

Clinical and Transpersonal Concerns With Lucid Dreaming Voiced

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Because the phenomenon of dream lucidity has become a field of inquiry for scientists, clinicians, philosophers, and dreamers, I would like to highlight a few concerns which have been mounting in my mind with regard to widespread access to lucid dreaming. We so often experience the lucid dream as pleasant and so seldom hear about "bad" experiences. Therefore it is easy for those interested in dream lucidity to gloss over potential problems. During my sabbatical year from the University of Northern Iowa, I have had the opportunity to talk to many people both in the United States and abroad about lucidity. Although there is much excitement about its potential, those who voice concern about its abuse are also being heard. This excitement is normal and often accompanies the "discovery" (in this case rediscovery) of any new state of consciousness. However, it is incumbent on the leaders of this emerging field to also voice concerns. My concerns with this field include clinical or personal experiential applications of working with parts of the self in the dream, as well as issues regarding the transpersonal nature of the experience.

Clinical/Experiential Concerns

It seems to me that clinical and experiential concerns center around issues of dream control, dream interactions and questions of the fabric of reality. (Several articles and letters address these concerns, [especially in the December, 1987 issue] of *Lucidity Letter*. Should one have control over one's dreams? Some would say no, that you should leave the content of the unconscious untouched as it appears in the dream. Most, however, agree that some control of the content could be beneficial (full control is probably impossible). Dream control is clearly tied to expectations but we may not always be conscious of the nature of our expectations, either while awake or while asleep [Editor's Note: See the panel discussion, "Should You Control Your Dreams?" in the December, 1990 issue of *Lucidity Letter* for a lively discussion of this particular issue].

I would particularly bring to the attention of the reader the work of Paul Tholey for advice as to the nature of applications of dream control in both clinical and normal populations. In the fall, I was fortunate to meet and visit with Paul in Germany where he continually stressed that in their research/clinical program they have found that the dream provides its own safety mechanisms. That is, he claims that the dreamer will only experience and change the lucid dream to the degree that he/she is able to cope with the outcomes. The reason I point so strongly to Tholey's work is that our

clinical/experiential work in the United States lags far behind his even though we have provided the major psychophysiological and psychological research foundation for dream lucidity. Unfortunately, much of his work was still in German but an English summary of the clinical/experiential applications of lucidity can be found in *Conscious Mind, Sleeping Brain: Perspectives on Lucid Dreaming* (Gackenbach and LaBerge, editors; Plenum, June, 1988). [Editor's Note: After this was written, *Lucidity Letter* also published more on Tholey's work; see the three extended articles reprinted in this commemorative issue, Volume 10(1&2).]

A second concern about working with lucid dreams is the extent and quality of interactions with dream characters/situations. Tholey specifically addresses this concern in the chapter referenced above. Further, during my visit he pointed out that the question "Who am I?" should be posed to other dream characters/situations while lucid. This notion of a receptive attitude to the dream experience rather than an aggressive manipulative one has also been pointed to by clinicians in the United States. Are lucid dream interactions relevant to waking state behaviors? This question of the transfer of information from lucid dreaming to waking life is crucial to the potential applications of the state. Tholey's work clearly shows that such transfer is not only possible but desirable. Relatedly, I would caution against taking an attitude toward the lucid dream state of it being unrelated to waking life. This could result in undue absorption in lucid dreaming, leading potentially to addiction (see the letter by Barroso in [the December, 1987] issue of *Lucidity Letter* for an excellent example).

Another clinical/experiential danger is that extensive exposure to dream lucidity might, in some individuals, lead to questions of the nature of reality both while sleeping and while awake (see the [June, 1987] issue of *Lucidity Letter* for an excellent example). The question "What is real?" has always intrigued philosophers and appeals to the philosopher in us all. But such questioning either as induction of lucid dreams and/or as a result of extensive, premature exposure to lucidity may in some people lead to quasi-psychotic splits with reality. This is illustrated by Bruce Marcot's comment about his lucid dream experiment: ". . . I was beginning to become confused as to various states of mind (sleep, awake, dream-conscious). I dropped the experimentation shortly thereafter" (p. 72) [Editor's Note: June, 1987 issue. See also the reprint in the 1991 issue].

