

## SD 63.13

## Mahā,supina Sutta

The Discourse on the Great Dreams

A 5.196

Theme: The bodhisattva's 5 great dreams just before the awakening

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2025

### 1 Sutta summary and significance

#### 1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND RELATED TEXTS ON THE 5 DREAMS

##### 1.1.1 Sutta summary

The **Mahā,supina Sutta** (A 5.196) records the Buddha, speaking in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, regarding the 5 dreams that he had just before the great awakening and their meanings, as follows:

- (1) **The whole earth, with the Himalaya and the surrounding oceans, is his bed.**  
He would gain full self-awakening to become the Buddha.
- (2) **Tiriya grass rise up from his navel to touch the sky.**  
He would realize the noble eightfold path and teach it to gods and humans.
- (3) **White worms with black heads covered all of his lower legs (from the feet up to the knees).**  
He would have lay followers who are committed to living the Dharma.
- (4) **4 birds of different colours from the 4 quarters fell at his feet and turned white.**  
People from all social classes will renounce under the Buddha's Dharma,Vinaya.
- (5) **He climbed up a mountain of dung without being soiled by it.**  
He would enjoy the 4 supports without being attached to them but use them mindfully.

##### 1.1.2 The Jātaka account

**1.1.2.1** The 5 great dreams are alluded to in **the Jātaka Nidāna** (J 1:69), the introduction of the Jātaka Commentary. No details are, however, given; it only says, "he saw the 5 great dreams" (*pañca mahā,supine disvā*). The context of this statement is interesting and useful for us to reflect on. It is here given in abridged form (J 1:68-71).<sup>1</sup>

The bodhisattva's 6-year self-mortification practice left him painfully emaciated and he fell into a deathly faint. Realizing the frivolity and danger of torturing the body, he decided to end it and took some food again. **The Jātaka Nidāna** relates that this last meal of the bodhisattva before his awakening was given by a young girl named **Sujātā**.<sup>2</sup> Born into the family of the householder Senāni of the market-town of Senāni (*senāni,nigāma*),<sup>3</sup> in Uruvelā, and having reached her age of discretion, made a wish each year at a banyan tree:

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see SD 52.1 (15). See also E J Thomas, *Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*, 1949:70 f.

<sup>2</sup> For the Sujātā story, see SD 52.1 (14.1). Lalita,Vistara mentions 9 other girls provided the bodhisattva with food during his austerities (Lalv 334-337 (267-270)). Divyāvadāna says that 2 girls, Nandā and Nanda,balā, offered the meal (Divy 392).

<sup>3</sup> J 1:68,6 = BA 286,38. The name seems orig to have been *Senā,nigāma* or *Senāni,gāma* (eg, V 1:21; M 1:166, 240; S 1:106). Buddhaghosa himself is not certain of the spelling. He says that it was so called because either (1) it was a village (*gāma*) occupied by soldiers (*senā* or *senāni*) at the beginning of the world-cycle (*paṭhama,kappikā-narṇ senāya nivittṭh'okāse patittṭhita,gāma*) or (2) it was the market-town of Sujātā's father Senāni (*sujātāya vā pitu senāni nāma nigāma*) (MA 2:173; SA 1:172).

“If I were to marry a member of a family of equal rank, and succeed in obtaining a son as my first child, I will make to you an annual sacrifice, costing a hundred thousand.”

When her wish was fulfilled, she sent her maid Puṇṇā to prepare the place for the offering. This was on the very day of the awakening, the full moon day of the month Visākha (April-May). Puṇṇā, finding the bodhisattva sitting beneath the banyan, and illuminating the whole tree with his bodily radiance, thought he must be the tree-deity who had come down for the offering. The night before the bodhisattva had dreamed 5 great dreams [1.1], and had risen with the certainty that he would that day become buddha.

**1.1.2.2** The young lady Sujātā came and offered him the food in a golden bowl, and the earthen one that the bodhisattva had miraculously received at his renunciation from brahmā Ghaṭikāra vanished. Having received Sujātā’s offering the honeyed milk-rice (*madhu pāyāsa*), he made them into 49 balls, each the size of a single-seeded palmyra fruit.<sup>4</sup> The bodhisattva took the bowl to the river bank, bathed at a ford called Suppatiṭṭhita, and had his meal. This was his only meal for 49 days (7 weeks).

Then he set the bowl on the river, declaring, “If today I shall be able to become buddha, let this bowl go upstream; if not, let it go downstream.” The bowl floated to the middle of the river, then moving upstream as swift as a horse for a distance of 80 hands,<sup>5</sup> and sank down in a whirlpool to the abode of Kāla, the naga king. There it struck against the bowls of the 3 previous buddhas (of this cycle) and stayed as the lowest of them.

**1.1.2.3** Having passed the day in a grove of sal-trees, in the evening he went along the highway towards the bodhi-tree accompanied by devas, who sang and honoured him with sweet flowers. At that time, a grass-cutter Sotthiya (Skt *svastika*) met him, and gave him 8 handfuls of grass. After trying each of the four quarters, he chose the east, the unshakeable place taken by all the buddhas for striking down the cage of defilements. Holding the grass by the ends shook it out to form a seat 14 hands wide.

He sat down cross-legged and upright with this famous “resolution of effort” (*virīya adhiṭṭhāna*), found, for example, in **the (Duka) Upaṅṇāta Sutta** (A 2.5), which runs thus:

“Willingly, I will let only skin,	sinews and bones remain;
let my body dry up,	and flesh and blood, too.
There will be no end in my effort until I have won what can be won by personal strength,	
personal effort, personal striving!”	(A 2.5,2/1:50), SD 51.5 <sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> “A single-seeded palmyra fruit” (*ek’aṭṭhi, tāla, pakka-p, pamāne*). J 1:70,8 = ApA 75,12.

<sup>5</sup> “Hand,” *hattha*, a cubit (the distance between the elbow and the middle-finger-tip (ie, the forearm): SD 49.12 (18.4).

<sup>6</sup> *Kāmaṃ taco ca nahāru* [Ce Ee Ke Se so; Be *nhāru*] *ca aṭṭ hī ca avasissatu, sarīre upasussatu maṃsa, lohitaṃ, yan taṃ purisa-t, thāmena purisa, viriyena purisa, parakkamena pattabbarṃ na taṃ apāpuṇitvā viriyassa santhānaṃ bhavissatīti* (also J 1:71,24-26). Comy: By this the Buddha shows that the ideal disciple practises by putting forth effort, resolving, “I shall not rise again until I have attained arhathood!” (MA 2:194 f). This is stock, see **Kiṭṭā, giri S** (M 70,27/1:481), SD 11.1; **Dasa, bala S 2** (S 12.22,6/2:28), SD 112.1; **Ghaṭa S** (S 21.3,10/2:275), SD 112.2; **Upaṅṇāta S** (A 2.5×3/1:50), SD 51.5; **Assājānīya S** (A 8.13,8/4:190), SD 112.3; Nm 1:66, 2:476; Nc:Be 297. See **(Sutta Nipāta) Padhāna S** (Sn 3.2) @ SD 50.11 (3.2.4.2).

Then, he made his aspiration (*paṭiññā*): “I shall not change this posture so long as I’ve not attained full self-awakening! Even a hundred thunderstorms were to break out, I will sit without breaking this invincible posture!”<sup>7</sup> The “invincible posture” (*aparajita pallāṅka*) is the full-lotus posture for deep meditation.

### 1.1.3 The Mahāvastu account

1.1.3.1 The Mahāvastu<sup>8</sup> (Mvst 2:136-139) preserves a close Sanskrit parallel of the account of the bodhisattva’s 5 dreams, but a few interesting divergences in terms of the dream images, as follows:

<u>Mahāvastu (Mvst 2:136-139)</u>		<u>Mahā,supina Sutta (A 5.196)</u>	
1 <sup>st</sup> dream	“Sumeru,”	“the Himalaya.”	[\$1]
2 <sup>nd</sup> dream	<i>kṣīrikā</i> or <i>sthirikā</i> grass,	“ <i>tīriya</i> grass.”	[\$3]
3 <sup>rd</sup> dream	“red worms with black heads,” <sup>9</sup>	“white worms with black heads.”	[\$4]
4 <sup>th</sup> dream	<i>sakuntā</i>	<i>sakuṇā</i> . (same)	[\$5]
5 <sup>th</sup> dream	<i>mīḍa,parvata</i>	<i>mīḷha,pabbata</i> . (same)	[\$6]

The interpretations of the dreams are again similar with slight divergences, thus:

1 <sup>st</sup> dream	the full self-awakening	<i>same</i>	[\$7]
2 <sup>nd</sup> dream	the 4 noble truths <sup>10</sup>	the noble eightfold path	[\$8]
3 <sup>rd</sup> dream	“red worms with black heads,” <sup>11</sup>	“white worms with black heads.” <sup>12</sup>	[\$9]
4 <sup>th</sup> dream	<i>sakuntā</i>	<i>sakuṇā</i> (same).	[\$10]
5 <sup>th</sup> dream	<i>mīḍa,parvata</i>	<i>mīḷha,pabbata</i> (same).	[\$11]

1.1.3.2 Mahāvastu gives the name of the mountain as **Sumeru**, which is a mythical mountain that was also seen the *axis mundi* or hub of the galaxy or universe. The Pali mentions *himava*, the traditional name for the Himalayas, that is, its older pre-mythical name.

The “white worms with black heads” of the Pali version fits the idea of white-dressed laity with unshaven heads, rather than the enigmatic “red worms with black heads.”

The Mahāvastu quotes the late section of a late sutta, **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11) with an inordinately long interpretation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> dream, while the Pali Sutta simply speaks of “the noble eightfold path,” which alludes to the “path of awakening.”

Clearly, the Pali Sutta uses better imagery and presents an older text than the late Sanskrit version.

<sup>7</sup> The above passage also in **Apādāna Comy**, and where the full passage reads: *Na tv-evāhaṃ sammā,sambodhiṃ appatvā imaṃ pallāṅkaṃ bhindissāmīti asani,sata,sannipātena’pi abhejja,rūpaṃ aparājita,pallāṅkaṃ ābhujitvā nisīdi* (ApA 76).

<sup>8</sup> **Mahā,vastu**, the earliest Skt biography of the Buddha we have, is found in the Vinaya of the Lokottara,vāda (“tradition of the supramundane”) which sees the Buddha as a transcendental being in a docetic sense. It was a branch of the Mahā,saṅghika (“great community”), regarded by some scholars as a possible antecedent of the Mahāyāna. See SD 61.10 (2.2.1.1).

<sup>9</sup> *Lohitaka prāṇakā kāla,śīrṣakā*.

<sup>10</sup> **Mvst** gives a much longer interpretation, mentioning the “3 phases, 4 modes” (*triparivarta dvādaśākāraṇ*) [SD 1.1 (6.2)] of the noble truths, with the gods of the sense-world and the brahma-world announcing the turning of the Dharma-wheel at *vārānasyām riṣivadane mṛgadāve*; cf **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,17 f), SD 1.1.

<sup>11</sup> *Lohitaka prāṇakā kāla,śīrṣakā*.

<sup>12</sup> *Setā kimī kaṇha,sisā*.

## 1.2 CHINESE DREAMS

### 1.2.1 Xuánzàng's dreams

**1.2.1.1** Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveller, and translator, 玄奘 (602-664),<sup>13</sup> was punctuated with dreams. 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 *dà táng dà cí ēn sì sān zàng fǎshī chuán* (**Biography of the Tripitaka Master of the Great Cí'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty**) says:

“Not long after Xuanzang was born, his mother dreamed that he was dressed in white and went West. His mother asked, ‘You are my son, where do you intend to go?’ He replied, ‘To seek the Dharma.’ This was a premonition of his wandering life.”<sup>14</sup>

As a monk, Xuánzàng wished to go to India to obtain authentic Buddhist scriptures to correct the errors, inconsistencies and contradictions in the Chinese translations of the time. He wanted to study Buddhism at its source to gain a deeper understanding of the true teachings and bring them back to China. His request for travel permit was turned down by the emperor.<sup>15</sup>

**1.2.1.2** Xuanzang's **Biography** reports the start of his journey west (to India) as follows:

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Zhēnguàn, autumn of the 8<sup>th</sup> moon, I was about to embark on my journey and sought auspicious omens. That night, I dreamed of a vast ocean, in which was Mount Sumeru. It was exquisitely beautiful, made of four precious materials. I wished to climb the mountain, but the waves were surging, and there were no boats or rafts.

Yet I was not afraid and determined to enter (the waters). Suddenly, a stone lotus appeared, springing from the water's edge, appearing at my feet. But upon closer inspection, it vanished with each step. A moment later, I reached the foot of the mountain. It was steep and precipitous, impossible to climb. I tried to leap up, and a gust of wind swept me upwards. With its support, I ascended to the peak. I looked around at the unobstructed vastness, and then awoke with joy.

Then I immediately set off on my journey. (T2053.50.0222c15-23)<sup>16</sup>

In **629**, the 26-year-old Xuanzang secretly left China on an overland journey that lasted 17 years. He visited many Buddhist sites, studied at Nalanda University, and returned in **645** with 657 scriptures and relics. The emperor welcomed him, especially since Xuanzang was then familiar with the western regions. Xuanzang compiled his travelogue, 大唐西域記 *dà táng xī yù jì*, “**Great Tang Records on the Western Regions**” in response to the emperor's frequent and numerous questions.

<sup>13</sup> Xuanzang's original or birth name is either 陳禕 *chén huī* or 陳禕 *chén yī*; but there is disagreement over this. Historical records provide two different Chinese characters: 禕 *huī*, “admirable, extraordinary,” and 禕 *yī*, “fine, rare”; both are very similar in writing except for their radical; the former radical, 衣 *yī*, has an extra *diǎn* or “left downward dot,” and is the clothes radical; the latter radical is 示 *shì*, “to reveal.” The 2 words are thus pronounced differently: 禕 is *huī* while 禕 is *yī*. Very likely, the proper character should be the latter as used in personal names; hence 陳禕 *chén yī*.

<sup>14</sup> T2053.50.0222c13: 初法師之生也。母夢法師著白 14 衣西去。母曰。汝是我子今欲何去。答曰。為 15 求法故去。此則遊方之先兆也。

<sup>15</sup> China, under emperor Taizong of the Tang dynasty, was engaged in a war and standoff with the Eastern Turks on its northern and western frontiers. The authorities imposed strict travel restrictions and border controls to maintain national security and stability. Hence, his application for a travel permit (*guo shuo*) was turned down.

<sup>16</sup> T2053.50.0222c15: 貞觀三年秋 16 八月。將欲首途又求祥瑞。乃夜夢見大海 17 中有蘇迷盧山。四寶所成極為嚴麗。意欲登 18 山。而洪濤洶湧。又無船筏。不以爲懼。乃 19 決意而入。忽見石蓮華踊乎波外應足而 20 生。却而觀之隨足而滅。須臾至山下。又峻 21 峭不可上。試躡身自騰有搏颺颺至。22 上昇到山頂。四望廓然無復擁礙。喜而寤 23 焉。遂即行矣。

**1.2.1.3** From **660-663**,<sup>17</sup> Xuanzang translated the **Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra** (MPPS) 大般若波羅蜜多經 *dà bōrě bōluómíduō jīng* (T7.220.5-7) in 600 fascicles, completed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> lunar month in 663 at the Yuhua palace 玉華宮 *yù huá gōng*. It was a collection of 16 sūtras, short and long, which articulate the doctrine of *prajñāparamita* (Mahāyāna). This massive work, filling 3 entire Taishō volumes, includes such well known works as the Heart Sūtra 心經 *xīnjīng* and the Diamond Sūtra 金剛經 *jīngāng jīng*, and is one of the most complete collections of *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* available.<sup>18</sup>

Xuanzang considered abridging his translation to avoid repetition as suggested by his translation team. He was dissuaded from doing so after having a series of vivid dreams [1.2.1.4]. He thus translated the *Prajñāpāramitā corpus in toto*.<sup>19</sup> In this case, there was perhaps a hint of fear of omitting details from the text, also a affirmation of Xuanzang’s personal inclination to do a full translation, and of legitimizing this decision against the suggestion of some members of his translation team to do an abridged translation by not including the repetitive and extraneous passages.

