

Proceedings from the Second Annual Lucid Dreaming Symposium Session 3: Transpersonal Implications of Lucid Dreaming

Lucidity as a Meditative State

Harry Hunt
Brock University

What I'd like to talk about this afternoon are some relations between lucid dreaming, meditation and what I'll be calling archetypical forms of dream experience. This is based on a study done with Barbara McLeod on lucid dreams in long term meditators, first published as an abstract in a *Lucidity Letter* in 1984.

First let's deal with the idea that lucid dreaming, or at least some lucid dreaming, could be considered as a spontaneous meditative state. Lucid dreaming should not be considered just as a mental waking up within the dream. I think one indication that this is only a very partial way of characterizing lucid dreaming is that many lucid dreamers, at least at the beginning of stabilizing their lucidity, report a lot more of the confusions of thinking and clouding of memory, that are typical in non-lucid dreams. What I'm suggesting is that lucid dreaming shows the same, or highly similar, patterning of consciousness that is sought in long term meditative practice. Both meditative states and stabilized lucidity show the same special development of a detached receptive attitude common to many alterations of consciousness. In meditation and lucid dreaming this attitude of receptivity is tenuously balanced with the more active controlling attitude of everydayness.

Secondly, both lucid dreams and meditative states have the same subjective sense of expansiveness, exhilaration and clarity, highly reminiscent of Maslow's descriptions of peak experience. There is some interesting converging physiological evidence along these lines from Gackenbach, Moorecroft, Alexander, and LaBerge (1987). Most powerfully and convincingly, something very much like lucid dreams is sought in meditative traditions, particularly in Tibetan Buddhism and Vedic practices, as the form of meditation that is naturally available during sleep and dreams.

In the Tibetan Buddhist context this form of lucidity leads to encounters with mythical and spiritual beings and ultimately is used as a platform to deepen ones meditation, to become aware of the so called white light of emptiness, waking meditation. This brings me to a first caveat. What I'm emphasizing here are formal parallels between the two states, particularly in terms of implications about underlying cognitive bases. I'm trying to avoid a valuative or ideological stance in presenting this data. This issue comes up particularly because of a letter from Ann Faraday last year in *Lucidity Letter*. What I'd like to stress about this parallel between meditation and lucidity is that we're not necessarily talking here about whether one should or should not meditate, or whether or not meditation is the only path to the deepening of lucidity. Obviously people who don't meditate and dislike it intensely can develop lucid dreams. Indeed, I would suggest that nothing happens in long term meditation that may not also happen spontaneously, albeit more fortuitously. The point here is twofold. First, there has been much more research on

meditation, on all levels of psychological and physiological analysis than there has been on lucid dreaming. So if there is a major parallel between the two then our theory and research on meditation are potentially transferable to lucid dreams. Second, there may be some indication that the development and particularly the long term stabilizing of lucid dreaming can develop towards the spiritual and transpersonal traditions of self awareness. The second introductory point that I need to make is with respect to the relationship between lucidity and what is usually in this research area called dream bizarreness. This brings me to a second caveat. "Dream bizarreness" is a horrible term that has lots of historical currency. In fact it's the only available term in the content of dream research for strikingly unusual transformations of consciousness in the dream. However, most people who use the term attach a value of mental disorganization, regression to primitivity, etc. What I'm trying to suggest is that while some forms of "bizarreness" are clearly negative, clouded and disorganized, other forms seem to show the activity of creative, insightful, metaphor. I'm more interested here in the latter.

The question of a potential relationship between lucid dreaming and dream bizarreness is important because the receptive attitude of meditation seems to operate on waking consciousness by releasing, what I would term the deep structures of imagistic intelligence: synaesthesias, out-of-body states, geometric mandala patterns, and white light experiences, with a corresponding felt significance. So we can ask whether lucid dreaming might operate on dream consciousness in the same way. I'm going to present some evidence that says maybe it does.

The first research on dream bizarreness in relation to lucidity by my colleagues and I at Brock seemed to show the following relationship. It was pre-lucid dreams, those dreams where you question whether or not you are dreaming or experience a false awakening that were the highly bizarre dreams. These were more bizarre than in our normative samples. Pre-lucid dreams had vivid visual intrusions into the dream narrative and considerable clouding and confusion of consciousness. Indeed if you're trying to find out whether or not you're dreaming you can get into some very interesting cognitive puzzles which are confusional from a waking point of view. Fully lucid dreams tended to be relatively mundane in form and content. Yet Gackenbach and Moorcroft (1987) have recently reported that certain lucid dreams can be highly bizarre, highly transformed from the normal everydayness. Certainly anecdotally this is what you'd expect from the Tibetan Buddhist literature, since their descriptions imply some rather unusual dreams.

