

The Dream's Destiny: Lucidity, Light and Nonduality

G. Scott Sparrow, Ed.D.

copyright 20130

An invited presentation given at the pre-conference symposium on Lucidity and Nonduality,

Science and Duality conference, San Rafael, 2011

University of Texas-Pan American

Introduction

I first prepared this presentation the summer before last when Fariba and I were scheduled to present together at the annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Dreams. However, her father passed away just before the conference, and so I filled the time as best I could with this my own presentation. Not only was Fariba not there to hear my companion piece, but the recording equipment failed, and the talk went unrecorded. The presentation was so well received that I thought, "I must do it again." Interestingly, a central figure in my talk was a man whom I'd never met before--Stephen LaBerge. And I based my presentation on an aspect of religious philosophy that was still new to me then--the Mahayana doctrine of emptiness or nonduality.

So today, I am with Fariba for the first time in several years, I have just met Stephen for the first time, and I am speaking at a conference on nonduality, of all things. If all history is practice, I have to believe that my talk at IASD was preparation for this moment.

Introduction

Change to Slide 2

I would like to begin my talk by sharing a dream that I believe captures the essence of my presentation. Indeed, I believe that if you can fully embrace the one-sentence message of this dream, then you can leave and have an early lunch with my blessings, for there's nothing I can offer you except respect.

In the dream, I am lucid and looking for the light. Everything around me is glowing, but as soon as I concentrate on a particular glowing object—hoping that the form will dissolve into light—the object loses its luster, and appears in its ordinary physical state. As I am growing progressively frustrated at my inability to see through the forms of the dream, a woman walks up to me and says simply, "You must first learn to love the form in order to see the light within it." (Repeat)

Change to Slide 3

In 1974, on a sunny day in south Georgia, I sat on the back porch of my apartment near West Georgia College and began writing on a yellow legal pad what may have been the first masters thesis on lucid dreaming. Very little had been written on the topic at the time, except for a very few published sources (Fox, 1962; Green, 1968; Tart, 1968). I had only my experience

and my enthusiasm to go by. Supported largely by Jungian theory, I hypothesized that lucid dreaming represented no less than an evolution in consciousness in the dream state that paralleled the emergence of nascent ego awareness in the waking state thousands of years ago. I also suggested that lucidity conferred the same advantages and downside risks of that monumental achievement.

After LaBerge established lucid dreaming as a true REM sleep phenomenon in the early 80s, lucid dream research became a legitimate field of its own.

Change to Slide 4

In my view, there were three main prongs in the initial decade of inquiry: induction studies that explored ways of increasing the frequency of lucid dreams, pioneered by LaBerge; studies that investigated the relationship of lucidity to a variety of personality variables led by Jayne Gackenbach; and anecdotal explorations of lucid dreaming, represented by my book *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light* and Ken Kelzer's book, *The Sun and the Shadow*.

Change to Slide 5

Division in the Ranks

Perhaps the most controversial question that arose during this first decade concerned the desirable or legitimate uses to which lucidity should be applied.

Change to Slide 6

To put it simply, there were two schools of thought: a group who espoused a values-free, experimental approach to lucid dreaming, and a group that recommended a more cautious approach.

Change to Slide 7

The first group operated under the reasonable assumption that the dream was a private, interior, "self created" experience (LaBerge and Reingold, 1990), and thus concluded that the dreamer alone should decide what to do in the confines of the dream state. LaBerge and Reingold captured the pioneering spirit of this approach in the popular 1990 book, *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*:

Change to Slide 8

“If fully lucid, you would realize that the entire dream world was your own creation, and with this awareness might come an exhilarating feeling of freedom. Nothing external, no laws of society or physics, would constrain your experience, you could do anything your mind could conceive. Thus inspired, you might fly to the heavens. You might dare to face someone or something that you have been avoiding; you might choose an erotic partner with the most desirable partner you can imagine; you might visit a deceased loved one to whom you have been wanting to speak; you might seek self knowledge and wisdom.” (LaBerge and Reingold, 1990, p. 14-15)

This approach has had wide appeal for obvious reasons: It offers an avenue into greater freedom and creativity, something usually lacking in ordinary dreams and waking reality.

