

Patricia Garfield's Pathway to Ecstasy Re-Released: An Interview

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Editor's Note: Here, Jayne Gackenbach interviews Patricia Garfield about her recently re-released book, Pathway To Ecstasy, originally published right after her best-selling Creative Dreaming.

Patricia Garfield: Spirituality and lucid dreaming were the things I was most excited about when I finished Creative Dreaming. They seemed like the future and thus where my writing should go. In 1974, before Creative Dreaming came out, I put together a book proposal and submitted it to Simon and Schuster. They felt there was not enough interest in dreaming to warrant another book, and particularly one devoted primarily to this weird aspect: lucid dreaming. I mean, nobody knew what that was. They wouldn't take it. I had the option of just submerging it into something much larger, making it a very minor part of a book, or sticking with it and trying to get it published elsewhere. I think I hadn't clearly developed how I wanted to pre-sent the whole of the material, other than the lucid aspects of it.

Eventually it was picked up by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, who were not terribly interested in the lucid dreaming aspect either. They were much more interested in the personal elements. At the same time this was going on, I was undergoing very intense forms of meditation. Suddenly there was the realization that these meditation experiences were connected to the lucid dream experiences. That's where they intersected. I became so excited when this happened.

Jayne Gackenbach: Would you talk about that moment of realization?

Garfield: It's in the chapter of the book called, "The Magical Land of Breeze And Light." You know the characteristic feelings that accompany lucid dreaming are, by now, quite well known. But at that time, very little was spoken about them. Frequently people who had lucid dreams would talk about the rush of wind in their face, and the intensification of colors and the other things that are now common knowledge. What I experienced I didn't quite know how to describe. I called it a "sound-feel," or a "vibration-buzz." To me it was kinesthetic, as well as auditory. It was not just wind in the face, the entire body seemed to "buzz." So when I practiced this Taoist meditation, and when I had, what would probably be called in other cultures, a kundalini experience, these inner sensations became very perceptible to me while

awake and meditating. Then they would occur spontaneously at other times once I had aroused them in meditation. This was then a very conscious force in my body. After I got some help with it, particularly by a Taoist meditation teacher who taught me methods of controlling it and calming it when necessary, then it became much more regulated.

The metaphor that flashes into my mind to describe these sensations is that it was like being pregnant when the baby's kicking you and you're sitting talking to someone, trying to be normal. The baby is kicking away inside, tickling you under the ribs, while you're saying, "Well yes, that's right." The effects of meditation can also have that inner life that is so strong that it makes it difficult to focus on the external. It's definitely a live quality once it has become aroused.

I found that it was a kind of barometer in the sense that certain things made it stronger, other things made it weaker. Certain foods that I ate stimulated it. Certain rooms, certain atmospheres. In any case, when I underwent an acupuncture treatment, I was amazed to feel this buzzing kind of line along the acupuncture channel, and I'd never heard anybody describe this or speak of it. When I talked with my acupuncturist about it, he said, "That's your chi. Most people don't feel it this quickly." It was probably that my body was already very aroused in certain areas, and this became perceptible to me in quite a vivid way.

This all came together in a dream.

Ordinary kinds of things were going on, and then suddenly I became aware that something was happening in the next room. I hurried around the corner, and entered a very spacious room. All the windows were open, with sunshine streaming in every window. There was a very high ceiling and sheer curtains on the windows that were being lifted up by a breeze that was pouring in along with the light. I said to myself, "The magical land of breeze and light!" I lifted up into the air with the excitement of realizing that I was dreaming. That was my clue. By then I'd had enough lucid dreams to know that when I experienced certain imagery, then this was dreaming. I felt myself lifted up by the buzzing in my legs, a "vibration-sound." In the dream I said, "My God! The buzzing vibration from acupuncture is the same as the feeling of lucid dreaming. It's identical."

That brought together a whole disparate number of experiences.

Gackenbach: So the felt experience plugged you into a wide range of other experiences.

Garfield: The connection came in the dream, while I knew I was dreaming. This

integration that occurred in my thinking combined the meditation experience, the acupuncture experience and the lucid dream experience.

Gackenbach: So there was an experiential element as well as a theoretical integration going on?

Garfield: Yes. How to frame what I was trying to express about lucid dreams began to make more sense. I was also at that time reading a great deal, and undergoing some training in Tibetan Buddhism. The concept of a mandala occurred to me as a possible framework. I began taking some of the most powerful images from my dreams and trying to make a mandala composed from my lucid dream images. For example, we know how common flying is in pre-lucid or lucid states, as a vehicle for moving up and out. I wanted flying in my mandala. I'd had a very powerful lucid dream that began very ordinarily, as so many of them do.