**1.2.1.4** Xuanzang’s **Biography** reports his dreams and decision to do a full translation as follows:

“The first reading<sup>20</sup> of the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra began on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of spring in the 5<sup>th</sup> year.<sup>21</sup> The Sanskrit text of the Sūtra contains 2000 verses. The text is extensive, and his students repeatedly suggested abridgements. The Dharma Master would, following the wishes of the many, and as Kumarajiva had translated, omitting redundancies and unnecessary details. He made this decision.

That night, he dreamed of profoundly fearful warning signs. He saw himself traversing a perilous path, witnessing ferocious beasts attacking him, trembling and sweating profusely before finally escaping. Awakening in fear, he recounted this dream to his students.

He decided to do the full translation. That night, he saw Buddhas and Bodhisattvas emitting light from between their eyebrows, illuminating his body and mind with comfort. The Dharma Master also saw himself holding a flower-lamp to offer to the Buddhas, ascending a high seat to teach the Dharma, surrounded by many people praising and respectfully addressing him. He also dreamt of someone offering him rare precious fruits. Awakening with joy, he dared not revise the text any further, keeping to (the style of) the Sanskrit version.”<sup>22</sup>

(T2053.50.0275c23-0276a09)

<sup>17</sup> Xuanzang died the following year, 664.

<sup>18</sup> See G A Keyworth, “On Xuanzang and MSS of the \*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra at Dunhuang and in early Japanese Buddhism,” (ed) SHI Ci Guang et al, *From Chang’an to Nalanda: The life and legacy of the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang (602?-664)*, [Frogbear], 2023:438 f. 5 Dec 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Further, see D Lusthaus, “Xuanzang’s dreams,” *Regional AAS* [1997](#). 2 Dec 2025.

<sup>20</sup> This reading formed the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of the translation process. As a rule, Xuanzang first recited the Skt text and gave his initial Chinese tr to a team of assistants, “Dictaters” or “principals” determined the final meaning and Chinese phrasing; Xuanzang held this role, too. Scribes then recorded the Chinese characters. “Revisers” or “polishing experts” refined the literary style, ensuring the Chinese was clear and elegant. Proofreaders then checked against the original Skt for accuracy. Special or difficult terms were transliterated to preserve their mystery, polysemy and cultural significance (or idiom); this he called “non-translatabn.” See HE Jiachuan, “A brief introduction to Xuanzang’s view of translation,” *International J of Education and Humanities* 8,2 2023:145-149; SHEN Huijia, “Xuanzang’s theory ‘transliteration for five occasions’ in religious and cultural loanwords translation,” *J of Humanities and Education Development* 4,3 May-Jun 2022:14-19.

<sup>21</sup> Ie, the 5th year of 顯慶 *xiǎnqīng* era (656-662) of emperor Gaozong’s reign, which corresponds to the year 660. For a list of [Chinese emperors](#) and [era names](#). 6 Dec 2025.

<sup>22</sup> T2053.50.0275c **23**: 至五年 **24**: 春正月一日起首翻大般若經。經梵本總 **25**: 有二十萬頌。文既廣大。學徒每請刪略。法師 **26-29** [break] T2053.50.0276a**01**: 將順眾意。如羅什所翻。除繁去重。作此念**2**已。於夜夢中。即有極怖畏事。以相警誡。或 **3**: 見乘危履嶮。或見猛獸搏人。流汗**2**戰**3**慄 **4**: 方得免脫。覺已驚懼。向諸眾說。還依廣翻。 **5**: 夜中乃

### 1.2.2 Dào'àn's dream<sup>23</sup>

Of all the early arhats, **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja** is clearly the most popular across the major Buddhist traditions.<sup>24</sup> The Buddha declared him the foremost of monks who receive almsfood (A 1:24).<sup>25</sup> His notorious public display of psychic power is related in some detail in the Culla,vagga of **the Vinaya** where the rule against monastics doing so.<sup>26</sup>

So famous and esteemed was Piṇḍola to ancient Chinese Buddhists, that the Chinese Vinaya master, 道岸 **Dào'àn** (654-717),<sup>27</sup> wrote, in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century, a special article on him, recounting the story of the bowl and his banishment from Jambu,dvīpa.

This work was followed by an even more interesting sequel. When Dào'àn was heavy with doubt about annotating the scriptures, it is said that Piṇḍola visited him in **a dream** as “an Indian man of Tao who had white hair and long eyebrow,”<sup>28</sup> and not only clears his doubt, but declares that he would assist Dào'àn in propagating the Dharma.<sup>29</sup>

Piṇḍola then rightfully requests as from one monk to another, “From time to time, you may make an offering of food.” Thenceforth, we are told, “they established a seat to make food offerings to him and everywhere this became the rule.”<sup>30</sup>

A number of Dào'àn's disciples expressed their desire to be able to see Piṇḍola again, since the Buddha had authorized Piṇḍola to return “occasionally and to take his seat when invited.”<sup>31</sup> Serendipitously, Piṇḍola's banishment means that is also available to anyone outside of Jambu,dvīpa, certainly to those who invoke and invite him.

### 1.2.3 Meeting the Buddha<sup>32</sup>

The Sanskrit **Pratyutpanna Sūtra**—般舟三昧經 *bōzhōu sānmèi jīng*<sup>33</sup>—was one of the earliest Indian sutras to be translated in China [1.2.4.3]. It shows remarkable affinity with the teaching of early Buddhist meditation, especially that of the recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*).<sup>34</sup> The sutra first instructs the meditator to lead a life of strict moral virtue. Then he should sit down in meditation and visualizes the Tathagatas (note the plural) in all their beauty and glory, sitting on the Buddha-throne and teaching (Harrison, 1978:45).

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見諸佛菩薩眉間放光照觸己身心 6: 意怡適。法師又自見手執花燈供養諸佛。7: 或昇高座為眾說法。多人圍繞讚嘆恭敬。8: 或夢見有人奉己名菓。覺而喜慶不敢更9: 刪。一如梵本。

<sup>23</sup> This section is very similar to SD 27.6b (3.3.1.2).

<sup>24</sup> SD 27.6a; **Arhats who became Bodhisattvas**, SD 27.6b.

<sup>25</sup> SD 27.6a (1.1).

<sup>26</sup> Cv 5.8 = V 2:110 f.

<sup>27</sup> See **How Buddhism Became Chinese**, SD 40b (2.3.4); not to be confused with the early master, Dào'àn 道安 (312-385) [2.3.3].

<sup>28</sup> Piṇḍola's face (esp his eyes) become more significant in his meeting with Aśoka [3.3.2].

<sup>29</sup> A **Link**, “The biography of Shih Tao-an,” *T'oung Pao* 46, 1958:1-48 (35). 1958: 35; J **Strong**, “The legend of the Lion-Roarer: A study of the Buddhist Arhat Piṇḍola Bharadvaja.” *Numen* 26,1 Jun 1979: 50-88 (70).

<sup>30</sup> Link 1958: 35-37. See Strong 1979: 82 n113 for a summary of Piṇḍola's appearance to Dào'àn in 385 (the year he died). Like Dào'àn, as we shall see below, Aśoka, too, meets Piṇḍola [3.3.2].

<sup>31</sup> S Lévi & E Chavannes, “Les seize arhat protecteurs de la Loi,” *Journal asiatique* ser 2, vol 8, Jul-Aug 1916: **5-50** & vol 9, Sep-Oct 1916: **189-304** (208).

<sup>32</sup> SD 40b.3 (3.4.4.3).

<sup>33</sup> In full, Pratyupanna,buddha saṁmukhāvasthitha samādhī Sūtra; tr by the Indo-Scythian Kushan monk, Loka-kṣema, 179 CE at the Han capital, 洛陽 *luòyáng*. In 2028, the discovery of fragments of a birch bark MS in Gāndhārī, written in Kharoṣṭhī script (117) was announced as dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> cent CE or possibly earlier. P Harrison, T Lenz & R Salomon, “Fragments of a Gāndhārī MS of the Pratyutpannabuddhasaṁmukhāvasthitasamādhīsūtra” (Studies in Gāndhārī MSS 1), *J of the International Assoc of Buddhist Studies* 41, 2018:117-143 (123).

<sup>34</sup> See *Buddhānussati*, SD 15.7.

Or, the meditator could choose to visualize a single Buddha, say, Amitāyus (that is, Amitābha), sitting in meditation for one day and night, for two, three, four, five six, or seven days and nights. If he concentrates on the Tathāgata Amitāyus with undistracted thought for seven days and nights, then when seven days and nights have elapsed he shall see the Lord, the Tathāgata Amitāyus. If he does not see that Lord by day, then in a dream while sleeping the face of the Lord ... will appear. (Harrison 1978:43)<sup>35</sup>

Having met the Buddha, it is said, the meditator then should worship him and receive teachings. Understandably, the Sutra was written at a time when *dreams and visions were believed to be real events*, or had real effects on one's waking life. The visionary or dreamer might then go on to write down his experiences or the "teachings" he had thus received as a "sutra." Experts in the psychology of dreams and auto-suggestion would be in a better position to provide an interesting analysis of such developments.<sup>36</sup>

#### 1.2.4 Dream as legitimizing monkhood<sup>37</sup>

**1.2.4.1** The strict state control over religion during the Míng dynasty kept many aspirants out of the monastic life, but this did not deter those who were determined or resourceful enough. Their main recourse would be **the Bodhisattva precepts**. In contrast to such stringent official measures, the Bodhisattva precepts, being apocryphal, clearly laid out an open attitude towards aspirants for ordination.

An important self-ordained monk was **Gǔxīn Rúxīn** 古心如馨 (1541-1615), the founder of the modern day Chinese *Vinaya* lineage.<sup>38</sup> Ruxin was said to have ascended Mt Wutai (五台山 *wǔtái shān*), where he "received" his precepts in **a propitious dream**, in which the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī conferred upon him the "precept substance."<sup>39</sup>

"It is indeed both intriguing and ironic," notes **William Chu**, "to think about what implications this story may have on the legitimacy of modern Chinese monasticism as a whole, which, as the story would have it, was transmitted without the staple requirement but through this alternative, fantastic channel sanctioned only by the apocrypha." (Chu 2006:8, digital ed)<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Paul Harrison, "Buddhānsmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-Sūtra." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6,1 Sep 1978:35-57. Zhìyǐ's *Móhē zhǐguān* 摩訶止觀 ("The great calm and insight," T1911.46.1a-140c) prescribes a more gruelling process: after initial purification and consecration, the devotee should repair to a specially assembled room with an Amitābha image in the centre, and was to circumambulate it for full 90 days without stopping, sitting or sleeping (Oxford *Dictionary of Buddhism*, 2003:228).

<sup>36</sup> Étienne Lamotte proposes that this is *de l'autosuggestion pure* (quoted by Paul Williams 1989:222). In Japanese Jōdo Shin tradition, the *Shinran muki* and the *Godenshō* by Kakunyo report that on the 95<sup>th</sup> day of Shinran's 100-day retreat in the Rokkakudō, Kannon appeared to him in a dream and said, "If the believer, because of the fruition of karma, is driven by sexual desire, | Then I shall take on the body of a beautiful woman to be ravished by him. | Throughout his entire life I shall adorn him well, | And at death I shall lead him to birth in Pure Land." (Dobbins 1989:23 f). It was this dream that led Shinran to give up celibacy and marry. For a complete story, see the Edo-period Takada-ha biography, *Shinran Shōnin shōtoden* (1715): see Alfred Bloom, *The Life of Shinran Shōnin*, Leiden, 1968:12 f.

<sup>37</sup> SD 40b.4 (4.3.3.6).

<sup>38</sup> According to Shengyan, the "two lineages" of the Míng were founded by Ruxin and Zhuhong. Only Ruxin's line survived and is considered to be the source of modern Chinese monastic tradition. SHI Shengyan, "The Renaissance of Vinaya Thought During the Late Ming Dynasty of China." In *Buddhist Ethics and Modern Society*, ed Fu & Wawrytko. NY: Greenwood, 1991:41-54 (46).

<sup>39</sup> SHI Shengyan, 1991:46.

<sup>40</sup> William Chu, "Bodhisattva Precepts in the Ming society: Factors behind their success and propagation." *J of Buddhist Ethics* 13 2006: 1-36. See also SD 40b.4 (4.3.3.10).

**1.2.4.2** In all the 4 accounts of dream cases in Chinese Buddhism [1.2.1-1.2.4], we can see an almost identical pattern in the premodern Chinese understanding of dreams, that is, they have a certain reality of their own, and may be regarded as valid as conscious judgement in reaction to any predicament, such as when it is impossible to get monastic ordination (eg, due to imperial sanction), as in the case of Ruxin [1.2.4.1]. Hence, when one is able to relate a dream convincingly, it would legitimize one's self-ordination—and also one's view of meditation [1.2.3], or one's claim of seeing the Buddha [1.2.4.2] or meeting an arhat [1.2.2], or one's actions, such as, translating the full sutra or text [1.2.1.3].

**1.2.4.3** Although the Pratyutpanna Sūtra 般舟三昧經 was translated in 179 CE, at the very dawn of Buddhism in China, I have slotted it after Dao'an's dream in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century. Although the text was translated early in China, it was then still a foreign religion accessible only to royal elite and literati. It would take a few more centuries before there were local Chinese monks, and those who meditated. What is stated in §1.2.3 refers to a time when there were local monks and when Pure Land Buddhism 淨土宗 *jìngtǔzōng*, a patently Chinese Buddhism, was already well established.<sup>41</sup>

### **1.2.5 Zhuangzi and the butterfly**

**1.2.5.1** Daoism profoundly influenced Chinese Buddhism, especially the Pure Land School [1.2.5]. Daoist philosophy is also one of the 3 roots of Chinese philosophy, besides Confucianism and Buddhism. Among the key Chinese philosophers was **Zhuāng Zhōu** 莊周.

Zhuang Zhou, better known as **Zhuāngzǐ** 莊子, “Master Zhuang” (c 369-c 286 BCE), was an influential Chinese philosopher who lived during the Warring States period (476-221 BCE), a time of great development in Chinese philosophy, especially the Hundred Schools of Thought. He is credited with writing—in part or in whole—a work known by his name, the *Zhuangzi*, which is one of two foundational texts of philosophical Daoism, alongside 道德經 *dào dé jīng*.

Zhuangzi's famous “**butterfly dream**” paradox is recorded in chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*, thus:

昔者莊周夢為胡蝶，栩栩然胡蝶也，自喻適志與。不知周也。

Once, Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering about, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know that he was Zhuang Zhou.

俄然覺，則蘧蘧然周也。不知周之夢為胡蝶與，胡蝶之夢為周與。周與胡蝶，則必有分矣。此之謂物化。 Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.

*Zhuangzi*, chapter 2 (Watson translation)<sup>34</sup>

**1.2.5.2** An intelligent student may wonder whether a butterfly could think like a human. We then need some philosophical licence; suppose this Zhuangzi's butterfly could think. On the other hand, we may attempt a practical Buddhist response. Imagine, after studying the 4 noble truths, I dreamed that I was the Buddha, and was profoundly enjoying that dream. When I woke I realize I am Piya. Then I wondered if thinking and knowing about the 4 noble truths made me buddha—no, not the Zen way, but the early Buddhist way—or is it because I am buddha that makes me know and understand the truths?

<sup>41</sup> 廬山慧遠 *lúshān huìyuǎn* (334-416), a pupil of Dao'an [1.2.2], was a pioneer of the Pure Land School. See CHEN Chien-huang 陳劍鏗; C B Jones, “The Process of Establishing and Justifying the Thirteen Patriarchs of the Lotus School,” *Pacific World* 20, [2018](https://doi.org/10.1017/pw.2025.1):129-147. 2 Dec 2025.