This brings me to a final caveat or concern. Bizarreness is not a simple continuum. It's very important to distinguish different forms or types of dreaming. Particularly here, in addition to lucidity, I'm concerned with what we could call a Jungian-type archetypical dreaming. Now I mean archetypical, here, in a descriptive sense; I'm not making any assertion about the existence or non-existence of a biologically based collective unconscious. Rather what I'm trying to index is dreams which are characterized in the following way. First negatively: They don't seem to be reorganizations of personal memories. This was very much the style of Freud's own dreams. They reorganized, recombined, condensed, displaced and fragmented recent and distant memories. Instead, what we find in Jung's own dreams, as you can see in his

autobiography, are powerful cohesive experiences. They are not disorganized. There is little mental clouding. They are accompanied by powerful feelings that you could call numinous-uncanny emotion, such as feelings of awe, fascination, wonder. There are also parallels with various mythological tales. And most importantly, there is a vivid sense of felt meaning within the dream. It's as though the dream itself carries a kind of charge or impetus of inherent significance, even though the subject may not be able to verbalize that fully on awakening. Indeed, these dreams are very similar to the so called "big" dreams or "culture pattern" dreams of classical shamanism. Another feature of such dreams is that they tend to stay with the person over time, often over many years. I think all of us at times have dreams that we remember for ten, twenty years. And relatively speaking they resist free association. You can try to do what Freud does with such dreams, but it doesn't work very well. You keep circling back to the sensation, the impact, the sense of meaning or self.

There have been various attempts to measure archetypal dreaming. The Jungian psychologist Kluger in 1975 developed a scale of archetypalness in dreaming. This has also been used in a recent study by Cann and Donderi at McGill in 1986. They showed that people who score as highly intuitive on the Myers-Briggs Jungian type indicator tend to have archetypal dreams. Earlier another Jungian psychologist, Fabor (1978) showed that long term meditators tend to have archetypal dreams, as rated on Kluger's scale. That measure consists in multiple ratings on dimensions of irrationality, everydayness, affect, and mythological parallels.

The present data are based on my own considerably more specific system for categorizing dream bizarreness. What we went after were changes of consciousness in dreams based on the changes in thinking, perception, and feeling that occur in waking altered states (Hunt et al, 1982). In our system, the potentially archetypal or transpersonal categories were as follows, and by the way, these are almost never rated in normative dream samples. So when we found them in the sample of long term meditators, it was a striking and qualitative departure. First there is what I term transformations of visual form as opposed to visual content. These are the phenomena of geometric mandala patterns, experiences of white light or diffuse color in the dream, and changes in size and shape. Somatic form included flying, floating, and changes in the body image. Going further down the first column of the table we find feelings of uncanny, numinous emotion, including descriptions of weirdness, eeriness, fascination, awe, wonder, bliss. Then there is the occurrence within the dream of mythological or metaphysical preoccupations. And finally "bizarre personification" covers all encounters with unusual or mythological beings. It would include monsters, talking animals, as gods and demons. When we asked normative subjects to give us the most fantastic dream-like dream they could recall, interestingly enough, their dreams were more archetypal, transformed, and bizarre in general than even Jung's own dreams. In other words, even though there is a consistent style of dream bizarreness, and we've shown this in individuals, any given person will oscillate across the range of dream types and come up with some pretty

astonishing dreams. The more ordinary categories that we rate very commonly in normative home and laboratory samples, are intruding on the generally plausible dream setting, generally visual and ranging in degree of improbability from 1 to 3, and clouding of consciousness effects that include sudden changes in scene, confusions in thinking difficulties in remembering within the dream, and unclarity of recall after awakening (see table). In this study we looked at the home dreams of long term meditators. There were 307 dreams from eighteen subjects, fourteen females, four males, with an average continuous meditative practice of 5.1 years, ranging from seven months to about seventeen years. Ten of these subjects were from the Karma Kargyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhist practice. All subjects were Westerners and were not attempting nor had they been instructed in dream yoga. They kept a thirty day dream diary, rating each of their dreams with respect to whether it was in whole, part, or momentarily lucid, controlled and pre-lucid, or non-lucid. That allowed us to create a seven point scale for lucidity. We also included Gackenbach's measures of felt body movement in the dream and verbal and nonverbal sounds.

