

## Conscious Mental Stillness in Dreams: Two Different Effects

**Elinor Gebremedhin**  
*Berwyn, Pennsylvania*

One of the advantages of being an isolated spontaneous lucid dreamer without any other lucid dreamers around to compare notes with, is that you may weather some very weird experiences years before someone else tells you their traditional names (if there are any). While this may not feel like an advantage while you are trying to integrate what happened without much in the way of verbal tools, it does make the reality more authentic, because no one had ever suggested that such a thing could be.

There is more than one way to be conscious while we are asleep. In my first full-blown lucid dream, I said to myself, "I'm awake and aware in my dream!" But there have been a number of other experiences, in which I am sleeping, and I gain consciousness, and I find myself saying to myself, "I'm sleeping, and I'm conscious, but this does not seem to be a dream." They can be very powerful.

The world of consciousness can get very confusing ...sometimes new experiences occur in the middle of a dream. It might seem that the very fluidity of being in a state that is not so tied to sense experience and specific body-shapes would leave the door open for unlimited numbers of experiences, a hopeless mess to sort through, so there's no point in trying to sort out what might be "lucid substates." The dreams I want to discuss here suggest this is not the case.

Many people who work with dreams seem to have the attitude that nearly all dreams except nightmares have a lot to offer. By and large, the goal with nightmares is to make them go away; otherwise the job is to dig out the pot of gold in the other types of dreams by interpreting it and applying the interpretation in waking life.

It is my opinion that a number of other aspects of dream-life are ignored by these approaches, and that it would be worthwhile to explore a more middle-of-the-road pragmatic position, at least with regard to lucid dreams (since it's harder to do anything about the others). Some dreams have a lot to offer and others might end up robbing you of something quite important: energy. Many of my lucid dreams, especially when my "I" have gotten quite clear-minded, have "charged" me with energy that lasts for days, even when the plot seems to be full of "negative" events. Other less negative-seeming dreams have proved to be a drag after I woke. It seems to be more important to be clear-minded and clear-hearted about whatever goes on, than to have a good time.

On this theme, I'd like to present two dreams with very similar experiences in them, which had opposite effect. The similarity lies in what I called then an episode of "mind-stillness" where the thinking of thoughts stopped for awhile, although I remained fully

aware. This sounds very similar to the "pure" consciousness or "witnessing" described by TM meditators in Lucidity Association's panel discussion on higher states of consciousness at their 1990 meeting in Chicago. However, only one of my dream experiences resulted in the predicted enhanced levels of well-being and energy -- the other did just the opposite.

### **Witnessing**

The following was a clear example of a dream which served as a bridge into another state.

#### Lucid Dream Within A Dream (8/2/84-2)

Dreamed I was in Center City Philadelphia after midnight, on the northeast corner of 16th Street and the Vine Street Expressway, waiting to catch a bus to go home. I was very tired and struggling with myself to stay awake. I leaned against a telephone pole, drowsily trying to remain upright and conscious while my mind clouded and dipped. Every part of my body felt full of sandy fatigue. Finally I could remain conscious no longer. I sat down on the curb, leaned my head against the pole and went to sleep, hoping I would wake when the bus came.

I immediately started to dream a lucid dream. In this dream's dream, my consciousness cohered into a lucid clarity that was in marked contrast to my mental functioning in the first part of the dream. I looked around alertly, head high, without feeling any sense of tiredness. I was on a railroad station platform with a male companion to my right. We were waiting for a train. "Lucid," I said to myself under my breath. As I continued to look around and take in this dream environment, I saw that it was late at night, and the train was rolling up. The wind blew my hair against my cheek with a distinct physical sensation, and I felt how this dream-hair was black, not my usual light brown. I also felt taller, thinner, and healthier.

This sensing of my characteristics as "different" made me think of that self that was asleep, leaning against the telephone pole...and it was THAT sleeping self I mistakenly thought of as the self that was dreaming the dream, not the real physical self at home in my bed in Berwyn. In other words, even though I was completely aware that I was dreaming, and thought I was thinking clearly, I wrongly identified the situation of my physical me as being the one sleeping against the telephone pole.

