



INSIDE ENGAGEMENTS

Using the Buddha's Teachings to
Break the Cycle of Incarceration

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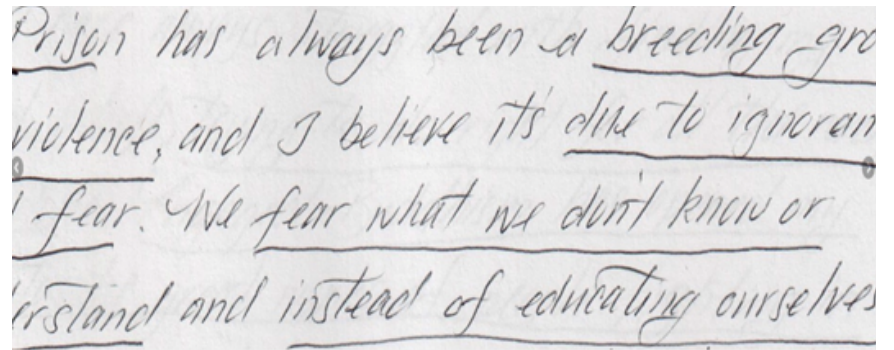
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ABOUT THE ENGAGED BUDDHIST ALLIANCE

We are a group of current and former university students who joined together around the idea that Buddhist-informed education can help incarcerated individuals and society break the cycle of incarceration.

JOIN US

The Engaged Buddhist Alliance is a 501(c)(3) registered nonprofit. If you would like to join us to help break the cycle of incarceration, please contact us. All donations are tax deductible.

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Thank you for your continued support!



THE USE OF DREAMS TO ENHANCE RECOVERY

by Mark Scott, BA, LAADC, SAP

INTRODUCTION

One third of our life is spent sleeping and dreaming. Why not make use of it? Experiments have shown that everybody dreams, every night during a phase of sleep called the rem (rapid eye movement). Active REM periods last 10 to 30 minutes and recur every 60 to 90 mins throughout the night- about 4 to 5 times per night.

In early recovery, it is common for people to have dreams about using their former drug of choice. A well-known study by researchers George Christo and Christine Franey, of the Centre for Research on Drugs in England, reported in Substance Use and Misuse (Jan. 1996) that, at seven weeks of abstinence, 84% of former drug users involved in their study were having drug-related dreams. More “using” dreams were experienced by abstinent subjects than by subjects who were still actively consuming drugs. Although the using dreams began to rapidly diminish after seven weeks, about half of the study subjects still experienced some using dreams into their sixth month of abstinence.

— Rita Milios on October 7, 2016 in *Behavioral Health, Living in Recovery*

About Dreams

When first sober, many people began to dream more often, more vividly, and to remember their dreams more frequently. If looked at carefully, a dream can be used to enhance the recovery process. We can see what stage of development the dreamer is in our relation to the phases of early recovery, the grief process, and the motivation for change. The dream can answer the question of which is stronger (?) the recovery intent or the addict Intent.

To the addict, any dreams containing drug use images are called “using” dreams. Addicts often respond in automatic ways to another addict who is reporting his or her using dream: “get to a meeting”; “use you lose”; “it’s a freebie, forget it”; “Thank God it’s just a dream. Shake it off.” Most addicts do not bother interpreting their drug use dreams further, because they assume that the dream merely provides further evidence of their desires to abuse drugs.

— Barbara Bishop, LMFT, Clinical Director, House Of Hope, San Pedro, CA, *Making Use of “Using” Dreams in Therapy and Recovery*

Dreams come from our subconscious and intuitive mind. The message is pure and undistorted emotionally.

“Every night you turn down the house lights and enter your own personal theater of dreams. Your subconscious taps into your vast base of human experience to write, cast, stage, direct, produce, and act in dozens of nightly dream “movie” shorts lasting from five to twenty minutes. This happens with or without your approval of the script.”

— Brian Scott Sockin, “Dreamlog”, pg 5



It is a common experience that a problem difficult at night is resolved in the morning after the committee of sleep has worked on it” (John Steinbeck) In our dreams, we talk to ourselves mostly in symbols that are personally meaningful and that come from our subconscious mind. All Dreams speak a universal language and come in the service of health and wholeness. There is no such thing as a ‘bad dream’ only dreams that sometimes take a dramatically negative form in order to grab our attention.

Much of our brain remains active when we dream, particularly those centers that process emotion, memories, associations and our social and spatial relationships. Dreams contain story lines that can be associated with our waking life situations. Could it be that dreams provide a window into the thought processes that influence our daily lives, if we could but understand their “language”?

