

East Meets West, Buddhism Meets Christianity: The Lucid Dream as a Path for Union

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When I think about lucid dreaming I think about a vast universe, so vast that everything we say here today has to be qualified. In particular, I think about Christopher Columbus and regard his epic voyage as a perfect metaphor for what we are attempting to do in exploring the lucid dream state. When Columbus discovered a new world (new to Europeans) there were many ramifications of his discovery. I have always been intrigued by the maps that appear in our history books, maps of the new world that originated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, attempts on the part of those early cartographers to begin to describe and delineate what the explorers were discovering. Some of those early maps had some degree of accuracy and some of them were intriguingly misshapen. I think it is important for us to keep this metaphor in mind as we approach the vast spectrum of lucid dreaming which we are attempting to explore.

I would like to discuss one end of this vast spectrum today, the end that constitutes one of my primary areas of interest, namely the lucid dream as mystical experience. I have for some time been intrigued by a book written by Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*. Some of you may know about this book. It contains an interesting section, fifteen or twenty pages in length, on the Yoga of the Dream State, the oldest known treatise that we have from any culture on the subject of lucid dreaming. While we have numerous brief and scattered references to lucid dreaming from other sources, Evans-Wentz book is the first text from any culture that attempts to talk about dream lucidity in length and in depth. I began re-reading some of his treatise, written very succinctly, just this morning, and I found that I really felt that I understood many portions of the text, and that they made a lot of sense to me. I remembered that when I had read this same material ten years ago it felt very strange, dull and foreign. Something happens to a person in his or her capacity to understand esoteric ideas. After we've had certain types of experiences we are better able to understand esoteric writings that once seemed totally foreign.

I was once a student for the Roman Catholic priesthood, and I spent eleven years of my life in the seminary system, a very rational analytic educational system. I am still very interested in how personal experiences of the "Light" are mentioned in the Bible, though mentioned very sparingly. One of my favorite quotations is from Ephesians, Chapter 5:14. "Awake oh sleeper, and arise from the dead, and the Christ will give you light." "The Christ" was not Jesus' last name as we often interpret it today, but it was a Greek term meaning the anointed one, someone specially chosen by God to play a prophetic role in Hebrew culture. This biblical passage and a few others indicate that in the Western world we do have a veiled tradition, a hidden tradition of references to personal

light and personal encounter with the light. But now in the twentieth century many of us are trying to bring that tradition out into the open and make it more available. Let me illustrate by recounting a recent dream from a lady in one of my therapy groups.

Suzanne* is an experienced lucid dreamer. She had been working on the issue of adjusting herself to the fact that her husband was about to retire about which she had a lot of mixed feelings. She is in her late fifties. Her husband is just turning sixty, and works as a top level executive for a company that allows him and his family to travel around the world in the company jet and attend fabulous parties in exotic places several times a year. Suzanne was very attached to these parties. She really enjoyed them, and while she was looking forward to her husband's retirement she was also already feeling incipient sadness and anticipatory grief over her forthcoming loss. This was her dream.

Suzanne is floating down a river to the ocean. As she reaches the ocean she realizes she is dreaming, and becomes lucid. As she swims out into the ocean she sees gigantic male arm and hand reaching out to her, and someone calling and beckoning to her. It speaks to her silently and symbolically saying, "Come and help me." She feels the power of the gargantuan hand and is determined not to get caught in its grip, so she swims around it repeatedly sending it a vibration of love and peace until finally the hand and arm shrink down to a manageable size. Now she takes the hand in her hand and goes down with it into the ocean. They go down, down and she comes to the bottom of the sea and she sees a nude male body lying on the ocean floor and approaches it. The man looks similar to her husband, though also dissimilar in certain ways. She feels a great deal of compassion for him. She approaches him and tries to send him a message of consolation. She makes a sexual overture but the man does not respond. Now she approaches his body from different sides and continues to make sexual advances while receiving no response, until at the last she decides it is just time to move on. She peacefully floats up to the surface of the ocean and as the dream ends she feels very good.

We worked with this dream in the group using a Gestalt therapy process. Suzanne lay down on the floor of the room, acted out the role of the man, then acted her role, experiencing the dream symbols from all of their different aspects. She played with the fact that she was lucid in the dream while the man was not, and that she was calling him to awaken but he did not. That night when her husband came home from work Suzanne had a most unusual experience.

