

## Dreams Old and New 1

Dreams are part of human experience, and they have certainly been part of mine. I vividly remember a dream I had when I was eight years old and in hospital with scarlet fever and chicken pox. In my dream I saw a boy of fourteen lying full length on a bed. He was brown skinned, naked, and dead, and I was looking down on him. Reflecting on the dream in my maturer years I have wondered whether the boy was me in a previous life and that I was taking my last look at the body I was leaving.

There is only one dream from my years in India that I remember. I had this dream more than once and I used to call it 'the dream of the two ashrams'. The first ashram was situated at the base of a mountain and was open to all. Various religious activities went on there. At the back there was a small door, and this door led to a flight of what seemed to be hundreds of steps. At the top of the steps was the secret ashram, the existence of which was known to a very few. Standing before the ashram there was a stout, middle-aged man, clad in brahminical white, whom I knew to be the rishi Agastya, who had led the Aryans from the Himalayas down into South India. Immediately behind him there was a kind of showcase in which were many golden figures of the Buddha. To the rear there was a courtyard on the right hand side of which ran a low wall. Looking over this wall one saw in the distance, silhouetted against the sky, a row of factories, some of which had chimneys.

I had the dream about the dead boy only once, but about the two ashrams I dreamed many times, including once or twice when I was back in England. Another dream that came to me more than once I called the dream of the deserted church. Just around the corner from one of our Triratna centres there stood a large church, seemingly built in the Victorian age. No one seemed to go there, and one day noticing that there was no lock on the back door, I went in. The interior was quite spacious and bare and there were no pews or chairs. Looking round, it occurred to me that it was a good place for a meditation centre and I started holding classes there. People came to the classes and soon I had a little congregation. I also gave lectures from time to time. These lectures attracted a group of young men, and with their help I built a shrine at the far end of the church. On special occasions the young men decorated the shrine, at the apex of which stood a figure of the Buddha. What with all the flowers, lighted candles, and other offerings it was an inspiring sight. One day when I had been using the church for several months, I arrived to find a clergyman there. The church was his, he explained. He did not mind my using it, even telling me that it had been deconsecrated, so that it was no longer a church but just a big building. In the course of the next few months we met several times and became good friends, and we kept up our friendship even after he moved to another town. There were also dreams in which I told different people about the deserted church and how I had turned it into a kind of Buddhist centre. I also told them about my friendship with the clergyman. So vivid were all these dreams that the church seemed actually to have an objective existence on another plane.

In yet another of my deserted church dreams I arrived to find a small group of clergymen there. They had been meditating in a tiny room in one corner of the church that I had not noticed and we got into a friendly discussion. One of the clergymen had his wife with him, and she was so medieval in her views that I told her husband that he ought to have a word with her about it. At the time I happened to be listening to John Robinson's *Honest to God* and a recollection of this may have found its way into my dream. There was also a dream in which a neighbour took me to see a church to which there was direct access from the street. Supporting the roof there were two rows of red marble pillars the capitals of which were carved and gilded. It was a magnificent sight but it left me cold.