I'm not sure what kind of answer would be useful for us in the real world. But such a thought makes me reflect on the fact that there is neither a "self" that is buddha nor is there a "self" that is "Piya." There is only someone *called* "buddha," and there is someone *called* " ..." (insert your name here). Try reflecting on this. I'm just wondering which one—Zhuangzi's dream butterfly or the "truth/self" dream helps me understand myself better. Perhaps, if we think deeply enough, both have the same answer.

### **1.2.6 Mohism and Mozi**<sup>42</sup>

**1.2.6.1** More practical and person-centred than Zhuangzi was the teaching of **Mozi** 墨子 *mòzǐ* (fl 470-391) known as **Mohism** or Moism. Confucianism is an elitist virtue ethics that focuses on traits and attitudes of ideal persons such as the *junzi* (the superior person), in whom right feeling and wise intellect fuse (Cua 1978: ch 4).<sup>43</sup> Mozi, by contrast, emphasizes the need for detachment from emotions such as pleasure, anger, joy, sadness, and love as unreasoned attachment (*Mozi*, ch. 47).

Mohism became the major rival to Confucianism for a good part of the ancient era up to the beginning of the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) but afterward lost virtually all its following. A possible historical factor in its downfall was the development of the highly centralized bureaucratic state that subordinated the interests of the artisan class and could not tolerate an organized political and social movement existing outside the confines of the established political order (Schwartz 1985:169).<sup>44</sup>

The Qin and Han dynasties transformed China into an imperial bureaucratic state. They brought an end to the classical period of dynamic thought and the start of China's dark age. The more totalitarian state repressed the guilds, while the bureaucracy provided a convenient home for the Confucians. The craft hypothesis explains why what little science did develop in China came from the Mohist school. Optics (especially mirror optics), geometry, and economics developed out of the period's crafts. China abandoned its move toward scientific theorizing when it subjected all schools and thinking to political domination and evaluation. (Hansen 1992:99)<sup>45</sup>

**1.2.6.2** Thus, the fact that Mohism was incompatible with the deep-rooted features of the Chinese political and elite culture helps to explain why Mozi is often taken lightly in the post-ancient philosophical tradition.<sup>46</sup>

Chinese philosophy thus does have some speculative depth as we can see. However, Chinese philosophy is, for historical and cultural reasons, better known for its **pragmatism**. Again this is not to say that Chinese philosophy does not lack *ethical or moral dimensions*. It did, but the ancient elitist class culture preferred pragmatism with which it commanded power over the people. Since Confucianism is better known than the ethical-moral philosophies of China, I shall briefly, only briefly, mention the latter, and then return to our discussion on dreams.

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<sup>42</sup> David B Wong, "Mohism: The founder, Mozi (Mo Tzu)," & Chad Hansen, "Mohism: Later (*Mo Jia*, *Mo Chia*)," in (ed) Antonio S Cua, *Ency of Chinese Philosophy*, Routledge, 2003:454-461, 461-469.

<sup>43</sup> Antonio S Cua, *Dimensions of Moral Creativity: Paradigms, principles, and ideals*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1985.

<sup>45</sup> Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A philosophical interpretation*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1992.

<sup>46</sup> For the texts of **Mozi**, see <https://ctext.org/mohism>. 3 Dec 2025.

### 1.2.7 Mencius<sup>47</sup>

Mencius is the anglicized name of 孟子 *mèngzǐ* (c 371-c 289 BCE), born 孟軻 *mèngkē*, was a 4<sup>th</sup>-generation disciple of Confucius, and often described as the “Second Sage,” 亞聖 *yàshèng*, to reflect his traditional esteem relative to Confucius himself. In significant ways, Mencius humanized Confucianism, which then came to be known as **Neo-Confucianism**.

According to Mencius, human destiny (*ming*) and human nature formed two aspects of human existence as a person reflected on himself. In fact, what was called the self could be regarded simply as composed of these two aspects, which were related and derived from the same source, heaven. However, in contrast to human nature, human destiny was imposed from without and appeared to be a restriction of individual activity. One’s individual situation could be explored for its advantages to oneself; nevertheless, it was an objective condition that one had to accept and could not change. In light of *ming*, one cannot simply do as one wishes; one must work in accordance with what it determines. However, this is not to say that a person is fully determined by *ming*.

The *ming* of a person was, again, derived from heaven, and thus the “mandate of heaven” (*tianming*) was beyond human control. Mencius defined heaven as that which is beyond one’s control, but this does not preclude the idea that one must plan one’s life by knowing *tianming*. Hence *tianming* has two seemingly opposing factors; it is beyond one’s control, and it is actually what one encounters as an obstruction. One must thus know heaven and, consequently, one’s own nature; in knowing one’s limitations, one comes to know oneself and one’s destiny.

## 1.3 MODERN DEFINITIONS OF DREAM

### 1.3.1 Normal dreaming

A **dream** is a succession of images, scenes and situations, pregnant with ideas, emotions, and feelings that usually arise involuntarily in the mind usually during deep sleep.<sup>48</sup> Humans spend about two hours dreaming per night,<sup>49</sup> and each dream lasts around 5-20 minutes, although the dreamer may perceive the dream as being much longer.<sup>50</sup>

As a rule, we are not aware when we are dreaming, unless we have the gift of “**lucid dreaming**,” or we are trained in lucid dreaming, that is, some level of almost conscious participation in our own dreams. In other words, we are aware that we are dreaming while asleep. With mindfulness and training, we can, to a certain extent, control or direct the dream, but the dream will always have its way, so to speak.

### 1.3.2 Intuitive dreaming

**1.3.2.1** Even if we are unable to have lucid dreams, we can train ourselves to have “intuitive dreaming.” This is when we get useful solutions and ideas for our intellectual work or any kind of problem that we are facing. The dream-state provides the calmness and clarity for us to let our wholesome mind work itself naturally. Firstly, we need the habit of keeping the mind calm especially through **breath meditation**, that is, simply letting go of the breath and enjoying the resultant calmness.

One also needs to keep regular sleeping time, even on week-ends. When one does get up in the night, one should simply relax (a gentle smile helps) with deep thoracic breathing in (4 counts) and breathing out slowly through pursed lips (8 counts). One will then fall back to sleep more easily.

<sup>47</sup> CHENG Ching-ying, “Mencius (Mengzi, Meng Tzu),” in (ed) Antonio S Cua, *Ency of Chinese Philosophy*, Routledge, 2003:440-448.

<sup>48</sup> Burton Watson (tr), *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, NY: Columbia University Press, 1964.

<sup>49</sup> [National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke - Wikipedia](#) 24 Nov 2025.

<sup>50</sup> L A Obringer & Y Jeffcoat, *How Dream Works*, [Howstuffworks](#), 2006. 24 Nov 2025.

**1.3.2.2** One is unlikely to remember most of the details of one’s dreams; more often, these details are our own “images” reconstructed in our waking memory, depending on our personality, intellectual acumen and creative genius. However, when some intuitive solutions arise in a dream, usually just before waking, we should make every effort to remember that solution or intuition by working on them right away, that is, by making careful notes about them.

In the **Mahā,supina Sutta**, the bodhisattva is able to faithfully recall all his dreams which, after all have arisen from a mind that is on the verge of full self-awakening. We may even surmise that these dreams are the last remnants of the bodhisattva’s unawakened desire or wishes; some “wishful thinking,” if you like, only that these wishes are actually premonition of what is really to come. Since the Buddha has no desire—he only acts appropriately in accordance with the present moment, moved by compassion—he has no dreams.

**1.3.2.3** As ordinary, unawakened beings, we as a rule forget our dreams, or if we do recall the dream, these are (as we have said above) our own conscious mind’s vision what our unconscious plays on our mind. We describe our dreams in accordance with our memory, language skill, creative genius and, often, with our psychological tendencies or wishful drives.

The following metaphorical scenario may help illustrate why it is difficult for us to recall our dreams in full or even in clear detail. We have seen a glorious sunset or the joyful face of dawn.<sup>51</sup> We feel its peace and goodness in the moment but it takes a Wordsworth to bring daffodils into vivid life in words as a poem,<sup>52</sup> or the genius of a Stevenson to project the terrors of dual personality into a gripping tale.<sup>53</sup>

But the sunset talk or daffodil poem is not the dream itself. It is only a memory, a personal re-telling of ineffable joy and beauty deep living below the conscious mind. For this reason, insightful teachers often remind us to “lose ourselves” through these portals into the dream-world. *We need to renounce the world in order to taste what is out of this world*, beyond time and space; a vision of eternity and beauty in the moment, as “They flash upon that inward eye | Which is the bliss of solitude.”

### **1.3.3 The bodhisattva’s dreams**

**1.3.3.1** In most normal dreams, we have only a vivid “memory” of them upon waking up. If we do not record them *immediately*, we are likely to lose many of the details, and resort to “filling in” those details as we try to recall them (especially when we are recording them later) even within the hour. The reason for these ephemeral states of dream-experience and dream-memory is that the dream itself is an unconscious event arising in our sleeping mind. When we try to recall the dream, it is a conative act, *an intentional conscious effort to reconstruct what is unconsciously imaginative, and at best liminal*.

As the hours pass, we tend to lose memory of more and more of the dream details until we almost completely forget them. Even when we try to record them within the hour, we often have to “work on” the details of how to express them in words. In other words, a dream, apparently has its own language like most of our deep feelings. We seem to know what they are but expressing them can be much more difficult. Hence, the earlier we record our dreams—ideally upon waking from them—the more closely they reflect the actual details of the dream.

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<sup>51</sup> “The joyful face of dawn (beaming) in the night” is a tr of a beautiful Pali phrase, *aruṇaṃ nandi,mukhī rattī* (Cv 9.1.1 (3.1), SD 59.2c).

<sup>52</sup> For the poem, “I wandered lonely as a cloud” (1807), see [[PoetryFoundation](http://PoetryFoundation)]. For details and refs, see [[Wiki](http://Wiki)]. 20 Dec 2025.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1886.

**1.3.3.2** Thus having a vivid imagination, a good memory and great creative talent help to “finally form” our dreams. This is often the case with great writers, poets, artists and deeply religious or spiritual people. Of course, we can never know the exact details of our dreams, much less our dream as it “actually” happened. This is like perceiving some event or object as we move along. We know what we are perceiving in the moment, but we will have difficulty trying to recall their exact details. Dreams are even more ephemeral than such waking perceptions.

What we recall are really impressions of our dreams.

**1.3.3.3** In the case of the bodhisattva’s 5 dreams, he was able to recall the details of all his dreams cohesively and authentically as he had dreamed them. This remarkable ability is possible and likely if we accept the fact that the bodhisattva was on the verge of awakening; in fact, the dreams occurred during the early hours of the awakening day itself.

In other words, the bodhisattva’s dreams were no ordinary dreams of the unconscious. They were portents of the awakening mind. They have a purpose—they were heralds of **the great awakening** and its blessings for the world:

The fully self-awakened **Buddha** will arise in the world.

The noble eightfold **path** will appear for all beings.

There will be **lay followers** committed to living the Buddha Dharma for happiness and awakening.

People from all social classes will **renounce** under the Buddha’s teaching.

The Buddha and his renunciants will enjoy **the world’s support** without being attached to them.

## 2 The bodhisattva’s 5 pre-awakening dreams

### 2.0 DREAMS OF THE AWAKENING

On the night before the Buddha awakened, he (as bodhisattva) had 5 dreams full of symbolisms that presage his awakening (A 5.196). These **dreams** are interesting even if merely for their clear details; this suggests that the dreamer’s mind was calm and clear during the dream process. Just as remarkable are the **interpretations** the Buddha gives for each of the 5 dreams; this shows that he clearly understood their significance and his impending role as the Buddha.

We will here look at these 5 dreams and examine the Buddha’s interpretations of them for our benefit of Buddhist practitioners and sympathisers today. Perhaps this study may even help us throw some light for a better understanding of the psychology of dreams that specialists are still struggling with today.

### 2.1 THE BODHISATTVA’S 1<sup>ST</sup> DREAM

#### 2.1.1 The cosmic bed

**2.1.1.1** The Bodhisattva’s 1<sup>st</sup> dream is that of a “cosmic bed,” that is:

This mighty earth was his bed;  
the Himalaya, king of mountains, was his pillow;  
his left hand rested on the eastern ocean,  
his right hand on the western ocean,  
and his two feet on the southern ocean,

(which means), bhikshus, that he would awaken to **the supreme, self-awakening**. [§7]

**2.1.1.2** In this dream, the bodhisattva is a cosmic being that straddles the whole of the ancient world, centering on the Himalaya as the world's hub with the world's oceans beside and below him. This gargantuan figure of the bodhisattva reminds us of the Vedic *puruṣa* or Primeval Man, from whose mouth, claimed the brahmins they issued forth, while the kshatriyas came from his arms, the vaishyas from his thighs, and the shudras his feet. This inhumanly pernicious ideology was used by the elitist brahmins to exploit others socially, and to alienate the dark-skinned natives.

On the other hand, the Buddha arose in the world to debunk this false and harmful view by teaching us how to be self-reliant, socially progressive and spiritually liberated. [2.4] The Buddha arose in India because it was then a society that deeply rooted in faith and wisdom. It was and is a society of countless religious teachers. Many of them were great teachers whose light shone brightly amongst the faithful. While most of these lights blinded believers and unbelievers alike, the Buddha was the only spiritual son of India whose light shone on the path for all to see and follow.

In this way, the Buddha became bigger than the whole of the society in which he arose. The Buddha became a world teacher, a teacher of gods and humans, the light of the cosmos.

## **2.1.2 Nirvanic rest**

**2.1.2.1** We can reflect on this dream interpretation as that the Buddha is referring to his well-earned rest from his difficult struggle for awakening, especially the 6 years of self-mortification. In the ultimate sense, the “mighty” bed alludes to the total freedom and rest that the Buddha enjoys on attaining nirvana. He is now free from the cyclic suffering of samsara by attaining nirvana. The massive bed represents the kind of rest and peace that anyone in the world can enjoy by working for the path to nirvana.

**2.1.2.2** The Buddhist path of training begins with “rest” for **the body** by abstaining from the bad karma of causing suffering to other beings and tasting the fruits of such suffering for oneself. The next training is that of “rest” for **the mind** by training to let the mind settle in peaceful calm. The mind then gains penetrative clarity to see and understand true reality that brings awakening.

## **2.2 THE BODHISATTVA'S 2<sup>ND</sup> DREAM**

### **2.2.1 The path that frees earth and heaven**

**2.2.1.1** The Bodhisattva's 2<sup>nd</sup> dream is that of **the *tiriyā* grass**, thus:

*Tiriyā* grass rose up from his navel and stood touching the sky,  
(which means), bhikshus, that he would awaken to **the noble eightfold path** and would well proclaim it as far as there are devas and humans. [§8]

**2.2.1.2** *Tiriyā*, says the Commentary, is another name for *dabba* grass (*dabba, tiṇaṃ vuccati*, AA 3:319,15), which is also called *kusa* or *muñja*. These are perhaps different varieties of the same family of grass.<sup>54</sup> The Buddha and the early Buddhist monks often lived in forests and parks, and are thus familiar with various types of grasses, as evident in this Thera, gāthā:

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<sup>54</sup> SD 62.12ab (2.1.1.4).

Devoting myself to solitude, I will push away with my chest<sup>55</sup>  
 dabba kusa,<sup>56</sup> potakila,<sup>57</sup> usira,<sup>58</sup> muñja,<sup>59</sup> pabbaja.<sup>60</sup> (Tha 27 = 233)<sup>61</sup>

The **Mahā Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2) records the Buddha as mentioning muñja-grass in his determination to seek awakening no matter what it takes, thus:

This muñja-grass I wear: shame on life!  
 Better is my death in battle if I were to live defeated. (Sn 440 = Tha 194)

The Commentary explains that in the course of battle (in ancient India), men who fought on without fear let known their state of non-retreat by tying muñja-grass on their head, or flag, or weapon, and declare: “Remember me as one who wears this!” (*saṅgāmāvacarā anivattino purisā attano anivattanaka, bhāvaṃ ñāpanatthaṃ sīse vā dhaje vā āvudhe vā muñja, tiṇaṃ bandhati, “taṃ ayam pi pariharati’cc-eva maṃ dharehi*, SnA 390,23-26).<sup>62</sup>

**2.2.1.3 The tiriya grass** is stated as rising from the bodhisattva’s navel and shooting straight up to touch the sky (where the sun shines). Like the *tiriya* grass, the bodhi tree, too, stands straight up into the sky. Early Buddhists had deep respect for plants, since they sustain life on earth by converting the sun’s energy into food that humans and other beings consume and prosper in the world.

