, eds. Vilmos Diószegi and Mihály Hoppál (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978), 376-377.

He asked the birch tree where it had been born . . . He asked how old the tree was . . . He begged the staff to serve the new shaman well:

– White birch-staff: be my horse, be my friend!

Again the shaman gave the answer: [on behalf of the staff]

– I agree.²⁹

Among the Magar of Nepal, the story of the mythical battle between the first shaman and nine witch sisters concludes in a pact whereby the shaman spares the life of the last evil witch in return for her agreement to obey his commandments when he performs the witch removing rituals.³⁰ The roles are clearly defined as the youngest and last witch pleads for her life:

Don't kill me,

.....

I will cause illness, you will cure it,

you will receive wealth, you will receive grain,

I will apply reversed knowledge,

you will apply straightened spells,

I will obey your assigned times and assigned cures,

I will put frogs and turtles into victims,

you will cure them . . .

throughout the world, I'll cause illness,

you'll cure it, don't kill me.³¹

In the shamanic world-view, then, all parties have a role to play and indeed *must* be allowed to play their part. Urgunge Onon, the Daur elder, puts it succinctly:

29. Vilmos Diószegi, *Tracing Shamans in Siberia: The Story of an Ethnographical Research Expedition*, trans. Anita Rajkay Babó (Oosterhout: Anthropological Publications 1968), 240.

30. Reinhard Greve, "The Shaman and the Witch: An Analytical Approach to Shamanic Poetry in the Himalayas," in *Shamanism Past and Present: Part 2*, eds. Hoppál and von Sadovsky, 219.

31. "Recital of the Nine Little Sisters"; quoted in "A Shamanic Semantic Plurality: *Dhāmīs* and *Jhākrīs* of Western Nepal," by Gregory G. Maskarinec, in *Shamanism Past and Present: Part 2*, eds. Hoppál and von Sadovsky, 211.

The fact is: all the things in the world and the people exist in their own way. We cannot and must not win over everything, but we must fight. Fighting is balancing. *Shurkuls* [devils] were never killed. You don't get the idea? If a shaman could completely get rid of *shurkul*, everything would lose balance. *Shurkul* has to be there.³²

Harmony is achieved through the public consensus, agreement, or contractual arrangements entered into between all the participants, animate and inanimate, good and evil. But harmony and balance cannot be achieved or maintained without effort. Shamanizing and dreaming alike are manifestations of the ongoing fight for equilibrium.

Dream Initiation

For many peoples, the beginning of the shaman's ability to exorcize disease spirits lies in the shaman's own experience of sickness and the initiatory dream where the shaman encounters the spirits who are responsible for his illness and, at the same time, hold the power to overcome it. The same power that is the cause of the illness is the cause of its removal. Therefore, the shaman who has control of that power is able to inflict illness as well as to heal it. In an initiatory dream or visionary experience common among the Siberian and Inuit, the shaman-to-be is stripped to the bone, his body dismembered or reduced to a skeleton and subsequently reconstituted and re-fleshed. In his travels among the Turks of the Western Sayans, Diószegi recorded just such an initiatory dream of the Beltir shaman Kyzlasov:

I have been sick and I have been dreaming. In my dreams I had been taken to the ancestor and cut into pieces on a black table. They chopped me up and then threw me into the kettle and I was boiled. . . . While the pieces of my body were boiled, they found a bone around the ribs, which had a hole in the middle. This was the excess-bone. This brought about my becoming a shaman. Because, only those men can become shamans in whose body such a

32. Urgunge Onon, in Humphrey, *Shamans and Elders*, 363.

bone can be found. One looks across the hole of this bone and begins to see all, to know all and, that is when one becomes a shaman . . . When I came to from this state, I woke up. This meant that my soul had returned. Then the shamans declared: "You are the sort of man who may become a shaman. You should become a shaman, you must begin to shamanize!"³³

The initiatory dream is itself the manifestation of the fledgling shaman's power to see the spirits and navigate the invisible world. As well, it is the bestower of that power and a sign that the power must be used; otherwise the shaman is in danger of incurring the anger of the spirits who have summoned him. A common theme in shaman chants is the difficulties of both obeying and disobeying the call of the spirits. Basilov reports the song of the Uzbek shamaness Aidai:

[First] I didn't want to take [shaman's role]
 Let your name vanish, you infidels [i.e., helping spirits]
 I didn't want to go your way
 [But] you gave the date (Uzb. *jiyda*) into my hand,
 (It turned out to be predestined to me).
 You gathered [the spirits] and put [them] on me.
 You gave an apple into my hand [as a sign of selection]
 You neglected my reluctance.³⁴

Similarly, a Kazakh shaman complains:

When [I was] 15 years [old] he [i.e., spirit, jinn] stuck to me,
 When [I was] 20 years [old] he befriended me.
 Having forced me to do this work—against my will.
 He bound me to a dry wood [i.e., to a kobyz].³⁵

And a Yakut shaman says to his spirits: "I was predestined [by you] to be unhappy . . . My fate was crippled!"³⁶

33. Diószegi, *Tracing Shamans in Siberia*, 62.

34. Vladimir N. Basilov, "Texts of Shamanistic Invocations from Central Asia and Kazakhstan," in *Ancient Traditions*, eds. Seaman and Day, 276.

35. Ibid., 278. A *Kobyz* is a stringed instrument used by Kazakh shamans instead of a drum. Ibid., 277.

The initiatory dream is also one that is recognized by the community at large as a sign of the election of the spirits. From south-west China, a Jingpo *tumsa* (sacrificial priest) reported that he became a *tumsa* after a series of dreams that signify such a call, for example, a dream of being possessed by the sun spirit, or of obtaining a sacred message, or of being saved by a celestial spirit, or of safely crossing a bridge.³⁷ A Yurak Samoyed shaman describes his initiation dream of travel beyond the top of the tent pole (world tree) to the heavens:

In the days when I became a shaman
I heard in my dreams
The noise made by the wings
Of twice seven cutting spirits
On the tent pole one sits
If one wants to go a bit further
One goes to the heavenly tube road
Of my mistress in the sky³⁸

Initiatory dreams can be as simple as dreaming of a particular mountain or animal, but they are also reported as amazingly complex and detailed. For example, A.A. Popov's account of the initiatory dream of the Samoyed Nganasan shaman, Djaruoskin, begins like this:

When I was a young man I used to dream all sorts of insignificant things just like any other man. But once, I saw myself going down a road until I reached a tree. With an axe in my hand, I went round the tree and wanted to fell it. Then I heard a voice saying: "(Fell it) later!" and I woke up. Next day the neighbours said to me: "Go and fell a tree for the *kuojka* sledge [special sledge for transporting sacred items]!" I set out, found a suitable tree and started to cut it down. When the tree fell, a man sprang out of its roots with a loud shout. I was petrified with fear (from this unexpected event). The man asked: "Where are you going?" "What could I do—I am going to my

36. Ibid., 278.

37. Shi Kun, "Shamanic Practices among the Minorities of South-west China," in *Shamanism: Past and Present: Part 2*, eds. Hoppál and von Sadovsky, 242.

38. T. von Lehtisalo, "Juraksamojedische Volksdichtung," *Mémoires de la Société Finno-Ougrienne* 90 (1947): 427-477; quoted in Róheim, *The Gates of the Dream*, 168.

tent." "Why, of course, since you have a tent, you must go there. Well, my friend, I am a man, who came out of the roots of the tree. The root is thick, it looks thin in your eyes only. Therefore I tell you that you must come down through the root if you wish to see me."—"What sort of a tree is that?" I asked. "I never could find it out." The man answered: "From times of old, it is of this tree that the *koujka* sledges have been made and the shamans have been growing from. Rocked in the cradle, they become shamans—well that's what this tree is for."—"All right, I shall go with you."³⁹

Djaruoskin follows the man into the root of the tree, and the dream story continues with his adventures in the spirit world and his shaman training—for seven pages! It ends with the statement, "Suddenly I recovered my senses: I must have been lying for a considerable time, near the root of the tree."⁴⁰ In this account, the distinction between ordinary dreams and shaman dreams is quite clear. The shaman-to-be is also directly introduced to the nature of the dream world where what appears to be in waking reality a thin tree root, not as thick as a man, proves, in this alternate reality, to be a wide tunnel entrance to another world. It is the capacity of dream for metamorphosis and transformation that the shaman learns to control, utilize, and extend into the waking reality of the group or tribe.

Hard and Soft

In her book *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, O'Flaherty proposes that the popular Western interpretation of what is real and what is not can be generally summed up in the categories 'hard' and 'soft': "reality is physical, public, external, and somehow 'hard', and . . . what is illusory or not real is mental, private, internal, and somehow 'soft'."⁴¹ She

39. A.A. Popov, "How Sereptie Djaruoskin of the Nganasans (Tavgi Samoyeds) Became a Shaman," in *Popular Beliefs and Folklore in Siberia*, ed. Vilmos Diószegi, Indiana University Publications: Uralic and Altaic Series, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, vol. 57 (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1968), 137-138.

40. Ibid., 144.

41. Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and other Realities*, 9.

goes on to illustrate how certain aspects of Indian thought play with the notions of hard and soft, illusion and reality, making of them dreams within dreams and reflections of reflections—an inescapable labyrinth from which “no one, not even God, can escape . . .”⁴² In the shamanic world-view, however, the many realities and illusions are each to be distinguished from the other. The hallucinations of a madman are not the same as the visions of a shaman. The living and the dead have each their own sphere and world of existence;⁴³ the world of dream and spirits is distinguishable from the world of waking consciousness. Yet it is also thought that what the modern mind perceives as ‘hard’ waking reality can be made malleable, subject to the shaman’s manipulations, and in the so-called ‘soft’ dream world, the shaman takes hold of spirit things.

Although a shamanic world-view does not confuse or confound these spheres, it does work with the idea of a homogeneous nature underlying different dimensions of existence and principles of homology and interconnectedness that allow for the interpenetration of different realities. Such principles of homogeneity and homology can work either with regard to the ‘hard’ physical world or the ‘soft’ spirit world. For example, in Kakar’s study of the healing practices of a Muslim *pir* (wise elder), the *pir* explains that the ‘holy water’ he gives his patients drives demons away by literally washing the blood so that the demon can no longer drink it and is, therefore, forced to leave.⁴⁴ In this view the concrete action of washing extends to the invisible healing process. Alternately, the many dimensions of

42. Ibid., 259.

43. Among the Chukchee, practically every species of plant and animal is a “separate tribe” with its own country or sphere of existence. See Bogoras, “The Chukchee—Religion,” 282-283.

44. Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors*, 50.

human beings and all phenomena include the dimension of spirit persona. Because of this, all types of phenomena have the capacity to enter into direct communication with other persons, sometimes under conditions, such as dreams, that appear to the modern mind as entirely subjective. Shirokogoroff points out that dream communication is a common phenomena among the Tungus (especially among shamans who regularly communicate through dreams) who use it when there is not enough time to send a messenger; they admit that some people cannot do it at all. Of those people for whom it does not work, they simply say, "They do not know how to do it."⁴⁵ Based on the homogeneity of personhood in a shamanic world-view, not only humans, but all kinds of soul-persons can communicate. Some cultures express this more graphically than others. The Karens of south-east Asia practice calling the soul (*kelah*) back for sick humans and equally for sick rice:

O come, rice *kelah*, come. Come to the field. Come to the rice. . . . Come from the West. Come from the East. From the throat of the bird, from the maw of the ape, from the throat of the elephant. . . . From all granaries come. O rice *kelah*, come to the rice.⁴⁶

Even beyond the phenomena of nature or the physical world, shamanic cultures regard as participating in personhood such things as a song, a dream, or a sickness. Some Native American tribes of northern California like the Paviotso speak of 'pains' as being both a source of power and a source of sickness. These 'pains' have personality and concrete shape and colour: "One is like a piece of raw flesh, others resemble crabs, small deer, arrowheads, and so on."⁴⁷ Among the Turkish tribes of Siberia, Diószegi tells the story of Mitkezhkov

45. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, 117-118.

46. Rev. E. B. Cross, "On the Karens," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 4. (New York: George P. Putnam & co., 1854), 309.

47. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, 105.

Toka, an old man who was stricken with small pox, “the spotted guest.” During a séance to cure him of this illness, when the officiating shaman was conducting Toka’s soul to the ancestral shaman of his own family, Toka’s soul and the shaman became separated, and it turned out that Toka’s soul had followed the father of the spotted guest instead of the road that lead to his ancestors—“the road of the spotted guest leads northward.” In this way, Toka became a shaman through the power of the ancestor of the small-pox, instead of through his own ancestor.⁴⁸ Among the Yuma, a shaman receives his medicine song in a dream. The song itself, it is said, comes from the north and sings the story of its long wandering journey from its home:

My home I leave it, I am going
My home I left, I saw, I related.⁴⁹

Songs, or magical incantations among the Chukchee are inherited from parents, received in dreams, or even bought from shamans. The most commonly used for harming are those that are invested with material shape by the performer, for example, as an animal or group of animals, a part of a carcass like a fox head without a body, or a person or any inanimate object. This materialized incantation or “spell,” as Bogoras calls it, can then be sent to bedevil the enemy.⁵⁰

Dream Power

Due to the homogeneity of personhood in shamanic world-views, the shaman can meet face-to-face and exert power over the invisible spirits. In the dreams and visions of the

48. Diószegi, *Tracing Shamans in Siberia*, 55-56.

49. Róheim, *Gates of the Dream*, 197.

50. Bogoras, “The Chukchee—Religion,” 471, 482.

shaman, all that is in the waking world spirit and invisible, takes shape, becomes visible, graspable, and subject to manipulation, including the dream person. The soul can appear as “a black little thing one cm long, thin as a hair.”⁵¹ The dream appears as both dream and dreamer. Ben St. Clair of the Wind River Shoshone describes the activity of the soul dimension called *navujieip* this way:

Navujieip comes alive, when your body rests; it acts as a guide and comes in any form: as an insect, an animal or a person, and so on. That is the case when I am dreaming; I see me then in my own shape, or like an animal, a snake, even a tree; I am acting in my *navujieip*. Sometimes it mystifies you: you do the most impossible things in the shape of your *navujieip*. It gives you advices.⁵²

In shamanic cultures, dreaming is understood as the experiences of the spirit-soul wandering about, but as the passage above indicates, as well as being a state of consciousness in which the person functions as a spirit, dream is itself understood as spirit or being. This idea is very pronounced among the South American Guajiro. Michel Perrin concludes from his research on this group that for them, spirits and dreams are “consubstantial.” Moreover, ‘Dream’ is thought of as a kind of deity from whom both dreaming and spirits issue forth:

Chez les Guajiro, les paroles de l’esprit, «qui parlent dans la tête du chamane», remplacent ou doublent la voix du rêve. Plus encore, les âmes, les esprits auxiliaires et indirectement les rêves seraient en quelque sorte «consustantiels», tous relevant de Rêve (*Lapü*), l’être du monde-autre qui les engendre ou les gouverne.⁵³

51. Åke Hultkrantz, “The Concept of the Soul Held by the Wind River Shoshone,” *Ethnos* 16 (1951):29.

52. Ibid., 30.

53. Michel Perrin, “Quelques relations entre rêve et chamanisme,” *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 18, no. 2 (1994): 30.

Similarly, the Wind River Shoshone concept of *navujieip* means both 'soul' and 'dream': "Every human being is born with a 'dream' that he retains through life unless he is robbed of it."⁵⁴ Like the Tibetan belief that the *la* can reside in soul-trees or soul-lakes, the Australian tribes on Cape York believe that one of a person's two souls, the *yorntal*, resides in a palm tree near a water-hole. This is his "Dream Place" and during sleep his second soul leaves the body and joins the *yorntal* here. "You can either ask a man where is your *yorntal* (soul) or where do you dream? It amounts to the same thing."⁵⁵ To speak of spirit or soul, then, is, in many instances, to speak of dream. The shaman who is the soul specialist is at one and the same time the dream specialist, a "rêveur sur commande,"⁵⁶ and it is by virtue of the dream that he becomes capable of doing his work with spirit.⁵⁷ The shaman does not only meet spirits in his dreams—he dreams them; the very act of dreaming is an act of power. Small, inconsequential, random dreaming indicates the small power of ordinary people; great, meaningful, controlled dreaming indicates the superior magic power of the shaman. In this context, Róheim notes that the Shipaya shaman passes on "his dream," meaning his spirit power, to his student.⁵⁸

The mystifying and impossible things noted above that one can do in the spirit mode

54. Hultkrantz, *The Concept of the Soul*, 32.

55. D. F. Thompson, "The Hero Cult Initiation and Totemism on Cape York," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 63 (1993): 427-429.

56. Perrin, "Relations entre rêve et chamanisme," 30.

57. The Chukchee also believe that the best way of communicating with spirits is through dreams. Bogoras, "The Chukchee—Religion," 463.

58. A. Metraux, "Le Chamanisme chez les Indiens de L'Amerique du Sud Tropicale," *Acta Americana* 11, 1944-1945, 211; cited in Róheim, *The Gates of the Dream*, 213-214.

or, as Ben St. Clair says, “in the shape of your *navujieip*” is another strong motif in shamanic dream traditions. In a Buryat story,⁵⁹ Minga Milá, “Thousand Eyes” (possibly a spirit or another shaman), is terrorizing the people of the Olzoni area and has seized all their cattle including those belonging to a powerful shaman. The shaman petitions his five shaman brothers to help him fight the demon to retrieve his cattle, but they are all too afraid. The shaman, realizing he will have to handle the problem alone, goes home, mixes himself a strong alcoholic drink made with horse’s milk, ties his horse to a post in the tent, and lies down with his axe under his pillow. He tells his wife, “Do not let my horse out and do not waken me.” As the story goes, “Soon he and his horse were sound asleep, but they were not asleep, it was only their bodies which were so quiet. In reality the Shaman was riding swiftly toward the Angara [river].” The shaman reaches a high mountain and the dream narrative continues:

From the top of this mountain the Shaman saw that Minga Milá had made a bridge across the river and was beginning to drive his cattle over it. . . .

The Shaman turned himself into a bee, made his axe equally small, and, taking it with him, flew under the bridge and hewed the pillars so that the bridge broke in two.⁶⁰

The cattle and Thousand Eyes are dumped into the river, and the shaman calls up a terrible storm at the end of which he is able to extract from his terrified opponent a vow that he will henceforth never trouble the Olzoni country. The story ends with the shaman returning to his tent. There, he gets up from his bed where his wife thought he had been sleeping, frees the horse from its post in the tent, and drives it out to the pasture. “And all was as if it had not

59. See Curtin, *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, 111-112.

60. Ibid.

been. But the cattle of Olzoni were never stolen again.”⁶¹ The dream transformation of the shaman in the passage above finds echoes in the practice of dream yoga in Tibet in which the yogi is instructed to practise the ‘Transformation of Dreams’; that is, having recognized the dream as dream within the dream, the yogi practises transforming his body into whatever he likes—a bird, a tiger, a lion, or a bee as in the dream above. He also develops the capacity to transform the external environment of his dream into whatever he likes: turn water into fire, a snake into a man, or, as above, call up a storm. ⁶²

The power of the shaman over the spirits is perhaps most called upon in the task of healing. Healing, however, is not merely a matter of curing the illness, but as Urgunge Onon noted, it is a matter of fighting to restore the balance of good and evil, to restore the harmony of life to the person and to the community of which the person is an integral part. To do this, the shaman must divine the ‘reason’ for the illness, determine the ‘person’ responsible for the illness; then the method of dealing with the person can be identified, be it coercion, ransom, trickery, or out-and-out battle. In the pains and symptoms of sickness, the Soyot recognize the torments of the soul captured by evil spirits:

The wicked spirits lie in wait, they capture the roaming soul and torture it. Thereupon the owner of the soul falls sick. If the wicked spirit dips the soul into hot water, the man, whose soul it is, suffers of fever. If it is submerged in cold water, the owner will have the shivers. If the spirit twists the hands and the legs of the soul, then the owner has pains in his limbs.⁶³

In a shamanic tradition, a sick person is not so much cured as rescued.

61. Ibid., 112.

62. Garma C.C. Chang, trans., *Teachings of Tibetan Yoga* (Secaucus, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1963), 92.

63. Diószegi, *Tracing Shamans in Siberia*, 294.

Shamanic power is also closely allied with the ability to communicate with the spirits through chanting, singing, or speaking the language of the spirits. As noted in Chapter 1, among the ancient Tibetans, singers and story-tellers were among those who performed a sacred role “protecting the kingdom” with their songs. The close relationship between bard and shaman among Central Asian tribes is underscored by the similarity of their names: among the Turkmen, Karakalpak, and Uzbek, *bakhshy* means ‘singer’, while among Kazakh and Kirghiz tribes, *baksy* and *bakshy* mean ‘shaman’. As Basilov notes, “The majority of the Uzbek groups also calls their shamans ‘bakhshy’.”⁶⁴ The role of dream in the call of a professional musician, as in the call of a professional shaman is prominent among the Kirghiz who believe that “a man could be a professional performer of the ‘Manas’ epos only after a benediction given by the epic hero Manas himself—in a dream or a vision.”⁶⁵

In “Blessing in a Dream,” Basilov recounts the dream of Allashukur, an old musician who was forty years old when he was stricken for six months with a type of paralysis.⁶⁶ In his dream, he embarks on a journey to a sacred mountain top shrine. On his way home, he encounters a retinue of *pari* spirits, male and female, and their chief. He is invited to join their feast and is given musical instruments and told to play by the women; although he has no such musical knowledge, he is able to play. The spirits ask about his illness, and it is determined that he has fallen ill because six months earlier on their way north, the troupe had stopped to rest near his village, and a sick spirit had drunk water from a jar in his house. When Allashukur subsequently drank water from the same jar, the spirit’s sickness adhered

64. Vladimir N. Basilov, “Blessing in a Dream,” *Turcica* 27 (1995): 238.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*, 240-244.

to him. The chief of the spirit troupe in front of Allashukur destroys the offending spirit of sickness and he is told, ““You are free from your illness now. We have killed your illness.””⁶⁷ Upon waking from this dream, Allashukur recovers from his illness, and although he takes no formal lessons and although none of his ancestors were musicians, he is able to follow the spirits’ instructions and sing and play the violin with skill. This dream follows a formula very familiar to Siberian and Central Asian tribes in which the initiatory illness is caused by the same spirits who heal and empower. Further, the dream is portrayed as a shamanic journey during which the person communicates with and receives help from the spirits.⁶⁸

To conclude, dreams and visionary mental states are the primary locus of shamanic activity. Although dreams can be significant in the normal life of a tribe, ordinarily people have no control over their dreams, just as they have no control over the spirits that bring disease and suffering. As a neophyte, the shaman has no control either over the spirits that beset him, hence the accounts of uncontrollable hysteria and other abnormal behaviours that are taken to be signs of election by the spirits. The initiatory dream, however, marks the beginning of control. From the outset, dreams that signify the shamanic vocation are not ordinary dreams; they are recognizable dreams with repeated themes.⁶⁹ In other words, they

67. Ibid., 242.

68. According to Basilov, in Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the particular spirits referred to in Allashukur’s dream, the *pari*, are commonly thought of as the shaman’s helping spirits. Ibid., 244.

69. Shirokogoroff notes that the Tungus have different words for two different kinds of dreams: dreams that are ‘revelation’ and dreams that are just ‘dreaming’. *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, 362.

are dreams controlled by a tradition that invests them with a certain shared interpretation. Beginning with this foundation, the shaman eventually learns to control his or her entire dreaming and visionary process. Power over the dream and control of the spirits go hand in hand. The dream is the vehicle by which invisible dimensions become visible in trances and visions achieved through various methods of fasting, alcohol, hallucinogenics, tobacco, drumming, dancing, chanting, or by simply going to sleep.

Dreams, which have been commonly regarded in post-Freudian Western culture as the ultimate private reality, function in shamanism as a crucial participant in the shared reality of the group. By this is meant not only the fact that private dreams are shared with others upon waking, or the idea that dreams can be shared by others within the dream itself, or that objects, practices, and rituals emerge into public life from private dreams. Beyond those notions, it is clear that the characteristics of dreams and dreaming—permeable, personal, symbolic, and unfixed—are equally the characteristics of a shamanic approach to the world and human existence. Whether a particular culture utilizes the phenomena of dream extensively or not in shamanizing, a common world-view can be recognized in diverse communities, one in which “fish are transformed women, animals may speak, shed their skins and become human. The sea and stones may cause pregnancy.”⁷⁰ The shamanic world, then, allows for a system in which, whether waking or sleeping, reality—what ‘is’—is of the nature of dream, and dreams participate in the concrete reality of what ‘is’.

70. Lola Romanucci-Ross, “The Impassioned Cogito: Shaman and Anthropologist,” in *Shamanism Past and Present: Part I*, eds. Hoppál and von Sadovsky, 38.

SECTION TWO: DREAM AND THE INDIAN BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 3

DREAM AND POWER IN ANCIENT INDIA

One of the most comprehensive works to date on the classical Indian treatment of dreams is Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty's *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, a study of ancient Indian ideas regarding the nature of reality and its transformations through dream, illusion, and myth. From the outset, she makes the point that in Indian thought, the concept of dream encompasses both the content and the form of the experience:

One word (*svapna*, etymologically related to the Greek *hypnos*) designates both the *content* of dreaming—i.e., the images in the dream, the actual dream that one “sees”—and the *form* of dreaming—the process of sleeping (including the process of dreaming), which involves the relationship between the dream and the waking world.¹

O'Flaherty concludes that among the truths expressed in the myths recounted in her book is what she calls “the central truth that is particularly Indian,” that is to say, “insight into the primacy, the solidity, and the power of the world of dreams and illusions.”² These are characteristics that resonate strongly with the shamanic approach to dream examined in Chapter 2. Further, the use of one term to signify both the dreaming process and the objects of the dream can be found also among Native American groups. Hultkrantz points out that the Wind River Shoshone use the word *navijjeip* (one of the soul dimensions of a person) to

1. O'Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 14.

2. Ibid., 304.

mean both the capacity to dream and the object one dreams about. Similarly, the Inuit use the word *isuma* for both the thinking faculty and the thought.³

This chapter will examine the Indian world-view with two purposes in mind. First, in order to establish the matrix of Buddhist ideas on dream and dream theory, it will explore seminal motifs and influences that show the roots and continuity of attitudes towards and understanding of the nature of sleep and dream in Buddhism. It will examine Vedic views of creative power and approach to ritual and sacrifice, Upanishadic views of dream and illusion, and mythological expressions of the world as dream. Secondly, as an element in the development of Tibetan Buddhist attitudes to dream, this chapter will draw attention to certain key comparisons between shamanic themes and the Indian world-view inherited by Buddhism.

The Vedic World View: Ritual and Power

The *Rig Veda* (ca. 1500-800 B.C.E.) is one of the oldest of mankind's religious texts. It forms the authority and foundation of all Hindu religious thought that came after it, yet is arguably devoid of the central religious concerns of classical Hinduism (the belief in continuing rebirth, the belief in an eternal metaphysical Soul (*Ātman*) as the essence of the individual, and the belief in the idea of ultimate spiritual liberation or release (*mokṣa*) from the round of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). The world-view that emerges from the hymns and chants of the *Vedas* is one dedicated to life and vitality in all its forms. David Knipe states in his work on the Vedic concept of creative heat (*tapas*) that "the early Vedic aspiration is

3. Hultkrantz, "Concept of the Soul," 33, n. 34.

uncomplicated: man should have life and have it more abundantly.”⁴ Religious life as portrayed in the early *Vedas* for the most part was focussed on pragmatic concerns of maintaining and augmenting individual life force and concomitant prosperity through ‘food’ of all kinds. This concern was extended to dead ancestors whose continued form or body (*tanū*)⁵ was dependent on the ritual feeding by way of the sacrifice, as well as to the immortal gods whose *tanū* was equally dependent on the nourishment provided by the sacrifice.⁶ All these forms of nourishment depended on the efficacy of ritual. The Vedic sacrificial rituals relate to a large pantheon of gods (each of which is extolled in different hymns as supreme) who frequently embody the various powers inherent in the universe—not only the physical powers of nature, but also the powers of mind and thought characteristic of human beings. Indra, the god of storms and battle, is described as “strong-willed” and “thunder-armed.”⁷ The primary religious emphasis in the *Vedas* is on ritual as the way to connect with, and thereby affect for one’s benefit, the divine and natural forces that constitute the cosmos. As in a shamanic world-view, ritual manifests power, and in the *Vedas*, the prime ritual is the sacrifice.

The cosmos in which the Vedic sacrifice takes place is a hierarchical one (familiar to ancient empires and tribal cultures alike)—the sky or celestial realm above, the middle realm

4. David M. Knipe, *In the Image of Fire: Vedic Experiences of Heat* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 37.

5. See N. Ross Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities press, 1990), 63. “The most essential element of the human being is his individual identity, which resides primarily in the quasi-material *tanū*.”

6. Ibid., 90-91.

7. RV 5.36.5, Ralph T. H. Griffith, trans., *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, ed. J. L. Shastri, new and rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), 254.

of air or space, and the earthly realm below. In this hierarchy, the gods are superior to humankind in their power and immortality, but gods, humans, nature, and the entire cosmos are kin, related in essence and genesis. Reat points out that mortal and immortal beings are called '*sayoni*' (of common womb or origin):⁸

7. Regard us Indra, Viṣṇu, here, ye Áśvins and the Marut host, us who are kith and kin to you.

8. Ye bounteous ones, from time of old we here set forth our brotherhood, our kinship in the mother's womb.⁹

The universe itself is conceived of as person. In the famous *Purusha Sūkta*, gods, humans, nature, the entire cosmos derives from the ritual sacrifice of the supreme 'Person':

The Brāhmaṇa [priestly caste] was his mouth, and
his arms were made the Rājanya [warrior caste],
his thighs became the Vaiśya [merchant caste], and
from his feet was the Śūdra [labourer caste] born.

From his mind was born the moon, and
from his eye the sun. From his mouth
were Indra and Agni born,
and Vāyu was born from his breath.

From his navel came the mid-air,
from his head the sky was fashioned,
from his feet the earth, and from his ear
the quarters. Thus they formed the worlds.¹⁰

From the Vedic perspective, the essence of all is life, and the essence of life is nourishment. Gods and humans both depend on the sacrifice for nourishment and well-being. The power of the sacrifice is the power of creation, the power of bringing-into-being. This power is

8. Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 51.

9. RV 8.72.7-8, Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, 451.

10. RV 10.90.12-14, Abinash Chandra Bose, trans., *Hymns from the Vedas* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1966), 286-289.

dependent on the Vedic view of the fundamental nature of the universe—that it is one cloth, all of a piece:

1. Sacrifice [resembles] a loom with threads extended
This way and that, composed of innumerable rituals.
Behold now the Fathers weaving the fabric; seated
on the outstretched loom. “Lengthwise! Crosswise!” they cry.

3. What was the model, the pattern, what the connection?
What was the ritual butter and the line of demarcation?
What was the meter, the hymn, the preliminary chant,
When all the deities sacrificed God in oblation?¹¹

Sacrifice and Homology

Among the interconnected concepts that define the Vedic world-view, Walter O. Kaelber lists heat (*tapas*), sacrifice (*yajña*), knowledge (*vidyā*, *jñāna*), and homology (*nidāna*, *bandhu*).¹² With regard to the relationship between shamanism and Buddhism, the presence of the principle of homology or correspondence in the ancient Indian matrix is of the most interest. This is the principle that underlies shamanic practices such as rituals of exchange or the belief that when the soul is tortured in the spirit world, the person in this world suffers. As a theory of fundamental interconnectedness between things, it also relates to the Buddhist theory of cause and effect and the way in which that theory was interpreted in Tibet in relation to both philosophic discourse and shamanic practices of divination and omenology.

In the *Vedas*, the sacrifice that brings the world into being is founded on the idea that things are multiform and interconnected and that interconnected things are related in

11. RV 10.130.1,3, Raimundo Panikkar, ed. and trans., *The Vedic Experience* (Pondicherry: All India Books, 1977), 356.

12. Walter O. Kaelber, *Tapta Mārga: Asceticism and Initiation in Vedic India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 1.

essence, bound together from their source. There is, however, a mystery about the way in which things are bound together, a mystery about existence that is poignantly stated in the

Nāsadīya Sūkta:

Who, really, knows? Who can here declare it?
whence was it born and whence come this creation?
The Devas are later than this world's production;
Then, who knows from where it came into being?

That from which this creation came into being,
whether It had held it together or It had not,
He who surveys it in the highest region,
He, truly, knows it, or maybe He does not know!¹³

Knipe notes that even though existence is mysterious for both gods and men, the aspect of 'otherness' and of mystery "is balanced by the . . . recognition of its availability to certain men . . . who have spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear that this mystery has structure (*ṛta*)."¹⁴ Knowledge of that structure, of the pattern, of the correspondences of things, brings the knower power to create as the universe was created. Hence the culminating question addressed in the later *Upanishads* (esoteric discussions between teachers and students composed ca. 800-600 B.C.E.): "What is that by knowing which everything else is known?" In the words of the *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka Upanishad*, "Do you know . . . that thread by which this world and the other world and all things are tied together?"¹⁵ According to Louis Renou, the Vedic poets were "constantly seeking hidden correspondences between things which belong to entirely distinct conceptual systems."¹⁶ In determining such

13. RV 10.129.6-7, Bose, *Hymns from the Vedas*, 305.

14. Knipe, *In the Image of Fire*, 32.

15. BAU 3.7.1, Robert Ernest Hume, trans., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 2d rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press), 114.

16. Louis Renou, *Religions of Ancient India* (London: The Athlone Press, 1953), 18.

correspondences, it was thought, the sacrificer could alter and affect seemingly disparate realities by knowing their hidden connections.

The words *nidāna* and *bandhu* are variously translated as ‘connection’, ‘correspondence’, and ‘correlation’. The primary meaning of the words has a two-fold connotation, both related to the concrete imagery of ‘rope’, ‘tie’, or ‘bond’. One meaning involves the notion of being bound or fastened together as disparate things are tied together by rope. The second meaning relates to the idea of ‘cause’, ‘original form or essence’—in other words, to join, unite, put together, and therefore produce something, as a fist is produced by clenching the fingers, as a bridge is constructed by joining the two sides of a river, as friendship or enmity is contracted between people.¹⁷

Some scholars have interpreted this concern with correspondences as nothing more than unfounded attempts at magical control over the forces of nature. In explaining how this works, Franklin Edgerton writes: “For instance, ‘the cow is breath’; I control a cow, therefore I control breath, my own life-breath, or someone else’s. That is the only reason for the fantastic identification.”¹⁸ Others, like Knipe, see the concepts of *nidāna* and *bandhu* as part of a deeper apprehension of the universe and all its parts. The Vedic belief in the intimate correlations between disparate phenomena should not, however, lead one to interpret it either in terms of a philosophy of monism, or merely as a system of symbolic representations. Knipe points to the heart of the matter in the following passage:

17. Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, new ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 548, 720.

18. Franklin Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy: Selections from the Rig Veda, Atharva Veda, Upaniṣads, and Mahābhārata* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 22.

The *brāhmaṇas* appear not to be content with William Blake “to see the world in a grain of sand,” or on the other hand simply to allow the grain of sand to symbolize or represent the world. Rather, there is a metaphysically aggressive process by which the grain of sand is pressed to reveal its identity in relationship, in fact literally in cosmic bondage to a stem of grass, to the wind, to a musical note, to a wooden bowl, to thought, and to every possible cosmic entity.¹⁹

In the complex exchange of the Vedic sacrifice, the sacrificer is himself the sacrificial offering, following exactly, and recreating, the primordial sacrifice out of which all phenomena arose. Thereby, he creates for himself the results of the sacrifice, whether that be the immortal worlds of the gods or the earthly material benefits of wealth and victory over enemies:

8. And when he performs the Vaiṣvadeva [sacrifice], then he becomes Agni, and attains to union with Agni and to co-existence in his world. And when he performs the Varuṇa-*praghāsa* offerings, then he becomes Varuṇa . . . And when he performs the Sākamedha offerings, then he becomes Indra and attains to union with Indra and to co-existence in his world.²⁰

The physical and metaphysical connections are laid out clearly in the ritual in that the entire arena for the sacrifice, the offering spoons, and the sacrificial stake were constructed according to the proportions of a human. According to the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, “It [the sacrifice] is made of exactly the same extent as the man: this is the reason why the sacrifice is the man.”²¹ However, the sacrifice was *not* a man but one or more animals in place of man.²²

19. Knipe, *In the Image of Fire*, 34.

20. SB 2.6.4.8, Julius Eggeling, trans., *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa: Part I*, 2d ed., The Sacred Books of the East Series, ed. Max Müller, vol. 12 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966), 450-451.