Suzanne's husband is a very rational, linear thinking type of man who generally thinks that dream work is a curiosity at best. As he entered the kitchen he said something to her that was very uncharacteristic: "Would you mind just hugging me?" She quickly complied. Then he suddenly lay down on the floor of the kitchen, and reaching up with one arm, said: "Would you just mind lying here on the floor with me and putting your arms around me?" Again she complied. But now her mind was racing with all of the power of

this event, which she recognized at once as both psychic and synchronistic. She comforted him physically for awhile, and when he said, "Thank you, that's fine," they both stood up. Then she said: "I have to tell you this dream I had three days ago." She told him her dream and her experience in the group and he was amazed.

I am not sure where all of these things, these "psychic events," are leading us, but as we become more lucid, they seem to be leading us into a new realm of living, similar to the "new world" that Columbus discovered. Our initial task perhaps, is to allow ourselves to become more comfortable with, more familiar with and more knowledgeable of psychic phenomena, and the transformative experiences that burst our old models of the universe. Secondly, we need to allow ourselves to become conscious of these types of experiences on a more frequent basis. Thirdly, after a sufficient number of recurrences these kinds of experiences don't seem to be so rare anymore, as we open and remain open to psychic possibilities.

Nightmare Therapy

As a psychotherapist I am particularly interested in the process of working with potential nightmares, dream situations in which the dreamer finds himself or herself being attacked. I am sure you are all familiar with various methods of fighting back in such dreams, and familiar with the potential for becoming lucid when one is under pressure both in the dream state and in the waking state.

Recently I had a client who presented an interesting lucid dream which introduced me to still another model for the transformation of nightmares. The first model that most of us are familiar with is to face the adversary in a dream and fight back, even to the point of killing the adversary if necessary. That method is commonly called the Senoi method. The second rather well known model is one of facing the adversary in a threatening situation and fighting back verbally and psychologically with a series of forceful and pointed questions such as "Who are you?" and "What do you want?" This demanding and aggressively engaging type of interaction is generally deemed to be less violent than the first model. The third model involves facing the adversary and becoming lucid in the dream, and then consciously creating strategic departures from or transcendings of the threatening dream image, such as flying away from the scene (which is not necessarily a form of escapism), flying over a barrier or flying through a wall, or perhaps levitating one's body in the dream,

A few days ago I heard a fourth model presented by one of my students. Facing the adversary and becoming lucid in a dream, this dreamer allowed the adversary to kill her with a sword, knowing all the while that absolutely no harm could come from this experience. Fully lucid and looking at her dream attacker she said: "You can plunge the sword through me if you wish," whereupon the adversary did just that. Then the dreamer drew the sword out of her own dream body and very lovingly and wisely gave it back to the adversary, and said: "Thank you." I don't know if that model is new to any of you, but

it was new to me. I am always impressed by these kinds of responses that are created by people who are using dream lucidity for personal transformation.

Ego Traps

I think the territory of dream lucidity is so vast that we will need frequent reminders of this fact in order not to fall into some of the more popular and readily available ego traps surrounding lucid dreaming. I would like to expand on this theme for a moment. You probably remember the story of the three blind pygmies who were each standing beside and each touching a portion of a large elephant. After a short time each pygmy began arguing vehemently that he knew what an elephant was and each began spending a lot of energy trying to convince the others to speak of the elephant exclusively in his terms. I believe we are beginning to see a re-enactment of the pygmy scenario in lucid dream dialogue and lucid dream debate. Perhaps many of these debates originate from our collective failure to realize that the territory of this altered state is so vast--it's much bigger than the elephant, and even much bigger than the new world that Columbus found--that many different explorers are bound to discover many different things. At this stage it is important to create an explorational attitude in our dialoguing with each other so that we can compare our differing reports with equanimity, and compare and contrast our differing experiences with mutual respect.

It is far too early yet to look for any kind of a consensus on the nature and scope of lucid dreaming. Simply because some people have mystical experiences in lucid dreams does not mean that everybody will, and it certainly does not mean that everybody should. Collectively, we need to continue letting go of our expectations about what ought to happen in lucid dreams. Obviously that is one of the first ego traps that we are likely to fall into: developing expectations and models about what we think ought to happen.

