

Lucid Dreaming: A Path of Transcendence or Transformation, or Both?

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Abstract

One of the great questions that has arisen in the lucid dream community has been, "What is the ideal stance that one should maintain in regard to the dream imagery?" From one standpoint, the imagery is presumably self-created, and thus subject to the will of the dreamer. But in the actual encounter, the imagery often asserts its own autonomous agenda. To the extent that one regards the autonomous manifestation of the dream imagery as meaningful, then it is perhaps incumbent upon the lucid dreamer to establish a relationship with it in hopes of learning from it, and perhaps becoming more fully integrated with it. But on the other hand, such engagement potentially threatens the continuation of lucidity and the constructive disengagement from the chaotic forms and energies of the dream. This dilemma reflects the age-old dialectic that expresses itself in various religious and spiritual traditions, in which two paths have clearly arisen: one leading to transcendence from the world of form, and one leading to the acceptance and utilization of the forms of creation, as well as the energies with empower those forms. The first path is associated with various spiritual philosophies, such as Vedanta. The downside of this path is, in its extreme form, a devaluation of the phenomenal world and, ultimately, a kind of solipsism that denies its independent reality. The second path is associated with alchemy in the West, and Mahayana's tantric philosophy in the East, in which the transformation or transmutation of "lower" forms and energies is considered the ideal approach. From this

standpoint, the Mahayana doctrine of nonduality holds that nirvana and samsara are two aspects of the same whole, and thus equally valuable pursuits. Hence from this perspective, the form of the dream offers a relationship that leads to the transformation and harnessing of its energies.

In my presentation, I will draw upon several dreams in order to illustrate that when dreamers adopt one of these classic positions or the other, the autonomous aspects of the dream often compensate for the dreamer's stance, thus intimating the need for synthesis of these divergent philosophical and psychological perspectives.

Introduction

I would like to start this presentation with a puzzle? What do alchemy, Mahayana Buddhism, and Rainer Rilke share in common that could reconcile one of the major conflicts in lucid dream inquiry? As you contemplate this question, let me give you a clue that came from one of my own dreams. 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, in this case it was a bicycle—hoping that the form will dissolve into light—the object loses its luster, and appears in its ordinary physical state. As I was 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." How's that for an answer? Now let me wind back almost four decades and develop a more lengthy, but perhaps less effective answer to this question.

Over 38 years ago, 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, and except for a couple of published sources (Faraday, 1972; Fox, 1962; Green, 1968; Tart, 1968), I had only my experience and my enthusiasm to go by. In a thesis 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 arousal of ego awareness in the waking state thousands of years ago. I suggested that lucidity conferred the same advantages (i.e. greater control, the capacity to plan and strategize) and vulnerabilities (i.e. dissociation from one's feelings and the immediate context) of that monumental achievement. Three years later, I expanded my thesis into a tiny book, titled *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light*, which was published by the Association for Research and Enlightenment. It went through eight printings over a period of 17 years, and is still available on my website, www.dreamanalysisitraining.com. It will soon be republished along with some of my more recent work.

After Stephen LaBerge and Keith Hearne independently established lucid dreaming as a true REM sleep phenomenon in the early 80s, lucid dream research became a field of its own. 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 Stephen LaBerge; studies that investigated the relationship of lucidity to a variety of personality variables led by Jayne Gackenbach; and spiritually oriented narratives that indicated that lucid dreaming was an avenue into radiant, ecstatic experiences. My own book and Ken Kelzer's *The Sun and the Shadow*, for

which I wrote the introduction, were two of the early examples of personal lucid dream testimonies.