Table 1
Categories of Dream Bizarreness in Lucid and Nonlucid Dreams

Scoring Categories	Total Meditation Sample N, 307 18 subjects	Dreams			Normative Home Recall N, 479 47 subjects	Most Fantastic N, 35 35 subjects	Jung's N, 34
		Lucid N, 71	Prelucid and Control N, 79	Nonlucid N, 157			
	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	1 (2+)
Hallucinosis: Percept. Transformations							
Visual							
Form ^a	26 (9)	38 (17)	24 (8)	21 (6)	13 (2)	43 (14)	24 (9)
Content 1 ^b	28 (6)	25 (4)	35 (6)	25 (6)	26 (7)	43 (3)	15 (3)
Content 2	18 (3)	14 (3)	15 (1)	21 (3)	14 (1)	34 (11)	53 (12)
Content 3	48 (25)	38 (18)	42 (25)	56 (28)	27 (8)	54 (26)	32 (12)
1,2,3 combined	65 -	49 -	67 -	72 -	47 -	86 -	80 -
Somatic							
Form	10 (3)	20 (7)	10 (3)	4 (1)	4 (0)	9 (0)	0
Combined Content	23 -	17 -	17 -	30 -	10 -	43 -	9 -
Auditory							
Content and Form	30 -	35 -	23 -	32 -	14 -	26 -	32 -

Table 1 (continued)

Scoring Categories	Total Meditation Sample N, 307 18 subjects	Lucid N, 71	Prelucid and Control N, 79	Nonlucid N, 157	Dreams		
					Normative Home Recall N, 479 47 subjects	Most Fantastic N, 35 35 subjects	Jung's N, 34
	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	1 (2+)	
Clouding/Confusion							
Abrupt change in scene, gaps	33 (11)	28 (7)	23 (3)	43 (18)	20 (6)	51 (14)	18 (3)
Confusion in thought ^c	60 (24)	61 (28)	54 (20)	63 (25)	41 (17)	54 (31)	35 (9)
Memory within ^d	31 (5)	44 (6)	30 (5)	33 (11)	15 (1)	29 (9)	12 (3)
Memory about ^e	29 (3)	17 (1)	23 (5)	40 (5)	30 (4)	31 (14)	9 (0)
General:							
Uncanny emotion	5 (0)	9 (0)	3 (0)	4 (0)	4 (0)	17 (0)	38 (0)
Mythic/overinclusive thought	12 (4)	14 (6)	15 (6)	8 (1)	3 (0)	26 (6)	38 (6)
Bizarre personification ^f	10 (0)	18 (0)	8 (0)	8 (0)	4 (0)	34 (9)	53 (9)
Observational attitude	17 (0)	24 (0)	10 (0)	23 (0)	10 (0)	20 (3)	15 (0)

a. Psychedelic transformations of formal properties of vision (Kluver). b. Content 1, 2, and 3 represent degrees of unlikelihood in objects perceived, without formal distortion.; c. Disorganization and confusion in reasoning, irrational insights. d. Anomaly of memory within the dream.; e. Difficulties in detailed recall after awakening.; f. Uncannily fascinating or terrifying others, strange creatures, animism.

With respect to the findings, we first compared the meditators with a control group of people who had a similarly high dream recall. The meditators had significantly higher estimates of dream control than this comparison group, consistent with Gackenbach, Cranson, and Alexander's more recent finding of elevated lucidity in meditators. Second, with respect to the sample as a whole, forgetting lucidity for now, we start with the first column of numbers, showing the percentage of dreams with one or more bizarreness category (the parentheses show the percentage of dreams with two or more of these effects) meditators have very unusual dreams, something also found by Faber. They show archetypical transformations in their dreams, particularly visual and somatic form. They also show elevations in the more ordinary forms of dream bizarreness, to an unusual degree when compared to normative dream samples. Thus there are lots of content intrusions of varying degrees of likelihood and considerable mental confusion and clouding of consciousness during the dream.

However, when you separate lucid, and non-lucid dreams in this sample, you get a much more specific picture. The archetypical categories of dream transformation now gravitate to the lucid dreams. In other words, it's the lucid dreams of the meditators that are archetypical. And in all instances the archetypical categories are greater in the lucid than the non-lucid. Their non-lucid dreams, in the fourth column, are also highly bizarre compared to our normative home recall sample, but in a more traditional way: confusion, sudden changes of scene, content intrusions, etc.