Change to Slide 9

Alongside this enthusiastic view, however, there were those who raised questions about the wisdom of promoting lucid dream induction without taking into account a variety of concerns. For instance, anecdotal accounts circulating in the early 1980s indicated that lucidity could exert a psychologically destabilizing impact, at least for some individuals. From a psychodynamic standpoint, this made sense, because the dream content could be viewed as the

embodiment of repressed memories and/or emergent archetypal forces, the direct exposure to which could feasibly shock, if not destabilize the integrity of the ego. In my letter to the *Lucidity Letter*, I suggested that the desire for greater awareness is, to some extent, uninformed:

Change to Slide 10

“I believe the desire for lucidity is, to some undetermined extent, insincere. Why? To the extent that one has continued to repress the awareness of unresolved, possibly painful pre-personal memories and issues (and that probably fits most of us to varying extents), the statement "I want to become lucid," implies a paradox. It seems to say: I am willing to become aware of what I've been unwilling to become aware of. How can we know ahead of time what we will suddenly perceive through our wide-open dream eyes? How can we know if we're ready for it?" (Letter to the *Lucidity Letter on the Advisability of Widespread Lucid Dream Induction*)

Change to Slide 11

From the East, the existent Tibetan Buddhist literature on dream yoga seemed to agree with this conservative view. Treating lucid dreaming as a powerful, accelerated path of yoga, the Tibetan literature asserts that dream yoga, to be done safely, requires the seasoned oversight of a guru.

Change to Slide 12

Still others believed that lucid dream behavior should come into alignment with the ethics that govern the waking state. After all, lucidity ushers the dreamer into what appears to be real-

time, vivid encounters with other persons whose ultimate natures—subjective, objective, or some combination thereof—can never be conclusively determined. While recent works, such as Robert Waggoner's book *Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self*, offer a multi-leveled, integrated view that regards dream characters on a continuum from mere "thought forms" to beings with independent agency, the controversy was very much alive then, and can still be felt today.

I wish to offer a perspective that may help to reconcile this controversy, and provide a balanced framework for the future exploration of lucid dreaming.

Let's return for a moment to the 1980s. The controversy came to head in late 1987 and early 1988.

Change to Slide 13

In the December, 1987 issue of *Lucidity Letter*, letters from Jayne Gackenbach and Stephen LaBerge articulated the differences between these two orientations to lucid dream induction. As a backdrop to this dialogue, there had been some reports of dreamers having unsettling experiences in their pursuit of lucidity. In response to these reports, Gackenbach suggested that lucid dream researchers and authors might provide some information about the potentially downside risks of lucidity upon which readers and participants could make informed choices. LaBerge disagreed, asserting that Gackenbach was being unnecessarily alarmist.

Change to Slide 14

In the following issue, several letters from well-known lucid dream authorities continued the debate. MaGallon chided Gackenbach and myself for operating "out of fear," while Bulkely stated that LaBerge had failed to take ethics adequately into consideration in his promotion of

lucid dreaming. LaBerge's energetic response to Bulkely's assessment left little room for agreement. This exchange left an impact that can still be felt even today, 25 years later.

Change to Slide 15

Looking back, this controversy was, in my opinion, a fertile moment. While many of the principals in this debate have gone on to do other things, and may have privately resolved or forgotten the conflict, I do believe that this controversy is an ageless clash of paradigms, and will continue to raise its head as lucid dreamers continue to favor one of these orientations over the other.

Change to Slide 16

Indeed, just the other day, I was talking to a lucid dream researcher who said to me, "I would like to write a book about lucid dreaming for intermediate and advanced lucid dreamers. But I am afraid that it would not sell." When I asked him "Why," he answered, "Because people don't want to hear that lucid dreaming can precipitate disturbing experiences."

I think the only way to make sense of this conflict, and then possibly to resolve it, is examine it in a larger context.

Change to Slide 17

From an evolutionary perspective, lucidity clearly represents a more evolved level of self-awareness, representing as much of an advance in the dream state as the ego, or more bounded self, must have represented in the waking state when it began to emerge thousands of years ago. After all, the lucid dreamer is not only capable of experimenting with alternative responses in the dream, but is able to access memories and facts usually not available in ordinary dreams (what's called "nonsituated" awareness), and pursue ecstatic states through meditation and yogic

methods. But whether one is talking about the waking state or the dream state, various theorists have argued that further differentiation in consciousness, while highly beneficial, also runs the risk of negating or dissociating from the previous dominant mode of consciousness, as well as from the body and feelings.

