

“Dream Lucidity and Near-Death Experiences”- A Lucidity-Meditation Analysis

Harry Hunt
Brock University

Wren-Lewis' fascinating account shows an apparently very rare approximation of near-death experience to a felt dissolution into voidness and mystical enlightenment. If such full experiences do occur in the actually dying then one could infer that most resuscitated patients are pulled back earlier from its access stages. Consistent with other accounts of mystical realization, previous daily life is now seen as a clouded forgetfulness closely akin to ordinary dreaming, both being characterized by a narrowed pragmatic involvement that is “forgetful” of just that overall context or perspective that comes with enlightenment (temporary or long term) and is made more likely with meditative practice (the major historical self-awareness technique). Similarly, deep dreamless sleep now occurs with ongoing awareness as the direct experience of voidness and there is an at least initial paucity of dreams--possibly because background phasic physiological discharges are no longer clustered within the REM state or are more generally reduced and equilibrated. The dreams that do occur are correspondingly ordinary-based on “day residue” in-completion. He plausibly suggests that any association between NDE and lucid dreams would depend on the enhancement of reflective self-awareness resulting from intermediate level NDE carrying over into dreams, which is also consistent with several suggestions that dream lucidity is itself a spontaneous meditative state. Indeed both developed meditation and lucid dreaming share a receptivity to a broader sense of context that balances off the narrowing involvements of the everyday world with all its “projects” (necessarily uncompleted because endlessly renewed and redefined). I have recently reported two studies in which we found a correlation between meditative practice and tendency to lucid-control dreams.

Where I am less certain is with his relation of lucid dreams to Faraday's “day residue” incompleteness model for all dreaming-with lucid dreams the carrying forward of uncompleted tendencies toward self awareness during the day. First, this tendency of the dream to complete previous waking experience may be part of a more general Zeigarnik effect--operating within wakefulness as well. There may also be a question of different types of dreaming: while all dreams (as a subspecies of all discernible experiences) may have some such completion aspect, it seems to be central only for certain forms of dreaming (such as Freud's dreams which are day residue centered and require some sort of memory model for their understanding). In Jung's archetypal dreams, however, day residue seems less determinative and we require cognitive concepts of creative imagination to make sense of the total dream. Second, and along these lines, it may be a mistake to treat lucidity as just another type of dream content-to be assimilated to a principle that is more general than dreaming anyway. Rather, with lucidity and developed meditation, a reflective and detached self awareness transforms consciousness--dreaming

and waking consciousness equally. It begins a release from pressures of discharge and specified completion which culminates in the enlightenment state that Wren-Lewis describes. What would Faraday-Lewis make of occasional shamanistic and meditative accounts where the transformation of consciousness seems to begin and develop entirely within dreams--only gradually carrying forward into daily life in the way that, more commonly, meditative practice carries forward into lucid dreaming? Again, what strikes me is the way that lucidity-meditation transforms ordinary "completion" consciousness in waking and dreaming about equally and beginning from either direction.

That said, Wren-Lewis' account is apparently consistent with my suggestion of a curvilinear relation between degrees of lucidity and corresponding transformations of dream consciousness. We found high levels of ordinary dream bizarreness associated with prelucid dreams, most lucid dreams being relatively true-to-daily-life, while highly developed lucidity moved towards the mandala and white light patterns of access mysticism. Wren-Lewis seems to start at the other end, however, where enlightenment leaves one "back" in the everyday world as now perfect (either with no dreams or "ordinary" ones) and/or with no difference between enlightenment realizations awake or dreaming. However, with a relative diminution of his enlightenment "plateau", we see, instead of the more expectable clouding of dream consciousness associated with anxiety and wine, a stimulation of full lucidity--as a sort of "peak experience" to balance the temporary loss of voidness by something more sharply ecstatic. It is reminiscent of mid to high level lucidity. I would anticipate that should he suffer more periods of diminution of mystical consciousness that these would be associated with very vivid and fully lucid dreams as well as more Maslow type "peak experiences" in waking life, precisely because lucidity is not simply derivative from waking consciousness but is mid level stage of meditative self reflectiveness which cuts across dreaming and waking. All this is not to deny the reality of Wren-Lewis' observations but to put them in a slightly different context. With full enlightenment, factors which are normally attenuating would paradoxically release more episodic peak-like returns. Going the other way, we would have a gradual development from bizarre-archetypal non-or-prelucid dreams, to lucid dreams with mundane content, to lucidity with psychedelic transformations of flying, mandala patterns, light, and ecstasy, to a cessation and/or mundanization of dreaming again as the episodic and narrowed structure of experience "as this or that" drops away altogether. All this would work on the model of a dialogue between an ever deepening attitude of detached receptivity (hard to develop, so requiring less intensity of active content in its early stages) and "content" that comes increasingly to "mirror" the open emptiness of the meditative attitude itself.

Finally, I would be inclined to see the Tart-type lucid dream-described early on by van Eeden-- not so much as a sign of degree of lucidity development per se but rather as a transition to the closely related out-of-body structure (also seen in different ways in flying dreams and Green's metaphoric hallucinations of one's actual surroundings). It may also be a by-product of closeness to awakening.

Lucidity, false awakening, out-of-body experience, and autoscopic hallucinations form a series of multipletransitions and subtypes. I am not sure that as yet we have any convincing or cognitively sensible way to arrange these linearly. However, further observations by gifted individuals like Wren-Lewis may begin to order what is present a multiform transitional series.

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