21. SB 1.3.2.1, *Ibid.*, 78.

22. The Fire Altar ritual (*Agnicayana*) refers to the sacrifice of five prototypical animals that represent ‘all the animals’—man, horse, bull, sheep, and goat—but eventually

Such an exchange is common also in shamanic practice as in the shaman's chant quoted in Chapter 1 in which it is told how chickens came to be the ones chosen to "go in place of man." The Vedic animal sacrifice was called *paśubandha*, 'the binding (*bandha*) of the animal (*paśu*)'. Herman Tull indicates that this binding could have referred either to the fact that the animal was strangled²³ with a rope or to the fact that it was tied to the stake.²⁴ More important in the context of the ritual, however, is the metaphysical bond by which the animal was connected to the sacrificer. This metaphysical connection is signified in the nearly indistinguishable word '*bandhu*', translated variously as 'correspondence', 'connection', 'association', 'correlation', or 'identity'. When the connecting link is seen and declared by the ritualist, that knowledge penetrates the solidity of disparate things and makes them subject to the transformative power of creation. The sacrificial animal is bound to the sacrificial pole, and in the same way that the animal is, by homology, the sacrificer, so the sacrificer is Agni by virtue of the bond (*bandhu*) between them. As Knipe explains, "x is so

settles on the goat to represent all five because based on physical comparisons (e.g., the goat is hornless and bearded and man is hornless and bearded), "in this animal doubtless the form of all (the five kinds of) animals is (contained)." SB 6.2.2.15, Julius Eggeling, trans., *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa: Part III*, The Sacred Books of the East Series, ed. Max Müller, vol. 41 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966), 177.

23. There is an interesting correspondence between the strangulation of the sacrificial animal and reports that upon entering a possessed state, Tibetan oracles (*sung-ma*) make gurgling, strangling noises. See Rock, "Shamanism of the Tibetan-Chinese Borderland," 811. Although the Tibetans attribute it to the idea that the possessing spirit is of a person who died by strangulation, the phenomena was also noted among the Inuit studied by Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos*, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24, vol. 9 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1932), 58. It is possible to see in this connection the idea of the shaman as sacrifice, binding the spirits, connecting them to humans, as the Fire God in the Vedic ritual is bound to man by the sacrifice of the animal that replaces man.

24. Herman Tull, *The Vedic Origins of Karma: Cosmos as Man in Ancient Indian Myth and Ritual* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 74.

'bound' to y that x is y. Agni . . . is *yajñabandhu* [bound by sacrifice] with man."²⁵ The ritual, however, is fraught with danger for all involved. By means of the sacrifice, the reality of increased life force, physical strength, wealth, and power is to be obtained, but the path leads through the opposing reality of death and destruction. The sacrificer must be intimately connected to the animal that is his death substitute, yet the danger is that his own life force will be polluted or destroyed by association with death. J. C. Heesterman sums up correctly the nature of sacrifice: "When taken seriously sacrifice is, quite bluntly, an act of controlled death and destruction . . . the vacuum created by the sacrifice has to be filled by the other side with the opposite of death and destruction, that is, the goods of life . . ."²⁶ This ambiguous and dangerous situation is addressed in a debate in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*:

10. As to this they say, "That (victim) must not be held on to by the sacrificer, for they lead it unto death; therefore let him not hold on to it." But let him nevertheless hold on to it; for that (victim) which they lead to the sacrifice they lead not to death; therefore let him hold on to it. Moreover he would cut himself off from the sacrifice, were he not to hold on to it; therefore let him hold on to it. It is held on to in a mysterious [imperceptible] way. By means of the spits the Pratiprasthātṛ (holds on to it); to the Pratiprasthātṛ [holds] the Adhvaryu, to the Adhvaryu the Sacrificer; thus then it is held on to in a mysterious [imperceptible] way.²⁷

This discussion indicates that there was some concern over physically touching the animal since it was being lead to death. The counter argument is put forward that the sacrificial way is not the way of death; nevertheless, in recognition of the danger of the situation, the

25. Knipe, *In the Image of Fire*, 43.

26. J. C. Heesterman, "Veda and Dharma," in *The Concept of Duty in South Asia*, eds. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty and J. Duncan M. Derrett (U.S.A.: South Asia Books, 1978), 87.

27. SB 3.8.1.10, Julius Eggeling, *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa: Part II*, The Sacred Books of the East Series, ed. Max Müller, vol. 26 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1885), 188.

sacrificer is protected by the intermediary presence of two ritual specialists between himself and the sacrificial animal. He is said to touch the animal in an imperceptible manner. The word used is '*parokṣa*' which also has connotations of 'out of sight', 'secret', 'hidden', 'mysterious', and 'cryptic'. His connection with the sacrificed animal is therefore both physically indirect and metaphysical (hidden from the ordinary senses). The physical ritual of the sacrifice mirrors the imperceptible, metaphysical nature of the correspondences between mortal and immortal, gods and men, heaven and earth.

Vital Power

In his study of the ancient Indian concept of the human being, Reat concludes, "the Vedic concept of the basis of human life is surprisingly materialistic when considered in relation to later Indian psychology."²⁸ This emphasis on the vitalistic nature of the gods, the cosmos, human beings, and the power that moves them all is captured in the term '*vayas*', a word closely associated with, and often translated as, 'food' but which in usage connotes more accurately the power or vigour, mental and physical, that resides in a well-nourished versus a malnourished person.²⁹ It is the power necessary for overcoming foes on the battlefield and is associated with the wrathful power of the Maruts, havoc-wreaking thunderstorms:

1. With gleaming lances, with their breasts adorned with gold,
the Maruts, rushing onward, hold high power of life [*vayas*]³⁰

28. Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 90.

29. Ibid.

30. RV 5.55.1, Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, 267. This image appears also in the Tibetan concept of *lung-ta*, 'wind-horse', an idea that encompasses such meanings as life

2. Yea, your birth, Maruts was with wild commotion, ye who
move swiftly, fierce in wrath, terrific.

3. Give ample vital power [*vāyas*] unto our princes: let our fair praises
gratify the Maruts.³¹

This vitalistic energy and power is requisite both for the heroes who fight in war and the
“singers,” the priests who empower the sacrifice and defeat foes with the power of their
rituals:

May the Ḡṛtsamadas [a type of priest], serving in secret,
through thee, O Agni overcome their neighbours,
Rich in good heroes and subduing foemen.
That vital power [*vāyas*] give thou to chiefs and singers.³²

Another term denoting vitality is ‘*vāja*’, a word that refers to a power of spirit, body, and
sexual potency such as is embodied in the vigour of a spirited racing stallion. In the *Vedas*,
swift horses are a source of wealth and victory over one’s enemies. Jan Gonda points out the
desirability of the vital power of *vāja* in RV 3.62.8 which he translates:

Take pleasure in these words of praise of mine—further my [song] [literally]
‘materialized vision’ that strives after *vāja* . . . as a bridegroom (takes
pleasure) in his young wife.³³

At times, it would seem that the hymn itself is sent to the gods as an offering in return for
which the singer expects to receive vital power, *vāja*. Ralph T. H. Griffith translates the

force, energy, personal charisma, and luck. When it is ‘high’, one is full of mental and
physical energy and succeeds in everything.

31. RV 7.58.2-3, Ibid., 363.

32. Ibid., 133.

33. RV 3.62.8, Jan Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets* (The Hague: Mouton &
Co., 1963), 150.

latter part of RV 7.37.2 to say, “give us bounties for the hymns we sing you.”³⁴ Gonda’s translation of a similar verse RV 9.76.3 reads: “(I hope, expect) that thou wilt perpetually allot as it were in exchange for (my) materialized vision manifestations of the generative power called *vājah*.”³⁵ In the Vedic world-view, an element of vitality and sensuality pervades all aspects of human beings and the cosmos in which they exist. Even mental operations were perceived as vital functions—the songs of the sages were not composed but ‘seen’, as in visions or dreams.

Mental Power

In the Vedic view, there is an intimate relationship between extraordinary vital power and strength and extraordinary power of mind or thought; mental power is closely associated with the concrete action of the senses, especially with the faculty of perception or vision. Gonda notes the association of the verb *cit* (thought) with meanings such as “appearing, becoming conspicuous” also “to make visible to, or manifest to, to reveal” (in both senses of “to exhibit to the sight” and “to disclose something not previously known”).³⁶ In Reat’s translation of RV 10.177.1,

The thoughtful (*vipaścitaḥ*) perceive (*paśyanti*) with heart (*hṛd*) and mind (*manas*) the bird adorned with the magic (*māyā*) of an *Asura* (a class of heavenly being).³⁷

34. RV 7.37.2, Griffith, *The Hymns of the RgVeda*, 354.

35. RV 9.76.3, Gonda, *Vision of the Vedic Poets*, 151.

36. Ibid., 99-100.

37. RV 10.177.1, Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 97.

The ability to 'see' with the mental organs of heart and mind is a power that adheres to those in whom the faculty of insightful thought is developed to a high degree. Gonda describes the 'vision' of the Vedic sages:

The exceptional and supranormal faculty, proper to "seers", of "seeing", in the mind, things, causes, connections as they really are, the faculty of acquiring a sudden knowledge of the truth, of the functions and influence of the divine powers, of man's relations to them . . . ³⁸

The connection between perception and the heart/mind was carried by Buddhism into the Tibetan context where the dreams that one 'sees' are said to originate from the heart.

There are a number of words that deal with mind and mental power in the *Vedas*. In exploring the origins of Indian psychology, Reat examines a cluster of such related terms.³⁹ According to his analysis, the root *√cit* refers to the faculty that deals with mental processes in general, whether perceptive, intellectual, emotional, or cognitive.⁴⁰ *Kratu*, the faculty of will or mental power, is "conceived of as the motive force which actualizes the creation of objects visualized in the creative imagination."⁴¹ *Dhī* is the faculty that experiences spiritual or mental visions and the vision itself. *Manas* is the mental organ, the mind, which functioning along with the heart (*hṛd*) is the seat of the emotions, the locus of the essential character of a person. Heart and mind fashion hymns and prayers, clarify visions, and purify libations. All these terms are intimately linked with divine creative power and vision beyond

38. Gonda, *Vision of the Vedic Poets*, 68.

39. See Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 96-143, for a full discussion of the mental organs of mind (*manas*) and heart (*hṛd*), and the mental faculties of thought (*citta*), mental vision (*dhī*), and mental power (*kratu*).

40. Ibid., 101.

41. Ibid., 107.

the reach of ordinary human beings: "Within the range of their surpassing power, by might, the Gods created Agni [Fire] with inventive thought."⁴² Pulling together all the terminology referring to mind, Reat states:

Thought, in the *Rg Veda*, is represented as primarily a perceptual phenomenon. Generally speaking, its locus is the heart (*hrd*), and the agent or instrument of thought is the *manas* [mind]. Derivatives of the verbal root *√cit* denote simply mental activity in general, and this primarily perceptual mental faculty may be applied to the achievement of ends by being channelled through the mental faculty *kratu*, "mental power". These faculties function primarily in the context of ritual to encode the contents of the sacrificer's vision (*dhi*) into an effective message and transmit this message to the gods, who, it is hoped will help the sacrificer to actualize his desires.⁴³

The great sacrificial rituals of the ancient Indians were dependent on the power of the priests to properly enact and 'envision' the sacrifice. Mere ritual actions, whether of body or speech, were of no value without the mental (visionary) power that carried the meaning of the sacrifice and was the creative force behind it. O'Flaherty recounts a story from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (a Sanskrit text composed between the sixth and twelfth centuries C.E.) that tells of a king who performed the sacrifice of royal consecration entirely mentally:

He made all the preparations mentally: he summoned the priests and honoured the sages, invited the gods and kindled the fires. A whole year passed as he sacrificed to the gods and the sages in the forest, but then the king awoke at the end of a single day, right there in the palace grove. Thus by his mind alone King Lavaṇa achieved the fruits of the sacrifice of royal consecration.⁴⁴

This story comes from a period much later than the *Vedas*, but it is supported from ancient times by the Vedic institution of the priest who was charged with the responsibility of

42. RV 3.2.3, Griffith, *The Hymns of the RgVeda*, 160.

43. Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 142.

44. O'Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 142.

mentally replicating the actions of the other ritual specialists.⁴⁵ O’Flaherty says, “This priest, the Brāhman did absolutely nothing; his job was to sit there and to *think* the sacrifice while the others *did* it.”⁴⁶ In the *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka Upanishad*, the Brāhman priest is further equated with mind, the means by which the sacrificer ascends to the heavenly world: “Verily, the mind is the Brahman [priest] of the sacrifice.”⁴⁷ The idea of mind as the vehicle of transport—whether transport of human offerings to the gods, transport of the sage to the world of the gods, or transport of the gods about their heavenly abodes—is emphasized in the motif and imagery of the god’s chariots which are said to be mind-made (*manasmaya*):

12. Clean, as thou wentest, were thy wheels: wind was the axle fastened there.
Sūryā [the sun-maiden] proceeding to her Lord, mounted a spirit-fashioned
[*manasmaya*, mind-made] car.⁴⁸

The *Rig Veda* refers to mind both as that which creates and the motive force by which things are transported between men and gods: “among all things that fly the mind is swiftest.”⁴⁹ The horses of the Ásvins that carry away the hymns of the singer are “mind-swift.”⁵⁰ Hymns and prayers are said to be “mind-yoked,” *mano-yuja*—Soma, the god of the intoxicating

45. That the king awoke could indicate a state of sleep or dream, and, indeed, O’Flaherty considers that this story validates the idea that one who dreams of initiation is in fact initiated. *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 142.

46. Ibid., 143. In comparison, it could similarly be said of the shaman that he ‘envisions’ for his audience the world of spirits.

47. BAU 3.1.6, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 108.

48. RV 10.85.12, Griffith, *The Hymns of the RgVeda*, 594.

49. RV 6.9.5, Ibid., 288.

50. RV 6.62.3, Ibid., 324.

sacred drink is implored to “set free the song which mind hath yoked, even as thunder frees the rain . . .”⁵¹ Reat quotes another passage:

O Indra caster of the stone, thou helpest him who praises thee. From Sacrifice I send thee a mind-yoked hymn (*dhiyaṁ manoyuja*) [literally, a mind-yoked vision].⁵²

Whether “mind-yoked” refers to the mind as the motive force or as the creative force, the general meaning according to Reat is that visions are “made mobile or functional by the mind.”⁵³

The *Vedas* are called *śruti*, that which is heard, but the ancient *rishis* (seers) to whom the songs and chants of the *Vedas* are traditionally attributed, were inspired visionaries who, it is said, *saw* what is heard. Their thought-visions were ‘materialized’ in ritual speech and song to be heard by gods and men. The *rishis* were those who first envisioned the mystic form of *vāc*, Speech, and subsequently those who through the liturgy of the sacrifice can, in actuality, transform vision into speech—in other words, those special ones to whom Speech reveals herself as a beautiful vision, like a “fond well-dressed woman to her husband.”⁵⁴ Wayman refers to the story of Kavaṣa Ailūṣa who saw the hymn called the *Aponaptrīya*: “The Gods, because able to see the ‘silent praise’ . . . invisible to the Asuras, were able to defeat their enemy.”⁵⁵ The ability to “see” the hymn of praise, then, is shared by gods and

51. RV 9.100.3, *Ibid.*, 521.

52. RV 8.13.26, Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, 521; quoted in Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 112.

53. Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 113.

54. RV 10.71.4, Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, 584.

55. Alex Wayman, “The Significance of Mantras, from the Veda down to Buddhist Tantric Practice,” in *Buddhist Insight: Essays by Alex Wayman*, ed. George Elder, Religions

sages and is a source of power. One could say that the song is experienced as a vision perceived by the mind of the *rishi*. In turn, for the hymns that are sung on earth to reach the gods, they must again be transformed through mind into mental visions that, by virtue of the mental power generated through the sacrifice, are transported to the heavens. Reat describes *manas* (mind) in the *Vedas* as functioning “like a television transmitter which transforms the scene in the studio into a subtle form which may be sent to a distant place and received there.”⁵⁶ This analogy is helpful but does not quite capture the fact that what is transmitted from men to gods or vice versa was not thought of in any way as ‘virtual’. The gods were considered to send actual earthly wealth and earthly cows to the sacrificer by the power of their mind-yoked visions, and the sacrificer equally sent the actual heavenly essence of the offerings and praises to the gods by means of the mind-yoked vision expressed in the liturgy of the sacrifice. The traditional Vedic analogy of horses and chariots described by Reat as a “mental pony express”⁵⁷ is, therefore, a more accurate description. Gonda notes that in this process of ‘mentalization’,

Making an entity or an idea the object of the process denoted by *man-* one “realized” it, that is to say: one does not only cause it to appear real to the mind by forming a clear conception of it, one is according to the view of the ancients also able to convert it into actuality.”⁵⁸

of Asia Series, eds. Lewis R. Lancaster and J. L. Shastri, no. 5 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 425.

56. Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 112.

57. Ibid.

58. Gonda, *Vision of the Vedic Poets*, 146.

This is what is meant by *dhiyam* √*sādh*, “to accomplish the vision.”⁵⁹ The ecstatic vision of the sage played out in the ritual songs is not to be regarded as something passive that is merely experienced; it is an entity that is complete only when its purpose is fulfilled and its effects made real. Whether those effects be health or strength, magical flight, the acquisition of cows, or the defeat of enemies, there is a strong association of *dhī* (vision) with the power to gain benefits:

20. What by his morning songs [*dhī*] Kāṇva, the powerful [possessor of *vāja*],
hath . . . gained—The herds of sixty thousand pure and spotless kine, have I,
the Rṣi, driven away.⁶⁰

Gonda comments on this verse:

What is of special interest is the combination of the ideas *dhīḥ* [vision] and *vājaḥ*, which is a general term for the specific power-substance of the generative potency which manifests itself in vegetation, cattle, horses, men, etc. and by which new food, new subsistence, new resources, new life is gained.⁶¹

Thus in the Vedic hymns, there is a reciprocal flow of power between gods and men. By means of the seer’s ‘vision become song’ carried to the gods by mind (swiftest of all flying things), the gods are empowered, evoked, and induced to bestow a vision that is in itself a sign of the power, the ‘vital-and-generative-energy’ that results in renewed life and wealth. Mental power in the *Vedas* is a vital force that moves, envisions, and creates reality. From these earliest hymns, one can see the process of interpenetration between the dimensions of earth and heaven, vital and mental, flesh and spirit, that culminate in the dream-within-a-

59. Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 134. This terminology is still used by contemporary Tibetan Buddhist lamas who speak of “accomplishing” the practice of a certain deity, making the mental transformation of oneself into the deity an actuality.

60. RV 8.4.20, Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, 394.

61. Gonda, *Vision of the Vedic Poets*, 150.

dream world-view of later Indian texts such as the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* with its themes of mutual dreaming and mutual creation.⁶²

Magic Power

More than any other term in Indian thought, the word that brings together notions of power, magic, illusion, deception, transformation, wisdom, skill, and mystery is *māyā*. The definition of *māyā* according to Monier-Williams indicates a distinction between the earlier and later uses of this term, earlier meanings being “art, wisdom, extraordinary or supernatural power,” and later meanings being “illusion, unreality, deception, fraud, trick, sorcery, witchcraft, magic.”⁶³ Arthur A. MacDonell brings together the two sets of meanings in his definition:

This term signifies occult power, applicable in a good sense to gods or in a bad sense to demons. It has an almost exact parallel in the English word ‘craft’, which in its old signification meant ‘occult power, magic’, then ‘skilfulness, art’ on the one hand and ‘deceitful skill, wile’ on the other.⁶⁴

The elusiveness of the concept, however, can be seen in the variety of approaches that scholars, ancient and modern, have adopted in explaining it. O’Flaherty chooses the word “transformation” as a translation that best captures both the early Vedic view of *māyā* as creative power, that is, “making something that was not there before . . .”, and the later idea of illusion, “making something that was there into something that was not really there.”⁶⁵ For David Shulman, “The essence of *māyā* is contradiction—the incongruous wonder of the

62. O’Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 252-259.

63. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 811.

64. Arthur A. Macdonell, *The Vedic Mythology* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1971), 24.

65. O’Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 118.

absolute transformed into sensible form . . .”⁶⁶ In his analysis of *māyā*, Gonda emphasizes the aspects of wonder, mystery, and incomprehensibility versus illusion and unreality as defining characteristics of *māyā*. He puts forth the central meaning of the term as follows: “Incomprehensible wisdom and power enabling its possessor, or being able itself, to create, devise, contrive, effect, or do something.”⁶⁷ Indra is said to wear every shape due to his *māyā*.⁶⁸ The same principle of magical and astonishing appearance of forms is at work in the imagery of the *Atharva Veda*. Regarding AV 10.8.34 that deals with the relation between the One and the many, Gonda says,

The poet resorts to two images. The creatures rest and originate in the concealed ‘centre’ of the universe which also is represented as a lotus flower, the roots of which remain hidden in the waters, whereas its stalks spread in the visible world. But if, the poet observes, we would like to ask whence this situation has arisen, the answer must be: *māyā*.⁶⁹

Like its counterpart ‘reality’, the meaning of ‘illusion’ is difficult to circumscribe. In early Vedic terms and in shamanic terms as well, reality can be equated with the many forms and dimensions of existence and with the forces that maintain existence. The concept of *māyā* in the *Vedas* has connotations of illusion, not in the sense of unreality, but in the sense of transformation, the becoming of things. More specifically, the Vedic idea of *māyā* means power, power to create and to transform that which appears. Creation is, in both Vedic and shamanic views, a process of magic, that is to say, a process of mysterious transformation.

66. David Shulman, “Tēnāli-Rāma: The Obliquity of the Real,” Manuscript, 1983; quoted in Doniger O’Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 120.

67. Jan Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion* (The Hague: Mouton & co., 1965), 166.

68. Ibid., 168.

69. Ibid., 169.

For both shamanic and Vedic worlds, this process works by virtue of the recognition of a certain homogeneity connecting seemingly disparate things. The earliest understanding of dream in Indian thought was one that reflected the plurality, solidity, and vitality characteristic of the early Vedic world-view, as well as the emphasis on *māyā* as a personal, magical (in the sense of bafflingly wondrous) power to create phenomena or manifest effects as one pleases. Further, this world-view is one that allows for the understanding of dream as a manifestation of the creative power of *māyā*. As will be shown, dream in the *Vedas* is both person and action.

Sleep and Dream in the Vedas

Among the paradoxes of life, one of the greatest is the paradox of sleep: human beings cannot live without sleep as it renews life, but in sleep, vitality and activity, all that is characteristic of life diminishes and fades away as in death. Reat notes that in the *Vedas*, the derivatives of the verb root $\sqrt{jiv}$ (life) not only meant life as opposed to death, but activity as opposed to sleep. The vital faculties are all associated with wakefulness and activity.⁷⁰ The Vedic mind was preoccupied with augmenting life, strength, vitality; sleep was regarded as a dangerous phenomenon associated with evils such as death and destruction. The following passage gives a good idea of the general Vedic view of the nature of sleep:

We know thy place of birth (*janitra*), O sleep; thou art son of seizure (*grahi*),⁷¹ agent of Yama (the Lord of Death); ender art thou, death art thou; so, O sleep, do we comprehend thee here; do thou, O sleep, protect us from evil-dreaming. 2. We know thy place of birth, O sleep; thou art son of perdition . . . 3. We know thy place of birth, O sleep; thou art son of ill-

70. Reat, *The Origins of Indian Psychology*, 86.

71. "Grahi : a she-demon who seizes and kills men." Ralph T.H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Atharvaveda*, vol. 2 (Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1968), 203.

success . . . 4. We know thy place of birth, O sleep; thou art son of extermination . . . 5. We know thy place of birth, O sleep; thou art son of calamity . . . 6. We know thy place of birth, O sleep; thou art son of the wives (sisters) of the gods, agent of Yama; ender art thou, death art thou; so, O sleep, do we comprehend thee here; do thou, O sleep, protect us from evil-dreaming.⁷²

Sleep is a powerful deity that can be called upon to protect one from evil dreams as well as to bring the forces of destruction and calamity upon one's enemies. The same words associated with sleep are used in a powerful curse:

1. With that I pierce him; with ill-success I pierce him; with extermination I pierce him;
with calamity I pierce him; with seizure I pierce him; with darkness I pierce him.
8. Now (*idam*) do I wipe off evil-dreaming on him of such-and-such lineage,⁷³ son of such-and-such a mother.⁷⁴

In the hymns of the *Atharva Veda*, Sleep is said to have been born among the Asuras (the Titans or anti-gods, powerful beings in conflict with the gods) and “in search of greatness” turned to the celestial gods who endowed him with his supreme dominion. But according to the traditional commentary, it seems Sleep (which is unknown to the departed ancestors and to the gods) over-stepped his bounds and seized on the *Ādityas* (a class of gods) who applied for relief to the great Lord Varuṇa and upon his instructions, “banished sleep from heaven to

72. AV 16.5.1-6, William Dwight Whitney, trans., *Atharva-Veda-Saṁhitā*, vol. 2, Harvard Oriental Series, ed. Charles Rockwell Lanman, vol. 8 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), 798.

73. The name and lineage of the person against whom the curse is being sent would be inserted here.

74. AV 16.7.1,8, Ibid., 800.

the abode of *Trita Āptya*, the distant limbo [of *Trita*, the scape-goat of the gods] to which threatened calamities were consigned.”⁷⁵

1. Thou art come hither from the world of Yama: thou, resolute, affectest men with rapture. Thou, Sleep, created in the Asura's dwelling, goest, well-knowing, with the solitary.
2. At first the all-containing depth beheld thee, ere Night was born, when only Day existed. Thence hast thou come, thence, Sleep, hast thou come hither, concealing, deep within, all form and figure.⁷⁶
3. Come from the Asuras in lofty, glory, he hath approached the Gods in search of greatness. Winners of heavenly light, the Three-and-Thirty endowed this Sleep with his supreme dominion.
4. Of him nor Fathers nor the Gods have knowledge, the Gods whose gentle talk is still about him. Urged by command of Varuṇa the Ādityas, Heroes, transported Sleep to *Trita Āptya*.
5. Thou whose severity hath reached evil-doers, and whose reward the good have gained in slumber, delightest heaven with thy most lofty kinship, born from his spirit who was worn and weary.
6. Of old we know all places whence thou comest. O Sleep, we know him who is here thy ruler. Protect us here illustrious with glory. Go, from afar, with poisons, into distance.⁷⁷

The hymn above has been glossed in traditional commentary as being addressed entirely to the demon of evil-dreaming—the word *svapna* (sleep) being taken in each instance to refer to *duḥsvapna* (nightmare, evil-dreaming). According to the commentary, “the solitary” in verse 1 refers to the “man who is dying of the effect of evil-dreaming, having abandoned son, wife, relatives, etc.”⁷⁸ Although Whitney debates this interpretation, it shows, nonetheless, in the mind of the commentator, the association of evil-dreaming with sin.

75. Griffith, *Hymns of the Atharvaveda*, 314, n. 4.

76. Whitney gives the translation, “From thence O sleep, didst thou come hither, hiding thy form from the physicians.” The commentary on this line says, “Evil-dreaming hid itself away from the medicine-men, lest they should meet it with an efficacious remedy.” Whitney, *Atharva-Veda-Saṁhitā*, vol. 2, 994.

77. AV 19.56.1-6, Griffith, *The Hymns of the Atharvaveda*, 313-314.

78. Whitney, *Atharva-Veda-Saṁhitā*, vol. 2, 994.

The earliest reference to dream in the hymns of the *Rig Veda* is concerned with protection from evil dreams:

10. The man, O King, be he workmate or friend,
who has scared me in a dream, enhancing my fears,
and the thief and the wolf who plan to harm us—
from these, O Varuṇa, protect us, we pray!⁷⁹

O'Flaherty points out the ambiguity in this passage as to whether or not dream is contrasted with waking reality or whether the thief and the wolf are also part of the dream.⁸⁰ Regardless of the ambiguity, however, the appeal makes it clear that one requires protection against the dangers that one comes to know of in a dream, just as one would need protection from thieves or wolves. Beyond that, the evil dream is itself a danger and like sin, it is conceived of quasi-materialistically as something to be separated from oneself:

Soma and Rudra, provide for our bodies
all needful medicines. Loosen and withdraw
from within us whatever sin we have committed,
which still adheres within our persons.⁸¹

3. If we have sinned, awake, asleep,
knowing, unknowing, through evil nature,
may Agni banish far from us
all such hateful wicked deeds!⁸²

5. Victorious now, we are free from sin!
May evil dreams and bad intentions
be directed to those who wish us ill
and those whom we ourselves detest!⁸³

79. RV 2.28.10, Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 515.

80. Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 15.

81. RV 6.74.3, Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 488.

82. RV 10.164.3, Ibid.

83. RV 10.164.5, Ibid.

In the Vedic hymns, concepts that could be interpreted entirely psychologically (bad dreams, unfulfilled wishes, fears of poverty, feelings of hatred)⁸⁴ are endowed with a vital and material aspect. The gods are petitioned to “loosen and withdraw” sins from the body, to banish evil deeds. Evil dreams and bad intentions can be sent like disease or hailstorms to strike one’s enemy. Just as sleep is no protection from sinful deeds that can take place while asleep, so waking is no protection from the demon of evil-dreaming that can strike while awake or asleep.⁸⁵ The externalization and personification of every aspect of human and divine nature creates a world-view of bewildering interactions between humans and a universe of ‘beings’. Evil dreaming is among the list of horrible personages that the following spell, cast over a magical herb, is intended to avert:

2. O truly conquering, curse-averting
powerful Plant, backward turned,
you and all plants have I invoked:
“Save us from this!” I prayed.

5. Evil dreaming, evil living,
demons, monsters, hags, and witches,
all of ill-repute or fame,
these we now destroy.⁸⁶

In Vedic literature, the power of sleep/dream is established by virtue of its fearsome nature. Sleep is the agent of death and far from being just a ‘bad dream’, *duḥsvapna* is among the evils most to be feared and averted, so much so that there is an entire collection of hymns and ritual actions dedicated to the ceremony of destroying evil-dreaming called the

84. AV 16.6.7-11, Whitney, *Atharva-Veda-Saṁhitā*, vol. 2, 799.

85. AV 16.6.9, Ibid.

86. AV 4.17.2,5, Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 472.

duḥsvapnanāśanagaṇa (list of hymns that destroy the effect of evil dreams),⁸⁷ among them the following verses from the *Atharva Veda*:

1. Sin of the mind, depart far away!
Why do you utter improper suggestions?
Depart from this place! I do not want you!
Go to the trees and the forests! My mind
Will remain here along with our homes and our cattle.
2. Whatever wrong we have committed, O Agni,
waking or sleeping, by ill-will or hatred
or cursing, remove it from us, whatever
displeases you. Thrust it afar!⁸⁸
1. Thou who are not alive, not dead, immortal-embryo of the gods art thou O sleep; Varuṇānī is thy mother, Yama thy father; Araru by name art thou.
2. We know thy place of birth (*janitra*), O sleep; thou art son of the god's sisters . . . agent of Yama; end-maker art thou; death art thou; so, O sleep do we comprehend thee here; do thou, O sleep, protect us from evil-dreaming.
3. As a sixteenth, as an eighth, as a [whole] debt they bring together, so do we bring together all evil-dreaming for him who hates us.⁸⁹

Sleep, as a deity, is invoked to protect the sleeper from Sleep's own terrifying aspects. The person is enjoined in the ritual to recite these verses while washing his or her face and, if the dream was very bad, then he makes an offering of ritual cakes or deposits such a cake in the territory of an enemy, thereby transferring the evil to the enemy. Other rituals involving the reciting of the hymns to banish evil-dreaming include fasting and making offerings of rice cooked in milk. As George Melville Bolling suggests, the hymns and rituals to get rid of evil

87. George Melville Bolling, "Dreams and Sleep (Vedic)," in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol 5 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 39, col. a.

88. AV 6.45.1-2, Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 489.

89. AV 6.46.1-3, Whitney, *Atharva-Veda-Saṁhitā*, vol. 1, 314-315.

dreaming show that, like sin, it was regarded as a form of quasi-physical contamination⁹⁰ that could adhere to cows as well as people and be sent to hang about the neck of one's enemy like an albatross:

5. What evil-dreaming is in us, what in our kine, and what in our house, that let him, who is not of us, the god-reviler, the mocker, put on like a necklace . . .⁹¹

Although the dream and its effects are as inseparable as disease and its effects, the Vedic view would indicate that the problem is not merely with the 'effects' that might be foretold by, or result from, a bad dream, but that the presence of the dream itself is a contamination that can be 'wiped off'. In the later *Upanishads*, along with a shift in emphasis from vitality to consciousness as the essence of the universe as well as of the human being, dream becomes a private inner psychological experience:

When he goes to sleep, these worlds are his. . . . As a great king, taking with him his people, moves around in his own country as he pleases, even so here this one, taking with him his senses, moves around in his own body (*śarīra*) as he pleases.⁹²

Similarly, Buddhism treats dream primarily as a psychological phenomenon. However, as will be shown, from its earliest period onward, Buddhist thought included the more ancient idea that some dream events and dream acts share the same reality value as the waking state. The ancient Vedic emphasis on the vitalistic interpretation of mental phenomena, the efficacy of ritual, and the necessity of the mediating activity of specialized ritualists is continued throughout the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Such characteristics may have been supported by the world-view of the indigenous shamanic culture in Tibet, but they were

90. Bolling, "Dreams and Sleep (Vedic)," 39, col. b.

91. AV 19.57.5, Whitney, *Atharva-Veda-Samhitā*, vol. 2, 998.

92. BAU 2.1.18, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 95.

already part of the Buddhist heritage that entered Tibet. The understanding of the use and meaning of dream in Tibetan culture is linked to both Buddhist and shamanic practice.

Dream and Illusion

The relationship between dream and the concept of *māyā* with its varied connotations is an intimate and natural one. In all of human experience, nothing illustrates the twin ideas of creation and illusion like dreams, in which a person, out of the darkness of sleep—*ex nihilo*, so to speak—suddenly enters a bright universe of sensory phenomena. A universe that is later understood as having been entirely self-created and, in contrast to the waking world, entirely insubstantial. According to the *Bṛihad-Āranyaka Upanishad*,

10. There are no chariots there, no spans, no roads. But he projects from himself chariots, spans, roads. There are no blisses there, no pleasures, no delights. But he projects from himself blisses, pleasures, delights. There are no tanks there, no lotus-pools, no streams. But he projects from himself tanks, lotus-pools, streams. For he is a creator.⁹³

Just as the dreamer spins the universe of dreams from his own mind creating illusory worlds, so in the Indian myths, the waking world is conceived through the dream power of the god Vishnu. In the vast cycles of evolution and devolution that constitute the ancient Indian understanding of time and the universe, Vishnu's sleep represents the dissolution of the universe into its formless state. At that time, the universe is not completely annihilated: it remains in a state of potential waiting for the causes and conditions that set it in motion again. So Vishnu is pictured resting on a thousand-headed serpent, that represents the potential for a new creation, and floating on the waters of non-form: "Then the whole universe is like an ocean. The supreme God, having devoured all beings, sleeps on the lap of

93. BAU 4.3.10, Ibid., 134.

the serpent.”⁹⁴ Then Vishnu is known as Nārāyaṇa (moving on the waters),⁹⁵ and as he sleeps, he dreams.

One of the more famous Vishnu myths from the *Matsya Purāṇa* addresses the external and internal ‘realities’ of dreams and visions. It begins with an account of the dissolution of the universe at the end of the world eon. According to Heinrich Zimmer’s rendition,

Vishnu sleeps. Like a spider that has climbed up the thread that once issued from its own organism, drawing it back into itself, the god has consumed again the web of the universe. Alone upon the immortal substance of the ocean, a giant figure, submerged partly, partly afloat, he takes delight in slumber. There is no one to behold him, no one to comprehend him; there is no knowledge of him, except within himself.⁹⁶

But within the body of Vishnu, the universe plays itself out in a vision of perfection. One of the players in this dream is Mārkaṇḍeya, an ancient sage, who wandering over the earth, accidentally falls out of the dream by falling out of the god’s mouth and finds himself in the dark empty expanse of the cosmic ocean. There he sees the immense sleeping form of Vishnu and becomes convinced that he is crazy or experiencing a dream or illusion, since this is nothing like ‘reality’. He is, however, soon swallowed up again and finds himself restored to his familiar real world where he can only think of his former experience as a vision or dream. Commenting on this myth, Zimmer says,

94. VP 1.2.64-65, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, with Hindi translation (Gorakhpur, 1940); quoted in *Hindu Polytheism*, by Alain Daniélou, Bollingen Series, vol. 73 (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964), 163.

95. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 151.

96. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, ed. Joseph Campbell, Bollingen Series, vol. 6 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 37.

Paradoxically, however, he himself, the human being unable to accept any reality that transcended the interpretive powers of his limited consciousness, was now contained within that divine being, as a figure of its universal dream. And yet to Mārkaṇḍeya, who has been suddenly blessed with a vision of the supreme Existence—in and by itself, in its all-containing solitude and quietude—that revelation likewise had been but a dream.⁹⁷

In Indian thought, the idea of all phenomena as ultimately unreal is one that developed in association with the search for an ontological unity underlying the plurality of creation. Certain thinkers interpreted all ordinary reality as entirely non-existent, like a dream. Gonda notes that according to the philosophy of the Vedāntin Gauḍapāda (ca.700 C.E.), there is “in principle, no difference between waking and dreaming.”⁹⁸ In the context of ultimate reality, appearances and experiences, either waking or dreaming, are equally false. Dream in Hinduism and Buddhism becomes the metaphor *par excellence* for the relationship between ultimate Reality and phenomenal life—that which appears utterly solid and real, yet upon awakening proves to be devoid of the reality it was mistaken for. In early Buddhist texts, the world and waking life are compared to dream not in terms of reality versus unreality, but in terms of their impermanent and fleeting nature. The *Buddhacarita* describes the world as “in a state of continuing separating”; therefore, the coming together of the beings of the world “is transitory as a dream.”⁹⁹ The pleasures of ordinary life based on sensory satisfaction are also “like the enjoyments of a dream . . . lost in this world in a moment.”¹⁰⁰ In Mahāyāna and Tibetan Buddhist writing, the dream comparison (along with

97. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols*, 42.

