

LAST CLASS BOOK LAUNCH
Speech by Kathy Turner
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Thank you for asking me to speak of dreams. I am very honoured to do so – especially, as I am speaking in relation to Muktanand – who had such an interest in and knowledge of dreams, and, that I am speaking in the context of welcoming this book *The Last Class* into our world. It is an extraordinary book. I will return to it at the end.

But first dreams.

Dreams are, for me, the best images of our mind. Our minds are like jewels. Each facet reflecting all that is around it.

Here is a description of the mind from Jack Kornfield's book: *A Path with Heart* (p.213):

“The emperor of China asked a renowned Buddhist master if it would be possible to illustrate the nature of the self in a visible way. In response the master had a sixteen sided room appointed with floor to ceiling mirrors that faced one another exactly. In the centre he hung a candle aflame. When the emperor entered he could see the individual candle flame in thousands of forms, each of the mirrors extending it far into the distance. Then the master replaced the candle with a small crystal. The emperor could see the small crystal reflected again in every direction. When the master pointed closely at the crystal, the emperor could see the whole room of thousands of crystals reflected in each tiny facet of the crystal in the centre. The master showed how the smallest particle contains the whole universe.”

Dreams allow us to see the nature of our mind. The jewel-like reflecting multifaceted nature of dreams is a gift we hold on waking.

Each image and scene and story in a dream is constructed from reflections of other related images in our mind and from reflections from the other images within the dream itself. This creates the wonderfully dense “poetic” nature of dreams that we are so familiar with.

But what are these reflections that we are catching in our dreams.

We know many of them and can catch them when we wake up: we can see how images from the previous day are reflected; and we can catch reflections from further back in our past too.

But there are other reflections we catch in our dreams that seem stranger.

We sometimes find reflections from our unremembered past (perhaps we only remember them once we see them in our dream; or something reminds us and then we say: “yes” it was like that).

There are dreams of our present, but from a different space. We catch the pain of a child or the death of a friend who lives far away.

There are reflections from our future too. We dream of something, and then it happens, that day or the next week.

Then too we have reflections from the dreams of others. Sometimes we have the same dream as a friend – or at least basically the same.

We even catch reflections of our body dreaming or, sometimes, I think we even catch the dreams of plants. Is this how shamans discovered what we could use to cure this or that?

We catch reflections of the store of myths, even ones we did not know or had never heard of. Jung thought of this as our access to the collective unconscious. That we inherited the human possibilities of knowing and the human patterns of knowing, even though we do not know them consciously.

How does our mind create these patterns of dense reflective images?

Through habit: Our mind naturally follows our habitual waking connections – after all they are laid down with such solidity as we repeat and repeat some response. So for example, we might be afraid of something at work – and there is our dream repeating and magnifying that fear.

Through a sense of play: Our mind follows paths of interest to itself. In a wonderful play of connectivity it dances, drawing in anything it delights in: a mood, or a colour, or a sound.

From a desire to teach: There are dreams that actively teach us or help us. The dreams lay out a way of relating; show us another possibility; literally tell us what to do.

From a desire to create the possibility of transformation: These are spectacularly different dreams.

Why is a transformation dream much more than a teaching dream?

Let me use Jung from his book *Dreams* (p. 94). He is speaking of interpreting dreams but I am using it to understand what a powerful thing transformation is. Jung says:

“The patient does not need to have a truth inculcated in him- if we do that we only reach his head; he needs far more to grow up to this truth, and in that way we reach his heart, and the appeal goes deeper and works more powerfully.”

The dreams of transformation work in just this manner: they create the possibility for us to grow up to the truth which they themselves recognize as in our future.

The truth that transformation dreams lead us towards is also very much to do with the nature of our mind – but a different aspect from the multifaceted reflecting.

In normal life we embed ourselves in patterns and solidify around ideas and feelings. Transformation dreams make it possible to “let go” of the patterns and solidifications that at that time we are holding on to but which are no longer sustainable. Transformation dreams create a more open, free mind.

Transformation dreams work from the part of our mind that knows it’s true nature is to be free and open AND they move us in that direction.

Our greatest dreams are the ones that transform us in a profound manner. They hold all the densest reflections from all connections at all levels: from our present and our remembered past; from our unremembered past and our future; using our store of images and that vast store of mythological images we have access to in our dreams. These are the dreams that Jung called **our BIG dreams**. They provide us with the possibility of moving towards a future they know is possible for us.