— Robert J. Hoss, “Dream Language” pg. 1

People Who Used Their Dreams to Create

- Examples of problems solved or creative inspirations in dreams include:
- Salvador Dali’s painting “The Dream”
- Frida Kahlo’s painting “The Dream”
- *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley’s
- *Salem’s Lot* by Stephen King
- Samuel Taylor Coolidge’s poem “Kubla Khan”
- Paul McCartney’s song “Yesterday”
- The “Turtle Boat” by Korean commander Yi Sun-Shin that helped to stop a 200,000 strong Japanese army on 700 warships in 1598
- Jack Nicklaus’s improved golf stroke

Paying Attention

By paying attention to our dreams, we can discover what we need to do to strengthen and support our recovery mind. We can discover triggers (people, places, things, events, emotions) of which they were not aware. We can become aware of when we are setting ourselves up to relapse. We can increase of our understanding of which people are truly supportive of our recovery process and which are not. We can become aware of other factors that many affect our recovery process such as grief, family, work, health, ambivalence about sobriety.



Stages & Phases of Recovery

The stages of grief: denial anger, bargaining/guilt, depression/ sadness, acceptance.

Phases of recovery: detox/withdrawal (anxiety, discomfort, ambivalence), honeymoon-the pink cloud (feeling good, relieved), the wall (son of a bitch everything is real), adjustment (to family, friends, work, career, self as a sober individual), resolution (into action and working a program of recovery).

Stages of change: precontemplation (not ready to change), Contemplation (thinking about change), Preparation (taking small steps to change), Action (changed for less than 6 months), Maintenance (changed for more than 6 months).

How to help Dream Recall

- Don't eat a heavy meal before going to sleep.
- Sit quietly before turning in.
- Focus on your breathing and just let your mind run free.
- Don't attach to any one thought.
- Try to get to bed early enough to get a good night's sleep 6 – 8 hours.
- Keep a pen or pencil and paper by your bed.

Write the dream down upon awakening or write down key words/phrases to help you remember it for later.

If you don't remember a dream, write down any thoughts, feelings, images you have upon awakening. If you do this consistently, you will find that dream images will start to appear.

Another option is using a voice activated tape recorder. But later, write or type the dream out in full.

6 Basic Hints for Dream Work by Jeremy Taylor (Author, Dream Group Guide, Unitarian Universalist Minister)

All Dreams speak a universal language and come in the service of health and wholeness. There is no such thing as a 'bad dream' only dreams that sometimes take a dramatically negative form in order to grab our attention.

Only the Dreamer can say with any certainty what meanings his or her dream may have. This certainty usually comes in the form of a wordless "aha!" of recognition. This "aha" is a function of memory, and is the only reliable touchstone of dream work.

There is no such thing as a dream with only one meaning. All dreams and dream images are "overdetermined" and have multiple meanings and layers of significance.

No dreams come just to tell you what you already know. All dreams break new ground and invite you to new understandings and insights.



Practice dreams

1. I am a driver of an ambulance for a mental institution. I am directed to pick up a combative patient. When I arrive, two attendants put the patient in the back of my ambulance and strap him in. He is big and muscular. He is very angry kicking and screaming. Before I take off, he breaks one of the restraints. I go back to tie him down again but every time I get one restraint on, he gets loose from another one. I am getting tired and frustrated. Someone in the hospital sees my struggle and calls the police. An officer arrives. He helps me secure the restraints on the patient with some difficulty but finally we succeed.
2. I am in a small rowboat at sea. I put my hand in the water and a killer whale grabs it. Terrified, I try to yank it out of his mouth, but the harder I try the harder he grips. Soon my whole arm is in his mouth and I think the end is near. I accept my fate and stop struggling. The whale, sensing my giving up the struggle, releases my arm and swims away.
3. I am going down a long tunnel underground. I come to a landing at the bottom. On the right of me I can hear music, laughter, the tinkling of glasses, and I imagine the snorting of coke. To the left I hear people sharing in a meeting. Suddenly my sponsor appears. He looks at me and says “come on with me!” I decide to go to the left and walk with him.

What do you see in these dreams. What might the dreamer be telling themselves?

When Talking to Others

When talking to others about their dreams it is both wise and polite to preface your remarks with words to the effect that “if it were my dream...” and to keep this commentary in the first person as much as possible. This means that even relatively challenging and confrontive comments can be made in such a way that the dreamer may actually be able to hear and internalize them. It also can become a profound psycho-spiritual discipline – “walking a mile in your neighbor’s moccasins.”

Understanding Your Own Dreams

First ask yourself what do I think the dream means. Remind yourself that the dream does have meaning and the meaning is generated by your subconscious. Think about what questions you can ask about the dream. What were the feelings, thoughts upon awakening. You can also ask a trusted friend, relative, your mentor or therapist for their thoughts.

Keep it simple. Be consistent. Be determined. It will pay off.

FOUR DREAM QUESTIONS TO HELP WITH UNDERSTANDING A DREAM

1. WHY THIS DREAM NOW?
2. BECAUSE OF THIS DREAM I REALIZE...?
3. I’M THANKFUL FOR THIS DREAM BECAUSE...?
4. BECAUSE OF THIS DREAM I COMMIT TO...?



Dream Yoga

The first step in dream practice is quite simple, one must recognize the great potential that dreams hold for the spiritual journey. Normally the dream is thought to be “unreal” as opposed to “real” waking life. But there is nothing more real than a dream. This statement only makes sense once it is understood that normal waking life is as unreal as dream life, and in exactly the same way. Then it can be understood that dream yoga applies to all experience, to the dreams of the day as well as the dreams of the night.