98. Gonda, *Change and Continuity*, 180.

99. BC 6.48, E.H. Johnston, ed., *The Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha: Part I—Sanskrit Text*, 2d ed. (Lahore: The University of the Punjab, 1972), 87.

100. BC 11.29, *Ibid.*, 155.

others such as the rainbow, the reflection of the moon in water, and images in a mirror) relates in a much stronger way to the idea of the phenomenal world as a purely illusory apparition. The autobiography of Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol (b. 1781), one of Tibet's most beloved yogis, says, "When someone feels a pleasurable sensation in a dream, and then awakens, there is nothing left. . . . Know that all phenomena are like this." And again, "like mirage, like an illusion . . . like dreams—the forms you have been taking for realities are empty by their very nature: know that all phenomena are like this."¹⁰¹

Dream in the *Upanishads*

The first philosophical treatment of dream in Indian literature appears in the *Upanishads*. Composed ca. 800-600 B.C.E., they are the latest genre of text that comprises the sacred literature called "the *Veda*." Their teachings and world-view focus on transcendence, transmigration of the Soul, and renunciation of the world. They present such a marked contrast to the early Vedic religion concerned with ritual and worldly benefit that scholars speculate the influence of religious ideas coming from outside the Vedic tradition. Ideas of transcendence and renunciation are also taken up in the heterodox systems of Buddhism and Jainism.¹⁰² One of the grandest themes of the *Upanishads* is the search for the immortal eternal *Ātman* (Soul or Self). What is it? Where is it to be found? What is its

101. Matthieu Ricard et al., trans., *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogi*, ed. Constance Wilkinson and Michal Abrams et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 306.

102. For a comparative survey of the "renouncer" traditions as represented by Jainism, Buddhism, and the tradition of the *upanishads*, see Friedhelm Hardy, "The Renouncer Traditions," in *The World's Religions*, eds. Stewart Sutherlands, Leslie Houlden, Peter Clarke and Friedhelm Hardy, SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1988), 582-603.

nature? The Soul is understood to be the essence and foundation of all the dimensions of the person, from the corporeal form to the subtlest energy and beyond. The *Taittirīya Upanishad* speaks of five sheaths (*kośa*) or dimensions of the human personality: the grossest dimension is the physical self made of food (*annamaya*); enfolded within that is the vital self consisting of breath (*prāṇamaya*); within that, the mental self consisting of mind (*manomaya*); within that, the self consisting of intellect or understanding (*vijñānamaya*); and, finally, enfolded within the intellectual sheath is the self consisting of bliss (*ānandamaya*).¹⁰³ Lama Anagarika Govinda makes the point that these five sheaths should not be regarded as separate layers arranged around a nucleus, but as “mutually penetrating forms of energy . . . The correspondingly finer or subtler sheaths penetrate, and thus contain, the grosser ones.”¹⁰⁴

The theory of the five sheaths is further correlated with the theory of the four states of consciousness—waking, dream, deep sleep, and transcendental (the ‘fourth’). According to Eliot Deutsch’s explanation of Advaita Vedānta philosophy, waking consciousness is associated with identification of self with the physical body consisting of the sheath made of food; dream consciousness is associated with identification of self with the subtle body consisting of the sheath of breath, of mind (i.e., mental operations relative to the senses), and of intellect or understanding.¹⁰⁵ Wayman compares the Hindu notion of the subtle body to the Buddhist concept of *manovijñāna* as a kind of subtle body that can separate from the physical body and wander about, “thus perhaps similar in regard to dream as the wandering

103. TU 2.1-6, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 283-286.

104. Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism: According to the Esoteric Teachings of the Great Mantra OM MANI PADME HŪM*, American ed. (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1969), 148.

105. Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 56-59.

soul of so-called primitive peoples . . .”¹⁰⁶ The third state of consciousness is deep sleep, characterized by the pacification of all desires and consisting of bliss.¹⁰⁷ This is known as the ‘causal body’ of the self because in this state, all that is manifest in the waking and dreaming states is present, as Deutsch puts it, “in a kind of pure potentiality.”¹⁰⁸ Finally, the transcendental state of consciousness is simply called *turiya*, the fourth. The *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* describes this ultimate state that culminates in liberation from rebirth:

Not inwardly cognitive . . . , not outwardly cognitive . . . , not both-wise cognitive . . . , not a cognition-mass . . . , not cognitive . . . , not non-cognitive . . . , unseen . . . , with which there can be no dealing . . . , ungraspable . . . , having no distinctive mark . . . , non-thinkable . . . , that cannot be designated . . . , the essence of the assurance of which is the state of being one with the Self . . . , the cessation of development . . . , tranquil . . . , benign . . . , without a second . . . —[such] they think is the fourth.¹⁰⁹

Although the four-fold analysis of the conditions of the soul distinguishes between waking and sleeping states, in Advaita philosophy, waking and dream form a single category that encompasses the gross and subtle aspects of the phenomenal world.¹¹⁰ Further, there are passages in the *Upanishads* that interpret all three lower states as states of sleep. In the *Aitareya Upanishad*, in comparison with the transcendental fourth, waking is no less a state of sleep than the others. The immortal *Ātman* is said to dwell in three dream/sleep states:

106. Alex Wayman, “Significance of Dreams in India and Tibet,” in *Buddhist Insight*, ed. Elder, 409.

107. MaU 5, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 392.

108. Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta*, 61.

109. MaU 7, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 392.

110. Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta*, 63.

He has three dwelling-places, three conditions of sleep [*trayaḥ svapnaḥ*]. This is a dwelling-place. This is a dwelling-place. This is a dwelling-place.¹¹¹

Condition of the Soul	Related Body	Related Sheath
Waking State	Gross Body, consisting of	Food
Dream state	Subtle Body, consisting of	Breath Mind Intellect
Deep sleep state	Causal Body, consisting of	Bliss of oblivion and non-duality
Transcendental Fourth state	Free from limitation of any form or association	

Figure 3. The Four-fold Analysis of the Soul

The earliest *Upanishad* to discuss the various conditions of the soul and the dreaming state is the *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka*. It speaks of this world of the living and the other world of Brahma. The Soul is associated with knowledge and inner light. Sleep and dreaming is perceived of as a liminal state between this phenomenal world of birth and death and the highest Brahma-world of bliss and immortality.

7. Which . . . is the soul?

The person here who among the senses is made of knowledge, who is the light in the heart. He, remaining the same, goes along both worlds, appearing to think, appearing to move about, for upon becoming asleep he transcends this world and the forms of death.

8. Verily, this person, by being born and obtaining a body, is joined with evils. When he departs, on dying, he leaves evils behind.

111. AU 3.12, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 297. In this *Upanishad* the soul, conceived vitalistically, is said to enter into man through the crown of the head. Hume notes that the dwelling-places are linked by some philosophers to specific parts of the body: in the waking state, the soul dwells in the right eye, in the dreaming state, in the throat, and in deep sleep, in the heart. This is echoed in Tibetan dream and sleep yoga, which similarly associates those states with consciousness centred in the throat and heart.

9. Verily, there are just two conditions of this person: the condition of being in this world and the condition of being in the other world. There is an intermediate third condition, namely, that of being in sleep. By standing in this intermediate condition one sees both those conditions, namely being in this world and being in the other world.¹¹²

In the *Upanishads*, sleep and dream, then, is a special condition that allows a person access both to this and the other world. The following passage reflects two interpretations of the Soul. One is vitalistic in that it is described, much as in a shamanic understanding, as leaving the sleeping body that remains behind guarded by the breath, and going forth, wanders through worlds high and low. In conjunction with this view, the text repeats an old injunction to not wake the sleeping person suddenly, lest the Soul not return. The other interpretation is more psychological since the Soul is portrayed as creating the worlds of the dream and enjoying the experiences of his own creations.

12. Guarding his low nest with the breath,
The Immortal goes forth out of the nest,
He goes where'er he pleases—the immortal,
The golden person, the one spirit (*hamsa*).

13. In the state of sleep going aloft and alow,
A god, he makes many forms for himself—
Now, as it were, enjoying pleasures with women,
Now, as it were, laughing, and even beholding fearful sights.

14. People see his pleasure-ground;
Him no one sees at all.

“Therefore one should not wake him suddenly,” they say. Hard is the curing for a man to whom He does not return.

Now some people say: “That is just his waking state, for whatever things he sees when awake, those too he sees when asleep.” [This is not so, for] there [i.e. in sleep] the person is self-illuminated.¹¹³

112. BAU 4.3.7-9, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 134.

113. BAU 4.3.12-14, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 135.

Hume's translation of verse 14 implies that dreaming is not merely the re-playing of waking experiences but a creative state of self-illumination in which things not pertaining to past experience can present themselves because the dreamer, being all, sees all:

Both what has been seen and what has not been seen, both what has been heard and what has not been heard, both what has been experienced and what has not been experienced, both the real (*sar*) and the unreal (*a-sar*)—he sees all. He sees it, himself being all.¹¹⁴

According to Paul Deussen's interpretation of the same verse 14, sleep is for the Soul also a waking state, "for what he sees waking, the very same also he sees in sleep. Thus therefore this spirit serves for a light for itself."¹¹⁵ In any case, whether one interprets the waking state as a state of dream or the dreaming state as a state of waking, the boundaries and distinctions between dreaming and waking are, in Indian thought, constantly being questioned and redrawn.

According to Deussen, the two ideas, of the Soul wandering about and of the Soul creating its own worlds, are reconciled in the passage below in which it is understood that the Soul moves around within the body of the dreamer:

When he goes to sleep, these worlds are his. Then he becomes a great king, as it were. Then he becomes a great Brahman, as it were. He enters the high and the low, as it were, as a great king, taking with him his people, moves around in his own country as he pleases, even so here, this one, taking with him his senses, moves around in his own body (*śarīra*) as he pleases.¹¹⁶

This passage has unmistakable affinities with the myth of Mārkaṇḍeya wandering about within the body of the god Vishnu whose dream is the reality of the old sage. As O'Flaherty

114. PU 4.5, Ibid., 386.

115. Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, trans. Rev. A. S. Geden, Dover ed. (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1966), 302.

116. BAU 2.1.18, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 95.

points out, with regard to dream interpretation, there are two ideas that remain intertwined in Indian thought: the idea that dreams reflect reality and the idea that they bring about reality.¹¹⁷ For the *Upanishads*, it is the creative, self-illuminating power of the Soul that is operative in both dreaming and waking:

When one goes to sleep, he takes along the material (*mātrā*) of this all-containing world, himself tears it apart, himself builds it up, and dreams by his own brightness, by his own light. Then this person becomes self-illuminated.¹¹⁸

The Soul is understood to be the Reality of all conditions. The *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka* says,

As a spider might come out with his thread, as small sparks come forth from the fire, even so from this Soul come forth all vital energies (*prāṇa*), all worlds, all gods, all beings. The mystic meaning (*upaniṣad*) thereof is 'the Real of the real' (*satyasya satya*). Vital energies, verily are the real. He is their Real.¹¹⁹

In this dynamic between real and 'realer', dream is also perceived in two quite contradictory ways: one view regards dream, in contrast to waking reality, as illusory and unreal; the other regards dream as more real than waking reality. In his commentary to the *Vedānta Sūtras* of Bādarāyana, the philosopher Śāṅkara invokes reason and scripture to refute the ideas that the waking state and the dreaming state are equally real, that the dream takes place outside the body and that the person actually wanders about having real experiences when dreaming. According to Śāṅkara, "It is not true that the world of dreams is real; it is mere illusion and there is not a particle of reality in it.—Why? . . . because the nature of the dream world does not manifest itself with the totality of the attributes of real

117. Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 19.

118. BAU 4.3.9, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 134.

119. BAU 2.1.20, *Ibid.*, 95.

things.”¹²⁰ By this Śaṅkara means that dreams do not satisfy the criteria for empirical reality in terms of conditions of space, time, cause, and the circumstance of non-refutation. For example, there is no space in the dream for real chariots; in a dream, many years can pass in only a moment, the efficient cause for perception or action, such as eyes, are not present, and, finally, dream is refuted, shown not to exist, by the waking state. “Hence the visions of a dream are mere illusion.”¹²¹ Further he says,

The Self wanders about in dreams together with the mind only. That wandering about moreover is founded on the mental impressions (*vāsanā*) only, is not real. Thus scripture also in describing our doings in dreams qualifies them by an “as it were”: “As it were rejoicing together with women” . . . Ordinary people also describe their dreams in the same manner, . . . “I saw a tree as it were.”¹²²

According to some scholars of Vedānta philosophy, although dreams are shown to be illusory appearances, they are not entirely unreal.¹²³ Śaṅkara accepts that dreams can be prophetic and can signify real things, such as success in one’s endeavours or death, fortune or misfortune. “In all these cases the thing indicated may be [empirically] real; the indicating dream, however, remains [empirically] unreal as it is refuted by the waking state.”¹²⁴ Finally,

120. George Thibaut, trans., *The Vedānta Sūtras of Bādarāyana with the commentary by Śaṅkara: Part II*, Dover ed. (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1962), 134.

121. *Ibid.*, 134-136.

122. *Ibid.*, 56.

123. According to Deutsch, in Advaita Vedānta philosophy, ‘Reality’ is that which cannot be sublated by any other experience. ‘Appearance’ is that which can be sublated by other experience, and ‘unreality’ is that which, by reason of its self-contradictoriness, cannot appear as a datum of experience and therefore neither can nor cannot be sublated by other experience. Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta*, 18-24.

124. Thibaut, *Vedānta Sūtras of Bādarāyana: Part II*, 137.

Śankara's position with regard to both waking and dreaming is made clear in the following passage:

We only maintain that the world connected with the intermediate state (i.e., the world of dreams) is not real in the same sense as the world consisting of ether and so on is real. On the other hand we must remember that also the so-called real creation with its ether, air, etc., is not absolutely real; for as we have proved before . . . the entire expanse of things is mere illusion. The world consisting of ether, etc., remains fixed and distinct up to the moment when the soul cognizes that Brahman is the Self of all; the world of dreams on the other hand is daily sublated by the waking state.¹²⁵

This view, then, is one in which dreams and visions can be said to be the ultra-illusions of an illusory world.¹²⁶ This idea, as shall be seen, is also prominent in Tibetan Buddhist thought. There is, however, another way of thinking that can be gleaned from the *Upanishads*, that is, the idea that the soul is closer to its real nature in dreaming than in waking.

The position of sleep and dream can be seen in the four states of the Soul as mentioned above—waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and the transcendental state. They are described in the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* in terms of a hierarchy of levels of consciousness: from the grossest waking state of consciousness called “Common-to-all-men” (*vaiśvānara*), in which all the limits of the body are present, to the state of dreaming called “the Brilliant” (*taijasa*) characterized by inner luminosity, in which what pertains to the body is transcended, to the state of deep dreamless sleep called the “Cognitive” (*prajña*), characterized by the pacification of all dualities (which is bliss), to the highest state of

125. Ibid., 138.

126. Deutsch makes the point, however, that “the world is an illusion only on the basis of an experience of the Absolute. The world cannot be an illusion to one who lacks that experience. Empirical reality . . . is transcended only absolutely.” Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta*, 32, n. 11.

ultimate characterless freedom known simply as the fourth (*turīya*) state.¹²⁷ The *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka* says the following regarding the dream state:

Striking down in sleep what is bodily,
Sleepless he looks down on the sleeping [sense].
Having taken to himself light, there returns to his place
The golden person, the one spirit (*haṁsa*).¹²⁸

The dream state, then, is one in which the Soul has transcended the limitations of the body and, self-illuminated, participates in his true form, the essence of life and light. In the *Chândogya Upanishad*, Prajāpati first describes the eternal immortal Soul as that which dwells in the waking state in visible form, but his student Indra is dissatisfied with this explanation since the visible form is subject to sorrow and perishable. Next the Soul is described as “He who moves about happy in a dream.” Indra is still dissatisfied because in dream, a person is still subject to sorrow and misfortune. Then the Soul is said to be experienced when one is in deep dreamless sleep, but Indra also questions this because in deep sleep there is oblivion and no self-knowledge. Finally, Prajāpati proposes that there is a highest form of the Soul which is described as “*uttama puruṣa*,” the supreme person, who “when he rises up from this body (*śarīra*) and reaches the highest light, appears with his own form.”¹²⁹ The Soul, then, is described in terms very reminiscent of the dreaming state described in the *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka*:

There such a one goes around laughing, sporting, having enjoyment with women or chariots or friends, not remembering the appendage of this body.

127. MaU 3-7, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 391-392.

128. BAU 4.3.11, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 134. *Haṁsa* = goose, gander, swan, a bird of passage, also translated as ‘spirit’ “typified by the pure white colour of a goose or swan, and migratory like a goose.” See Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1286.

129. CU 8.12.2, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 272.

As a draft animal is yoked in a wagon, even so this spirit (*prāṇa*) is yoked in this body.¹³⁰

This understanding does not fit very well with the more philosophical and more widely accepted view of the fourth state given in the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* which, as quoted above, takes the *via negativa* approach in that the Soul in this state is described as unseen, imperceptible, ungraspable, without characteristics, inconceivable, and indefinable.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the other, vitalistic approach to consciousness is taken into Tibetan Buddhism along with the view of dream as illusory.

Dream Classification and Theory

Although *svapna* in the *Vedas* almost always designates good sleep and dream, as opposed to *duḥsvapna*, bad dream, there are passages that refer more specifically to dream as good or bad, indicating the earliest classification of dream:

3. Embryo of the wives of the gods, instrument of Yama, [is the] excellent [*bhadrāsvapna*, auspicious] dream; the evil [dream] that is mine, that do we send forth to him that hates us.¹³²

According to O'Flaherty, the first major description of dream theory, typology, and divination in Indian literature is found in the sixty-eighth appendix of the *Atharva Veda* composed in the sixth century C.E. In this system, dreams are classified according to the ancient divisions of "humours": choleric, phlegmatic, and bilious—in other words, according to the physical and emotional makeup of an individual. Dreams, it is thought, mirror a person's temperament, so that certain dreams are indicative of a particular type of person

130. CU 8.12.3, Ibid.

131. MaU 7, Ibid., 392.

132. AV 19.57.3, Whitney, *Atharva- Veda-Samhitā*, vol.2, 997.

and, conversely, particular types of people have specific kinds of dreams. O'Flaherty's summary gives the following examples from the *Atharva Veda*: choleric or fiery people will dream of "tawny skies and the earth and trees all dried up, great forest fires and parched clothes, limbs covered with blood and a river of blood, gods burning things up, and comets and lightening that burn the sky." People of watery, phlegmatic temperament dream of "rivers covered with snow—and clear skies and moons and swans; the women in their dreams are washed with fine water and wear fine clothes." People of bilious temperament dream of "flocks of birds and wild animals wandering about in distress, staggering and running and falling from heights, in lands where the mountains are whipped by the wind; the stars and the planets are dark, and the orbits of the sun and moon are shattered."¹³³

Although dreams are classified as auspicious or inauspicious, it is not at all obvious which dreams would belong to which category. What might appear as the goriest nightmares—dreams of dismemberment and destruction—are said to bring good luck. "If his ear is cut off, he will have knowledge; his hand cut off, he will get a son; his arms, wealth; his chest or penis, supreme happiness. . . . If someone dreams that his bed, chairs, houses, and cities fall into decay, that foretells prosperity."¹³⁴ Conversely, "A dream of singing, dancing, laughing, or celebrating a marriage, with joy and rejoicing, is a sight portending evil pleasure or disaster."¹³⁵ Other lists contain perhaps more easily recognizable

133. AV 68.1.13-19, 29-37, 44-47, George Melville Bolling and Julius von Negelein, eds., *The Parisistas of the Atharva Veda*, vol. 1, text and critical apparatus, pt. 2 (Leipzig, 1910); quoted in Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams Illusions and Other Realities*, 18.

134. AV 68.2.9-20, 23-24, 31-33, George Melville Bolling and Julius von Negelein, eds., *The Parisistas of the Atharva Veda*, vol. 1, text and critical apparatus, pt. 2 (Leipzig, 1910); quoted in Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 19.

135. AV 68.5.1-14, *Ibid.*, 20-21.

interpretations. Wayman cites examples of good dreams from the *Svapnādhyaṃya*: “crossing over of a stream or body of water, the sun rising into the sky, a blazing fire, the vision of a moon-disk among the asterisms and planets, a mounting in palaces or to the summit of temples . . .”¹³⁶ In the same text, bad dreams are signified by seeing, “the sun or moon devoid of light or the asterisms and other stars tumbling down; or [seeing] the *Aśoka* tree, the *Oleander*, or the *Palāśa* tree in full bloom . . .”¹³⁷ Dreams are said to also have immediate prophetic implications for close family:

If a man sees shattered two bolted doors and a bed and a doorpost, his wife will be destroyed. If he sees a lizard or a jackal or a yellow man mount [his wife’s] bed, his wife will be raped. If a man kills a white, yellow and red serpent in a dream or cuts off the head of a black serpent, his son will be destroyed.¹³⁸

The idea of a dream that bears a real effect on another is close to the shamanic view that in dream the shaman can interact and bring about real effects on another. However, in a shamanic world-view, it would be understood that the dream not only foretells the act but in many instances, in dreaming, the act is carried out. Other Indian texts speak of the influence of spirits on the dreamer. Certain malevolent spirits that are believed to inspire paranoia are also said to cause a person to dream of people with shaven heads, camels, pigs, and untouchables.¹³⁹ Remembering the nature of dream in the *Vedas*—instrument of the lord of

136. *Svapnādhyaṃya* 2-4, with Hindi commentary (Bombay: Venkateśvara Steam Press, 1927); quoted in Alex Wayman, “Significance of Dreams,” 401.

137. *Svapnādhyaṃya* 39-40, Ibid.

138. AV 68.2.51-54, 68.5.1-9, Bolling and von Negelein, *Parīṣiṣṭas of the Atharva Veda*, quoted in Doniger O’Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion and Other Realities*, 21.

139. *Mānava Gṛhya Sūtra* (Groningen, 1941) 2.14.7-12, cited in Doniger O’Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 22-23.

Death, son of calamity and misfortune—it is not surprising that the Indian medical texts include long lists of dreams that portend death or illness, among them dreams of being tied up and dragged toward the south by a black woman with wild hair wearing red garments; of being naked with a red garland on one's head; of being tied up by crows; of a bamboo or a lotus or a palm tree growing out of one's chest; of one's teeth falling out and so on.¹⁴⁰ As will be shown, many of these motifs appear again in Tibetan Buddhist texts.

The early Vedic view of sleep as linked with disintegration and destruction finds its mythological expression in Rudra-Shiva, the terrifying lord of sleep and lord of tears—Rudra, from the verb root *√rud*, meaning to weep, wail, lament, cry, or howl. He is implored:

Injure us not in child or grandchild, nor in life!
Injure us not in cattle! Injure us not in horses!
Slay not our strong men in anger, O Rudra!¹⁴¹

An entreaty from the *Rig Veda* says:

7. O Rudra, harm not either great or small of us, harm not the growing boy,
harm not the full-grown man.
Slay not a sire among us, slay no mother here, and to our own dear bodies,
Rudra, do no harm.

10. Far be thy dart that killeth men or cattle . . .¹⁴²

As the agent of destruction, Rudra-Shiva comes to represent the force of *tamas* that brings about the dissolution of the universe at the end of the world age. According to Shaivite tradition, “Ultimately everything arises from disintegration (*tamas*) and ends in disintegration. Because he rules over disintegration and controls it, the lord of sleep is the

140. *Suśruta Saṃhitā* (Delhi, 1968) 1.29.54-64; cited in Doniger O’Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 22-23.

141. SU 4.22, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 406.

142. RV 1.114.7,10, Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, 76.

principle of the universe.”¹⁴³ In his work on Hindu mythology, Daniélou indicates that the state of deep dreamless sleep is connected with the quality of *tamas* (darkness, inertia, the power of dissolution), and with Shiva who is known as the lord of sleep.¹⁴⁴ “wakefulness and dream are said to spring from the obscurity of deep sleep and to fall back into it.”¹⁴⁵

The double nature of Sleep as both the bearer of evil dreams and the protector from evil-dreaming is reflected in the double nature of the lord of sleep Rudra-Shiva, who is both the bearer of the deadly arrows of disease and death and the lord of healing balms and plants, who represents both the terror of annihilation and the bliss of total peace. Such paradoxes inherent in the nature of the gods can be seen as elaborations of the ur-paradox of life: that it feeds on death, and death feeds on it. Because of death, one can perceive its counterpart immortality, and due to the passage of time, through which both life and death are played out, one is able to envision eternity. In a hymn to the sun, the *Rig Veda* calls immortality the shadow of death:

2. Giver of vital breath, of power and vigour, he whose commandments all the Gods acknowledge:
The Lord of death, whose shade [*chāyā*] is life immortal.¹⁴⁶

Commenting on this passage, Willard Johnson points out that the phrase is based on a double meaning of the word *chāyā* (shadow), which also carries the connotation of ‘likeness’, ‘reflection’, or ‘image’, as well as a sense of refuge:

143. Svāmī Karapātrī, “Liṅgopāsanā-rahasya,” *Siddhānta*, II, 1941-42, 155; quoted in Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 23.

144. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 22-23.

145. *Ibid.*, 25.

146. RV 10.121.2, Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, 628.

The *chāyā* of time is death, death being the shadow (of the sun) that accompanies human beings through life; but time is also a “likeness” or a “reflection” (*chāyā*) of immortality and nontemporal being, because time is a revelation of its opposite, eternity.¹⁴⁷

It is in this imagery of shadows, reflections, and likenesses that a fruitful approach to the understanding of dream in Indian thought can be found. The dream state is said to be between waking and deep sleep, between this world of phenomena and the other world of Brahma. There is evidence, however, that dream consciousness is not merely situated in an intermediate space, but functions like a double mirror with no perceivable dividing line. Dream reflects the likeness of the waking state in that it is described as having the same number of organs of sense and knowledge, the same “seven limbs” and “nineteen mouths” as the waking state.¹⁴⁸ It is also the reflection of the ultimate state of the soul, he who “rises up from this body and reaches the highest light, [who] appears with his own form.”¹⁴⁹ The dream state also reflects the bliss and brilliance achieved in deep sleep. Dream is a condition of self-illumination. It is called *Taijasa*, ‘the Brilliant’, derived from *tejas*; it has connotations of light or brilliance and fiery heat. René Guénon notes that the subtle body through which dream functions is likened to a fiery vehicle.¹⁵⁰ Deep dreamless sleep is described as entering completely into *tejas*, heat, light, brilliance. “When he is overcome

147. Willard Johnson, *Poetry and Speculation of the Rg Veda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 165. He gives the *Rig Veda* phrase as “*yasya chāyā-amṛtam yasya mṛtyuḥ*.”

148. MaU 3, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 391.

149. CU 8.12.3, *Ibid.*, 272.

150. René Guénon, *Man and his Becoming According to the Vedānta*, trans. Richard C. Nicholson (New York: The Noontday Press, 1958), 97.

with brilliance (*tejas*), then that god sees no dreams; then here in this body arises this happiness (*sukha*).¹⁵¹ This idea is also expressed in the *Chāndogya Upanishad*,

1. Now, when one is thus sound asleep, composed, serene, he knows no dream; then he has crept into these channels; so no evil touches him, for then he has reached the Bright Power (*tejas*).¹⁵²

The luminosity of the dream state is the shadow of the brilliance of deep sleep, which in turn is the likeness and shadow of the ultimate brilliance and bliss of the Soul itself. Dream is the place where the reflections of various realities dissolve one into another. In her study of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, Doniger O'Flaherty has mapped the ways in which these realities interpenetrate, creating worlds in which waking and dreaming cannot be ultimately separated because "the universe is like a dream." And in Indian thought, "to understand what a thing is *like* is to understand what it *is*."¹⁵³

In this chapter, it has been shown that the Vedic world-view has notable similarities to shamanic concepts and notions. The world is a web of hidden relations and correspondences, knowledge of which is power. They share a vitalistic and materialistic approach to the world. Spirit is not so much spirit as another form of material existence; mental activity is grounded in the physical senses. Ritual and sacrifice are the methods by which the deities are petitioned and evil forces exorcized. The mutual flow of visionary empowerment between men and gods in the *Vedas* is noted also in shamanic world-views where the shaman's chants and offerings induce the spirits to descend; by offering himself to

151. PU 4.6, Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 386.

152. CU 8.6.3, *Ibid.*, 267.

153. Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 260.

the spirit, the shaman becomes the spirit, gains the power of the spirit. According to both as well, the flow of communication between gods and men is dependent on exceptional persons acting on behalf of individuals or the community. The Vedic sacrificial ritual became an extremely elaborate operation, demanding the division of tasks among many priests. Alternatively, in a shamanic séance, one person, with or without a helper, primarily performs similar tasks: chanting the invocations, carrying out the ritual actions, and 'thinking' or 'envisioning' the ritual into reality, for similar purposes of healing, banishing evil, or bringing material benefit to the community.

With regard to dream, the Indian world-view accepted the concept of dream as signifying both content and process. By the time Buddhism arrived on the scene, there were well-established systems of classification founded on the basic division of good and evil dreams as well as instructions for the ritual use and interpretation of dream. Also present in the Indian background is the notion of dream as prophetic, and a vitalistic and personalized view of dream apparent in the concept of the spirit of evil-dreaming in the *Rig Veda*. From the *Upanishads* comes the idea of dream as the activity of the soul free from the constraints of the physical body. At the same time, the Upanishadic concept of *māyā* (illusion) elaborated in philosophies such as Advaita Vedānta contributed to the idea of dream as a metaphor for the illusory nature of the world. It is clear that contradictory themes regarding the status of dreams were strongly represented in the Indian world-view out of which Buddhism arose.

CHAPTER 4

DREAM IN INDIAN BUDDHISM

The Early Buddhist Background

In the fifth century B.C.E. when the Buddha gave his first teaching and founded an order of monks, he joined a number of other heterodox teachers who were questioning the established religious views. From within the orthodox Brahmanic religion, the discussions and debates contained in the *Upanishads* also represented a philosophic discontinuity with the ancient Vedic tradition. As discussed in chapter 5, the *Upanishads* belonged to the 'renouncer' traditions and held many ideas in common with the heterodox systems of that time. Buddhism shared the Upanishadic view of existence as an eternal cycle of death and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) driven by *karma*, habitual psychological tendencies supported by the actions of body, speech, or mind. To be 'liberated' meant to be free from the exigencies of *karma* and rebirth by cutting away all desires and attachments. Buddhism, however, rejected the Upanishadic idea of the *Ātman*, the eternal, undying Soul that in the *Upanishads* is taught to be the foundation of individual human existence (physical, mental, and psychological) and the basis for continuity from life to life. Scholars who study the relationship between Buddhism and indigenous cultures have seen in this rejection of soul a major point of tension

between normative Buddhism and indigenous traditions that insist on the continuation of the person in spirit form.¹ For example, in his well-known study of Burmese Buddhism, Melford Spiro states,

[Most Burmese] insist—normative Buddhism notwithstanding—on the existence of an enduring soul which, persisting from rebirth to rebirth, experiences the consequences of karmic retribution. This soul is conceived to be either the pre-Buddhist *leikpya*, or in the case of the more sophisticated, an entity (*nāma*) derived from (but inconsistent with) normative Buddhist metaphysics.²

Whether or not Spiro reports accurately on the popular Burmese understanding of the concept of *anātma* (no-soul), it should be noted that the textual tradition of Buddhism did not reject the established Indian world-view of spirits or methods of dealing with obstructing spirits, neither did it reject the idea that there are subtle dimensions to the human being beyond the gross physical dimension.³ In the *Majjhima-Nikāya*, the Buddha says:

I have proclaimed to my disciples the way to create from this body another body having form, mind-made, with all its limbs, lacking no faculty. Just as though a man were to pull a reed from its sheath . . .⁴

Buddhism simply rejected the idea that there is an eternal, unchanging aspect to any composite structure, such as the human personality, in either its gross or subtle manifestations. The tensions that exist between Buddhist and shamanic views do not,

1. Melford Spiro uses the term 'normative' to refer to the doctrines and teachings of the canonical texts. *Buddhism and Society*, 6-7. Lessing raises the same issue regarding the Buddhist canonical denial of the soul in soul-calling rituals presided over by Buddhist lamas. "Calling the Soul," 265.

2. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 88-89.

3. For a discussion on the *gandhabba*, "spirit-being of the intermediary existence" in the Pāli canon, see Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvāṇa in Early Buddhism* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995), 105-108.

4. MN 2.18, Bhikkhu Nyānamoli, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima-Nikāya)*, ed. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 643.

therefore, lie in the area of belief or disbelief in spirits or in a subtle form of the person that can separate from the gross physical body. Indeed, in Shirokogoroff's opinion, "Any religion which does not oppose the idea of spirits and the possibility of their independent existence is not in conflict with shamanism."⁵

Throughout its 2500-year history, Buddhism has coexisted with the gods of the people wherever it has spread. The earliest teaching of the Buddha did not refute the existence of gods or their powers; it merely refuted any claim that the gods were outside of the round of birth and death to which all living beings are bound. Within the cosmological worlds of Buddhism, the inhabitants of the heaven worlds, the gods, no less than the inhabitants of any other world of rebirth, are considered to be subject to suffering. Further, all Buddhists agree that 'dis-ease' of all kinds is conditioned and dependent, primarily on self-oriented desires and fears. The goal of Buddhist practice is to put an end to the distress arising from self-oriented desires and the perception of a permanent and independent 'I' subject to birth and death.

In the Pāli literature, six types of supernormal knowledge are available to the accomplished meditator: (1) magical powers, (2) divine ear, (3) penetration of the minds of others, (4) remembrance of former existences, (5) divine eye, and (6) extinction of all impurities.⁶ The 'awakening' or liberation of the Buddha is described in terms of three of those kinds of knowledge. On the legendary night of Enlightenment, in the first watch of the night the Buddha recalls all his past births in complete individual detail. In the second watch

5. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, 276.

6. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, ed. Nyanaponika, 4th rev. ed. (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, reprinted 1980), 3-4.

of the night, with the divine eye he sees the births and deaths of all beings according to their deeds. In the third watch of the night he realizes the extinction of all psychological defilements or impurities that bind one to the cycle of birth and death:

I understood as it really is: This is anguish, this is the arising of anguish, this is the stopping of anguish, this is the course leading to the stopping of anguish . . . ignorance was dispelled, light arose even as I abided diligent, ardent, resolute.⁷

The first two types of knowledge belong to the ordinary or mundane powers attained through mental concentration; only the last is the supermundane, salvific knowledge, attained through the perfection of insight, that constitutes *nirvāṇa* or liberation. Among the mundane powers, the *siddhis* or magical powers are traditionally listed as the following: the ability to multiply oneself, becoming one or many; to be visible or invisible, passing unobstructed through walls and mountains as if through air; to be able to plunge into the earth and shoot up again as if through water; to walk on water without sinking as if on the ground; to travel cross-legged through the air like a bird on the wing; to stroke the sun and moon with one's hand; and to have mastery over the body even up to the highest heaven, the Brahma-world.⁸ These *siddhis* can be compared to the powers of flight and self-transformation attributed to shamans.

During the first five hundred years of Buddhist thought and philosophy, scholars carefully analysed the components of physical and mental existence in order to establish the fictitious nature and radical impermanence of all that is composite. In the *Milindapañha* (ca first century C.E.), the monk Nāgasena gives the Indo-Greek King Milinda the famous

7. MN 1. 22-23, I. B. Horner, trans., *The Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya)*, vol. 1, Pali Text Society Translation Series, no. 29 (London: Luzac & Company Ltd. 1967), 28-29.

8. MN 1.34, Horner, *The Middle Length Sayings*, vol. 1, 43.

simile of a cart by which he can understand the ultimate non-existence of a person: just as when the cart is analysed into its parts and pieces, no 'cart' can be found, so when the human person is analysed into its physical and mental components, no 'person' can be found.⁹ For the early Buddhists, however, the world was not illusory or unreal. While they accepted that no material substratum could be found inhering in any entity, they nevertheless believed that mental and physical processes existed, and not merely as illusory perceptions. The one who attained insight into the impermanent, conditioned nature of things and who extinguished the false perception of self as really existing also extinguished the conditions for any future rebirth, thereby attaining *nirvāṇa*. Such a person was called a Worthy One, an *arhat*.

