

Middle-of-the-Night Meditation and Dream Reliving  
as Catalysts for Lucid Dreams

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There is an old Buddhist story about a man who wanted to obtain the magic sword, with which he hoped to defeat all of his enemies. He went to his spiritual master and asked her how he could find the sword. Instead of discouraging the seeker, the master told him what he needed to do. She told him to go to a certain shrine in the forest and to engage in constant prayer, repeated prostrations, and ritual sacrifices for a complete lunar cycle. She went on to say that at the end of the month, a snake would appear at the foot of the shrine, and that if the man would take it by its tail, it would turn into the magic sword. Well, the man did just as he was told. He left his cell phone and laptop at home, and fulfilled the requirements of his quest to the letter. At the end of the month, the snake appeared, and the man promptly seized it by its tail; and just as the master had told him, it turned into the magic sword.

But the only thing that she failed to tell him became obvious at that very moment. He no longer wanted to use it.

Lucid dreaming has been considered a magic sword of sorts that permits the dreamer to wield considerable power and creative influence over the dream imagery. The words from *Ex-*

*ploring the World of Lucid Dreaming* capture the immense freedom and power that lucidity bestows:

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).

I was completely unaware of all of this amazing potential when my first lucid dream occurred in early January, 1971. At that time, there were only two books in print that had any mention of lucid dreaming, and I was unaware of both of them. The last thing on my mind was to try to have a lucid dream. Indeed, I did not even know what the term meant until I stumbled upon Celia Green's book *Lucid Dreams*. Even then, the thing that impressed me most about my first lucid dream was not the fact that I was aware that I was dreaming, but that I had been infused with a great light and an immense sense of spiritual purpose and belonging. I wanted it to happen again, but I didn't really care if I was lucid or not. That wasn't the point.

Actually, becoming lucid has never really been an independent goal of mine. Before I knew enough to seek lucidity, I was already meditating and seeking enlightenment, or spiritual fulfillment. Lucid dreaming began to happen spontaneously, almost from the very start.

Part of the reason lucidity has accompanied my spiritual journey is because I began to meditate in the early morning hours shortly after my first light experience. It wasn't my idea. Actually, I was associated with a group of students at the University of Texas who studied the work of Edgar Cayce along with mystical Christianity, Jungian psychology, and Eastern spiritual practices. Cayce, I discovered, had said on several occasions that if a person meditated for an hour at 2 a.m. for a complete lunar cycle, he or she would "know a peace that you've never known." Eventually, I did this month-long ritual twice, but even before I committed to such an ordeal — and it was — I began meditating at the more user-friendly hour of 5 a.m. as part of my daily meditational practice. I would meditate from 15 to 30 minutes before returning to sleep for another hour or so before rising.

The consequences of this early morning discipline were astounding. Not only did the light experience recur, but lucid dreams began to occur on a regular basis, along with nighttime kundalini awakenings, persistent high-frequency tones, and gentle, pulsating waves of energy in between waking and sleep. Indeed, there were nights when I could not easily go to sleep because of the energetic phenomena that literally overtook me at that formative time. I would begin to leave my body, and just to go to sleep, I would have to sit up and shake it off. It was, as they say, an embarrassment of riches.

One might ask, why does meditation increase lucidity? It may seem obvious, and it may be unnecessary to discuss it with you. But it has been reported by Goleman and Goleman that meditation increased the activity of the reticular activating system, which as you probably know is related to self awareness and the orienting response. In contrast, it reduced the activity of the limbic system, which you probably know is part of the so-called old brain, and is the seat of our

emotions and instinctual impulses. So, in effect, meditation produces a state of awareness that is relatively unencumbered by our underlying drives and emotional reactions. Of course, this is a very old study, and I'm sure there have been many others since.

After writing my master's thesis on *Lucid Dreaming as an Evolutionary Process* in 1974, and my book *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light* in 1976, I became familiar with several other researchers who were exploring the phenomenon, including Jayne Gackenbach, Stephen LaBerge, and Ken Kelzer. At that time, there seemed to be two basic approaches to lucid dreaming emerging: one that considered lucid dreaming as an end in itself, and one that considered it as a fruit of spiritual practice. Since I had always treated lucidity as a tool that could assist me in recognizing the light in the dream state—or seeking the presence of the master in its many manifestations—rather than as an independent objective, I naturally preferred the latter approach. However, I have since realized that early morning meditation is a highly effective and natural avenue to lucid dreaming, regardless of what you believe about how that “magic sword” should be used. In fact, if you pursue lucid dreaming through early morning meditation, you may find that not only will you have more frequent lucid dreams, but that the quality of your response to the dream will be enhanced as well, regardless of your original intent.