While the plant imagery apparently shows how life is sustained in the world, the **Mahā Supina Sutta** passage on the bodhisattva’s dream, the *tiriya* grass linking earth and heaven like a divine umbilicus. The Buddha’s awakening opens the noble eightfold path of freedom to all beings, both human and divine. For this reason, too, the Buddha is said to be “teacher of gods and humans” (*satthā, deva.manussānaṃ*).<sup>63</sup>

## 2.2.2 Liberating humans and gods

**2.2.2.1** The early Buddhists, and probably the ancient Indians, too, viewed that their world—of which **Jambu, dīpa**, the ancient Indian subcontinent, was a **microcosm**—was located just below the cosmic mountain, Mount Sumeru (represented by one of the higher mountains of the Himalaya or the mountain range as a whole—surrounded Uttara, kuru to the north, Aparā, goyāna to the west, Pubba, -videha to the west, and the vast ocean to the south.

<sup>55</sup> Be *usīraṃ muñja, pabbajaṃ urasā panudahissāmi* [vl *panudissāmi, padahessāmi*], “I shall push away the grasses with my chest”.<sup>55</sup> Comy explains by *dvedhā katvā purato gamissāmi*, “make apart and go forward.”

<sup>56</sup> *Dabbaṃ kusaṃ* = *kusa* grass or “sacrificial grass” known as *dabba* (Skt *darbha*), a fragrant grass, *Poa cynosuroides*; Sinh *kusa taṇa, kuśa tṛṇa*; arrow grass, *Paspalum sanguinale*; also Sinh *ītaṇa*, *Andropogon contortus*; *kuśa* may also mean *iḷuk*, *Imperata arundinacea*. On *kusa*, see **Nadi S** (S 22.93,3), SD 42.19; SD 22.8 (3.3); D 5 quote n, SD 52.1 (15.1.1).

<sup>57</sup> *Potakilaṃ*, a grass, *Saccharum spontaneum*, Sinh *vāluk*, “vining sugarcane,” *Phragmites karka*, a reed, resembling sugar-cane, growing in marshes and near rivers; hence, “cane grass.”

<sup>58</sup> *Usīraṃ*, the fragrant root of *Andropogon muricatus* (Nadkarni, *Indian Materia Medica* I, 1954:109 f); Sinh *sāvāna, babus taṇa mul*, *Andropogon squarrosus, cuscus* grass.

<sup>59</sup> *Muñja*, a kind of grass, *Saccharum munja* Roxb; Sinh *mudu taṇa = mṛdu taṇa*, “tender grass.” See **D 15**, 1.2 n, SD 5.17; **Sn 3.2**, 16 n SD 51, 11; SD 61a (2.1.2.9).

<sup>60</sup> *Pabbajaṃ*, PED: bulrush. vl *babbajaṃ*, a sort of coarse grass, *babus taṇa*; PED: used to make slippers, etc.

<sup>61</sup> Tha 27 (ThaA 1:90,18-20) = 233 ≈ Ap 545,18/505,24 ≈ J 6:508,1\*.

<sup>62</sup> For summaries on scholarly discussion on this, see Jayawickrama 1950:188 = 1978a:10 f & Sn:N 250 n440.

<sup>63</sup> SD 15.7 (3.7); SD 54.2 (4.1.1.4).

This ancient Indian cosmography is surprising reflected in the modern imaginary universe of the Star Trek TV series. If we collate these “earthly” regions with the Star Trek conception of their universe, we have the following: Jambu,dīpa (Alpha Quadrant), Aparā,goyāna (Beta Quadrant), Pubba,vidēha (Gamma Quadrant) or Uttara,kuru (Delta Quadrant).<sup>64</sup>

The early Buddhist dhyanic universe comprises of **the 4 form worlds or universes**, whose beings are of “fine-material” form. Unlike sense-world beings who are dependent on the 5 physical senses of *sight, sound, smell, taste and touch*, the dhyanic brahmas only need the senses of seeing and hearing.<sup>65</sup> The bodies of the form-world devas are pure light; one of the senses of *deva* is “shining beings.” Technically, however, beings of the form and the formless worlds are called *brahma*; they are of “perfect form,” that is, not dependent on the physical senses.

**The formless world brahmas** are of even more refined form than the form world brahmas. The beings of the formless universe may be said to comprise of pure energy. Hence, they are totally invisible to others; but, like the form-world brahmas, they may assume more material form if they want to appear in the sense-world, such as to see the Buddha.

**2.2.2.2** Despite their remarkable form and formlessness, and their incredibly long lives, these brahmas are, as a rule, still unawakened. These divine beings, whether of the sense-world, the form world or the formless world—collectively called “devas” (*devā*)—who are unawakened, or not on the path of awakening—upon the exhaustion of their godly karma will die and be reborn in lower realms, even in the suffering states.<sup>66</sup>

Only those devas who have attained at least streamwinning—as streamwinners in general—are not reborn in the subhuman states. They are not reborn below the human state because they do not identify with their body or any part of it, they are certain of their self-salvation, and they do not depend on any belief, dogma, or ritual.

**2.2.2.3 Karma** is a kind of natural “balancing act,” by which samsara keeps beings acting and moving by way of “quality control,” in which *as we act so we get*; our actions—how we interact with others—decide our own fruit and deserts. These on-going activities keep us so terribly busy that our body-based lives have almost no room for our own growth.

Since **the mind** is behind our actions so long as we are aware, we are capable of noticing the difference between what helps us to be happy and grow, and what pains and stunts us to be but mere victims of the samsaric cycle. What keeps us *happy and growing* is good (*puñña*) and wholesome (*kusala*); what keeps suffering pain and repeating this same cycle is bad (*pāpa*) and unwholesome (*akusala*).

**The mind** that notices this difference and its significance, learns about life and, in due course, noticing how the causes and effects work, the mind becomes wise. The wise mind *awakens* to the true nature of things. The first being, a human (since he sees both suffering and happiness and understands), becomes a buddha, “awakened one.”

This first human to see true reality and break free is called **the Buddha**; he is fully awakened and wise. He also sees how other beings suffer and is moved to act by effectively teaching his mastery over true reality—call *dhamma* (Skt *dharma*)—so that other beings may understand and be free, too; he is

<sup>64</sup> The Alpha Quadrant is a major part of the Milky Way galaxy, containing most of the United Federation of Planets’ territory and major powers like the Klingon and Cardassian empires, though much of their territory is in the Beta Quadrant. A stable wormhole was discovered in the Alpha Quadrant, which provided a gateway to the Gamma Quadrant. This video explains [the Star Trek quadrants](#). 25 Nov 2025. See SD 52.1 (2.2.1.7).

<sup>65</sup> Except in the case of the non-percipient beings (*asañña,satta*) of the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana, who live in a suspended state of animation for 500 aeons. Once a thought arises in them, they fall from that state and are reborn elsewhere. See SD 23.14 (3.2.6); also SD 57.10 (6.1.2.1).

<sup>66</sup> (**Catukka**) **Puggala S 1** (A 4.123), SD 23.8a.

compassionate. Since the Buddha is himself self-liberated and liberates others, and that he knows (he is wise) and he acts (he is compassionate), he is said to be “endowed with wisdom and conduct” (*vijjā.-caraṇa,sampanna*).

**2.2.2.4** What the Buddha realizes and teaches is not some religion proclaiming *who created sam-sara or whom we must believe in or submit to*; rather, the Buddha teaches that we suffer because we do not see suffering; **ignorance** (*avijjā*) creates suffering. Not knowing we keep doing what chains us to repeated suffering; this is **craving** (*taṇhā*).

When we see suffering, we learn that it is painful. It is the nature of the world—with its unstable and unstill elements (earth, water, fire, wind)—to be unsatisfactory; but, in our ignorance, we keep on seeking satisfaction from this unstable and unstill world, so we continue to suffer. Only by self-knowing we see this **impermanence** and this **suffering**.

Seeing the causes and the effects of suffering—that is our ignorance and craving—we also see the ending of suffering. Then, the Buddha, the wisest and most liberated amongst us in this generation of the cosmic age (the world cycle)—teaches others, humans as well as gods—those of this world and those of other worlds, *to be self-aware, learn from self-knowledge, be wise and be free*. He is thus called “teacher of humans and gods” (*satthā,deva.manussānam*). This light, that is awakening, dawned in India, shone throughout the world and beyond, reaching even other quadrants of the universe. The Buddha is indeed **the light of the cosmos**.

This awakening light will shine on the path which will continue to be seen and traversed so long as we know and practise the Buddha’s teaching, the Dharma, the path that brings freedom for earth and the heavens, for all beings.

## 2.3 THE BODHISATTVA’S 3<sup>RD</sup> DREAM

### 2.3.1 Refuge for the world

**2.3.1.1** The Bodhisattva’s 4<sup>th</sup> dream is that of **the white worms with black heads**, thus:

White worms with black heads crawled from his feet up to his knees and covered them, (which means), bhikshus, that many white-dressed householders would go for lifelong refuge to the tathagata. [§9]

**2.3.1.2** The white worms with black heads (*setā kimī kaṇha,sisā*) is an allusion for the worldly or sense-world lay followers. They are like “**worms**” because they are usually small-minded (burdened with much greed, hatred and delusion), “**White**” refers to the lay-followers devotion to the spiritual life by wearing simple white clothing, symbolizing an attempt to cut down worldly attachment and cultivating moral purity. They have “**black heads**,” full of hair because they are, as a rule, unshaven like the renunciants.

The white worms are said to have “**crawled**” due to their slow but steady spiritual progress; “**from** [the bodhisattva’s] **feet up to his knees**” means that they are deeply devoted to the Buddha as refuge and look up to him as exemplar; “**and covered them** [the feet up to the knees]” refers to the huge population of lay-followers who go to the 3 jewels for refuge.

The figure of “worms” is a humorous depiction of the lay-followers’ commitment to Dharma despite various limitations. However, these “worms” are like caterpillars that grow and change, in due course, becoming butterflies flying freely on their own in the open air. This means that lay-followers, with proper practice, are able to gain or at least aspire for **streamwinning** in this life itself, as guaranteed by the

Buddha himself in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1) and the remaining 9 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25.2-10).<sup>67</sup>

### 2.3.2 Safe refuge

**2.3.2.1** The quick direct path to awakening is to renounce the world as a monastic in the Dharma-Vinaya (early Buddhism), that is, to cultivate the body in *wholesome action and speech* that conduces to cultivate the mind, that is, gain *calm and clarity* so that we can see through into the true reality of existence and gain spiritual freedom in this life itself as **arhats**. This means that we will realize nirvana in this life itself and end rebirth and suffering.

**2.3.2.2** For those of us who are unwilling or unable to renounce the world in this life, but prefer to live a “pleasure-enjoying” (*kāma,bhogī*)<sup>68</sup> lay life, we can opt for the training rooted in **the 5 precepts**, that is, *abstaining*:

- (1) from killing and letting die,
- (2) from stealing and taking the not-given,
- (3) from sexual misconduct,
- (4) from falsehood (and wrong speech) and
- (5) from intoxication and substance dependence.

To strengthen and deepen our moral virtue, we further cultivate respect for **the 5 values** underpinning the precepts, that is,

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| (1) the value of <b>life</b> ,      | by cultivation love and showing compassion to all beings;                               |
| (2) the value of <b>happiness</b> , | by working for <u>wealth</u> and <u>learning</u> , and wisely sharing them with others; |
| (3) the value of <b>freedom</b> ,   | by respecting others’ <u>person and space</u> for their happiness and growth;           |
| (4) the value of <b>truth</b>       | by communicating and promoting <u>wholesome truth</u> for good and justice;             |
| (5) the value of <b>the mind</b>    | by keeping the mind free from being clouded so that it is <u>joyful and clear</u> .     |

**2.3.2.3** By **refuge** (*saraṇa*) is meant self-reliance (*atta,saraṇa*), in keeping with the Buddha’s final instruction as recorded in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 9), thus:

Therefore, Ānanda, dwel with yourself as an island, with yourself as refuge, with no other refuge—dwel with the Dharma as an island, with the Dharma as refuge, with no other refuge.  
(D 16,2.26 = 26,1, 26,27; S 22.4, 47.9, 47.13, 47.14)<sup>69</sup>

When we **take the Buddha as refuge**, we understand and accept that the Buddha was a historical person who saw the realities of suffering and left the world of pleasure, plenty and power to seek freedom from suffering. As teacher, the Buddha shows that since he has found spiritual freedom, we too can be spiritually free.

What the Buddha realized through his awakening, he formulated as truth—**the Dharma**—for the benefit of posterity and all beings. By taking refuge in the Dharma means that we understand and accept that spiritual liberation comes not from dependence of any kind of beliefs or external power

<sup>67</sup> S 25.1-10/3:225-228; S 25.1 (SD 16.7); S 25.6 (SD 17.4(10)); S 25.10 (SD 42.17).

<sup>68</sup> On *kāma,bhogī*, see **Mahā Vaccha,gotta S** (M 73,10/1:491), SD 27.4; SD 54.9 (4.2).

<sup>69</sup> **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.26/2:100), SD 9.1 = **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26,1/3:58 = 27/3:77), SD 36.10; **Atta,dīpa S** (S 22.43/3:42), SD 93.8; (**Bhagavā**) **Gilāna S** (S 47.9/5:154); (**Saripattāna**) **Cunda S** (S 47.13/5:163); **Ukka,celā S** (S 47.14/5:164 f).

figure but through self-understanding of true reality. By awakening to true reality, we free ourselves from suffering and rise to be noble individuals (*ariya, puggala*), those who live liberated and wholesome lives benefitting others and society. These noble individuals of path saints, monastic and lay, collectively form **the noble sangha** (*ariya, saṅgha*).<sup>70</sup>

## 2.4 THE BODHISATTVA'S 4<sup>TH</sup> DREAM

### 2.4.1 Birds of different feathers

**2.4.1.1** The Bodhisattva's 4<sup>th</sup> dream is that of **the 4 birds of different colours**, thus:

Four birds of different colours came from the 4 quarters fell at his feet and turned all white, (which means), bhikshus, that members of **the 4 classes**—kshatriyas, brahmins, vaishyas, and shudras—would go forth from the household life into homelessness in the Dharma and Vinaya proclaimed by the tathagata and realize unsurpassed liberation. [§10]

**2.4.1.2** The metaphor of **birds** in the bodhisattva's 4<sup>th</sup> dream is both appropriate and beautiful, expressing the freedom of the life of the renunciant who keeps to Dharma and Vinaya. The bodily training of a monastic and a meditator is not only that of *decorum and mental focus*, but also for keeping their bodily balance (*thira*)<sup>71</sup> and mental harmony (*upekkhā*).<sup>72</sup> The renunciant and meditator dwells contemplating "the body in the body" in this way, mentally or through any of his sense-experiences, seeing impermanence (rising and falling) in all such actions unattached to the world,<sup>73</sup> "free as a bird, wherever it goes, flies with its wings as its only burden."<sup>74</sup>

### 2.4.2 A free society

**2.4.2.1** The training of the Buddhist sangha of monastics is to gain **freedom** (*vimutti*) in every sense of the word. In the worldly sense or on a social level, being a Buddhist monastic, one is free of the burden, limitations and stigmata of a class system where elitism is defined by birth and class. A Buddhist monastic who keeps to the monastic rules and spirit is a true individual, who is socially and psychologically free in having overcome or at least limiting being hampered by the unwholesome roots, that is, *greed, hatred and delusion*.