My companion and my lucid dream-self climbed into the train as soon as it came to a halt. We found that it was separated into compartments, like some European trains are, so we went into one of them. My companion was a quiet, good-natured, moderately good-looking, scholarly fellow, who immediately settled down to read a book. I felt a need of sleep, but it was quite different than the desperate way the first "I" needed sleep. The

lucid I didn't exactly feel tired, but just felt the need of stopping the movement in my mind for a while. The need presented itself as a kind of knowledge rather than a physical sensation.

I lay down on the seat facing my companion, with a sense of nonworry, because I knew he would wake me when we arrived, or if anything untoward occurred. However, as soon as the train started up, I had difficulties because the rocking movement threatened to pitch me off on the floor. As I struggled to stay put, I dipped in and out of sleep. Finally I got up and lay down on the floor, twining my arms around one of my trusted companion's legs, and using his foot as a pillow. He raised his eyebrows in an expression of mild surprise, so I explained, "The ground is one place you can't fall down from." He sat very still, perfectly immobile so as not to disturb me, and returned to his reading. I felt secure in my sleeping place, and in the atmosphere of caring that he exuded.

Then I fell into a deep sleep, but it was an odd kind of sleep, because I did not black out into unconsciousness. I remained lucid, still aware I was asleep, but all mental movement stopped, all thinking of ideas halted. Maybe instead of having a lucid dream, with ideas, feelings and a plot going on, I was having a lucid sleep. My mind and all the rest of me was simply clear, like a deep transparent lake where all currents have been stilled. This mental immobility felt like it lasted for a relatively long duration...fifteen or twenty minutes, or maybe even an hour. I don't mean that during all this time there was an image of a lake in my mind, but that's the best likeness I can think of to point to the big transparent stillness that just sat there, with no thoughts going on.

Then I "awoke" from this deep lucid sleep, not into the lucid dream, but into the original nonlucid level of the dream. I felt tremendously refreshed, but alarmed, because I felt it was now 1:00 A.M., and I might have missed the bus. I thought about the "dream" I had just had, and suddenly realized what a dope I was to be standing here and waiting for the bus. I should be taking a train, just like in the dream, because all I had to do was walk a few blocks, six blocks or so, and I would be at the train station (the waking-life distance is about four blocks), and I could go directly home.

I thought, I must have been really tired to just stop here and start waiting for this bus, when I would have had to change busses, and besides, Philadelphia busses were less reliable anyway. I wondered if one of the busses had already passed me by. I decided to "take my dream's advice" (as I put it to myself), and go immediately to the train station. I woke just as I had started to walk down the street.

When I woke from this dream, which included an experience I had never had before, I did not feel so much ecstatic or bemused, or anything like that--I felt enormously NORMAL and very healthy (which was unusual, since I was leading a frantic life mothering five children and working in the computer industry). The picture of my exhaustion at the beginning of the dream was a good representation of the way I felt most

of the time when I went to bed (and sometimes when I got up, too). The distinct sense of deep refreshment from what I labelled motionless "lucid sleeping" or "mind-stillness" that was carried into the waking-life day was wonderful. My notes from that time show that I felt great for a number of days, not just one. I conjectured at the time that if I knew how to do this at will, I would need very little sleep to operate at optimum levels. I thought I might even live longer as well as feeling great.

This is just the opposite of conventional wisdom, which has it that you need to black out into a deep unconscious sleep to be really refreshed.

This is the only dream I have ever had that shifted into a state that so clearly resembled what the TM people are calling "witnessing," but I immediately recognized it when they spoke of it, and was able to distinguish it from a second dream, following, which has superficial resemblances.

### **Who's The Dreamer?**

My second example involves a dream with another motionless episode that has an entirely different effect. However, the basic situation won't make sense without a side-track into some background information.