Perhaps the most controversial question in the whole enterprise concerned the desirable or legitimate uses to which lucidity should be applied. To put it simply, there were two schools: a group who espoused a values-free, experimental approach to lucid dreaming, and a group that questioned the anything-goes approach for a variety of reasons. The first group operated under the assumption that the dream was "self created," (LaBerge and Reingold, 1990), and that the dreamer alone should decide what to do in the private confines of the dream state. This approach dominated the popular literature for obvious reasons: It offered readers an avenue into heretofore unimagined freedom in the dream state. Alongside this optimism, however, there were those who raised questions about the wisdom of promoting lucid dream induction without taking into account a variety of legitimate concerns. Anecdotal accounts 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 unfiltered exposure to which could feasibly destabilize the integrity of the ego. From the East, the existent Tibetan Buddhist literature on dream yoga, which was minimal at the time, seemed to agree with this conservative view. Treating lucid dreaming as an accelerated path of yoga based on the tantric principle of the interchangeability of consciousness and energy, the Tibetan position assumed that lucidity inevitably stir powerful dormant forces—the *kundalini*—to life, thus requiring seasoned oversight. Still others believed that lucidity should come into alignment with the ethics that govern behaviors in 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 or objective—can not be determined. The interpersonal consequences of lucidity became, therefore, a legitimate ethical issue.

The whole matter came to head in late 1987 and early 1988. In the December, 1987 issue of *Lucidity Letter*, letters from Jayne Gackenbach and Stephen LaBerge articulated the differences between these two approaches 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, in the very least, lucid dream researchers and authors might provide some information about the potentially downside risks of lucidity upon which readers and participants could make informed decisions. LaBerge reacted to such concerns, asserting that Gackenbach was being unnecessarily alarmist. In the following issue, several letters from well-known lucid dream researchers, including Alan Worsely, Kelley Bulkely, Linda MaGallon, Bob Trowbridge, and myself continued the debate. MaGallon chided Gackenbach and myself for operating "out of fear," while Bulkely who was particularly critical of LaBerge's position, stated that LaBerge had failed to take ethics adequately into consideration in his promotion of lucid dreaming. LaBerge's fiery response to Bulkely's blistering assessment had an impact that is still felt today, almost 25 years later.

Establishing a Larger Context for the Debate

Who was right? I think the only way to make of sense of this debate is to consider it in the context of a bigger picture. From an evolutionary perspective, lucidity seems to represent a significant advancement over ordinary dream awareness, much like the arousal of self

consciousness must have represented a huge leap forward in the waking state thousands of years ago. Not only is the lucid dreamer more clearly bounded and distinct in the dream state, but the lucid dreamer is able to access information and facts usually unavailable in ordinary dreams (i.e. nonsituated awareness). Various theorists have argued that the advent of a new level of consciousness represents further differentiation at the risk of dissociating from the previous average dominant mode of consciousness. Jung warned against the dangers of ego inflation, which can occur whenever when the conscious self becomes possessed or inflated by powerful, emergent archetypes. From a slightly different perspective, Wilber argues that the ego may wreck havoc as a consequence of becoming dissociated from the body self and its feelings. From Wilber's perspective, each successive level of awareness effectively transcends the constraints of the prior stage, and consequently may opt to disregard the priorities of the lower level in favor of exploring the freedom and power made possible by the new level of consciousness. Taking his lead from Hegel, Wilber promotes the view that the function of each new level of consciousness is first to differentiate from the earlier level, and then to incorporate the old structure of consciousness into a new inclusive structure, rather than leaving it behind. Dissociation is always a possibility, and can express itself collectively as such unfeeling horrors as genocide. Indeed, Whyte refers in the book, *The Next Development in Man*, to the Nazi phenomenon as a consequence of a culture-wide division between consciousness and feeling that he has termed the "European dissociation."

The Dream as the Best Source of Feedback

In addition to the caveats laid out by Jung, Wilber, Whyte, and others, perhaps the greatest evidence that the lucid dreamer cannot or should not prevail over the dream content can

be discerned in the feedback from dream content itself, at least for those who are willing to acknowledge it. This was never more true than in my own case. My initial lucid dreams were simply glorious. Admittedly, I was less entranced by lucidity than by the light that appeared in the dreamscape, and which I often experienced inwardly as well. I naturally came to see lucidity as a platform upon which I could consciously seek the experience of light and ecstasy within the dream state. However, since some of my lucid dreams were disturbing, such as the dream of the panther, I began to favor a conservative approach, believing that lucidity and the quest for higher consciousness could inadvertently provoke greater awareness of unresolved and upsetting psychodynamic conflicts. A Jungian analyst voiced this perspective when, after hearing about my exploits in the lucid state, she said simply, "I hope you have your circle of fire around you." I thought she simply didn't understand, but it was I who didn't.

