

## Translator's Foreword

The **Song of the Debate Between Wake and Dream** is an important work by the great Buddhist scholar [Ju Mipham Rinpoche](#) (1846-1912). It has been widely studied and taught by many Tibetan Buddhist masters (especially those of the Nyingma tradition, such as from [Larung Buddhist Academy](#)). This work is about a debate between two imaginary figures - Wake, representing one's waking experience, and Dream, representing the dream experience. Despite the fact that the language is easy to understand, it has very profound meanings. The debate actually shakes one's fundamental attachments and establishes the core view of Buddhism, namely emptiness, or the illusory nature of all phenomena. Following the debate, the second half of the work allegorizes the essence of Buddhist practice of the wisdom tradition. For spiritual practitioners, it is a very important text and should be studied carefully.

So far, I did not find any mention of this great work on English-language web pages, so I decided to translate this text on my own. The text was originally written in Tibetan. This translation is mainly based on the Chinese text translated by Khenpo Yeshe Phuntsok, a great Buddhist scholar from Larung Buddhist Academy. My understandings and inspirations are mainly from my Buddhist teacher [Tersar Yingrik Drubpa Rinpoche](#), who gave this teaching in mid 2018. Another source of reference is the [teaching notes](#) 《醒梦辩论歌·幻乐众音讲记》 by Master Zhiyuan. The footnotes are added for explanation purposes. I also want to thank Elan Hourticolon-Retzler, Samantha, and Kent Wilcox for helpful suggestions. In the future, it is my hope that there will be additional English-language commentaries about this work.

I also hope that the translation of this work will inspire people who have been struggling with philosophical problems like the [Brain in a vat](#), or the [Dream argument](#). Contrary to the philosophies, debates, efforts, and conspiracies made by various theorists, the Buddhist answer to these questions is simple: "Yes, we are living in a dream, but it is our own mind who is creating all the dream-like experiences, so we should work with our mind." The essence of this answer may be partially seen in the popular movie [The Matrix](#).

Now, what should we do? Simply follow and maintain one's curiosity, glean the core meaning of the debate, and carefully examine the nature of reality. It will give you the deepest of inspirations.

May all gain wisdom!

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Silicon Valley, California

## The Song of the Debate Between Wake and Dream

### 醒梦辩论歌

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English translation by Forest Rui Jiang 姜锐 英译

Om Swasti (may all be auspicious),  
唵索德！（愿吉祥！）

Homage to the sublime Manjushri<sup>2</sup>.  
After sincere prostration, I say the following.  
稽首文殊大圣尊，至心礼已宣此言。

The wonderful experience in the dream last night I had,  
The daytime phenomenon I now encounter,  
昨夜梦中美妙境，今朝所遇显现法，

Those two initially arise in a similar way,  
Those two eventually disappear in a similar way.  
二者最初同等生，二者最终同等灭，

Dream holds that what appears in the dream is real,  
Wake thinks that what appears when one is awake is real.  
Now Wake and Dream debate on who is real.  
梦执梦现以为实，醒执醒现方为真。  
醒梦今辩谁为真。

Wake, while solidifying his appearances, says:  
“Dream, your appearance is a deceptive illusion.”  
夸大显现醒者言，梦汝现者是迷乱。

Dream, being fickle and chaotic, refutes:  
“not only I am illusory, you are also deceptive!”  
纷纭幻变梦反诘，非仅我迷汝亦乱！

“I, Wake, am not deceptive. There is clear proof of that:  
things clearly appear so I am real.”  
我醒不迷有明证，现前显现故真实。

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<sup>1</sup> Because of his extraordinary wisdom, Ju Mipham Rinpoche gained the title “The Omniscient”.

<sup>2</sup> Manjusri is the wisdom manifestation of Buddha and represents the transcendental wisdom.

Dream, being honest, replies to Wake:

“The same is true for Dream, so your statement is not definitive!”

梦者如实回彼言，梦亦有此故不定！

[Wake:] “Today, you disappeared, so it is definitive.”

[Dream:] “Tomorrow, you will also disappear, so it is not definitive!”