All dreams of transformation, if we tend to them, and our waking life, with awareness, support large changes in how we relate to our world.

I'd now like to read parts of a BIG dream that Muktanand had and which is told in this book: The Last Class. **It is her Wave Dream.**

“The sun is shining, clear blue sky – a perfect day. I am at the beach sitting on a small rock platform that sits above the water, not far from the sand.

Suddenly there is a huge towering wave. It sweeps over me towards the beach and I ride to the top which is just cresting over. Fortunately it does not break and crash down on me. I am lifted by the water – well out of my depth – and swept away.

Wave after wave comes like this, and I find I can't swim towards the shore. Each wave sweeps me further away from the shore, into deep water and the strong current carries me out and down the beach. Several times I see a wave tipping, but I manage to stay near the top so the waves pass without crushing me down.

After some time I see that there are lots of people in the water in trouble, and the lifeboat has been sent out to rescue them. I see Kundan striding through the shallow water near the shore, following the boat, looking for me.

At some point I think, or someone shouts, ‘Can't you ride a wave in?’ I do manage to catch a wave – although not with skill or aplomb – but I manage to ride sufficiently far to bring me near the rescue boat. Then I find I am nearly swept under the boat and to prevent this I brace my legs against the side as I'm pulled through the water. Not in the boat, not even holding onto it really – those in the boat don't see me – but being swept along into shallow water near the boat or in its wake, braced to prevent myself from going under it.

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When I reach the shoreline I find lots of people in the water swimming, as if nothing had happened. I'm confused and can't orient myself to decide where I must go. I ask directions from a woman swimming with a man nearby. I explain what happened – she's sympathetic and helpful.

Once I find my direction I walk in. There's a barrier I must cross to get to the beach. As I approach the barrier I see a pair of feet in the sand, and realize they belong to a body buried under wet sand and shallow water. Then I notice a number of partially visible bodies buried this way and realize that a number of people were drowned and buried by these huge waves. But not me.

The barrier is transparent – glass or Perspex – with a chrome steel–metal rail on the sea side. There are a number of young people sitting on the other side, the young men with their backs to me. I try to attract their attention so that I can climb over, but they don't respond.

So I walk to the left around the barrier and onto the sand. I see Kundan indoors, doing some yoga. As I walk closer I wave and call out, but he doesn't hear me. He has two guys with him – they were helping him find me. He's on a mobile phone.

When I walk in the two men leave, before I can thank them. I walk up to Kundan and give him an enthusiastic kiss."

This is the dream that sustained Muktanand. It made it possible for her to be at peace as she coped with the terrible effects of cancer and treatment.

She constantly returned to the dream, seeing its prophetic nature; some 5 days after the dream Muktanand comments:

"The last few days I have been swept into deep emotional waters. I see that the dream was previewing what has and is now occurring. The shock of the result (that the chemotherapy was not working), the tears and grief of realising (again!) that I really might die soon."

Muktanand's Wave Dream gave her hope. It sustained her by buoying her up literally with the possibility of life and rescue.

Muktanand held on to the dream; just as she held onto the "rescue boat". She says: "All I can do now is hang onto the dream. Thoughts come but I don't follow them up (or down)."

And a number of weeks later Muktanand says: "Without the wave dream I would've gone to pieces." [21/11/03]

I know Muktanand put all her effort into living. She did everything both medically, mentally and spiritually to maximize her chance at life. It was the most valiant, heart wrenching effort.

The rescue boat was a life boat to Muktanand during her last months but, in the end, it was also something far more – it was the boat spoken about in so many myths – that carries the souls of the dead to another life.

The dream took Muktanand to her death. In her dream she arrives at a beach and sees the dead buried in the sand. **But the dream overlays this awareness with one of love and enjoyment – for the beach calls up Deadman's Beach** (as John nicely remarked) – the dream connecting a fond memory from the holidays she and John spent at Stradbroke (where there is a beautiful beach called "Deadman's beach"), with it being literally a beach of the dead.

And with another image of great power and beauty – she sees the dead buried with only the soles of their feet showing. What a beautiful image of footprints in the sand – but inverted – there are no footprints after death. Maybe just souls are visible after death – is that what her dream is saying?