Change to Slide 18

Drawing on the work of L.L. Whyte, Ken Wilber argues that the ego structure has wrecked havoc in Western consciousness, by becoming increasingly dissociated from the body and its immediate, spontaneous feelings. Taking his lead from Hegel, Wilber goes on to suggest that the function of each new level of consciousness is to differentiate from the earlier level *without dissociating from it*, and then to incorporate the old structure of consciousness into a new inclusive structure rather than leaving it behind. Jung offers another perspective on the dangers of expanding consciousness, saying that the ego may move too quickly, and thus become inflated and destabilized by the influx of powerful, emergent archetypes.

Other voices of caution have weighed in since this initial clash of positions. Most notably, and relevant to our discussion here, Ryan Hurd's recent book, *Sleep Paralysis*, suggests--albeit anecdotally-- that there is a correlation between lucidity and sleep paralysis along with a wide range of disturbing phenomena. While Hurd shows how embracing the challenge of the "lucid nightmare" leads to deeper and more sublime levels of consciousness, he soberly acknowledges the compelling realism of the lucid nightmare.

In addition to the cautionary perspectives laid out by Jung, Wilber, Tibetan sources, and Hurd, perhaps the greatest evidence that the lucid dreamer should never wholly dismiss the

dream content can be discerned in the feedback from dream itself. This was never more true than in my own case.

Change to Slide 19

My initial lucid dreams were simply glorious—full of light and ecstasy. Admittedly, I was less entranced by lucidity per se than by the brilliant light that often appeared to me in the dreamscape, and which I often experienced inwardly as well. I came to see lucidity, not as an end in itself, but as a platform upon which I could consciously seek the luminous source of the dream. In reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, I also learned that the light is often present in the after-death phenomenal experience, but is usually overlooked or avoided by the deceased soul, who presumably remains in a swoon during the initial *bardo* of the after-death experience. Since the Tibetan text asserts that same obscured radiance appears in our dreams, learning to recognize the light in our dreams is regarded as a way to commune with the source during our lifetimes, as well as prepare to be fully present and aware in the after-death state. Thus I set about on a transcendent mission—to "pierce the veil" of illusion, and to commune with the radiance that could be found embedded in the dreamscape. However, because some of my lucid dreams were also deeply disturbing, I began to favor a less ambitious, meditative approach to lucid dream induction, realizing that lucidity and the quest for higher consciousness can awaken unresolved psychodynamic conflicts and powerful archetypal forces, as well. A Jungian analyst voiced this perspective when, after hearing about my ambitious exploits in the lucid state, she said simply, "I hope you have your circle of fire around you." I thought that she didn't understand, but I soon discovered that it was I who didn't fully understand. It is a very long story,

but one that would raise hairs on the back of your neck. But a couple of examples should suffice to convey what began to happen.

The first evidence that my quest for the light would awaken deep psychodynamic conflicts occurred in what I have called my "coming of age dream." About a week before my 21st birthday,

Change to Slide 21

I dream that it is time to reveal my purpose in life to my parents. It is just before dawn as I ask them to follow me out onto the driveway of my childhood home. I raise my hands over my head and begin to chant. Lightning archs across the dark sky, and when I lower my arms, it strikes the ground nearby.

Change to Slide 22

I repeat this gesture several times, becoming lucid as I do, and all the while wondering what is going on! Meanwhile, my parents are cowering behind me, obviously disturbed by the demonstration. Suddenly, my father hurls a lance into my back, and I drop to the ground dying. They bend over me with fear and alarm in their eyes. I say, "I was really your son. But I am the son of the unborn son, who is still to come."

Change to Slide 23

Whatever my parents represented, they clearly overpowered my agenda. Thus I began to consider that lucidity and the quest for the Light could not be pursued independent of acknowledging powerful countervailing forces within me. I came to see the content of the dream not so much as self created, but powerful and mysterious, and indeterminate of origin.

Years later, I came to see this dream as describing the inevitable fall from initial spiritual heights beautifully articulated in Underhill's classic tome, *Mysticism*, in which the author describes how the newly awakened mystic inevitably falls into psychological turmoil and real-life conflict—which we have come to describe the dark night of the soul. While it feels like a curse, Underhill argues that it actually enable a process of necessary integration, which then precedes a more stable and complete union.