Norbert Sattler, a German psychologist in private practice in Frankfurt, acknowledges that he screens all his patients for reality-testing problems and if they seem to have such problems he does not introduce the concept of dream lucidity. To his remaining patients he introduces dream lucidity and with about one-third of them, he works with lucidity as the therapy technique of choice. However, for persons simply picking up a popular book, reading the April [1987] OMNI article or hearing about

lucid dreaming from a neighbor, such screening does not occur. Dare we so wholeheartedly recommend lucid dream induction practices which require reality testing?

However, is it the moral responsibility of the leaders of the field to withhold information because of potential misuse and/or misunderstanding by a few? Perhaps not, but it is their responsibility to caution their audiences for the benefit of those for whom such advice may cause a slower unfolding of lucidity in dreams. The MacTiernan letter in the [December, 1987] Letters to the Editor section is a case in point. His experience was based on reading an article in OMNI by Steve LaBerge and myself. Are we at fault for what happened to him? Clearly no. But we are at fault if we do not routinely caution audiences about abuse or even dangers in accessing an incredibly powerful state of mind.

After hearing about Tholey's training of an Olympic athlete with dream lucidity, a colleague spontaneously remarked, "Dream lucidity is really the ultimate drug!" Yes, the state has that potential. But so too comes the potentiality of abuse through ignorance of proper use and possibly addiction.

Transpersonal Concerns

I have found in my reading, research, and personal experience with dream lucidity that it is indeed fertile ground for truly transpersonal glimpses into the nature of being. However, I have become aware that there are different approaches to the transpersonal experience of consciousness during sleep. This happened initially in my work with colleagues at the Maharishi International University and later as I talked to others more widely about the transpersonal aspect of lucidity. And I began to be confused . . . in fact, I am still confused!

It seemed to me on the surface that the central question here, too, was with dream control. It became clear on closer inspection that the attitude towards the dream is the key question. Should one engage in an active, involved attitude of dream consciousness or should one engage in a passive, uninvolved attitude while conscious that one is dreaming? A third option might be that one could use either attitude interchangeably as the demands of the state require.

What does all of this have to do with transcending ordinary consciousness, albeit dream consciousness? This question centers around the relationship of dream lucidity (active attitude) to dream witnessing (passive attitude). Essentially, dream witnessing is claimed to represent a fourth state of consciousness which is "higher" than waking, sleeping, and dreaming. One is said to have "transcended" these ordinary states of consciousness (see especially talks by Harry Hunt and Charles Alexander and a

research report by Gackenbach, Moorecroft, Alexander, and LaBerge about these questions in [the December, 1987] issue of Lucidity Letter). So what is the concern?

Two concerns have struck me thus far in my thinking about the transpersonal aspects of lucidity. First, if one finds a natural passive "consciousness" during their dream and then hears that they can manipulate their dreams, should they? Or if one naturally tries to manipulate the dream should they force a passive attitude? It seems to me that we should honor what comes naturally to each individual and not try to force unfamiliar styles on each other during dreaming any more than we should during waking.

Of even more concern to me is the possibility of pursuing the "spiritual highest" while lucid as a sole end. If this occurs to the exclusion of all other dream activities, might we not miss the value of lucidity for helping us work out our daily problems? Might not such "spiritual egocenteredness" serve as another form of denial of waking problems?

What is the Proper Attitude/Behavior?

How do we find out what is the proper attitude/behaviors to engage in while lucid in sleep? We go SLOWLY. We ask other lucid dreamers what works for them, we consult other colleagues, whether scientist, clinician or philosopher, and we consider models from both ancient literature as well as from contemporary clinical practice. An excellent example of a blend of these approaches is Ken Kelzer's recent book, *The Sun and the Shadow*. By combining the spiritual and the clinical, the mundane and the sublime Kelzer offers a tour de force of the proper attitude we should have in working with both our lucid and our nonlucid dreams.

I don't think any of us can stop the increasing interest in and experimentation with the state of dream lucidity. But what we can do as pioneers in the area is to advise caution when we hear of someone who has discovered their lucid dreams. Bad examples do exist. Read the first two letters to the editor in [the December, 1987] issue of Lucidity Letter as well as the panel discussion on ethical issues in the symposium proceedings in order to arm yourself with specific illustrations.

Finally, write to Lucidity Letter about your own experiences with dream lucidity, BOTH GOOD AND BAD. We can all benefit from each other's accounts. Only if we share our experiences, thoughts, reflections, research results, clinical insights, and philosophies can we all learn about this exciting "new" state of consciousness.