At the time the dream occurred, I had been thinking about the difference between what seemed to be "my" dream-thoughts, and the events which seemed to happen TO me. Even though a dream was "my" dream, my control over what happened was unpredictable and weak when I was lucid and almost nonexistent when I was not lucid.

"Wait a minute," I thought. Is this idea that "I" made up the dream-environment and the dream-plot just another one of those fictions my scientific civilization is fond of? There is something quite different about dreams, which I can "experience" quite fully, and scenes and plots which I consciously "imagine." My conscious imaginings involve a watered-down, "unreal" element to them. I visualize, but I don't actually see. Even if I go to the movies, where I really hear and see, and get so involved that I cry when the hero dies in the end, I still don't feel the cold of the blizzard that did him in, or smell the coffee he drank at his last breakfast. When I dream, I can even feel cold and smell coffee (although it's more common to just know somehow that the cold and the coffee are there and operative elements of the plot).

Perhaps there is something "out there" making all this happen to me, and my "I" is just an honored guest who is occasionally able to experience everything to the full.

In support of this idea, it occurred to me how often in my dreams, things happen "suddenly" and I am "surprised." If I make up the ideas and events myself, even on the fly, why should I be so surprised at what happens? In fact, now that I think of it, one of

the reasons dreams are great fun is that things happen which I can't see myself beginning to think up in waking reality. Whatever "the unconscious" is, it is certainly a necessary item, if we are going to maintain that all of our dream is ours. If "I" made up the whole dream, the reason I am surprised must be because my "unconscious" made up the plot, and my "I" is in my conscious mind, not my unconscious mind.

At this point, I was relieved to remember how much of the dream-environment seems to be made up of the nuts and bolts of my daily life. I found it very uncomfortable to try and seriously entertain the idea that somebody or something else might be wandering through, producing "my" dreams. At least "my" unconscious was "mine" (whatever that meant, it felt like a good idea). Another argument in favor of the all-mine theory was how often a dream that fascinated me was completely boring to someone else.

However, the exercise of deliberately trying to undermine my felt-sense of the dream being all mine, and especially the thought about the element of surprise, had added an element of uncertainty as to where the boundary ended between "my" dream "in here" and something or someone "out there." This also left me thinking about who dreamed the dream. The one who made up the parts of the dream that surprised me (ignoring whether this was myself, other, or both of us) might or might not be able to control what my "I" experienced in the dream. In that case my unconscious was also having a dream with the unpredictable element being how my "I" responded. In that case, who was having the WHOLE dream? (This may seem like a ridiculous thought-snarl to someone who is always pondering cognition as part of his or her life's work, but I'm trying to explain what I had gotten myself tangled up in just before I had the following dream).

My tentative answer was that the one who is having the whole dream is the one asleep on the bed, not the dream-I (dream ego) in the plot, the one that we usually call "the dreamer."

When my dream-body walks up to a visible dream-door, feeling the walking was "my" activity, and the door was "out there", the "real" physical me remained unmoving in a bed in a dark room where the door was not visible. I envisioned the whole dream as an entity that had some kind of boundary (my dream-mind had come up with this years earlier) and the whole thing sat inside my sleeping head, and inside the dream my "I" and the rest of my mind both experienced the dream.

Immediately, I wanted to see how my dreaming mind would react to this conception. I decided that I would try to remember, while I was asleep, that the one I felt myself to be was not the one having the whole dream. Knowing that usually I can remember only short "slogans" from the daytime, I decided I would say to myself, "I am not the dreamer," and remember the real dreamer, sleeping "out there." in order to evoke the whole line of thought. Since I had occasionally remembered the one sleeping "out

there," this seemed workable.

That brings us up to date with the background thinking behind the following dream.

#### I Am Not The Dreamer (1/19/87)

Sometime in the middle of the night, abruptly I began dreaming, knowing I was dreaming from the start. I felt myself to be in the familiar formless dream-space with nothing going on yet but my own thoughts. I thought very hard...there was something important I was going to try out next time I had this lucid kind of "dream." Then I remembered, and I said very cautiously (because of feeling I didn't want to destroy "the fabric of the dream"), "I am not the dreamer." I felt my mind sucked being "backwards" out of the dream (I wasn't aware of any body), and tried to concentrate "forwards," into the dream, which seemed to be more towards the front of my head.