On a spiritual level, the true monastic is free from **the 3 wrong views**, that is, understanding or at least accepting the truths of *impermanence, suffering, and nonself*; or better, have broken **the 3 fetters**, that is, *self-identity view (identifying with the body, feelings, perceptions, emotions or consciousness), doubts in the Buddha and his teachings, and being superstitious*.

**2.4.2.2** The basic teachings of early Buddhism, especially those of natural morality (of the 5 precepts) [2.3.2.2] and of mindfulness and mental concentration (or "meditation" for short), have a wide and subtle effect on all the world religions. Most world religions, for example, have adopted **meditation** or "mindfulness" in some way. Urban society has also been widely influenced, through modern psycho-

<sup>70</sup> **The one true refuge**, SD 3.1 (3.2); SD 27.3 (3.1.1).

<sup>71</sup> *Thira* lexically means "firm, hard; fixed; strong, durable"; here it is used in a broad sense of "balanced," that keeps one "firm, fixed, durable and strong."

<sup>72</sup> SD 60.1e (9.8.15 f).

<sup>73</sup> M 10,8+9/1:57), SD 13.3.

<sup>74</sup> D 2,66/1:71 (SD 8.10). See SD 60.1e (12.3.8).

logy, of the benefits of **mindfulness** practice (basically, body-based meditation and lovingkindness cultivation).

When religions themselves promote meditation and mindfulness, and their teachers and practitioners meditate and are more mindful, they are less likely to cause religious strife and social mischiefs that are notoriously widespread and insidious.<sup>75</sup> In significant ways, we see early Buddhism playing an effective role in secularizing religions in the modern world and promoting a “secular faith” of mental health and mutual tolerance. We are likely to see this role of Buddhism in future religion that promotes self-reliance, open learning and a free society.

## 2.5 THE BODHISATTVA’S 5<sup>TH</sup> DREAM

### 2.5.1 The dung-hill

The Bodhisattva’s 5<sup>th</sup> dream is that of **the dung-hill**, thus:

He climbed up a huge mountain of dung without being soiled by it,  
(which means), bhikshus, that he would receive *robes, almsfood, lodging, and medicines and provisions for the sick*, and he would use them without being tied to them, infatuated with them, or blindly caught up in them, seeing danger and knowing the escape. [§11]

### 2.5.2 Scatological metaphor

The metaphor of **the dung-hill** (*mīlha, pabbata*) stands out as unique, being very different from the first 4 dream metaphors—those of the mighty earth, of worms, of *tiryā* grass, and of the birds. The dung-hill is a **scatological figure** connoting the true nature of materials things—in this case of *clothing, food, shelter* and *health support*—especially for a renunciant. These are the 4 basic supports of life that keep the renunciant healthy and vigorous enough for the spiritual quest for awakening and living that life.

Early Buddhist **scatology** consists mostly of highlighting the nature of our bodies and everything else that we use as being subject to *change, destruction, even foulness*. The idea is not that these objects are foul in themselves; rather, it is to help us reflect on the true nature of all conditioned things, to use them for the spiritual life, and not to be attached to them.<sup>76</sup>

The fascinating nature of **early Buddhist scatology** as a skillful means in teaching Dharma is discussed in a separate essay, **Early Buddhist scatology**, (SD 63.13a).

## 2.6 DREAM-SHARING

### 2.6.1 Dreams as skillful means

Dreams can reflect, even express, the vision and virtue of our wisdom when the conditions are right and wholesome. This is especially true in the case of the bodhisattva, just before his awakening. In this spirit, we can see **the Mahā, supina Sutta** (A 5.196) as another skillful means in the Buddha’s teaching, that is, **dream-sharing**.

Barbara Tedlock (1942-2023), renowned anthropologist and oneirologist, in her article on “Dreams,” insightfully comments:

<sup>75</sup> The priests and pastors of Christian religions, eg, were widely reported to have committed child molestation for decades, even generations. See SD 17.3 (2.3).

<sup>76</sup> In contrast to early Buddhist scatology, the suttas also give *sensuous* description, such as that of the “woman jewel” of the world monarch: **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,39/3:174 f), SD 2.22.

By studying dream-sharing and the transmission of dream theories in their full social contexts as communicative and integrative events, including the natural dialogical interactions that take place within these events, scholars have realized that both the researcher and those who are researched are engaged in the creation of a social reality that implicates both of them. Although ethnographers have long subscribed to the method of participant observation, it still comes as a shock when they discover how important their participation is in helping to create what they are studying.<sup>77</sup>

(B Tedlock, "Dreams," in Gale Encyclopedia of Religion 4, 2005:2487)

In the Buddha story, the dream sequence as related in **the Mahā Supina Sutta** (A 5.196) helps to build up the momentum towards the great awakening, following the accounts of Sujātā's offering of honeyed milk-rice and followed by the 7 weeks of the "fasting buddha" as he contemplatively rejoice in his newly arisen awakening.

The bodhisattva's 5 dreams are unique in that they are neither conditioned by past habits or some kind of wish-fulfilling hopes. They are said to be precursory (*pubba, nimitta*, AA 3:319,1), occurring on the night before the day of awakening; that is, the Buddha awakened the following night. The Commentary adds that these dreams are unique in the sense that they occur only to the "all-knowing bodhisattva" (*sabbaññu, bodhisatta*),<sup>78</sup> not to anyone of the worldly masses, nor great kings, nor world monarchs, nor the foremost disciples, nor the pratyeka-buddhas, nor even the fully self-awakened buddhas (A 3:318,14-17).

## **2.6.2 The bodhisattva's dreams**

**2.6.2.1** The Buddha does not dream since his mind is always calm and clear, and his latent tendencies have all been uprooted; he has no more greed, hatred or delusion. The bodhisattva's mind just before awakening was calm and clear, too, in an unawakened; there was still some level of desire in him. Or in a pre-awakened way, since he was less than a day away from awakening.

The bodhisattva's pre-awakened mind is one with **the 4 bases of spiritual power** (*iddhi, pāda*),<sup>79</sup> thus:

- (1) **will** (*chanda*), his desire for awakening, that is, understanding true reality and breaking free from samsara;
- (2) **effort** (*virīya*), that is, the determination in him since the arising of the thought of renunciation up to that moment, he looks forward to the fruition of his spiritual struggle, awakening;
- (3) **mind** (*citta*); his whole being is set on working for his awakening; with his recall of the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana he experienced when only 7 years old, he was now certain of his meditation, that it would bear the fruit of spiritual freedom; hence, the dreams, and
- (4) **investigation** (*vīmaṃsā*), which means that he understands the significance of the dreams and interprets them for our benefit.

<sup>77</sup> Gilbert Herdt reported his surprise at discovering the therapeutic dimension of his role in New Guinea as a sympathetic listener to his key consultant, who shared with him erotic dreams that the consultant could not communicate to anyone within his own society. ("Selfhood and discourse in Sambia dream sharing." In ed B Tedlock, *Dreaming: Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations*, 1992:55-85).

<sup>78</sup> This unique term, I think, refers to the fact that the bodhisattva will be the fully self-awakened buddha, the one who knows "the all" (*sabba*): **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

<sup>79</sup> On the 4 bases of spiritual power (*iddhi, pāda*), see **Cattāro Iddhi, pāda**, SD 10.3; **Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20), SD 28.14; SD 57.22 (1.2.39).

**2.6.2.2** The practical significance of the bodhisattva's 5 dreams is that since he had firmly directed his mind to seek awakening, and put in every effort in that directed, he surely in due course attained his goal of awakening. The lesson for us as practitioners today is that when we firmly put our minds to seek awakening—studying and practising the Dharma—we will surely in due course surely awaken to the true reality that the Buddha had himself realized. This aspiration may be like a dream now, but they are fore-signs of our impending attaining of the path and awakening.

### 3 Dreams as belief and psychology

#### **3.1 BUDDHIST VIEWS REGARDING DREAMS**

##### **3.1.1 Dreams and their interpretation**

**3.1.1.1 Dreams** (*supina*) are mental images that occur during sleep or sleep-like states. There is widespread belief that dreams have some significance to us. Some people believe that dreams can foretell future events, others that the dead or deities can communicate with the living through them. Modern psychoanalysts say that when interpreted correctly, dreams may reflect past habits or trauma, and may offer insight into suppressed desires and drives, and thus can lead to a deeper self-understanding.

**3.1.1.2** While dreams may have spiritual significance (such as the bodhisattva's 5 dreams), the Buddha instructed that **dream-interpretation** should neither be done for personal profit nor as a livelihood. Thus, in the *mahā, sīla*, "great moralities," pericope of the first 13 Dīgha suttas (the Sīla-k, khandha Vagga),<sup>80</sup> such an engagement is regarded as an "animal art" (*tiracchāna, vijjā*), thus:

Whereas some recluses and brahmins, living off food given in faith, maintain themselves through wrong livelihood by way of the low arts, such as **interpreting dreams** ... .

(D 2,56), SD 8.10

##### **3.1.2 Sleeping and dreaming**

**3.1.2.1** Sleeping and dreaming are of course a normal part of monastic life, as they are of any human life. **The Muṭṭha, sati Sutta** (A 5.210), for example, mentions 5 benefits of sleeping mindfully and aware, that is, without any negative thoughts. Such a person (1-2) sleeps and wakes happily; (3) does not have any bad dreams; (4) devas protect him; and (5) he has no wet dreams.<sup>81</sup>

For monastics, intentional emission of semen is a *saṅgh'ādi, sesa* (one entailing suspension and rehabilitation by the sangha). It is not an offence if he was dreaming and not an intentional act.<sup>82</sup> Brain activity is high during REM sleep [3.3.1], the stage when most vivid dreams occur. Sexual dreams during this time may lead to physiological responses, including ejaculation. Since this is not an intentional action, it entails no karmic effect.

**The Mettānisamsā Sutta** (A 11.16) mentions 11 benefits of one who habitually and properly *cultivates lovingkindness* (*mettā*):

(1-2) one sleeps and wakes happily; (3) **one sees no bad dreams**; (4-5) one is dear to humans as well as non-humans; (6) one is protected by devas; (7) fire, poison and weapons cannot harm one; (8) one

<sup>80</sup> See eg **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1,21/1:9,3), SD 25.2; **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,43-62), SD 8.10 (3); SD 44.18 (2.2).

<sup>81</sup> A 5.210/3:251 (SD 103.12).

<sup>82</sup> Sangh 1 (V 3:112,17 f).

easily concentrates; (9) one’s countenance is serene; (10) one dies unconfused, and (11) if one attains no higher, one is reborn in the brahma world.<sup>83</sup>

**3.1.2.2** A dream only arises when one is asleep, that is, when the 5 physical senses are at rest or not functioning. In other words, the dreamer is non-conscious, and that, as a rule, no intention underpins the dream.<sup>84</sup> Even when one dreams of doing something, such as killing someone or stealing something, it is not ethically significant and has no karmic effect (V 3:112). Thus one has understood that dreams are beyond the power of the will.

However, in lucid dreaming, when one *intends* to participate in the dream is aware of it, there is likely to be at least some level of intention involved. Hence, it entails at least mental karma.

### 3.2 POST-BUDDHA VIEWS ON DREAMS

#### 3.2.1 Milinda,pañha

**3.2.1.1** Early Buddhist psychology recognizes several types of dreams, that is, according to their causes. **The Milinda,pañha** lists 6 kinds of dreams, or rather, **6 conditions any of which may cause a dream**, that is, it may be:

(1) due to wind	<i>vātika,</i>	due to bodily “winds” (such as bad circulation);
(2) due to bile	<i>pittika,</i>	due to excitement or anger (fire element);
(3) due to phlegm	<i>semhika,</i>	due to predominance of water element;
(4) due to deities	<i>devatūpasamhārato,</i>	due to “deities” or psychic conditions;
(5) due to mental exertion	<i>samudaciṇṇato,</i>	due to overthinking, worries, stress, etc;
(6) due to a foresign	<i>pubba,nimittato,</i>	relating to future events or an intuition.

(Miln 2:298)

The 6 causes of dreams are very similar to the better known 4 causes of dreams of the Commentaries [3.2.2]. In such a case, a longer list is likely to be later than a shorter one; or perhaps that the commentarial list is based on an older source. Hence, we will here only briefly look at these 6 conditions, and discuss them further under the 4 causes of dreams [3.2.2].

**Causes 1-3** may be subsumed under the 1<sup>st</sup> commentarial cause of a dream, that is, “due to disturbance of the elements” (*dhatu-k,khobhato*). **Cause no. 4**—“due to deities” (*devatūpasamhārato*)—is the same as the commentarial cause no. 3, with only a minor difference in spelling of the term. **Cause no. 5**, “due to mental exertion” (*samudaciṇṇato*) overlaps with the commentarial cause no. 2, “due to previous experiences” (*anubhūta,pubbato*), since “mental exertion” is often related to or caused by past experiences. **Cause no 6**, “due to a foresign,” is identical with the commentarial cause no 4.

**3.2.1.2 The Milinda,pañha** reports Nāgasena<sup>85</sup> as stating that dreams occur neither when one is sleeping nor awake.<sup>86</sup> Dreams occur during the interval between **drowsing** (*okkante middhe*)<sup>87</sup> and

<sup>83</sup> A 11.16/5:342 (SD 2.15).

<sup>84</sup> However, in lucid dreaming, when one *intends* to participate in the dream one is aware of it, there is likely to be at least some kind of intention involved. Hence, it entails at least mental karma.

<sup>85</sup> The Bactrian monk who answers the Greek king Milinda’s questions. For details, see DPPN sv.

<sup>86</sup> *Yo so, mahā,rāja, supinaṃ passati, na so niddāyanto passati, nāpi jāgaranto passata* (Miln 299,11-13).

<sup>87</sup> I have used the term “**drowsing**” to differentiate it from “drowsiness,” which is a common but important term in dream psychology. While the 2 terms may significantly overlap, drowsing has a specific sense as used here. On drowsiness, see eg Thorpy & Yager, *The Encyclopedia of Sleep and Sleep Disorders*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, NY: Fact on File, 2001:64.

before one enters into the life-continuum (*bhavaṅga*).<sup>88</sup> Having emerged from the drowsing state, the mind then enters the life-continuum. The mind ceases to function while the life-continuum flows; when the mind does not function<sup>89</sup> one knows neither pain nor suffering, and so no dreams can occur. One only sees dreams when the mind is working.<sup>90</sup>

Just as in dense darkness, no reflection can be seen even in a well-burnished mirror, even so when the mind, drowsing, enters the life-continuum, and remains there.<sup>91</sup> The mirror is like the body, the drowsing is like the darkness, and the light is the mind. (Miln 299,18-24)

Or, just as sunlight cannot be seen when there is a dense fog over the earth, and though the sun's rays exist they are not shining, and so there is no light. Even so, when one's mind is drowsing, the mind is entering the life-continuum; a mind entering the life-continuum does not function. A mind that does not function, does not see a dream. Even so, the sun is like the body, the fog over the earth so is the drowsing, the sun's rays are like the mind.

**3.2.1.3** Now, **the drowsing state** (*middha*) has 3 parts: the beginning, the middle and the end. The beginning is the “covering, enveloping of the mental aggregate” (*kāyassa onāha pariyaṅga*),<sup>92</sup> explained in **Dhamma,saṅgaṇī** as the state unwieldiness (*akammaññatā*), of drowsiness or torpor, and includes the hindrance of sloth and torpor.<sup>93</sup> The ending of drowsing is when the mind sinks into the life-continuum or the life-continuum takes over completely.