今无此故谓决定。来日无此故不定！

[Wake:] “I experience directly (through my senses), so it is definitive.”

[Dream:] “I also experience things directly, so it is not!”

吾现量见故决定。吾亦见此故不定！

[Wake:] “My day experience is stable and lasts long, so it is definitive.”

[Dream:] “There are both long-lasting as well as fleeting phenomena in both Wake and Dream!”<sup>3</sup>

此则坚久谓决定。历时长短谁亦有！

[Wake:] “In a dream, one can go through a mountain in no time.

I will admit that you are real if one can do this when one is awake.”

梦里瞬间穿山过，醒能如此谓汝真。

[Dream:] “If now there are proper conditions, one also achieves that<sup>4</sup>,

Without conditions, there is no way to do that even in a dream!”

今能聚缘亦如是，无缘梦中亦不能！

[Wake:] “It does appear without conditions in a dream.”

[Dream:] “Then, why it is not constantly like this?!”<sup>5</sup>

梦中无缘亦能现。何故不能恒如此！

[Wake:] “You dream about dead relatives with deep affection,

and you could also have kids or nephews you never had in reality.

I, Wake, do not have such things.”

汝梦亡亲仍具情，曾无子侄亦有生，

我则无有如此事。

[Dream:] “If the appearance (of relatives and so on) could not establish their existence,

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<sup>3</sup> For experiences during the day, there are short ones such as sparks. For experiences in a dream, there are long and stable ones. There are people who had years pass by in a dream. The movies *Travelers and Magicians* and *Inception* illustrate this point.

<sup>4</sup> In Buddhism and other religions, there are accomplished people who can exert higher capabilities such as flying, leaving their footprints/handprints on a rock, or going through mountains.

<sup>5</sup> The argument is that, dream phenomenon also has its causes and conditions. Otherwise, the dream experience of going through a mountain will never appear or disappear.

Why you think your kids and other relatives exist when you are awake?”  
以有非能成立有，汝醒子等何故有？

[Wake:] “(In a dream) the deceased may come back to life.  
The non-existent may appear to exist.  
They existed in you Dream, but have now disappeared.”  
昔人已逝可复生，无者亦可现为有，于汝虽有现今无。

[Dream:] “Things that have passed on in your eyes are seen by me,  
Phenomena non-existent for you appear for me,  
Our positions are fundamentally equal!”  
于汝已亡我则见，于汝为无我有生，汝无我有本平等！

[Wake:] “Though one may enjoy heavenly cuisine in the dream  
that cannot dispel the hunger and thirst after waking up.”  
梦中虽享天肴膳，晨醒非能除饥渴。

[Dream:] “One may have a peaceful nap in a magnificent palace.  
That cannot protect you against rain in the dream!”  
昼于妙宫安然寝，至夜不遮梦雨淋！

[Wake:] “You only arise from delusion and have no real significance.”  
[Dream:] “The feelings of hunger and so on in the waking state are also illusory!”  
彼无实义自迷现。醒时饥等亦妄现！

[Wake:] “When waking up, one realizes that the dream is unreal.  
In a dream, how can you know the unreality of the waking experience?”  
梦境醒时知为假，梦里岂知醒见假！

[Dream:] “The dream experience exposes the unreality of the waking experience.  
How could the waking experience disprove the existence of dream experience?”  
梦能暴露醒见假，醒于梦现有何害？

At that time, Wisdom, the Chief Justice,<sup>6</sup>  
sends Miraculous Wisdom, the Judge,  
尔后智慧大法官，派遣妙慧审判员，

To tell the two debating parties:  
“if you keep arguing like this,  
告于争论双方言，倘若如此而宣说，

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<sup>6</sup> From here on, the text is full of metaphors. Here, the Chief Justice signifies the root wisdom, the nondual wisdom of Buddha, or Manjusri. The judge signifies the derived wisdom, which is derived from the root wisdom and capable of discerning.

there could be infinite words, but the evidence is already enough.

Let me adjudicate for you two.

虽有多言量已足，我于汝二作裁决。

“Both of you are real, but at the same time also unreal.