Change to Slide 24

Back to the controversy that divided the lucid dream community. To understand the divergent positions, let us consider a "lucid nightmare" of mine that appeared in *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light*, and was later included in LaBerge and Reingold's book, *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*. I believe that this one dream effectively takes us back to the historic moment in which two approaches to lucidity were clashing. I will use this lucid nightmare, and two more, to develop my thesis, which is as follows:

Change to Slide 25

that lucidity as a new level of consciousness confers the immediately capacity to *transcend* the dream content, but that transcendence is an insufficient solution. Further, an important function of dreaming is the integration of unresolved conflict and emergent potential into an evolving structure of consciousness, and that lucidity can facilitate this through only through relating to the dream content as a legitimate, independent "other" that is not necessarily self-created.

My "lucid nightmare" is as follows:

Change to Slide 26

I am standing in the hallway outside my room. It is night and hence dark where I stand. Dad comes in the front door. I tell him that I am there so as not to frighten him or provoke an attack. I am afraid for no apparent reason. I look outside through the door and see a dark figure which appears to be a large animal. I point at it in fear. The animal, which is a huge black panther, comes through the doorway. I reach out to it with both hands, extremely afraid. Placing my hands on its head, I say, 'You're only a dream.' But I am half pleading in my statement and cannot dispel my fear... (Sparrow, 1975)

In my commentary on this dream, I said,

Change to Slide 27

This dream reveals that "...even lucidity can prove inadequate to cope with the encounter with threatening dream content."

I discovered years later that LaBerge and Reingold quoted this dream, but argued a different point. They said,

Change to Slide 28

"Here the dreamer uses his lucidity to try to make his frightful image disappear. There is little difference between this and running from dream monsters. If, upon reflection, Sparrow had recognized that a dream panther could not have hurt him, the thought alone should've dissipated his anxiety. Fear is your worst enemy in dreams; if allowed to persist it will grow stronger and your self-confidence will diminish."

A study of dreams will quickly confirm that fear in a dream tends to escalate the perceived threat, and make it more difficult to exercise creative responses. However,

Change to Slide 29

the position from which LaBerge and Reingold were operating in their assessment--that fear is unwarranted because it's just a dream is a position that cannot be ascertained. Just because a dream occurs in the confines of sleep doesn't mean that the dreamer is privy only to his or her own subjective creations. From that unsupported premise they go on to conclude that the dream figure cannot hurt the dreamer, which cannot be established.

Change to Slide 30

From another standpoint more congruent with the dreamer's subjective sense of alarm, it is parsimonious to say that the dreamer encountered something more powerful than he was, at least in that moment. Holding this view of the dream respects the dreamer's phenomenological experience, and acknowledges the limits to our knowledge even as we may try to counsel a less fearful and more inquiring response. But more importantly, accepting the independent agency of the dream content permits the dreamer to enter into reciprocal exchanges with an inherently mysterious other, which Tarnas asserts in his *Passion of the Western Mind* is the prerequisite for a true relationship.

Change to Slide 31

It may seem that I am denigrating the position that LaBerge and Reingold took. Actually, I was initially in the same camp, but in a different tent. We were both on a transcendent quest.

While he was extolling the virtues of lucidity *per se* as a path to creativity and freedom, I was more intrigued by lucidity as a way to access the experience of light in the lucid dream state. Regardless of our different goals, both of us were arguably minimizing the value and possibly independent agency, at least functionally, of the dream content. However, since I fell to earth rather quickly in my headlong quest for my transcendent goal, I assumed a more conservative stance in regard to lucid dream induction at a time when LaBerge and his associates were exploring greater heights.

Before I share another lucid nightmare, it's important to consider the work of various theorists who might say that fear serves to "re-tether" emergent awareness to the emotions and to the instincts.

Change to Slide 32

We know that the emergence of the ego was an unprecedented advance in the evolution of consciousness, but differentiated awareness trends toward dissociation and its devastating consequences. It's possible that the nightmare serves to keep the dream ego from "colonizing" (Boznak) the dream state.

Let us look at another lucid nightmare (that was not one of my own) that develops much further, and provides clues that might help us reconcile the two positions described.

Change to Slide 33

I am in a cabin alone, and the door opens. Three figures enter and stand abreast just inside the doorway: Dracula, Werewolf and Frankenstein. I am alarmed, but the

strangeness of event convinces me that I must be dreaming. Realizing that they are only a dream, and that I can make them go away, I say, "You are only a dream. Go away!"