Around the first century C.E., Buddhist thought saw the rise of a new approach to the goal of *bodhi* or Awakening. New texts were written and attributed to the Buddha, texts that formed the basis of the teachings of the Mahāyāna, the Great Vehicle. The proponents of this branch of Buddhism critiqued the earlier goal of attaining *nirvāṇa* for oneself alone as selfish. They proposed the *bodhisattva* ideal, the ideal of the person who strives for Buddhahood for the sake of all others, who does not turn away from *saṃsāra* but vows to be reborn again and again, putting off his or her own full enlightenment until all beings achieve that very same state. The Mahāyāna spiritual ideal was open not only to renunciate monastics but to lay persons of either gender who genuinely generated the desire to attain enlightenment for the sake of benefiting others. The philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism rests on the "Perfection of Wisdom" texts that re-interpreted the earlier Buddhist teaching of 'no-soul' or essencelessness into a doctrine of 'emptiness': if the composite structures of

9. MP 2.1.1, T. W. Rhys Davids, trans. *The Questions of King Milinda: Part I*, The Sacred Books of the East Series, ed. Max Müller, vol. 35 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), 40-45.

ordinary reality are empty of any real, that is, permanent, irreducible state of being, then so too are the components of those structures. No ultimate state of existing can be assigned to anything whatsoever. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāp ramit* states, “a Bodhisattva, a great being, leads countless beings to Nirvana, and yet there is not any being that has been lead to Nirvana, nor that has lead others to it.”¹⁰ All things exist only conventionally, provisionally, relatively, dependent on the causes and conditions that bring them into being and support their continuity. The phenomenal world and all the mental and physical processes that constitute it are, in their manner of appearance, utterly illusory. According to this theory, all existents are universally empty of any ultimate status or reality. Underlying all theory and practice in Tibetan Buddhism is the Mahāyāna concept of the realization of emptiness as wisdom conjoined with the active compassion of the *bodhisattva* who remains in the wheel of life and death.

Dream Theories in Hindu and Buddhist Thought

With regard to the investigation of the nature of dreams, Indian authors generally fall into two camps: those who argue that dreams are basically memories or recollections (*smṛti*), and those who argue that dreams are direct perceptions. These classifications bear deeply on the present study and are worth setting out in some detail. The following summary draws from Jadunath Sinha’s comprehensive examination of the subject in his two-volume work *Indian Psychology*.¹¹

10. Edward Conze, trans., *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāp ramit The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Slokas* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1958), 8.

11. Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Psychology*, vol. 1, 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 307-324.

Sinha uses the terms 'presentative' and 'representative' to classify the Indian positions on dream. The former refers to the position that dreams are direct and immediate perceptions and the latter holds that dreams are mere recollections of past experience. The representative theory is stated clearly by Śaṅkara (ca. 788-820), the major exponent of Advaita Vedānta philosophy. He says, "Dreams are reproductions of past waking perceptions owing to the revival of their subconscious impressions; so they have the semblance of waking perceptions."¹² This idea is elaborated in the theory of memory obscuration (*smṛtipramoṣa*) according to which dream cognition as well as waking illusions or hallucinations are based on memory but appear to be direct perceptions due to a lapse or obscuration of memory. Sinha explains:

Recollection is the apprehension of the previously apprehended and if the element of 'the apprehended' sinks below the threshold of consciousness, then recollection appears as a direct apprehension or perception, or, the *re*-presentation appears as a direct and immediate presentation.¹³

The representative theory does not allow that dream cognition is the result of the direct presentation of an object, real or illusory, to the senses. Sinha points out that another Advaitin, Dharmarājādhvarīndra, accepts the presentative theory stating that "dream-cognitions too are illusory perceptions, during sleep, of illusory realities produced at that time and place, like the illusory realities of our waking life."¹⁴

According to Sinha, most Indian thinkers advocated the presentative theory that dream cognition is essentially perceptual, not recollective, in nature. The emphasis on dream as sensory perception versus memory harkens back to the Vedic view of mental operations

12. Ibid., 310.

13. Ibid., 310-311.

14. Ibid., 312.

as primarily perceptual rather than psychological in nature. It is argued, according to the presentative theory, that dream perceptions are not apprehended merely as memories arising during the dream state but as direct perceptions “produced at that time and place.” The dreamer is conscious during the dream that he ‘sees’ a chariot, not that he ‘remembers’ a chariot, and on waking from the dream that he ‘saw’ a chariot. Further, it is noted that the theory of dream as mere recollection of past waking experience does not explain the objects of the dream experience that were never perceived in the past, such as one’s own head being chopped off.¹⁵

Wayman sums up the difference between these two positions as dependent on the acceptance or not of the function of mind as a sixth sense.¹⁶ What Sinha calls the presentative theory is important for Buddhist thought, according to which, although the sense organ of sight is not functioning during sleep, and a dream chariot as an object of sight is not present, nevertheless, the mind which is “a sense organ like other sense organs”¹⁷ is functioning and perceives its own objects without the participation of the other senses. In other words, the dream is experienced due to the perceptive faculty of the mind alone. Following the explanation of the Mādhyamika exponent, Bhāvaviveka, Wayman states that “the perception that is based on the sixth-sense mind (*manovijñāna*) . . . is what perceives the dream.”¹⁸

15. Ibid.

16. Wayman, “Dreams in India and Tibet,” 408.

17. Ibid., 409.

18. Ibid.

The development of the Mahāyāna practice of *Buddhānusmṛti*, 'recollection of the Buddha', is closely related to the idea of dream as direct perception. It has its origins in the earlier Buddhist practice of calling to mind the qualities of the Buddha. In the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa's (fifth century C.E.) instructions on the early Buddhist practice of *Buddhānusmṛti*, the practitioner is instructed to recollect the special qualities of the Buddha and, in particular, the reasons why it can be said that the Buddha embodies the following characteristics:

Accomplished, fully enlightened, endowed with [clear] vision and [virtuous] conduct, sublime, the knower of worlds, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed.¹⁹

In these early instructions, there is no reference to the image of the Buddha or his physical features. It is an analytical form of meditation in which the meditator contemplates, point by point, each quality. The text indicates that *Buddhānusmṛti* does not lead to full absorption in a trance state (*jhāna*), but to a lower stage called 'access'. Buddhaghosa says of the meditator who has successfully practised recollection of the Buddha,

He attains fullness of faith, mindfulness, understanding and merit. He has much happiness and gladness. He conquers fear and dread. He is able to endure pain. He comes to feel as if he were living in the Master's presence. . . His mind tends towards the plane of the Buddhas.²⁰

The results of this type of meditation are described in psychological terms of fearlessness, happiness, and a feeling of closeness to the Buddha due to the power of remembering his extraordinary qualities. There is no indication that the meditator literally sees the form of the Buddha or has a vision of him or that a vision of the Buddha was the goal of the practice.

19. Vsm 7.15.2, Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, vol. 1, trans. Bhikkhu Nyānamoli (Berkeley: Shambhala, 1976), 206.

20. Ibid., 230.

The practitioner develops a virtuous mind because as the text says, “When he encounters an opportunity for transgression, he has awareness of conscience and shame as vivid as though he were face to face with the Master”.²¹

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, along with the belief in numerous celestial *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* appearing in the universe for the benefit of beings, the practice of recollection of the Buddha goes beyond psychological benefits. It comes to be associated with the ability to directly perceive the Buddha. In the *Mahāratnakūṭa sūtra*,²² the instructions to meditators in the practice called the “Single Deed Samādhi” are pertinent to this discussion. They are told to sit erect, facing the direction of the Buddha,²³ to “concentrate their minds on a Buddha, and recite his name single-mindedly.” It concludes:

If they [the meditators] can maintain mindfulness of the Buddha without interruption from moment to moment, then they will be able to see all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future right in each moment.²⁴

The practice of *Buddhānusmṛti* leading to direct perception of the Buddha, whether waking or sleeping, is the subject of one of the earliest of the Mahāyāna *sūtras*, the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra*, translated from the Tibetan version by Paul Harrison as “The Samādhi of the Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present” (hereafter referred to as

21. Ibid.

22. The *Mahāratnakūṭa sūtra* is not one *sūtra* but a collection of Mahāyāna *sūtras*, selections from which have been translated from the Chinese. Garma C.C. Chang, ed. and trans., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra* (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983).

23. The Mahāyāna Buddhas are thought to dwell and teach in their Pure Lands in all directions of the compass. For example, the cult of Amitābha Buddha in the West is one of the most prominent.

24. Chang, *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 110.

PraS).²⁵ In this text, the practitioner is enjoined not only to recall the special qualities of the Buddha, but also to recall the physical characteristics of a Buddha, “endowed with the thirty-two marks of the Great man and a body with a colour like gold, resembling a bright, shining, and well-set golden image, and well adorned like a bejewelled pillar . . .”²⁶ Further, the meditator should consider where this Buddha dwells, in what quarter of the sacred cosmos he lives and teaches:

In accordance with what they have learned they concentrate on the thought: “That Lord . . . now resides, . . . and teaches the Dharma . . . in the world-system of Sukhāvatī, one hundred thousand *kotis* of Buddha-fields to the west of this Buddha-field;”²⁷

In the Mahāyāna version of this practice, there is great emphasis on the role of the imagination in generating a mental percept of the Buddha. Further, in the PraS, dream is used both as a simile for explaining the nature of the meditative vision as well as a vehicle for the encounter. Chapter three of the text explains the practice through which one can directly experience the Buddha Amitāyus in this way:

For example, . . . some men or women in dreams while sleeping see various material forms, see . . . friends, kinfolk . . . or companions that are pleasing. . . and in those dreams they dream of . . . amusing themselves with them, of speaking and conversing with them. When they wake up they relate to others all those things and people that they saw, heard . . . spoke and conversed with; . . . In the same way . . . *bodhisattvas*, whether they be householders or renunciates, go alone to a secluded spot and sit down, and in accordance with

25. The earliest firm date related to the PraS is 179 C.E., the year it was translated into Chinese. See Paul Harrison, trans., *The Samādhi of the Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present: An Annotated English Translation of the Tibetan Version of the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Sammukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra*, Studia Philologica Buddhica Monograph Series, vol. 5 (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1990), viii.

26. PraS, Harrison, *Samādhi of the Direct Encounter*, 37.

27. PraS, Ibid., 31. “This Buddha-field” refers to our world-system, the Pure Land of Śākyamuni Buddha.

what they have learned they concentrate their thoughts on the . . . Perfectly Awakened One Amitāyus; . . . If they concentrate their thoughts with undistracted minds on the Tathāgata Amitāyus for seven days and nights, then, when a full seven days and nights have elapsed, they see the Lord and Tathāgata Amitāyus. Should they not see that Lord during the daytime, then the Lord and Tathāgata Amitāyus will show his face to them in a dream while they are sleeping.²⁸

Here the author is concerned to show that this meditation leads to an alternate reality experience that is as direct and immediate and sensuous as one's experience of dreams can be. Beyond that, the encounter can take place as a trance-like daytime vision or as a night-time dream. In another dream analogy, the text points out that just as the faculty of sight is not obscured by darkness or walls in a dream, and this not due to any magic power, so in the state of concentration or in a dream arisen due to this meditation, the vision of the Buddha and the hearing of the Dharma is not the result of magic powers:

Without having obtained divine vision, the bodhisattvas see the Buddha Amitābha; without having obtained divine hearing, they hear the sūtra/dharma expounded by the Buddha Amitābha; without having obtained magic power, they succeed in going to Amitābha's Buddha-field. The bodhisattvas also do not die from here to go to be born there. Simply staying in this world as before, they see the Buddha . . . and hear him expounding the Dharma. As they have heard it they take it up. The bodhisattvas then wake from this concentration, and then expound it widely to others the Dharma as they have heard it.²⁹

Since this practice is advocated for monastics and ordinary householders alike, the author makes sure that its marvellous effects are not mistaken for supernormal powers that take long years of extreme meditative effort to achieve or as the results of being reborn in some other state after death. The above passage also presents the Mahāyāna idea that authentic new teachings can be received and propagated through visionary and dream experiences.

28. PraS, Ibid., 32.

29. PraS, Ibid., 33.

Elsewhere, the text states explicitly: “For those *bodhisattvas* who preserve this *samādhi*, *sūtras* which have not [previously] been expounded to or heard by them will be spoken and their uttering heard, even if it is only in their dreams.”³⁰

As shown above, the PraS uses dream in a variety of ways: as a simile for immediate perception; to show that the subtle body functions independently of magical powers; as a mental state that allows for encounters with supernatural beings to take place; and, finally, as a method for realizing the soteriological goal, the liberating truth about the phenomenal world, that it is ultimately as illusory as a dream. With regard to this last use of dream, the PraS relates a story in which three men dream of three different courtesans whom they had heard of but never met. Due to their lustful thoughts dwelling on the beautiful appearance and lovely qualities of these women, they each encounter the woman of their dreams in a dream and have sexual relations with them. On waking, they relate all that they had experienced to the Bodhisattva Bhadrapāla, who then teaches them the meditation method of the PraS. The implication that the dream experience serves as a basis for realizing the empty nature of all phenomena (*śūnyatā*) is drawn out in another version of this story translated by Etienne Lamotte:

En songe, ils rêvèrent qu'ils les possédaient. Une fois réveillés, ils se dirent: “Ces femmes ne sont pas venues à nous et nous ne sommes pas allés à elles; pourtant le plaisir s'est produit. À cause de lui, nous nous sommes éveillés. Tous les Dharma sont-ils de ce genre?”. Alors ils se rendirent auprès du bodhisattva *P'o t'o p'o lo* (Bhadrapāla) pour l'interroger sur cette affaire. Bhadrapāla leur dit: “Tous les Dharma sont bien ainsi; ils sont tous issus de la pensée”; puis il expliqua adroitement (*upāyena*) à ces trois hommes la vacuité (*śūnyatā*) des Dharma, et tous trois devinrent des [Bodhisattva] sans régression (*avaivartika*).³¹

30. PraS, Ibid, 117.

31. Etienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna* (*Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*), vol. 1 (Louvain: 1944-80), 425-426; quoted in Harrison, *Samādhi of the Direct Encounter*, 35.

The dream experience then is shown to be of great significance in the path to Awakening, both as a method of accessing an alternate reality where the Buddhas are encountered face to face and teachings are received, as well as a method of realizing the ultimate truth that all realities are of the nature of dreams. They appear to the organs of sense, but upon investigation and analysis, no ultimate reality can be affirmed about anything.

Dream Classification and Interpretation

Dreams are categorized in many different ways in Indian texts. As previously discussed, the earliest *Vedas* present a simple division of dream into good dream (*svapna*) and evil dream (*duḥsvapna*). In later literature, the most basic division is similarly twofold—auspicious (*śubha*) and inauspicious (*aśubha*), or ‘having desirable effect’ (*iṣṭaphala*) and ‘having undesirable effect’ (*aniṣṭaphala*).³² According to Sinha’s summary, other categorizations include the Vaiśeṣika school of Hindu philosophy that recognizes three causes of dreams: (1) pathological disorders (2) subconscious impressions, and (3) unseen agency.³³ The ‘unseen agency’ category appears also in the Jain threefold division of dreams into those that reflect things seen (*dr̥ṣṭa*), those that reflect things not seen (*adr̥ṣṭa*), and those that reflect a combination of the two (*avyakta dr̥ṣṭa*). According to the Vaiśeṣikas, *adr̥ṣṭa* (unseen agency) is the cause for dreams about things never before experienced in waking life; these dreams are omens, that is, prophetic dreams caused by the ‘unseen agency’ of the merit or demerit, *dharma* or *adharma*, of the dreamer.³⁴ As will be demonstrated, the

32. Wayman, “Dreams in India and Tibet,” 401.

33. Sinha, *Indian Psychology*, 321.

34. Doniger O’Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 25.

category of prophetic dreams caused by one's merit or demerit plays a great role in Buddhist dream theory. Sinha also points out that the Buddhists added to the Vaiśeṣika list a category of dreams caused by the influence of supernatural beings or spirits.³⁵

The *Milindapañha* is the earliest text to offer a Buddhist interpretation of the phenomena of dream. In the conversations between King Milinda and the Buddhist sage Nāgasena, dream is defined as a sign, mark, or image (*nimitta*) "coming across the path of the mind."³⁶ These signs can be either true (*saccam*) prognostications or deceptive/false (*alīkam*) appearances. Nāgasena classifies dreams according to the type of person who is doing the dreaming. These are of four kinds: (1) persons whose physical condition is dominated by wind, by bile, or by phlegm (according to ancient Indian medical philosophy, the three 'humours' that determine the person's disposition or temperament); (2) persons who are under the influence of a god; (3) persons who have many dreams due to previous experiences; and (4) persons who receive true prognostications. In this list, the dreams of persons who are suffering from an imbalance of the humours are false; so are the dreams of someone whose mind is simply indulging in the play of experience, as well as the dreams that arise due to the influence of gods and spirits. The only dreams that are true are those that come to those who receive true prognostications. This is a crucial point in Buddhist dream theory because it ties the truth or falsity of the dream to the character of the person dreaming. One would have to ask then, "What kind of person receives true prognostications?" The answer to the question appears in two fourth century texts, the *Manorathapūraṇī*,

35. Sinha, *Indian Psychology*, 316.

36. T. W. Rhys Davids translates *nimitta* as "suggestion." *Questions of King Milinda: Part 2*, vol. 36, 157.

Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, and the *Samantapāsādikā*, a commentary on the Pāli *Vinaya*. Both texts enumerate the same four causes of dreams: (1) imbalance or disorder of the physical elements of the body, (2) previous experiences, (3) influence of spirits, and (4) portents. The following is summarized from the Chinese version of the *Samantapāsādikā* translated by Bapat and Hirakawa.³⁷

A person suffering from physical disorders would have dreams such as slipping down a mountain or flying or being pursued by a tiger, a wolf, a lion, or a thief. These dreams, along with those based on previous experiences that simply replay what one has seen or heard previously, whether good or bad, are dismissed as “airy nothing and not real.”³⁸ Dreams due to the influence of gods may portend good or evil to come depending on the disposition of the spirit towards the dreamer. Unlike Nāgasena, however, for whom dreams due to possession by a god are entirely false, both the *Manorathapūranī* and the *Samantapāsādikā* classify these dreams as possibly true/real dreams or possibly not. In any case, the signs manifested in these dreams are not to be trusted. Finally, the fourth type, real prognosticatory dreams (good or evil) are those that arise due to the merit or demerit of the dreamer. “If he has accumulated merit, then a good dream is displayed. If demerit, then is displayed an evil dream.”³⁹ Buddhaghosa gives as examples of true prognosticatory dreams the dream of Queen Māyā, portending the birth of the Buddha, the sixteen dreams of the King of Kosala, and the five great dreams of a *bodhisattva* (to be discussed later). In all these cases, the dreamer is a person who has accumulated great merit throughout his or her present

37. P. V. Bapat and A. Hirawaka, trans., *Shan-Chien-P'i-P'o-Sha* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1970), 357.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

and past lives, by virtue of which the dream is *saccam eva hoti*, especially true or very true.⁴⁰ On a more mundane level, the *Samantapāsādikā* states that dreams of worshipping the Buddha, reciting scripture, taking vows of good conduct, acts of generosity, or doing any kind of meritorious act also belong in this category; that is to say, they are true signs or omens of the future.⁴¹ In the *Manorathapūranī*, Buddhaghosa continues to say that “these four kinds of dreams are seen by ordinary people . . . those who have perfected . . . themselves do not see dreams.”⁴² The view that the self-perfected ones do not dream is corroborated in the Tibetan practice of dream yoga. According to one of the foremost contemporary Tibetan exponents of dream yoga, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoché, the instructions for the final stage of dream practice are the same as the instructions for achieving enlightenment in the *bardo*—to remain in the clear light, that is, in non-dual presence, in the union of emptiness and pure awareness. He says, “When the practitioner fully integrates with the clear light, dreaming stops.”⁴³ This is also borne out in the *Six Yogas of Nāropa*, the classical text containing instructions on Tibetan dream yoga.⁴⁴

In Vajrayāna as well as in Theravāda theory, dreams are understood to arise based on the dualistic play of mind, and although they can portend future awakening, it is agreed that, in themselves, dreams are a sign of not having achieved the soteriological goal. There is a

40. MP 5.10.6, Buddhaghosa, *Manorathapūranī: Commentary on the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, vol. 3, ed. Hermann Kopp (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd. 1966), 316-317.

41. Bapat and Hirakawa, *Shan-Chien-P'i-P'o-Sha*, 357.

42. MP 5.10.6, Buddhaghosa, *Manorathapūranī*, 317.

43. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoché, *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*, ed. Mark Dhalby (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1998), 140.

44. Chang, *Teachings of Tibetan Yoga*, 97.

certain denigration of dreams in early Buddhism linked with the fact that dreams, omens, astrology, and the like were the business of the brahmins and were not considered right livelihood for the Buddhist monastic *sangha*, partly because it was so open to manipulation and superstition and partly because it often involved animal sacrifice. According to the *Milindhapañha*:

The business of Brahmins and their sons is concerned with . . . the knowledge of lucky marks (on the body), of legends, . . . astrology, interpretation of omens, and of dreams, and of signs, . . . of the prognostications to be drawn from . . . the junctions of planets, the fall of meteors, earthquakes, conflagrations, and signs in the heavens and on the earth, . . . of the interpretation of the omens to be drawn from dogs, and deer, and rats, and mixtures of liquids, and the sounds and cries of birds.⁴⁵

In the *Mahā-supina Jātaka*, the Buddha tells the story of the King of Kosala's sixteen dreams. The story juxtaposes the interpretation of the brahmin soothsayers with the Buddha's interpretation. The brahmins predict great evil for the King based on his dreams and propose to sacrifice great numbers of animals and birds to avert the disaster. In the Buddha's interpretation, the dreams are also prognostications of evil, but they are dreams foretelling events of a future degenerate age having no impact on the King's present life and, therefore, requiring no ritual. In the standard *Jātaka* formula, the sixteen dreams are also placed in the context of the past lives of the players; the Buddha further comforts the King by telling him that he is not the first to have these dreams and that these same dreams were dreamt by kings of bygone days. The Buddha continues regarding the King's dreams:

Then as now, the Brahmins found in them a pretext for sacrifices, whereupon at the instance of the wise and good, the Bodhisattva was consulted, and the dreams were expounded by them of old time in just the same manner as they have been now expounded.⁴⁶

45. MP 4.3.27, T.W. Rhys Davids, *Questions of King Milinda*, vol. 36, 247-248.

46. J 1.77, E.B. Cowell, ed., *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*,

The brahmins are represented as exploiting the righteous King for the sake of their own gain and the ethical position of Buddhism is put forward. The story ends with the *Bodhisattva* exhorting the King: "Henceforth, O king, join not with the Brahmins in slaughtering animals for sacrifice."⁴⁷

In another *Jātaka* tale, the Buddha tells the story of a brahmin who made prognostications by means of pieces of cloth, and, similarly, the story is repeated about a past birth in which he retrieves a suit of clothes from the charnel ground to the horror of the brahmin who had thrown it away because it had been eaten by mice and was, therefore, an ill-omened thing that would bring bad luck to the wearer. The Bodhisattva expounds on the Buddhist view of omens: "We have no belief in superstitions about luck, which are not approved by Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas or Bodhisattvas; and therefore no wise man ought to be a believer in luck."⁴⁸ The story closes with the following verse:

Whoso renounces omens, dreams and signs,
That man, from superstition's errors freed,
Shall triumph o'er the paired Depravities
And o'er Attachments to the end of time.⁴⁹

In early Buddhist thought, dreams belong to a world-view of omenology, unfounded superstition, and concern with ritual purity that is to be overcome by empirical investigation and insight into the truth of how things come into being and pass away. However, the disparagement of dreams in early Buddhism needs to be balanced with the great importance

vol. 1, trans. Robert Chalmers (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1957), 192-193.

47. J 1.77, *Ibid.*, 194. The same objection to animal sacrifice is raised in the encounter between Buddhism and shamanic cultures.

48. J1.87, *Ibid.*, 217.

49. *Ibid.*

granted to dream omens that portend the birth of the Buddha and his enlightenment. This dual approach to dream appears very strongly in Tibetan biographies where, as Serinity Young notes,

After a dream is recited, discussed, interpreted, and acted upon as a vital, meaningful communication, a warning may be included about the deceptive nature of dreams. Such a warning makes the point that only some, but not all dreams are significant. It also represents dreams as an example of the illusory and empty nature of reality.⁵⁰

Young chooses to interpret the contending messages primarily in terms of the elite versus the popular view of dreams:

The conflicting statements that often surround dreams within the same text illustrate these different views of the elite and popular traditions. Both traditions accepted dreams as a meaningful form of cognition, but the elite tradition maintained an added position on dreams, that they are a prime example of the empty and illusory nature of this world.⁵¹

She further states,

Although I have attempted to trace some of the causes for the contradictory opinions about dreaming in Buddhism, underlying these causes is the simple fact that Buddhism is comfortable with such contradictions.⁵²

In the Tibetan context, however, the lay population are steeped in the “elite” view of dream: in the research for this project, ordinary lay Tibetans were as likely as monastics to pronounce on the illusory nature of dream. And as Young has proven, the use of dream for its prophetic value has a prominent place in the Buddhist biographies of the spiritual elite. This makes it difficult to ascribe views on dream specifically to elite or popular traditions since both popular and elite traditions hold both views quite indistinguishably. Further, there

50. Young, *Dreaming in the Lotus*, 16.

51. Ibid., 17.

52. Ibid.

is no evidence to support the idea that Buddhism is comfortable with the contradictions since from within the tradition no contradiction is presented. The division of dream theory into elite and popular views as an explanation for conflict is also misleading since the elite philosophical tradition in no way denigrates prophetic dreams, and the popular view of dream includes the understanding that the world is like a dream. Further, in both elite and popular views, dream states, like waking states, are ultimately value-free. In other words, there is no basis for conflict or contradiction between these two views with regard to elite versus popular traditions.

The two views of dream are present in early Buddhism, but with the heightened emphasis on the practical prophetic use of dream in the elite tradition of Tibetan Buddhism came a corresponding emphasis on the ultimate view of all phenomena. The Tibetan approach to dream is further affected by the interaction of Buddhism with the indigenous culture. It has been shown that dream and visionary experience is a mark of shamanic cultures and authenticates a shaman's work. In the encounter between Buddhism and shamanism, the necessity for Buddhism to maintain its soteriological superiority while engaging in similar authenticating dream practices can be seen as a crucial factor in the contradictory attitudes toward dream in Tibetan Buddhism. When conflicting statements regarding dream appear in the same text, it implies some deeper tension than merely the difference between the emphases of the 'great' and 'little' traditions. As will be shown, the nature of that tension is more clearly understood in terms of the struggle for Buddhist dominance over a competing world-view.

The Seven Questions of Ariyavansa-Ādiccaransī

A systematic overview of the Indian Buddhist approach to dream appears in Shwe Zan Aung's introduction to the *Abhidhammattha-sangaha* translated under the title of *Compendium of Philosophy*. In his introduction he states that "no attempt at anything like a systematic explanation of dream phenomena appears to have been made in Burma till nearly a century ago, when one Ariyavansa-Ādiccaransī propounded seven questions relating to dreams."⁵³ The following summary and adaptation of Aung's material reflects many of the ideas discussed above.⁵⁴

1. Are dreams perceived by the senses or by mind?

Peripheral sense stimulations such as a light brought near to a sleeping person's face can induce dreams in coordination with the inner activities of the mind, but all waking and dream perceptions take place by the agency of the mind (as a sixth sense), not by the agency of the five senses.

2. How are dreams classified?

They are divided into four categories: dreams due to (1) pathological disorders, (2) previous experiences, (3) the influence of spirit agents, and (4) the clairvoyant character and capacity of the dreamer (prophetic dreams).

3. How do dreams correspond to external events?

Dreams due to disorders of the body or due to previous experiences have no true correspondence to either present or future events. Dreams due to the influence of spirit

53. Mrs. Rhys Davids, ed. *Compendium of Philosophy: Being a Translation now made for the First Time from the Original Pali of the Abhidhammattha-sangaha, with introductory essay and notes by Shwe Zan Aung* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1972), 46.

54. *Ibid.*, 46-53.

agents are telepathic dreams corresponding to present events and are sometimes true and sometimes not. Prophetic dreams are always true and correspond to future events.

4. What are the classes of beings who dream?

Altogether twelve classes of intelligent beings are identified, four are ordinary, and eight are noble. The ordinary classes of beings include all those—humans, animals, spirits, or gods—living in the various realms of the Buddhist cosmology in either miserable or good conditions. The noble classes refer to the classes of Buddhist saints, those who have attained to the higher stages on the path. Of those, some dream but the *arhat*, who in Theravāda Buddhism is considered to have attained the final stage of enlightenment, does not dream “as he is no longer subject to hallucination (*cittavipallāsa*).”⁵⁵

5. When does a dream occur, in sleep or in waking?

According to both the *Milindapañha* and the *Samantapāsādikā*, if it were to be said that one dreams while asleep, that would contradict the *Abhidhamma* teaching that sleep takes place when there is no disturbance of the mind-stream by thoughts. And if it were to be said that dreaming takes place while awake, that would contradict the *Vinaya* that says that a person is not morally responsible for dream acts. Hence the Buddhist position is that dreaming occurs when a person is neither asleep nor awake, but during the many transitional moments when the stream of consciousness rapidly changes between the disturbance of thought and the rest of no thought. Note that this can take place while one is so-called ‘asleep’ or ‘awake’. The question of the process of dreaming is taken up below in the section on the relationship between dreaming and paranormal powers.

55. Ibid., 50.

6. Is a dream thought or act moral, immoral, or amoral?

7. Are dreams effective?

The answer to questions 6 and 7 is related to the question of volition and the effect that every state of mind has on the person. A person is not thought to commit sins in a dream because it is said that although the mental processes are the same in dreaming as in waking, in dreaming one does not have volitional control over the dream thought or act, hence one is not morally responsible for it. However, it is also understood that dreams are dependent on the character of the person and, in turn, have an effect on the personality; therefore, in the refuge precepts of Vajrayāna Buddhism, one undertakes to abandon harming others even in dreams.⁵⁶ There is the sense that even though one is not morally responsible for one's dreams, they can, to some degree, be controlled and further, that they can both reveal and mould the character of the dreamer.

Dreams in Indian Buddhism: The Conception Dream of Queen Māyā

The narrative of the life of the Buddha is situated in the context of incalculable eons of time, the eternal cycles of evolution and devolution of the universe, and the beginningless, endless round of birth and death that characterize the ancient Indian world-view. The turning point from being an ordinary person to being a *bodhisattva* (someone who is certain to become a Buddha) takes place when the mind of the person reaches a stage from which there is no reversal in the commitment to attaining enlightenment. This stage in the life of the Buddha is represented by the story of a previous life in which, incalculable eons in the past, a brahmin ascetic by the name of Sumedha encounters the Buddha of that period, named

56. Refuge vows and precepts are taken when one formally accepts the Buddhist faith.

Dīpaikara and is moved by faith and devotion to aspire to achieve the same state of Buddhahood. Based on his divine vision, Dīpaikara prophesies that Sumedha's aspiration will be fulfilled and that he will be reborn to become Gautama the Buddha.⁵⁷ But this does not take place for many hundreds of eons. After many births and accumulation of great virtue, he is reborn in the Tuṣita heaven from where he descends into the womb of Māyā, the wife of the chief of the Śākya tribe, to live out his last birth. As a continuous account, this legend first appears in the *Nidāna-kathā* and the *Lalitavistara*.

Māyā's conception dream of a white elephant entering her womb is the paradigmatic prophetic dream in Buddhist legend. This dream and its interpretation is preserved more or less elaborately in all accounts of the life of the Buddha. According to W. Woodville Rockhill, the Tibetan sources for the life of the Buddha mention four dreams that occurred to Māyā: (1) of a six-tusked white elephant entering her womb; (2) of moving in space above; (3) of ascending a great rocky mountain; and (4) of a great multitude bowing down to her.⁵⁸

These four dreams appear as a single dream in the *Nidāna-kathā*:

The four Guardians of the world, lifting her up in her couch, carried her to the Himālaya mountains, and placing her under the great Sāl-tree, seven leagues high, on the Crimson Plain, sixty yojanas broad, they stood respectfully aside. Their queens then came toward her, and taking her to the lake of Anotatta, bathed her to free her from human stains; and dressed her in heavenly garments; and anointed her with perfumes; and decked her with heavenly flowers. Not far from there is the Silver Hill, within which is a golden mansion; in it they spread a heavenly couch, with its head towards the East and on it they laid her down. Then the future Buddha, who had become a superb white elephant, and was wandering on the Golden Hill, not far from

57. T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *Buddhist Birth-Stories (Jātaka Tales): The Commentarial Introduction Entitled NIDĀNA-KATHĀ THE STORY OF THE LINEAGE*, ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, new and rev. ed. (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1925), 89-96.

58. W. Woodville Rockhill, trans, *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of His Order* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd.), 15.

there, descended thence, and ascending the Silver Hill, approached her from the North. Holding in his silvery trunk a white lotus flower, and uttering a far-reaching cry, he entered the golden mansion, and thrice doing obeisance to his mother's couch, he gently struck her right side, and seemed to enter her womb. . . . And the next day, having awoke from her sleep, she related the dream to the rāja.⁵⁹

Dreams heralding the conception of a great being are also prevalent in other traditions of the Buddha's time. Jain literature speaks of Trīśālā, the future mother of Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, as having fourteen conception dreams which include many of the motifs found in Māyā's dream, such as an elephant, flowers, a palace, silver and gold, as well as being anointed.⁶⁰ Regarding conception dreams among other traditions, it is interesting to note the idea of "conception totemism" among the Aboriginal tribes of central Australia—a dream revelation that links the child to be born with the mythic Dream-time of the original ancestors. Aboriginal belief is that "prior to a child's birth, his or her 'totem' makes itself known to the child's parents or certain other close relatives in a special dream."⁶¹

For the purposes of this study, Māyā's dream is of great interest because it indicates a third understanding of dream apart from dream as prophecy and dream as illusion. In many texts, Māyā's conception dream is presented as an immediate event that she experiences in

59. T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Birth-Stories*, 149-150.

60. (1) a huge, white elephant; (2) a tame white bull; (3) a playful white lion; (4) the goddess Śrī being anointed by elephants; (5) a garland of white flowers; (6) the silver-white moon; (7) the sun; (8) a large flag; (9) a golden pitcher full of water; (10) a lotus lake; (11) an ocean of milk; (12) a celestial palace; (13) a heap of jewels; (14) a smokeless fire. In Hemacandra's encyclopedia of Jinist mythology (twelfth century), the account of Trīśālā's dreams ends with the words, "these dreams in succession the Mistress [Trīśālā] saw entering her mouth," an expression that is reminiscent of the shamanic idea that the spirits enter the shaman through the mouth, signified by yawning. See Jagdish Sharma and Lee Siegel, *Dream-Symbolism in the Śrāmaṇic Tradition: Two Psychoanalytical Studies in Jinist & Buddhist Dream Legends* (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd. 1980), 10.

61. Ronald M. Berndt, "The Dreaming," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 13 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 480.

the dream state. In the *Mahāvastu*, the conception dream is presented both as dream and as event:

When the mighty and mindful one passed away from his abode in Tuṣita, taking on the form of an elephant of the colour of a snow-white boar, mindful, self-possessed and virtuous he descended into his mother's womb as she lay abed high up in the palace, fasting and clothed in pure raiment. At break of day she said to her gracious spouse, "Noble king (in my dream I saw) a white and lordly elephant come down into my womb."⁶²

The *Lalitavistara* states something similar:

The Bodhisattva . . . saw that the right time had arrived. Just at the appropriate moment, on the fifteenth of the month when the moon was full. . . the Bodhisattva descended from the Tuṣita realm, and, retaining full memory and knowledge, entered the womb of his mother . . . Through her right side he entered in the form of a small, white elephant with six tusks, his head the colour of cochineal, his tusks of gold, his limbs and organs all without imperfection. And having entered the womb, he remained on her right side, never moving to the left. Māyādevī, sleeping softly on her couch, saw this in a dream:

An elephant entered her womb. White as snow or silver,
with six perfect tusks, and beautiful feet,
a finely wrought trunk, and a rosy head;
the most beautiful of elephants, with graceful gait,
and a body as immutable as a diamond.⁶³

Buddhist tradition, however, was not entirely comfortable with this interpretation. Bhikkhu Rahula notes that a philosophical treatise such as the *Abhidharmakośa* dismisses this representation as merely poetic expression⁶⁴ and Alfred Foucher points out that the Chinese annals try to make sense of the descent by portraying the Bodhisattva as entering his

62. J. J. Jones, trans., *The Mahāvastu*, vol. 2, Sacred Books of Buddhists, vol. 58 (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1952), 11.

63. Gwendolyn Bays, trans., (*Lalitavistara*) *The Voice of the Buddha: The Beauty of Compassion*, Tibetan Translation Series (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1983), 95-96.

