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with Lama Somananda Tantrapa, Tulku
by Julia Griffin

According to Tibetan Dream Yoga, there are two ways of dreaming. One takes place during our waking hours of daily life. The other occurs in our night dreams. In passing through the Four Gateways, we come to fully realize that the two types of dreams are really identical. With this realization comes true Oneness with our Source and an end to the separation that causes all of our pain.

To learn about Tibetan Dream Yoga and its Four Gateways, we spoke with Lama Somananda Tantrapa, Tulku, a Tibetan Dream Yoga teacher from an illustrious lineage who was accorded religious asylum in the United States in 1997.

Lama Somananda's background includes a degree in anthropology, certification in hypnotherapy and neurolinguistic programming, and research in Native American shamanism. He also teaches Qi Gong and Mind-Body Sports Therapy and holds a black belt in Aikido. His

aim, he says, is empowering people "to open to the infinite source of intuition that exists within them."

Julia: How is the nature of dreaming identical to the dream we call life? Is this the way that Tibetan Dream Yoga differs from other forms of learned dreaming?

Lama Somananda Tantrapa, Tulku: Tibetan Dream Yoga is not very different from the study and development of lucid dreaming. The main distinction is its incorporation of practice into the daily life.

Daily life is also a dream. It is illusion, right? So we begin by becoming lucid in this day-dream we call life. Since day dreams have the same quality or nature as night dreams, we become lucid in daydreams and translate that into night dreams. And that is a matter of changing our perception.

Julia: How can we do this?

Lama Somananda: It begins by realizing that everything we know about our lives is based on memories — including knowledge of our dreams. The world of dreaming is identical to the nature of the dream that we call our life. Everything we know about both uses the same mechanism of memory.

Since all of our perceptions are based on memories, these memories must be recalled whenever we have a sensory perception. If we taste, feel, or smell, we are recalling our memories of this perception. There is also a delay in our perception — an actual length of time needed by the neuro-receptors to relay the impulse of what we perceive as life.

The mind also has filters that color our perception. The filters are installed in childhood through socialization and our early environment. These filters tell us what is important, what we should pay attention to. So our perception is programmed by our attention: what we pay attention to or don't pay attention to.

To be free, we have to learn how to deprogram our perceptions. This means seeing beyond our filters — becoming capable of looking at things without categories or labels.

We begin by relating to who we really are and not who we think we are. Then we learn to perceive others more clearly. Many people wear a mask that hides who they are, and we may spend our entire lives reacting to people's masks and not ever perceiving who they really are.

Learning to become attentive by paying attention to the energy that animates life is the First Gateway in Tibetan Dream Yoga. This changes our perception of life altogether. We must embody physically all of our revelations and experiences. This is the main difference between Tibetan dreaming and lucid dreaming.

Julia: How do we physically embody our experiences?

Lama Somananda: We embody our experiences and revelations by learning not to analyze them. When we are completely in the body, there is no one to talk with because we are experiencing the physical body. The internal chatter ceases, and there is nonverbal communication.

Because our role model is of being stuck in the head or stuck in thought, we tend not to be in the body. We don't move our bodies freely, so we can't embody the energy or "walk the talk." We are in a fight-or-flight mode, a mode of attack, when we are stuck in the head. We feel vulnerable, and we project this into the characters of our dream by trying to protect ourselves against them.

When this happens, conflicts occur. People can't communicate. There is no flow, and there is conflict between people, groups, and nations.

The energy of dreaming manifests in the physical. The energy, itself, has the power to do what needs to be done. There is so much power in the body, so much power in the

Source of Dreaming that lies within us. Why is this so? The Tao is a reflection of both the microcosm and the macrocosm. The Tao is a reflection of the Source within us.

When we stop the internal chatter, we stop doing what we think we are supposed to do. There is nothing for us to have or to do. The energy from the Source has the power to do what needs to be done. When we are in the body and not in the head, we can surrender to the Source and become free.

Julia: Would you tell me about the first gateway of Tibetan Dream Yoga?