Change to Slide 34

They disappear immediately. Alone again, I think to myself, "Maybe I should have surrounded myself with light instead." So I call out to them to return. The door opens again, and they come back in. I say to myself, "I surround myself with light." Instantly, a pinkish white glow envelops me. As for the figures, I can barely see them through the bright haze.

Change to Slide 35

Then I think, "Maybe I should invite them into the light." So I say, "Please come into the light." As they walk forward, the light fills me, and I experience an overwhelming sense of ecstatic love. Following the dream, I remained in a blissful state for several days.

Change to Slide 36

In this remarkable dream, we can see that this dreamer was immediately prompted to use his lucidity to dismiss the unwanted dream characters. The dreamer reacted as I had reacted toward the panther, but he was successful in dismissing the three figures, perhaps because he was less frightened. From the standpoint that the dream is self created, the dreamer's fear is unjustified, but from the standpoint of not really knowing the origin of the images, nor being able to ascertain their threat to him, the dreamer's defensiveness is nonetheless reasonable, even from a lucid perspective.

Change to Slide 37

But the dreamer doesn't stop there. Indeed, the successful exercise of power over the imagery gives way to a new consideration—finding a way to coexist with the dream figures by establishing a protective boundary between himself and the original threat.

One can argue that this second solution would not have been possible if the dreamer had held purely to the original notion that the images were "just a dream." Further, the dreamer's decision to invite the figures back, and to erect a boundary between them, acknowledges that the dream images are imbued with independent power and agency. It is clear that the dreamer sees this new "solution," which permits coexistence with the threat, as a better one than simply dismissing the dream characters.

Change to Slide 38

Then, the dreamer goes even further: By inviting the characters to come into light with him, the dreamer affirms that they are not just powerful, but possess something *of intrinsic value*. One can detect a sense of compassion for the figures that had been previously overshadowed by the dreamer's alarm and self-protectiveness.

The intriguing change in the dreamer's stance toward the dream characters—from a summary dismissal of them toward a willingness to welcome them—did not come all at once:

Change to Slide 39

It came in stages, the first of which was a stark assessment of the independent power and agency of the dream figures, which then allowed for a "re-tethering" of the dreamer's awareness with the dream content.

Change to Slide 40

Let us examine another dream, which reveals the exact same progression—from the perception of a real threat, to lucid dismissal, to defensive coexistence, and finally to reapproachment and integration.

After my friend Benny's death in 1973, I began dreaming about him on a regular basis. In every dream, he would appear demonic, intent it seemed on hurting me or killing me. I would run from him, and often I would become lucid and try to awaken. I found it difficult to remain awake, as if the dream would pull be back into it. I would finally awaken in terror.

Change to Slide 41

After several such dreams, I finally became lucid. He appeared in front of me, holding a knife. He said, devilishly, "I want to show you my new knife." Suddenly, I realized that I was dreaming! I knew what to do then. At least, I thought I did.

Change to Slide 42

I said, "You are only a dream. May the light of the Christ surround you." Nothing happened, and Benny crept closer. He was obviously amused by my ineffective tactic. Without wondering how I obtained a knife of my own, I began doing battle with him until I eventually disarmed him -- an unlikely outcome, since Benny was much larger and faster than I was in real life.

Then came the culmination of the dream series.

Change to Slide 43

In the final dream with Benny, he had me pinned down, pummeling me with his fists. I knew that he would eventually kill me if I didn't free myself. I managed somehow to free

one arm. Instead of hitting him back, however, I reached up and gently stroked his shoulder. Looking back, I don't know why I thought this would do any good. But he stopped hitting me immediately, and he began to cry. His tears fell into my face, and he said, "I only want to be loved."

Change to Slide 44

These two dreams support a view of the dream content as autonomous and meaningful, even from the standpoint of lucid awareness. The acceptance of the independent agency and value of the form of the dream seems initially to presuppose a duality between the dreamer and dream. This problem can be reconciled, as Jung did, by viewing the independent agency within a framework of psychological dualism, which while necessary in our course of becoming, resolves itself in due time. By respecting the dream imagery as autonomous, it sets the stage for a meaningful *relationship* between the dreamer and dream, as well as reconciliation and possible synthesis.