I was standing on a street corner talking to some people about a book I was going to get published. They were going to the publishers, and I said, "I'll meet you there in a while." I had to run home and pick up some notes. I hurried to where I seemed to live in the dream and opened a little iron gate that led to an alleyway. I was barefoot in the dream. I went into this little alleyway, and I was suddenly across it. I'm never barefoot outside on the sidewalks, and I don't live in an alleyway, so these are discrepancies that might have clued me to the incongruent aspects of the dream. But it didn't happen until I got into the alleyway and I saw this beautiful tree across the street. It was covered, not with leaves, but with blue feathers. On this feathered tree were sitting many, many blue-birds, and I looked at the tree and said, "Ah! I'm dreaming! You know, this has got to be a dream tree! Suddenly one of the birds was on my finger and I began stroking this little creature. And I started to say "Oh you pretty. . . ."

But I began to feel tired. For me, when a dream becomes lucid or right after, there's often a change in consciousness that can take the form of going to sleep. It can take the form of waking up. It can take the form of going into a trance. It can be being light-headed, but there is some kinesthetic feeling in my head that says, "Oh, you know. . . ." And I go into another state.

In this case I suddenly felt very tired, and I lay down on my right side and I could feel this buzzing vibration, but in this case it had the actual form of light. It was a buzzing light that travelled in my legs and around my buttocks and I just lay still in the dream watching this buzzing light knowing perfectly well I was dreaming, just waiting to see what would happen. And suddenly it occurred to me that my husband actually turned over in bed, so the whole bed jiggled, and my dream snapped into the ordinary. It

continued, but now there was this little child, a little boy lying in his cot on his right hand side and his mother had just opened the door to ask him what he wanted for dinner. In the lucid part I was trying to decide what to do with the lucidity and here was this little boy being offered a choice of all kinds of wonderful things. Then she looked at him and said, "Oh I'm sorry. Did I wake you up?" And then I actually awoke.

The bluebird that was in my dream became an important figure representing the ability to fly, so I condensed my many, many flying images from lucid dreams into one blue feather that had a place on the mandala.

Passionate dreams are a very consistent part of my lucid dreaming, not always, but often. In one of the dreams which became lucid:

I was lying on the couch in a beautiful room, and I looked out the open window, and saw that the moon was full. I suddenly realized that I was dreaming and said, "Fly me to the moon." I lifted off the couch, out the window and into the night sky with the wonderful streaming of the wind against my face and hair. There was an exhilaration of moving toward the light, this wonderful luminous light, and suddenly I was there, on the moon, and everything was red. There was a bare-breasted woman in a red dress that was in the shape of a strawberry. The whole dream scene was infused with this strawberry red light.

So from this dream I then took the symbol of the strawberry, almost like a nipple, a female succulent symbol that became my image for the passion of lucid dreams. So I had the flying element, and I had the passionate element. I call these figures "deities" in the framework of the mandala because they were, it seemed to me, to be the images that brought a supernatural kind of experience.

You know how sound in lucid dreams can become very crystal clear. Often there is music, pulsation and rhythm going on. Another compelling image from my dreams was a woman who spoke in musical tones which I called in the dream "bell tones." When she opened her mouth to speak, what came out was a musical bell tone, so I used the bell as a symbol. This is the way I built the mandala. There were four major deities and there were the "temple walls" which were the walls of my childhood where negative dreams used to take place. I likened this to the sacred space in which the dreamer's power is encapsulated if you can get in touch with it, rather than being frightened by it and scared away by the fear.

The central figure of the mandala became the deity of the branching woman, which was another one of these revelations from an accumulation of dreams. I had a dream

once in which I was at a conference. I described this in *Creative Dreaming*.

I stood up and . . . nobody was paying much attention to me. (It was long before I had written *Creative Dreaming*, and there wasn't any response to my work.) I said, "I've had a series of dreams in which there were women that had growths coming from their head. They were branches or antlers, I wasn't quite sure, but many, many reaching out in all directions. I'm fascinated with this."

And in the dream, people just started talking and not paying any attention, and going on with their thing and my husband leaned over and said, "Oh, you did that very well." And he kissed me on the cheek. I wandered over to the table where people were eating and there wasn't any food left for me.

I woke up and thought, "What a weird thing to say! Have I ever dreamt about women with things growing out of their heads? I don't remember it." I often draw little sketches in the left hand column of my dream journals, so I went back through the journals, years back, and I found that, indeed, that was true. There was a whole series of such images. They were characters in the background. One for instance was a woman in a hat that just had branches coming out of it. All the way through the years there had been a series of images that I never consciously noticed. And then finally this branching woman. It became a numinous symbol for me, I mean, what is this? It was the arising of an archetype. I wondered, "What is this coming from?" I sculpted it and I painted it and I thought a lot about it and it finally occurred to me that this was upward moving energy, from my point of view, that referred to my own creativity that was branching, that was growing, that was reaching out in many directions.

