

Reflections on 20 Years of 'Conscious' Sleep Experiences

Father "X"

EDITORS NOTE: Over the past several years, Father "X" (who prefers to remain anonymous) has written a series of letters to Charles Tart (with copies to Lucidity Letter senior editor, Jayne Gackenbach) together with copies of dream diary entries in which he detailed his extensive experiences with lucid dreams and out-of-body experiences. Father "X" has kindly shared his correspondence and diaries with us, and in a previous issue of Lucidity Letter, we published excerpts. Recently, he sent us copies of his latest letter to Charles Tart and [the accompanying] diaries. What follows are two lightly edited representative diary entries describing his experiences, and an excerpt from his letter in which he summarizes his thoughts about these phenomena. Where our editing involves addition of or substitution of clarifying words, we have added brackets ([]).

October 16, 1989 Diary Entry

Another one of those instantaneous out-of-body experiences without the usual paralysis and vibrations. I was just resting on my bed after mass, fully clothed, with my eyes closed and mind not thinking about anything. Suddenly, presumably out of nowhere, that "television set" in my head clicked on.

A scene of an empty parking lot, maybe on a Sunday morning, came before my eyes. The sky was overcast and I wondered if I could create a sun in that dark sky. As I began concentrating my mind on that idea, sure enough a sun appeared in the sky and I was no longer in bed but wandering around in that empty parking lot. As usual (when I am not overcome by fear) I had a great sense of excitement and exhilaration at being able once again to leave my normal state of consciousness and to enter another state with my complete day-conscious mind about me. A big truck came rolling by with two men sitting in the cab. When I yelled and waved at them, they responded with yells and waved back; then they turned their truck around and headed back toward me. When they got about twenty yards from me they stopped and the sides of the truck started peeling away from the main body. The whole truck was transformed into a huge building with wide steps in front going up to the roof. I scrambled up the steps to the roof and [found myself] overlooking an enormous desert where hundreds of soldiers were manning tanks and other vehicles that were half buried in the sand. The whole scene had a dark, foreboding, terrifying look about it, like a World War I battlefield; before I could do anything else the experience ended.

March 5, 1990 Diary Entry

These early morning experiences after the office of Vigils were preceded by two vivid non-lucid dreams which I will briefly describe only to make the point that lucidity is not triggered by the bizarreness of the dream landscape. I had lain awake in my bed for over an hour when they began:

. . . one second I [felt myself to be lying] in my bed and the next second I was leaving an outdoor meeting [i.e., conference] together with a nun (although she wasn't completely dressed as a nun, she did have a veil and a dark dress). After crossing the street we stood in front of a small store and continued our conversation, until I noticed a dead pigeon lying on the ground in front of me. The nun knelt over the pigeon and tried to cover it with her body, which quickly became the body of a black cat resting on top of the pigeon.

Then it ended and I found myself back in my bed wondering why lucidity had not clicked on because of the bizarre nature of the experience. While I was still pondering this question I went right back to the same location:

. . . this time the nun and the pigeon were gone. Sitting on the steps of the store was someone who looked like one of our monks talking to a childhood acquaintance of mine who has appeared in several of my experiences. I don't know why he has because he was not a close friend but only a general acquaintance. Anyway, they were babbling away together and I jumped in and asked him if he ever finished college (In reality I don't know if he ever started).

Before he could answer, the experience ended and I was back in bed wondering why I still couldn't attain lucidity. But now something new was being added--I could feel tensions and chilly vibrations starting up in my body and I knew I would have lucidity in the next experience.

And sure enough, when I found myself standing on the steps of what might be a huge mall or a large office building with shops and stores on the ground floor, all I had to do was walk a few steps and I had total lucidity confirmed by the tensions I still felt throughout my dream body. Perhaps a better term would be "Energy Body," because it really feels like your whole body is percolating with energy. I immediately walked down the steps and out the door which opened out onto this huge piazza filled with people. I fought the temptation to go up to the first person I saw and start interrogating him; instead I tried to take everything into my memory but I knew I would only remember a fraction of what I was looking at. (That is what is so damn frustrating about these experiences, along with their ending so quickly, usually at a crucial moment.)

Well, anyway, as I was trying to take everything in, a man came up and started talking to me; the best I could make of his conversation was that he was trying to sell me an air pump. When I told him that I wasn't interested, a sinister-looking crowd started gathering around us. As I said on a number of occasions, there is nothing that scares me more than

being surrounded by these creatures with no place to run, and I could see that I was indeed surrounded. From the look of them I know that they weren't going to sing "Oh for he's a jolly good fellow" to me; they had something else on their mind and I could feel the panic starting to take hold of me. So I closed my eyes and started shaking my head as vigorously as I could and concentrating on my body back in my monastery bed; after a few moments of struggle I was back in my bed.

September 8, 1990 Letter

Dear Dr. Tart:

I hope you have been keeping well as it has been a little over two years since my last letter. Here I am again with what should be the last installment of my experiences, which gives me a sense of relief at having this burden taken off my shoulders. My experiences are now "out there" for researchers to comment on as they see fit, and what I perceived to be a moral obligation to scientific research has been fulfilled.