The following sample dream shows how strikingly imaginative these lucid dreams could become:

I am in my bedroom, it is scary and dark (uncanny emotion). I am talking to a female acquaintance about prescription drugs (auditory 1). Between us is a dark scary hole (visual form, uncanny emotion) which I know (confusion in thought--i.e. intuitive knowing without basis in previous dream events) to be full of demons (archetypal personification). My husband, asleep behind me, starts babbling loudly in his sleep in a voice that sounds like a teenage school girl gossiping about school work (auditory 3). My fear of the demons starts to grow (uncanny emotion, personification) and I float over to my husband (somatic form) to wake him, but it doesn't work. I almost wake myself instead and the dream starts to repeat (memory within). However, approaching me from the side of the hole is a very beautiful young girl (visual 3) who looks like a more appropriate owner for the voice. I sense the demons (confusion in thought, personification) coming up through the hole but there is no escape and my fear is rising (uncanny emotion). Then I clasp the jewel at my heart (somatic form, visual form) within my other two hands (somatic form, visual form) and am repeating the mantra of Chenrezig (mythic thought) and rising up in the air as I do so (somatic form). I rise higher and my fear starts to subside as I lift my first two arms up towards the sky (somatic form, visual form).

In addition to those dream comparisons, a factor analysis of average dream ratings for each subject, including the other major variables, located two clusters. The first, accounting for 46% of the variance, was organized around the amount of time spent meditating each day and included nonbizarre sensory detail from the dreams and ratings of kinesthetic sensations and dream sounds. The second factor was defined by years of meditative practice, lucidity in the study, lucidity estimates over the past year, and somatic form. In general the lucidity measures and years of meditation were significantly positively correlated with the archetypal categories and negatively with content intrusions and confusions (Pearson r 's), especially striking since all bizarreness categories are positively correlated in normative samples.

Of course correlational findings cannot establish an identity between lucidity and meditation. Yet it is of interest that the degree of lucidity in this sample was statistically unrelated to subjects' estimates of prior attempts to change or control their dreams, implying at least that lucidity might follow as an automatic result of long term meditation. Also some subjects could not tell whether some of their dreams were "lucid" or whether they had actually awakened and were spontaneously meditating.

Given the significant relations between length of meditative practice and the occurrence of both lucidity and archetypal dreams, it seems reasonable to conclude that lucid dreaming is a close analogue to the waking state sought in meditation. Lucidity operates on dream consciousness in much the way that meditation can transform waking consciousness - images and enhancing an open receptive attitude. Lucid dreaming is a spontaneous meditative state.

References

- Cann, D.R., & Donderi, D.C. (1986). Jungian personality typology and the recall of everyday and archetypal dreams. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 1021-1030.
- Faber, P.A., Saayman, G.S., & Touyz, S.W. (1978). Meditation and archetypal content of nocturnal dreams. *Journal Analytical Psychology*, 23, 1-22.
- Gackenbach, J., & Moorecroft, W. (1987). Psychological content of "consciousness" during sleep in a TM subject. *Lucidity Letter*, 6 (1), 29-36.
- Gackenbach, J., Cranson, R., & Alexander, C. (1986). Lucid dreaming, witnessing dreaming, and the transcendental meditation technique. *Lucidity Letter*, 5 (2), 34-40.
- Gackenbach, J., Moorecroft, W., Alexander, C., & LaBerge, S. (1987). Physiological correlates of "consciousness" during sleep in a single TM practitioner. *Sleep Research*, 16, 230.
- Hunt, H.T. (1987). Toward a cognitive psychology of dreams. In J. Gackenbach (Ed.), *Sleep and dreams: A sourcebook* (pp. 251-281). New York: Garland Publishing.
- Hunt, H., Ogilvie, R., Belicki, K., Belicki, D., & Atalick, E. (1982). Forms of dreaming. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 54, 559-633.
- Kluger, H.Y. (1975). Archetypal dreams and "everyday" dreams. *Israel Annals of Psychiatry*, 13, 6-47.
- Ogilvie, R.D., Hunt, H.T., Tyson, P.D., Lucescu, M.L., & Jeakins, D.B. (1982). Lucid dreaming and alpha activity. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 55, 795-808.