

## Experiencing the Divine in the Lucid Dream State

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Having personally experienced numerous lucid dreams following incubation tasks centered around wanting to be in the presence of the Great Spirit, I realized that in every lucid dream I experienced the Divine differently. If I were looking for the Divine, my dream ego was actively searching, and usually found a Divine presence; however, if I let go of control, a Divine presence appeared to me. Since I didn't have any expectation as to the form of the Divine, the outcome of my experiences was often unexpected. Thus I became very curious how other people experienced the Great Spirit in their lucid dreams.

I struggled with many different topics for a Master's thesis, but my heart was drawn to this one. Since I had to conduct an experimental study, I knew I would be facing many challenges and limitations. In view of my doubts about conducting such a project, I decided to incubate a dream to assist me. I prepared myself for a few days and waited. My incubation query was, "Should I do research about lucidity and the Divine?" The following is the account of my dream.

I am standing on top of a mountain looking over a panoramic forest. I see a large hawk swirling around. I tell myself that if this were a dream I could fly like this hawk. As soon as I say this the hawk comes straight towards me. As it comes closer it becomes smaller and changes into a hummingbird flapping its wings fast, smiling at me. I smile back and at the same time I know this must be a dream. I start imitating the hummingbird and start to fly. As I am in the air, my intention comes to me. "Should I write my thesis on lucidity and the Divine?" Suddenly, I see a dot of purple green color expanding in the sky. It keeps getting bigger, filling the landscape and moving towards me, changing into different rings of colors. The space in which this is occurring is so vast that it is beyond my visual ability. As the rings come closer they change into particles of light moving extremely fast, creating lines that cover everything, everywhere. Strong energy starts to move inside me and my body is changing its form into these particles of light. I don't see my body any longer but I know I am still there!

These particles slowly change into a night sky with stars. The sky moves like a movie screen from left to right with different planets on display. As the planets move they change into different colored bubbles. There is no landscape anymore, just a vast space with giant air bubbles of different colors, with light

shining through them. The bubbles transform into halos covering the infinite and vast space. I know that I am be-coming a witness to different layers of the universe. Suddenly everything turns black for a few minutes. I don't see anything, I don't feel anything and in the moment of nothing happening, everything happens. Soon, I become aware of my body, I take some deep breaths and slowly the first landscape appears again and I am in the air floating.

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I become more conscious of my body sensations but I don't feel I have a body any longer. It is as if my body has dissipated in the experience. Suddenly, I hear noises, I think I have awoken but I have entered into a false awakening . . . [in it] I wake up and write in my journal. Then as I stand up I feel extremely dizzy. I walk out of the door and go on the deck and knock at my housemate's (Tish) office door. She is sitting in her office with a box full of beads on her lap and on the rocking chair in front of her, an old white haired woman is sitting. I tell Tish I am having an important lucid dream and ask her not to come and wake me up. I walk back to my room but have a hard time keeping my balance. I go back to sleep trying to continue with the lucid dream but I wake up.

I was very confused and disoriented when I actually awoke. I looked at my journal, but it was blank. I wrote down some parts of the dream and went outside on the deck. Tish was on the lower deck. I asked her about the event. She said, "You must have been dreaming!" However, she said she had been in her office the past hour looking through some old beads that were given to her by her grandmother. We found out that the time she was going through the old beads corresponded to the time I was having my false awakening!

I still feel unable to verbalize the experience fully, but it left me with an incredible feeling of focus and purpose. I took the experience as an initiation, a permission to partake in my project. There was no choice but to dedicate my time to explore that aspect of lucidity.

From ancient times, dreams have been a source of inspiration, creativity and, in some traditions, a way to communicate with God (Genesis 28:12; Numbers 12:6; Baha'u'llah, 1945). Lucid dreaming (van Eeden, 1913), a phenomenon in which dreamers are aware in the dream that they are dreaming, has been used as a discipline for spiritual advancement (Evans-Wentz, 1953; Norbu, 1987; Nydal, 1988). [Reports from many researchers in the field of lucid dreaming suggest the possibility of experiencing the Divine in the lucid dream state (Sparrow, 1976; Gillespie, 1983, 1984; LaBerge, 1985; Kelzer, 1987; Bogzaran, 1987, 1988; Hewitt, 1988; Clerc, 1988, Gackenbach & Bosveld, 1989). The word Divine in this study refers to concepts

such as God, the Great Mystery, True Self, etc.