Around the time of my deserted church dreams I was having many dreams about London, where I was born and grew up. More than once I had dreams that I was standing on the southbound platform of the Tube, waiting for the train that would take me to Tooting Broadway. The train came at last, the name of its destination brightly lit on the front. Once, having arrived at the Broadway, I set out for my old home, perhaps expecting to find my parents there. Instead of my parents I found my grandmother, who in actual life had never lived there, at least not when I did. Indeed, that particular house had never been lived in by me and existed only in that dream. In another dream I was waiting for the Tooting Broadway bus at a bus stop somewhere in North London. It arrived at last and I took a window seat from which I looked out at the shops and other buildings we passed. They were all familiar to me though they did not correspond to anything in my actual life. There were also times when I wandered round central London with a friend. Once we walked right through Westminster Abbey entering through the front door and leaving it by the back door. The vast interior differed in all sorts of ways from the real thing. We also visited the National Gallery, which had a very different layout from the one in Trafalgar Square, and was filled with very different pictures. Once we came upon a tower which was several hundred miles high, and for the cost of a ticket one could go to the top and enjoy the panoramic view. My sister happened to be there and I offered to treat her to a trip. But she declined and I went on my own. In a matter of minutes I had reached the top of the tower which was circular and surrounded by a balustrade. I looked down expecting to see the whole of London spread out far below me, but I saw nothing as we were high above the clouds. On the way down we stopped half-way and I was told that Princess Margaret had recently stopped there and been presented with a bouquet. These dreams were all relatively clear and I did not find it difficult to remember them when I woke up. There were other dreams about London that were confused and unsettling. In them I wandered, sometimes with a friend, among the foundations of the buildings above. Some of these foundations were very complex and for various reasons difficult and unpleasant to negotiate. Once I was being driven through them by a colleague, but eventually the obstacles were such that we had to abandon the car and proceed on foot.

There was a dream in which I saw the tower from somewhere out in space. At that distance it looked no bigger than a needle. At times the needle rose out of London and at times it rose from the summit of a great mountain, such as I often saw in my dreams. The mountain was irregular in shape, with deep valleys and steep pathways. Sometimes I trod those pathways myself, and sometimes, from above, I watched the tiny figures of others negotiating them. One side of the mountain swept down to the sea where there were yellow beaches with which I was familiar. Beyond the beaches there was the dark blue sea, and beyond the sea a vast expanse of brilliant blue sky. This hearkened back to a much earlier dream in which I was high above the earth. The blue of the sky was not only above me but all around me and beneath me. The sea was far below and on the sea, its intense whiteness contrasting with the surrounding dark blue, there was a cruise ship, and I was about to allow myself to drop straight down onto its deck.

Adhithana

28 April – 1 May 2018

## Dreams Old and New II

I've always loved second-hand bookshops, and some of the happiest hours of my life have been spent in them whether looking for a particular book or simply browsing. It is not surprising, therefore, that there should be bookshops in the world of my dreams or that I should visit them. As in actual life, they were usually situated down obscure side streets and more often than not consisted of no more than a single room crammed with books. There would also be an elderly, overalled proprietor, who in the course of my visits I would get to know. During the last few years I have dreamed of huge leather-bound volumes as well as of daintily produced volumes of more recent date. On waking up in the morning, I had sometimes even remembered the titles of books bought in my dreams. There was one dream in which I bought so many books that I had to ask friends to help carry them home. Besides bookshops there were also teashops in my dreams, where I sometimes had a cup of tea and a piece of cake. These dreams were more frequent during the years I was having acupuncture, first twice a week and eventually once a month. I had dreams of children and small animals, especially white kittens, which my acupuncturist took to mean that I was getting better. There was also a big, angry, black bull and I had to run fast to shut the gate and prevent him from getting out.

The American Indians are said to distinguish between 'big dreams' and 'little dreams', and perhaps my bookshop and teashop dreams were of the latter kind. There were also dreams, especially after I moved from Madhyamaloka to Adhithana, which could be considered as being more like 'big dreams'. These began with a series in which I lived in dark, gloomy, caves sometimes on my own and sometimes with others, the others being either Tibetan monks, or yogis, or even yellow clad *bhikkhus*. Once or twice I was myself a *bhikkhu*, living with other *bhikkhus* in India or Thailand. In these dreams I had friends among the *bhikkhus*, though they were all dream friends, some of whom I had known for a long time, and not any of the *bhikkhu* friends I had known in actual life. Alternating with these dreams there were dreams of an initiatory nature. What I was being initiated into I do not know but the atmosphere of the place was solemn, mysterious. And in one dream the initiation was also an ordination. I very much wanted this ordination and I received it thanks to the intervention of someone I knew, who approached the giver of the initiation on my behalf. At one point the latter was standing beside me and squeezed my arm as a sign that he would be giving me the initiation, whereupon I burst into tears. In actual life I am unable to shed tears whether of joy or sorrow, as my current medication makes me feel 'detached', as my GP warned me it could do. It was a relief to know that the medication did not operate in the world of my dreams.