64. Bhikkhu Telwatte Rahula, *A Critical Study of the Mahāvastu* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 192.

mother's womb "mounted on an elephant."⁶⁵ In most versions of the legend, the account of the Bodhisattva's time spent in the Tuṣita heaven, his discussion with the gods as to which family he should choose to be born into, which place, which time, and in what form he should descend to take birth are all represented as actuality, but the transition from one world to another is couched in the liminal language of a dream event, an idea that resonates with the shamanic understanding of dream *as* event. According to Foucher, many of the sculptures that decorate *stūpas* in India show that Māyā's dream in the popular mind represented a concrete occurrence. Speaking of the depiction of the conception dream on the Bharhut *stūpa* (ca. the second to the first century B.C.E), he says:

That the sculptor himself believed it is confirmed by the gesture of surprise of one of the queen's attendants, which is so well rendered by the artist's chisel that it proves that the vision of the elephant was not just part of the sleeper's dream as far as the sculptor was concerned.⁶⁶

In the continuation of the story in the *Mahāvastu*, brahmin sages are brought in to interpret the dream for the King who is told that such a dream means that a male child has been conceived in the womb of the Queen and further that if the child remains in the household life he will become a great world ruler, but if he renounces the household life he will become a Buddha. The god Mahā-brahmā is finally brought in to give the definitive interpretation. He puts it to Māyā that a woman who sees a sun or moon will give birth to a universal king, but "the woman who in her dream has seen a white elephant enter her womb will give birth to a being as select as the elephant is among animals. He will be a Buddha

65. Alfred Foucher, *The Life of the Buddha* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), 24.

66. *Ibid.*, 25.

who knows the Good and the True.”⁶⁷ This interpretation links the dream with the prognosticatory certainty that the child to be born will attain the enlightened state of a Buddha. However, this foremost dream in Buddhist history is from the outset ambiguously interpreted as both an important and true prognosticatory dream and, from a much more shamanic perspective, a real event occurring in the liminal space of the dream world. The presence of both these views in the biographical texts would imply that it was easily accepted as both. As O’Flaherty notes, “This liminal nature of dreams is the key to the material power they possess . . .”⁶⁸

The Relationship Between Dreaming and Paranormal Powers

The Buddhist view of how dreaming takes place is of great importance in establishing the correspondence between dream and paranormal powers, a correspondence that is commonly recognized in shamanic cultures. In *The Selfless Mind*, Peter Harvey explains the dream process relative to the Theravāda Buddhist concept of *bhavaṅga-citta*. Harvey describes *bhavaṅga-citta* as the “natural, unencumbered state of *citta* [mind].”⁶⁹ And further, as “the ground-state returned to by discernment [awareness] when not actively processing objects through the six sense-channels.”⁷⁰ It should be noted that the *bhavaṅga*-mind is to be understood in the sense of ‘basic continuum of awareness’ that is disturbed when mind becomes active, not that this state forms a subliminal mental stratum beneath conscious states of mind. Based on his research into the Pāli texts, Harvey outlines the

67. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, 12.

68. Doniger O’Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 18.

69. Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 162.

70. Ibid., 166.

Theravāda view of the processes of consciousness in waking perception, in meditation, and in sleep.⁷¹ In deep dreamless sleep, the mind enters the *bhavaṅga* state and is entirely undisturbed by mental activity. In waking consciousness, there is an alternation between moments of activity and transitional moments when the mind returns to its resting state. In the dreaming state, as in the waking state, there is alternation between the *bhavaṅga* resting mode, when *citta* (mind) is not functioning, and moments of mental activity that represent a disturbance in the flow of the *bhavaṅga*. *Bhavaṅga-citta* is further described as radiant and shining. It is considered to be a pure state, undefiled by mental afflictions, but as soon as mental activity takes place, then, in ordinary persons, the afflictions of greed, ill-will, anger, pride, desire, and so forth arise. Buddhaghosa's commentary says:

Mind also is said to be 'clear' in the sense of 'exceedingly pure,' with reference to the subconscious life-continuum [*bhavaṅga*]. So the Buddha has said:— "Bhikkhus, the mind is luminous, but is corrupted by adventitious corruptions."⁷²

These afflictions, however, are not inherent to the active state of mind and when they have been eliminated, the radiance of the natural state of mind pervades all mental activity, and the mind is empowered to develop the higher types of knowledge, which include the overcoming of the restrictions of normal physical laws through supernormal powers. Harvey's study of mind in the Theravāda texts leads him to conclude that the *bhavaṅga* state is the mind's naturally pure state and that "to unlock the power of this natural purity, the

71. See Ibid., 163 for charts explicating the sequence of mind moments in sleep and in meditation.

72. Pe Maung Tin, trans., *The Expositor (Atthasālinī): Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dhamasangaṇī, the First Book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka* vol. 1, ed. and rev. Mrs. Rhys Davids, Pali Text Society Translation Series, nos. 8-9 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1976), 185.

mind must be fully 'woken up' by meditative development, so that its radiant potential may be fully activated."⁷³ His research indicates that the process of dreaming and the process of experiencing the higher (supernormal) types of knowledge are one and the same:

The mind functions in a parallel way in dreaming and in experiencing the higher knowledges, when the *citta* is free of defilements. In both cases, there is a very rapid alteration between *bhavaṅga* [basic mental continuum] and *javana* [active mind], the mind being 'quick to change' in both. The difference lies in the fact that, in dreaming, wholesome *cittas* [mind states] are 'confused', due to the debilitating effect of dullness-and-drowsiness. In the higher knowledges, the full radiance of *bhavaṅga* is uncovered, and can empower the *javana cittas* [active mind states] with the ability to develop paranormal powers.⁷⁴

This would imply that the mind state that allows for supernormal powers is none other than the dreaming state purified of its confusion and defilements. It should be noted that the main hindrance to be overcome in developing supernormal powers is dullness and drowsiness. A person can develop supernormal powers without being enlightened and without destroying the root afflictions of attachment, anger, and egoistic delusion by developing "heedful, methodical attention, which is wide awake and free from dullness and drowsiness."⁷⁵ It could be said that mundane supernormal powers are a function of wakeful dreaming. For example, in Tibet, standard monastic retreat practice is carried out alone, but dream yoga practice requires a partner to make sure that the practitioner remains subtly awake and alert in his or her sleep and does not fall into a deep unconscious sleep. A partner is also necessary to make sure that no one disturbs or wakes the practitioner suddenly.⁷⁶

73. Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 173.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid., 172.

76. Private communication from Jurme Wangda, former monk and body-guard to the Dalai Lama.

Dreams of Awakening: The Five Great Dreams of a Buddha

Just as the physical birth of a Buddha-to-be is heralded by a dream, likewise the spiritual birth of a fully enlightened Buddha is heralded by dream. Among the earliest Buddhist texts in which dreams are associated with liberation is the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (AN), a text belonging to the Pāli canon written down in approximately the first century B.C.E.:

Monks, to the Tathagata, arahant, fully awake to the highest—ere his full awakening, when he was not yet wholly awakened and but a being awakening— there came five great dreams.⁷⁷

In the AN, the Buddha tells his disciples about the five great dreams that appear to a *bodhisattva* marking the moment of his Awakening and Buddhahood.⁷⁸ In the first dream, the Bodhisattva reclines on the world like a great bed with his head resting on the Himālaya Mountains as his pillow, his left hand plunged in the eastern sea, his right hand in the western sea, and both feet in the southern sea. This dream portends his full enlightenment. In the second dream, sacred *kuśa* or *tiriyā* grass sprouts from his navel and reaches to the clouds. This portends the proclamation of the Dharma (the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Way) to gods and men and throughout the three worlds. In the third dream, white worms with black heads creep up and cover his feet and legs as far as the knees. This portends the numbers of white-robed householders (the lay *sangha*) who will take refuge in the Buddha's teaching. In the fourth dream, four variously-coloured birds come from the four quarters of the world and fall at his feet turning white. This portends that people from the four Hindu castes will throw off caste and join the monastic *sangha*. The fifth dream

77. AN 6, E.M. Hare, trans., *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara-Nikāya)*, vol.3, Pali Text society (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1973), 175.

78. Ibid., 175-177.

finds him walking on a mountain of dung without becoming soiled by the filth. This portends the Buddha's activity in *samsāra* and his non-attachment to the things of the world. The dreams, then, mark the coming into being, the 'awakening' of the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

The AN appears to say that when he has the dream, he is then wholly awakened.

When monks to the Tathagata, arahant . . . ere his full awakening . . . there came the dream that this great world was his bed of state . . . monks by the Tathagata . . . the unsurpassed full awakening to the highest was wholly awakened [within him]. To him, wholly awakening, this first dream came.⁷⁹

The implication is that the dreams occurred immediately prior to the moment of awakening or even 'as' he was awakening. Young interprets this immediacy in terms of a causal relationship between the dreams and the Buddha's awakening. She proposes that the dreams contained signs that caused the Buddha to awaken, that the seed of enlightenment and the seed of the eightfold way were lying dormant in the Buddha only needing to be "stimulated by dreams."⁸⁰ This interpretation, however, would appear to go against the Pāli Buddhist teaching that awakening or *nirvāṇa* is a state that cannot be ascribed to any cause or condition. It is unborn, unbecome, uncreated, and unconditioned.⁸¹ Although the Theravāda tradition provides many descriptives for *nirvāṇa*, both positive (*Mutti*, 'Freedom') and negative (*Nirodha*, 'Cessation'), it is never considered to be subject to any cause or

79. Ibid., 176.

80. Young, *Dreaming in the Lotus*, 26.

81. Udāna 8.3, Peter Masefield, trans., *The Udāna* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1994), 166.

condition.⁸² There is no support for interpreting these dreams other than the way in which the tradition regards them—as true prognosticatory dreams described in the classifications given by Nāgasena and Buddhaghosa. Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the AN says, “When a Bodhisattva sees these dreams then the next day he will attain enlightenment”⁸³ In different texts, the timing of the Enlightenment relative to the dreams is ambiguous. E. J. Thomas suggests, according to Buddhaghosa’s commentary, that they took place the night before the Buddha’s Enlightenment.⁸⁴ Young concludes from the placement of the dreams in the LV that they took place six years earlier on the night before his departure from the palace. In the wording of the AN, however, there is a strong sense of immediacy: “To him, wholly awakening, this first dream came.” The passage indicates that the liberation dream like the conception dream is a sign or mark of a present occurrence. One could say that the dream ‘announces’ the immediate arrival of the person at the state of liberation as trumpets announce the arrival of a king, but one could not say that they are cause or catalyst for the state of liberation. The implication is that these dreams immediately presage the attainment of the final stage in the spiritual life of one destined for liberation.

Just as the archetypal and legendary life process of a Buddha is marked by dream prophecy,⁸⁵ so in Mahāyāna Buddhism the spiritual career of a *bodhisattva* includes the dreams or visions that signal immediate spiritual attainment. The *Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*

82. For the Theravāda view of *nirvāṇa*, see Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 2d ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1974), 35-44.

83. MV 5.20.6, Buddhaghosa, *Manorathapūraṇī*, 316-317.

84. E.J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History* (London: Routledge, 1960), 70.

85. For a detailed examination of dream in the biographies of the Buddha, see Young, *Dreaming in the Lotus*, 21-41.

provides the following elaborate account of the visions seen by a *bodhisattva* at the point of attaining to each of the ten stages of spiritual development.

When he is about to attain the stage of:	The Bodhisattva has the following vision:
1. Great Joy	All the innumerable hidden treasures in the billion-world universe.
2. Stainless Purity	A billion-world universe with its ground as flat as one's palm and adorned with countless lotus flowers.
3. Illumination	Himself, clad in armour and brandishing a cudgel, repressing enemies dauntlessly and resolutely.
4. Radiant Flames	All kinds of rare flowers being scattered over the ground by the wind from the four quarters.
5. Invincible Strength	Women with garlands of <i>atimuktaka</i> , <i>vārṣika</i> , and <i>campaka</i> flowers on their heads and various adornments on their bodies.
6. Direct Presence	Himself playing in a beautiful pond with gold sand at the bottom, and jewelled steps on its sides, adorned with blue, red, white, and variously coloured lotus flowers.
7. Far-Reaching	Himself passing unharmed through hells to the left and right of him.
8. Immovable Steadfastness	Himself bearing the signs of a lion king on his shoulders, frightening all beasts.
9. Meritorious Wisdom	Himself as a universal monarch teaching the true Dharma, surrounded by innumerable kings, and shaded by clean, white, jewelled canopies.
10. Dharma-Cloud	Himself with a body the colour of gold, complete with all the thirty-two auspicious signs of a Tathāgata, haloed with a circle of light several feet in radius—seated on a lion-throne, and surrounded by countless gods.

Figure 4. The Ten Visions of a Bodhisattva⁸⁶

These dreams are very stylized and triumphal in spirit, but their presence indicates the persistent theme of dream or vision as an authenticating feature of Enlightenment and

86. Chang, *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 421-422.

spiritual attainment within the textual tradition. As will be shown, this legitimizing aspect of dream becomes a predominant value in the Tibetan tradition.

True prognosticatory dreams arise not only on the basis of a person's accumulation of merit but also on the accumulation of demerit. Dreams portending evil for the dreamer are also true for the person who has accumulated great demerit. The dreams of Māra, obstructor of Enlightenment, exemplify this point. On the night before his battle with the Buddha, Māra dreams of thirty-two signs portending evil. Among them, he sees the heavens darkened, his palace covered with dirt and stones, his body trembling with fear, himself galloping away in all directions, his crown fall from his head, the trees and flowers of his garden withered, his lakes dried up, his favourite garden birds falling to the ground, his women weeping, his clothes and body grimy and filthy, the walls and towers of his palace destroyed, trees and forests uprooted, the world come to an end.⁸⁷ Māra himself interprets the dreams as evil omens:

They are not propitious, but on the contrary of evil omen, for it seems to me they indicate that soon I shall lose my dominion through the power of some great man, who is to be born within my domain.⁸⁸

Māra's son also interprets the dreams to portend disaster and advises that he not do battle with the Buddha. The dream, of course, is proven true in the ensuing battle in which the forces of Māra are routed. It is interesting to compare this dream to one reported by the Bodhisattva's wife that has similarly disturbing motifs. Both Siddhārtha's father and his wife Gopā have premonitory dreams of his departure from the palace. In the LV, Gopā dreams that she sees the sun and moon and stars fall from the sky, her crown fall off, her pearl

87. Samuel Beal, trans., *Abhinīṣkramaṇasūtra: The Romantic Legend of Śākya Buddha* (London: Trübner & Co., 1875), 200.

88. *Ibid.*, 201.

necklaces and jewels broken and scattered, herself naked with arms and legs cut off, her hair cut off, her bed broken down, trees uprooted, and Meru, the king of mountains, shaken to its foundations.⁸⁹ Both the teaching on dream as ultimately empty of value as well as the teaching on the prophetic value of dream are to be found in the textual responses to Gopā's dream. In the *Abhinīṣkramaṇasūtra*, the Bodhisattva gives these dreams a very philosophic response. He knows they are premonitions of his leaving but at the same time, according to Buddhist teaching, they are "but the empty products of a universal law." Therefore, she should not be troubled. In the LV, the dreams are interpreted by the Bodhisattva as containing favourable omens portending good for the dreamer. The images are very similar to those of Māra's dream but these omens are interpreted positively for the dreamer, and this is explained:

Be happy—these dreams show nothing wrong.
Beings who have formerly practiced good works
are the ones who have such dreams.⁹⁰

Specifically, among the omens are signs of her spiritual progress:

Since you have seen trees uprooted,
And your hair cut off with your left hand,
soon, Gopā, you will cut the net of the fettering passions;
you will remove the veil of false views
that obscures the conditioned world.⁹¹

Serinity Young concludes the following from her analysis and comparison of these dreams:

The Buddha's positive interpretation of this dream (one that Brahmanical Hindus would see as negative because of its images of a woman whose hair is shorn and who is naked and without jewellery) . . . suggest an attempt to

89. Bays, *The Voice of the Buddha*, vol. 1., 293.

90. Ibid., 294.

91. Ibid., 295.

establish a new dream terminology that reverses the world-affirming values of Brahmanical Hinduism.⁹²

Certainly, Buddhism invested many established Hindu practices, motifs, and ideas with new meaning. For example, the Buddhist practice of the *brahmavihāras* as meditations on Loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic joy, and Equanimity was a reinterpretation of the Brahmanic ritual practices that were said to lead to the heaven of the god Brahmā. However, with regard to dream, as O'Flaherty notes, there was a well-established Indian tradition dating back to the *Vedas* that interprets negative dream images in a positive way:

Whoever, in a dream, has his head cut off or sees a bloody chariot will become a general or have a long life or get a lot of money. If his ear is cut off, he will have knowledge; his hand cut off, he will get a son; his arms, wealth; his chest or penis, supreme happiness . . . If he dreams that his limbs are smeared with poison and blood, he will obtain pleasure; if his body is on fire, he will obtain the earth. . . .⁹³

The Buddhist contribution to Indian dream theory is neither in their classification of dreams, which simply reflects and elaborates on classifications already present in Vedic literature, nor particularly in the reinterpretation of motifs. What is peculiarly Buddhist is the emphasis on the role that merit and demerit play in the establishment of the validity of the dream. The interpretation of Gopā's dreams in the LV concludes with this speech from the Bodhisattva:

Because, Gopā, you have always honoured me
and surrounded me with the greatest respect,
there are for you neither unfortunate rebirths nor sorrow;
soon you will rejoice, filled with great joy.

In times past, I gave in abundance,
I guarded my conduct and always acted patiently.

92. Young, *Dreaming in the Lotus*, 36.

93. AV 68.2.9-20, 23-24, 31-33, Bolling and von Negelein, *The Pariśiṣṭas of The Atharva Veda*, vol. 1; quoted in Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 19.

That is why those with faith in me
Will all be filled with pleasure and joy.

For tens of millions of kalpas in the world,
I purified the path of Enlightenment.
That is why, for all who have faith in me,
The paths to the three unfortunate rebirths
Will be no more.

Be happy and do not give in to sadness;
be joyous and give yourself over to cheer.
Soon you will obtain joy and contentment.
Sleep, Gopā; the omens are favourable for you!⁹⁴

It is clear that the omens are favourable because of her virtuous character and because of her association with one who is supremely virtuous. One is led to understand then that it is not the content of the dream but the condition of the dreamer that is the determining factor in whether or not the dream is of positive or negative value.

An important question for the monastic community whose aim is to live an ethically pure life is whether or not the actions one performs in dreams generate merit or demerit—a different question from whether or not the dream itself is a good dream, portending good for the dreamer, or bad, portending evil. The *Vinaya*, the body of monastic regulations, takes up the problem of a monk who emits semen during a dream. The intentional emission of semen is an offence requiring a formal confession and probation for the monk in question; however, the Buddha proclaimed, “there is no offence if he was dreaming, if there was no intentional emission, if he was mad, unhinged, in pain, a beginner.”⁹⁵ Again, this interpretation places the emphasis on the condition of the person. Commentaries on the Pāli *Vinaya* such as the

94. Bays, *The Voice of the Buddha*, vol. 1, 296.

95. I. B. Horner, trans., *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka)*, vol. 1., Pali Text Society (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1970), 197.

Kathā-vatthu make the further point that dreams in general may be ignored precisely because the mental actions of dreams do not have the strength to create consequences:

Although a dreamer may entertain evil thoughts of murder, etc., no injury to life or property is wrought. Hence they cannot be classed as offences. Hence dream-thoughts are a negligible quantity and for this reason, and not because they are ethically neutral, they may be ignored.⁹⁶

A causal relationship between dream and Enlightenment is, from a Theravāda perspective, questionable, but it will be shown that in the Tibetan tradition, the mental actions of some dreams are indeed strong enough to create consequences.

O’Flaherty notes that several of the dream motifs found in Buddhist texts appear in traditional Hindu dream books, and one could surmise that they would be familiar to the Buddha’s audience.⁹⁷ In the Buddhist texts, however, the practical approach to dreams and their interpretation, as a method of predicting and achieving this-worldly happiness, health, and prosperity, is overlaid by an approach that deals with the phenomena of dream and vision as a method of promoting Buddhist ethics and of furthering the Buddhist goal of liberation. This approach, in fact, is one that is brought to bear on any kind of success or power that a Buddhist practitioner wishes to obtain, whether in terms of material benefits, spiritual benefits, or supernormal powers, the method is the same—one should be “possessed of moral habit . . . possessed of right conduct and resort, seeing danger in the slightest faults . . .” He or she should be “one who fulfills the moral habits, who is intent on mental

96. Shwe Zan Aung and Mrs. Rhys Davids, trans., *Points of Controversy or Subjects of Discourse: Being a Translation of the Kathā-vatthu from the Abhidhamma-Pitaka*, Pali Text Society (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1969), 362.

97. Doniger O’Flaherty, *Dreams Illusion and Other Realities*, 153.

tranquillity within, whose meditation is uninterrupted, who is endowed with vision [*vipassanā* - insight], a cultivator of empty places.”⁹⁸

The counter-culture tradition, to which the Buddha belonged, emphasized renunciation, solitude, prolonged meditation, and the realization of supernormal powers leading to enlightenment. These are all characteristics of what Samuel would call “shamanic Buddhism.” Ironically, however, the shaman or charismatic religious specialist in classical shamanic complexes, such as those of the Siberian Tungus, would regard the practical use of dreams as of the highest value, whereas the ‘shamanic’ Buddhist is one who regards dreams as empty of ultimate value. The dreams of the shaman signify his supreme accomplishment as a shaman; the dreams of the Buddhist signify that the supreme goal has not yet been achieved. The distinction is very important from the Buddhist perspective because although Buddhism accepts and works with the relationship between dream and mundane psychic powers, there is no attaining to the supramundane power of liberation through dream because of its association with sleep as a state of dullness or unconsciousness, the antithesis of mindful awareness. Contrary to those, who “seeing the wonderful feats, such as levitation, etc. that are experienced in dreams, [hold] that the dreamer may not only penetrate the Truth, but also attain Arahantship,” Buddhaghosa argues that there can be no penetration of the Truth “by one who is asleep, or languid, or blurred in intelligence, or unreflective.”⁹⁹ Nevertheless, throughout Buddhist history, dreams continue to appear as signposts of ethical and spiritual progress and function as alternate states of consciousness by means of which other worlds and other beings become accessible.

98. Horner, *The Middle Length Sayings*, 41.

In this chapter, it has been shown that Buddhism accepts the idea that dreams represent direct perception and that in Buddhist psychology, the process of dreaming is closely related to the process of developing supernormal or magical powers. These are ideas that resonate with a shamanistic approach in which dreams are realities and dreaming itself is a power. The conception dream of the Buddha's mother, the most significant dream in early Buddhism, highlights the role of dream as a liminal place of transition and communication between the heaven world where a *bodhisattva* waits to take birth and the earthly beings among whom he will be born. The idea of dream as manifesting a real event is also recognizable in a shamanic context. Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches that through the power of concentration and recollection one can attain direct perception of the Buddhas and visit the Buddha paradises, either as waking visions or night-time dreams. Through such communication, one can receive authentic spiritual instruction. The Buddhist emphasis on merit and demerit in the interpretation of dreams is a mediating factor between the view of dreams as providing valid cognition or trustworthy prognostications and the view of dreams as illusions, exemplary of the illusoriness and unreality that is characteristic of all phenomena. One who has attained great merit is one whose prophetic dreams are to be trusted. At the same time, the accumulation and perfection of merit is a crucial factor in achieving the goal of liberation from illusion. It can be said that although Buddhism maintains a strong soteriological orientation, there are many aspects of its world-view that would be familiar to a shamanistic way of thinking.

SECTION THREE: DREAM THEORY AND PRACTICE IN TIBET

CHAPTER 5

TIBETAN CULTURE AND DREAM – I

The first record of Buddhism in Tibet is of a legendary royal family who revered Buddhist texts but did not know what they meant. According to traditional Tibetan history, the “Beginning of the Holy Doctrine”¹ took place during the reign of King Lha Thotori Nyentsen (twenty-eighth in the line of Tibetan kings beginning with Nyatri Tsenpo), when a casket mysteriously fell from the sky onto the roof of the palace. It contained Buddhist texts dedicated to the celestial Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara and a golden *stūpa*. Although the King had no idea what they contained, he felt they were auspicious and worshipped them calling them the “Awesome Secret.”² Tibetan historians Gos Lotsawa and Bu-ston both indicate the distinction between the religion of the old kings, dominated by priests called *bon* and the new religion represented by the miraculous appearance on the roof of the palace. According to Bu-ston, “up to that time the kingdom had been ruled by the

1. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 38. *The Blue Annals* composed by Gos Lotsawa ca. 1476-1478 C.E. and Bu-ston’s *History of Buddhism* ca. 1322 C.E. are the major sources for traditional Tibetan history. E. Obermiller, trans., *History of Buddhism by Bu-ston (Chos-hbyung)* (Heidelberg: O. Harrassowitz, 1931).

2. Dudjom Rinpoche, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Gyurme Dorje with Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), 508. Bu-ston gives the name “Mysterious Helper” because by worshipping them, the King came to live for one hundred and twenty years. Obermiller, *History of Buddhism by Bu-ston*, 183.

Bön.”³ Gos Lotsawa also refers to the *bon* priests and gives another version of the story. He quotes from the writing of another scholar:

Nelpa paṇḍita said: “Because the Bon-pos adored Heaven, it was said that (these books) had fallen from Heaven.” Instead of this Bon-po tradition, it is said that (these) books had been brought (to Tibet) by the Paṇḍita Buddhiraṣita . . . and the translator . . . Li-the-se. Since the (Tibetan) king could not read, and did not understand the meaning (of the books) the paṇḍita and the translator returned.⁴

The tradition of King Lha Thotori Nyentsen also contains the first dream relating to Buddhism in Tibet. In a dream, the King is told that five generations after him there would be one who would understand the meaning of the texts.⁵ That prophecy is considered to have been fulfilled in the reign of King Songtsen Gampo, the fifth monarch after Thotori and the first Tibetan king to formally accept Buddhism. During his reign, scholars were sent to India to study grammar and devise a Tibetan script for the purpose of translating Buddhist texts.

The Buddhism that took root in Tibet was Mahāyāna Buddhism in its tantric form called Vajrayāna (the Diamond Vehicle). From the first millennium C.E. onward, the spread of Buddhism in India and the development of the Mahāyāna emphasis on the universality of the *bodhisattva* path and the ‘emptiness’ of all phenomena created an all-embracing philosophic atmosphere, regarding which Snellgrove comments:

As a pan-Indian religion Buddhism was now ready to adopt any religious practices whatsoever, so long as they might be used as a means towards the perfection of enlightenment, and since the decision about what was usable or not depended upon no recognized authority, but upon those practicing the religion, there was no form of Indian religious practice that did not now have some Buddhist equivalent.⁶

3. Obermiller, *History of Buddhism by Bu-ston*, 183.

4. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 38.

5. Obermiller, *History of Buddhism by Bu-ston*, 183.

6. Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 70.

This opened the way for a new religious trend to make itself felt throughout Hinduism and Buddhism. From about 500 C.E., new texts appear called *tantras*, found in both Hindu and Buddhist versions. The tantric approach is grounded in the following principles outlined by Friedhelm Hardy:

Man lives in a universe which is pervaded by all kinds of forces. Many of them are destructive and threatening, others relate in a more positive manner to his life. What conventional society has on offer as the means of controlling these forces is believed to be limited and restrictive as to the realisation of man's full potential there is, however, a knowledge available which the more adventurous and mature person can draw on and thereby improve that realization radically. But it is esoteric, well guarded by a secret tradition. With the help of this esoteric knowledge it becomes possible to expose oneself to even the most dangerous and powerful of such universal forces and not just survive, but actually control them and absorb them for one's own fulfillment.⁷

Tantra is, in essence, the pursuit of power, whether spiritual or practical. Theologically, in Hinduism, the tantric approach presented "the concrete, ritual means . . . of establishing individually the union of the absolute with the world of phenomena . . . liberation within the world can thus be achieved."⁸ In Mahāyāna Buddhist terms, the complementary poles corresponding to 'absolute' and 'phenomenal' are wisdom (the understanding of emptiness as the absolute or ultimate nature of existence) and compassion (manifesting as the world of appearance).

Regarding the transmission of *tantra* to Tibet, Hardy makes the important point that "the Tibetans adopted Tantric Buddhism not as an already fixed system, but as a still dynamic affair, and they actively continued the conceptualization of the Tantric approach in

7. Friedhelm Hardy, "The Esoteric Traditions and Antinomian Movements," in *The World's Religions*, eds. Sutherland et. al, 650.

8. Ibid., 653.

terms of Mahāyāna thought.”⁹ In the Tibetan language, the word for ‘*tantra*’ (*rgyud*) has the sense of continuity or a chain of things joined together.¹⁰ The literal translation is ‘lineage’ because the teachings contained in the texts are transmitted in a lineage from authentic master to qualified disciple. This understanding is exemplified in the commentary on the title of the *Ambrosia Heart Tantra*, a Tibetan medical text translated by Dr. Yeshi Dhondhen and Jhampa Kelsang. There it is explained that “this tantra has traditionally been an oral teaching and has been passed on through an unbroken lineage of physicians since the time of Buddha Śākyamuni.”¹¹ As will be seen in the comments of Patrul Rinpoché later in this chapter, the concept of lineage and its purity becomes one of the bulwarks of Tibetan Buddhism against the improper and unauthorized use of antinomian tantric practices.

The amalgamation of Mahāyāna doctrine and the tantric approach formed an entirely new vehicle, the Vajra-vehicle (Vajrayāna), which took as its prime symbol the vajra, symbol of the thunderbolt of Indra, the Vedic king of the gods, presider over storms and battle. In Vajrayāna Buddhism, the vajra represents the diamond-hard, indestructible nature of ultimate reality, a state that the practitioner aims to realize. Another name for the tantric approach was Mantrayāna, the Mantra-vehicle. This refers to the primary method by which the devotee connected and identified with the deity, which was through the sound of the

9. Ibid., 654–655.

10. Sarat Chandra Das, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary with Sanskrit Synonyms*, eds. Graham Sandberg and A. William Heyde (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), 318.

11. Yeshi Dhondhen and Jhampa Kelsang, eds., *The Ambrosia Heart Tantra: The Secret Oral Instructions on the Eight Branches of the Science of Tibetan Medicine*, vol. 1, Tibetan Medicine, no. 6 (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1983), vii. The emphasis on lineage in Tibetan Buddhism resonates with a shamanic emphasis on ancestry and genealogy.

mantra or incantation that was identified with the deity. Repeating the *mantra* hundreds and thousands of times, the devotee eventually became one with the power of the deity.

Snellgrove describes this method:

The great gods and goddesses were envisaged conventionally as resembling kings and queens. They were enthroned in the center of a palace, surrounded by an entourage of lesser divinities and controlling the four quarters of the world. Any such particular set of divinities, as envisaged at any particular time, possessed total control over the whole of existence, and the skilled meditator, by calling them forth in his mind, identified himself through the concentrated use of the requisite 'spell' with the central divinity in the heart of the universe. Thus through the medium of his chosen divinity, he himself was temporarily consubstantiated in buddhahood itself.¹²

Incantation and ritual have been an aspect of Buddhist practice from its earliest period. However, it is only in the Mahāyāna and, subsequently, the Vajrayāna development that these methods became a dominant means of attaining the goal of liberation. The ideal spiritual person in the Vajrayāna is the *siddha*, the spiritual adept, the one who "gains power over beings in other spheres of existence, either dominating them, so that they may do one's will, or identifying . . . with them, so that one may enjoy their higher states of existence."¹³ As Snellgrove notes, the success (*siddhi*) that is achieved through the deity-yoga rituals is to be understood as "supramundane or magical power."¹⁴ In his introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, John Powers explains that tantric texts put forward "systems of practice and meditation . . . emphasizing cognitive transformation through visualization, symbols and

12. Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 70.

13. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 130.

14. *Ibid.*

ritual.”¹⁵ The basic principle of tantric transformation can be discerned in the following passage from a Tibetan Bon text:

The notions of external and internal, of vessel and essence, of physical and metaphysical,
are transformed from the nature of the Five Evils into the essence of Wisdom,
and oneself is absorbed into the magical play.
The whole phenomenal world, earth, stones, mountains, rocks, villages,
shrines and dwellings,
are transformed into the Body of Perfect Enjoyment.

The outer vessel of the world is transformed into a temple
and living beings who are the inner essence,
all those who draw breath,
are transformed into the form of gods and goddesses.¹⁶

Vajrayāna combined the traditional monastic form of Buddhism with the tantric tradition that emphasized transformation through ritual. It was this form of Indian Buddhism that took root in the shamanic culture of ancient Tibet in the seventh century C.E., informally via peripatetic tantric Indian yogis as well as formally through state sponsored visits by respected Buddhist monks.

Conflict and Competition

A distinctively Tibetan world-view emerged from the interplay between adopted Buddhist ideals and practices and the pre-Buddhist indigenous shamanic culture. In Tibet, Buddhist authority came to dominate the religious landscape not only in terms of Buddhist monastic ethics, philosophical ideals, and soteriological goals, but also in terms of the magic and ritual that the Tibetan people had always depended upon to keep them safe in a world of

15. John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1995), 219.

16. Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, 173.

capricious and hostile spirits. This preeminence, however, was hard won. During the reign of King Songtsen Gampo (618-650 C.E.) when the Tibetan Empire was a rising force, Buddhism was flourishing in the surrounding regions of Nepal, China, and Central Asia. It is said that two of the King's wives from Nepal and China brought with them Buddhist images and were active in supporting the building of Buddhist temples, including the twelve 'limb-binding' temples that were built to suppress the demons of Tibet.¹⁷ This was the first significant step in the development of Buddhism as a state religion. However, it was not until the reign of Trisong Detsen (ca. 740-798) that Buddhism was fully established as the religion of the Tibetan kings, and the full-scale dissemination of Buddhism as a religious institution began. The inscription set up by King Trisong Detsen to mark the founding of a temple indicates the dissension that he faced over the new religion:

This practice of the Buddhist religion is to be held in affection and in no way for no reason whatsoever is it to be destroyed or abandoned, whether because people say it is bad, that it is not good, or by reason of prognostication or dreams. Whoever, great or small, argues in that way, you are not to act accordingly.¹⁸

In another edict regarding his conversion he stated,

That [Buddhism] was not the old religion. Because it did not accord with the propitiations and rites of the tutelary deities, all suspected it to be no good. They suspected it would harm [me, His Majesty]. They suspected it would threaten governance. They suspected [that it brought about] epidemics and cattle plagues. They suspected it, when famine suddenly fell upon them.¹⁹

17. Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*, 125-126.

18. Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 38. This inscription also points to the use of dream divination in that period.

19. Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 53.

And indeed the rival *bon-po* regarded Trisong Detsen as the worst kind of traitor. The curse of one hermit reads:

King Trhi-song-de-tsen is a foolish fellow.
 His ministers are monstrous rogues.
 Our blazing light is now withdrawn.
 Now is the time of these Buddhist monks.
 The princes have great faith in gold
 And our haloed *Bon* declines.
 May the king be a village beggar
 And his ministers be shepherds!
 May the land of Tibet break into pieces
 And these Buddhist monks lose their law!
 May these nuns bear children
 And these Buddhist priests lead fighting gangs!
 May their monasteries be filled with battle
 And their temples set on fire!
 May the princes sift their own gold
 O may my curse be effective
 And may these books of mine be found by someone worthy!²⁰

The first dissemination of Buddhism continued throughout the regimes of subsequent Tibetan kings reaching its peak under the reign of Relbachen (reigned 815-836 C.E.).²¹ He was the last of the three 'Religious Kings' and his devotion, it is said, was such that he became a monk.²² The royal patronage of Buddhism during the eighth and ninth centuries notwithstanding, the old religion of Tibet held its own. The kings continued to be buried as their forefathers were, according to the ancient pre-Buddhist rites carried out by *bon* priests. In the affairs of state, the presence of Buddhist monks did not affect the shamanic-style

20. Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 107.

21. The period of Buddhist contact and activity associated with the seventh to the ninth centuries is known as the 'first dissemination'; after a period of persecution and political break-up, the revival of Buddhism in the tenth century marks the 'second dissemination'.

22. Songsten Gampo, Trisong Detsen, and Relbachen are known as the three religious kings.

rituals accompanying the conclusion of treaties. For example, the records of treaties concluded between Tibet and China in 727, 782, and 821 C.E. include accounts of the participants smearing their lips with the blood of a sacrificed dog and other animals, along with rituals calling on the sun, moon, and stars as well as a variety of Buddhist and non-Buddhist deities. According to Snellgrove,

The Chinese accounts [of the 821 C.E. treaty] confirm that the principal ceremony was non-Buddhist and accompanied by animal sacrifices. It is, however, made clear that on this occasion the Buddhist participants abstained from smearing their lips with blood and that they afterwards moved into a temporary chapel for Buddhist rites.²³

The competition between Buddhist and *bon-po* played out in the political rivalries and intrigues of court ministers oscillated between periods of compromise and coexistence and periods of persecution on both sides.²⁴ More dramatically, it took the form of rival displays of magic and sorcery. One of the most famous competitions between lama and *bon-po* in Tibetan literature is recorded in the biography of the eleventh century saint Milarepa. It recounts the shaman-like battle of magic between a *bon-po* priest called Naro Bhun Chon and the Buddhist yogi Milarepa (1040-1123 C.E.). In several contests, Milarepa defeats his opponent. The final contest is a race to the top of the snow mountain called Di Se. The text relates that very early in the morning while Milarepa sleeps, the *bon-po* is seen flying through the air on his drum playing a *bon* musical instrument on his way to the peak. Milarepa's students are worried that he might be beaten, but Milarepa, unconcerned, waits until daybreak and proves himself master of the mountain:

23. Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 93.