The study was designed to investigate two questions:

1. What is the relationship between the dreamer's waking concept of the Divine and the dreamer's experience of the Divine in the lucid dream state? The concept of the Divine may be considered the dreamer's formulation of the Divine, God, or the equivalent.
2. What is the relationship between the nature of the dreamer's incubation phrase and the dreamer's subsequent experience of the Divine in a lucid dream? More specifically, does the experience of the Divine during a lucid dream bear any relationship to whether the dreamer incubated a phrase involving actively "seeking" the Divine as compared to passively "experiencing" the Divine?

## **Method**

### **Subjects**

A total of 250 lucid dreamers were contacted and asked to participate in this study. Seventy-seven subjects (39 female, 38 male) responded to the questionnaire. Thirty-five of these remembered to do the task in their lucid dreams and constituted the sample upon which subsequent analyses were based. Thirty-one did not have lucid dreams related to the task during the experimental time. Eleven subjects re-turned only previous experiences related to this study.

### **Instrument**

The researcher developed a questionnaire specifically for this study. In addition to the general background questions, other items included the individual's concept of the Divine as well as the formulation of the incubation question of seeking, experiencing and seeing the Divine in their lucid dreams.

### **Procedure**

1. The following materials were mailed to subjects: cover letter; instruction sheet; incubation task information; instructions for Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dream-ing (MILD); questionnaire; dream report form and post questionnaire.
2. An incubation phrase was formulated by the lucid dreamers as a question or a statement to ask or say in their lucid dreams. The following is a selection of

some of the incubation phrases that the lucid dreamers formulated:

"I would like to see how the universe is run."

"I want to give up my power and submit to the higher self."

"I am Divine."

"I will seek the Divine."

"I wish to experience the Divine."

3. Subjects repeated the incubation phrase during the day so their intention would be clear when they became lucid in their dreams. While lucid in their dreams, they carried out their intention by voicing either their incubation phrase or question.

4. Lucid dreamers completed the Dream Report immediately after the lucid dream ended. The research materials were mailed back to the researcher at the end of the two weeks of experimental time.

## Coding

In order to study the relationship between the lucid dreamers' concepts of the Divine and their experience of the Divine in their lucid dreams, the researcher categorized both the dreamers' concepts of the Divine as described in their questionnaire and the reports of their lucid dreams.

The concepts of the Divine were categorized as either *personalized* or *impersonalized*. Those subjects who indicated that their concept of a Divine is that God is manifested through a person, were categorized as personalized. Those who gave a general answer and believed that the Divine is all encompassing, energy, formless, etc. were categorized as the impersonalized Divine.

Encounters of the Divine during the lucid dream were also categorized as either *personalized* or *impersonalized*. When the lucid dreamers encountered a person as a Divine presence, their reports were categorized as personalized. Cases where the dreamer reported encountering light, color, etc. were categorized as impersonalized.

The following are some examples of concepts of a Divine figure and lucid dream reports which in this study are referred to as the personalized Divine.

My God is my Father. Though my relationship with my own father is a loving, tolerant one, I see both my father and my Father as authority figures. . .

The following is the same dreamer's lucid dream report.

I became aware of the dream. . . . I was floating and saw a short way in front of me a large marble block. . . . I walked-floated toward it, around to the left, and

saw that it was the back of a throne. A chair arm, solid and massive was cut into the side of the block. I crept around the side, saw a person's arm on the marble chair arm. The hand was old, but firm and strong, like a carpenter's. The sleeve was white and full. The fingers were curved downward over the edge of the arm—relaxed but full of life. I couldn't see higher than the elbow from my position slightly behind and below. I knew it was God without any doubt.

When individuals did not specify their concept in terms of a person, the imper-sonal Divine category was selected. For instance one subject wrote, "Divinity is the animate spark which both gives form to everything and is everything. God is not a separate being but an all-encompassing Beingness." The following lucid dream reflects this person's encounter with the Divine.

During a lucid dream I try to maintain lucidity but the scene wants to go blank. I lie very still and try not to awaken. Then I recall that I should ask to see God. I do so and before me appears a moving picture with numerous interwoven cycles—like the workings of a clock. It is also like patterns of pulsating light and shadow moving in cycles. No complete cycle can be seen.

