

Induction of Ecstatic Lucid Dreams

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In recent years there has been a growing interest in lucid dreams of a "transcendent" or "mystical" nature, with corresponding efforts to develop language for their description (LaBerge, 1985; Tart, 1984). Without attempting to solve the terminology problem, as my main focus is on experience, I would like describe some of my lucid dreams, which I will simply refer to as "ecstatic"—in the sense of joyous intensification of consciousness being their main feature—and discuss elements which I have found relevant to their induction. I will begin with an example:

May, 1986. I suddenly become lucid in the dream as I am walking in the hallway of my high school. I am very glad to be lucid, and to be virtually as aware as in waking life. As usual, I want to get outside, into the light. Walking down the hallway I come to the exit, but my attempt to open the door is thwarted by the hulk of a wrecked truck. Realizing it is only a dream, I manage to get through the door enough to grasp the vehicle with both hands and heave it up and to the side almost without effort.

Outside, the air is clean, the sky blue, the scene pastoral and brilliantly green. I run through the grass and leap into the air joyously. Soaring through the treetops, I become entangled in branches, and have to hover while extricating myself. Finally above the limbs, I continue my flight to a few hundred feet high. While flying, I think, 'I've flown so many times before, maybe I'll try a floating meditation in the sky.' Having decided on the attempt, I ask for help from the "Higher," saying aloud, "Highest Father-Mother, help me to get the most out of this experience!" I then roll over backwards and cease attempting to control my flight, without fear of falling.

Immediately I begin to float through the sky, upside down with eyes closed, the sun beaming brilliantly down upon me, filling my head with light. I feel like a feather floating lazily through the air. During about five minutes of floating, I gently but firmly push thoughts that arise out of my mind, as in my waking meditation practice. The less distracted I am by thoughts, the more intensely aware and genuinely joyous the experience becomes—what I can only describe as ecstasy. Gradually I become aware of my body in bed, and as I awaken there is a feeling of lightness and well-being which is hard to describe.

I have had lucid dreams for eighteen years, but only learned to induce them at will

through my training in the MILD induction technique and association as an oneironaut with Stephen LaBerge's research. In the five years since then, in my lucid adventures I have done a great deal of exploring, signaling in the laboratory by way of eye movements, carrying out experiments, and especially flying. Having learned to make lucid dreams last for up to an hour, there was plenty of time for these activities. Among other things, I learned to fly very fast and very high, to pass through walls, including steel (and to burn holes through them with lasers from my fingertips!), to study the lucid dream environment in exquisite close-up detail, explore other planets, and especially to alter the dream environment at will, as in making things appear, disappear, and change shape and color.

After five years of memorable experiences I began to be concerned, because much as I love lucid dreams, I was running out of things to do! I might go on for perhaps half an hour, exploring, flying and altering the environment. However, although a lucid dream is always very meaningful for me, I began to long for the greater depth I had long believed possible in a lucid dream. I was becoming a little jaded.

In 1985 I began experimenting with meditation in lucid dreams in an effort to discover this depth. These experiments brought profound results. On a half dozen occasions I succeeded in remembering my intention to sit down in the dynamic atmosphere of the lucid dream, and managed to be undistracted by dream imagery long enough to practice deep, rhythmic breathing. In each case awareness seemed to expand into an egg-shaped sphere which encompassed my dream body, with a corresponding dramatic intensification of consciousness. As this happened, colors flowed like pools of neon light in my inner vision, as they sometimes do in meditation and before falling asleep. The state intensified until the dream imagery, through half shut eyes, took on a diaphanous character and finally disappeared. I became a point of consciousness contentedly floating in an intense yellow-orange field of light.

Unfortunately, the state would last for at most a minute, and I would wake up. This may have had to do with the lack of dream imagery to maintain the brain's model of the dream world. I intend to continue my efforts to meditate in lucid dreams, as others have, but I have since learned another method for achieving a state of very intense consciousness, as distinguished from my "usual" range of lucid awareness.

The previously described lucid dream of floating in sunlight illustrates this method as follows:

1. A preliminary overcoming of obstacles; followed by
2. Intentionally refraining from manipulation of outward dream content;
3. Appeal to the "Higher";
4. Control of thoughts; and

5. Trusting myself to the flow of the lucid dream without fear.

Before I can hope to have an ecstatic lucid dream, I need to maintain lucidity long enough to attain stability and clarity sufficient to remember and carry out my intentions. In my experience, for a dream to become really exquisitely lucid requires about five minutes. A number of mishaps can occur to thwart me in this period—an unrecognized false awakening, a fearful or startling event which causes me to awaken, or losing the lucidity and falling back into dream. Recognition of false awakenings depends largely on sufficient daytime practice of reality checks associated with the MILD technique. My method of remaining lucid is to try to move as slowly and deliberately as possible, then to repeat aloud, "This is a dream," and avoid interactions with dream characters for as long as necessary to achieve stable lucidity. Further, almost invariably I encounter obstacles in my lucid dream. Obstacles have included being entangled in branches, finding myself lucid under water or in-side steel girder cages or rooms with no doors or windows, being held under restraint by dream entities, and so forth. Overcoming such obstacles and the fear which accompanies them requires deliberate thought, focus of intention and execution of certain acts, such as passing through walls. In the process of overcoming fear and obstacles, my lucidity is intensified, resulting in a greater sense of awe.