— The Tibetan Yogas of Dream & Sleep by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

“Once upon a time, I dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was myself. Soon I awaked, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man.”

— Zhuangzi, *The Butterfly as Companion: Meditations on the First Three Chapters of the Chuang-Tzu*



AWARENESS IN THE TIME OF DEATH

by Irv Relova



Joey's first day home

Last week was the 30th anniversary of the day I was arrested on my 19th birthday. For over 2 decades when that day came around, I always relived the sights, sounds, and the adrenaline that jolted all the senses in my body. It wasn't until two years ago that my body finally caught up to my mind, my body wasn't jolted by those past memories. This year it was somewhat of a different sense in my body.

About six months ago our dog Joey a Boxer/American bulldog was diagnosed with T cell lymphoma and the doctor counted on six months for him to live. From then

on, we stayed by his side and monitored everything he did. From his veterinary doctor's appointment, chemotherapy, to administering his daily medications, observing, and noticing the changes in his body, and everything else in between. As the months went on, I notice the beginning of his muscle loss and down to his loss of energy. Even through this deteriorating state his personality was still there. He was always friendly and happy to everyone he would see, always enjoyed going for walks and especially going to the beach, always wanted to chase after squirrels, he always kept up with me when I would go out for a run, always wanted to go



for ride in my truck, and never rejected any kind of treats. He would watch everything we did in the kitchen, and he always kept his eyes on us when we were eating. His most favorite thing above everything else was going for a ride and after that is whipped cream, peanut butter, and potato chips, all in that order! Oh yeah, never liked his bath!

It was two weeks ago when the changes started to happen. Even his doctor noticed it at his last appointment. Normally, he is always excited to go to the veterinary. He would pull to go inside the exam room and say hi to all the technicians. After we came home that day that's when he started isolating himself in our meditation room. He stopped sitting with us on the couch and sleeping on our bed at night. He started lacking in appetite and would only eat one meal a day. But he would still take his treat!

Last week for three days in a row when we went out for his walks, he stopped at every house of all the people he knew and their dogs. Then, it crossed my mind he was saying his goodbyes. The day after that, that's when he stopped eating and his back legs started to go out. I put a sling on him to help him walk a bit out to our patio. A day after that, his front legs went out. It came to a point where he stopped drinking water, so we had to give him some fluid infusions. By this time, he was bedridden and could hardly move. When he wanted to move and shift sides, he was still able to push himself up. His eyes were still alert, and he was still able to make some sounds when he wanted to move. So, I would lift him up and shift his body position so he would be comfortable and go back to sleep. For three nights I slept next to him to help him move and to make sure he knows that he was not alone. After midnight on my birthday, I thanked him for staying with me and I told him it's OK to let go and he's a good boy.



Joey's last birthday

The day after my birthday that's when everything drastically changed. I could hear his labored breathing and that's when I knew he was close to the end. For four days in a row, I played the Medicine Buddha mantra continually to make sure he heard it, my wife and I prayed and recited mantras by his side so that he may be reborn as a human being in the next life. We stayed by his side for a few hours, when his breathing significantly changed that's when we knew it was time. We thanked him for bringing so much joy and love to our lives, we told him he can let go and he is a good, sweet boy, and we will find him again in the next life. We stepped out of our meditation room for 5 minutes, when I came back to check on him, he stopped breathing. He died at approximately 6:50 PM that night in our meditation room surrounded by statues and pictures of the Buddha.

From the time I was young, before prison, and while in prison for over 2 decades I have experience death and people dying around me. From family members who died while I was in prison and close friends who died in prison, for me it's that all too familiar feeling of emotional and mental exhaustion that manifests itself through the body. It comes in waves, the pain, grief, suffering, and heartache.



Joey's last ride

Going through this experience with Joey, it reminds me that the only difference between us as human beings and animals, is that animals can't tell us that they are in pain and ask for help. But to be mindful and have the awareness that we are all living beings. As living beings, we all go through Samsara.

We adopted Joey from a rescue on May 4, 2021. From the time he came out of the gate he ran straight inside my truck and never looked back. As a Boxer/American bulldog; an

exceptional personality, very smart, stubborn, goofball, adventurous, brave, sweet, and loyal. To say the least, it's was never a dull moment! He gave us a lot of love and he left us as better human beings.

I read somewhere the difference between humans and dogs. For humans, we only have them for a part of our life. For dogs, we are their whole life.

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Visiting California State Prisons since 2013.

WHAT WE DO

The Engaged Buddhist Alliance (EBA) provides college-level classes on Buddhism to incarcerated individuals in eight southern California state prisons. We employ a contemplative pedagogy that includes critical as well as experiential learning. The EBA serves as a hub to coordinate the efforts of member organizations working in California prisons and jails. We are working towards college accreditation for the classes we offer and are exploring with our member organizations how to offer reentry services. We do offer occasional reentry guidance to some of our students.



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For more information about Engaged Buddhist Alliance, access resources, and view past newsletters, please visit www.engagedbuddhistalliance.org

