

THEORETICAL AND PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

Memory and Reason in Lucid Dreams: A Personal Observation

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There is a need to pursue the question of whether the lucid dreamer has the same ability to reason and the same access to memory that he or she has when awake, which is implied when lucid dreaming is spoken of as “waking consciousness occurring during the dream.” Tart (*Altered States of Consciousness*, 1969, p. 116) observed that Frederik van Eeden “possessed all of his normal intellectual faculties” when dreaming lucidly. Tart again (“From Spontaneous Event to Lucidity: A Review of Attempts to Consciously Control Nocturnal Dreaming”, in *Handbook of Dreams: Research, Theories and Applications*, edited by B.B. Wolman, 1979, p. 255) says that the consciousness of the lucid dreamer has the clarity, the lucidity of his waking state. His consciousness is “practically identical to his waking state. Then Stephen LaBerge in his *Psychology Today* article on lucid dreams (January, 1981) wrote that the lucid dreamer “can reason clearly, remember freely.”

Since I never have my normal intellectual faculties during lucid dreams, and I never have had the clarity or lucidity of the waking state even at my best moments in what is now 397 lucid dreams, I questioned, in an article in *Lucidity Letter* (October, 1982), the use of the expression “waking consciousness during the dream”, and the claim that lucid dreamers remember and reason as when awake. Since such claims contradict my experience I felt that they were incorrect. Now I see that somewhat differently. Since such things continue to be said, even by some who have had lucid dreams, it must be correct that some people do have good memories and good reasoning ability while dreaming lucidly.

However, even if some people have “waking consciousness” in lucid dreams, it is questionable that these characteristics should be included in the definition of lucid dreams. Paul Tholey’s article, “Relation between Dream Content and Eye Movements Tested by Lucid Dreams,” appearing in *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, (1983, 56, 875-878) begins with a definition of lucid dreams that Tholey attributes to Tart (in the “From Spontaneous Event to Lucidity” article): “Lucid dreams are those in which the dreamer is aware that he is dreaming, clearly recalls his waking life, and considers himself to be in full command of his intellectual and motivational abilities” My lucid dreams are excluded by this definition. In lucid dreams I retain the restrictions of my ordinary dream consciousness. I forget most of my daily waking life. I do not know where I am sleeping, or what year it is. I recall little even if I try. Less than half the time can I remember what experiment I had planned to do. Memory is often false. My ability to reason is limited. I cannot plan the future beyond the immediate. I am little aware of my inconsistencies, mistakes and ignorance. I accept dream events uncritically. I am unable to judge (until awake) the results of experiments I do in

my lucid dreams. I do somethings that make no sense. I have only enough lucidity to become aware of some inconsistency in the dream or to realize somehow I am dreaming and to proceed according to that knowledge.

Now I see that it is possible, since the claims of memory and reasoning ability are made by so many who study lucid dreams, that this may very well characterize most lucid dreamers, even though it does not characterize me. The truth may be that there is a greater variety among lucid dreamers than is now recognized.

The simplest definition of lucid dreaming that I have found, is one used by Gackenbach. For instance, in "Lucid Dreaming Project" in *The A.R.E. Journal* (1980) she describes lucid dreams as "awareness of dreaming while in the dream state." For the "Sleep and Dreaming Questionnaire" that I filled out under her direction, it is said that lucid dreams "are dreams where you are aware that you are dreaming while you are dreaming." With this kind of restricted definition I am a lucid dreamer, which I do not question anyway. If the questionnaire's definition had included the specific characteristics of reasoning clearly and remembering freely, I, and I trust others, could not have filled out the questionnaire.

Even though some may reason somewhat well and remember somewhat well while dreaming lucidly, I suspect that such ability may often be overplayed. Even van Eeden, who, it is said, "possessed all of his normal intellectual faculties" does not give the impression that that was strictly so, as we read his account of his dream lucidity (*Altered States of Consciousness*, pp 152— 157). There are some statements that show less than normal memory and rationality. He says, "it is very difficult...to control emotional impulses." When he first talked to his brother he did not remember that his brother had died. He said to his brother, "Now we are dreaming, both of us...I had indeed a very strong feeling of certitude that it was really van't Hoft with whom I talked...I took myself then for younger than I was.. I said that I understood him, though after waking up I was utterly puzzled by it and could make nothing of it...I had no idea of my real condition."

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