In retrospect, as a more mature thinker who has studied philosophy and comparative religion, I look upon the conflict that arose in the lucid dream community as a seminal event that could have given way to a deeper understanding of the role that lucid dreaming might yet play within the larger context of transpersonal theory and the spiritual journey. That being said, I wish to return to this issue, not so much to revive the controversy, but to recast it in such a way as to make it possible for reconciliation between the two positions.

Whenever a new dimension of consciousness arises in the life of the individual or in the greater community, it affords the bearer a new level of freedom, even transcendence, from the previous status quo structure of consciousness, as well as from the social, familial, cultural, and biological contexts--which may have constrained the individual from greater expression. As such, consciousness is always seen, in Jung's words, as the "unnatural" thing in nature, as a

curse, or as a fall from previous innocence. Whether consciousness is an advance or a mistake depends on who you ask, but most of us in this room would probably favor the former position. Regardless of the position you take, however, the ultimate authority, at least in the short term, is one's own dream life. It is likely that the bearer of a new awareness will meet with resistance and/or confirmation from this singular source of inner authority.

Let us consider a dream that appeared in *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light*, as well as in LaBerge and Reingold's book, *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*. I believe that it takes us back to the "scene of the crime," in which the "liberal" and "conservative" approaches to lucidity clashed. I will use this lucid nightmare as a centerpiece in my discussion, and then draw on two more to develop my thesis, which is as follows: that lucidity as a new level of consciousness confers the capacity to transcend the dream content, but that the emancipation that it affords us is only a partial solution. The overarching purpose of dreaming is the integration of submergent (i.e. repressed) and emergent (i.e. archetypal or teleological) content into an evolving structure of consciousness, and so lucidity can facilitate this endeavor only through relating to the dream content as a legitimate "other" that deserves and even demands respect. According to this view, the content cannot be dismissed as unimportant or "self created:" it must be accommodated and incorporated. The meaningful tension between reflective awareness and the autonomous content defines a dialectic in which 1) consciousness is challenged and "contextualized" in relation to the content, and 2) the content is transformed and incorporated into the evolving structure of self.

The dream is as follows:

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. I pray for Jesus' presence and protection. But the fear is still with me as I awaken. (Sparrow, 1975)

I presented this dream originally to argue that lucidity can be limited in its capacity to deal with powerful, autonomous forces in the unconscious. I said,

This dream reveals that when a dreamer's desire to confront the subconscious barriers is excessive, even lucidity can prove inadequate to cope with the encounter. If the dreamer wishes to avoid such upsetting and possibly dangerous experiences, he must realize that his conscious desires can set in motion a deep, inner process, but they must then await rather than force the natural unfoldment of his inherent capacity. The deeper self seems to operate on the principle that true growth occurs only over a long period of time and cannot be rushed.

I discovered years later that LaBerge and Reingold referred to this dream, as well, but argued a different point. They said that the problem wasn't in the power of the image, but resided in the fear of the dreamer. They argued that the dreamer's fear was the only problem:

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, the thought alone should've dissipated his anxiety. Fear is your worst enemy in dreams; if you allowed to persist it will grow stronger and your self-confidence will diminish.

LaBerge and Reingold suggest that the problem resides within the dreamer. According to this line of thinking, the dreamer in failing to acknowledge that the dream panther could not hurt him, used his lucidity inappropriately to try to dismiss it. From this standpoint, there was just too little lucidity and too much fear. But from another standpoint, it is possible that the dreamer encountered something more powerful than he was, at least at the time. Holding this view of the dream may seem excessively pessimistic. But we cannot know for sure if the dream image can always be tamed with enough lucidity. I hazard to guess that Jung would not have believed so, and would have smiled at that presumption. Indeed, sometimes it may be true that the archetype is, by nature, more powerful than we are, at least from the standpoint of our current stage of development. The psalmist exclaims, "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," which resonates with a sober respect for the powers and principalities that reside within us. It could even be true that discovering our relative powerlessness in the face of various psychodynamic and spiritual forces may represent a step forward, rather than backward, by introducing a level of respect and humility into the relationship, and controlling for the downside effects of inflation and hubris.

