

Concerns with the Field of Lucid Dreaming Essays/Letters Lucidity and Other Things That Might Go Bump in the Night

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The possible dangers of lucidity for the masses are just a small part of a larger, more general philosophical issue. Most of the Eastern and shamanistic traditions include warnings against misuse or premature use of certain abilities or techniques. Don Juan was continuously warning Carlos Castaneda of dangers. Fear and pain have proven to be excellent focusing agents for consciousness and have been used for millenia in initiations and rites of passage. But are fear, danger and pain necessary ingredients in consciousness expansion and spiritual evolution? Are they inherent in the process? I don't think so. I don't know if the masters in these ancient traditions were hyping their followers or were just ignorant.

The problem with such traditions is the same problem that science has, a belief in objective reality. Science believes in a simple cause-and-effect universe. Dangers are either objectively real or they are not. Interestingly enough the esoteric traditions, including Eastern and shamanistic traditions, also believe in objectivity even in the non-physical realms.

Both science and the esoteric traditions believe in external and internal dangers, believe in the possibility of being victimized by outside or inside forces or beings. Science believes in germs, genetics and guns. The esoteric traditions believe in demons, psychic attack and kundalini gone wild. But these interior dangers are objectified. A demon is as real as a germ or virus.

A current example which crosses the scientific and esoteric traditions is Robert Monroe's out-of-body experiences. As a scientist Monroe assumed that because he met some unsavory characters on some of his trips, such characters were actually floating around out there and others might run into them. Now others have indeed run into unsavory characters in their out-of-body trips, but they weren't Monroe's unsavory characters. They "belonged" to those who encountered them.

Edgar Cayce said that Jesus and John the disciple went through initiation in Egypt. Such initiations, depicted in the Tibetan and Egyptian books of the dead, consisted of isolation and sensory deprivation. In this state one would meet whatever monsters lurked within their unconscious, especially if that's what tradition led them to expect. If you were able to overcome these monsters you achieved enlightenment or at least spiritual growth. If you failed, you could go crazy.

One could say that such initiations were dangerous, but they were chosen by the participants and could be stopped at any time. Individuals, then as now, were responsible for their experiences. The fact that these experiences had common elements for the participants does not objectify the experiences. Tribes and communities that agreed upon the meaning of certain waking and dreaming symbols could depend on those symbols to come up appropriately. That didn't make the symbols objectively real. The psyche is

perfectly willing to cooperate with such symbolic traditions.

The question is whether the scientific and esoteric belief in cause and effect is correct. My belief is that it is not. To put it in terms of fear and danger, we are not afraid because there is danger. There is danger because we are afraid. Lucidity is a special state of consciousness, but only one among many. There is no inherent danger in lucidity, but if one is afraid of the potential of lucidity or afraid of consciously confronting one's own demons, then one shouldn't pursue lucidity.

If the fear is strong enough, then one shouldn't pursue life. Schizophrenia and suicide are decisions not to pursue life. Unfortunately, such escape isn't workable, at least for the schizophrenic. The demons don't go away - they simply move from the unconscious to the conscious.

If fear is the cause of danger, should those in positions of authority be pushing fear? Where does responsibility lie? Warnings about possible danger in the lucid state are actually powerful suggestions. The suggestion itself makes the state more dangerous to the extent that it arouses fear. Some unstable individuals might use lucidity to go crazy. That doesn't mean that lucidity is the cause of their psychosis. I know a lady who, at age 16, had a tonsilectomy. She came out of the operation psychotic. Did the tonsilectomy and/or anesthetic cause psychosis? Should people be warned about tonsilectomies?

To the extent that there are external causes for cancer (and I don't believe there really are any) what's the single most carcinogenic factor? I would say it would have to be the various cancer societies and associations, those organizations that continually warn us and actually tell us to *look* for cancer. If you look for something hard enough and with enough emotion, there's a good chance you'll find it. If we talk about the dangers of lucidity long enough and convincingly enough we can make it quite dangerous. Now, individual teachers or therapists have to make their own judgements about encouraging clients or students into lucidity. If they feel that screening is necessary, then they should do it. But to take responsibility for the subjective experiences of individuals cannot be done. You might not give an hallucinogenic substance to an individual you consider unstable, but if that individual chooses to take the drug on their own, they're completely responsible for that choice and the consequences.

It's fair to say that some people have had bad experiences in lucid dreams. Lots of people have bad experiences in normal dreams, but my assumption is that those "bad" dreams come with a healing intent. The same would be true of bad lucid dream experiences. It would be fair to tell individuals and the public about these bad experiences, but I think it is essential that it be made clear that the bad experiences are not inherent in the lucid state but are the result of the individual's own unconscious material.

I believe that psychosis itself is the result of the body/psyche attempting to heal itself. The frightening experiences in normal dreams, lucid dreams or initiations are all attempts of the Self to heal the self. To the extent that we back away from such experiences we also back away from an opportunity for healing. We may need therapeutic or spiritual assistance at that point, but the longer we hide from our monsters

the bigger they get; the psychosis or serious physical problems are the result of not dealing with monsters while they are still small.

Metaphysical sources such as Jane Roberts' Seth claim that we create our own reality with our thoughts and beliefs. Edgar Cayce made some powerful philosophical statements that are relevant here: "Thoughts are things, mind is the builder and we are always meeting self." Fear creates danger. The thoughts that we put out are going to be accepted by many people. What will these thoughts be building, monsters or mastery?

As therapists and teachers we have to be careful that we don't objectify our own fears and doubts and unconsciously try to get others to take them on for us. What kind of seeds are we going to sow into the mass consciousness about dreams and lucidity?

We also have to be aware of objectifying the purpose for lucidity. Each of us sees everything from the point of view of our own philosophical framework. We believe our framework to be objective. It may or may not be. Each of us has to work within our own framework and our own beliefs about the purpose of lucid dreams and of life. We will teach others the same. We may be right and we may not. The purpose of the lucid dream may be enlightenment or transformation, or the purpose of the lucid dream may be whatever we decide.

Because of our own beliefs and focus we assume that lucidity has a specific intention and that intention is in harmony with our underlying philosophy, which is to be expected. It's just possible, however, that lucidity doesn't have an inherent purpose or, if it does, that it's different from what we suppose; for example, the idea that the state should not be used to gratify frivolous desires such as flying, sex and the magic performances.

It's just possible that such light and joyful uses of lucidity might actually move one closer to enlightenment (lightness, levity) than more ponderously serious and "spiritual" disciplines. I think that God is far lighter than we give him/her/it credit for. Anyway, that's my bias. I'm actually open to a wide range of experiences in normal and lucid dreaming, and I try not to focus too narrowly because I may be interfering, by trying to be spiritual in such a limited way, with transformative experiences that do not fit such narrow definitions.

I'm concerned about all of the warnings I see being promulgated by some sectors of the dream/spiritual/new age community. I agree with Cayce that mind is the builder. Given that, we need to continually ask ourselves what we are building within ourselves and in the mass consciousness.

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(Editors Note: Bob Trowbridge, M.Div., is a co-editor of the Dream Network Bulletin)