



Awake in the Dark: Imageless Lucid Dreaming

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Most dream research, interpretation methodology and reports of dreaming phenomena presuppose that a dream consists of visual impressions. Even the term LUCIDITY evokes the vividness and clarity of dream imagery. Yet, there is ample experiential evidence to warrant a rethinking of this assumption. Imageless lucidity can and does occur at all levels of dreaming.

Entry via Hypnagogia

As the dreamer drifts into dreaming through lucid hypnagogia, watching the imagery flicker and metamorphose, she or he may encounter a "blank" period just before the dream scene appears. In this state, there is no sensation but rather the general impression that the dream is "taking a breath" before forming a landscape in the dreamer's mind.

The Initial Awakening State

This is the lucid equivalent of the false awakening state, reported by such notables as Dr. van Eeden and Oliver Fox. The dreamer may become aware of auditory stimuli unrelated to waking sounds. If tactile sensation is retained, the dreamer can

eventually experience a sense of duality or bilocation as he or she moves into deeper dreaming. None of this need be accompanied by images.

An excerpt from my own dream journal provides an example of this state, experienced as an imageless dream:

(When the hypnagogic images fade,) I become aware of a continuous conversation, which I assume means I have reached a telepathic level. I concentrate to determine the quality of this level in order to conjure it up in the waking state. It seems quite removed from full waking sensations, and is characterized by a low buzzing. The conversation sounds like a male news reporter announcing for a radio station, so I listen carefully for the call letters, expecting they'll start with a "K". Instead, I hear 'HBO'.

I now become aware of a conversation of my two children, who seem to be lying next to me. I can even feel my arms around one of them. Vic is talking about my feet. I sense that both are younger than they are in waking life, about toddler and elementary age. I am concurrently aware that in fact they are much older and the only person in bed with me is my husband, Manny. However, I keep my emotions neutral in order to experience the simultaneous awareness.

Then my lucidity leaves as I begin to hear people talking down the hall: I presume they are Victor and my mother. It seems my mother comes into the room and starts to tell Manny about a girlfriend who is returning to school. 'She's going back to take American History,' she says. My response is to wish that she would shut up. I groggily think how rude it is to talk so loud when someone is trying to sleep, but I don't want to rouse myself completely out of the dream state in order to tell her so. I finally become lucid once again, realizing the illogic of my mother's presence in the house.

After a pause, a bright scene springs up...

The initial awakening state can be a launching platform for either lucid dreams or out-of-body experiences. Steve M. reported a series of dreams in which he felt himself to be rising in the air above his bed. He experienced no images because he kept his dream eyes closed. It took several such experiences before he gathered the courage to "open his eyes" and look down at the bed beneath him. Unfortunately, the first attempt resulted in

the opening of his physical eyes, too! Subsequent experiences have remedied the situation.

Monroe (1977) and others have reported encountering entities, being touched or having a feeling of suspense or pressure while in darkness. One of Celia Green's (1968) OBE subjects described "walking around the bedroom" without seeing anything.

Conversing in the dark

This dream is all audio and contains no visual images. The dreamer dialogues with persons whom are recognized but unseen throughout the course of the dream. Rina D.'s dream is an example:

I'm talking to JG, as if on a phone, and at first he seems not to know who I am, speaking of some upsetting things that have been going on in his life. When I thank him for the First Day Covers he has arranged to have sent to my stamp-collecting husband in the days of important (Space Shuttle) launches, he realizes who's talking to him. We discuss Challenger and its destruction...

She reported another audio dream the same night:

...(It) was simply a voice saying, "Hello". I recognized it immediately (as) that of a close friend with whom I had been speaking the day before but had had to cut short his long distance call because of an interruption. When I heard the voice I was quite excited, hoping to lucidly continue the conversation, but I apparently broke the connection and woke up...

Exploring the Imageless Dream

Some lucid dark periods are involuntary. Night falls, the dreamer loses his or her focus or is spontaneously projected backwards or forwards into dark spaces.

But dream lucidity enables willful entry into darkness. De Saint-Denys (1982) reported multiple occasions in which he closed his eyes in order to change the course of a lucid dream. Quick movement such as flying or utilizing Stephen LaBerge's spinning technique can cause temporary loss of scenery. I've walked through walls and passed through holes in walls in order to get "outside" of my dreamscape. By far the easiest method for me is one I told to Robert W.:

Paul H. and I are in a fairly murky room. I realize that I am dreaming and decide to pick up a glass bottle or vase to smash against the room's fireplace mantle in order to see how it will break in the dream state. Then I decide "why make a mess", so I put it aside. I

remember Linda Magallon's wave technique in which she waves away a dream scene, and I decide to try it. I wave my hand and everything vanished. Complete, total fog - except for my friend's voice. This amazed me. I looked into the nothingness and decided to wake up.

It is possible to retain the dream even when the images fade, however, by concentrating on alternate senses. These options have all proved successful for me:

Auditory Stimuli - Listening to voices or music Concentrating on my breathing
Beginning or continuing a conversation

Tactile Stimuli - Rubbing or opening my eyes Touching my body: hands and face
Touching objects: glasses, hair brush, edge of mirror Being touched; hugging Flying;
feeling stretched out in the air

I also take advantage of the darkness to change location: moving forward or back; calling out a destination or person's name. I might try to encourage the reemergence of the scenery by projecting an "imaginary" image and see if it takes or by ordering "please increase the light".

But one of the most satisfying solutions is to simply relax and wait for another scene to spring up. The dark can be quite warm and friendly.



To the Outer Limits

Beyond the imagery and sensations related to and dependent upon physical orientation is an arena in which no symbols are encountered, visual or otherwise. Called the "predream state" or the "undifferentiated area", it is that part of the dream universe in which all awareness of the self as body or special entity leaves. It is also characterized by peace, silence, and absence of visual stimuli.

Returning Through Hypnapompia

At times a dreamer will be in contact with his own mental processes, in which ideas stream together or concepts are moved around like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle or experienced in total. Images, if they do form, take on the appearance of sentences or geometric forms. A nondreaming sleeper might awaken from this state with a phrase or sentence or answer to a problem fresh in his mind.

To become aware of such processes can involve a shift toward the waking state. "Clicking" into the hypnapompic allows the opportunity to consciously translate some of the nonvisual impressions into images or verbal thought.

The hypnapompic, like the hypnagogic state, is also an excellent receptor of vocal conversations, music and other aural stimuli and does not require visual imagery.

Imageless dreams seem to be related to the characteristics inherent in the particular dream state of the volition and expectations of the dreamer. Further exploration will help determine the differences.

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