24. See Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, especially 66-83.

[He] snapped his fingers, donned a cloak for wings, and flew over toward Di Se. In a second he arrived at the summit of the mountain . . . Meanwhile Naro Bhun Chon had reached the neck of the mountain. When he saw the Jetsun [Milarepa] . . . sitting at ease on the summit, he was dumbfounded and fell down from the heights, his riding-drum rolling down the southern slope of Di Se.²⁵

The closing words of Milarepa attribute his victory not to sorcery, but to the strength of his spiritual lineage, devotion to his guru, virtue in observing the moral precepts, and his state of spiritual liberation; all these elements serve to separate the Buddhist from the *bon-po* and to provide the Buddhist soteriological rationale for his miraculous powers.²⁶

Variants of the storied battle between the lama and the shaman/*bon-po* can be found among the present-day Tamang people of Nepal. Tamang society, however, recognizes three ritual specialists: the lama who presides over the death rituals and guides the shadow-soul to a good rebirth, the *lambu* who performs the sacrificial offerings and exorcisms, and the shaman/*bombo* who calls back lost shadow-souls and mediates between humans and spirits while in trance. The stories of the ancient conflict between the lama and the *bombo* are, therefore, not resolved as neatly as in Milarepa's story. In the Tamang version, the lama and the *bombo* were brothers. In their competition the lama was also victorious, but the *bombo*

25. Chang, "The Miracle Contest on Di Se Snow Mountain," in *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, vol. 1, 215-223. In the account of this competition in magic power, Milarepa accuses the *bon-po* of a practice familiar to sorcerers of India and the witches of medieval Europe saying, "I shall not emulate you, the magician who smears drugs on his body in order to deceive others by conjuring up delusive visions." Chang, *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, 218. For a discussion on the 'witch's salve' and its relation to magical flight, see Hans Peter Duerr, *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary Between Wilderness and Civilization* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 1-11.

26. The challenge of the magician and the display of magical power in the service of the Dharma is a theme that also appears in Indian Buddhism. In the *Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*, the magician Bhadra challenges the Buddha to a contest. That account is also concerned to show that the miraculous power of the Buddha is based on his profound insight into the nature of illusion and not on such things as spells or rituals. See Chang, "The Prophecy of the Magician Bhadra's Attainment of Buddhahood," in *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 3-21.

who was banished to the bottom of a lake continued to dance there and managed to throw a spell on the eyes of the lama's daughter. The lama could not cure her, so he was forced to return to the *bombo* and make a deal with him. In addition to some payment for his services, the lama promised the *bombo*, "I will take care of the dead and you will take care of the living."²⁷ In this way, the ritual roles were divided between them. The *bon-po* in the Milarepa story does not convert; he is defeated and leaves accepting his defeat. In the Tamang version, the shaman figure is defeated, but even the victorious lama is shown to be in need of his services. In a sense, the stories show that the indigenous religion was defeated but not eliminated. Indeed, there is evidence that the indigenous world-view continued and continues to emerge in many places, never having entirely disappeared, never having entirely conformed to Buddhist ideals. An Amdo folk song indicates that while the Buddha's teaching and the lamas who propagate it are respected, nevertheless, an older way of life remains to challenge it:

Do not fire the gun, speaks the lama.
The word of the honoured lama, indeed, is true.
But full of wild yaks are the rocky, chequered mountains.
To shoot not even one of them—that will hardly do.²⁸

The competing visions of the world that can be heard in the gentle words of the folk song are more pronounced in the rituals of the Tibetan New Year. There are two festivals that mark the beginning of the year. One is taken from the Chinese calendar and is called the 'King's New Year', the other is an older festival celebrated by villagers at the time of

27. Holmberg, *Order in Paradox*, 218-219.

28. M. Hermanns, *Die Familie der A-mdo Tibeter* (Freiburg, 1959), 336; quoted in F. Sierksma, *Tibet's Terrifying Deities: Sex and aggression in religious acculturation*, trans. Mrs. G. E. Van Baaren-Pape (The Hague: Mouton & Co. 1966), 15.

harvest called the 'Farmer's New Year'. A distinctive feature of the older festival is the 'scapegoat' ceremony. There are many varieties of the ransom figure onto which the evil, sickness, or impending harm is transferred. It can be a person, an effigy, or an animal. Animals such as a sheep, goat, horse, or yak rescued from a butcher are especially used as ransom for illness. According to Nebesky-Wojkowitz' description, the New Year scapegoat is a lay person who takes on the role of ransomer. Dressed in rough clothes, conical hat, and face painted half white and half black, he takes upon himself all the misfortune of the coming year, especially the harmful forces of the "brotherhood of the seven 'gong po demons'".²⁹ The Ransom King goes about receiving donations from all the houses that he visits and according to L. Austine Waddell's account, "He helps himself to what he wants. . . shaking a black yak's tail over the heads of the people, who thus transfer to him their ill-luck."³⁰ At the end of that time, he is confronted by a monk playing the part of the supreme spiritual personage of Tibet, the Dalai Lama. In this drama, the Ransom King disparages the 'Dalai Lama' and voices his denial of the entire religion of the Buddha: "What we perceive through the five sources (the five senses) is no illusion. All you teach is untrue."³¹ The fake Dalai Lama debates with him, but eventually the winner is chosen by the throw of the dice. Three throws of fixed dice inevitably turn up the 'winning' number for the lama and the losing number for his opponent. The scapegoat is then symbolically chased out of the city in

29. René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 508.

30. L. Austine Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism With Its Mystic Cults, Symbolism and Mythology, and Its Relation to Indian Buddhism*, Dover ed. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972), 512.

31. Ibid.

a procession among which are eight masked priests holding choppers and skull-cups—their task is to drive the ransomer forward and see that he does not return to the city.³² He is a demon and is driven off to the abode of the demons.³³ Although such a rite has much in common with rituals of rebellion and the topsy-turvy world of carnival in many cultures, in this instance, it is a sharp reminder of the tensions that remain between a world-view that considers the world of the senses to be of highest value and one that does not.³⁴

The ghoulish and horrific deities for which Tibetan Buddhism is famous also bear witness to the powerful forces of indigenous Tibet that were conquered in the early days of Buddhist interaction by the superior magic of the eighth century yogi Padmasambhava.³⁵ He is said to have defeated them and bound them by oath to become Protectors of the Dharma; nevertheless, they are ever to be treated with caution and are continually reminded of their defeat and their sworn promises in words such as the following:

Hung! Before, in the past, the Acharya, Padmasambhava,
Bound all you gods and spirits to the oath.
Do not waiver from your previous vow.
Partake of this ornamental torma [offering cake] and,
Accomplish through your miraculous activities, whatever we yogins request
of you.

32. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, 509.

33. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 217.

34. In her study of Sherpa rituals, Sherry Ortner describes the contemporary Sherpa version of the scapegoat ritual and discusses the antagonism between the Buddhist religion and lay life. She concludes that rituals in Sherpa life function as “primary arenas for symbolically confronting that [Buddhist] ideology, and rendering it more compatible with lay life.” Sherry B. Ortner, *Sherpas Through Their Rituals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 162.

35. Padmasambhava was a legendary eighth century tantric yogi known for his skill in magic. He is said to have come from the region of Swat and was invited to the court of King Trisong Detsen to prove the power of Buddhism and help defeat the *bon* magicians. See Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 78.

Hung! The Acharya, Padmasambhava,
 Bound you, the twelve Tenma sisters, to your oath.
 Do not transgress his command and your vow.
 Partake of this ornamental Torma,
 And accomplish the [miraculous] activities that are asked of you.³⁶

In examining the make-up of the Tibetan world-view, a number of strands of influence can be identified: the Buddhist goal of enlightenment; the ancient Indian world-view of *karma* and rebirth, tantric rituals of transformation, and elements of the shamanic complex that predated Buddhism. The distinctive religious dynamic of Tibet emerged from the particular way in which the shamanic elements were incorporated into the elite religion of the monks and, conversely, the way in which the popular folk religion absorbed the teachings of Buddhism. In his comprehensive work on Tibetan societies, Samuel organizes these influences into three types of overlapping religious activity found among Tibetans: activity oriented towards the ultimate Buddhist goal of Enlightenment which he calls the 'Bodhi Orientation'; activity aimed at securing a good rebirth, the 'Karma Orientation'; and activity specifically directed towards obtaining good fortune or defending against misfortune in this life, the 'Pragmatic Orientation'.³⁷ These three can be said to sum up the Tibetan world-view in which Buddhist ethics and soteriological aims, tantric rituals, and shamanic methods of dealing with spirits have been inseparably interwoven. The following pages will examine the Tibetan approach to dream as it relates to each of Samuel's categories.

36. The Ched-do and Tenma offering verses from *The General Sadhana Format for Meditational Deity Generation*, a Nyingma practice text in the possession of the author.

37. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 26.

Dream and the Bodhi Orientation

In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions, the phenomenal world is likened to a dream in its fleeting, changeable, insubstantial nature—in other words, not ultimately valuable or reliable. Dreams themselves, however, as has been shown, were regarded throughout early Buddhist history as of practical value in that they can measure spiritual growth or foretell events of the future. In Tibet, an entirely new approach to dream developed in the form of dream yoga. This method of dealing with dream is neither concerned with the prophetic aspect nor the philosophic aspect. It is a method of conscious engagement with the dream process such that the dreamer comes to exercise power over the dream perceptions, transforming them at will. The dreamer then learns to recognize the perceptions of all mental states as dream-like and insubstantial, subject to transformation, including the perceptions of the passage from life to death. This practice is part of a set of six yogic practices most closely linked with the teachings of the Indian yogin Tilopā, his student Nāropa, and, concerning dream, especially with Nāropa's wife Niguma.³⁸ Tilopā advises Nāropa in these words:

This rope of the three worlds, Samsāra,
Should be cut, Nāropa. Look
Into the mirror of your mind, the place of dreams,
The mysterious home of the Dākinī.³⁹

38. The six yogic practices are Heat Yoga, Illusory-Body Yoga, Dream Yoga, Bardo (Between-state) Yoga, Light Yoga, and Transformation (Transference of consciousness) Yoga. Explanations for all these practices can be found in Chang Chen Chi, trans., *Esoteric Teachings of the Tibetan Tantra*, ed. C. A. Muses (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1982).

39. Herbert Guenther, trans., *The Life and Teaching of Nāropa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 67.

Matthew Kapstein recounts the story of the meeting between the yogini Niguma and one of her most famous students, Khyung-po Naljor. In the story, Khyung-po is told to seek out Niguma as one who has “come face to face with the Buddha himself.”⁴⁰ She appears to him in a vision, floating in the sky “wearing ornaments of bone, holding a *khaṭvāṅga* [a ritual lance or trident piercing a skull] and *kapāla* [skull-cup] . . .”⁴¹ Khyung-po pays obeisance to her and requests esoteric teaching. At first she is threatening: “How do you know,” she said, “that I’m no cannibalistic witch? When my circle arrives, you’ll be our dinner!”⁴² Later when her circle of *dākinīs* does arrive, she accepts him, giving him the initiation into the practices of the Illusory-Body and Dream yoga. Khyung-po is then spirited away to a golden mountain where he participates in the *ōākinās’* feast and witnesses their dancing. Not knowing where he is, Khyung-po questions Niguma: “Where in India is such a mountain as this to be found, or is this too the *dākinī’s* magical creation?” Her answer is her quintessential instruction on the fruits of dream yoga:

These varied thoughts, full of passion and hate,
 Stirring saṃsāra’s ocean,
 Are insubstantial; when you realize that
 All’s a golden isle, my son.
 As for apparitional dharmas,
 Like apparition contemplate them to be;
 You’ll become an apparitional Buddha—
 By the power of devotion it will come to be.

40. *Shangs-pa gser-'phreng*, *Khyung-po rnal-'byor-pa'i rnam-thar*, folios 15b-17a; quoted in Matthew Kapstein, “The Illusion of Spiritual Progress: Remarks on Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Soteriology,” in *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, eds. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Robert M. Gimello, Studies in East Asian Buddhism, no. 7 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 195.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 196.

And she added, “Now I will bless you. Grasp your dreams!” having grasped my dreams, I journeyed to the land of gods and demigods, where a gigantic demigod just swallowed me whole. The *ḍākinī* appeared in space and said, “Do not try to wake up, my son.” It was at that time that she taught me the six doctrines in their entirety.⁴³

The passage above privileges the Vajrayāna emphasis on devotion and the blessing of the guru in the path to liberation. It also gives a paradigmatic example of the dream yoga practice in which the practitioner is instructed to first recognize or ‘grasp’ the dream as dream. Then one is to practice transforming the dream in a variety of ways— turning one’s own body into anything one wishes, such as a bird, tiger, lion, rock, forest, king, deity, or the things of the dream into something else, such as an animal into a man, water into fire, one into many, or vice versa. In this state, the dreamer should also engage in the supernormal powers such as “shooting fire from the upper body or water from the lower body, trampling on the sun and the moon, or multiplying his body into millions and billions to fill the entire cosmos.”⁴⁴ Finally, the dreamer is instructed to practise journeying to the cosmological heavens, “instantaneously, like a shooting star,”⁴⁵ or to the paradise of a particular Buddha, where one can make offerings to the Buddha and receive teachings. In Khyung-po’s case, the blessing of the guru engenders his ability to “grasp” the dream; he travels to the heaven worlds and is swallowed by a demigod. With the encouragement of Niguma to remain dreaming, he receives the esoteric instructions he seeks while in the belly of the demigod.

It is not difficult to relate this Buddhist account of the yogi’s travels in a dream state to accounts of the shaman’s soul travel to other worlds, and to the shamanic idea of dream as

43. Ibid.

44. Chang, *Teachings of Tibetan Yoga*, 92.

45. Ibid., 93.

the activity of the soul separated from the body. In his discussion on dream yoga, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama explains that in the Vajrayāna understanding, this ability is the result of a “special dream state” in which the person has created a “special dream body” that is capable of dissociation from the gross physical body. He further notes a difference between ordinary dreams that take place “within the body” and those that constitute the external activity of the subtle or dream body.⁴⁶

The subtle self does not manifest in all dreams, only in a special dream in which one has a special dream body that separates from the gross body. That’s one occasion when the subtle body and the subtle self manifest. Another occasion is during the *bardo* or intermediate period between two lives.⁴⁷

The goal of dream yoga, however, is not attained by perfecting the magical abilities of the dream body. The practitioner is enjoined to abandon all conceptualization and enter into what is called the ‘clear light’, “blissful radiance united with non-conceptual thought.”⁴⁸ The clear light experience beyond waking or dream states is described by the eighteenth century Nyingmapa yogin Lama Shabkar:

Completely at rest in the natural state of mind—empty, luminous, without taking things as real—I sang this song . . .

Without a center, without a border,
The luminous expanse of awareness that encompasses all—
This vivid, bright vastness:
Natural, primordial presence.

Without an inside, without an outside,

46. Francisco J. Varela, ed., *Sleeping, Dreaming and Dying: An Exploration of Consciousness with the Dalai Lama* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997), 38-39.

47. *Ibid.*, 125.

48. Glenn Mullin, ed. and trans., *Selected Works of the Dalai Lama II: Tantric Yogas of Sister Niguma* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1987), 139.

Awareness arisen of itself, wide as the sky,

.....
 Within that birthless, wide-open expanse of space,
 Phenomena appear – like rainbows, utterly transparent.
 Pure and impure realms, Buddhas and sentient beings,
 Are seen, brilliant and distinct.

.....
 Having seen this for myself, I was ready to sit among the glorious sky-like
 yogins.⁴⁹

Practitioners are frequently instructed to regard the universe as a dream or illusion especially in the teaching of the older schools of Tibetan Buddhism such as the Nyingma and the Kargyu.⁵⁰ The great nineteenth century Kargyu teacher Jamgon Kongtrul advises, “In postmeditation practice, be a child of illusion.”⁵¹ In this context, the idea of dream or illusion should not be understood as existing in opposition to reality, nor as another form of reality. According to Nyingma and Kargyu teaching, appearances of any type represent manifestations of mind. They are subject to the will of those who have realized and penetrated their utterly illusory and insubstantial nature. This view is in line with the Mahāyāna tradition set out in the *Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra* where the Buddha explains to the magician Bhadra his ability to miraculously multiply himself:

If one knows that all dharmas [constituents of existence]
 Are like magic and illusions,
 He is able to produce magically
 The bodies of ten billion Buddhas

49. Ricard, *The Life of Shabkar*, 174-175.

50. The four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism are Nyingma, Kargyu, Sakya, and Gelugpa. The first two align themselves with the earlier dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth and ninth centuries, and the latter two are associated with later reform movements.

51. Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Great Path of Awakening: A Commentary on the Mahayana Teaching of the Seven Points of Mind Training*, trans. Ken McLeod (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), 12.

And deliver beings in millions of lands,
Just as by [ordinary] magic Bhadra can conjure up
Various things out of nothing.⁵²

Clearly from within the Buddhist tradition, there is a strong link between the miraculous power of the yogi, the world of dream consciousness, and the ultimate state of enlightenment.

Dream and the Karma Orientation

The Karma Orientation of Tibetan religious activity is, in Samuel's analysis, concerned with death and rebirth and the accumulation of merit that ensures both good fortune and a good future life. It has been shown in Chapter 4 that in the Buddhist approach to dream, significant and true dreams are intimately related to the merit or demerit of the dreamer. In dream yoga instructions, merit also plays a great part in determining whether or not one can even attain to the preliminary level of recognizing the dream. Broken vows, transgressions against the Dharma or the guru, unwholesome mental states such as greed or lust, and pollution of the body are all hindrances that prevent the recognition of dream and are to be purified.⁵³ Further, the successful practitioner of dream yoga is said to purify all his *karma* from previous births in the six cosmological worlds.⁵⁴ As was discussed earlier, Buddhist tradition holds that actions in a dream, such as killing, are generally involuntary and so do not have the strength to create karmic results. However, actions carried out in

52. Chang, *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 13.

53. Chang, *Teachings of Tibetan Yoga*, 88.

54. Guenther, *Life and Teachings of Nāropa*, 69. The six cosmological worlds are the heaven worlds of the gods, the world of the anti-gods, the human world, the animal world, the world of the hungry ghosts, and the hell worlds.

dream yoga, which are conscious and voluntary, indeed have an effect on *karma* and, therefore, on one's future life. By penetrating the nature of what one takes to be dream, one penetrates the nature of what one takes to be reality. The biography of Nāropa states,

Both Sūtras and Mantra-texts assert that the whole of entitative reality is like a dream. By heeding this the mistaken belief in a Pure Ego is undermined. Moreover, in dreamless sleep one treads the path of death; in dream one passes through the intermediate world between death and (re)birth; and when one awakens one is in the world of concrete patterns. Therefore for undermining the belief in the exclusive reality of what appears during daytime, the fact of dreaming is the most excellent index from among the twelve similes as to the illusory-hallucinatory nature of our world.⁵⁵

In the Vajrayāna view, the whole process of death and rebirth can be understood as analogous to sleeping, dreaming, and waking.⁵⁶ A dying person experiences eight very distinct stages of dissolution culminating in the 'clear light' experience which, in this context, is called the clear light of death. If a person at that point falls into complete unconsciousness and does not recognize the clear light as the true nature of the mind, in other words, if consciousness does not recognize itself, then the process continues and the person reawakens to experience the hallucinations of the intermediate state between death and rebirth. Finally, the person once again falls asleep into the womb and awakens to a new life. The very same states and stages are said to constitute the transition from waking to sleeping to dreaming states and back to waking, so one can also experience the clear light of sleep that arises just before consciousness enters into the dream state. For the most part, the

55. Ibid., 67-68. "A magic spell, a dream, a gleam before the eyes, a reflection, lightning, an echo, a rainbow, moonlight upon water, cloud-land, dimness before the eyes, fog and apparitions, these are the twelve similes of the phenomenal." Ibid., 63.

56. For more information on the Tibetan Buddhist view of the process of dying, see Sogyal Rinpoché, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, eds. Patrick Gaffney and Andrew Harvey (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992). On the relationship between the states of waking, sleeping, and dreaming and the process of death and rebirth, see Varela, *Sleeping, Dreaming and Dying*, 111-130.

stages pass by quickly and without any conscious recognition on the part of the ordinary person, but the yogin who learns how to fall asleep and dream consciously is also practising to die and re-awaken to a new birth consciously. Dream, as has always been maintained in Buddhism, is the best simile or metaphor for the fleeting, impermanent, illusory nature of ordinary reality. In the Tibetan development of dream yoga, however, the metaphor itself becomes the method by which one can directly experience its meaning. It is this quality that sets dream apart in Nāropa's twelve similes of ordinary reality.

Dream and the Pragmatic Orientation

How to create prosperity, health, and peace of mind for a particular group? How to ensure that the rain falls in the rainy season and the sun shines when it should? How to defend against the dangers of the unseen spirit world, and how to prevent premature death? These pragmatic concerns are the business of religious specialists in shamanic cultures around the world. In Tibet, they constitute what Samuel calls the "folk religion." However, as he points out, in contrast with Theravāda communities where "... magical and shamanic operations [form] an only partially acknowledged fringe to Buddhist practice, in Tibet they are an integral and fully recognized part of it."⁵⁷ Herein lies a major source of tension between Buddhism and the shamanic presence in Tibetan culture. Where the shamanic ritualists are kept distinct, as in Theravāda countries, the Buddhist monks can easily maintain their perceived spiritual superiority and the superiority of the Buddhist soteriological way. In Tibet, where the Buddhist lamas have taken over the role of the shamans as ritual experts engaged in prolonging life, defeating demons, and guiding the spirits of the dead, there is concern that these worldly activities not demean or devalue the 'superior' aim of Buddhist

57. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 31.

practice. The lama is expected by the community to exhibit his or her mastery over supernatural forces. At the same time, he must take care not to be identified simply as a superior shaman. The validation for his power must be based on Buddhist ethical and soteriological concerns; otherwise, there is no real basis for claiming spiritual superiority. This concern is evident in one of the most widely revered texts of Tibetan Buddhism, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, written in the nineteenth century by Patrul Rinpoché. Throughout the text, Patrul Rinpoché castigates so-called lamas and ritual practitioners who perform the rituals without any true understanding of the Buddhist path. Here is what he has to say about their healing methods:

They work themselves into a furious display of rage, staring with hate-filled eyes as large as saucers, clenching their fists, biting their lower lips, lashing out with blows and grabbing the invalid so hard that they tear the clothes off his back. They call this subduing the spirits, but to practice Dharma like that is totally mistaken.⁵⁸

Patrul Rinpoché is not impressed with supernormal powers. They are not the special province of only Buddhist priests:

Even someone who can fly like a bird, travel under the earth like a mouse, pass through rocks unimpeded, leave imprints of his hands and feet on rocks, someone who has unlimited clairvoyance and can perform all kinds of miracles—if such a person has no bodhichitta [the mind of Enlightenment, the wish to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all beings], he can only be a tirthika [non-Buddhist yogi] or possessed by some powerful demon.⁵⁹

Patrul Rinpoché's words show that for him the Buddhist practitioner is set apart from other wonder workers by virtue of the *bodhi* mind, the mind that is oriented towards the ultimate soteriological goal of Buddhahood. Samuel proposes that "lamas in Tibet function as

58. Patrul Rinpoché, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 302.

59. Ibid., 257.

shamans, and they do so through the techniques and practices of Vajrayāna Buddhism.”⁶⁰ It is important to note, however, that the lama is *not* a shaman and that Buddhist authorities vigorously defend themselves against the charge of being shamans, even civilized ones.

Again, Patrul Rinpoché writes:

Nowadays householders, announcing that they are going to protect themselves and their flocks from disease for the year, call in some lamas and their disciples—none of whom have received the necessary empowerment or oral transmission, nor practiced the basic recitation—to open up the mandala of some wrathful deity. Without going through the generation and perfection phases, they goggle with eyes like saucers and whip themselves into an overwhelming fury directed at an effigy made of dough. . . .

Padampa Sangye says: They build a Secret Mantra mandala in the village goat-pen and claim it is an antidote!

Practices of this sort poison the Secret Mantrayana and transform it into the practices of the Bönpos.⁶¹

It should be noted that what is at issue here is not the ritual but the qualifications of the ritualist. Patrul Rinpoché is describing a Buddhist tantric ritual, but the performing priest is said to be devoid of either outer or inner authenticity. He has not received the initiation into the *maṇḍala* and, therefore, he has no permission from the Buddhist hierarchy to perform the ritual, neither has he performed the inner purification necessary for the efficacy of the ritual. It is possible to see in this scenario the actions of corrupt lamas or the appropriation of Buddhist tantric techniques by village shamans who use them for their own livelihood claiming the established authority and power of Buddhism. In softer words but exhibiting the same concern for the deterioration of tantric practice through its use by uneducated and

60. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 9.

61. Patrul Rinpoché, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 190. In this context, “Bönpos” refer to village sorcerers and not the organized religion of Bon.

unauthorized practitioners, the Vajrakilaya wrathful deity practice text (*sādhana*) from the Longchen Nyingthig cycle ends with the colophon:

This manner of practice . . . is exactly as Chagmed Rinpoche wrote it. . . . envisioning that persons unskilled in *sadhana*, such as village *ngakpas* [spell-masters], may mistakenly assemble the practice . . .⁶²

In response to the question, “what makes a lama different from a shaman?” Tibetan lamas provided various answers. One lama commented that the difference lay in the source of refuge—the shaman takes refuge in worldly deities whereas the lama takes refuge in the Triple Gem, The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Another lama pointed out that if, for example, a lama and a shaman both have the power to kill a bird by magic, the lama has the further power to revive the dead bird or to liberate the consciousness. He also expressed the view that, in general, Buddhist rituals aim to pacify the spirits whereas the shaman violently subjugates or dominates them. This feeling is reflected in the contemporary life story of one of Tibet’s most famous weather controllers Ngagpa Yeshe Dorje Rinpoché. In 1959, having fled Tibet, he spent nine years in Darjeeling “making and stopping the rain and hail.”⁶³ During that time he tells of the jealousy that he aroused in the local ritualists of Darjeeling who were “uneasy that a Tibetan lama was doing what they should have been doing.” And he describes the ritual of a local non-Buddhist priest:

The priest was half naked, sitting on the ground. His wife was also almost naked. On one side of her head her hair was braided; on the other, her hair hung loose. Their faces were painted red on one side and black on the other.

62. *The Daily Practice of the Secret Attainment of the Unsurpassed Extremely Secret Vajrakilaya called “The Essence of the Play of Concerned Activity,”* revealed by Tertön Ratna Lingpa, distributed by Mirror of Wisdom, Greenbrae, Calif., 2000, 49. Practice text in the possession of the writer.

63. Marsha Woolf and Karen Blanc, *The Rainmaker: The Life Story of Venerable Ngagpa Yeshe Dorje Rinpoche*, with a foreword by His Holiness The Dalai Lama and an afterword by Robert A. F. Thurman (Boston: Sigo Press, 1994), 49.

The woman approached her husband carrying a rooster and a knife in her hands. While she moved around him, the priest continued performing rituals, writhing on the ground and motioning. The priest had a fire burning in front of him. After shouting and hooting for a while, she cut the rooster and killed it. She then drank some blood and offered some to the priest. This is how they performed the hail rites.⁶⁴

Yeshe Dorje considered this to be a “bizarre ritual,” but he acknowledged that it was a big success and blamed his subsequent poor health on the terrible climate that ensued. In competition with this same local priest, and being angered at the situation, Yeshe Dorje revealed his power. He says,

One day, in a sudden fury, I decided to do something. I lifted up my *shabten* [ritual worship] cup and, evoking the deities, called out the name of this priest and said, “You want this: you have it!” I visualized throwing the cup to the priest. Sadly, there was a thunder and hailstorm a few moments later. Heavy hail fell near the house of the priest. His wife lay unconscious, in shock for several hours, due to the surprise of the storm. There was loud thunder and lightening, as if pieces of meteorites were landing. The priest’s house was flooded, carrying out his belongings, while nothing happened to the other houses.⁶⁵

In such ways, both past and present Buddhist authorities draw important distinctions between themselves and other ritual specialists and maintain the superiority of the Buddha Dharma.

In the practical day-to-day life of a shamanic culture, the rituals of divination are among the most called upon. In her analysis of Siberian and Inner Asian shamanic séances, Anna Siikala notes that the séance frequently ends with a period of interaction between the shaman and the audience when the shaman answers questions and gives further instructions

64. Ibid., 50-51.

65. Ibid., 51.

on propitiations to be made.⁶⁶ At the end of the Siberian Evenk séance documented by Anisimov,

The shaman, at the request of those present, began to divine by means of his rattle and a reindeer scapula. The clansmen, in turn, set forth their desires. The shaman threw his rattle up in the air and, from the way it fell, determined whether or not the desire would be fulfilled. Then he took the shoulder blade of the sacrificed reindeer, laid hot coals on it, blew on them, and predicted according to the direction and character of the cracks in the bone what awaited his clansmen in the future.⁶⁷

As in those cultures, divination and omenology are an inseparable part of ordinary traditional Tibetan life, and although there are some lay people who would be recognized as having expertise in this area, Buddhist lamas are generally the ones called upon to perform what is called *mo* (divination). Divination was not specifically prohibited in early Buddhist doctrine, but superstitious concern for lucky and unlucky signs or omens and attachment to rites and rituals for their own sake was discouraged among Buddhist monastics. Those who engaged in such practices were generally non-Buddhist ritual specialists regarded by the *sangha* as spiritually inferior to the monks and nuns who kept themselves apart from such worldly concerns. The involvement of Buddhist monks and lamas in practices of divination is, therefore, not without tension. The four Tibetan lamas who contributed to Robert B. Ekvall's study *Religious Observances in Tibet* were divided in their interpretation:

There were much discussion and some disagreement among all four lama collaborators as to what was permissible or proper and what was not. They cited lamas who would divine even for projects of violence and killing, as in the case of blood-feud reprisals, and others who would divine only when the proposed action could be shown to lead to increased religious observance.

66. Anna-Leena Siikala, "Siberian and Inner Asian Shamanism," in *Studies on Shamanism*, by Siikala and Hoppál, 12.

67. A. F. Anisimov, "The Shaman's Tent of the Evenks and the Origin of the Shamanistic Rite," in *Studies in Siberian Shamanism*, ed. Michael, 105.

But it was generally agreed that a lama was under considerable pressure, both from his own sense of obligation and from public opinion, to divine for anyone who requested it.⁶⁸

The injunction not to refuse requests for divination was also confirmed in my research by a Nyingmapa Khenpo who commented that when his abbot sent him to teach in the West, he was told that he should fulfill all that was requested of him, even requests to perform divination (*mo*), although he was previously quite unfamiliar with such practices.⁶⁹

Within the Tibetan corpus of religious observances such as prostrations, circumambulation, and making offerings, divination occupies an ambiguous and liminal position, “neither *enjoined* nor *prohibited*”⁷⁰ by Buddhist doctrine. Ekvall notes that among Tibetan Buddhist authorities, while there is unanimous agreement that certain other religious practices and observances are “religious,” “there is wide divergence of opinion about divination.”⁷¹ He outlines the following range of practices that can be subsumed under the general heading of “divination.” Prognostications can be made by means of rosary beads, dice, arrows, boot-straps, drums, stones (either skipping them over a lake or throwing them), pebbles, animal scapulas, religious books, butter-lamps, animal entrails, astrology, songs, casting lots, clairvoyant pronouncements, interpretation of omens (*tendrel*), manner of breathing, smoke, phrases, the cries of living creatures, especially ravens and crows, movement of the eyes, humming in the ears, sneezing, pronouncements by oracles and the

68. Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet*, 276, n. 29.

69. Personal communication from Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso Rinpoché, senior professor of Buddhist philosophy from Ngagyur Nyingma Institute located in Byla Kuppe, South India.

70. Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet*, 256.

71. *Ibid.*

god-possessed, and dreams.⁷² Of this great variety, which is not exhaustive but representative, there are many types, such as divination performed by means of the drum, scapular, entrails of animals, the arrow, and by dream, that can be recognized as belonging to the shamanic complexes of pre-Buddhist Tibet and the related cultures of Central Asia and Siberia. Within the context of Tibetan Buddhism, these practices are more or less sanctioned by religious authorities—those practices that have closer ties to earlier Buddhist practice, such as clairvoyant perception and dream interpretation, more so than those such as scapula, drum, or entrail divination that are identified with specifically shamanic complexes. According to the lamas questioned by Ekvall, among all forms of divination, a dream sign is “the most trustworthy of all the observances and gives the most exact answers.”⁷³

This statement reported by Ekvall is supported by the contribution that dream signs have made towards the controversial decision made by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama to ban the worship of a certain contentious spirit called Dorje Shugden.⁷⁴ The Dalai Lama reported a series of dreams beginning from the time that he first came into direct contact with the spirit through the mediumship of an oracle. At that time, he had a very auspicious dream of his teacher dressed in yellow robes pouring out scoops of clarified butter with a golden ladle and surrounded by yellow flowers. Later, after the state oracle indicated to him the negative consequences of worshipping the spirit, he remembered that the dream also included the presence of many yaks, a symbol of communal discord. His own meditation, prayers, and

72. Ibid., 262-273.

73. Ibid., 272.

74. The Dalai Lama's dreams recounted here are reported in an audiotaped interview with freelance journalists Andrew Brown, Madeline Bunting, and Mary Finnigan. Audiotape in the possession of the writer.

divination support the instruction of the state oracle. It is important to note that the success of the divination is very much bound to the personal character and dedication of the Dalai Lama. He recounts that he questioned a senior and very respected master who was unaware as to the nature of his divination, saying “what do you think about my divination—will it be very reliable or not?” The old master answered, “Generally the Dalai Lama’s divination should be very reliable particularly this time because the preparation including meditation and prayer has been carried out with so much care.” With this confidence, the Dalai Lama presented three options for divination: (1) continue the worship, (2) continue but secretly, and (3) immediately stop. The divination fell on number three, and the Dalai Lama stopped his personal worship of the spirit from that day forward. Subsequently, many other dreams indicated to the Dalai Lama that problems of spiritual dissension and discord are associated with this spirit, including one in which the Dalai Lama wrestles with a huge four-armed Mahākāla, a deity associated with Shugden. The Dalai Lama wins this battle, breaking two of the four arms of the figure. In another dream, Shugden appears as a small boy beside his bed holding the Dalai Lama’s right hand, but the true nature of the boy is revealed when his nails transform into claws. Then visualizing himself as the deity Hayagriva, the Dalai Lama turns the boy into a small dog and swallows him. Finally, after he extended a public ban on the worship of this spirit, the Dalai Lama’s tutor appeared to him in a dream, bathed in light and pronouncing his endorsement of the restriction.

To summarize, the spread of Buddhism to Tibet met with strong resistance on the part of those who represented the old religion, but royal patronage of the monastic institution

continued to provide a strong base for Buddhist activity.⁷⁵ On an unofficial level, it has been shown that Buddhist yogis entered into competition with *bon* priests with enthusiasm and did not hesitate to display their own brand of magic that was based on the understanding of the nature of dream and illusion.⁷⁶ The use of dream as a method of divination and prognostication was familiar to early Tibetans as it was to Indian Buddhism, and it continued to be a prominent aspect of divination rituals after the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet right up to the present day. The development of dream yoga further established a new role for dream in Tibetan Buddhism in that dreaming became a practice entered into not merely for its prophetic value but for its ability to lead one along the paths of death and deathlessness.

75. Kapstein traces the 'conversion' of Tibet and argues that among the factors contributing to the cultural dominance of Buddhism by the eleventh century were "the association of Buddhism with the old monarchy and its successors, its mastery of literacy and learning in this world and of one's destiny hereafter." Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 17.

76. Eventually, as Kapstein notes, a synthesis prevailed that saw spiritual accomplishment in terms of both ritual mastery and philosophic learning. The guru was to be "endowed with both learning and attainment." Ibid., 19.

CHAPTER 6

TIBETAN CULTURE AND DREAM – II

In the Tibetan view of dream, it is accepted that dreams and the process of dreaming are the result of a confused mind, a mind constituted of karmic habits formed and reinforced by the three mental poisons of attraction or lust, aversion or hatred, and ignorance or delusion. Figure 5 illustrates an extensive classification of dreams from a Tibetan Mahāyāna text entitled “The Meeting of the Father and the Son” using precisely those three categories in co-ordination with the sense organs through which they manifest. In Tibetan literature, however, dreaming is also a method by which one can attain the highest goal of awakening from ignorance and delusion. These two aspects of dream serve to underscore, on the one hand, the Buddhist teaching of non-attachment to any phenomenon whatsoever and, on the other hand, the understanding that by penetrating the nature of ordinary dream, one can penetrate the dream-like nature of ultimate reality. Further, the interrelationship of dream as delusion and dream as path to enlightenment manifests the most profound aspect of Buddhist philosophy, the principle of Dependent Origination and the idea that suffering and ignorance carry within themselves the germ of their own destruction. In his article on Longchenpa’s (1308-1363) discourse on the “meditative states of the bodhisattva,” David Germano reflects on the dynamic represented by dream in Tibetan culture. He indicates that the instructions in the text point to a moment when “the dreams fade away into a continuum of radiant light, a structureless nirvāṇa where all personalized images dissipate into a continual flow.”

