

Freud, van Eeden and Lucid Dreaming
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Editor's Note: Although only a small portion of the original article is presented here, Freud's letter is reproduced in its entirety.

Fredrik van Eeden, who is credited with coining the phrase "lucid dream" and publishing the first serious research into these dreams [has been] remembered more as a poet, essayist, and social reformer than as a psychopathologist. . . . However, with recourse to van Eeden's diaries and several of his biographies, with the know-ledge that he is something of a major literary figure in the Netherlands, and with the discovery of a letter written by Freud to van Eeden, [a more pertinent] historical sketch can be drawn.

. . . Fredrik Willem van Eeden (1860-1932), . . . after completing his medical training and Ph.D. work, . . . pursued both a literary career [as] one of the founders of the literary-political journal, *De Nieuwe Gids*, and a medical career . . . as a physician in Bussum. In 1887, he opened the first psychotherapeutic institute in The Netherlands, in collaboration with the seemingly practically-minded A.W. van Renterghem (van Eeden was the theoretician of the two). By 1893, van Eeden had lost interest in this "experiment in hypnosis" (Liebault method) along with psycho-therapy. Until 1892, he did publish frequently in Dutch, English and French journals on psychotherapy, hypnosis and related subjects (Bulhof, 1983; Fontijn, 1990; Wentges, 1976).

. . . It was probably not until Freud's star rose at the beginning of this century that he seriously attracted van Eeden's attention, which at first was very negative. . . . Yet something occurred which apparently made him begin to rethink his attitude towards psychoanalysis. We do not know the nature or cause of this change, . . . one of the most interesting of the questions yet to be answered about van Eeden.

If September 1913 represented the beginning of van Eeden's intellectual turn-around, then it seems likely that his "conversion" to psychoanalysis was completed in February, 1914. At this time, van Eeden was on a lecture tour. On January 29th he was in Vienna and amongst his audience on that night were several psychoanalysts — including Freud. A meeting took place after the lecture, with Hugo Heller acting as "host," which appears to have led to van Eeden being invited to Freud's house for lunch on February 1st. This meeting seems to be the real point of full conversion. After this date van Eeden would never say anything against Freud himself, although he never lost his skeptical attitude towards some aspects of psychoanalysis. With this new attitude, van Eeden wrote an article on Freud in the *German Daily, Frankfurter*

Zeitung (May 29, 1914). From this there is evidence that shortly after the lunch meeting an exchange of letters had occurred. . . .

Freud's Letter To van Eeden

The following letter [which had not been published prior to the December 1990 issue of Lucidity Letter], would appear to be Freud's response to a request by van Eeden for several points of clarification regarding dreams, and in particular, lucid dreaming. The full text of the letter reads:

1 March '14
Dr. Freud
Vienna 1X Berggasse 19

Dear Dr. van Eeden,

It is of great and valuable interest to me that you will be writing an essay on my work and I am happy to give you the information you request, although I cannot add any more to what has already been written in my "Interpretation of Dreams." I secretly hope, however, that you have not read it properly and that I can induce you to re-examine a few points.

To your First Question: My "Interpretation of Dreams" is not based on dreams by neurotics, but largely on my own dreams. The assertion that one does not judge nor appraise in a dream, nor speak, cannot contradict your experiences, for it is derived from the distinction between manifest and latent dreamthoughts—which is a fundamental one—yet one which is so rarely being taken seriously. Analysis shows, that all thought, judgment and suchlike stem from the latent dreamthoughts in which, of course, our entire psychic activity is reflected. One must not, however, confuse the dream with the latent dreamthoughts, like the Swiss do now. The dream is, correctly perceived, the result of dream-work, a process that converts the latent thoughts into the manifest content. This dreamwork does not know judging, appraising, dialogue-forming and suchlike. Wherever something like this occurs in a dream it has been taken over from the dreamthought either dark or distorted, and reshaped.

Read again the relevant examples of my dreams in which manifest content as well as judgments and suchlike may appear just as in yours (Section Dreamwork). There is thus no contradiction between our experiences, but a misunderstanding, which is based on the fact that you neither accepted nor

applied the premise, in every dream interpretation, of the distinction between manifest and latent dream content.