The differences expressed in the two approaches to the panther dream represent no less than a clash of the two fundamental philosophical paradigms: idealism and realism. My position reflects the classic paradigm of realism, which states that the world is objective and enduring. In its extreme form as it is expressed in religion, philosophy, and social policy, realism can give

way to dualism, in which the forces of good and evil exist independently, and cannot be reconciled. In psychology, it can be seen in Freud's split between id and superego, and even in Jungian theory of autonomous complexes and archetypes, which have a functional life of their own. The problem with psychological realism is that it can impede a view of a unitary reality that might transcend, or incorporate the disparate elements of the dualistic worldview.

Let me say at this point that I believe LaBerge and I were both initially pursuing a "transcendent" approach to the dream state at the time. While he was extolling the virtues of lucidity per se, I was entranced by the experience of light in the lucid dream state. Both of us were arguably discounting the authority of the dream content. Since I fell to earth in my headlong quest, and he apparently did not, we great apart in our narratives about lucid dreaming. I raised concerns about lucid dream induction, and thus began to challenge LaBerge and others who favored, in large part, a wholly sanguine view of its potential.

LaBerge's position reflects the other classic paradigm known as idealism, which holds that the world can only be known through the observer, and thus should be treated only as a subjective, contingent reality. Taken to the extreme, idealism becomes solipsism, which treats the world as an illusion that must be overcome. In religion, idealism has taken many forms including Vedanta, various schools of gnosticism that competed with early Christianity, and the new age principle that we create our own reality. The solution to one's problems, according to this paradigm, is ultimately a matter of changing one's perspective. However, the problem with treating the world as self created, as Wilber so eloquently points out in his criticism of new age thinking, is that some things cannot be overcome simply with a change in attitude. He refers to the absolute, causal connection between breathing in plutonium dust, and developing lung

cancer. No amount of positive thinking will overturn this connection. He even coins a new term, "neogenic guilt" to describe the self-blame that accompanies the erroneous assumption that one should be able to heal oneself, regardless of the condition. Similarly, the presumed self-created nature of the dream content inherent in a solipsistic view of the dream sets the dreamer up for a sense of failure if he or she should fail in dispelling a dream threat. Indeed, the possibility that the panther embodies something beyond the dreamer's control makes no sense within a paradigm that treats the content as wholly self created.

Let us return to the panther dream. The dreamer encounters the form of the panther, and endeavors to use his lucidity in an effort to transcend the conflict. Believing that what he sees is a dream, he nonetheless feels afraid and is unable to make the panther go away. The dreamer thus feels rightly or wrongly that the panther is stronger than his is. LaBerge and Reingold counter with the proposition that the dream cannot hurt you since it's self created. This assumption, however appealing, cannot be ascertained. Just because a character appears in a dream does not mean that it is necessarily self created. My wife appears in my waking experience every day, and depending on my actions, she is more or less agreeable. But the moment I treat her as someone I can control, I learn that she is far from self created.

The postmodern paradigm of constructivism has been seen as a synthesis of idealism and realism. Believing that all experience is constructed from language, beliefs, values, and prior experience, everyone's reality is somewhat different. But constructivism, and its recent offspring social constructionism--which adds interpersonal relationships to the mix of determinants of one's reality--does not deny the existence of the world: it only says that one's reality is always, to some extent, subjectively constructed, and thus unique from anyone else's reality. Hence

constructivism offers us a possible integrated perspective when considering the reality of the dream content; that is, as both objective and subjective, or co-created.

Rather than continuing abstractly, let us look at another lucid nightmare that develops much further, and provides clues that might help us reconcile the two positions described.

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!" 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. 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.

