

Book review: Dreaming Yourself Awake by B. Alan Wallace

Tadas Stumbrys

Institute of Sports and Sports Sciences, Heidelberg University, Germany

Summary. This book by a Tibetan Buddhist scholar and practitioner aims to integrate two approaches to dream practice: Lucid dreaming and dream yoga. Wallace introduces methods promoting lucidity from both traditions and fosters further dialogue between East and West.

Wallace, B. A. (2012). *Dreaming Yourself Awake – Lucid Dreaming and Tibetan Dream Yoga for Insight and Transformation*. Boston: Shambhala.

Keywords: lucid dreaming; dream yoga

This book aims to bridge East and West: to join the findings of the scientific lucid dream research from the West with the wisdom of the Tibetan dream yoga tradition from the East. And the author, B. Alan Wallace, seems to have all the credentials to do that. The most recent efforts to present the dream yoga tradition to the West were mainly limited to Tibetan teachers (e.g. Norbu, 1992, Wangyal, 1998), who were not well acquainted with modern lucid dream research, or Western researchers (e.g. LaBerge, 2003), who lacked extensive training in the Tibetan Buddhism tradition. Wallace, on one hand, is a long term practitioner of Buddhism and a former Tibetan Buddhist monk. On the other hand, he is a Westerner who has a PhD in religious studies from Stanford, as well as a Bachelor's degree in physics and philosophy of science. For twenty years, he has led workshops on dream yoga and has been collaborating with Stephen LaBerge, one of the pioneers and leading figures in lucid dream research. This gives him a unique position to build the bridge between the East and West traditions and combine their insights into a comprehensive whole. The book is structured in three parts: Part I deals with lucid dreaming; Part II covers dream yoga; and Part III aims to "bring it all together". As this structure is completely natural for the scope of the book, I will adhere to it in the present review as well.

I. Lucid Dreaming

Alan Wallace is first and foremost a practitioner of Buddhism. So, even the lucid dreaming section of the book heavily draws on Buddhist meditative tradition. Shamantha meditation training, whose goal is to stabilize attention, is presented as a core technique to bring lucidity into dreams. Wallace goes into great depth describing shamantha practices. Many beginning meditators will find the material very useful. First, shamantha techniques to cultivate relaxation, stabilize attention and increase vividness are introduced to lay "the groundwork for lucidity". Then, Wallace provides further exercises to improve sleep; to settle the mind in its natural state (namely, mindfulness); and exercises to prac-

tice the awareness of awareness. Although parallels between meditation and lucidity have been suggested before (Gackenbach & Bosveld, 1990; Hunt & Ogilvie, 1989; Hunt, 1989; Stumbrys, 2011), empirical research on whether or not meditation practices are effective in increasing lucid dream ability is lacking (cf. Stumbrys, Erlacher, Schädlich, & Schredl, 2012), but would be very welcomed indeed.

In addition to meditation practices, Wallace also describes a number of "Western" lucid dreaming methods, such as keeping a dream journal; Tholey's critical reflection and reality checks; LaBerge's MILD (Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams); and WILD (Wake-Induced Lucid Dreaming) techniques. Sometimes the descriptions contain inaccuracies. For example, according to the conventional notion of the term, WILD designates techniques whose goal is to enter the dream state directly from wakefulness without losing conscious awareness in between (cf. Stumbrys et al., 2012). Wallace under this notion also includes the WBTB (Wake-Back-To-Bed) method or sleep interruption. WBTB is a method in which a person wakes up in the early morning hours, stays awake for some time, and returns to bed for a nap expecting to have a lucid dream. While one could say that in such a way lucidity would be wake-induced, yet when returning to bed a person can use both WILD and DILD (Dream-Induced Lucid Dreaming - initiation of lucidity from within the dream) techniques to achieve lucidity. Further, it is mentioned a few times in the book that scientific lucid dream research was started in the late 1980s, while actually it happened a decade earlier (cf. Hearne, 1978; LaBerge, 1980).

Apart from an extensive description of various techniques for lucid dreaming, the first part of the book lacks a more thorough review of the theory of lucid dreaming, even though it has a chapter with such a title. While Wallace is by no means a lucid dream researcher himself, he is still a Western scholar, and the book would greatly benefit from incorporating the findings of the Western lucid dream science and enriching them with insights from the Eastern dream yoga perspective (just about the opposite what LaBerge did in a Wallace's edited book a decade ago; LaBerge, 2003).

II. Dream Yoga

The dream yoga section of the book provides a "Western-adapted" introduction into the topic. In his lively writing style, Wallace lucidly presents the essence of the Buddhist worldview, including a Buddhist model of the psyche. He discusses extensively the illusory nature of reality, drawing

Corresponding address:

Tadas Stumbrys, Heidelberg University, Institute of Sports and Sports Sciences, Im Neuenheimer Feld 700, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany

Email: tadas.stumbrys@issw.uni-heidelberg.de

on the teachings of Padmasambhava, the eight-century Indian master who introduced Buddhism in Tibet.

The dream yoga practices are divided into daytime practices, based on comprehension of the illusory nature of reality (i.e. all our waking reality is merely a dream); and nighttime practices which include motivation, a specific sleeping posture (sleeping-lion), and visualisation exercises. Yet, in comparison to the extremely detailed descriptions of shamantha meditation practices in the first section of the book, the dream yoga practices are described rather sparsely. Readers who are interested in more detailed descriptions of the Tibetan dream yoga techniques are advised to consult other sources (e.g. Wangyal, 1998). Although Wallace briefly mentions lucidity in a dreamless sleep, he does not make a clear distinction between dream yoga and sleep yoga (or yoga of clear light, cf. Norbu, 1992) which are considered as two parallel paths in the Tibetan tradition (cf. Wangyal, 1998). This distinction in Western terms might be compared to the development of REM vs. NREM lucidity (cf. Stumbrys & Erlacher, 2012). In my opinion, this section of the book is missing a clearer conceptualization of the progressive stages on the dream yoga path, namely: (1) holding the dream; (2) mastering the dream; (3) realizing the illusion; and (4) meditating on thatness (Tarab Tulku, 1988, 2000). While Wallace talks about these different aspects of dream yoga practice, he does not provide a clear framework for an aspiring reader to follow.