Lama Somananda: The first gateway of Tibetan Dreaming is attention. The shift is from wanting attention to becoming attentive. Everyone wants the attention of other people. There is a simple reason for this — where attention goes, energy goes. People can actually want attention so much that they become vampires, drinking up others' energy. There is a solution for this dilemma, and the answer is to become attentive.

When we become attentive, this reverses the flow of energy. We don't need to take from others because we have energy within the self, and we are aware of that energy. Learning to become attentive is a major healing experience for most people.

Attentiveness is understood by perceiving the energy behind the form as opposed to the outer shape or appearance. One learns to see the energy of a tree and not its outer shape or form — the leaves or branches. It is possible to see behind the masks that most people wear, to bypass the mask and relate to the true person.

Everything in our universe is composed of one thing — energy. Every thing, every object that appears in any dream — whether night or day dream — is also comprised of energy. When we see the energy, we can perceive the flow of the energy rather than the flow or movement of appearances.

"Are we dreaming?" Most people say no, because they don't realize that we are always dreaming. The answer is always yes. This is because we are always seeing the world of illusion, full of colors and shapes and objects.

So we begin our Dream Yoga with daydreaming, asking again and again about our everyday life: "Are we dreaming?" and answering in the affirmative. This way, We turn our attention toward the illusion in everyday life and learn to see the flow of energy behind it.

Usually people are not in a mode of paying attention to what matters. We can see this in everyday life. They try to deal with clients or their boss, their daily tasks, or their appearance, but they are unaware of what is energetically happening. For instance, they don't watch the energy of the boss, the energy of interactions, or the energy of their own bodies.

When we are not attentive, this manifests in the physical body. We don't pay attention to little discomforts. Or we take a painkiller. Eventually our lack of attention manifests as illness.

Whenever we shift from outer appearances to inner appearances by becoming attentive, the physical body immediately surrenders to the flow, without stereotypical concerns. Being in the flow brings about profound energy, and being out of the flow brings about exhaustion. Everyone's flow is individual and distinct. We cannot copy someone's flow, because this is attachment to form. The physical body moves in an uninhibited movement.

When we move beyond our sensory perceptions that are stifled by our filters, we engage a different Self. This Self perceives with the sixth sense or intuition. When we don't do anything, and we quiet the mind, this Self provides hunches or intuitions about what is really happening. This signifies that we have stepped through the first Gate of Dreaming and become attentive.

When we become attentive, we begin to pay attention to reality. This means we have learned how to pay attention to the physical body and what is within the self.

So we ask, "Are we dreaming?" and the answer is "Yes, we are dreaming." Finally, we come to the realization that we are dreaming. This realization opens us up to a new world of possibilities, and we shift into the second gateway of knowledge.

Julia: If being in the flow brings about positive changes and being out of the flow brings about nightmares, this must be true in day-to-day living. Do we feel the direction of flow and visualize what we feel? How do we learn to move with the flow?

Lama Somananda: When we perceive the flow, we begin to see the energy that is behind the illusion, the energy that animates both the dream of life and the night dream. A good analogy to explain moving with the flow of energy is surfing. We can notice where the waves are going and move into the wave.

If we catch the wave, we are moved with no resistance or effort. If we try to move the wave with our personal power or go in a different direction from the wave, then we become driftwood. We are tossed up and down, and everything becomes a nightmare. Going against the flow causes nightmares. This is moving against the flow, and we can see it in people's lives as well. It's funny that people actually call it this — "ups and downs" in life.

If we realize that life is a dream, we don't have to run away. We can face everything that life presents to us. If we look at the inner essence of challenge, we can see that it reflects a part of us that creates the problem or challenge. It is a lesson about our Self based on an improper memory perception. If we can see the energy beneath the problem, we can become more integrated and whole because we haven't separated from the part of us that created the

challenge. Every crisis is a learning opportunity.

Julia: You are saying that we shouldn't try to control our dreaming at all? Most forms of lucid dreaming involve changing the background, characters, or the direction of the dream.