What interests us here is the middle of the drowsing, that is, the light **monkey-sleep** (*kapi,niddā,pareto*, Miln 300,23),<sup>94</sup> when one sees a dream.<sup>95</sup> In **the Milinda,pañha**, Nāgasena explains this middle part—what we may call a “conscious sleep” state<sup>96</sup>—thus:

<sup>88</sup> *Api ca okkante middhe asampatte bhavaṅge etth'antare supinaṃ passati* (Miln 299,13 f). **The life-continuum** (*bhavaṅga* or *bhavaṅga,sota*) is neither consciousness, the preconscious (intentions) nor the unconscious (the latent tendencies). It arises when none of the senses are functioning, ie, when one stops being conscious, such as when one is asleep or unconscious or in a coma; hence, it may be said to be some kind of “existential consciousness.” **Bhavaṅga,sota** or “stream of consciousness” is a late canonical term, def by Abhidhamma as the foundation of existence. It consists of an unbroken stream of unconscious mind-moments bearing the impressions or potentials of past experience. This makes memory possible. The *bhavaṅga,sota* is the Pali counterpart to the “store-consciousness” (*ālaya,vijñāna*) of Yogācāra or Cittamātrā (4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> cent). See SD 17.8a (6.1); SD 32.1 (3.8); SD 48.1 (9.2.1.3); SD 61.18abc (5.1.2.1).

<sup>89</sup> This also happens during cessation (*nirodha*) (Miln 399,5).

<sup>90</sup> *Middha,samārūhassa mahārāja cittaṃ bhavaṅga,gataṃ hoti, bhavaṅga,gataṃ cittaṃ na-p,pavattati, appavattaṃ cittaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ na-p,pajānāti, appaṭivijānantassa supinaṃ na hoti, pavattamāne citte supinaṃ passati* (Miln 299,14-18).

<sup>91</sup> *Yathā mahārāja timire andhakāre appabhāse suparisuddhe pe ādāse na dissati, evam eva kho mahārāja middha,samārūhe cite bhavaṅga,gate tiṭṭhamāne pi sārīre cittaṃ appavattaṃ hoti, appavatte cite supinaṃ na passati* (Miln 299,18-22). Abhidhamma teachers usually speak of the *bhavaṅga* “arising” to continue the life-process in the absence of consciousness.

<sup>92</sup> Here *kāyassa* is def as “made up of the 3 aggregates” (*khandha-t,taya,saṅkhātassa*) (DhsA 378), ie, feeling, perception and formations (DhsA:P 2:485 n1), ie, the functioning mind.

<sup>93</sup> Dhs §1157/205; DhsA 378,2.

<sup>94</sup> See also NmA 2:415,2-17; DhsA 408. The monkey metaphor suggests activity or restlessness, like a monkey clambering from tree to tree, swinging from one branch to another. On the restless mind being like a monkey, see **Assutava S 1** (S 12.61,8), SD 20.2; SD 19.15 (2) the monkey.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted at AA 3:317, VbhA 408; in both cases, the reading is *kapi,middha,pareto*, “monkey drowsiness.”

<sup>96</sup> Earlier on explained as “being lightly asleep, half-awake, in monkey sleep” (*kapi,niddā,pareto vokiṇṇakam jaggati*) (Miln 300,23).

Maharajah, just as one dwelling with self-restraint,<sup>97</sup> mentally focused, steadfast as to the mental object, his discernment unshaken, plunges into a forest that is free from fin and noise. He thinks over some subtle point, and does not fall asleep there. There, composed, his mind one-pointed, he penetrates the subtle matter.

Even so, maharajah, the man who is alert (*jāgara*) and not fallen into drowsiness, but has entered into “monkey sleep,” sees a dream while sleeping the light “monkey sleep.”

Maharajah, alertness is like the tumult and noise; “monkey sleep” is like the secluded wood; and as the person who, leaving behind din and noise, and not sleeping but of level mind, penetrates that subtle point, even so the man who is alert and not become drowsy, sees a dream when he is sleeping the light “monkey-sleep.”

*Yathā mahārāja koci yata,cārī samāhita,citto thita,dhammo acala,buddhi pahīna,kotūhala,-saddaṃ vanam-ajjhogāhitvā sukhuma atthaṃ cintayati, na ca so tattha middhaṃ okkamati, so tattha samāhito ekagga,citto sukhumaṃ atthaṃ paṭivijjhati;*

*evam-eva kho mahārāja jāgare na middha,samāpanno ajjhupagato kapi,-niddā,pareto supinaṃ passati.*

*Yathā mahārāja kotūhala,saddo evaṃ jāgaraṇaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ, yathā vivittaṃ vanam evaṃ kapi,-niddā,pareto daṭṭhabbo, yathā so kotūhala,saddaṃ ohāya middhaṃ vivajjetvā majjhatta,bhūto sukhumaṃ atthaṃ paṭivijjhati, evaṃ jāgare na middha,samāpanno kapi,-niddā,pareto supinaṃ passati ti.* (Miln 300,25-301,6)

**3.2.1.4** It is interesting here that the Milinda,pañha’s description of a dream-state is remarkably close to the modern scientific description of **the REM** (rapid eye movement) state. Rapid eye movement (REM) sleep or REMS is a stage of sleep characterized by vivid dreaming, and a state where the brain is highly active—the “monkey-sleep” [3.2.1.3]—while the major voluntary muscles are temporarily paralyzed. During REM sleep, brain activity, heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure increase, but the body’s muscles remain limp so that dreams are not acted out. This stage is crucial for memory consolidation, learning, and emotional regulation.

REM sleep is said to be “paradoxical” because of its similarities to wakefulness. Although the body is paralyzed, the brain acts as if it is somewhat awake, with cerebral neurons firing with the same overall intensity as in wakefulness.<sup>98</sup> Most of the eye movements in REM sleep are however less rapid than those normal waking humans. They are also shorter in duration and more likely to loop back to their starting point. About seven such loops occur over one minute of REM sleep.

In slow-wave sleep, the eyes can drift apart; however, the eyes of the paradoxical sleeper move in tandem.<sup>99</sup> The eye movements themselves may relate to the sense of vision experienced in the dream,<sup>100</sup> but a direct relationship remains to be clearly established. Congenitally blind people, who do

<sup>97</sup> *Yata,cārī*, which recurs at Sn 971c, where Comy explains as “spoken of one who dwells restrained by way of posture, restrained in body, speech and mind” (*saṃyata,vihāro rakkhit’iriyā,patho rakkhita,kāya,vacī,mano,dvāro vā ti vuttaṃ hoti*, SnA 573 f).

<sup>98</sup> L Matarazzo, A Foret, L Mascetti, V Muto, A Shaffii, P Maquet, A R Morrison, B N Mallick, R W McCarley, S R Pandi-Perumal, “[A systems-level approach to human REM sleep](#)” 28 Nov 2025. In (eds) Mallick, Pandi-Perumal, McCarley & Morrison, *Rapid Eye Movement Sleep: Regulation and function*. Cambridge University Press, 2011:71. D Myers, *Psychology* 9th ed, NY: Worth Publishers, 2010:93-96.

<sup>99</sup> M M Steriade R W McCarley, *Brainstem control of wakefulness and sleep*. Springer, 2013:307-309.

<sup>100</sup> T Andrillon, Y Nir, C Cirelli, G Tononi, I Fried, “Single-neuron activity and eye movements during human REM sleep and awake vision” [download](#), *Nature Communications* 6 (1038), Aug 2015:[7884](#). [PMC 4866865](#). 28 Nov 2025.

not typically have visual imagery in their dreams, still move their eyes in REM sleep.<sup>101</sup> An alternative explanation suggests that the functional purpose of REM sleep is for procedural memory processing, and the rapid eye movement is only a side effect of the brain processing the eye-related procedural memory.<sup>102</sup>

Research in dream psychology began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has made great advances. However, much remains to be discovered and understood about dreams and the mind in scientific terms.<sup>103</sup>

### 3.2.2 Commentarial views on dreams

**3.2.2.0** The Commentaries on A 5.196, on the Vinaya, Mahā,niddesa, and the Vibhaṅga speak of **4 causes of dreams**, besides giving other details:<sup>104</sup>

- |                                |   |           |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------|
| (1) <i>dhatu-k,khobhato</i> ,  | “due to disturbance of the elements”;         | [3.2.2.1] |
| (2) <i>anubhūta,pubbato</i> ,  | “due to previous conditions and experiences”; | [3.2.2.2] |
| (3) <i>devatōpasamhārato</i> , | “due to possession by deities”;               | [3.2.2.3] |
| (4) <i>pubba,nimittato</i> ,   | “due to a foreshadowing.”                     | [3.2.2.4] |

**3.2.2.1** The 1<sup>st</sup> cause of a dream, “due to disturbance of the elements” (*dhatu-k,khobhato*), may arise from an imbalance of the humours (*dosa*; Skt *doṣa*)<sup>105</sup>—as stated in the first 3 causes given in **the Milinda,pañha** [3.2.1.1], that is,

- |                   |                  |   |
|-------------------|------------------|---|
| (1) due to wind   | <i>vātika</i> ,  | that is, due to bodily “winds” (such as bad circulation);                                   |
| (2) due to bile   | <i>pittika</i> , | that is, due to excitement or anger (fire element);   |
| (3) due to phlegm | <i>semhika</i> , | that is, due to predominance of water element (such as water retention or urine retention). |

We can thus see that this set of causes overlaps with “an imbalance of the elements” (earth, water, fire and wind). In modern terms, we may see these “elements” as physiological or health conditions. Certain medications, strong drinks and recreational drugs, can alter sleep patterns and lead to more vivid dreams.

One’s diet can affect one’s sleep and dreams. Eating heavy or spicy foods (the earth element), especially close to bedtime may influence the nature and intensity of dreams. Hence, a common Buddhist advice regarding diet is to be moderate in eating (*bhojane mattaññutā*).<sup>106</sup>

Significant life changes, going through some life or social rituals, or even a day filled with new information may appear in various forms in dreams.

<sup>101</sup> J A Hobson, E F Pace-Schott, R Stickgold (December 2000). “Dreaming and the brain: toward a cognitive neuroscience of conscious states”. *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. **23** (6) Dec 2000:793-842, discussion 904-1121. [PMID 11515143](#). [S2CID 14104546](#). 28 Nov 2025.

<sup>102</sup> J Zhang, *Towards a comprehensive model of human memory*, 2016 28 Nov 2025. M Jouvet, *The Paradox of Sleep: The Story of Dreaming*. Tr L Garey L. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

<sup>103</sup> See eg Barrett & McNamara (eds), *Ency of Sleep and Dreams*, vol 2, Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2012 2:540-563. Various articles on REM and related topics of dreams.

<sup>104</sup> See AA 3:316,11-319,6 (on A 5.196); VA 3:520,13-521,21; NmA 2:414,10-415,17; VbhA 406,11-408,34 (on Vbh 322,8-10).

<sup>105</sup> SD 60.1a (2.2.2). Pali *dosa*, however, can mean in Skt either *doṣa*, “humour,” or *dveṣa*, “anger, hatred.”

<sup>106</sup> On *bhojane mattaññutā*, see **Kakacūpama S** (M 21,7.2), SD 38.1; **Bhaddāli S** (M 65,2), SD 56.2; **Mahā Assa,-pura S** (M 39,9), SD 10.13; **Kiṭṭa,giri S** (M 70,4), SD 11.1; **Āma,gandha S** (Sn 2.2), SD 4.24 (3.4.1); SD 32.2 (5.1); SD 37.13 (1.2).

Bodily discomfort may be due to **winds** (such as bad circulation). When one is affected by a drop or rise in blood pressure, for example, one may feel dizzy, which may factor in a dream of flying or falling from a precipice. Even falling off one's bed may cause one to dream as if one is falling off a precipice!

Body-disturbances due to bile or predominance of **the fire element** may cause dreams, such as being chased by a beast or robber, or one acting in a violent manner in the dream.

**The water element** here refers to a "phlegmatic" person, one who is usually calm, easy-going and emotionally stable. They are typically introverted, empathetic, and tend to keep peaceful relationships by avoiding conflict. While this can make them great listeners and friends, their passive nature can cause them to lack assertiveness or miss opportunities. Such traits may factor in their dreams.

**3.2.2.2** The 2<sup>nd</sup> cause of dreams, "due to previous conditions and experiences" (*anubhūta, pubbato*), refers to past conditioning, experiences and other personal conditions. Such psychological or emotional states may cause stress and anxiety, which may in turn lead to more vivid and emotionally intense dreams, including nightmares. Past traumatic or painful events can influence dream content, as the brain works to process them. Conditions like depression, PTSD, and schizophrenia can also affect dream patterns and intensity.

With additional information from modern psychology, we can better understand how our brain processes itself during sleep. Dreams may, for example, be a result of the brain sorting and storing new memories from the day. Further, feelings of stress, grief or anxiety may be released as dreams acting like an open pressure valve. Some modern theories also suggest that dreams are the brain's attempt to make sense of random neural firings during sleep itself—these are of course present conditions bringing on dreams.

**3.2.2.3** The 3<sup>rd</sup> cause of dreams, "due to possession by deities" (*devatōpasamhārato*) or spirit-possession, is a common belief amongst folk Buddhists. The belief is that such a possession may occur as dreams with positive or with negative effects, depending on the belief and understanding of the dreamer and significant others who influence his views and actions.

What folk Buddhism speak of as "spirits" causing dreams may have physiological and medical causes such as sleep disorders, illness, or pregnancy. In sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea and narcolepsy, REM sleep behavior disorder can disrupt sleep patterns and affect dreaming. Other physical health problems like cancer, heart disease, or even just a fever can trigger different types of dreams. Pregnancy, too, with its hormonal changes may lead to vivid dreams.

One suspects that when dreams arise from such pathological states which were unknown or not understood by the ancients, they relegated the cause of such dreams to "deity possession" or "spirit possession."

**3.2.2.4** The 4<sup>th</sup> cause of dreams, "due to a foreign or premonition" (*pubba, nimittato*), is more difficult to explain especially when this is seen as merely rooted in faith and mythology. This is not to say that they are "untrue" or "impossible," and take them merely as stories for the edification of the faithful. Perhaps, we could, with literary licence, accept such accounts as the bodhisattva's 5 dreams, or Mahā Māyā's dreams of the conception, as religious literature, to be respected just as we love ancient myths and great literature.

In the case of the bodhisattva's 5 dreams, there is no reason to doubt their veracity or authenticity. They fit coherently into the context of the great awakening and the life and nature of the Buddha. One who *sees the significance* of these 5 dreams as reflecting the Dharma sees with **wisdom**; one who *feels the beauty* of these dreams in terms of Dharma practice has **wise faith**.

In modern psychological terms, we may see the 4<sup>th</sup> cause as producing **intuitive dreams**. When the mind is firmly set in wholesome thoughts, such as difficulty understanding a teaching, one could simply

hold that thought in mind and let it solve itself as it were. The solution or vision may come by way of a dream. [1.3.2]

### 3.3 RELATED VIEWS ON DREAMS

#### 3.3.1 Modern discovery regarding the stages of sleep

**3.3.1.1** According to modern psychology, **sleep** occurs in **5 stages**: wake, N1, N2, N3, and REM. Stages N1 to N3 are considered non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep, with each stage leading to progressively deeper sleep. Approximately 75% of sleep is spent in the NREM stages, with the majority spent in the N2 stage.<sup>107</sup> A typical night's sleep consists of 4 to 5 sleep cycles, with the progression of sleep stages in the following order: N1, N2, N3, N2, REM.<sup>108</sup> A complete sleep cycle takes roughly 90 to 110 minutes. The first REM period is short, and as the night progresses, longer periods of REM and decreased time in deep sleep (NREM) occur.<sup>109</sup>

**3.3.1.2** These are [5 phases](#) of sleep in a sleep cycle can be further detailed as follows:

- **Stage 1:** Light sleep, slow eye movement, and reduced muscle activity. This stage forms 5% of total sleep.
- **Stage 2:** Eye movement stops, and brain waves become slower, with occasional bursts of rapid waves called sleep spindles.
- **Stage 3:** Extremely slow brain waves called delta waves begin to appear, interspersed with smaller, faster waves.
- **Stage 4:** The brain produces delta waves almost exclusively. It is difficult to wake someone during stages 3 and 4, which are “deep sleep.” There is no eye movement or muscle activity. People wakened while in deep sleep do not adjust immediately and may feel disoriented for several minutes after waking up.
- **Stage 5:** This stage is [rapid eye movement \(REM\)](#). Breathing becomes more rapid, irregular, and shallow, eyes jerk rapidly in various directions, and limb muscles are temporarily paralyzed. Heart rate increases, [blood pressure](#) rises, and men may develop penile erections.<sup>110</sup> When people awaken during REM sleep, they can describe bizarre and illogical tales. These are **dreams**.