What do I mean by the quality of your response? Most lucid dreamers that I've known admit that lucidity is not a very stable or consistent state of mind. Some authorities have noted that a lucid dreamer may still do odd and unfortunate things even while “fully” lucid, as if to say that we are still motivated by habitual ways of responding even after we become aware that we are dreaming. For instance, I once counseled a woman who became lucid almost every night. How did she use her magic sword? By flying away from anything that was stressful in the least.

Clearly, she was acting according to habit, just as much as a non-lucid dreamer might exhibit the same knee-jerk responses to an ordinary dream.

I have exhibited such familiar habit patterns on so many occasions in my lucid dreams that it is sobering to say the least. In one dream, I became lucid and decided to fly up into the morning sky. It was exhilarating, but when I came back down to earth and encountered my mentor, he said that the master had come for me twice, and that I had been distracted by my own agenda. In another lucid dream, I had the opportunity to go to a boy who had just been hit by a car on his bicycle. I was afraid of what I would see, and didn't know if I could handle it, so I avoided the chance to help him. I still regret that.

Clearly, what we call lucidity is neither singular, nor stable, nor consistent, nor always the same as our waking awareness. And so if our principal goal is only to "become lucid," we may achieve that objective without appreciating how the lucid dreamer may still lapse into chronic habit patterns and overlook a greater design that is emerging in the dreamer-dream relationship.

I once asked my mentor what I should do when I became lucid. He said two things: Do something creative, and look for the light. A simple agenda, but one that is easily dismissed in the first moments of lucidity. Lucidity itself does not confer the wisdom of how best to use it. However, because meditation is an activity of putting one's own agenda aside for the sake of a greater good, I believe that it effectively prepares the lucid dreamer to make the best use of those precious moments of heightened awareness and fearlessness. I believe that it "sheathes" the sword; that is, it keeps whatever power is available to the dreamer in abeyance so that the dreamer can be more attentive and open to the requirements of the moment. Now have I said a lot with those words, and I don't mean to slip my paradigm under the door so to speak, but what

I am saying is that a pursuit of lucidity in and of itself can tilt the dream too much in the direction of the dreamer's narrow agenda, and may overlook a more important initiation which is surfacing through the particular imagery of the dream.

Certainly, those dreamers and dream analysts who are steeped in Jung's approach to the psyche consider it essential to respect the particular imagery and situations that arise in the dream, and would urge a respectful if not humble approach to them. To give you the flavor of a Jungian's response to my own regular experiences of lucidity back in my youthful days, Dr. Edith Wallace—a Jungian analyst in the New York area who has since passed on—only said, “I hope you have a circle of fire around you,” as if to say that the forces of the unconscious were more powerful than I was. It was a warning that I never forgot, and it turned out that she was most definitely right. But that is another story that is much too long to tell.

While this conservative attitude may seem put a damper on the lucid dreamer's expression of freedom and control, it nonetheless treats the dream experience as a relationship in process, which depends upon the respective contributions of dreamer and dream to weave the tapestry of the emerging Self. Obviously, lucidity can further that process, or it may disrupt it if the dreamer dismisses the imagery as merely “self created” and thus, by implication, less important than the dreamer's conscious agenda.

So, what I'm saying is that you want to have lucid dreams, go to the shrine in the forest and...well you know what I'm saying. By practicing early morning meditation, you can achieve lucidity, but the practice itself will instill an attitude—if it is not already in place—that will allow you to sheathe the sword of your personal agenda, and to use your expanded powers to partici-

pate more fully in the unfolding dream drama. It will assist you in having a *contextually correct sense* of what to do to facilitate an integrative process that the dream is making possible.

Another lucid dream induction practice that can be used alongside early morning meditation is what I have called Dream Reliving. I have been using and researching this method since the late 70s, and explored its effectiveness in an experimental dissertation at William and Mary in 1983. While I have not taken the time to publish the results of this and other inquiries into this method, let me say that it does work as a therapeutic intervention, as well as a lucid dream induction method. Personally, I have used Dream Reliving upon returning to sleep after my early morning meditation period for many years. It has been a powerful combo.