Lama Somananda: Most people who engage in lucid dreaming do so with the desire to develop dreaming and control the flow of dreaming. We have to ask ourselves, "What are dreams?" They are messages of our spirit, our spiritual self. Why are we given these spiritual messages? We're not sure.

What should we do with them? This is what we want to find out.

We can identify the essence and energy (as opposed to dream symbols and signs). Or we can simply ask the Source of Dreaming what the image means.

How do we alter a message of spirit when we are not sure what to do with it? We should not tweak, manipulate, or control these images or messages — just learn to let them flow spontaneously. The same applies to waking or daily life. We need to learn to live without manipulation or control.

Julia: Is this the Second Gate of Dreaming?

Lama Somananda: The Second Gateway is the Gateway of Knowledge. Remembering begins when we become attentive. Attentiveness signifies that we have arrived at the gate of knowledge. As we shifted from wanting attention to being attention in the First Gateway, in the Second Gateway we shift from wanting knowledge to being knowledgeable.

Being knowledgeable means not relying on past experiences or someone else's knowledge or opinion. We learn to move into the inner source of knowledge, totally bypassing all of the filters, and learning to perceive energy through intuition.

We become knowledgeable by finding the Source behind the dream. We perceive knowledge intuitively through the Dreamer of the Dream or the Dream Being. This is the source of the energy that animates the dream. The Dream Being dreams up or creates the experience we are dreaming. All that we see in dreaming is based on our memories. The entire Universe is dreaming its existence.

So in Tibetan Dream Yoga, we begin with attention and knowledge. Knowing that we are dreaming in day-to-day existence is not a static awareness. It is not a "state." It is a process. The process involves being aware of dreaming in our daily life, using the constant affirmation: "Yes, I am dreaming." We have to experience the dreaming and become awake. So we give ourselves that constant affirmation.

We all have had a feeling in a dream that it is so real; there can be no doubt that we are awake. But then we wake up and say, "It wasn't real. It was a dream." But nothing is more real than our dreams. And it is too late when we wake up after a dream to ponder it. There is nothing to gain in mulling over the memory.

We must be aware at the moment of dreaming. We must learn to establish a bridge between the conscious mind and the Dream-being. We must find and address the Source of the Dream, wherever or whoever it might be. We can question reality from this point. We can look at the essence of the things in the dream and relax and surrender to the flow of the dream.

Again, "waking" life is also a dream. This is the paradox of the belief installed in the consciousness. We have believed that dreaming was not real and that reality was not a dream. They are both real. The Source of All Experience, the Dream Being, dreams both reality and night dreams.

The point is to wake up and know that this is so. When we understand that the reality behind the dream is the Dream

Being, we have stepped into true knowing and can learn about the Third Gateway.

Julia: Your writings state: "In our dream world, the powers that used to be considered paranormal or supernatural are a matter of everyday life." Is this what you mean when you speak of using intuition as "true knowing" or a different way of perceiving the world?

Lama Somananda: If we perceive through our intuition, then we perceive the world in a way that is often called paranormal or supernatural. We are free in our dreams, so there is no limitation to what we can have. By removing our filters of sensory perception, we can change how we see the world.

We can experience different states of consciousness in dreaming. All four stages of dreaming are different forms of consciousness. We don't have to manipulate the world — we can simply have a different perspective. So what we perceive as paranormal in our "reality" can also be called the true nature of things.

Julia: What is the Third Gateway of Dreaming?

Lama Somananda: The Third Gateway is the Gateway of Power. The shift of consciousness in the Third Gateway involves power. This is the shift of having power and being powerful. When we experience awakening in dreams, we feel empowered, energized, and almost almighty. When we become powerful, we can have any dream that we desire come through and manifest whatever we want. The question arises: Do we want to have power over other people or indulge in power?

We don't impose our power on others. We don't want to manipulate or waste our power on trivial or vain things. Some people engage in lucid dreaming to gain the power to do things they can't do in daily life.