[Neuroscience](#) offers explanations linking the rapid eye movement (REM)<sup>111</sup> phase of sleep as a likely candidate for the cause of dreaming. Modern research in dreams and the mind is still growing, along with interesting new insights from the ancient teachings and meditation methods of early Buddhism. The current popular term for this new practical mind science is “**mindfulness**.”

<sup>107</sup> J Malik, Y L Lo, H T Wu, “Sleep-wake classification via quantifying heart rate variability by convolutional neural network,” *Physiological Measurement* 39,8 20 Aug 2018:085004. [[PubMed](#)] [[Reference list](#)] 28 Nov 2025.

<sup>108</sup> A K Patel, V Reddy, K R Shumway, et al. *Physiology, Sleep Stages*. [Updated 26 Jan 2024]. In [StatPearls](#) [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing, Jan 2025. 29 Nov 2025.

<sup>109</sup> I Feinberg, T C Floyd, “Systematic trends across the night in human sleep cycles,” *Psychophysiology* 16,3 May 1979:283-291. [[PubMed](#)] [[Reference list](#)] 29 Nov 2025.

<sup>110</sup> In this connection, it was intuitive of the Vinaya to regard nocturnal ejaculation by monks as not entailing an offence [3.1.2.1].

<sup>111</sup> J M Martin, D W Andriano, N B Mota, S A Mota-Rolim, J F Araújo, M Solms, S Ribeiro, “Structural differences between REM and non-REM dream reports assessed by graph analysis,” *PLoS One* 12,15(7), 23 Jul 2020:e0228903. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0228903. PMID: 32701992; PMCID: [PMC7377375](#). 29 Nov 2025.

### **3.3.2 Dreaming, cognition and interpretation**<sup>112</sup>

**3.3.2.1** The West generally sees a dichotomy between dreaming as an internal subjective reality and the waking state as an external objective reality, along with a devaluation of dreaming. This was an inheritance from the ancient Greeks, especially from Aristotle. He dismissed dreams as nothing but mental pictures that, like reflections in water, are not real objects. In *On Prophecy in Sleep*<sup>113</sup> he famously attacked the practice of dream interpretation. He denied that dreams are of divine origin, but allowed that occasionally, small affections of the sensory organs as might stem from distant events that cannot be perceived in waking are perceptible in the quiet of sleep. He also believed such dreams were mostly likely to occur in dullards whose minds are like an empty desert—an assessment that does not encourage interest in dreams.<sup>114</sup>

This idea was elaborated at the end of the Middle Ages, when the notion of the person as having a soul or spirit that could temporarily leave the body during dreaming became heretical to Christian dogmatism. A similarly negative view was held by early modern philosophers who believed dreams were often the source of superstitious beliefs.<sup>115</sup>

The Middle Ages ended in 1500 for Europe as a whole. Dreaming was still devalued in the West by the time of the emergence of naturalistic or scientific thought. It was not until the rise of Cartesian dualism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that dreams were firmly placed within the realm of fantasy or irrational experience.

**3.3.2.2** It must be remembered, however, that the irreducible dualism of “spirit” and “matter,” which denies the common principle from which the terms of this duality proceed by a process of polarization, was a historical development within Western philosophy. Most people in the world do not think in such an oppositional way, and thus have not isolated dreaming within the “unreal” realm of spirit.

Rather, it is a rationalist proposition that dreaming is somehow a more subjective, false, private, illusory, or transient reality than the more objective, true, public, real, or permanent reality of waking life. This difference in attitudes toward dreaming is demonstrated by a set of interchanges between **Raramuri Indians** living in northern Mexico and the ethnographer William Merrill (1992).

Merrill noted that he was frustrated when on numerous occasions people described to him incredible personal experiences but failed to mention that the events had taken place in dreams until he specifically asked them.<sup>116</sup>

**3.3.2.3** Another researcher living in a **Tzeltal Mayan** community in Chiapas, Mexico, noted that since dream events were deeply integrated into conscious and social behaviour, it was often difficult for her to decide whether a person was referring to an actual occurrence or to a dream.<sup>117</sup>

A third ethnographer who was editing a **Tzotzil Mayan**’s life story reported that she found herself asking him over and over again whether a particular event he was describing occurred in conscious waking life or in a dream while he was sleeping.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>112</sup> This section is mostly based on Barbara **Tedlock**, “Dreams,” *Ency of Religion* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Thomson Gale, 2005:2485 & Jennifer M **Windt**, “Dreams and dreaming,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015, [2019](#).

<sup>113</sup> Aristotle, [Parva Naturalia. On Prophecy in Sleep](#). 30 Nov 2025.

<sup>114</sup> K Kroker, *The Sleep of Others and the Transformations of Sleep Research*, Toronto, 2007:37

<sup>115</sup> T Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651], (ed) C B Macpherson, London: Penguin, 1985; I Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* [1766], Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002. A Schopenhauer, *Kleinere Schriften* [1847], Zürich: Haffmans Verlag, 1988.

<sup>116</sup> William Merrill, “The Raramuri Stereotype of Dreams.” In (ed) B Tedlock, *Dreaming: Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations*, Santa Fe, NM, 1992.

<sup>117</sup> M Esther Hermitte, *Supernatural Power and Social Control in a Modern Mayan Village*, Chicago, 1964:183.

<sup>118</sup> Calixta Guiteras Holmes, *Perils of the Soul: The world view of a Tzotzil Indian*, 1961:256 f.

**3.3.2.4** During fieldwork at **Zuni** Pueblo in western New Mexico, Barbara Tedlock sometimes found it difficult to tell whether a person was narrating a nighttime dream or a waking experience. When she asked a middle-aged man whether he ever had dreams that foretold the future, he answered:

“Yes, awhile back a sheep herder found a dead rabbit, badly torn up, and he cooked and ate it. Later on the man was thrown from a burro, his foot caught in the stirrup, and he was dragged around in some rocks. When his partner found him, he was all tore up, dead.” (Tedlock, 1973 field notes).

Instead of narrating one of his own dream experiences, this man related a waking omen. Thus although there are separate terms in the Zuni language to distinguish dreaming from the perception of omens, the fact that the rabbit was eaten in life rather than in a dream seemed to be a matter of indifference to the narrator. Either way, the incident of the rabbit portended the incident with the burro. This blending of waking omens and sleeping dream signs into a single category of premonitions is found more generally among Amerindians.

**3.3.2.5** This remarkable creative potentiality of dreaming occurs because dreams can be a way of thinking and of organizing knowledge. At some level everyone believes this, as is revealed by the well known saying “I’ll have to sleep on it,” meaning that you will delay making a decision until the next day or later to have more time to think about it carefully.

On the other hand, many people hold the belief that dreams are meaningless fantasies or confused mental imaginings with little truth value. This ambivalence arises from an educational system that teaches that only fully conscious rational thoughts can provide true knowledge. Nevertheless people, especially those who are mentally or spiritually creative, also know that irrational, or better yet non-rational, unfettered thoughts or intuitions can be a sign of “genius.”

**3.3.2.6** We know today that dreaming and intelligence, even intuition, can be closely linked in people who are either mindful in their thinking or focused in mind. In terms of **information processing**, some theorize that individuals with higher IQs process more information, leading to more complex dreams as the brain sorts and processes these thoughts.

In **problem-solving**, dreams can act as a form of mental “processing plant” where new information and concepts are sorted. Incorporating these dream experiences into waking life has been linked to improvements in reasoning, verbal abilities, and better short-term memory.

**Creative inspiration** by way of dreams is well known in creative people such as writers and poets. Many creative achievements and breakthroughs have been inspired by dreams, suggesting dreams can play a role in creativity and innovation, that is, in the promotion of truth and beauty in thinking, writing and cultural expression in general.<sup>119</sup>

### **3.3.3 Great literature related to dreams**

Here are examples of literary classics & foundational works based on or related to dreams.

**3.3.3.1 PREMODERN CLASSICS** include the following works:

**The Iliad** by Homer (c 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE). In this epic poem, which has inspired many films and books, a false dream is used by Zeus (king of the gods), persuading Agamemnon to attack Troy. Agamemnon is convinced by the event, which is evidence that Homer recognised the influence of dreams in our waking lives; and this is not the only case of false dreams being used for mischievous ends.

“We men are wretched things.” (Achilles)

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<sup>119</sup> On **cultural expression** such as music, see Grace, 2001), painting (see Coxhead and Hiller, 1976, Platow, 2005), and graphic novels (e.g., the works of Neil Gaiman and Jesse Reklaw).

*Piers Plowman* (William Langland, c 1370-86) and *The Divine Comedy* (Dante Alighieri, early 1300s) are medieval works that are prime examples of the “dream vision” genre, where the narrator falls asleep and experiences spiritual or allegorical journeys that reveal profound truths through social satire.

A *Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare (1595/96), in which dreams are integral to the play, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy, and exploring the irrationality of love and perception. After some surreal shenanigans in the forest, the over-confident but good-natured Bottom concedes,

“I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream ... The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was!” (Bottom, Act 4 Scene 1).

At the play’s end, Puck apologetically disclaims to the audience that no one should be offended by the play, as it’s nothing more than a dream. Even then, one must wonder with amazement how well Shakespeare actually understood the unconscious!

*Dream of the Red Chamber* 红楼梦<sup>120</sup> *hóng lóu mèng* by Cáo Xuěqín 曹雪芹 (1791) is clearly the greatest work of Chinese literature and one of the classics of world literature. It uses a complex narrative structure involving both real-world events and a powerful, symbolic dream world. It is known for its psychological scope and its observation of the worldview, aesthetics, lifestyles, and social relations of [High Qing](#)<sup>121</sup> China. It has been acclaimed psychological depth.<sup>122</sup>

### 3.3.3.2 MODERN WESTERN CLASSICS include the following titles:

(1) Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s most famous poem, *Kubla Khan* (1797, published 1816), is a fragment inspired by an opium-influenced dream he had in 1797. While writing down the dream's imagery, he was interrupted by “a person from Porlock,” causing him to forget much of the vision, which is why the poem remains unfinished. Other poems like the 3-stanza “[The Pains of Sleep](#)” (1803) and “[Christabel](#)” (1797, 1800) also reflect his views on dreams, both the beautiful and the nightmarish.

(2) *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818) has its core idea from a vivid, waking dream or nightmare where she envisioned a “pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together,” which then stirred with life.

(3) *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens (1843). This classic festive story features the miserly Scrooge being visited by a succession of apparitions who impart various lessons in the meaning of family, friendship and the zeitgeist of the early Victorian revival of the Christmas holiday. In true Dickensian spirit, this is a secular story with Christian allegory.

“You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of under-done potato. There’s more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!” (Ebenezer Scrooge denying the reality of Jacob Marley's ghost; autograph MS, Dec 1843:12.)

(4) *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (1847 as “Ellis Bell”) is set on the wild and windy moors and featuring the enigmatic Heathcliff. This Victorian classic has many dream-like qualities. On several occasions the characters are guided by their dreams. Lockwood, for example, has an unsettling dream about a brawl at an endless church sermon while staying at Wuthering Heights, while Catherine accepts a marriage proposal from Edgar after seeing a dream about going to heaven with their union.

<sup>120</sup> Traditional 紅樓夢.

<sup>121</sup> “High Qing” era 康雍乾盛世 *kāng yōng qián shèngshì*), or simply the High Qing, refers to the golden age of the Qing dynasty between 1683 and 1799. China was ruled by the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong Emperors in this period, during which the prosperity and power of the empire grew to new heights. (Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1997:20.)

<sup>122</sup> Cynthia Chennault, “[CHT 4111, “Dream of the Red Chamber”](#)”, Univ of Florida, 2014. 30 Nov 2025.

“I have dreamt in my life, dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they have gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind. And this is one: I’m going to tell it—but take care not to smile at any part of it.” (Catherine, ch 9)

**(5) *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*** by Lewis Carroll (1865), is an entire adventure of young Alice falling down the rabbit hole into a fantastical world, framed as a vivid and nonlogical dream, allowing for an exploration of nonsense and satire. It delightfully centres on Alice’s ability to get lost in the dream state and make connections and observations in her real life—much like we all actually do when dreaming.

**(6) *Crime and Punishment*** by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866). Dreams feature as a regular motif in Dostoevsky’s Russian classic. Some argue that one dream scene in the novel, in which a mare is being whipped, represents the overarching theme of the book – the gratification of destruction in a society where one can justify such actions (the mare was unfit for purpose).

“I did not bow down to you, I bowed down to all the suffering of humanity.” (Raskolnikov to Sonia, part 4, ch 4)

**(7) *War and Peace*** by Leo Tolstoy (1867). As in life, one of the great pleasures of dreams in literature is attempting to discern meaning from them. A creative writer, presumably, has only his imagination to limit his use of dreaming with an express narrative purpose. In *War and Peace*, Pierre has a terrifying dream about being attacked by dogs. His wishing to “enter the temple of virtue” after his dream makes him assess his “evil passions.” We are all familiar with this.

“If we admit that human life can be ruled by reason, then all possibility of life is destroyed.” (Tolstoy)

“If there were no suffering, man would not know his limits, would not know himself.” Leo Tolstoy (1867), *War and Peace*, tr Anthony Briggs, 2005:1986 (ch 9).

**(8) *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*** by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886), in which Stevenson dreamed several key scenes of the novel, including the moment Hyde, pursued for a crime, takes a powder and changes into Jekyll in front of his pursuers.<sup>123</sup> “... [A]ll human beings, as we meet them, are mingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone, in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil.” (ch 10)<sup>124</sup>

Since Stevenson’s dreams actually provided ideas for and shaped his gothic tale of grotesque human transformation, we may say that these are “intuitive dreams” in the literary sense.

“Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened but go on in fortune or misfortune at their own private pace, like a clock during a thunderstorm.”<sup>125</sup>

**3.3.3.3** IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE, too, we see the use of dream as literary expression in such works as these:

**(1) *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*** (and other “Dream Cycle” tales) by H P Lovecraft (1943). Much of Lovecraft’s work, particularly his dream cycle stories, was inspired by his own graphic nightmares and explores a detailed, elaborate dream world.

**(2) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*** by George Orwell (1949) is a dystopian classic where dreams play a radical role for the protagonist Winston Smith, representing a final bastion of personal freedom and uncontrol-

<sup>123</sup> See R L Stevenson, “The dream of the tale,” in (ed) K Linehan, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Norton Critical ed, 2003:87-91. From “A Chapter on Dreams,” *Scribner’s Magazine* (Jan 1888): 122-28. Repr in *Robert Louis Stevenson, Across the Plains* (1892). These selections touch on what Stevenson relates in the essay of the ungovernable nightmares of his youth as well as the development of the facility for artistically productive unconscious creation in the writing of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. For other refs to Stevenson’s defining work in the gothic horror genre, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strange\\_Case\\_of\\_Dr\\_Jekyll\\_and\\_Mr\\_Hyde](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strange_Case_of_Dr_Jekyll_and_Mr_Hyde). 10 Dec 2025.

<sup>124</sup> Ch 10, “Henry Jekyll’s full statement of the case,” digital ed, p 56 of 68.

<sup>125</sup> R L Stevenson, “La fère of cursed memory” (1878) in *Dreams of Elsewhere: The Selected Travel Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed J S Sawyers, Neil Wilson Publishing, 2011, 2013:128. “Fère” (“brother”) is archaic English (before 1000; from Old English *fēran*, to go), “a companion, mate.”

lable thought in a totalitarian state that seeks to control even the subconscious mind. This control is achieved through “doublethink,”<sup>126</sup> the ability to hold two contradictory beliefs simultaneously, and the power a totalitarian state has over its citizens’ thoughts and memories.