In this remarkable dream, we can see that this dreamer was not so much afraid as startled by the spectacle of the three monsters—so much that he was prompted to use his lucidity to dismiss the unwanted dream characters. From the standpoint that the dreamer is self created, there was nothing to fear. However, from the standpoint of not really knowing the ultimate origin of the images, nor being able to ascertain their ability to harm the dreamer, the dreamer's dismissal of them makes perfect sense. Although he is lucid, his concern is nonetheless reasonable. But he doesn't stop there. Indeed, the exercise of power over the imagery gives way

to a new consideration—to find 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." Indeed, the dreamer's decision to erect a boundary between himself and the three images acknowledges that the dream images are independent and have the power to hurt him. Hence the dreamer shifts away from idealism to realism as he struggles to find a solution that can reconcile his lucidity with the presence of the mysterious figures. It is clear that the dreamer sees this new "solution" as a better one than simply dismissing the dream characters.

Then, the dreamer goes even further: By inviting them to come into light with him, the dreamer affirms that the characters are not just powerful, but possess something of value. I am reminded of the words, a "turning about in the deepest seat of consciousness" in order to capture the immensity of the dreamer's courageous and compassionate gesture.

The change in the dreamer's stance toward the dream characters—from a solipsistic dismissal toward a willingness to embrace them—did not come all at once, it came in stages, which I propose may be a necessary sequence in the development of the lucid self. Let us examine another dream, which reveals the exact same progression from 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 me back into it. I would finally awaken in terror.

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. 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. 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."

The above two dreams support a view of the dream content as essentially autonomous and meaningful, even from the standpoint of lucid awareness. This ultimate acceptance of the reality, autonomy, and value of the form of the dream seems initially to presuppose a duality between dreamer and dream, but actually it sets the stage for meaningful interaction between the dreamer and dream, and for experiencing a synthesis of the two. In contrast, the belief that the dream is self-created, while seeming to offer a way of transcending the illusion of the dream, hides a more subtle dualism that idealizes the creator (dreamer ego) and disparages the creation

(dream imagery).¹ This subtle dualism effectively eliminates the importance of a relationship on the basis that the form of the dream is wholly without substance or meaning. This may seem to work at first, but it leaves the dreamer alone, free to relate only to himself or at best, to his own empty creations.

I do not stand in judgment of those for whom lucid dream induction was the sole aim, and who approached the dream content as self created. I, too, entertained singular aspirations that initially disregarded the importance of the dream content. Instead of seeking the freedom and creative powers conferred by lucid awareness, I sought the ecstasy and pristine awareness that I found in the experience of white light in my dreams. Because some of my initial light experiences occurred in nonlucid dreams, I never considered lucidity as a necessary or sufficient condition for the experience of radiance, only a faculty that increased the likelihood of the experience of radiance. Nonetheless, my singular attachment to the experience of radiance was just as much a transcendent and thus divisive path as LaBerge's preoccupation with lucidity. In my own case, it brought about a series of compensatory experiences that made me reconsider my disregard of the dream content.

One of those dreams was the dream that I shared at the beginning of this talk. As you may recall, I was lucid and looking for the lights, and becoming progressively frustrated at my inability to see through the forms of the dream, when an unknown woman walked up to me and said simply, "You must first learn to love the form in order to see the light within it." It has been the message for this lifetime, if not a message for all times.

¹ Interestingly, early Christians who disparaged the world as evil were accused of "blaspheming the creation."

In retrospect, this "lesson" contains the seed of a complete nondualistic worldview that honors the forms of our experience without accepting this relationship as the end point of our search. For centuries, religion has struggled with the question of whether the world has any real meaning for the truly devoted spiritual aspirant. Some religions have held that the world is an illusion, even a trap, and that knowledge of this fact can emancipate the wandering soul. But while religious philosophy can tilt toward the view that the world has no value, the seeker is always brought back to earth if he embraces this viewpoint at the expense of living fully in the world. For instance, my Vedanta professor left class one day only to run into the fist of a disturbed and angry student, who said to Dr. Rao as he lay on the ground, "This fist is real." While we may abhor such violence, the world and the dream has a way of reminding us that we can go only so far into lucidity or toward the light before the forms of our experience reassert itself.