The incubation phrases were also categorized according to the lucid dreamers' formulation of the incubation task. The two predominant incubation phrases reported included a seeking/looking for the Divine or an experiencing of the Divine. Thus, in order to see the effect of the incubation task on the dream experience, two categories of active and passive were developed to classify the task. The lucid dreamers were categorized as either actively looking for the Divine or passively observing the outcome of their incubation phrase in their lucid dream.

## Results

A chi-square was conducted to determine if the paired observations obtained on the two variables of "the concept of the Divine" and "the lucid dream report" were related. The result,  $X^2(1) = 16.688$ ;  $p < .0001$ , revealed a substantial relationship between the subjects' concept of the Divine and their encountering the Divine in their lucid dreams.

As can be seen in Table 1, 83% of the subjects who believed in the Divine as a person indeed experienced encountering a person as a Divine presence while as 87% percent of the subjects who believed in an impersonal Divine experienced the Di-vine in forms other than a person.

The second research question was: Does the experience of the Divine during a lucid dream bear any relationship to whether the dreamer incubated a phrase involving actively seeking the Divine as compared to passively experiencing the Divine? A chi-square was also conducted to determine if the paired observations obtained on the two variables of "incubation phrase" and "dreamer's activity in lucid dreams" are independent. The result,  $\chi^2(4) = 121.039$ ;  $p < .0003$ , showed that the two variables are not independent. Significantly, 92% of the persons who formulated their incubation phrase as "seeking the Divine" were actively looking for the Divine. As can be seen in Table 2, 88% who formulated the phrase as experiencing the Divine did not look for the Divine, but either passively witnessed or allowed the dream to unfold by itself.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Among the many limitations of this study, perhaps the most important one is that this type of design reduces the participants' concepts of the Divine into categories. This kind of simplification into categories of personal and impersonal, which is required by quantitative research, cannot do justice to beliefs and experiences that are sacred and unique to the individual.

The results clearly indicated a significant relation between the person's report of their preconsidered concept of the Divine as well as the formulation of their incubation task and their subsequent experience of the Divine in their lucid dreams.

The reports of the concept of the Divine were formulated either towards a belief that God or the Divine appears in a human form (personal concept) or is an all-encompassing energy, formless, etc. (impersonal concept). Individuals who reported their concept of the Divine as a religious figure, e.g., Christ, Buddha, Mother, etc., encountered a person or a religious figure in their lucid dream. On most occasions the encounter was reported to be of a Divine nature or an encounter with a person that the dreamer reported as God.

This research suggests that our preconception of the Divine has an effect on our experience of the Divine in lucid dreaming. In some cases of personalized concept, the Divine was referred to as He, She, Jesus Christ or to a specific person that the subject believed carried the Divine nature and consequently, in their lucid dream, they experienced this person with a Divine nature.

In the post questionnaire, subjects were asked to give feedback as to whether their concept of the Divine was validated. In one case of the personalized Divine, the subject responded:6

Yes, my concept of God is validated by the sense of [the] power of God's love which I experienced in the dream. I believe that my experience is real and that I learned subjectively what I only believed objectively before.

With a few exceptions, the subjects who had a clear image of what or who the Divine is, experienced a Divine figure similar to their concept. This finding supports Garfield's statement that "dreamers who have a clear conception of what to expect of a god or saint in a dream are likely to see their dream image distinctly" (Garfield, 1974, p. 34). Also the report showed that the majority of people with an impersonalized idea of what or who the Divine is, resulted with impersonalized encounters with the Divine. Additionally, in the majority of the cases, even if the dreamer's concept of the Divine were not so clear, the dreamer's encounter with the Divine in a lucid dream reflected clearly the dreamer's concept of the Divine.

The following is an example of a lucid dream from an individual who wanted to seek the Divine:

. . . In response to something just previous in the dream, I become lucid. . . . I re-member my dream task for the Bogzaran study—to seek God and the divine—and immediately fall to my knees and assume a praying posture (this would be a very unu-sual thing for me to do. . . .) Rather than praying, I begin to "seek" in some undefinable manner, reaching out with my mind and trying to contact God out there somewhere in the fabric of the dream.