The second ego trap is what I would call the "merit badge trap". Now that some of us are becoming lucid dreamers, we may be tempted to act like Eagle Scouts, parading around in public with our merit badges and focusing excessively on our emotional investment instead of focusing primarily on communicating about our experiences. I think we need so communicate about what is happening in our inner realms, but we have to let go of the specialness of it, because we can fall into an endless kind of struggle if we turn psycho-spiritual development into some kind of an achievement. There is a challenging paradox here because if we look at such development from a certain model it does seem to be an authentic achievement. And yet if we look at it only from the achievement model we are going to fall, I think, into the "specialness of me" trap the merit badge trap.

Still another trap is the trap of the universal blueprint. This trap contains the assumption that some type of universal blueprint exists in which the developmental stages of personal growth in dreamwork can be discovered or deciphered. For example, I

originally assumed that lucid dreaming occurred in people who were somehow more advanced in their development. Also, I assumed that serious students of the dreamstate needed to develop their basic dreamwork skills before intentionally introducing lucidity. Now, I have come to realize that these assumptions are only assumptions, and while they may be accurate in certain cases, they do not necessarily hold true in all cases,

Mystical Experiences

But what about mystical experiences? Do they happen in lucid dreams, and if so what does that mean? In my own process of inducing lucid dreaming deliberately, which I began in 1980 after working with dreams as a teacher and therapist for over 15 years, I was surprised, and in some ways shocked, to encounter certain dreams that were so powerful that they transcended all of my former experiences and broke me out of those models of the universe, models of consciousness and models of feeling, thinking and reacting that had heretofore structured my reality. Some of this was quite alarming to me at the time. I would like to read one of those dreams to you, perhaps to give you a flavor of what some people do indeed encounter in the lucid state, and the need that I think we have to be aware of the potential of this powerful altered state. This morning Dr. Tart talked about the low lucid dream and the high lucid dream. I like that concept very much, but I would extend it even further. I think that we need a model similar to a giant graduated cylinder that goes all the way up to the sky and beyond. I remember taking chemistry in college and working with one of those tall, glass, graduated cylinders that went from 1 cc to 100 cc's. I think that an objective scale for the measuring of dream would have to be something like that tall, graduated cylinder except it would not stop at 100. It would go on up to 1000 or even 10,000 and the top of the scale would be beyond our vision at this point in time. I think now, that the range of such a scale would have to be infinite, implying that there are many, many degrees and gradations of lucid consciousness.

Let me read now an example of a dream that I have recounted in my book which I consider to have been a mystical experience. I call this dream "The Arrival of the Serpent Power."

I'm standing somewhere inside a small dark room, and I see two square window frames in front of me. The frames are simple open spaces in the wall, and I see a bright light streaming in from the outside. I see someone's hand coming in through one of the windows, reaching toward me, as it holds out some small object of art, perhaps a jewel or crystal. I only see his hand and wrist, and the beautiful small object, as the room itself is in total darkness. Suddenly I realize I am dreaming, and I feel a powerful jolt of energy shoot through my body. I rise up off the floor and enter the light, flying head first through one of the open window frames.

Instantly I enter a whole new scene. Still lucid, I am now outside in a remote area in the woods, standing beside a small log cabin. A beautiful blanket of freshly fallen white snow covers the entire scene with many trees and a lovely valley that extends before me. I am with an unknown female companion, and we are held captive by a band of Indians. As I look out across the valley below me and up the crest on the opposite side, I see two strong-willed and determined cowboys mounted on horses. Swiftly they ride through the deep snow drifts and in a matter of seconds they cover the distance between us, and they rescue us from the Indians. There is no shooting or violence. They simply arrive, emitting so much power out of their bodies that I know we are liberated.