“If you want to keep a secret, you must also hide it from yourself.” (Part 3, ch 4; Harcourt ed, 2003: 281 digital)

The quote suggests that true secrecy requires erasing the memory and consciousness of the secret from oneself, a feat achieved in the novel through the Party’s control and manipulation of reality.

**(3) *The Lathe of Heaven*** by Ursula K Le Guin (1971) is a science fiction novel that centres on a man whose “effective” dreams have the power to alter reality, leading to a complex exploration of power, consequence, and the nature of reality itself.

**(4) *The Alchemist*** by Paulo Coelho (1988) relates the protagonist, Santiago, a shepherd boy who has a recurring dream about a treasure buried in the Egyptian pyramids and goes on a journey there.

**(5) *The Sandman*** (75-issue comic book series, Jan 1989-Mar 1996) by Neil Gaiman. The story series’ protagonist is Dream (also known as Morpheus), the personification of dreams and storytelling, making the entire series a profound exploration of the subject.

**(6) *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*** by J K Rowling (2003). As with The Iliad’s Agamemnon’s dreams, induced by Zeus, Harry Potter, hero of Hogwarts, is also led astray by subconscious thoughts implanted by a dastardly villain. This link was revealed to the pair after Lord Voldemort inadvertently led Harry to the prison of Ron Weasley’s father, after their psychic connection alerted The Boy Who Lived to the entrapment.

In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (1997), Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, in his wisdom, reminds Harry and us: “It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live.”<sup>127</sup>

### 3.4 SOME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT DREAMS

#### 3.4.1 A few interesting facts regarding dreams

Before we close this study, a few summary facts are worth remembering:

- We dream between 3 and 6 times a night; but some 95 percent of dreams are forgotten by the time we get out of bed.
- Each dream seems to last between 5 to 20 minutes, but we may perceive it to last much longer, relative to the dream context.
- By practising to recall our dreams or recording them down can help us learn and develop long-term memories. [3.2.1.4]
- The congenitally blind apparently dream with a significantly higher frequency of non-visual sensory components (sound, touch, taste, and smell) compared to sighted people.

To dream then is to **sleep**; to sleep is to rest, recover and regenerate ourselves. Lack of sleep or bad sleeping habits may not give us the rest, recovery and regeneration that we need daily. It may also negatively affect our memory. Hence, poor sleeping habits may lead to dementia, or worsen its symptoms, such as losing one’s memory.

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<sup>126</sup> “Doublethink” is the acceptance of contrary opinions or beliefs at the same time, esp as a result of political or religious indoctrination.

<sup>127</sup> (UK ... *the Philosopher’s Stone*) (1997). Harry was mesmerized by the Mirror of Erised in Hogwarts Castle, which showed his deepest desires (ie about his parents and family), spending much time there and neglecting his studies and other important things. The quote reminds Harry (and readers) to focus on the present life rather than getting lost in memories, fantasies or regrets.

### 3.4.2 Dreams and mental health

Just as physical exercise is vital for bodily health, especially in advancing age (that is, so long as one lives), **mental exercise** is vital for mental health, that is, keeping the mind calm and clear as much as possible. This is best done with regular, even brief daily sessions of breath meditation (to calm the mind)<sup>128</sup> and lovingkindness cultivation (to keep the mind positive).<sup>129</sup>

A brief session of either meditation before sleeping often helps one to fall asleep quickly and easily. It is normal for elderly people to wake up to 2 times in the night. A good habit to cultivate is just smile and relax when we waken in mid-sleep, and perhaps do a simple breathing or lovingkindness exercise to fall back to sleep.

### 3.4.3 The Buddha, dreams and sleep

There seems to be an interesting anomaly regarding sleeping and dreaming. We know from the commentaries that the Buddha sleeps very few hours daily. In the suttas, the night is divided into 3 “watches” (*yāma*). During the 1<sup>st</sup> watch (6.00-10.00 pm), the Buddha attends to monks seeking his advice. The middle watch (10.00 pm-2.00 am) is spent with devas and others who come to consult him.

**The last watch** (2.00-6.00 am) is divided into 3 parts: the first part the Buddha spends in mindful walking by way of exercise and meditation (2.00-3.00 am); during the second, he **sleeps** (around 3.00-5.00 am); and in the third he meditatively reflects on those who, on account of their past good karma, are capable of benefiting from his teaching and appear in his vision, and, if needed, he appears to them to instruct them.<sup>130</sup>

We may think it remarkable that the Buddha sleeps only 2 hours a day. But the Buddha is fully self-awakened, an arhat; he has overcome *greed, hatred and delusion* (the 3 roots of suffering). Hence, he sleeps happily and well, even in uncomfortable conditions, as he states in **the Hatthaka Āḷavaka Sutta** (A 3.34).<sup>131</sup>

We may thus surmise that those who have mastered deep meditation, especially dhyana (*jhāna*),<sup>132</sup> will be able to sleep well and do not need as much sleep as non-meditators. However, we need proper research on this before we can confirm this interesting possibility. Anyway, even without research, we can know for ourselves that proper meditation does help us sleep better and improve mental health.

### 3.4.4 Readings on dreams

For a philosophical survey on dreams, see **Jennifer M Windt**, “Dreams and dreaming,” 2015, revised 2019, in [the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). (29 Nov 2025)

For an insightful essay on dreams by a renowned anthropologist and oneirologist, **Barbara Tedlock** (1942-2023, University of New York, Buffalo), see her “Dreams,” (ed) Lindsay Jones, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987, 2005:2482-2491.

For an overview of dreams in Buddhism as a whole, see **Kelly Bulkeley**, *Dreaming in the World’s Religions: A comparative history*, New York Univ Press, 2008: ch 3 (79-109). This is a scholar’s summary of a difficult Buddhist subject, which may be read as an intellectual introduction to the subject, and to go on to read the original Buddhist texts in due course.

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<sup>128</sup> On breath meditation (*ānāpāna,sati*), see **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,5-7 + 15-22) SD 7.13.

<sup>129</sup> On lovingkindness cultivation (*mettā bhāvanā*), see **Aṭṭha Mettānisaṃsa S** (A 8.1), SD 30.6; (**Ekā,dasa**) **Mettānisaṃsa Sutta** (A 11.16), SD 2.15 & SD 38.5 (8.1); **Araka J** (J 169/2:61); also PmA 2:129; Miln 198.

<sup>130</sup> DA 1:45,10-48,10; 2:470,29. See SD 36.2 (5.6.1 f).

<sup>131</sup> A 3.34,12/1:137 f (SD 4.8). See also (**Buddho ti**) **Sudatta S** (S 10.8/1:210-212), SD 87.10.

<sup>132</sup> See **Dhyana** (SD 8.4).

## Mahā Supina Sutta

The Discourse on the Great Dreams

A 5.196

(Originating in Sāvatti.)<sup>133</sup>

### The bodhisattva's 5 great dreams

**1** Bhikshus, before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened, **5 great dreams** occurred to the tathagata, the arhat, fully self-awakened.

What are the five?

1.2 (1) Before his awakening, bhikshus, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened, the tathagata, the arhat, (dreamed)<sup>134</sup> that

1.3 this mighty earth was his bed;  
the Himalaya, king of mountains, was his pillow;  
his left hand rested on the eastern ocean,  
his right hand on the western ocean,  
and his two feet on the southern ocean.

*ayaṃ mahā, pathavī mahā, sayanaṃ ahoṣi  
himavā pabbata, rājā bimb'ohanam<sup>135</sup> ahoṣi  
puratthime samudde vāmo hattho ohito ahoṣi  
pacchime samudde dakkhiṇo hattho ohito ahoṣi  
dakkhiṇe samudde ubho pādā ohitā ahesuṃ*

**2** This, bhikshus, was **the 1<sup>st</sup> great dream** that occurred to the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened.

**3** (2) Again, bhikshus, *before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened, the tathagata, the arhat, (dreamed) that*

3.2 a grass called **tiriyā**<sup>136</sup> rose up from his navel  
and stood touching the sky. **[241]**

*tiriyā nāma tiṇajāti nābhiyā uggantvā  
nabham āhacca ṭhitā ahoṣi*

3.3 This, bhikshus, was **the 2<sup>nd</sup> great dream** that occurred to the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened.

**4** (3) Again, bhikshus, *before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened, the tathagata, the arhat, (dreamed) that*

4.2 **white worms with black heads** crawled  
from his feet up to his knees and covered them.

*setā kimī kaṇha, sīsā pādehi ussakkivā<sup>(137)</sup>  
yāva jāṇu, maṇḍalā paṭicchādesuṃ*

<sup>133</sup> *Savatti, nidānaṃ*, only in Ce.

<sup>134</sup> The sentence here is *Tathāgatassa bhikkhave arahato sammā, sambuddhassa pubb'eva sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattass'eva sato*. Comy adds that the bodhisattva "seeing the great dreams" (*mahā, supinne pasanto*, AA 3:316,11), "sees the dream" (*supinaṃ passati*, AA 3:316,24).

<sup>135</sup> Be *bimb'ohanam*; Ce Ee Se *bimb'ohanam*. Be notes: *bimba + ohanam iti pada, vibhāgo* (A:Be 2:210; V:Be 295). *Bimba*, red (from the red fruit of *Momordica monadelphica*, a kind of amaranth); *ohana*, pillow, cushion, bed.

<sup>136</sup> *Tiriyā*. Comy says this is *dabba* grass (*dabba, tiṇam vuccati*, AA 3:319,15); also called *kusa* or *muñja*, perhaps differing only in variety: SD 62,12ab (2.1.1.4).

<sup>137</sup> Be: (*Agga, nakhato*) *katthaci dissati*; some MSS add "from the tips of the (toe-)nails."

4.3 This, bhikshus, was **the 3<sup>rd</sup> great dream** that occurred to the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened.

5 (4) Again, bhikshus, before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened, the tathagata, the arhat, (dreamed) that

5.2 **four birds of different colors** came from *sakuṇā nānā,vaṇṇā catūi disāhi āgantvā*  
the 4 quarters, fell at his feet, and turned all white. *pāda,mūle nipatitvā sabba,setā sampajjimsu*

5.3 This, bhikshus, was **the 4<sup>th</sup> great dream** that occurred to the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened.

6 (5) Again, bhikshus, before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened, the tathagata, the arhat, (dreamed) that

6.2 he climbed up a **huge mountain of dung** *samāno mahato mīlha,pabbatassa uparūpari*  
without being soiled by it. *caṅkamati alippamāno mīlhena*

6.3 This, bhikshus, was **the 5<sup>th</sup> great dream** that occurred to the Tathagata, the arhat, fully self-awakened, before his awakening, while he was just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened.

### **The Buddha interprets the 5 great dreams**

7 (1) Now, bhikshus, when the tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one—before his awakening, while just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened—(dreamed) that

7.2 *this mighty earth was his bed;*  
*the Himalaya, king of mountains, was his pillow;*  
*his left hand rested on the eastern ocean,*  
*his right hand on the western ocean,*  
*and his two feet on the southern ocean,*

7.3 (which means), bhikshus, that he would awaken to **the supreme, self-awakening**.<sup>138</sup>

7.4 Bhikshus, **this 1<sup>st</sup> great dream** occurred to the tathagata, the arhat, fully self-awakened, in regard to **the full self-awakening**.<sup>139</sup> [242]

8 (2) Bhikshus, when the tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one—before his awakening, while just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened—(dreamed) that

8.2 *tiriyā* grass rose up from his navel and stood touching the sky,

<sup>138</sup> Comy uses *pubba,nimitta*, “foresign” (AA 3:317,1) to highlight the significance of the dreams.

<sup>139</sup> *Tassa\* abhisambodhāya ayam paṭhamo mahā,supino pāturahosi*. Be Ce *tassā* (f sg or pl); Ee Se *tassa* (m sg). Comy is silent and there is no Chinese parallel. Simply, *tassā* (f) qualifies *abhisambodhāya* (f). Since the *-sambodhi* words are feminine, they should be qualified by *tassā*. This usage, I think, parallels *tassā methunarā dhammarā paṭisevati* (V 3:21,30), where Comy says *tassā* is “locative” (*tassā ti bhumma,vacanaṃ*, VA 1:227,7), ie, loc of “relation” (Wijesekere, *Syntax of the Cases in the Pali Nikayas*, 1993:229 f (§176). As for *tassa* (“his”), it should refer to “his” (awakening) or “to him,” ie, the future Buddha. The interesting form, *tassā* occurs as: (gen sg f) *tassā na sunāmi kiñci pāpaṃ*, “no evil do I hear of her” (Sn 22), *yā sā mahesī ... tassā puttassa* (D 1:92,16), *tassā te* (J 3: 22,2\*); as lengthened final (J 5:15,25\*), *tassā me* (J 3:165,26\*). For declension table, see Geiger & Norman, *A Pāli Grammar*, 2000 §105, For See T Oberlies, *Pāli Grammar*, 2019:68, 273.

8.3 (which means), bhikshus, that he would awaken to **the noble eightfold path** and would well proclaim it as far as there are devas and humans.<sup>140</sup>

8.4 This 2<sup>nd</sup> great dream occurred to him of his awakening.

**9** (3) Bhikshus, when the tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one—*before his awakening, while just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened*—(dreamed) that

9.2 white worms with black heads crawled from his feet up to his knees and covered them,

9.3 (which means), bhikshus, that many white-dressed householders would go for lifelong refuge to the tathagata.

9.4 This 3<sup>rd</sup> great dream occurred to him of his awakening.

**10** (4) Bhikshus, when the tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one—*before his awakening, while just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened*—(dreamed) that

10.2 four birds of different colours came from the 4 quarters fell at his feet and turned all white,

10.3 (which means), bhikshus, that members of **the 4 classes**—kshatriyas, brahmins, vaishyas, and shudras<sup>141</sup>—would go forth from the household life into homelessness in the Dharma and Vinaya proclaimed by the tathagata and realize unsurpassed liberation.

10.4 This 4<sup>th</sup> great dream occurred to him of his awakening.

**11** (5) Bhikshus, when the tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one—*before his awakening, while just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened*—(dreamed) that

11.2 he climbed up a huge mountain of dung without being soiled by it,

11.3 (which means), bhikshus, that he would receive robes, almsfood, lodging, and medicines and provisions for the sick, and he would use them without being tied to them,<sup>142</sup> infatuated with them, or blindly caught up in them, seeing danger and knowing the escape.

11.4 This 5<sup>th</sup> great dream occurred to him of his awakening.

**12** These, bhikshus, are the 5 great dreams that occurred to the tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened—*before his awakening, while just a bodhisattva, not fully awakened*. **[243]**

—evaṃ—

251120 251203 251220 260405.3

<sup>140</sup> “Would well proclaim it,” etc, *yāva deva, manussehi suppakāsito*. See discussion on this at D:RD 2:236 & PED sv yāva.

<sup>141</sup> These 4 classes or castes were an ancient construct introduced by the brahmins to manipulate society for the brahmins’ benefit by claiming to be highest class by birth (*jāti*) and fair skin (*vaṇṇa*). The kshatriyas (*khattiya*) were the ruling nobles and warriors; the brahmins (*brāhmaṇa*) were predominantly priests who propagated the Vedas and related teachings; the vaishyas (*vessa*) were the merchant class; and the shudras (*sudda*) were artisans or menial workers, but who were not privileged to enjoy the brahmins’ religious services. The “fifth” (*pañcama*) referred to a “non-class” or outcastes, ie, the dark-skinned autochthonous people. See SD 10.8 (6).

<sup>142</sup> Also at **M 26**,33/1:173 (SD 1.11); **S 20**,9/2:270 (SD 69.12); **S 42.12**/4:336 f (SD 91.3); **A 10.91**/5:178 (SD 100.8): negative version, **D 13**,27/1:245 (SD 1.8).