When not examined, both are real at their own positions.

汝二亦真亦虚假，未察各于自位真，

“When examined, every change of phenomenon leads to a revelation.

Actually (the two are) equal without differences.

察则一过为一揭，实际平等无差别。

“Although both of you are unreal,

Dream admits his delusion, hence he has the quality of being honest.

汝二虽然悉不真，梦迷许迷性正直，

“Wake, you are delusional but refuse to admit it.

Being so stubborn, and not giving up the wrong idea, you should be punished.

醒汝迷乱说不迷，固执不舍当惩治。

“Dream, though being dull and delusive, at least has integrity.

Wake, though being astute and skillful, is actually more ignorant.

梦虽愚迷然正直，醒虽精明反更愚，

“The stableness and unstableness are conditioned upon habituation.<sup>7</sup>

The two (dream and waking experience) are same in terms of effects.

坚与不坚由习因，二者自果则无异。

“Now, Wake. You should follow after Dream.<sup>8</sup>

The view and action should be unified for both of you.”

汝今跟随梦者后，彼此见行应合一，

After saying so, (the Judge) ties up Wake with the rope of mindfulness,

and hands the rope to Dream, not allowing Wake to leave.

言讫念绳系醒者，交付梦手不许离。

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<sup>7</sup> A phenomenon lasts longer if the habitual pattern lasts longer, and lasts shorter if the habitual pattern lasts shorter. According to Yingrik Drubpa Rinpoche, the delusion of waking state is thick as ice sheets. The delusion of dream is thin as frost. However, both are of a similar nature.

<sup>8</sup> This verse and the next one mean: one should view the day experience as if it is a dream, and maintain this view with mindfulness. In this way, one will be freed from attachments, sufferings, and obstacles.

“You two should not argue but live in harmony,<sup>9</sup>  
Otherwise, you will become the demon bringing sufferings to the billion-fold (entire) universe.  
汝二莫争应和合，违成三千破败魔，

“If in harmony, you would be the guide of the world of three times (past, present and future).  
Understanding that, both of you will have benefits.”  
和为三世引导师，知此彼此悉获益。

From here on, Wake and Dream know that they are not different.  
And they treat phenomena from both sides equally.  
此后双双知无别，见谁遇谁同等作，

At that moment, the debate ends between the two.  
Then, the perceptions of the two minds are unified into one.  
从此二者争论息，二心所缘转成一。

Combining the words of same and different,  
Wake and Dream sing an improvised song together:  
集诸同类异类语，无有定规唱一曲：

[Wake & Dream:] “‘We are different and different’, people would say.  
We are actually same and same. They are wrong.  
不同不同众人说，同等同等彼有错，

“The significance of same and same,  
is mentioned by few, and understood by fewer.  
如是同等同等义，说尚鲜少知更稀。

“Understand that the waking perception is equality,  
and the dreaming perception is the same. It is not deceptive.  
知于醒义皆同等，夜时亦等无错谬，

“This meaning is extremely important, but those who are ignorant think  
that Wake and Dream (are different and) appear alternately.  
此义极要然愚思，似成交错而显现。

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<sup>9</sup> This verse and the next one summarize the following point. All the sufferings in samsara (cyclic existence) are fundamentally caused by the dualistic thinking that the world experience is real or truly existent. Instead, one should understand the dream-like nature of all phenomena, allowing oneself to uproot all the attachments, ego-clinging and harmful karma. When one practices this and becomes enlightened, one is deemed as the guide of the world across spacetime.

“Now, the teaching from the King of Magical Illusion<sup>10</sup>  
is not just plain words. We carefully look into its meanings.  
今以幻化王教言，不徒虚言观察义，

“In the blissful play of touching each other,<sup>11</sup>  
we taste the sweetness without eating.  
我二接触戏乐中，未食而尝甜蜜味，

“We enjoy the intoxicating dance without drinking,  
we watch the mirage-like drama without rehearsing.  
未饮而品醉人舞，未排而赏奇妙戏，

“O. This is the supreme teaching, surpassed by nothing.  
Dear friends, please remember this in your heart.”  
再无胜此关要矣，诸位心中将此记。

