

Book Reviews**Charles Tart's Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential****Reviewed by John Wren-Lewis***Department of Religious Studies, University of Sydney, Australia*

Perhaps the most interesting thing about lucid dreaming is its Janus-character, allowing us to experience simultaneously both the fascination of the mind's inner dramaturgy and our capacity to witness it from outside. The social cultures of waking life almost always emphasize one aspect of this duality at the expense of the other, and Charles Tart's new book reflects a major pendulum-swing in this respect on the part of psychologically-oriented Westerners. Nearly two decades ago, his *Altered States of Consciousness* played a pioneering role in persuading Western public opinion to take dreaming seriously as a creative human potential instead of dismissing it as nonsense. Now in *Waking Up*, he describes his experience in using the techniques of that eccentric turn-of-the-century genius G. I. Gurdjieff, for whom (as for traditional Eastern thought) dreaming served only as an analogy for the human mind's proneness to live in a world of fantasy, from which we must somehow "wake up" to be really sane. Not that Tart himself has had any change of heart about the positive value of paying attention to dreams, but in his book he chooses to say almost nothing on the subject, sensing that for a substantial public in the 1980s the priority is "enlightenment" in the sense of *transcending* mind, even mind at its most creative. He carries this self-denying ordinance to the point of omitting all mention of his own considerable work on "waking up" to lucidity in the literal dream-state, simply referring readers to Stephen LaBerge's *Lucid Dreaming* if they wish to pursue this question for themselves.

Yet I would urge that this book be required reading for all serious students of dream lucidity, as a very practical program for gaining more experience of what "waking up" actually involves, in any state of consciousness. On the same ground I would commend it to anyone with a really serious concern for spiritual "awakening," even though Tart has chosen to present Gurdjieff's ideas almost wholly in terms of gaining greater clarity in the mundane affairs of everyday life and relationships, with minimal reference to religious concepts. Here again, he makes only very brief reference to topics on which he is well known as a pioneer, such as parapsychology and transpersonal psychology, preferring to get readers actually working on "waking up" in day-to-day living, without risking distraction into controversial speculation. (Buddha, I seem to recall, took the same line.)

This essentially practical concern explains, I believe, a feature of the book which might put off *Lucidity Letter* readers at first sight. Throughout the early sections Tart adopts a very basic, almost pedestrian approach suggestive of an elementary psychology text, with detailed nuts-and-bolts explanations of concepts like repression, projection, identification etc. which any psychologically sophisticated reader might be forgiven for thinking were common knowledge. But "I already know all this" is a trick the mind often uses to evade taking ideas really seriously in one's own life. It is even

possible to get very turned on by a life-changing concept and remain quite oblivious to the fact that one isn't applying it personally. Tart relates, with a disarming frankness which is one of this book's main virtues, how he caught himself out doing this when his interest in Gurdjieff was first aroused by reading P. D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* in 1965.

He tried the exercise which Gurdjieff called "self-remembering", a continuous effort to widen consciousness beyond whatever concern one happens to be pursuing at any moment, by stopping and taking note of the whole penumbra of surrounding thoughts and feelings, of the sights and sounds and smells from the environment, and, most important, of the sensations in one's body. (It is, as Tart remarks, a case of literally "re-membering" oneself, in the sense of consciously reclaiming all one's members instead of allowing awareness to remain sunk in the mind's current preoccupations.) The result was a new sense of aliveness and clarity which he found such a turn-on that he plunged eagerly into further study of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Three months later he "woke up" to the fact that he'd never actually done the self-remembering exercise again after the first day, although he'd been reading and talking about it with great enthusiasm!

My hunch is that he has deliberately adopted something of a kindergarten style to try to outwit such mental slipperiness. He is prepared to risk being found boring because he wants to "bore in" Gurdjieff's basic principles with minutely detailed step-by-step exposition and down-home illustrations, showing at each stage how later psychological research has confirmed what for Gurdjieff were only brilliant intuitions. I certainly found that all kinds of psychological ideas I thought I knew already were getting properly through to me for the first time, at the kind of practical level which made all the difference when I came to try out the self-remembering and self-observation exercises described (with equally necessary pedestrian detail, and equally telling illustrations from the author's personal experience) in the later parts of the book.

In fact this is not a book to be judged by ordinary reviewing standards. Its real value will become apparent only when readers who have the humility to take it seriously begin to feed back, with honesty and frankness equal to Tart's own, the results of following out its practices. For those who feel they need group support in such efforts, Tart has some very sensible advice to give about how to find it, emphasizing that group membership also brings pitfalls of its own, especially the temptation of exchanging our ordinary social conditioning for conformity to Gurdjieffism (or whatever system the group is following). In this connection, Tart tells how he himself has found some of Gurdjieff's cosmological speculations more of a hindrance than a help, and also how the long-term practice of Gurdjieffian disciplines have led him to seek beyond them, firstly in Tibetan Lama Sogyal Rinpoche's exercises for developing compassion, and most recently in *A Course in Miracles*.

If just a small percentage of Tart's likely readership are inspired to try out his exercises and give honest, factual reports on the results, he will once again have proved himself a pioneer - in this case, of a new era in which real evidence replaces confessions of faith in humanity's age-old quest for enlightenment. Meantime, I personally look forward to hearing further from Tart himself, particularly if he has anything to report about effects of

his exercises on his own or his students' dream life. If there is anything in the hypothesis that lucidity in waking life is a trigger for lucid dreaming, the results will be of direct interest to this journal!