Change to Slide 45

In contrast, the dismissive belief that the dream is self-created reveals a more subtle form of dualism that idealizes the presumed creator (dreamer ego) and disparages the creation (dream imagery). This is an age-old dilemma. For instance, early Christians who were influenced by the gnostics and came to view the world as illusory, even evil, were accused by the orthodox fathers of "blaspheming the creator by disparaging the creation." Regardless of the historic context, the subtle dualism inherent in treating the world as an illusion effectively eliminates an inherently mysterious and animated other to whom the dreamer can meaningfully relate.

For centuries, religion has struggled with the question of whether the phenomenal world has any real meaning for the truly devoted spiritual aspirant. Some religions have held that the world is an illusion, and that knowledge of this fact can emancipate the wandering soul. But while religious philosophy can tilt toward a solipsistic view that the world is unimportant, the seeker is always brought back to earth if he embraces this viewpoint at the expense of dismissing the important of "real life."

Change to Slide 46

My Vedanta professor left class one day only to be knocked to ground by a disturbed and angry student. The student said to Dr. Rao, "This fist is real." While we may abhor such violence, the waking world and the dream realm alike have distinctive ways of reminding us that we can go only so far into a transcendent viewpoint before the characters in our lives assert their agendas.

Change to Slide 47

The quest for lucidity or the light, or anything higher or better, inevitably pivots off of what is considered less desirable. Any quest for transcendence invokes a duality by leaving the lower, the forgotten, or the untouchable behind. This, as many teachers have said, is the self-defeating paradox of the spiritual quest. One can never arrive if anything is left behind.

Change to Slide 48

Treating the dream as self created also effectively "de-animates" the phenomenal realm, similar to the effect of Newton's solving the problem of planetary movement. By reducing the mystery of the wandering stars to mathematics, Newton effectively removed God from the equation. We were alone in the universe for the first time. Tarnas argues that we are on the verge of a necessary "re-animation" the universe. His efforts to establish the validity of astrology in *Cosmos and Psyche* represents one such effort.

Change to Slide 49

Again, the dream that I shared at the beginning of my talk contains, in my opinion, the whole story in a single sentence: "You must first learn to love the form in order to see the light within it." These words succinctly captures the spirit of what has been called alchemy in the West, and tantricism in the East. That is, she conveyed the idea that the highest spirit co-inheres with all forms.

Change to Slide 50

This non-dualistic position was honored by Jung and his followers, in particular, especially in the concept of "shadow work." in which wholeness is accomplished only by understanding and transforming the unredeemable.

Jung was not alone in the West in upholding this alchemical view the highest resides in the lowest.

Change to Slide 51

Rilke espoused a similar view when he stated, in many different poems and prose passages the essential value of all that we normally despise. In *Letters from Muzot*, he says,

“ . . . we should not only refrain from vilifying and depreciating all that belongs to this our world, but on the contrary, on account of its very preliminary nature which it shares with us, these phenomena and things should be understood and transformed by us . . . Within us alone can this intimate and constant transformation of the visible into the invisible take place.”

Change to Slide 52

In Mahayana, this radical truth is expressed in different ways. We have, for example, the doctrine of the five sheaths, in which the highest spirit is regarded as penetrating outward and downward, as it were, into the progressively grosser forms of reality, leaving nothing beyond in its reach. The Psalmist's exclamation, "Lo, though I make my bed in hell, behold, thou are there," expresses this radical philosophy in a form that poetically compels assent, even though it challenges the foundation of much of what is propounded by conventional Western religion.

Change to Slide 53

Perhaps the most sophisticated and refined expression of this philosophy, through which one might respect the transcendence and creativity of the lucid mind while honoring the agency and value of the lowest critter that crawls across the floor of our dreams, is the Mahayana doctrine of emptiness, or non-duality. Simply put (since I have a simple understanding of this), it

is the belief that because nothing endures, it is thus empty. Instead of supporting a nihilistic view, however, the doctrine of emptiness promotes a joyfulness by treating everything of equal value in the grand journey of the soul. Ultimately, nirvana (which translates as the "blowing out" of karma or attachment) and its customary antithesis samsara (usually translated as the wandering of the soul) are considered as two aspects of this non-dual perspective, and thus both equally legitimate paths.

Change to Slide 54

What we arrive at through these various philosophies is a tension between emerging consciousness (e.g. lucidity) and the world of form (e.g. dream content), such that both are regarded as equally valuable in an evolving synthesis.