This too, I saw was related to meditation. If you look at any form of esoteric knowledge, all systems have some symbol that has to do with the head, and the radiance coming from that. In Christianity you have the halo. In Buddhism you have the thousand-petaled lotus. In many of the groups a piece of hair is at a particular point on the head. In acupuncture this point is called the "thousand crossroads." There is, again in Chinese acupuncture theory, a spot at the top of the head at which all the channels cross, and it is this point that becomes active in meditation, when there is a kind of kundalini experience. I somehow came to the realization that my branching woman was my personal version of all of these images in different systems that come up with a different image, but that the energy was in the same place. And so this became the central image in my dream mandala.

Gackenbach: What were you were trying to say with Pathway?

Garfield: I was trying to integrate the experience of enlightenment. Regardless of

whether it took place within a dream or in a waking meditation, I was trying to trace that experience within the visual form. There is a certain path that you follow within the mandala. You enter in a certain place and you move around it. And each of the images were signposts of what was happening within the dream.

Gackenbach: It wasn't just dreams though. It was within meditation as well.

Garfield: Yes, it was paralleled. Higher states of consciousness and lucid dreaming share many characteristics. Many of the things that are happening in lucid dreams also happen in intense meditation sessions. There is a parallel between the two states. One could have created a mandala based on meditation experience. I chose to make a visual pattern that was based on my lucid dream experiences.

Gackenbach: What's nice is that the dream is better able to offer you clear visual images. In meditation that can happen, but it's more rare.

Garfield: And it's considered distractive by many disciplines, so that you might almost suppress it rather than welcome it. In the dreams visual imagery is so much a part of the experience that it helps you to retain it. It helps you to stay in touch, I think, with the energy and the feeling and the emotion of the dream, and gives you the handle to get back into it.

Gackenbach: Have you ever had experiences of what I would call "pure consciousness?" Just awareness, not witnessing. Where there's no second thing, yet you're very clear. You are all awareness, not just awareness of something.

Garfield: Yes I have, but more in waking meditation, or even just lying asleep in bed at night awakening in the night, probably fresh from the dream, when I am awake, but just extending. There is no limits to the body, and I can actually feel waves of pulsation, extending out from some center.

Gackenbach: You don't necessarily call it, "me, me."

Garfield: Of course in dreams one has this sometimes, or something like it anyway. Have you never dreamt you were a point of awareness in the dream, just a tiny speck? You're not a thing.

Gackenbach: Or it emerged out of pure awareness to a point and then it became structured, and then a "me" got put on it. Like geometric forms came before "I" came, but awareness came before the geometric forms.

Garfield: Mine would be more perhaps the opposite, just like this tiny crumb, some-

times going between being one little focused point, somewhere in the dream, just watching, and then to a giant, I call it "God-like." Suddenly you're above and you're not in a dream body. You're omniscient somehow. You see and know everything.

Gackenbach: When you read such accounts there are certain themes that reverberate through them.

Garfield: I'll just conclude by saying, Jayne, that I'm really pleased that Pathway has a second life because the first was very short really. It was in print for one year, and it was the year that the government imposed a tax on inventory. The publishers were panicking right and left, and they were taking any book that wasn't moving fast enough to suit them and chopping them up into paper towels. If you want a nightmare, picture the book of your heart being chopped up into paper towels. So it was rather traumatic, extremely distressing. But as time went on. .

Gackenbach: So why the second offer, do you think?

Garfield: Because, although Pathway didn't have a broad audience at the beginning, it did have a very devoted one. The people who read it and understood it were limited, but they were absolutely passionate about what it meant to them. People kept it by their bedside, and said, "It was the best book I ever read. This book changed my life." That kind of thing. It was much more extreme than for the first book, which was generally liked. This was at a much deeper level. I began getting letters from libraries saying that their copy had been stolen again, so please, please could I re-place it? It was one of their most popular books. People began hunting for it. I got passionate letters asking if they could please buy a copy from me, they'd put searches on it. So there was a whole stream of people to whom it did speak. Finally, ten years later, after it had come out in seventy-nine, one of the publishers said, "But this is a New Age book. You know, you were ten years too early, and now we want to publish it." They asked me to write a new introduction, and said that the time is right for it now. Now people can understand it. So many people now know what lucid dreaming is—it's almost a household word. And the dreamwork movement is very broad. The bodywork movement is very developed, but at the time that this was originally written, it was all embryonic. Way ahead of its time. I know a lot of people who say, "I was so glad to see that in print again." So I think it has a new life and has something to offer to a certain segment of aware dreamers.

Gackenbach: I think it would be nicer to be able to say something deeply to a few people than something cursory to so many.

Garfield: Well, one would like to be able to do both.