However, as he continues, “if we were to thus conclude that dreaming is an inherently distorted process that must be eradicated, we would be left bewildered as to why Tibetans put such great stock in the content of dreams . . .”¹

Sense Organ	Dominated by Lust	Dominated by Hatred	Dominated by Delusion
Sight	one sees oneself enjoying sexual play with a beautiful woman	one sees oneself fighting with an enemy	one sees oneself attacked by a demon and confused with fear
Hearing	one hears singing and music played by a beautiful woman	one hears the sounds of lamentation over a parent's death or the loss of something dear	one hears unintelligible words
Smelling	one dreams of anointing one's body with a fragrant substance	one smells the clinging odour of the carcass of a dog, a man, or a snake	one feels that one has lost one's sense of smell
Tasting	one dreams of hungrily filling oneself with delicious food	one dreams of being ravenously hungry with nothing to eat but tasteless seeds	one feels that one has lost one's sense of taste
Touching	one dreams of embracing the waist of a beautiful woman	one dreams of a blazing copper slab on one's lap	one feels that one has lost one's sense of touch
Imagining	one dreams of enjoying the objects of the five physical senses as though magically produced by a magician	one dreams that along with attendants and followers one is swept away by a flood	one feels intoxicated as with wine

Figure 5. Dream Classification from "The Meeting of the Father and the Son." This chart is adapted from Wayman, "Significance of Dreams," 403.²

1. David Germano, "Food, Clothes, Dreams, and Karmic Propensities" in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 295-299.

2. This classification is a good example of Benjamin Kilborne's argument that dream classification expresses world-view and changes with the cultural context. In this case, the substitution of the three mental afflictions for the three humours in Indian medical literature reflects the specifically psychological Buddhist world-view being presented. See Benjamin Kilborne, "On Classifying Dreams," in *Dreaming: Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations*, ed. Barbara Tedlock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 189-191. The early Pāli literature describes *nirvāṇa* as the destruction of precisely these three afflictions. See F. L. Woodward, trans., *The Book of Kindred Sayings* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993), 170.

In order to examine the relationship between dreaming, delusion, and enlightenment, this chapter will first outline general Tibetan dream theory and then present a selection of various types of dreams and their interpretations found in the oral and written culture of Tibet. Dreams to be examined are those related in medical texts, in folklore, in biography, and those related by contemporary lay and monastic Tibetans. Finally, the Tibetan approach to dream will be examined in terms of the meeting between an indigenous shamanic perspective and the Buddhist soteriological world-view that was imported to Tibet.

Dream Theory

In Tibetan literature, dreams are interpreted according to their association with a complex set of contributing factors, including the time the dream occurred, the frequency of the dream, the health of the person, the mind state or daily life of the person, and the degree to which the mind of the person is dominated by the afflictive emotions. Further, dreams are considered significant only to the degree that they are dreams of clarity as opposed to confused 'karmic' dreams that arise from psychological imprints or latent predispositions resulting from previous intentions/actions. As explained by a renowned contemporary master, Namkhai Norbu, in Tibetan dream theory, dreams can be classified broadly into two types: (1) those based on karmic traces (*bag chags*, habitual tendencies created by *karma*) and (2) dreams based on the natural clarity of the mind.³ Karmically influenced dreams are further subdivided into two types: those related to the body/mind condition of the dreamer, and those based on past experiences (whether in this life or in past lives). Dreams of clarity are also related to mental conditions and previous experience, but their quality is vivid and

3. Namkhai Norbu, *Dream Yoga and the Practice of Natural Light*, ed. Michael Katz. (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1992), 37-42.

clear indicating the attenuation of obscuring mental factors. As Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso Rinpoché pointed out, “some *bag chags* [habitual tendencies] are better than others.”⁴ Dreams of clarity are associated with a mind that is relaxed and relatively free of ego-related emotional disturbance, as well as with the even flow of psychic energy through the body. Such dreams are said to occur in the early morning hours just before waking, when sleep is light, and are especially significant if recurring.

For purposes of dream interpretation, Tibetan works frequently divide the night into three watches or periods: “Dreams under karmic influence are said to take place in the first watch; the dreams under the influence of spirits occur in the second watch, while the prophetic dreams arise in the third watch.”⁵ Drawing from the writing of Longdol Lama (b.1719), Norbu Chopel identifies the periods as dusk, midnight, and dawn.⁶ Dreams occurring before midnight are usually ignored as nothing more than confused recollections resulting from the left-over imprints of thoughts and actions (*bag chags*) that, in themselves, were based on a deluded apprehension of reality. To dwell on such dreams is merely to contribute to further confusion and delusion. Dreams occurring in the second period after midnight are thought of as arising due to the influence of external spirits, gods, or other non-human beings. They can be taken as auguring events that could come to pass in the future, but cannot be relied upon. Dreams occurring in the last period, just before waking, indicate the immediate future of the dreamer or of others. If they are frequent and clear, it is

4. Personal communication.

5. Antonella Crescenzi and Fabrizio Torricelli, “Tibetan Literature on Dreams: Materials for a Bibliography,” *Tibet Journal* 22, no.1 (1997): 61.

6. Norbu Chopel, *Folk Culture of Tibet: Superstitions and Other Beliefs* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1983), 91.

considered that the prediction will definitely come to pass. Norbu Chopel echoes Buddhaghosa and the earliest Buddhist theories of dream interpretation when he notes, "Only dreams during this period call for interpretation."⁷ As will be seen, Tibetan dream theory follows the fourfold arrangement of the *Milindapāñhā* discussed in Chapter 4: dreams arising due to pathological disorders, previous experiences, spirit influences, and prophecy.

Medical Dream Theory

In Tibetan medical theory, the mind/body organism is understood to exist as an interrelated complex of material, mental, and psychic dimensions ranging from gross to extremely subtle. The gross pathways of energy in the body such as veins and arteries and their centres of conjunction are thought to have subtle counterparts.⁸ In his commentary to the biography of Yeshe Tsogyal, the enlightened consort of the Indian yogin Padmasambhava, Keith Dowman notes:

The system of nerves, energy flows and their focal points has a parallel in the body's physiology and also in the mental sphere, for the subtle, the gross and the mental inter-relate. The word for psychic nerves (*rtsa, nāḍī*) is the same as for veins and arteries, and for tendons and muscles.⁹

The various operations of the physical senses are also correlated with what Dr. Tenzin Tsephel (of the Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute of The Dalai Lama, Byla Kuppe

7. Ibid.

8. For a detailed discussion on the Tibetan system of nerves and channels, see Tom Dummer, *Tibetan Medicine and Other Holistic Health-Care Systems*, with a foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama (London: Routledge, 1994), 10-13; Terry Clifford, *Tibetan Buddhist Medicine and Psychiatry: The Diamond Healing*, with a foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and an Introduction by Lokesh Chandra (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1990), 68-76.

9. Keith Dowman, *Sky Dancer: The Secret Life and Songs of the Lady Yeshe Tsogyel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 246.

Branch Clinic) described as the “innermost sense or innermost consciousness” (*gnyid nam shes-pa*) situated in the centre of energy at the heart. Because of this innermost sense, the subtle sensory experiences of dreams are displayed according to the flow and distribution of energy in the body.¹⁰

The four medical texts that constitute the fundamental work on which Tibetan medicine is based are known collectively as The *Gyu-zhi*, the *Four Tantras*—that is, the Root Tantra, the Exegetical Tantra, the Instructional Tantra, and the Subsequent Tantra.¹¹ In *Tibetan Buddhist Medicine and Psychiatry*, Terry Clifford discusses the close relationship between Buddhism and the classical Indian system of medicine, Ayurveda. He notes that the golden age of Ayurveda (approximately mid-fourth century B.C.E. to the mid-eighth century C.E.) coincided with the flourishing of Buddhism in India and its dissemination to other countries, and at that time it became as much Buddhist medicine as Hindu medicine.¹² Dream classification and imagery, then, in the Tibetan medical tradition closely mirrors classical Indian texts such as the *Caraka-Saṃhita*.

The information below on the Tibetan medical view of dreams is drawn from chapter seven of the Exegetical Tantra, which appears in a translation by Dr. Yeshe Dhondhen and Jhampa Kelsang entitled *The Ambrosia Heart Tantra*.¹³ Further, the summaries

10. Personal conversation with Dr. Tenzin Tsephel. In Chapter 3, it was noted that the ancient Indians also considered the locus of mind or thought to be in the heart.

11. Gyurme Dorje and Fernand Meyer, eds., *Tibetan Medical Paintings: Illustrations to the Blue Beryl treatise of Sangye Gyamtso (1653-1705)*, prepared from the summaries of Yuri Parfionovitch, with a foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1992), vol. 1, 14-15.

12. Clifford, *Tibetan Buddhist Medicine and Psychiatry*, 38.

13. Dhondhen and Kelsang, *Ambrosia Heart Tantra*, vol. 1, 51-52.

accompanying the paintings that illustrate the *Blue Beryl*, a seventeenth century commentary on the *Gyu-zhi*, have been consulted¹⁴ and the explications of Dr. Tenzin Tsephel also taken into account.¹⁵

The *Gyu-Zhi* identifies seven classes of dreams:

1. dreams that arise due to previous visual experiences
2. dreams that arise due to previous auditory experiences
3. dreams that arise due to previous mental/emotional experiences
4. dreams that arise due to aspirations made in prayer
5. dreams that arise due to desires and other mental conceptions
6. dreams that arise due to future possibilities (prognosticatory)
7. dreams that arise due to the humours (the natural constitution of the person) or due to some ailment or imbalance of the humours¹⁶

Of these, as was the case in earlier Buddhist dream analysis, the only kind that is of significance are prognosticatory dreams. The *Gyu-Zhi* says,

Dreams in the early part of the night may arise due to an obstruction of the vital channel by the mixing phlegm as it begins to digest food. In the middle of the night this channel may be blocked by the digestive bile, and late at

14. Dorje and Meyer, *Tibetan Medical Paintings*, vol. 1, 14-15.

15. Personal interview. It should be noted that what is presented here is a literary view of Tibetan medicine regarding dream. It is important in that it contributes to the holistic Tibetan view of a person, and the images reported participate in the general Tibetan view of dream, but Dr. Tsephel was of the opinion that the use of dream in medical prognosis or diagnosis is not much found in contemporary Tibetan medical practice—although he noted that he paid attention to his own dreams when sick.

16. A similar seven-fold classification is to be found in the Indian medical text, the *Caraka Samhitā*: dreams of objects that have been previously seen, heard, or felt, dreams based on desires, dreams based on imagination, premonitions of future events, and pathological dreams. See Sinha, *Indian Psychology*, vol.1, 315.

night it may be obstructed by the fire-accompanying wind. Thus dreams at these times do not generally produce effects.¹⁷

From the Tibetan medical point of view, then, indigestion is as likely to produce dreams as spirits and ghosts. Recurring dreams that arise towards dawn and are clearly remembered upon awakening are examined to determine the prognosis of recovery or not. Other dreams can assist in the diagnosis of the illness.

Dream Images in the Medical Tantras

In the medical *tantras*, it is the content of prognosticatory dreams that receives the greatest attention. Traditional Tibetan medical diagnosis requires the doctor to conduct a thoroughly holistic investigation encompassing all aspects of the patient's mental and physical behaviour, condition, and external surroundings. The fundamental Buddhist principle of interdependent causality and conditionality—called in Tibetan *tendrel* (auspices, karmic connections)—through which all things originate and are interconnected is the basis for an approach that takes into consideration the total cosmic, psychic, and physical environment. In his study of Tibetan medicine, Dummer emphasizes, “Cause and effect operate on every level—horizontally, vertically and in combination. Nothing is unrelated and should it appear to be, it is only apparently by chance.”¹⁸ Such an understanding of total interrelatedness underlies the instructions in the medical *tantras* dealing with the auspicious or inauspicious signs encountered by the doctor on the road to the patient's house as well as those that are noticed in the immediate vicinity or entrance to the house. It is incumbent on the physician to take note of the auspices (*tendrel*) of decay or recovery that are contributing

17. Dhondhen and Kelsang, *Ambrosia Heart Tantra*, vol.1, 51.

18. Dummer, *Tibetan Medicine*, 75.

factors to the total situation in which diagnosis, assessment, and treatment of the patient's condition takes place. For example, Figure 6 shows the auspicious and inauspicious signs that, according to the *Blue Beryl*, if encountered by the doctor would have a bearing on a patient's condition.¹⁹

Auspicious	Inauspicious
• a basket full of grain, a vessel full of curd, a jar full of ale • fried rice, jam • a burning butter-lamp, a burning fire • flowers being offered in a religious ceremony, an image of a deity • a cow with a calf, woman with a child • an odd numbered gathering of certain animals like dogs or foxes	• An even-numbered gathering of animals like foxes and dogs • an expired butter-lamp • broken clay jar • at the house of the patient, grain or curd being carried out of the house

Figure 6. Signs of Recovery or Decay from the *Blue Beryl* Treatise.

Similarly, significant dreams of the patient function as omens of recovery or decay. Since the Tibetan medical texts follow the Indian classification of 'humours', dream images further indicate what humoral dispositions predominate in the patient. It is believed that a predominance of the wind (air) energy results in images that are black, green, or blue and sensations of flying or riding. Those in whom bile (heat) predominates perceive yellow and red images, and their dream world is sluggish and solid. Phlegmatic (watery) temperaments perceive white images like snow, white flowers, white garments, or pearls and have dreams of physical contact and sensory pleasure. Dreams influenced by phlegm are said to occur late

19. Dorje and Meyer, *Tibetan Medical Paintings*, vol. 1, 49.

in the evening, those by bile in the second part of the night (midnight or later), and those by wind towards dawn.²⁰

According to the *Blue Beryl*, dreams originate “when consciousness is carried in the directional movement of the energy channels and the wind during sleep.”²¹ With regard to energy flow and the types of images arising in dreams, subtle energy moving upward towards the head results in images of ascension and flying that are cosmologically related to the god realms; energy moving through the opthalmic channels results in rapturous sensations; energy moving downward in the body results in images of darkness, fear, and bestiality that are associated with the animal and hell realms (See Illustration 2). Sick people are said to have bad dreams precisely because the pathways of energy flow, especially the central channel at the heart, are blocked by imbalances in the various types of energy circulating in the body.

There are specific dreams that indicate serious illness or, as the text says, that the patient has been “ensnared by the lasso of the Lord of Death.”²² These dreams are listed in the *Blue Beryl*: riding a cat, a monkey, a tiger, a fox, a human corpse; riding naked on a buffalo, horse, pig or a camel;²³ a thorn bush sprouting from the centre of the chest; a bush with a bird’s nest growing from the crown of the head;²⁴ lotuses emerging from the heart;

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., vol 2, 205.

22. Ibid., vol.1, 49.

23. The *Gyu-zhi* elaborates that one is riding in a southerly direction. Dhondhen and Kelsang, *Ambrosia Heart Tantra*, vol.1, 51.

24. The *Gyu-zhi* identifies the bush as a willow tree. Ibid.



2. Origin of Dreams from the *Blue Beryl* Treatise

falling into an abyss; sleeping in a cemetery; breaking one's skull; being surrounded by tormented spirits,²⁵ ravens, or villains; having the skin peeled from one's limbs; re-entering the womb of one's mother; being swept away by water; being swallowed by a giant fish; sinking into a swamp; finding or receiving iron or gold or silver; losing at a business venture or in a quarrel; being prosecuted for tax evasion; taking a bride; sitting naked; having one's hair cut or one's beard shaved.²⁶ Certain dreams as illustrated in Figure 7 indicate the possibility of death from particular illnesses.²⁷

Disease	Indicated by dreams of
Relating to blood or bile	Drinking ale and dancing with dead relatives, being dressed in red, having a red-coloured body or wearing a red garland, and being led away by a laughing woman
Consumption	Riding a buffalo
Tumours	A thorny plant or bamboo or palm tree growing from the heart
Leprosy	Performing a flameless burnt offering, receiving an oil massage, or lotuses growing from the heart
Urinary disease	Drinking oil together with bandits and bad people
Insanity	Dancing with a fierce spirit, or drowning
Epilepsy	Dreams of drunken dancing or being carried off by a dead person

Figure 7. Dreams Related to Specific Diseases from the *Gyu-zhi*

25. The *Gyu-zhi* explains these as spirits of beasts that eat their young, such as scorpions. Ibid.

26. Dorje and Meyer, *Tibetan Medical Paintings*, vol. 2, 205.

27. Ibid.

Auspicious dreams that indicate the return of health and longevity are listed in the *Blue Beryl*: dreams of the gods, such as Brahmā, Indra, Varuṇa or other sacred beings; a great buffalo (leader of the herd); a holy man or a famous person; a great conflagration like a forest fire; a pure lake; being smeared with blood; wearing white garments; raising a Buddhist flag of silk or an umbrella or victory banner; finding or receiving apricots, apples, or walnuts; climbing a mountain, the roof of a house, or a walnut tree; riding a lion, elephant, horse, or bull; swimming across a river, travelling northeast; escaping from danger; defeating an enemy; being praised or worshipped by a deity or one's parents. Further auspicious dreams include one's body being ablaze or fainting and getting up again.²⁸

Popular Dream Imagery

The oral folk tradition contains similarities but also significant divergences from the dream symbols recorded in the *Gyu-Zhi*. Informal conversations with members of the older generation of Tibetans resident in one of the refugee camps of South India,²⁹ most of whom were from the Kham region of eastern Tibet, yielded the examples of auspicious and inauspicious dream symbols shown in Figure 8. In general, Tibetans do not feel the need to have their dreams interpreted as the shared symbolism is very clear. Only in cases of dreams where the symbolism is very enigmatic or the dreams indicate a continued decrease in *lungta* (luck/fortune) would a person seek out ritual interpretation and assistance. Distinct from ordinary auspicious and inauspicious symbols are dreams relating to Dharma practice or the spiritual state of the dreamer. Dreams of saying many mantras, of seeing oneself in Buddhist robes or in the company of monks, as well as dreams of *stūpas* or other images related to the

28. Ibid., vol. 1, 51.

29. Tibetan Refugee Camp Four at Byla Kuppe in the state of Karnataka.

monastery or the deities are all considered very auspicious, whether or not the person is currently engaged in any specific Dharma practice. It was pointed out, however, that to dream of meeting a high lama whom one had never met before indicates the influence of a *gyelpo*, a local deity associated with mountains. Since worldly deities are considered unreliable, this may or may not be a good dream.

Auspicious	Inauspicious
• wearing fine clothes • burning house • fruit • lit candles or butter-lamps • finding or using needles • barley—birth of a boy • wheat—birth of a girl • big guns—birth of a strong boy • pure water • dead body • lots of falling snow • going uphill • flying • crops growing nicely • wearing ornaments • blowing on a conch shell • holding a knife • washing oneself • gathering or loading wood	• ragged clothes • broken down house • spoiled meat • candles or butter-lamps extinguished • hurricane or a big wind blowing the house or tent away • finding gold or silver and giving it away • dirty water • being naked • riding naked on a mule • owls and foxes • going downhill • upper teeth falling out—death of a male in the family • lower teeth falling out—death of a female in the family

Figure 8. Dream Symbols provided by lay Tibetans in Camp Four, Bylakuppe, Karnataka, India.

Based on the list provided by the elderly people of Camp Four, it is clear that the folk images are notably different from the medical textual tradition. They relate, as might be expected, to household life, outdoor life, festivities, and the religious imagery of Buddhism.

To counteract the effects of negative dreams, which, in general, can be interpreted as the result of a decrease in one's merit and wisdom, a lama would prescribe antidotes such as engaging in meritorious activities, meditating on emptiness and performing rituals of purification such as a peaceful fire offering. Although many dream symbols are commonly recognized by Tibetans, ritual dream interpretation (*Zim-lam Tag-pa*) is the province of experts, and the dream to be interpreted is not necessarily dreamt by the person requesting the interpretation. For example, Chophel reports that in order to determine the cause of an illness, a person would give a piece of upper body clothing to a qualified lama who would put it under his pillow and "invite a dream to come to him." The dream vision is said to appear in one, three, or five days depending on the power of the spirit causing the illness.³⁰

One of the great visionaries of the Nyingma school was Migyur Dorje from whose writings come the account of a dream in which he receives instructions for a ritual to interpret and counteract negative dreams and omens. At the age of eleven years, Migyur Dorje dreamed of a three-headed, six-armed wrathful form of Padmasambhava who gave him these instructions:

First, visualize yourself as Wrathful Guru. Second, bring to mind what you need to examine. Third, put frankincense (*spos-dkar*) in your mouth and accumulate this mantra Om Hri Ha Ha He Mai Ni Ya Hung Hung Phet Phet Swaha. Then remove the frankincense from your mouth. Fourth, hold one mouthful of barley in your mouth and chant this mantra Om Bhetali

30. Chophel, *Folk Culture of Tibet*, 90.

Ah Li Ah Shu Shu Trag Trag Ah Hung Phet Swaha, then remove the barley from your mouth. Fifth, place some earth in your mouth and chant this mantra—Om Hri Tana Khyag Pai Teng Thing Pa Tang Ta Hung Hri Phet Swaha, then remove the earth from your mouth. Then visualizing oneself as Wrathful Guru, examine the dream. Whoever the obstacle creators are, imagine that everything dissolves into light and then take that light into your mouth.³¹

The emphasis here on holding things in the mouth, removing things from the mouth, and taking the obstructing spirits into the mouth recalls the account of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's dream in which he swallows the obstructing spirit and also Hemacandra's statement that Mahāvīra's mother saw the fourteen great dreams in succession "entering her mouth" (Chapter 4, n. 58.). The thread of this theme can be followed into the shamanic world that speaks of spirits entering the shaman through the mouth, and it calls attention to the close relationship, even identity, between dream and spirit as Perrin noted among the Guajiro. The passage above also relates to a category of divination called 'request for examination of marks'. Ekvall notes that the difference between this and other forms of divination such as *mo*—divining by means of dice, rosaries, arrows, pebbles, animal bones, and so forth—is in its religious significance. Other forms of divination are regarded as more secular; and further, the 'sign', the omen to be examined is not sought or induced but is 'self-originated', spontaneously arisen.³² Based on dreams such as this, by those who are recognized to be in communication with the deity, new rituals and practices are brought into Tibetan Buddhism.

31. From *Collection des trésors révélés par Gnam-chos Mi-'gyur-rdo-rje*, vols. 1-13 (Paro Kyichu, Bhoutan: Dilgo Khyentsey Rinpoché; Bylakuppe, Mysore, Inde: Pema Norbu Rinpoché; published under the auspices of Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 1983), trans. Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso Rinpoché during a personal interview. Thanks to Chris Fynn for drawing my attention to this passage.

32. Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet*, 268.

Dream in Religious Practice

Dreams are an integral part of the omenology that helps to direct the lives of ordinary lay Tibetans, but ordinary lay people are also very well aware of the Buddhist teaching of emptiness and the ultimate insignificance of dreams. Yet upon examining the role of dream in religious practice, rather than diminishing, it was shown to be of even greater significance in that sphere than in lay life. The crucial role of dream in Tibetan Buddhist religious practice is highlighted in the idea of 'permission' (*rjes gnang*) to evoke a deity. In tantric practice, one aims to actualize in oneself the enlightened and powerful state or nature of the deity through meditation on, and visualization of, the deity with the correct accompanying incantations (*mantras*). This is done through a process called *sādhana* outlined in manuals of instruction also called *sādhana*s. However, before the practitioner can carry out such a practice, he or she must receive permission to do so from the guru by means of an initiation. More importantly, for the initiation to be successful, one must first receive permission from the deity whose permission is given through auspicious dreams. Such an idea is similar to the initiation of shamans that begins with the call of the spirits to the person who is to become a shaman, a call that frequently comes through dreams or visions. With reference to the preparation of a disciple for initiation, Mkhas-grub-rje's (1385-1438 C.E.) survey, "Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras" translated by Lessing and Wayman states:

The sign of his mental purity must arise; and there must be the sign that the Initiation is not opposed by the deity . . . Furthermore, if the permission (*amujñā*) of the gods has been received, one may enter into Initiation and the other acts of the *maṇḍala* even if the [prescribed] amount of service is not completed. That very [permission] substitutes for the measure of service, because that [permission] is paramount.³³

33. Ferdinand Lessing and Alex Wayman, trans., *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, 2d ed., translated from Mkhas-grub-rje's *Rgyud sde spyi'i par gzag pa*

Further elaboration on the method of determining the deity's permission is given by Mkhas-grub-rje's teacher, Tsong-kha-pa, who says:

However, the one who has already done the service consisting in contemplation and muttering [the mantras], must for the performance of Initiation examine his dreams [and decide that] permission has been granted and that it is not opposed . . .³⁴

Examples of auspicious dreams that would indicate the permission of the deity and the readiness of the disciple include dreams of the Triple Gem—the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—one's personal deity, *bodhisattvas*, mountains, elephants, waterfalls, or obtaining riches and clothing.³⁵ Good dreams and prognosticatory dreams also indicate success in the practice itself; conversely, bad dreams indicate the departure of the deity.

With regard to success in ritual practice, the *Vairocanābhisambodhitāntra* states:

One should examine his dreams and assess them as auspicious when in dreams there occur monasteries, parks, superb buildings, the dome of a residence; a sword, wish-granting gem, umbrella, assorted flowers, good women dressed in white, pleasant relatives and children; books, Brahmins, Buddhas, Pratyekabuddhas, disciples of a Jina, eminent bodhisattvas; gain of fruit, seeing a crossing of lakes and oceans; from the sky auspicious entrancing words that mention the desired fruit as arising. And a wise person knows that their reverse is a bad dream.³⁶

According to the commentary on the *Vairocanābhisambodhitāntra*, good omens, including dream omens, are categorized in three ways corresponding to the ancient Vedic cosmic divisions of the celestial region above, the atmospheric region between, and the

rgyas par brjod (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 279.

34. Ibid., 278, n.12.

35. Ibid., 203.

36. Alex Wayman, trans, "Study of the *Vairocanābhisambodhitāntra*," in *The Enlightenment of Vairocana*, Buddhist Tradition Series, ed. Alex Wayman, vol. 18 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), 121.

earthly region below. In this classification, superior omens like the sounds of the *devas* (gods) come from the sky, middling ones such as seeing brahmins come from intermediate space, and inferior omens such as seeing a conch shell on the ground are from the ground or earth.³⁷ Reflecting the Indo-Tibetan love of analysis and classification, those three are further analysed into superior, middling, and inferior. According to Wayman, the passage quoted above would be classified as illustrated in Figure 9.³⁸

One of the most important uses of dream for a religious practitioner is to gauge his or her success in the practice. On this, Keith Dowman quotes the Master Sahajalalita and others:

“What occur in one’s dreams are signs of future practice: a beginner learns in his dream by the strength of the mantra whether or not he will succeed by reciting more.” Thus signs of success are to dream that the gurus of former times are pleased, that women wearing beautiful clothes prophesy and offer garlands and silk and the three white foods, that one wears beautiful white clothing and ornaments, that the sun and moon rise, that music plays, that one meets the deity’s emblem or shrine or person, that one is liberated from terror, and so on; and according to the oral tradition ascribed to Drepa the special signs are that “if one dreams of flowers or *ts’ats’a* [small clay votive images], then death and impediments are averted.”³⁹

37. Ibid., 143.

38. Ibid., 145.

39. Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tara: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 466.

Origin of dream	Level	Dream
Earth	Superior	Sword, wish-granting gem
	Middling	Umbrella, assorted flowers, good women dressed in white, pleasant relatives and children, books, brahmins
	Inferior	Monasteries, parks, superb buildings, the dome of a residence
Intermediate Space	Superior	Auspicious words from space that mention the desired result
	Middling	Seeing the crossing of lakes and oceans
	Inferior	Gain of fruit
Sky	No symbols in the given passage illustrate omens from the sky	

Figure 9. Classification of Dreams from the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhitāntra*.

Tibetan dream manuals also classify dreams according to one's dedication to spiritual practice; the section on "Categories of Dreams in the Course of the Night" from the *Zap-mo gChod-kyi dMigs-'Bum* of Machik Labdronma relates that those who engage in Dharma practice occasionally may dream of falling off cliffs, going up or down very steep inclines, entering narrow passages, seeing fearful sights, or going in frightening directions.⁴⁰ The text notes that such negative dreams are encountered when one aims for liberation in that one's own negative actions emerge as obscurations to hinder the process. However, if a person is doing intensive meditation practice, then signs of

40. James and Tsering Mullens, trans., "Categories of Dreams in the Course of the Night," from the *Zap-mo gChod-kyi dMigs-'Bum*, by Machik Labdronma, unpublished dream manual manuscript, Dharamsala, 1981, 4.

progress are to dream of the following: finding scriptures, flying through the sky, climbing trees, being successful in debate and discourse, beautiful gardens, landscapes and flowering fruit trees, hearing music such as horns, conches, and drums; carrying a sword or gold or gems; being beautifully dressed and adorned. Beyond that, the signs of having actually accomplished the meditation practice are to dream of seeing a region or land or nice house that one has never seen before or being offered fruits, flowers, or nice things to eat and drink by a beautiful boy or girl.⁴¹

The importance of dreams as signs of spiritual progress or signs of permission and authentication of spiritual attainment is supported by the numerous accounts of dreams and visionary experiences contained in the life stories of Tibet's great yogis and saints. One of the most prolific sources of dreams and visions is the *terma* (concealed treasure) tradition associated with the Nyingma school.⁴² In this tradition, it is taught that the ninth-century yogin Padmasambhava concealed various tantric teachings and ritual objects to be revealed at a later time by reincarnations of his spiritually adept disciples. The *terma* can be physical objects hidden in caves and rocks (earth *terma*) or teachings and instructions that appear in the mind (mind *terma*) of the *tertön* (treasure revealer). The instructions and prophecies leading to the discovery of the treasure arise spontaneously in pure visions during the waking state, in meditative experiences, or through dreams of clarity.⁴³ The dream instructions regarding the treasure to be revealed can be extremely detailed and extensive. The great Tertön Padma Ling pa records in his autobiography:

41. Ibid.

42. There is also a concealed treasure tradition associated with the Bon religion.

43. *The Autobiography of Padma Ling pa—The Exquisite Ray* (published by Kunsang Tobgay, 1975) quoted in Tulku Thondup Rinpoché, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*:

When I was staying at Kun zang trag, in a dream three women in Tibetan dress came to me and said, “Padma Ling pa, wake up!” When I suddenly awakened, before I could think, they told me, “In the lower part of this valley, to the east of Thar ling at a place called Cha trag, there is a rocky mountain known as Dor je trag. Before the rocky mountain, there is a river, and on its bank an oak tree. Level with the top of the tree is a flat red rock like a mirror with a vermilion letter *Āh* in the middle of it. At a distance of one dom; [an arm-spread] to the right, the door of the Terma will be found in the design of a swastika. In the center of the swastika there is a hole the size of an egg, invisible from the outside. If you put a wooden dagger in the hole and push upwards the door will open. Inside is a bronze image of Vajrasattva one and a half feet high and a four-inch scroll of the sadhana of Vajrasattva sealed by a letter *Āh*. You should discover them on the tenth of the sheep month [eleventh month of the Tibetan calendar].” And they disappeared.⁴⁴

This account begins as a dream but continues with Padma Ling pa being “awakened” to hear the words of the women. Thus it presents a view in which dreams, waking visions, and ordinary physical waking reality completely interpenetrate one another. From the biography of Ter dag Ling pa (1646-1714) comes the record of a dream that left behind a physical manifestation. In Ter dag Ling pa’s dream, a celestial *dākinī* comes to him in the form of a smiling lady; she removes her ring and places it in his cup. The account continues:

Then she disappeared and he awoke. It wasn’t dawn yet, so he couldn’t see anything, but he felt a scroll of paper in his cup. He left it where it was. At dawn he took it to the window and found that it was the prophetic guide of a Terma. It was a light red scroll of paper with a script printed in very thin letters as if written with a single hair.⁴⁵

To be recognized as a *tertön*, however, one must also have been appointed and prophesied by Padmasambhava as such. As in the theory of ‘permission’ to evoke the

An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, ed. Harold Talbott (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997), 90.

44. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 75-76.

45. Thondup Rinpoché, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, 74.

deity, this legitimization is also determined through the dreams and visionary experiences of the *tertön*. Janet Gyatso describes the process in her study of Jigme Lingpa's (d. 1798) secret autobiographies, in which Jigme Lingpa reports many dreams that he interprets to be signs that he is a *tertön*, and, therefore, that the teachings revealed to him in his visions are authentic *terma*.⁴⁶ The interpretation is not entered into lightly. Tibetan dream theory posits that most dreams are deceptive hallucinations influenced by external spirits or by one's own deluded mind-stream. And as Gyatso points out, Jigme Lingpa struggles with self-doubt over his own visions:

The ones who display the most doubts are the discoverers themselves. . . . As would be expected, they do not indicate doubts about whether a discovery actually took place; rather they worry about the source of their revelation: did it really come from Padmasambhava? Thus does Jigme Lingpa record his fear that his visions might lack the requisite appointment, benediction, and prophecy of Padmasambhava and might have been blessed instead by gods and ghosts, or represent merely the "natural display-energy of clarified channels" or some other kind of "ordinary" meditative experience.⁴⁷

The Question of *Tendrel*

Fundamental to the idea of receiving approval or permission from the deity, and to the idea of authentication of *terma* through dreams is the concept of *tendrel*. Tucci explains it as "the expression of the profound syntony which should put two kindred forces into mutual agreement." In other words, a '*karma* connection' between the

46. Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*, a translation and study of Jigme Lingpa's *Dancing Moon in the Water* and *Däkki's Grand Secret-Talk* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 162-167.

47. *Ibid.*, 162.

practitioner and the spiritual plane to which he or she aims to attain.⁴⁸ An example of this is given in Shabkar's autobiography when he records that the night before taking the initiation of the deity Hayagriva, he dreams that his mother gives him a skull-cup full of beer that he drinks. When he reports his dream to the initiating lama, he is told, "This is a good dream. It indicates that you have a connection that will enable you to accomplish all the guru's pith instructions."⁴⁹

The word *tendrel* is a contraction of *tenpar drelwar gyurwa* (*rtan par 'brel bar gyur ba*)⁵⁰ meaning "dependently and relatedly arisen."⁵¹ It is used both practically and philosophically. Practically, it refers to auspices and omens of all kinds that can be analysed to determine whether a given situation augurs good or ill. Philosophically, it refers to one of the most profound and pervasive Buddhist principles, the principle of interdependent origination (in Sanskrit, *pratītyasamutpāda*) and the twelve-fold manifestation of that principle as the cycle of re-birth and re-death.⁵² The way in which these two meanings are integrated is important for understanding the nature of dream in Tibetan Buddhism. Samuel points to the meaning of *tendrel* as "connections that are not

48. Giuseppe Tucci, *The Theory and Practice of the Maṇḍala*, trans. Alan Houghton Broderick (London: Rider & Company, 1969), 91.

49. Ricard, *The Life of Shabkar*, 44.

50. Das, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 537.

51. Geshe Gedün Lodrö, *Walking Through Walls: A Presentation of Tibetan Meditation*, trans and ed. Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1992), 127. Geshe Lodrö gives *rtan cing 'brel bar 'byung ba* as the long form.

52. The twelve links of the wheel of birth and death are (1) ignorance, (2) karmic formations, (3) consciousness, (4) name and form, (5) the six sense organs, (6) contact, (7) sensation, (8) desire, (9) attachment, (10) becoming, (11) birth, (12) old age and death.

visible on the surface.” In this context, then, as a practical guide for assessing the future, he comments: “Dream events, apparently chance combinations of words in conversation, the behavior of animals and other natural phenomena can all supply *tendrel*.”⁵³ But how can the cries of crows and the multitudes of traditional beliefs to be found in Tibetan folklore be related to the central Buddhist truth of cause and effect? This question was put to a Nyingmapa authority, Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso. He answered that the relationship rests on the all-pervasive nature of the principle of interdependent arising. Because the principle that all phenomena arise interconnectedly applies without exception to every existent, linking them throughout time and space, then what appears to be a random or chance occurrence, can be analysed in terms of its connections. He also commented that although one can create auspicious conditions, omens to be examined or interpreted are understood to be omens because they have occurred spontaneously and without contrivance.⁵⁴ In his work on the history and teaching of the Nyingma School, Dudjom Rinpoché writes, “the twelve modes of dependent origination [*tendrel*] are both outward and inward.”⁵⁵ According to Khenpo Tsewang’s explanations, the outer dependent origination (*tendrel*) refers to the external world of physical elements that arises based on causes and conditions, and the inner dependent origination refers to sentient beings who arise according to the twelve-fold formula.⁵⁶ Based on his interviews with Dezhung Rinpoché, Ekvall gives the following example of how these two relate: a

53. Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 448.