III. Bringing It All Together

The goal of the third and final part of the book is “to bring it all together”, i.e. to fit lucid dreaming and dream yoga into a comprehensive picture. However, it is mainly limited to illustrating lucid dream applications such as fun, psychological and physical healing, training and creativity, as in other popular books on lucid dreaming (e.g. Gackenbach & Bosveld, 1990; LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990; Waggoner, 2009); providing a brief question and answer section; and expressing criticism of both scientific materialism and contemporary Buddhism. Although some of his criticism is indeed valid and sometimes overlooked, this third section of the book lacks a more comprehensive synthesis of East and West.

Our Western tradition of lucid dream research is rather young, going back only three decades to the ground breaking discoveries of Stephen La Berge (1980) and Keith Hearne (1978) or, at best, a century/a century and a half to pioneer lucid dreamers Frederick van Eeden (1913) and Harvey de Saint-Denys (1982/1867). Yet in the East, lucid dreaming and techniques bringing conscious awareness into dreams have been known for hundreds of years. Indeed, Tibetan yogis and yoginis have been practicing dream yoga since the 8th century AD. There is no doubt that we can learn a lot from their knowledge, especially considering the fact that Buddhism perhaps is the most empirical and scientific religion among others. Yet we need to acknowledge that Tibetan dream yoga techniques are strongly rooted in Eastern culture and in both Buddhist and shamanistic Bön worldviews. All Tibetan practices were orally transmitted from a master to a disciple. These techniques were not for beginners, but for advanced adepts. Thus, such dream practices can not just be placed in a “guidebook for dummies” with hopes of achieving significant results.

Wallace sees lucid dreaming “as a laboratory for exploring the mind” (p. 33) and I completely share his view. While both Buddhism and Western psychology have different points

of departure and a different collection of tools for exploration, the area they are digging into is the same. Thus I really welcome B. Allan Wallace in his effort to join these two explorations of consciousness within the dream state and the present book provides a nice introduction into both topics. However if the reader wants to build a more comprehensive understanding of both lucid dreaming and dream yoga and their practices, he or she may pursue further literature on both topics (e.g., for lucid dreaming: LaBerge, 1985; LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990; Waggoner, 2009; for dream yoga: Wangyal, 1998). Otherwise I found this book interesting and I hope it will foster further dialogue between the Eastern and Western traditions.

References

- De Saint-Denys, H. (1982). *Dreams and How to Guide Them*. (M. Schatzman, Ed.). London: Duckworth. (Original work published 1867).
- Gackenbach, J., & Bosveld, J. (1990). *Control Your Dreams*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Hearne, K. M. T. (1978). *Lucid Dreams: An Electro-Physiological and Psychological Study*. University of Liverpool.
- Hunt, H. T. (1989). *The Multiplicity of Dreams: Memory, Imagination, and Consciousness*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hunt, H. T., & Ogilvie, R. D. (1989). Lucid dreams in their natural series: Phenomenological and psychological findings in relation to meditative states. In *Conscious Mind, Sleeping Brain: Perspectives on Lucid Dreaming* (pp. 389–417). New York: Plenum Press.
- LaBerge, S. (2003). Lucid Dreaming and the Yoga of the Dream State: A Psychophysiological Perspective. In B. A. Wallace (Ed.), *Buddhism & Science: Breaking New Ground* (pp. 233–258). New York: Columbia University Press.
- LaBerge, S. (1985). *Lucid dreaming. The power of being awake and aware in your dreams*. Los Angeles: Tarcher.
- LaBerge, S. P. (1980). *Lucid dreaming: An exploratory study of consciousness during sleep*. Stanford University.
- LaBerge, S., & Rheingold, H. (1990). *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming* (p. 277). New York: Ballantine Books.
- Norbu, N. (1992). *Dream Yoga and the Practice of Natural Light*. (M. Katz, Ed.). Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications.
- Stumbrys, T. (2011). Lucid dreaming: discontinuity or continuity in consciousness? *International Journal of Dream Research*, 4(2), 93–97.
- Stumbrys, T., & Erlacher, D. (2012). Lucid dreaming during NREM sleep: Two case reports. *International Journal of Dream Research*, 5(2), 151–155.
- Stumbrys, T., Erlacher, D., Schädlich, M., & Schredl, M. (2012). Induction of lucid dreams: A systematic review of evidence. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 21(3), 1456–1475. doi:10.1016/j.concog.2012.07.003
- Tarab Tulku. (1988). A Buddhist Perspective on Lucid Dreaming. *Lucidity Letter*, 8(2).
- Tarab Tulku. (2000). Lucid dreaming: Exerting the creativity of the unconscious. In G. Watson, S. Batchelor, & G. Claxton (Eds.), *The Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, Science and Our Day-to-Day Life* (pp. 271–283). Boston: Weiser Books.
- Waggoner, R. (2009). *Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self*. Needham, MA: Moment Point Press.
- Wangyal, T. (1998). *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*. New York: Snow Lion Publications.
- Van Eeden, F. (1913). A study of dreams. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 26, 431–461.