Change to Slide 55

As we consider these various expressions of a non-dual perspective, then trying to become more lucid or rack up more experiences of ecstasy carries the taint of a dualistic perspective that dishonors the ordinary form of our dreams, and of our lives. Rather than trying to accumulate more lucid dreams or more experiences of ecstasy, a pursuit that can distance us further from the presumed lower forms of expression, we would do well within an encompassing non-dual paradigm to concentrate on relating to the particular forms of our dreams with respect and compassion, and to use our lucidity as a platform for making what LaBerge refers to as "adaptive responses" to the dream.

Change to Slide 56

Through this accommodating stance, the spirit that inheres in all forms might be revealed to us, and the forms that manifest can be freed to evolve and transform into more subtle and pristine expressions. Instead of pursuing a transcendent goal, our goal becomes meaningful engagement with ourselves and the world, giving way to a flowering of a myriad of creative forms and possibilities.

Change to Slide 57

If we return to our dream examples, especially the two in which the dreamer progresses through a series of stages toward the integration of the once-abhorrent dream characters by "loving the form" of them, we see a non-dualistic stance emerging somewhat paradoxically out of an initial dualistic stance of treating the dream characters as real and powerful in themselves. Such dreams promote an alchemical or tantric view of the dream, in which the forms are seen as imbued with independent power and agency, but offering an avenue through which one might experience the highest reality.

Change to Slide 58

With that in mind, I believe that the alchemical or tantric or nondualistic paradigm is not only a theoretical stance that can resolve an old conflict, but it also a highly functional model in the dream state. It involves several key premises. It treats the dream content as having autonomy or independent agency, at least from a provisional perspective, and as inherently mysterious. It

also honors the dreamer's emotional responses to the dream as an acceptable starting point in an evolving relationships.

Change to Slide 59

It also treats the negative intensity of the dream as purposeful--as a way that the dream re-tethers emergent awareness and guards against dissociation. This paradigm supports the analysis of dreams, whether lucid or not, from a relational perspective in which dreamer and dream evolve in an interactional field toward union.

Change to Slide 60

The non-dual model supports an attitude that we can bring to our therapeutic work with dreamers who want our help in understanding their dreams. Most of the dreams that I hear everyday are not lucid dreams, but they do contain the seeds of the highest potential, even in the midst of the very worst dream scenarios--that is, if I believe it, and thus can see it. For example, after working several months with a client who had been molested as a child, the client dreamt that

Change to Slide 61

she awakened in bed, and saw rats dropping onto the bed through holes in the ceiling. Terrified, she got up and ran out of the room, down the hall, and up the stairs. As she approached the top stair, she turned around to see if the rats were still following. One of them was climbing the step just below her. She looked at it closely and was suddenly intrigued by the lustrous texture of its fur. Drawn to its beauty, she reached down and touched the fur. At that moment, the rat

transformed in a beautiful snow leopard. Startled by the change, the dreamer awakened with a sense of profound peace, and--in time--a deeper acceptance of her own sexuality.

Change to Slide 62

So we can see that the debate that arose in the lucid dream community in the 80s pitted two valuable, but arguably incomplete positions against each other. If today we frame the conflict as containing the seeds of a non-dual perspective, in which the opposing arguments are equally valuable positions in the process of engaging the world of form, then we may create a bigger tent for the lucid dream community—one that accommodates those who aspire to greater heights of freedom and creativity, and those who wish to forge a more intimate and respectful relationship with the dream content.

Change to Slide 63

This conversation is evident at the lowest and highest reaches of our evolutionary path. At the dawn consciousness, the nascent self rose to greater and greater heights at the expense of the body and relationships. Dreams may have effectively re-tethered the mind to the world of form. At the highest reaches, the quest for transcendence and enlightenment is counterbalanced by a need to incarnate fully, and to participate in a relational, transformative process.

Change to Slide 64

In closing, I am reminded of a dream that I had years ago that captured the spirit of these twin paths. In the dream, I am with my lover, and we both aspire to get to heaven. For her part, she knows that she must go inward and meditate in order to transcend the attachment to this world. For my part, I must complete a lonely journey through a dark, wooded area, and face a variety of challenges that will soon reveal themselves. As we say goodbye, I playfully wager that I will get to heaven first, and that I will be there to greet her when she arrives.

Change to Slide 65

I pray it may it be so. Thank you.