I found myself in a body-image lying on a bed-image in the middle of a light-colored room, and distinctly felt the sensation of my back pressing on the mattress. However, I managed to keep my mind carefully focused on the dream state without being too forcible about it; this felt a little tricky, but after a brief uncertainty, everything seemed to stabilize into a stable lucid dream. I felt myself float upwards out of the body on the bed, and said to myself, momentarily puzzled, "Well, this may look like an out-of-the-body state, but it certainly doesn't feel like it."

Then very cautiously, but firmly, I tried my affirmation again, "I am not the dreamer." This time I managed to stay floating in the room without being sucked backwards, so I hazarded picturing in my mind (fuzzily) where the real dreamer was--somewhere "outside" of the dream environment, in a physical body sleeping on a bed someplace. It felt dangerous to do this; it felt like I didn't have a strong enough grip on my mind to stretch it that far away and still stay here, so if I were not careful, I would lose my precious lucidity. I quickly pulled my mind back together again, without attempting to go any further than that, and focused "forward" again, in the lucid direction.

There was a door in front of me. Very cautiously, remembering the lucid dream where the tree had slapped me in the face when I tried to walk through it, I reached my hand forward, and pushed it through the door. There seemed to be no difficulty now. After deliberating on the closed door and my arm imbedded in it for a bit, it abruptly came to me that I couldn't see what might happen to the part of my arm on the other side of the door. Galvanized, I withdrew the arm, scurried back to the the security of the dream-body on the dream-bed, and jumped into it, forgetting completely that this wasn't the "real" dreamer's body. I stayed with this body-image for a while, just feeling safe, not thinking or experiencing anything, a kind of mental immobility without any content. The plot, my thoughts, everything stopped. Then I felt myself being lifted up again. I labored

mentally to get going, to verbalize a direction, still lucid, but now feeling very muddle-headed and spent. Laboriously, I thought, "Highest," and, "God."

Suddenly I was surrounded with something like a clear current, or a wind, which was lifting me up and pouring into all parts of my drifting body from all directions--head, ears, mouth, chest, abdomen and so on. Without any thought or intention on my part, or any other type of other preliminary imagery, I felt a distinct sexual sensation, climaxed, and abruptly woke up.

I was very surprised when I woke up, because nothing in what went on prepared me for the outcome. I had occasionally had problems with this "wind" having a sexual side effect (usually it didn't), but previously there had always been some preparatory sexual feeling, even if the partner was indistinct. However, that is beside the point here.

What lingered after this dream was exhaustion. It was the very opposite of the first dream. Why?

I have several observations on this point. First of all, this dream did not shift completely into another state like the first one did. I jumped into the body on the bed and lay there--but this was not "going to sleep" (changing state). Secondly, it is quite clear in the dream that I moved from a state of pretty clear lucid functioning to a state that was less clear, requiring more effort to say even a few words. The movement into the body involved confusion. Whatever might or might not be symbolized by the manifest content, the direction of the mental clarity was opposite to that of the first dream.

It appears that these mental

So much for the results of these dreams. What about cause?

I have no idea where they came from, what they are related to, or why I have never had a witnessing dream. I am not a steady meditator. Although I have dabbled in it a visualizing form of meditation, I have never practiced TM. Therefore it was very interesting to hear them try to describe my "lucid-sleeping" experience in their terms.

The effects of the dream on the steadiness of my energy level, and overall sense of well-being and health were so striking that going to the conference has made me consider trying out TM! (Other types of meditation have always attracted me more.)

But the bottom line is that still feel that if I could find out how to open this particular door more often in my lucid dreams, my health and energy would be top notch. The most odd thing about this "altered state" was that it felt so NONweird, so UNunusual, so totally ordinary that it wasn't ordinary. In this day and age our minds need deep rest.