Not all my dreams at this period were of a religious or spiritual nature. Some were very mundane, not to say worldly, and in at least two of them I was myself being quite worldly. In such dreams I was in my late teens or early twenties, and in one of them I had come to know an extremely rich man, probably an American. This man, who was about the same age as my father, gave me a million pounds, (or was it a million dollars?), at the same time telling me that if within three years I could double the amount by my own efforts he would take me into partnership in his business. I did not succeed in doubling the amount, so was not taken into partnership; but I did not mind this, as I was having other interesting dream experiences. In one dream I was exploring the extent of a vast American university, in another I was buying a new suit, while in another I was travelling about in space on some business of my own. The craft in which I travelled was white, and I was surrounded by the same blue sky as in other dreams. Sometimes I experienced a sense of expansion, of unknown possibilities, and even of freedom from cares.

The London of the seventeenth century was not the London I knew. In several dreams I looked at it from above. It was busy and bustling and more like an anthill than a truly human habitation. At times I looked down, not at the city itself but at a great map in which every single building and every single person was distinctly depicted. In later dreams this London was overwhelmed by tribes

coming from the north, and there seemed to be a pattern. People of various kinds moved not only from north to south but also from south to north, the latter being more widespread and more diverse. I saw little bands from Nepal moving up into Tibet as well as individuals making their solitary way from south to north in a variety of geographical contexts. Sometimes there would be fighting between individuals as well as between groups, and this would sometimes take place on the upper slopes of the great mountain that was often the focus of my dreams. In dreams of this kind there was darkness rather than light and the sense of everything human being at an early stage of development.

In some dreams I visited places of which I had dreamed before so that it seemed that the place possessed a kind of existence in the dream world. Such was the hill with which I became very familiar. It was covered with trees and bushes and there was a deserted stone cottage from which I had a view down the hillside, as well as having a glimpse of white houses below. With the stone cottage as my base, I wandered about on my own. The ground was very uneven, and I had to be careful where I trod. Only rarely did I meet anybody. Once it was an old woman gathering sticks, while on another occasion it was a young French couple, tourists, who had lost their way and whom I directed to the nearest road.

Though there were places which I have visited more than once in my dreams there was at least one place which I visited only once and which had, moreover, a unique conclusion. This place was a tract of English woodland far from any habitation. It was not only quiet and peaceful but had an atmosphere that could only be described as spiritual. As I wandered about I became aware that I was not alone for there were *arahants* living in the woodland, and though I could not see them I could feel their presence. I do not know how long I wandered there whether for hours or days and whether as reckoned by earth time or dream time, but suddenly there was a great change. The dream woodland vanished and was replaced by a memory that had been submerged for decades.

When I was seven my father took me to see a work friend called Arthur Govey. He lived in Morden at the southernmost end of the Northern Line and on leaving the Tube I noticed that the houses were all newly built. Arthur lived in one of these with his wife Elise and son Roy, a boy of my own age, but all I remember of the visit was that the house had a billiard table and that Arthur and my father spent the evening playing billiards. It was not long before our two families were meeting on Wimbledon Common on Sundays. We had a favourite spot and while our elders talked, Roy and I would wander off into a stretch of woodland, where the trees made a pleasant shade and where the green fern grew breast high. Roy and I made a clearing in the fern which we regarded as our headquarters, and we investigated the rotted underside of a great log where there was to be seen tiny snails of various colours. When my dream of a tract of English woodland ended, it was the memory of the time I had spent with Roy that succeeded it. I had not thought of Arthur Govey for years nor of Roy nor of the part of Wimbledon Common in which Roy and I had wandered more than eighty years ago. Now I remembered them clearly, the memory having been nudged into existence by my dream of that tract of English countryside where *arahants* dwelt.

Adhithana

2 May – 7 May 2018