

Notes from Talk by James.

When we look at the history of the Buddhist approach to dreams, it is similar to other traditions. In our dreams, we perceive new ways of perceiving reality and possibilities which may touch us both personally as well as being significant to other members of the community.

We know of the strenuous journey of Gotama, trying to gain a deeper understanding of the truths of life, a new path; how he wandered the countryside, approaching all the distinguished teachers of his day. None were able to be of help. He practiced all the severe austerities of a monk's life but that didn't work as well. Legends tell us that he was close to death from starvation when he had a wonderful experience: a woman, a stranger, who saw him, had compassion for him and offered him a special rice dish. This happened to him before he had the famous five dreams. I include this experience because it was an experience of love, compassion, and not one more theory. Previous theories had not opened the door for him. This nurturing opened him to new experiences and possibilities. He would have had many dreams but only five are recorded. They took place before enlightenment and were an essential part of that development. It is important to remember that we only have abbreviations of the actual dreams, but these do give us an insight into the journey to which the Buddha was being invited. I will include three of the five dreams:

1."He dreamed that he was sleeping on the surface of the earth as his bed, with the Himalaya mountains as his pillow, placing his left hand on the Eastern Ocean, his right hand on the Western Ocean, and both his legs on the Southern Ocean." We do not know how long it took him to realize that his calling would involve reaching out to many countries. He was not called to be a hermit or monk, separate from the larger world.

2."A woody vine was growing out of his navel and reaching up to the sky and remained there." It is difficult to imagine how long it took him to realize that there was a connection between his inner being and the "heavens". The growth is from within. He is in a receptive/prone position and the growth that is taking place is one that is connecting him to the object of his search. The imagery of the navel can certainly lead to an awareness that the growth that is taking place is life-giving.

3."Four different-coloured (blue, golden, red, grey) birds came from the four directions, fall at his feet and turn entirely white" This eventually led him to the awareness that he would need to move from sectarian discrimination in the caste system, manifested in the different colours. Whether brahmin (priests, teachers, intellectuals), warriors and rulers, traders, farmers and merchants, or menials, labourers, even street cleaners, the untouchables) can achieve enlightenment in this life. Being a member of a lower caste was not a punishment for deeds committed in a past life. The Buddha placed a higher value on morality and the equality of people instead of on which family or caste a person was born into. He welcomed outcasts, an incredible social position.

It is important to consider the Buddha's dreams as well as other dreams that we find in the great Pureland teachers. However, It is not only significant to see the importance of these dreams in the lives of the great founders, we are invited to see their importance in our own personal lives. For example, when we consider these three dreams, there are certain questions we could ask ourselves:

1. To what extent do we limit ourselves to various parts of our lives; this could include nationality, language, religion, culture; to attitudes and insights that we are familiar with?
2. Do we believe in our giftedness, our experience of the divine? Are we open to the challenge of being one with the heavens?
3. One of the many challenges in this life is to go beyond the expectations and sense of entitlement that we are brought up with.

It is good to remember that we are gifted with about four dreams every night. We are surrounded by abundance and our main task is to remain open and receptive.

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