The scene changes abruptly. Now I am lying face down on the ground somewhere on a patch of bare brown earth. Still fully aware that I am dreaming, I see a huge serpent approach me from the right. Quickly it glides over my back, then turns and passes back underneath me, silently sliding between my body and the ground. Then it rises and turns and comes back up over me again, strongly gripping me around my chest in its powerful coil. Its grey-brown body is about three to four inches thick, and about thirty feet long. Its eyes are strange yellow, green in color, and they gaze at me calmly and steadily, continuously emitting their soft, yellow-green luminescence from within. Finding its position now, the serpent pauses, its head poised in the air about three feet above me. It watches me through its glowing eyes, with a calm and amazingly neutral objectivity. Arching my neck backward and straining to lift my head, I look upward. Our eyes meet, and the impact is extremely powerful, absolutely unforgettable as I gaze for a long moment into the serpent's profound yellow-green eyes, utterly perplexed and fascinated at the same time. Now I drop my head to the ground and begin to wrestle with the serpent, trying to free myself from its grip. I discover that I am no match for its incredible strength. I feel afraid that it will crush me, and I wrestle with all my might for some time, until exhausted I decide to stop struggling. Soon I perceive that the serpent is actually very gentle, merely intent on holding me in its relentless grip. I am very surprised to feel that its body is warmblooded, and not cold blooded as I would expect. Suddenly it makes a quick jerky movement with its coil, which rotates my prone body onto its side. After a few moments it jerks me back again to a face down position. The serpent seems to be playing with me in some strange uncanny fashion, rotating me back and forth in a gradual deliberate manner. Several times it rotates me from my face down position up onto one side, then back to face down, and then up onto the other side. I feel totally subject to its will, as these movements are repeated several times, each time with a quick and powerful jerk of its massive coil."

Suddenly the whole scene vanishes. I feel many confusing, swirling energies moving through my body and I feel a lot of dizziness in my head. After a while my field of vision gradually becomes clear again, and I see myself lying on the same spot of bare, brown earth, face down with my body fully outstretched once again. I am still lucid, fully aware that I am dreaming. Now another large,

gray-brown serpent approaches me from my right in the exact same manner as the first. This serpent is fully identical to the first in every detail of its appearance, except it is slightly smaller in size and length. Quickly and smoothly it glides over my body and passes beneath me, going between, my body and the ground and coming up over the top again; making one full coil around me exactly as its predecessor had done. Though it is slightly smaller in size I can feel that this serpent too is extremely powerful. It also positions its head about three feet above me and gazes down upon me with full steadiness and inner calm and with the same abundance of amazingly neutral, universal objectivity. Again I stare upwards for a time into the amazing powerful eyes of the serpent trying to fathom its intent. I am entranced with the soft, yellow-green luminescence that steadily flows from somewhere deep, deep within the serpent's eyes and even from beyond its eyes, as if from the untold reaches of another world. I feel totally in awe as I absorb the air of mystery that emanates from the serpent continuously. I return its steady gaze for a while and then I drop my head as I began to wrestle with it, struggling with all my might to free myself from its powerful grip. I thrash and thrash about, struggling in every way that I can while the serpent remains virtually motionless, calmly gazing at me from above. Effortlessly it holds me in its single coil, exactly as the first serpent had done, until at last I finally surrender, knowing that I am no match for its incredible strength either. As I lie there quietly for several long moments, I realize that like its predecessor, this serpent, too, is quite gentle toward me, in the same, strange, neutral way. I am surprised to feel that it, too, is a warm-blooded creature.

Suddenly I awaken, and I feel very dizzy and confused by multiple, swirling energies surging throughout my body, flowing directly from the dream. I feel overwhelmed by the sheer power of the dream and very excited by it as well

When the dream ended and I woke up, it was about 3:00 o'clock in the morning. I was completely overwhelmed with the indescribable power that surged through my body, originating from this dream. And now, still examining this experience I fully believe that it was a Kundalini type of initiation. Not intended, searched for, expected or planned by the dreamer, it was, however, a type of experience that can happen in certain lucid dreams, and a type of experience that I have heard about from a number of other people. Consequently, I think that we definitely need to be aware of the possibility that some people may experience mystical states and spontaneous Kundalini awakenings through the lucid dream state. And in spite of all confusion, doubts and struggles with such esoteric experiences, we would do well to keep our thoughts fixed on a vision of hope. As Richard Bach once wrote: "There was always light shining in the darkness for those who dare to open their eyes at night."