

Remarks by a Lucid Dreamer

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Some years ago I had my first lucid dream after having learned that such a phenomenon does exist. I have since then recorded such dreams; some of them share traits described in such literature as I have read. Others have aspects that I have not seen described.

I have experienced the traditional false awakening, the dream within a dream, and what I think is also fairly typical, the attempt to retain the memory of the experience by describing or recording it, usually in an ordinary dream state subsequent to the lucid interval. For instance, in a long dream sequence I was once accompanied by an acquaintance I had lost track of in waking life. She was by profession a reporter, and as we rode a dream train together, I looked out the windows on one side, and requested her to check the scenery on her side.

Like others, I find the experience positive, with a sense of a joyous altered state of consciousness during the dream. I customarily wake with a cheerful “afterglow” that carries through the day.

And like others I do carry out “experiments” in the dream, though I am usually too happy and fascinated to be systematic. Food often appears. If I eat it, trying deliberately to see how “real” it is, I find that I get some sense of the texture—of a slice of bread for instance—but the actual taste tends to be vague and elusive. Though visual impressions are vivid and lovely, and I do hear words or music, I cannot ever remember experiencing smell.

Like many lucid dreamers I have some ability to control or alter the environment, though I have not made many such attempts. When I once tried to change a dark night time sky to a light one, I did not get, as I hoped, daylight; instead stars came out in the night sky, providing dim illumination. This rather joking “response” is typical of a playful element in my dreams, sometimes tending to the prankish or clownish.

A trait that I and others have noted is the “odd” or incongruous detail that triggers off or at least, accompanies, the awareness of lucidity. In an ordinary dream, I approach my waking life front door, holding a child by the hand. But my door has a carved surround which does not exist in waking life. I note the surround, say, “Oh this is lucid,” and taking the child’s hand, I say “Let’s try flying,” and we rise into the air. This ability to fly, is, of course, typical, but I’ve never achieved any very extensive soarings.

A paradoxical aspect of my dreams is the combination of solidity and flimsiness in the surroundings. That is, massive buildings of stone, or stony urban settings, are very typical.

They are, in a way, much more solid or impressive than the settings of ordinary dreams, and yet they have a kind of “stagy” unreal quality to them. It is as if the dream manufacturer were trying to convince me of the reality of what I see. And yet once viewing a row of very solid houses, built against each other, no spaces in between, I had some sense of “nothingness” behind them.

In a very curious dream I once registered at a hotel and went upstairs in an elevator that was missing one side. I entered a room which was crowded with partying people, though my “business” was with only a couple of those present. The other guests were more like a part of the setting, but what I noted as odd was that two or three of them in the background consisted of a greyish, almost misty stuff which formed the shapes of featureless heads, necks, shoulders, like a kind of ectoplasm. This, together with the missing elevator side, seems to suggest that the dream--creating power was in a hurry, and didn't get around to completing the elevator or the guests. But the bizarre implication seems to be that of a kind of neutral, basic dream “material” out of which the specific images are formed.

I had often recorded a doubling phenomenon, as for instance a dream in which I stand in a narrow passage and am aware of two identical library rooms, one on each side. I was there—fore much interested to read in Patricia Garfield's Pathway to Ecstasy that she often experiences a doubling not only of image but of process, a movie starts over, a story is repeated. In a short paper on this subject Dream Network Bulletin (DNB), I speculate to whether this might have something to do with the two halves of the brain, or with the sensation of being in both a physical and a dream body. However, if this were so, then might one not expect doubling to occur in non-lucid dreams also? If it does, I have not seen any account of it.

I also contributed an essay to the DNB called “Continuity in a Lucid Dream”. In this I describe four lucid dreams I had in one night. Between each was an interval of either ordinary dreaming or of wakefulness. What struck me was that the four lucid dreams were connected and that the “plot” had progressed during my absences. It was like waking in and out of a theater performance, except that I continued, in some sense, to be simultaneously an actor in the play. Each of the four lucid episodes was initiated by the tingling physical sensation which many lucid dreamers have noted.

I have not experimented very much with the various induction methods, but have found that almost any form of preoccupation with lucid dreaming tends to increase the number of such dreams. This was the case when I was translating some German material on the subject, and also dramatically the case when for some weeks I met regularly with a group of people interested in developing their capacity for lucid dreaming.

References

Garfield, P. (1979) Pathway to Ecstasy. N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

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