Then, the two unite into one,  
and the one dissolves into space.  
此后二者融为一，一亦融入虚空里。

Then, Miraculous Wisdom the Judge  
presents this result to Wisdom the King.  
随后妙慧审判员，呈禀慧王此结局。

The King is delighted and smiles:  
“Your mediation is in such a good manner.  
王心欢喜笑呵呵，汝擅调和之风规，

“From here on, up till to the end of space,  
you may soar freely like a Garuda bird with wings widely open.<sup>12</sup>  
从今乃至虚空际，如鹏展翅自在飞，

“The sovereignty of the Kingdom of Fearless Emptiness,<sup>13</sup>  
I now bestow on you. Please kindly protect it!  
无畏虚空此王政，交付于汝善守持！

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<sup>10</sup> King of Magical Illusion means the Buddha. The Buddha taught the illusory nature of all phenomenon, as mentioned in the end of [The Diamond Sutra](#): “All conditioned phenomena / Are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, / Like dew or a flash of lightning; / Thus we shall perceive them.”

<sup>11</sup> This verse and the next one talks about the experience when one realizes the dream-like nature of the reality. Things appear vividly without having a solid nature.

<sup>12</sup> Garuda bird is fearless and effortless to fly. By resolving the debate, one become enlightened (hence being fearless) and can navigate freely in the samsaric world (e.g. the enlightened being can choose to be born anywhere and in any form).

<sup>13</sup> An enlightened being is the king of all phenomena and has no fear.

“In this garden of emptiness,<sup>14</sup>  
wind blows, and pure honey falls.<sup>15</sup>  
虚空花园此境中，风吹淳蜜纷飘降，

“Eat it, eat it, as you go.  
O. This will never be exhausted!  
食兮食兮此行去，何时亦无穷尽矣！

“There, the barren woman’s daughter, virtuous and beautiful,<sup>16</sup>  
being pleasant and satisfactory, joyfully plays.  
彼处贤美石女女，悦意称心而嬉戏，

“This never-aging youthful consort is bestowed on you,  
in union with you. Enjoy the miraculous bliss.  
无老春妃赐予你，与伊融合享妙乐，

“With the bliss of touching her,  
all the ease and pleasure in this three worlds,<sup>17</sup>  
以接触彼之喜乐，所有三有之安乐，

“are like vomit compared to nectar.  
The craving towards those (mundane happiness) now should be loosened!  
犹如甘露前呕物，于彼贪执当松矣！

“As such, if you say this and act according to it,  
you will be in union with Wisdom the King.”<sup>18</sup>  
如是言彼亦行彼，将与慧王融一体。

The above-mentioned metaphorical words are of experiential nature,  
are easy to understand when carefully examined, otherwise obscure,  
此等经验双关语，察则易解不察难，

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<sup>14</sup> Here the garden of emptiness means the Dharmakaya, which is beyond all concepts. From Dharmakaya, boundless Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya can appear.

<sup>15</sup> This and the following verses describe the effortless manifestation from Dharmakaya to benefit sentient beings with temporary and ultimate happiness. These activities are spontaneous, effortless, and boundless.

<sup>16</sup> Here, barren woman’s daughter signifies emptiness. The bliss of realizing great emptiness (the union of appearance and emptiness) is the ultimate happiness, which is superior to all worldly happiness.

<sup>17</sup> Three worlds: world of desire, world of form, and world of formlessness.

<sup>18</sup> The above words said by the King here represent that, through resolving the conflicting view of Wake and Dream, a Bodhisattva reaches higher level realization, towards Buddhahood.



are of significant meaning if carefully pondered,<sup>19</sup> otherwise they are insignificant, and are written at the place of great bliss by the one named “Dhīh”!<sup>20</sup>  
思则义大不思小，大喜乐地德者造！

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<sup>19</sup> One can reach enlightenment from these teachings, so it is significant.

<sup>20</sup> “The place of great bliss” refers to the retreat site where Ju Mipham Rinpoche wrote this text. The seed syllabus of Manjushri, “Dhīh”, is used as an alias of him.