However, I am also aware that I may be overestimating the importance of my experiences, and some may see them as nothing more than the "hallucinations" of a "mad monk." That doesn't concern me, as my only purpose was to contribute, along with others, to the slowly accumulating data of this most strange phenomenon.

It is still a great mystery to me why some dreams become lucid and others remain non-lucid. I don't think it is just a matter of finding the right technique; I'm sure it goes a lot deeper than that. It certainly isn't the often-times incongruous dream environment. I have had many dreams with the most outlandish situations in which lucidity never clicked on, and when I awoke and reflected upon them, it just amazed me that they didn't become lucid. On the other hand, there were many dreams that became lucid when I was involved in the most ordinary things. And, as far as my out-of-body experiences are concerned, I wouldn't even begin to try to explain them.

So I guess what I am saying is that I am as perplexed about these experiences today as I was almost 20 years when they first began, and the wonder of them still amazes me. Every time I enter an experience I feel like an astronaut landing on Mars for the first time and finding a thriving civilization. When I read reports of other peoples' experiences, and the almost blase and casual attitude they have toward them, I sometimes wonder if we are talking about the same thing. The bottom line on my experiences is that I have entered a world inhabited by people who look and dress a lot like us, and do a lot of things that we do; they live in apartments and houses; they eat in restaurants and drink in bars; they drive cars and taxis; and ride in buses; they go to meetings in large halls and watch sporting events in huge stadiums; they attend colleges and universities; they work in offices and factories; they attend "religious" services in buildings that look like churches; they take their children for walks in the park, etc., etc. But they are not us! Then who or what are

they?

To simply label them as "dream characters" and let it go at that seems to me to be more than over-simple. There is a lot more going on here, as I am convinced that they have some kind of personal consciousness. At one time I thought (and maybe I still do) that they might be "spirits of the dead" who have somehow got trapped in some sort of transition world between here and the hereafter. Or maybe this is the hereafter -- then we're all in trouble. A few times when I asked them if they were dead, some replied in the affirmative, but most of the time they just look at me with a confused look on their faces and say nothing. But I still can't forget that woman checking out books in a library who replied to my questions by saying, "Yes, but I am the only one around here who remembers dying." I've always thought that was a most extraordinary thing to say, and although she spoke in English I thought I detected a Swedish accent.

In the Dec. '89 issue of *Lucidity Letter* (Pg. 15, bottom paragraph) Paul Tholey has something to say about communications with dream characters:

...Inexperienced lucid dreamers frequently have difficulty conducting a rational dialogue with other dream figures. This is because most of these figures play word games involving hidden or multiple meanings which the dream ego can not initially understand. Thus it is not surprising that the dream ego considers the dream figures' speech to be pure nonsense--although it can later often be shown to have logical meaning...

After almost twenty years of these experiences I have a hard time seeing myself as a "inexperienced" lucid dreamer, and I still have not been able to make sense out of many of the responses I have received from these "dream characters" or whatever they are. If Dr. Tholey has some sort of Rosetta Stone for distilling meaning from these mostly illogical [dream] statements I would hope that he would share it with us, because I would love to know what the relationship is between the Italian traveller Marco Polo and the Swedish botanist Linnaeus. It would also be fascinating to know what a character from a Henry James novel was doing in one of my experiences -- a novelist whom I have never read.

There are times when I think that it may take another Darwin to figure all this out, because I honestly believe deep in my gut that something very important for the study of human consciousness is going on here. However, I must admit that there are other times when I feel that these experiences have no meaning at all outside my own muddled-up subconscious, that they are just some erratic chemical/electrical connections firing off haphazardly in my brain. Well, I will let the professional researchers worry about it, as I try not to think about it any more.

Most of my experiences in the last couple of years have been what I refer to as the "instantaneous" kind; what I mean by that is that they are similar to my out-of-body

experiences, except that there is no paralysis or vibrations preceding them, nor do you have the feeling of leaving the body. One second I am lying on my bed wide awake and the next second I am walking around in this strange world; in some of these experiences I have complete lucidity right from the beginning, as in my out-of-body experiences, while other times lucidity comes over me slowly. What all this means is that I don't pass through any sleep cycle -- alpha, beta, delta, theta, REM, whatever -- but enter this other state of consciousness directly from the waking state, as in my out-of-body experiences. These are the kinds of experiences that I suspect LaBerge would describe as "WILD's" (Wake Initiated Lucid Dreams). Since I don't pass through any sleep cycle but enter this strange world spontaneously how could they be labelled as lucid dreams of any sort? It seems to me that a new category needs to be found.

Researchers keep talking about "higher" states of consciousness, but I am not sure that that is how I would describe the world I have been visiting these many years. It is more like a "lower" state of consciousness because rational discourse seems to be at a premium, and some of these "dream characters" behave in such a zombie-like way that I would certainly think twice before I invited them into my home.