Dream Reliving is similar in many ways to Krakow's Imagery Rehearsal Therapy, which has been used successfully to reduce the frequency of chronic nightmares associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. With IRT, one changes the ending to a chronic nightmare, and then rehearses the more pleasant imagery associated with the changed ending. Dream Reliving differs from IRT slightly, by placing the emphasis on mustering a lucid response to the dream scenarios, and then observing the changes in imagery that occur in the dream's imagined outcome. Unlike some lucid dream induction techniques that increase dreamer awareness without regard to ideals or intentions, Dream Reliving joins early morning meditation as a method that weds a specific ideal or intention with the goal of becoming lucid. While early morning meditation prepares the dreamer to respect the imagery and the relationship with it, Dream Reliving focuses on altering the dreamer's response to a chronic upsetting dream scenario in preparation for doing it differently in subsequent dreams. So, if early morning meditation brings spiritual

and integrative intention to the relationship with the dream, Dream Reliving supplements it with a corrective or therapeutic response to problematic dream scenarios.

Let's see how this works. I'm the guinea pig here, so be kind in your psychodynamic assessments of me as I bare a bit of my soul.

I have a history of having plane crash dreams during times in my life where I've taken on too much, or I'm under a lot stress, and my ability to keep it all in the air so to speak is seriously in question. Of course, such overcommitment calls for some pruning of obligations, but I also suffer from a fatalistic attitude that can bring it all down when it could have conceivably remained aloft. Also, my wife and I are currently in a dialogue about whether to leave south Texas, which is putting some stress on me since it's where I grew up, teach, guide fly fishers, and have my therapy practice. Keeping all of my work commitments in the air and contemplating a move away from my comfort zone can be a bit overwhelming, but I don't want to dig in my heels and create a problem with my wife, or suppress the opportunities for my further growth and creative expression. See the picture? Sound like real life, right? So I recently decided to use the occasion of giving this particular presentation as a good reason to put these induction strategies into renewed practice, not only to provide some proof of their efficacy, but to find a creative way through my personal dilemmas.

So imagine it's around 4:30 am, and I'm grabbing my robe and blanket and tiptoeing around our three sleeping dogs, and heading down the hallway to my therapy office where I will sit down on the sofa and meditate for a while before going to sleep on the sofa for the next hour or so. Before going to sleep, I imagine that I am in a dream, seeing a plane that may be in trouble approaching the runway. Instead of watching it crash and burn, I imagine myself becoming lucid

and then feeling hope and confidence in its pilot, affirming that it will land safely. Of course, it lands without incident in my pre-sleep fantasy, and then I fall asleep.

During the day, I supplement my early morning regimen with periodic “state checks”—a method pioneered by Tholey—to make sure that I am, indeed, awake. I do all of this for several days, and the dreams begin to reflect the influences of these practices. Within the first week, I have my first of four lucid dreams, and begin to have non-lucid dreams, as well, that reveal a dramatic change in the plane crash theme. Let me share a couple of the dreams to give you the flavor of how these practices recently impacted my dream life.

In the first lucid dream, I am leaving my childhood home in south Texas, riding in the back seat with an unknown Asian woman who seems to be my guide. I suddenly become lucid, and then she leans over and kisses me. I become sexually aroused by her, and I know that she is available in the dream, but since I am married, I feel that I need to restrain that impulse in the dream. (What a good guy, huh?) I awaken feeling aroused and stunned by the intensity of the dream. Around that time, I have another dream—a non-lucid one—in which I am on the runway of an airport. Trucks and vans are clearing the end of the runway of old containers and various debris, and carrying their cargo back to the airport, as if on an important mission.

In the second lucid dream, I am trying to find my way through a nighttime setting to reach a place from which I will be able to get public transportation home. People are everywhere, and I meander through crowds, lost. Suddenly, an unknown younger woman takes my hand and quietly leads me through the crowds of people, and says goodbye. I walk on, and enter a setting like a medieval city with buildings constructed of dark wood, and become lucid. I can see my destination on the horizon, and know that I can get a bus home from there. Several women ap-

proach, and ask me about my books. I sign one of my books for one of the women, and the dream ends.

Meanwhile, at about the same time, I had a non-lucid dream in which I am in a small plane and headed for the ground. I realize that a huge craft is directly over me, and keeping me from pulling out of the dive. I have enough control of the smaller craft to slow down and let the larger craft pass over, allowing me to pull up into the open sky. I fly upward, and then navigate easily around mountains and trees before awakening.

The third lucid dream addressed my question of where I need to go, and what work do I need to do. I am back at my old job in Virginia Beach preparing resume my outwardly spiritual work, and my old vintage electric typewriter is humming on the desk, waiting for me. But there is a problem. There is a new section to the building, and a female spirit is haunting that section. I know I have to pass through the area to get to where I need to go, so I enter the area alone, and walk down a long hallway, hoping to avoid an encounter with the woman. Of course she appears at the end of the hall, wearing ropes or ribbons than drape to the floor. She does not look happy. At first I turn away from her, but then realize that I am dreaming. So I turn back to face her. And then, I become even bolder, and walk up to her. She is obviously surprised. I ask her with a smile, "Who paints your face?" And suddenly the dream is over. I don't know where those words came from, so don't ask me what I meant. It seemed to be a way of showing respect, however.