Another example of actively seeking the Divine:

I become lucid. . . . I find myself in another room. . . . Then I begin to look around at my own surroundings. I peek behind a mirror attached to the wall, trying to find a doorway. . . .

In this study it was also found that the formulation of the incubation task has an effect on the dreamers' experience in the lucid dream. When the dreamers' intentions were to "seek" the Divine, they actively looked for the Divine. In this active intention of looking for the Divine, some individuals were able to actually "find" the Divine in a human form or felt the presence of the Divine in other forms or sensations. In his book *The Sun and The Shadow*, Ken Kelzer describes a lucid dream of encountering the Christ Child that he considers one of the most exceptional and powerful dreams he has ever experienced. He named the dream "The Gift Of Magi." In this lucid dream, he is travelling by camel across northern Africa in search of the Christ Child. His journey of seeking the Christ Child takes many days, and finally he arrives at the

Jerusalem gate. After he leaves Herod's court, he writes:

I quickly arrive at a small, modest home where I behold a marvelous scene. I see the small Christ Child, probably a year old, lying in his crib with Mary and Joseph sitting beside him. (Kelzer, 1987, p. 40)

Although Kelzer did not choose an incubation phrase prior to "seek[ing] the Christ Child" in his dream, he found himself travelling across Africa in search of the Christ Child. With that strong intention he actively searched and finally found Him. His experience supports the reports of many individuals in this study who are actively looking and find a Being that the dreamer refers to as a Divine presence. When their intention was to "experience" the Divine, they passively observed the dream event. In the majority of these cases the Divine presence appeared to them rather than the dreamer looking for the Divine. The following dreams are examples of more passive experiences.

. . . I found myself within a universe of "evil." I said to myself, "I hope I am dreaming," whereupon I became lucid. There was still the presence of evil, it was all-pervading. I was very much afraid and recalled that I wished to experience the Divine. Having thought, or uttered, the task, there was an explosion of color at the center of this "evil" universe, and I felt a shock wave of all-pervading God that seemed to reach to the core of my being. I thought to myself, 'Good grief,' whereupon I awoke.

In another example the dreamer writes that after he becomes lucid:

. . . My attention is drawn upward. As I look up I first see a figure quite high in the sky that is slowly descending. I immediately recognize it as Jesus. He is wearing a golden robe and there is a golden aura about him. I lower my head and am in great awe at His appearance. My first thought is to not move, but wait to see what transpires. I don't want to do anything that might cause me to lose lucidity.

In this dream the dreamer again is allowing the experience to unfold without voluntarily looking for the Divine. Here Jesus appears to him and he remains where he is in the dream while witnessing the coming of Christ. Later in his dream he has a lengthy conversation with Jesus while remaining lucid in his dream.

It seems that the intention of wanting to be in the presence of the Divine during a lucid dream can facilitate the occurrence of such an experience. Our concept of the Divine, however, might have an effect on our experience of encountering with the

Divine. Thus the way in which we set and carry our intention can have an effect on how our dream ego responds in the lucid dream. Individuals who were actively seeking the Divine seemed more likely to exert a certain amount of control over the direction of the dream. On the other hand, when the dreamer allowed the experience to unfold, the dream took charge.

Although there was a significant relation found in this study between the in-cubation phrase and dream experience, the words that are used might not be so important as the intention. In his book *Lucid Dreaming*, Stephen LaBerge reports his experience of "seeking the highest." It is a good illustration of setting a task of seeking the Highest and also allowing the experience to unfold.

In his lucid dream he is driving a car. While lucid and in control he is confronted with an attractive hitchhiker. His first impulse is to pick her up, but he decides that he has done that in other dreams before. He wants to try something new. He decides to "seek the Highest." He writes:

As soon as I opened myself to guidance, my car took off into the air, flying rapidly upward, until it fell behind me like the first stage of a rocket. I continued to fly higher into the clouds, where I passed a cross on a steeple, a star of David, and other religious symbols. . . . (LaBerge, pp. 270–271)

Although he says he wants to seek the Divine (implying active control), he "opened" himself to guidance, at which point he seems to let go of control and the dream takes charge.

In the present study reports showed that, in both searching or experiencing the Divine, the Divine encounter occurred in one form or another. One implication of this research is that it is possible to experience the Divine (the Divine in which we believe) through incubating lucid dreams.

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