To be truly powerful, we must empower ourselves by

understanding that personal power can never match the power of the Source of Dreaming: the Dream Being that manifests our entire reality. It is much more powerful than we are. How do we find true power? It is through surrender to the Source. The only block to true power exists where we have not surrendered to the Source.

Julia: What is the difference between having power and being powerful?

Lama Somananda: The mode of having power implies that we have power over others, power to do things, power to impose or seduce. This is indulging or showing off power. When we have power, we want to demonstrate it to hide our vulnerability. Vulnerability results from the fear of stripping away the emotional armor. And so we cannot relate to the world in a vulnerable state, because this armor filters our perception. There is the fear of exposing our weak spots. It is like wearing a gas mask and then trying to smell flowers.

Being powerful is a state of fearlessness. It is impossible to have fear when we are in a state of being powerful. When we are being powerful, no one can do anything to us. We understand that we are dreaming our own reality. We have the visceral perception that we are dreaming.

True empowerment is the knowledge that we are powerful. Once we are powerful, there is nothing to do, nothing to wish, show off, or demonstrate. We have connected to the center within ourselves. Instead of being protective, we are protected by the power within.

We stop going in different directions; there is no struggle. We experience integrity as a result of integrating all the parts of ourselves into a unified system. This integrity is free of moral, religious, or ethical rules or norms; it is about being centered and whole.

Personal power or having power is nothing. When we move away from the Source and try to flow into our personal power, we are not surrendering to the Source. This way of

indulging in power is the main reason that practitioners do not make it through the Fourth Gate.

Julia: What is the Fourth Gate?

Lama Somananda: The Fourth Gateway is night dreaming. We must identify the Source of the Dream while dreaming. We must realize that we are the dream and every aspect in the dream is a reflection and representation of our own inner process. We must realize that the energy that animates the dream is the Dream Being. So we have to identify with the Source of the Dream.

If we think we are the creator, then we are separate. The delusion of separation is the cause of all suffering, an inability to dream with the Source, the dream itself. The Dream-Being is not only the One who dreams things up; it is also the Universe dreaming. We are not distinct. Everything is the Dream-Being. We have to learn to dissolve the boundaries of the self and unify with the Source. By ending the delusion of separation, we can merge with the Source. Through this practice, we may become enlightened.

Julia: How does one merge with the Source?

Lama Somananda: Merging with the Source is becoming One with the Tao. We can only know if we have experienced it. It is not a matter of hoping or longing for the experience.

Julia: If one wants to deepen their dream practice or learn Tibetan Dream Yoga, how might they begin?

Lama Somananda: Anyone can begin with the constant question and affirmation of "Am I dreaming?" and the answer, "Yes, I am dreaming." One simple exercise is to daydream a picture of being totally free and happy. Everything that can be imagined is composed of energy, so we can also daydream that we perceive energy and go with the flow. Or imagine that we have a magic wand with the capability of perceiving the true nature of people. Another

exercise is to imagine that we are becoming the Dream-Being.

These exercises are about perceiving energy. When I say that people are going to learn to perceive energy, they say, "What is he talking about?" Most people have an uncanny imagination. They will find that they can do a great deal with their imagination and these exercises if they give them a chance.

Also, I teach Tibetan Dream Yoga both here and on other continents. I teach by phone or I visit in my students' dreams for instruction or initiation. They often get excited and call me to say they received a lesson in their dreams. I say, "I know. And that lesson was free!"

Lama Somananda Tantrapa, Tulku is the holder of the lineage of Qi Dao that has been fostered in his family for 27 generations. He was taught Qi Dao by his grandfather, the previous Grand Master of this style of Tibetan Intuitive Qigong. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has officially recognized Lama Somananda's initiatives for peace and spiritual freedom.



In addition to dream consultation, he gives private sessions in Qi Gong and in what he calls "Peak Performance Coaching" — designed to enhance the quality of every area of life, eliminating fears and self-limiting beliefs. He may be reached at 503-646-0446 or Lama@qidao.org. For more information on Tibetan Dreaming, please visit Qidao.org.

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