Once these obstacles are overcome, I then appeal to the "Higher," followed by an intentional relinquishing of control of dream content. My attempts at making such an appeal were on LaBerge's suggestion (1985). The importance, I feel, of appealing to my conception of a higher being or a "higher self" for guidance to get the most out of the experience lies in recognizing the limitations of the dreaming self, which after all is only one aspect of the total self. Otherwise the dream self, a reflection of the waking personality, is wont to impose its limited perspective/desires on the lucid dream: flying, exploration, sex, meeting famous people, etc. The relinquishing of control of dream content frees my brain (or unconscious mind, if you will) to devise a broader, different and more inspiring scenario. This paradoxical process of deliberate effort to relinquish control seems necessary because otherwise the brain's productions tend to be more along the random, chaotic lines of nonlucid dreaming. Once I entrust myself to whatever unfolding the lucid dream will then take, by maintaining a "meditative" attitude, keeping my mind free of extraneous thoughts, and maintaining a quiet, receptive state, whatever occurs will be minimally altered or interpreted by my thinking. As experienced lucid dreamers know, lucid dream thoughts easily become manifest in imagery and sensations.

Essentially, the development of skill in controlling the content of a lucid dream has made it easier for me to deliberately give up control of content while maintaining an intended frame of mind, focusing on clarity of consciousness rather than specific

dream content. I am indebted here to the Tibetan exercise termed "transmutation of dream content," the altering of dream phenomena by which one strives to understand the nature of mental phenomena in general, and the applying of that understanding in gaining states of increased awareness (Evans-Wentz, 1935).

The following dream in November of 1986 further illustrates the role of these factors. Becoming lucid after recognizing an anomaly in the dream,

. . . immediately I hop into the air to verify by hovering, but the scene changes and I am in a very dark room, feeling vulnerable. I try spinning three or four times to make the scene change again, unsuccessfully. I can sense other entities in the darkness. I calm myself intentionally with deep breaths and assurances to myself that it's only a dream and to not be afraid. Finally after a few minutes I manage to find a door and go outside. It is light and pretty with trees and flowers, a great relief from the dank darkness. As I walk, I repeat aloud . . . , "This is a dream," until it no longer seems necessary.

I encounter a man I seem to know. He is pleasant and I ask if he wants to fly with me. We lock arms and leap into the air. Almost immediately we encounter vast, thick tree branches and strips of bamboo like a canopy and have to separate to pass through. I continue alone and encounter very fine wires about eight inches apart which block the entire sky. I force my way through and get above them, then fly out over the vast land-scape. I remember that I wanted to meditate and think of going into a floating meditation in the sky. But I continue to marvel at the stability of the perceptions, concentrating on the minute detail of the flowers and moss on the ground as I land. To fly too much would tire me, as I know from past experience.

My friend joins me again and we talk about the world around us. He seems to marvel with me, as I say that this seems like a parallel universe or fourth dimension. I then try to meditate, sitting on the grass, but he keeps interrupting me. I remember Stephen's admonition to me to not always ignore dream characters, and minutes later he seems to dissipate into me. I go on flying and exploring on the ground for awhile, concentrating much of the time on keeping my mind free of thoughts, to simply perceive the dream world around me as deeply as possible. I ask for some help, saying "Highest Father-Mother, help me to get the most from this," and just relax, floating in the sky. Shortly thereafter I experience potent flashes of awareness of extreme clarity— what seem to be glimpses of a higher reality, in some way deeply personal and familiar. One of these flashes is accompanied by an image from afar of an Eastern spiritual master I admire. I feel convinced that these glimpses are

indeed flashes of a higher reality, and can honestly say it is one of the most intensely spiritual experiences of my life. Eventually, after about half an hour, I begin to awaken.

Although I did not succeed at spinning in the above dream, many other times success enabled me to maintain lucidity for long periods, sometimes with ecstatic experiences. This dream includes many of the factors described earlier: efforts to maintain lucidity, overcoming fear and obstacles, appealing to the "Higher," relinquishing control over dream content, and maintaining a receptive attitude.

In conclusion, I want to encourage others to try the approach described. However, it is easy to fall into the assumptions that doing steps A, B and C will cause result D. In my experience of lucid dreaming, there are underlying currents or themes of my spiritual life that have been present for a long time. Sri Ramakrishna once said, "No matter how much you churn water, you won't get butter." The most important ingredient may therefore be the synergistic interaction of the method with my long searching for the higher life. My hunch is that the approach will interact in a similar way for others, but it may produce different results in conjunction with the materials, motivations and vision of their own inner life. My intention is to suggest possibilities that a lucid dreamer can experiment with and adapt to his or her own development as a way of deepening the state.

It seems that sufficient motivation is necessary to take such steps in a lucid dream, as well as the help of the deepest parts of one's psyche in order to make this process fruitful, and that involves looking inside oneself to try to identify one's own deepest drives or motivations or spiritual yearnings. I am quite excited about the possibilities for this type of lucid dream, and would like to hear of the experiences of others in this regard.

References

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