The fourth lucid dream took place about two weeks into my combined regimen of early morning meditation and Dream Reliving. It is interesting that this dream incorporates the themes of the previous lucid dreams of trying to find my way, as well as the theme of flying. In this one, there is no woman to help me, nor a plane that is in danger of crashing. I have no memory of

what led up to the lucid dream, but I just remember becoming suddenly aware that I am dreaming. Immediately, I jump up and fly through a wall, and come down in a nighttime setting. I begin to look for the light. I see white Christmas lights strung on the trees and shrubs outside a building, so I move toward the tiny lights, and focus on them in hopes that the light will infuse me. But the lights dim as I concentrate on each one, and so I fly upward until I come to rest on the top of a tall building. I sit cross-legged and prepare to meditate, and wonder why I was not able to see the light when I tried. Then the thought comes to me, “The Light is in the eye.” These words from *The Secret of the Golden Flower* make me realize that the precious thing that I seek is already inside of me. Then I awoke, realizing that by believing these words would not only help me “keep the plane aloft” so to speak, but also have faith that wherever I am, my true home is always with me.

While I am happy to know that the “Light is in my eye,” and not going anywhere, those of you who seek to experience the infusion of Light as I do may find that early morning meditation offers you the very best chances of encountering and communing with the holy light, or whatever term you wish to give it. Words do fail us in describing this ecstatic experience, but Gillespie does it beautifully by referring to it so simply as the fullness of light.

I could relate several of light experiences following early morning mediation, but I think it’s more important to emphasize that it’s not so much the quality of the meditation that seems to precipitate such momentous experiences as one’s sheer willingness to show up. During my second 28-day vigil, for instance, I was getting sleepier and sleepier each night. I had companions who were allegedly meditating with me in their respective homes, but after the first 15 days or so, it became increasingly difficult to wake up sufficiently to put in my time at 2 am. So I would

nod off, and gradually slide into a semi-reclining posture, hoping to receive credit somewhere for putting in the effort.

It was only the 17th day or so when I found myself leaning over, half asleep, feeling like a fraud in my fleeting moments of near wakefulness when suddenly I felt his breath. I say “his” because it seemed to be a man, and it seemed to be “the master.” I did wake up rather quickly. After all, feeling someone’s breath on your face in the middle of the night has a way of ruining the best of slumber. I kept my eyes closed, because I didn’t want to lose the connection. His breath became increasingly intense waves of energy, and I just received this blessing as best I could. Then I heard a voice. “What were you in Rome,” he asked? I struggled, but somehow knew the answer. “I was two things,” I said, even though I had no idea what I meant. With that admission of hypocrisy, his breath became the light, and it cascaded through me as if it was his response to my answer, his gift in view of my honesty.

Perhaps all of this is a bit confusing. But I wanted you to have a real life taste of how early morning meditation and Dream Reliving can effectively induce lucidity within the framework of spiritual and therapeutic intentions, and how such discipline can also increase the chances that you will experience the light. It is a simple, natural approach that gives rise to lucidity, almost without trying. Which brings to mind another Eastern story of the disciple who learned to levitate across the river. Excitedly, he went to tell his master about his prodigious achievement. The master replied, “For two pennies, you could have taken the ferry.” It may not seem cheap to get up in the middle of the night to meditate, but in essence, meditation is the simple solution that can ferry you across the river.

I engage in early morning meditation almost every morning. I wake up around 4:00, put on my robe and walk down the hall to my office, all the while fighting my inclination to do the sane thing and go back to my bed and return to sleep. By the time I'm sitting cross-legged on the sofa, I'm feeling pretty happy that I've made it this far, and after about 20 minutes, I head upstairs to my dream bed where I sleep alone for the last two hours of the night. The excitement I feel as I lie down reminds me of when I was 25 and having lucid dreams every night. The arthritis in my hands, and my lower back pain seem insignificant in the big picture of what I am willing to do at this stage in my life to "show up" for the grand tour of the soul's continuing journey.

In summary, I assure you that early morning meditation, paired with Dream Reliving when appropriate, will have a positive influence on your life, as it has mine. If done with diligence and faith, it will easily increase the frequency of lucidity in your dreams, and may also open the door to experiences of light and ecstasy.

The hard part is just getting out of bed and doing it.