To your Second Question: I think you are being unjust by saying: for me there is nothing else psychic than what is conscious. This can only be said as long as one has not taken any notice of the facts of dream analysis, observation of parapraxes, study of neurosis.

Of course, every one of us knows only conscious processes in oneself and may conclude that those of some other person, unconscious to himself, are known to that person. But whoever analyzes must learn by necessity that he has erred in this quite natural premise, and that he can find psychic acts in himself that have remained unknown to his conscious awareness which he must, however because of certain consequences, deduce in the same way as reliable circumstantial evidence without a confession. Finally, analysis provides him with the means to raise to consciousness these, initially unconscious processes, similar to photography that makes visible otherwise invisible ultraviolet rays. I cannot understand, however, that the unconscious should mean a loosening of the relationship between our psychic life and our individual body.

My unconscious thought is my individual property in the same way as my conscious one. At this point we are not threatened by a radical change. I now have two copies of your work. Jelgersma's talk surprised and pleased me. Thus the Interpretation of Dreams has been recognized in an academic setting in your little Holland of all places. It was in fact particularly on this point, that Bleuler did not follow me. Your visit has left us with the most pleasant memories. The ladies still often speak of you and your so informal and charming companion, and the boys regret not to have seen you, because of the change of your initial plans. My kindest regards to you together with the request to continue sentiments of friendship regardless of our theoretical disagreements.

Yours Faithfully

Freud

The translation of the German transcript of this letter has been made to conform to current translations of Freud. Strictly speaking, the word Seelische means "soul" or "soul-based." In the version above it has been left to read "psyche" and "psychic" because of the implications of the translation problems . . . with respect to our current understanding of Freud.

It would seem that the exchange of letters between the two men was not abundant,

though it may well be that there are a few others in existence. It is obviously of great interest to find the van Eeden original which led to this reply. . . .

Overall, Freud's letter offers three main points:

1. It supports the claim made in van Eeden's diary that the two men did meet, at least on one occasion;
2. It alludes to the article . . . which appeared in the Frankfurter Zeitung; but most importantly of all:
3. It offers Freud's basic attitude towards what we can call in retrospect the "lucid dreaming concept" (although it is not mentioned by that name in the letter itself).

The Limited Importance of Manifest Content

A central point in Freud's dream theory is his distinction between the manifest dream and latent dream content. . . . On a practical level, this meant that it was not so important how a person experienced the manifest dream, but rather what the symbolic content of a dream actually related to in the unconscious. It is only by breaking the person's symbolic code that the analyst can trace the source of the dream, hidden in the person's unconscious.

This distinction between the two parts of an individual's psyche is applied by Freud to the difference and function of the person's conscious awareness of the dream (as suggested in the lucidity concept) . . . as far as the general idea of lucidity in dreams goes, Freud indicates in the letter that he is basically happy with it. "The assertion that one does not judge nor appraise in a dream, nor speak, cannot contradict your experiences. . . ." Where he takes issue is in the interpretation of this activity and the importance that may be attached to it. Since, according to Freud, the conscious mind is the less important part of a person's total psychological activity (the bulk of which lies in constant flux in the unconscious) it is of little real importance how dreams are experienced—especially so in the context of the therapeutic process. In the final analysis, we can say that it is Freud's devaluing of the manifest dream (a point which contributed to the split with Jung) that naturally led him to "devalue" the idea of lucid dreaming. Lucid dreaming posed no threat to his major thesis. . . .

. . . It would appear that shortly after van Eeden's article on Freud and the related exchange of letters, van Eeden dropped out of the psychoanalytic scene. Exactly why is not known at present. However, since . . . Freud did know about the concept of lucid dreaming, a new area of research has presented itself. New [topics might include] the tension between lucidity and psychoanalytic notions (e.g., the manifest

dream, wish-fulfillment, and Freud's denial of judgment in dreams), or van Eeden's ideas as expressed in the Diaries or any of his other written work in relation to psychoanalytic ideas in general.

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