The dialectic that emerges in all of this is not so much between idealism and realism, or between lucidity and nonlucidity, as between transcendence and incarnation. That is, the quest for lucidity or the light inevitably pivots off of what is considered less desirable, i.e. nonlucidity or ordinary lackluster experience. Any quest for transcendence rests upon a duality that cannot be resolved by leaving the lower, the forgotten, or the untouchable behind. This, as many teachers have said, is the self-defeating paradox of the spiritual journey. One can never really leave if one wishes to arrive.

Sometime the dream offers the solution. Indeed, I suggest to you that when the woman told me that I must first learn to love the form in order to experience the light within it, she succinctly captured the spirit of what has been called alchemy in the West, and tantricism in the

East. That is, she conveyed the idea that the spirit coinheres with all forms as energy or consciousness that can be experienced through the refinement or transmutation of the original form, and that it can only be released through embracing the forms with love or compassion. This is a very radical position, but honored in Jungian theory, especially in the concept of "shadow work," as well as in Mahayana Buddhism in the form of the bodhisattva vow and in the emphasis on the nirmanakaya, which is the guru's perfected form body. Jung's preoccupation with alchemy was based on his concern for healing the gulf in the Western psyche between spirit and matter. Finding in alchemy the fundamental premise that the ultimate substance coinheres with the grossest forms of matter, he founded a psychology that both respected the apparent dualism in the psyche, but alluded to its eventual synthesis through a willing contemplation of the apparent irreconcilable opposites in our natures.

Jung was not alone in the West in upholding this alchemical view. Rilke, in particular, espoused a similar view when he stated, in many different passages the essential value of all that we 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.”

From an entirely different Western source, in the readings of the clairvoyant Edgar Cayce, we find these provocative words: “Until you can see the Christ in the vilest of passion, you haven’t begun to understand the meaning of love.”

And again, from Rilke, we have in *From Letters to a Young Poet*:

“Perhaps everything which is terrible is, in the final analysis, only something that wants our love.”

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 basic philosophy of non-duality emerging. The seeker's initial emphasis on lucidity or light seems hollow compared to the powerful relational healing and integration achieved in the course of these dreams. Such dreams promote an alchemical or tantric view of the dream, in which all forms are treated respectfully as housing the ultimate spirit, and through which one might experience the highest reality.

In Mahayana Buddhism, this radical truth is expressed in 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 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 dualistic Christianity.

Perhaps the ultimate expression of this philosophy which has the power to respect the transcendence and creativity of the lucid mind while honoring the value of the lowest critter that crawls across the floor of our dreams, is that of the Mahayana doctrine of emptiness, or nonduality. This philosophy that arose hundreds of years after the life of Buddha, and whose adherents claim to be the esoteric teachings of Buddha is the belief that everything is ultimately transient and empty. Instead of promoting a nihilistic view, the doctrine of emptiness considers

everything of equal value in the journey. 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 through the realms of karmic illusion) are considered as two aspects of this non-dual perspective, and thus both equally legitimate paths.

As we consider these various expressions of a non-dual perspective, then trying to become more lucid or have more experiences of radiance carries the taint of a dualistic perspective that dishonors the form of our dreams, and of our lives. Rather than trying to accumulate more lucid dreams or more experiences of ecstasy that distance us further from the presumed lower forms of expression, we would do well within this radically encompassing 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 beautifully refers to as adaptive responses to the dream. Through this radically accommodating stance, the spirit that inheres in all forms might be revealed, and the forms that manifest can be freed to evolve and transform to more subtle and pristine expressions.

There are several stories that capture this spirit, some of which I am sure you have heard. In one, a guru and his followers were attacked by bandits, and the guru was killed. As he was dying, he cried out. His surviving devotees were concerned that their guru's last minutes indicated that he was not enlightened after all, so they went to another revered teacher and told her about the incident. She smiled and said, "Yes, your master cried out. And one could hear his voice for miles!"