54. Personal communication.

55. Dudjom Rinpoché, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 1, 228.

56. Personal Communication.

bowl of yoghurt offered to someone is a good “outer” *tendrel* (omen), and if that person recognizes it as a good omen, then by virtue of receiving it in that way he brings it into the twelve-fold causation cycle of his life at the link of ‘feeling’ or ‘sensation.’ This connection may then produce other *tendrel* in the future.⁵⁷ With regard to dream, this explains the importance of examining how one ‘feels’ upon awakening from the dream. In general, a good feeling indicates a good omen. The relation of feeling to dream interpretation is also recognized in contemporary shamanic cultures. Marie-Françoise Guédon writing on her experiences with the Dene states:

L’interprétation du rêve ne commence pas par son contenu mais par l’impression qu’il laisse. Lorsque je racontais mes rêves de la nuit, je me faisais questionner autant sur la façon dont le rêve s’était présenté que sur le rêve lui-même. La question la plus importante était toujours: <<Comment te sens-tu maintenant?>>⁵⁸

In the same vein, the Tibetan dream manual of Machik Labdronma concludes:

In sum, dreaming of any beautiful form or tasty food, or pleasant conversation or meeting close friends or doing any good works whatsoever, *and* when upon awakening the mind is joyful and the heart is bounding with happiness, then surely happiness will be the result. (One will have) good fortune, long life, be free of disease and one’s wealth will increase.⁵⁹

It should be noted, however, that the passage above relates to the practical world of health and prosperity. With regard to the religious life, dream interpretation is not so simple. The yogin, Milarepa warns his student: “Some evil dreams appear as good—[But only an expert] sees they presage ill.”⁶⁰

57. Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet*, 254.

58. Marie- Françoise Guédon, “La pratique du rêve,” 81.

59. Mullens, “Categories of Dreams in the Course of the Night,” 4.

60. Chang, *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, vol.1, 235.

Tibetan Attitudes to Dreams

In the Tibetan medical tradition, dreams are accepted as part of a person's entire mental and physical continuum and can indicate past, present, and future states of health or illness. The folklore and popular tradition emphasize dream in its function as an omen or sign of future good or ill fortune. These approaches to dream do not present any conflict except insofar as skill is required to interpret the dream correctly. However, with regard to the dreams of yogis, lamas, and serious tantric practitioners, there is much greater evidence of the tensions related to dream. The worry and doubt expressed by *tertöns* such as Jigme Lingpa reflects a general dichotomy in the Tibetan attitude towards dreams, a dichotomy that has much greater significance for the spiritual adept than for the ordinary person.

Dreams can be a vehicle for the display of a deluded mind, or they can be a vehicle for the transmission of authentic spiritual teachings and lead to the direct perception of the absolute true nature of mind and existence. In the Tibetan context, the tension inherent in this dichotomy is not merely a matter of true and false, significant versus insignificant dreams, nor is it to be entirely understood in terms of elite versus popular views. It is a conflict that relates to the Mahāyāna understanding that *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, suffering and salvation, are not two realities, and to the tantric view that the only way to overcome the afflictive emotions is by means of those same afflictive emotions. The deceptive hallucinations of the dream state, in themselves, reveal the truth of existence to those who recognize appearances as the empty play of their own mental projections—in the words of the *Bardo Thodol*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*,

“Recognition and liberation are simultaneous.”⁶¹ But if one should confuse the hallucination with the truth, then the cycle of birth and death is not broken.

According to Mahāyāna Buddhist belief, the nature of *all* phenomena, gross or subtle, ordinary or sublime, is like a dream—perceived and experienced by the senses, yet utterly insubstantial. At the outset of his autobiography, Jigme Lingpa characterizes all that is to follow as a “great lying projection” and quotes a Perfection of Wisdom *sūtra*:

All phenomena are like a dream, Subhuti. If there were to be some phenomenon beyond the phenomenon of nirvāṇa, even that would be like a dream, like an illusion. Thus have I taught, Subhuti, all phenomena are imperfect, imputed. Although they don’t exist, they appear, like a dream, like an illusion.⁶²

Jigme Lingpa continues, “If this is so, then even more delusive is the dream, whose apparitions, [the products of] residual propensities, are extremely hollow.”⁶³ This denigration of dream in the process of presenting dream as profoundly valuable to spiritual life is common in the writings of Tibetan visionaries. A similar stance is taken by the Fifth Dalai Lama who writes in the opening of his secret autobiography:

As if the illusions of samsara were not enough, this stupid mind of mine is further attracted to ultra-illusory visions . . . Either due to the traces of karmic action left over from my previous existence which now emerge or due to a deception of the Lord of Illusion, I have had various visions which should never have occurred and which ought to be forgotten. But I being small-minded, talkative and unable to keep my fingers at rest, noted them down.⁶⁴

61. Francesca Freemantle and Chögyam Trungpa, trans., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo by Guru Rinpoché according to Karma Lingpa* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1975), 60.

62. Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 16.

63. Ibid.

64. Karmay, *Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama*, 14.

Janet Gyatso makes the important point that although there is social pressure on the writer to appear modest and self-effacing, “the theme of lies, illusion and deception is not only a gloss, gratuitously superimposed, so as not to appear self-congratulatory . . .”⁶⁵ For the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the illusions of *saṃsāra* are subtle and far-reaching, requiring the utmost skill to penetrate. In the *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, the conversation between Milarepa and his student Gampopa presents the dichotomy in even stronger terms. Responding to the request of his student to explain whether his dreams are auspicious or not, Milarepa answers:

My son you have learned the teaching . . .
 You have mastered and stabilized
 The good Samadhi. I have always thought
 That you were wondrous and outstanding.
 But now in your great enthusiasm,
 By your dreams you have been caught.
 Is this due to lack of understanding,
 Or merely a pretense? Have you
 Not read Sutras and many Tantras?
 Dreams are unreal and deceptive, as was taught
 By Buddha himself, in the final truth of Paramita.
 To collect, supply and study them
 Will bring little profit.
 So Buddha used dream as one of the eight parables
 To show the illusory nature of all beings.
 Surely you remember these injunctions?
 And yet, your dreams were marvellous—
 Wondrous omens foretelling things to come.
 I, the Yogi, have mastered the art of dreams,
 And will explain their magic to you.⁶⁶

The philosophy that informs the above statements proposes that dreams, like waking life, are ‘appearances’, arising based on causes and conditions, ultimately empty of any independent or inherent reality; therefore, they are called illusions. However, as

65. Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 16.

66. Chang, *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, vol.1, 231-232.

Gyatso emphasizes, if the illusions of *samsāra* are ultimately true illusions, then there would be no way of awakening from it.⁶⁷ What is called illusion, itself arises based on causes and conditions and is itself empty of any inherent reality. When this nature of emptiness is fully understood and realized as inseparable from the nature of appearance, then all phenomena including dreams are “manifestations of enlightened awareness.”⁶⁸ As a realized yogi, Milarepa indicates his power over the apparent illusions of *samsāra* saying, “I am a yogi who has fully mastered this illusory body. With a full knowledge and direct realization of the essence of all dreams as such, I can, of course, interpret as well as transform them.”⁶⁹ Milarepa is here taking on the shamanic role of the dream-master, but for the Buddhist, as noted above in the writing of Patrul Rinpoché, magic or ritual power is of no ultimate value without the soteriological knowledge of the Dharma, hence Milarepa’s reminder to Gampopa of the teachings of *sūtra* and *tantra* with regard to dream. He then enters into an extensive and detailed interpretation of Gampopa’s twenty-four dreams. Finally, Milarepa ends with a justification for his interpretation, an admonition against becoming attached to illusory dreams, and the necessity of the requisite knowledge to carry out the interpretation:

To prophesy by judging signs correctly
Is a virtue allowed by the Dharma;
But ‘tis harmful to be attached
And fond of dream interpretation,
Thereby incurring ills and hindrances.
Knowing that “dreams” are but illusions,
You can bring them to the Path.

67. Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 199.

68. Ibid.

69. Chang, *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, vol.1, 231.

How can you explain them
 Without thorough knowledge?
 Some evil dreams appear as good—
 [But only an expert] sees they presage ill;
 Only a master of the art
 Can recognize good dreams
 When they take on ominous forms.
 Do not, good priest, attach yourself
 To either good or evil signs!⁷⁰

Thus Milarepa exemplifies Kapstein's statement that "in the Tibetan soteriography, it is essential that the subject's religious authority be authenticated in two traditions [indigenous/shamanic and Buddhist] simultaneously."⁷¹ But this is a tension-filled situation. The shaman's ability to work with the world of the spirits is measured, and his authenticity established, by his practical efficacy relative to the individual demands of the people. The individual practical benefits delivered by the Buddhist lama are subservient to the soteriological aim of universal benefit. Mumford's study of the relations between Gurung and Tibetan in Nepal highlights the fact that the Ghyabrē shaman is willing to consciously modify his death rituals, substituting a bird for the traditional sheep sacrifice in response to a scathing denouncement of animal sacrifice by a visiting high lama.⁷² He is willing to entertain the possibility that blood sacrifice might have a negative effect on the deceased's ability to find the path to the ancestors. However, the lama, for whom the karmic merit/demerit system is supreme, would not be inclined to consider the argument of the shaman that "without an ancestral link between sky and underworld, abundance is

70. Ibid., 235.

71. Kapstein, "Illusion of Spiritual Progress, 198.

72. Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 192.

inconceivable and that the lama's imagined substitutions are unrealistic: mere symbolism which can never become the real offering required in valid gift exchange."⁷³

As has been shown, the world of dream and vision is the primary arena for shamanic activity, whether ritually enacted or manifested in the person of the shaman. Regarding the causes for the contradictory opinions about dreaming in Buddhism, Serinity Young states "underlying these causes is the simple fact that Buddhism is comfortable with such contradictions."⁷⁴ The evidence however is that Buddhism is not comfortable with the contradiction. In shamanic world-views, there is the idea that contradictory values such as good and evil, suffering and joy, are individually necessary and that each holds its integral place in the universe. Buddhism does not hold that good and evil, deception and truth, are contradictions to be maintained simultaneously. According to Mahāyāna teaching, they are dualistic categories that obscure the true nature of 'Ultimate Reality'. A popular verse quoted to me by a lama says 'good is a white cloud, evil is a dark cloud and both hide the sun.' For the lama, the ritual, the dream, the vision, apart from being practically efficacious must also be liberation-oriented and, therefore, disaffirmed as having any ultimate status. There is no contradiction, but there is tension lest the practical employment of dream overshadow the soteriological understanding. Ordinary people have very little conflict with regard to dream since they do not need to resolve this issue, liberation being a long way off, but for the spiritual adept who aims for liberation now, in this life, the tension is great. From its earliest days, Buddhist thought has distinguished between what is of concern to ordinary

73. Ibid., 114.

74. Young, *Dreaming in the Lotus*, 17.

worldlings and what is of concern to the one who aims for perfection. In a story from the Pāli canon, a forest spirit admonishes a monk who is having a bath in a forest pool and enjoying the sweet scent of a lotus saying, “That blossom, child of water, thing not given, thou standest sniffing up the scent of it. This is one class of things that may be stolen. And thee a smell-thief must I call, dear sir.” The poor monk protests that he has not stolen anything, but the deity continues to advise him as to the view of one who has taken on the path of purity:

To him whose character is void of vice,
Whoever maketh quest for what is pure:-
What to the wicked but a hair-tip seems,
To him doth great as any cloud appear.⁷⁵

Similarly, in Tibetan saints’ and yogis’ accounts of dreams, there is an acknowledgement of the tension between the worldly view of dream and the purity of the soteriological understanding that the yogi must maintain.

Tibetan texts on dream theory and imagery are clearly related to mythic Indian prototypes in both medicine and philosophy. However, popular dream imagery from the oral tradition employs more homely themes related to Tibetan pastoral and agrarian life. The mythic tradition emphasizing the hegemony of Buddhism is captured in the dreams of the Fifth Dalai Lama that refer frequently to divine and earthly figures from the seventh to ninth century, the period of the first thrust of Buddhism into Tibet and the first imperial support for Buddhism. His dreams also reflect his position in establishing

75. Mrs. Rhys Davids and F. L. Woodward, trans., *The Book of Kindred Sayings (Saṃyutta Nikāya)* (London: Pali Text society, 1930), 260-261.

Buddhism as a state religion in the seventeenth century.⁷⁶ The philosophic, medical, and popular traditions merge in figures such as Milarepa and Gampopa. For example, Gampopa's dreams include popular auspicious imagery: wearing beautiful clothes and ornaments; medical imagery of colours, in his case, overwhelmingly white; tantric imagery of the skull cup and animal pelt; and Buddhist imagery of a *bodhisattva* seated cross-legged on a lotus seat (See Appendix). Milarepa interprets all these dreams in terms of Gampopa's spiritual progress and eventual success in attaining the Buddhist soteriological goal. In Tibetan Buddhist religious practice, dreams take on the crucial role of providing assurance for a practitioner, that he or she has the approval of and connection with the deity, without which no spiritual practice can be successful. This view is comparable to the shamanic view that the success of a shaman, as shaman, depends entirely on his or her direct connection to and relationship with the helper spirits, a relationship that is manifested in the shaman's dreams and visions. Tensions regarding the role of dream are apparent both internally, within the Buddhist tradition, as well as externally, in the relationship between Buddhism and the shamanic layer of Tibetan culture. However, the Buddhist concept of interdependency and interconnectedness (*tendrel*) as the basis for the arising of phenomena and the shamanic emphasis on the homology and interrelatedness of different worlds coalesce to provide a point of resolution between indigenous beliefs in dream signs and omens as signifying balance or imbalance in the universe and the soteriology of Buddhism that aims for spiritual perfection and liberation.

76. Karmay, *Secret Visions*, 14-32.

SUMMATION AND CLOSING COMMENTS

The illustration that opens this dissertation comes from a cycle of ritual texts and practices related to the deity Karma drag-po (a fierce aspect of the venerated guru Padmasambhava) found in the secret biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama. In one of the numerous dreams and visions recounted in the biography, the Dalai Lama follows a rainbow path to a castle built of human skulls where he encounters Karma drag-po and his consort.¹ In another vision, a large scorpion that is an attribute of the deity devours all the internal parts of the Dalai Lama's body and then emitting flames, it burns away the remaining body parts.² In these and other dreams and visions, the Dalai Lama receives the instructions for the liturgy and ritual objects associated with Karma drag-po and other deities. The question, regarding the illustrated figure posed at the beginning of the study was, "What are we to make of this as a Buddhist dream when its themes are so closely related to shamanic imagery and practices?" The answer can now be stated as follows: in the Tibetan context, what makes this a Buddhist dream is that even while it is understood that its ritual effects take place in the relatively real world, the dream itself and the rituals associated with it are understood to

1. Karmay, *Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama*, 23.

2. Ibid., 24. The Dalai Lama noted that after this dream he was totally recovered from an illness that had been bothering him. As a dream of healing, it can be related to the gruesome shamanic visions of being dismembered or taken apart that indicate the healing of a Siberian shaman.

be ultimately empty and unreal. The Dalai Lama writes that his words “will disappoint those who are led to believe that the desert-mirage is water.”³ What makes it a significant dream, a true dream that the community takes seriously, like the dreams of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama discussed earlier, is that the dream has arisen based on the great merit and devoted religious practice of the dreamer. That aspect, in Buddhaghosa’s words, makes it “extremely true.”

The primary purpose of this study has been to determine the significance of certain contradictory attitudes towards dream present in Tibetan written and oral traditions. I have proposed that the contradiction between the view of dream as spiritually valuable and dream as ultimately illusory can be understood in terms of the continuation of ancient Indian attitudes already established in Buddhist literature, and as a multi-layered response to the presence of the indigenous shamanic layer of Tibetan culture, especially in relation to the role of dreams and visions which both systems privilege as a means of religious authentication. Contradictory statements in Tibetan Buddhist literature towards dreams are in part the inheritance of attitudes already established in Mahāyāna Indian Buddhist texts and in part a manifestation of the inevitable tensions arising out of the interface between two sets of world-views that rest on very different premises. From its Indian Buddhist background, Tibetan culture inherited an approach to dream that can be analysed according to three basic divisions as follows:

- 1) *The psycho-physical approach*, based on the Indian understanding of the mind and how it functions. Under this heading comes the medical view of dream as caused or influenced by mental and physical factors, both internal and external. In the Buddhist analysis of personality, the factor of materiality or form encompasses, as a continuum,

3. Ibid., 14.

the psycho-physical organism as well as the external world with which it interacts. Therefore, dream as caused by the activity of external agents such as gods and spirits also comes under this heading.

- 2) *The philosophical approach*, related to philosophical debates over dream as recollection versus dream as direct perception. As has been shown, Buddhist theory accepts the view of dream as direct perception. This approach is also associated with the Upanishadic view of *māyā* as illusion in the sense of appearance versus reality, the illusory world of *saṃsāra* versus the absolute reality of the liberated state. In Indian Buddhist literature, dream is held to be the most suitable metaphor for the illusoriness of phenomena.
- 3) *The ritual approach*, which constitutes the interpretation of dreams as signs and omens. This view can be found in the earliest Vedic texts that deal with dispelling the misfortune arising from *duḥsvapna*, evil-dreaming. Dream as prognostication can be further broken down as follows:
 - a) prophetic of worldly fortune or misfortune
 - b) prophetic of disease and healing
 - c) prophetic of spiritual progress
 - i) related to real-life situations of initiation and confirmation of meditation success
 - ii) related to the mythic career of *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas*

These three approaches in combination form an integrated response to dream that has been shown to be present in the Indian Buddhist tradition as well as in Tibetan dream theory and practice. It has been demonstrated that within the Indian Buddhist tradition there was already a degree of tension associated with dream in that early Buddhist teaching tended away from an emphasis on the efficacy of ritual and tended toward a devaluation of worldly activity,

equating it with the fleeting insubstantiality and unreality of dream. In the later Mahāyāna, and especially in the Tibetan Vajrayāna, developments of Buddhism, dream and the world of the senses retain their somewhat negative connotation of illusoriness and unreality, but that illusoriness takes on a more positive aspect as the very nature of the mind and phenomena to be realized, not escaped. It cannot be overlooked that the Tibetan developments took place in the context of the interaction between Buddhism and a shamanistic culture that would have valued dream in its religious life.

The Yogi and the Shaman

With regard to the Buddhist response to Tibetan culture, Buddhism engaged in direct competition with the indigenous shamanic presence and the established ritual traditions. At the same time that the new religion was required to prove itself dominant in practical efficient terms, it was also constrained to establish and maintain its soteriological superiority. The relationship between Buddhist lamas, shamans, and other ritual specialists of a given group or region has been the focus of a number of studies dealing with the relationship between Vajrayāna Buddhism and indigenous traditions.⁴ The title of Geoffrey Samuel's study of Tibetan culture—*Civilized Shamans*—captures his thesis that the literate lamas of Tibet function as shamans and that Vajrayāna techniques function as a sophisticated means of training shamanic practitioners. The lama as shaman is a correlation that a number of scholars have made based on the observance that Tibetan lamas perform rituals of exorcism, healing, demon-suppressing, divination, or guiding the dead; in fact, as Samuel has shown, whatever service is performed by a shaman can be performed by a lama. Further,

4. See Holmberg, *Order in Paradox*; Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*; Ortner, *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*; Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*.

the reputation of certain lamas for rain-making, mediating the counsel of a deity through possession, or for magical powers are also features to be found among shamans, and in all these ways lamas can be compared to shamans. However, the crucial differences that allow Tibetan Buddhist lamas to entirely differentiate themselves from shamans and their practices cannot be ignored in favour of the outward similarities of the practices. Some writers go too far in their comparisons, as for example Barbara Aziz does in an article relating the shamanic phenomena of spirit possession to the idea of the *tulku*, the reincarnate lama. She suggests that the *tulku* can be regarded as possessed from birth by a deity, in other words, possessed for life!⁵ Tibetan Buddhism encompasses the concept of 'god-fallen-on' (*lha babs*) or 'god-seized' (*lha adzin*): in these cases, an oracle becomes possessed by a spirit, and exactly as in shamanic forms of possession, the spirit speaks through the oracle-medium. A *tulku* may well be someone who can divine by means of possession, but to say that the *tulku* is, by virtue of his or her reincarnation, 'possessed' would seem to stretch the concept of possession into meaninglessness. According to Buddhist thought, all beings are reincarnate and by that logic everyone would be possessed for life by the spirit of past lives. Similarly, in William Stablein's study of the ritual dedicated to the tantric deity Mahākāla, although he admits that the Vajramaster does not become possessed in the same way a shaman does, he continues to say that "if a shaman can say, 'I am possessed by a spirit', the Vajramaster, after the invitation phase of the ceremony, can say 'I *am* Mahakala'."⁶ Again, the writer seems to ignore the fact that these two statements would arise from entirely different premises within

5. Barbara Aziz, "Reincarnation Reconsidered—or the Reincarnate Lama as Shaman," in *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, eds. John T. Hitchcock and Rex L. Jones, (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1976), 347.

6. William Stablein, "Mahākāla the Neo-Shaman—Master of the Ritual," in *Spirit Possession*, eds. Hitchcock and Jones, 368.

the shamanic and Buddhist traditions and that their meanings would therefore be entirely different. The shaman's statement acknowledges the reality of himself and the spirit that speaks through him. The lama's statement actualizes (or ritually represents that state) in himself of the ultimately empty nature of all phenomena including self and deity. With regard to the relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and shamanism, Stablein comes to the conclusion that the Tibetan Vajramaster is a "neo-shaman" and that "Vajrayāna Buddhism as practiced by the Tibetans offers us an example of how shamanism may have evolved from a preliterate to a literate stage of development."⁷ What is persistently missing from such studies, including Samuel's *Civilized Shamans*, is an emphasis on the fact that Buddhism as it arrived in Tibet was already imbued with Indian tantric yogic practices, the shamanic components of which have yet to be satisfactorily distinguished from the tantric elements, but which, nevertheless, constituted an entirely separate tradition from the indigenous religion of Tibet.⁸ In his research on Bon, Per Kværne has argued,

Both bon-po and čhos-pa [buddhist] sources suggest that Buddhist siddhas, i.e. tantric adepts, and possibly also Śivaist yogins, established themselves in what is now Western Tibet . . . This happened prior to—or at least independently of—the official introduction of Buddhism in Tibet in the form of čhos [Dharma]. Siddhas . . . established themselves in Tibet where they, as all sources agree in stating, became violently opposed to those Buddhist

7. Ibid., 373.

8. James Mullens notes this point in "Tantra and Totemism: Tibetan Buddhism and the Language of Primal Religions," a paper presented to the Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ottawa, May, 1998. The question of the relationship between a shamanic complex and the ancient Indian tradition is a subject of debate. Some scholars have seen in the long-haired space-traveling yogins of the *Rig Veda* (RV 10.136.1-7) strong affinities with the classic shamanic complex of Siberia. The Vedic seers are also called *vipra*, literally 'the quivering one', possibly indicating the ecstatic shaking characteristic of shamanic possession (see J. F. Staal, "Sanskrit and Sanskritization," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 22 (1963): 261-267). The connection however, is questioned by Gonda who argues that the word *vipra* can equally refer to poetic inspiration or the "vibrant and exalted speech of moved poets." Gonda, *Change and Continuity*, 208.

groups who enjoyed the particular favour of the royal house and who designated their doctrine as *chos*.⁹

This indicates that apart from the indigenous shamanic layer, there were two other competing religious systems—the tantric and the normative Buddhist. These three strands, then, provide the framework for the development of Tibetan religion. As Buddhism became acculturated to the region, it further absorbed and transformed for its own soteriological purposes aspects of the shamanic tradition which were familiar to its tantric heritage. This acculturation process enriched the Buddhist tradition, generating new ideas and new forms of expression. In turn, it is not difficult to find Buddhist ideas that have filtered into the shamanic practices of the peoples who have been in touch with them and which, similarly, have been used to further the goal of the shaman.¹⁰ To say that Tantric Buddhist masters are neo-shamans or that Tibetan Buddhism represents the intellectualization of shamanism is to subvert the integrity of both Buddhist and shamanic world-views.

One of the strongest distinctions to be drawn between the Indian tantric tradition and shamanism is the yogic emphasis on what Matthew Kapstein terms “perfectabilism.”¹¹ The Buddhist monk, as shown in the ‘Smell-thief’ story above, is one who aims for moral perfection. The tantric adept is called a *siddha*, meaning ‘accomplished’, ‘perfected’, ‘completed’ one. This concept of perfection is related to a central concern of classical Indian religious thought—the idea of *mārga*, the ‘path’ to liberation, the perfect accomplishment of which is the religious goal. Regardless of the similarities between the dress or practices of

9. Kværne, “The Buddhist tradition in Tibet,” 38-39.

10. See Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue* for an insightful study of the influences of Buddhist lamas on shamanic practice and vice versa.

11. Kapstein, “Illusion of Spiritual Progress,” 199.

the Indian *siddhas* and those ritual specialists that can be called shamans in whatever culture they are found, the emphasis on attaining to perfection of all kinds¹² including the perfect salvation from the suffering that ensues from ignorance and delusion is a mark of the yogin that is not present in the shamanic world-views related to Tibetan culture. The idea of exiting the world entirely, based on a mode of behaviour in life, as a positive religious goal, so far has not been shown to play a part in Siberian or Central Asian shamanism. The indigenous tradition of Tibet, which is more closely related to these cultures, would not have shared the pronounced soteriological outlook of Buddhism. In contemporary life, Mumford's study shows that the Tibetan Buddhists of Gyasumdo continue to distinguish themselves as spiritually superior to their shaman neighbours based on their perception of the shaman's lack of concern with merit and the goal of universal freedom from rebirth. The shamans in turn point to the hypocrisy of the Buddhists: "They say we are sinning by killing the animals, but after their fast they come to our village and buy the meat for food."¹³ In such ways, the shamans point to the conflict in Buddhism between the lay life and the religious life that Sherry Ortner noted in her study of the Sherpas—a struggle that she describes as both manifested in, and mediated by, shamanistic rituals.¹⁴

12. The Mahāyāna tradition emphasizes that the *bodhisattva* path consists in developing six major *pāramitās* (Perfections): the Perfection of generosity; virtue; patience; energetic effort, meditative concentration, and wisdom. See Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1932), 165-168.

13. Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 113-114.

14. Ortner, *Sherpas Through their Rituals*, 157-169.

Shamanism and Soteriology

Ninian Smart gives the meaning of soteriology as 'doctrine of salvation' or 'way of salvation'. He states: "The implication of the idea is that human beings are in some kind of unfortunate condition and may achieve an ultimately good state either by their own efforts or through the intervention of some divine power."¹⁵ This definition ties the concept of salvation to the human condition (characterized as unfortunate) and the utter transcendence of that misery (characterized as 'ultimately good'). In an article that traces the ancient Mediterranean sources of the concept and its Christian usage, Willard Oxtoby notes three aspects that inform the traditional Western view of salvation: victory over death, victory over sin and evil, and victory over purposelessness.¹⁶ These three aspects relate to the Christian emphasis on resurrection, the final defeat of Satan, and the ultimate goal of human life. It is this view of salvation that has formed the standard against which the doctrines and ways of salvation of other religious systems have been determined and judged.

Scholars who apply the concept of soteriology to shamanic complexes often interpret salvation in terms of traditional themes such as resurrection and victory over death and evil. For example, with regard to tribal religions Smart says, "In small-scale societies the figure of the shaman is often important in serving as the expert who provides healing and reenacts the death and resurrection of the person who has experienced evil."¹⁷ Alternatively, the concept

15. Ninian Smart, "Soteriology: An Overview," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Eliade, vol. 7, 418.

16. Willard G. Oxtoby, "Reflections of the idea of salvation," in *Man and his salvation: Studies in memory of S.G.F. Brandon*, eds. Eric J. Sharpe and John R. Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), 26-27.

17. Ninian Smart, "Soteriology: An Overview," 421.

has been interpreted in terms of shamanic themes such as the vision quest. In his study of the encounter between the Tibetan yogi Khyung-po and his teacher the yogini Niguma discussed above, Kapstein identifies four different types of soteriological themes in the story: the soteriology of the shamanic vision quest, of the guru's grace, of yogic perfection, and of Buddhist insight.¹⁸ The latter three all deal with salvation as traditionally understood—the utter transcendence of the unfortunate human condition—accomplished by means of devotion to the guru, the practice of yoga, and insight arising from meditation practice. The first is based on Kapstein's recognition of shamanic themes in Tibetan Buddhism:

Their [shamanic motifs] superabundance in the culminating moments of a pilgrim's quest must be seen above all as authenticating the hero's attainment of a shaman's salvation, through power won from a woman during a dream-flight on a magical mountain of gold.¹⁹

It is difficult to say just exactly what Kapstein understands as a "shaman's salvation" except perhaps the successful completion and fulfillment of the vision quest which he compares to the quest for enlightenment. Such an understanding, however, would miss the crucial point that the completion of the vision quest in a shamanic tradition marks the successful beginning of a shaman's journey, not the culmination of the religious life as it is in the Buddhist tradition. Further, in the traditional Christian understanding of the concept, salvation is once-and-for-all, and associated with the state of the person after death. This accords with the Buddhist understanding of the attainment of Buddhahood as the final stage in the spiritual path beyond both life and death. It would be difficult to find such an idea of finality with regard to a spiritual goal strongly represented in many shamanic traditions.

18. Kapstein, "Illusion of Spiritual Progress," 197-201.

19. *Ibid.*, 198.

Jonathan Smith is one scholar who questions whether or not soteriological patterns must rely on the theme of triumph over death. He proposes a basic dichotomy of world-views, the “locative” and the “utopian” in which the locative refers to those traditions or currents in a tradition that emphasize one’s place in the world, the delineation of boundaries and the labour of maintaining the fragile balance of the cosmos. The utopian vision of the world stresses the value of no place, the breaking of all boundaries and limits.²⁰ According to Smith, for locative traditions, to return from the dead is not a sign of salvation: “What is soteriological is for the dead to remain dead. If beings from the realm of the dead walk among the living, they are the objects of rituals of relocation, not celebration.”²¹ In this instance, however, ‘soteriological’ could only signify something very general like ‘ultimate good’, and as has been discussed, to speak of ultimate good from a shamanic perspective can be misleading in light of the shamanic view of the necessity of according evil its place in the cosmos. Perhaps it would be fairer to simply admit the disjunction between a place-oriented world-view and the idea of salvation as ultimate freedom from place than to try and adjust the concept to include a shamanic perspective. This is not to say that Smith’s idea of a utopian vision of breaking all bounds and limits is entirely missing from small-scale tribal religious systems. Smith warns against the tendency to identify the locative, place-oriented view with ‘primitive’ or ‘archaic’ society and the utopian, freedom-oriented view with ‘modern’ society and religion:

Both have been and remain coeval existential possibilities which may be appropriated whenever and wherever they correspond to man’s experience of

20. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 101.

21. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 124.

his world. While in this culture, at this time or in that place, one or the other view may appear the more dominant, this does not effect the postulation of the basic availability of both at any time, in any place.²²

The beliefs of the indigenous cultures of Siberia, Central Asia, and what can be gleaned of pre-Buddhist Tibet, for example, fall primarily under Smith's locative category, but other cultures exhibit a combination of these strands. For example, Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff's study of the Tucano Indians shows that their use of narcotic drugs "is always connected with the aim to transcend the bounds of empirical reality and to obtain a glimpse of that 'other world' where the miseries and trials of daily existence may find their remedies."²³ Another South American tribe, the Warao, have the idea of eternal life after death with a patron deity for those artisans who have perfected their skill in the crafts associated with their gender, such as canoe-making for males or hammock-weaving for females. Johannes Wilbert writes that for the Warao, the soul of an expert canoe-maker is assured of eternal life:

Throughout his adult life, this artisan practices his trade with diligence and careful observation of the ethical code that governs it. He knows that only utmost dedication will please the Mother of the Forest in the southeast and guarantee him a place on the sacred mountain with this patroness of the boat-builder and his fellow artisans.²⁴

Such examples show that the issue of relating shamanism to a concept of salvation is a complex one. Some tribal cultures encompass ideas that might resonate with a traditional Western concept of salvation, but it is questionable as to whether the idea of salvation in the

22. Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 101.

23. Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *The Shaman and the Jaguar: A Study of Narcotic Drugs among the Indians of Colombia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), 201.

24. Wilbert, "Eschatology in a Participatory Universe," 175.

sense of a universal goal of religious behaviour can be said to play a role in the ritual way of shamans.

Dream and the Confluence of Buddhist and Shamanic Themes

In Tibetan literature, as Young has shown, dream narrative proliferated far beyond the Indian Buddhist material. Dreams related to mythic themes of conception and Awakening continued to appear, but compared with the grand mythic dreams of *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* recorded in Mahāyāna texts, Tibetan biographies and autobiographies give the impression of recording real-life struggles of spiritual aspirants as they learn to distinguish truth from deception, mundane from supramundane, in their path to liberation. Concern with dream is the hallmark of a Tibetan Buddhist spiritual career.

The contradiction posed by juxtaposing dream as illusion and dream as effective prophecy in Indian Buddhism is primarily philosophic. It represents the classic split between the world-affirming ritual-based Brahmanic religion and world-denying philosophies of the renouncer traditions. The contrasting views already present in Indian Buddhism, become, however, further compounded in the Tibetan context by tensions based on the practical function of dream as a vehicle of spiritual authentication and a path to enlightenment. As has been shown, dream authenticates equally the shaman and the Buddhist lama. In the Tibetan context, dream further becomes a practical method of attaining the highest goal of liberation, yet while the shaman stands confident in the reality and efficacy of his dreams, the lama must maintain the philosophic view in which dream signifies delusion, incompleteness, and lack of perfection. One could say that the Buddhist spiritual practitioner is authenticated by lies and confusion; the wisdom of the Buddhist sage is attained by means of the same illusions that keep one bound to ignorance. This paradoxical situation is,

nevertheless, solidly based in Buddhist philosophy which claims that the seed of the destruction of suffering lies within suffering itself and not without.

In Tibetan culture, normative Buddhist, tantric/yogic, and shamanic strands have merged into a single continuum that constitutes Tibet's unique religious synthesis. With regard to dream, this study has shown that the formation of such a continuum has reinforced the existing tensions between the ultimate and relative status of dreams as well as created new ones. Such tensions are necessary to delineate important differences that would otherwise be lost, differences that maintain the balance and integrity of the constitutive strands. Forces of resolution, however, must also be present because without them the continuum cannot hold. In their encounter with Buddhism, Tibetans found a tradition whose philosophic emphasis on the interdependency and interconnectedness of all phenomena allowed the practical shamanic art of interpreting dream signs and of actively working in and with dream to flourish. In turn, this efflorescence of dream interest within Buddhism combined with the tantric and shamanic emphasis on ritual contributed to the development of a distinctively Tibetan visionary soteriology captured in the words of the mistress of dream yoga, the *yogini* Niguma:

When we meditate upon the illusion-like nature
Of all the illusion-like phenomena,
We attain illusion-like Buddhahood."²⁵

This study has been presented as a contribution to the general subject of dream in shamanism. It has demonstrated that dream is not only a vehicle and sign of the shamanic call, but an integral aspect of the shaman's activity, a form of shamanizing. Further, in the specific case of Tibet, this study has contributed to the understanding of Tibetan attitudes to

25. Mullin, *Tantric Yogas of Sister Niguma*, 97.

dream and the Buddhist/shamanic dynamic that underlies those attitudes. There are many themes arising from this study that would be fruitful areas for further research. For example, although there are a number of works explaining the Tibetan ritual practice of dream yoga, its in-depth history and specific influences have yet to be traced. Another area encompasses the whole question of the relationship between shamanism and soteriology. This issue is one that, to use Jonathan Smith's typology, has been previously addressed either from the perspective of a locative or utopian map of the cosmos. Smith takes a step in a new direction when he proposes that there are traditions that follow a third map. These traditions he claims, "neither deny nor flee from disjunction, but allow the incongruous elements to stand. . . . They seek, rather, to play between the incongruities and to provide an occasion for thought."²⁶

26. Smith, *Map is Not Territory*, 309.

APPENDIX

Gampopa's Dreams

He wears

- a silk and fur-trimmed white hat with the emblem of an eagle on it
- smart green boots decorated embossed with brass and fastened with silver buckles
- a red-dotted white silk robe decorated with pearls and gold threads
- a belt embroidered with flowers and decorated with silk tassels and pearls
- a white silk scarf with silver decoration

He carries

- a staff decorated with precious stones and gold work
- a skull bowl of golden nectar for drinking
- a multi-coloured sack of rice for eating
- the skin of a wild animal with head and claws for a seat

He sees

- on his right, a meadow of golden flowers with sheep and cattle
- on his left, a jade-green meadow of flowers where women bow to him
- in the center of the meadow on a mound of golden flowers, a golden bodhisattva cross-legged on a lotus seat
- in front of the bodhisattva, a fountain and a brilliant aura surrounding him like flames and the sun and moon shining from his heart

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