And then in the dream Muktanand gets to the glass barrier – she calls it later “an artificial barrier” – and finds her way around it to – joy.

Her image of the “artificial glass barrier” reminds me exactly of one in another dream about a glass barrier between life and death in a book *Dreaming beyond Death* by Bulkeley and Bulkley (mother and son).

This is a dream an elderly woman had on the day she died (which gave her great peace):

The woman dreams that she sees a candle lit on the windowsill of the hospital room and finds that the candle suddenly goes out. Fear and anxiety ensue as the darkness envelopes her. Suddenly, the candle lights on the other side of the window and she awakens.

In Muktanand’s dream her final image is of joy: she meets and kisses John.

She described it like this sometime later: “there was a lot of love and light at the end”.

The image of joy in the form of Muktanand kissing John reminds me of the way the Sufi poets saw union with the divine. This is a poem from Rumi:

Quietness

“Inside this new love, die.
Your way begins on the other side.
Become the sky.”

I will leave Muktanand’s dream now to just say something about transformation.

How are we transformed in life?

We know from experience that transformation comes from falling into another place; another way of seeing. We know too that we can never reach transformation until we have absolutely exhausted all the possibilities of our old habits. While they have any life in them we cling to them.

Transformation cannot occur without losing everything we hold dear. We face a crisis before transformation precisely because we know, at one level, though not consciously, that we will have to give up on our old habits, but we love them too dearly, we are too attached to them.

But at some point, no more movement is possible.

Then our mind has nowhere else to go. It literally cracks open: to a new possibility.

When I said to John this is how I saw transformation – he said that this is how tantric yogis also see it. He has given me this quote from a book Georg Feuerstein – *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* (Shambhala, 1998, pp 29-30):

“The goal of Tantra Yoga, as of any Yoga, is to crack the cosmic egg (our view of reality as bound, hostile, restricting). In our case, the crack is the path of Tantra Yoga. It creates the necessary opening in cyclic existence through which genuine wisdom can

manifest. when wisdom fully manifests, the world becomes transparent, revealing our true nature, which is inherently free. The idea that we are bound is the first and last illusion. ..

When we realise the imperishable Self, previously obscured by karmic habit patterns, we overcome the world, which means we overcome our particular restricted world experience. In that instant the world loses its hostile quality and instead reveals itself to us as the benign ever-present Reality itself. Until that moment of metanoia, however, we are entrapped by our own representation of Reality, our idiosyncratic (though largely shared) mirrorings of Truth. This is the meaning of bondage (bandha) in the Hindu liberation teachings, including Tantra.”

Muktanand’s dream calls upon this image of transformation – it lays out the path to freedom: walk through death to joy.

This is the pattern for all transformation: we must all die to some aspects of our old selves to be transformed.

For Muktanand, her Wave Dream was about her literal death – and what was beyond.

In the last hours, up to the moment of her death, Muktanand was almost totally unconsciousness (due to lack of oxygen, I think, from her body filling with fluid and increasingly making it impossible for any organ to move in any way). Then, just before midnight, as we moved Muktanand, and it needed three of us to support her for she could not even support her head, Muktanand became aware that she was dying. For a fleeting second, (it appeared to me) emotions of shock and anger moved over her face, like clouds in a sky, then:

Suddenly Muktanand took total control of her own body and sat up with the straightest spine, with her held just right, her eyes wide open, and greeted death.

A moment later, she was dead.

It is not surprising that Muktanand felt sure her Wave Dream came from her enlightened self.

I am still listening to Muktanand’s dream. It will stay with me for the rest of my life.

I would like to congratulate John on putting together this book. It is an extraordinary book. It is beautiful to hear Muktanand speaking again through the pages. It is also an extraordinary book because I doubt that there has ever been such a collection of dreams and visions and experiences put together like this. This book is definitely a teaching in the very best way—not as a moralistic lesson—but like a teaching that might come from dreams; images and dreams and visions, waking experiences and death and above all love. I feel sure it will create something new in all of us as we read it.

Of course John could not have written such a book without all of us – an amazing group of dreamers and visionaries.

And of course John could not have written the book without Muktanand. It is Muktanand’s love and interest and determination that have drawn us around her life. More it is the enormous psychic energy that accumulated around her illness and especially her death and after death that made such a wealth of dreams and experiences possible.

This book is indeed a very powerful last class in every sense of the word.