In another story, two devotees are in the woods. One of them is meditating, and one is dancing. Their master appears, and the meditator asks, "Master how many more lifetimes must I

have?" The master said, "On three more." The devotee sighed, and said, "Three more," and went back to meditating. The devotee who was dancing came up to his master and said, "Master, how many more lifetimes much I live?" The master said, "A thousand more, I am afraid." The devotee smiled and said, "Only a thousand?" And at that moment, he experienced nirvana.

The last story, which you have all heard reminds us again that the lower is also the higher. A devotee runs up to his master and exclaims, "Master, I have just levitated across the river!" to which the master replied, "For a penny you could have taken the ferry."

In summary, I want to say that the alchemical or tantric paradigm is also a highly functional model in the dream state. For it supports lucidity as an avenue to emancipation and unattachment, but it acknowledges the value of the form of the dream as an embodiment of the spirit which may need refinement through our attention and compassion. Time and time again, I have discovered the power of this nondualistic model in my own dreams.

In one, I was running from a man who wanted to kill me. I could not find a secure hiding place, and the sheer stress of the threat finally made me wonder if I was dreaming. After confirming that I was dreaming, I decided to find the man and confront him. I flew up in the sky and affirmed that I would be taken to his location. Immediately, I found myself entering a room where he sat facing away from me. Hearing me enter, he jumped up, wheeled around, and fired several shots from a handgun. I felt the "bullets" pass through me like the wind. Then I walked up to him, reached up and touched his face. He looked alarmed and defensive at first, but then his face softened, and he tentatively lifted his hand and touch my face, too.

The alchemical or tantric model is an attitude that we can bring to our work with dreamers who want our help in understanding their dreams. Most of the dreams that I hear every

day 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. And through believing it, I can assist the dreamer in "mining" the dream for gold until he or she has a breakthrough in awareness, and can facilitate the transformation of the threatening dream forms through adaptive responses to them. For example, after working for several months with a client who had been molested as a child, the client dreamt that 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 to a foyer, and up the stairs. As she approached the top stair, she turned around to see if the rats were following. One of them was climbing the step just below her. She looked at it closely and was suddenly intrigued by the texture of its fur. Drawn to its beauty, she reached down and touched the fur. At that point, the rat became a beautiful snow leopard. Startled by its transformation, the dreamer awakened with a sense of profound peace, along with a deeper acceptance of her own sexuality.

Greater dream awareness in general, and lucidity in particular, offers the dreamer new and better ways to circumvent the usual claimants who appear with regularity in our dreams. That may be the initial, necessary response of heightened awareness to the presentation of chronic stressors in the dream state; that is, to assume a superior position in relation to the disturbing or demanding dream content. But this demonstration of transcendence apparently gives way to a willingness to look again at the very thing that once distressed the dream ego, with an eye to its value, even in its homely attire. This acceptant attitude leads us toward accommodation, which then may precipitate a transformation of the dream content, making integration all the more likely.

So we can see that the debate that arose in the 80s pitted two valuable positions against each other, and caused considerable dissension among lucid dream researchers. However, if we frame the conflict as a meaningful and necessary dialectic, in which the opposing arguments are seen as equally valuable positions in the process of living more freely in the world of form, then we may create a bigger tent for the lucid dream community—one that accommodate those who aspire to greater heights of freedom and transcendence, and those who advocate using lucidity to forge a more intimate and respectful relationship with the forms that appear in our dreams. I am reminded of a dream that I had years ago that captured the spirit of both. I am with my lover, and we both want to get to heaven. For her part, she must go inward and meditate in order to transcend the attachment of this world. For my part, I must complete a journey through a dark wood. As we part, I playfully tell her that I will arrive in heaven before she does, and that I will be there to greet her.

No matter how high I have flown in my quest for lucidity and the light, I have learned that I must eventually come back to earth—to embrace a path with heart in order to deal with unfinished business, and to submit to a deeper calling. But I do not think that we can skip the noble quest for transcendence, either. It's all good, in my opinion, and the only error that I can think of in this whole process is losing sight of the one in an exclusive quest for the other.

LaBerge, S., Reingold, H. (1990). *Exploring the world of lucid dreaming*. New York: Ballentine.