

Beyond Lucidity - a personal report by Ann Faraday

This article first appeared in Lucidity Letter, a journal devoted to the study of 'lucid' dreaming wherein the dreamer is actually conscious of dreaming in the dream itself.

In the December 1985 issue of Lucidity Letter John Wren-Lewis described a radical and continuing change of consciousness following upon a near-death experience (NDE) which gave him a new perspective for understanding dream-processes, including lucid dreaming. In the same issue Charles Tart, Harry Hunt, George Gillespie and Michael Grosso used John's observations as a basis for discussing a number of issues which have been prominent in Lucidity Letter since its inception, such as the range of meanings which can be attached to the term 'lucidity', and possible relationships between lucid dreaming and meditation. My purpose in writing this present note is to describe a very unusual sleep-experience of my own in October 1985 (shortly after John's article had been sent off but before I knew of the other comments) which casts new light on some of these issues.

We were staying in an old Christchurch manor during a very rushed working tour of New Zealand when I picked up Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh's The Book of the Secrets and read the chapter on 'devices for transcending dreaming' before going to sleep one night. In it Rajneesh suggests that the famous self-remembering techniques used by Gurdjieff can be adapted to achieve dream lucidity by taking a clear sense of identity into sleep. So, as instructed, I dutifully repeated the words "I am, I am, I am...." only to wake up several hours later laughing because Rajneesh and Gurdjieff had got it all wrong; the truth was much more like "I am NOT". 'I' was emerging from a state of consciousness without any 'I', an experience without an experiencer - a condition that sounds like a total contradiction when described in ordinary words, yet had a reality that made 'Ann' seem like a mere figment of the imagination.

Indeed the very process of re-entry felt much like being dreamed into existence, as all the personal bits and pieces - hopes, fears, loves, hates, achievements, goals, opinions - were gradually re-collected, not around any central core of Ann, but actually producing the entity known as Ann, who felt to be no more than a bundle of memories. And there was incredible liberation in realizing that this whole collection had no more permanent significance than a knot in a string or the inside of a clenched fist.

I feel sure this was the classic mystical Void experience which was also the core of John's NDE, though I can now confirm what he and many others have said, that until it happens any efforts to conceptualize it are totally wide of the mark. It was in no way a blissful or peak experience in any sense that I have ever understood or known, since these have always involved an 'I' who does the experiencing, even though this 'I' is imagined or felt to be bigger or better than the normal self. The phrase 'Only one sky', which was with me on waking, made sense for the first time - not an 'I' perceiving or even merging into the Clear Sky, but Only Clear Sky. I also realized that my efforts at spiritual growth had merely produced a firmer knot, and that my battles with ego had been mere shadow-boxing exercises against a mirage with no real existence.

While the Void-experience undeniably fulfilled Rajneesh's promise of transcending dreaming, it was nothing like any lucid dream I have ever had or seen described in the literature, not even the Tart-style dream with full consciousness of the body in bed etc. In fact I have deliberately not called it a dream because it was de-void of all those cognitive qualities in terms of which dreaming is usually defined. George Gillespie writes of using the lucid dream state to perform a Tibetan-type meditative exercise of removing content in an attempt to reach a Void-experience, but as he describes it, the very process of removing content would seem to confirm the I who is doing the removing and therefore to lead in absolutely the opposite direction.

So I would confirm John's conclusion, affirmed in Michael Grosso's comment, that the altered state of consciousness which mystics speak of as liberation or awakening from the life-dream is something qualitatively different from witness-consciousness either waking or in lucid dreaming. And on the mundane level of lucid dream research, I would very much agree with Charles Tart about the need for fuller discussion of terminology, since even the apparently simple statement "I knew I was dreaming" begs the question "Just who is the 'I' knowing this?"

My reservations about the kind of lucid dream meditation described by Gillespie would apply just as much to any other kind of meditation. As Krishnamurti points out repeatedly in his writings, the very nature of meditation as an activity which I perform must confirm the 'I'. So I would plead with Hunt, Tart and others for much more critical caution about using the term meditation as if it could be simply equated with mystical awakening. While I do not doubt that meditators may come to such awakening, I wonder very much whether this is any straightforward result of their meditative efforts, any more than the Christchurch experience was a straightforward result of the Rajneesh exercise, which was actually intended to yield dream lucidity with a firmer sense of 'I'.

And this brings me to what is perhaps the most interesting conclusion to be drawn from the experience, a very encouraging one for dreamers generally, namely that in some curious way the sleeping brain or psyche seems to have known better than my conscious intention. In everything I have written about dreams, I have emphasized that the psyche can be even more creative in attempting to complete the day's unresolved problems while asleep than when awake (not at all in the very limited sense of a day-residue Zeigarnick effect, Freudian wish-fulfillment or Jungian compensation, as Hunt seems to think in his comment on John's article.) And the Christchurch experience confirms this even though it wasn't exactly a dream, for it shows the sleeping psyche picking up an unrecognized pre-sleep concern (Who exactly is this 'I' of the 'I am' exercise?) and completing it in a way my waking mind could never have conceived.

I cannot really believe that my brief and somewhat perfunctory repetition resulted directly in a transformation of consciousness, and I wonder whether Gurdjieff and Rajneesh, both tricksters *par excellence*, ever meant it to be a centering exercise, though they knew it would have to sell itself to the ego in that guise. Perhaps they really meant it to function as a koan, hoping that on occasion at least it would so deeply confuse the mind's self-referencing habits that they would be transcended. Whether that was the intention or not, it certainly worked that way for me in Christchurch, possibly helped by endless discussions on the nature of the Void since John's NDE; and it has given me, as the NDE gave John, an entirely new basis both for daily living and for future work with dreams. I share the story here primarily in the hope of stimulating some of the new ways of thinking about consciousness emphasized by Tart as the major need for future research in the whole field of psychology.

Ann, who is the author of the international best selling books on dreaming - Dream Power and The Dream Game, told me that the sense of self has never returned.