

Observations of a long term dream journalist

Christoph Gassmann

Horgen, Switzerland

Summary. The author describes his attempts to remember dreams and to dream lucidly over a time span of 32 years. He evaluates his success in those efforts and explains what motivated his interest in dreams, which is central in these endeavors. Also, experiments with nutritional supplements are described.

Keywords: Remembering Dreams, dream series, lucid dreaming

1. Remembering dreams

Due to a very impressive dream in 1971 or 72 my interest in dreams was kindled. In 1973 I began a psychoanalysis which lasted till 1978. Unfortunately, the countless dream reports from that time are lost. In April 1982 I again began a dream journal, this time on my own. I filled 6 empty books till February 1993 when I began to journal on my computer using the Alchera Software (<http://mythwell.com>).

In the beginning I slept deeply and had a very poor dream recall. One of my first interests was to raise my dream retention. I used autosuggestion before sleep and I needed several nights till I was able to remember the first dream. When I was diligent with my autosuggestion the dream came quite easily to my waking consciousness in the morning but, when I became lazy, the dream flow slowly subsided after some days.

In 1983, my determined focus to my inner world (I also began to do Autogenic Training regularly, a form of meditation) led me to a Sufi Group in London which emphasized the remembering of dreams. In 1984 I returned to Switzerland and I continued my dream journaling with a somewhat lower frequency. Because I focused on my professional career as a psychologist and later on the relationship with my girlfriend whom I married in 1991, the dream recall frequency dropped considerably. In 1995 I began to transfer my old dreams to the electronic journal, which kindled my interest in dreams again. In 1998 I decided that I could use my dream journal to write a book about dream work (Gassmann, 2000), which was published in 2000. This, in turn, led me to the International Association for the Study of Dreams (<http://www.asdreams.org>) and I established various online contacts with other dreamers. Before, I was alone with my interest in dreams, despite being a psychologist. The years of domi-

nance of depth psychology were definitively over. Beginning in 2001 I attended a dream group in Zürich for two years. All this contributed to a considerably higher level of dream recall. In 2011 my interest in dreams began to drop again because I realized that I could go no further in becoming more conscious in my dreams. Because of my journals I also detected recurring dream themes which varied in the details, but were nevertheless somewhat boring due to the repeating themes. I decided then to journal only those dreams which were somewhat unique and therefore special.

Today my access to dreams is easier. I established a routine to interrupt my sleep between 1 and 4 am and meditate for 20 minutes. I usually wake up in the night and in the morning with a remembered dream, whether I journal them or not (in the beginning the journal was essential for remembering dreams at all). Maybe I should mention that I douse the light at about 10 pm and wake up in the morning at about 7 am. I never use an alarm clock because it is a loud "dream destroyer". It pulls attention away from the dreams and the mode of consciousness is changed abruptly. Sometimes I do not remember dreams, but if I wish to, I remember them easily and without delay for several days. So I can say that I was able to improve my skill in remembering dreams over all those years.

I also use a vitamin B complex supplement regularly in the evening that, in addition, contains 80mg of Cholinbitartrat. I experimented with various supplements, including Vitamin B 1 + B6 and B complex without Cholinbitartrat, which did not satisfy me. I do not know if it is due to a placebo effect or if it has an additional effect. But with this formula I found that the dreams upon waking were somewhat clearer and easier to remember. I did not detect any tolerance by using it regularly.

4mg Galantamine and 3mg Melatonin provided me with some prolonged and vivid dreams, but there the tolerance was obvious. Already on the second day the effect was nearly nil and I suspect that my body found a way to counterbalance Galantamine quickly, even if I waited for a month or even years between the experiments, as if it would remember. So I had the most impressive effects with Galantamine with the very first experiments. Today I no longer use that combination.

Corresponding address:
Christoph Gassmann, Dipl. Psychologe FH, Einsiedlerstrasse
326, 8810 Horgen
Email: cgassmann@sunrise.ch

Submitted for publication: August 2015
Accepted for publication: October 2015

Dreams

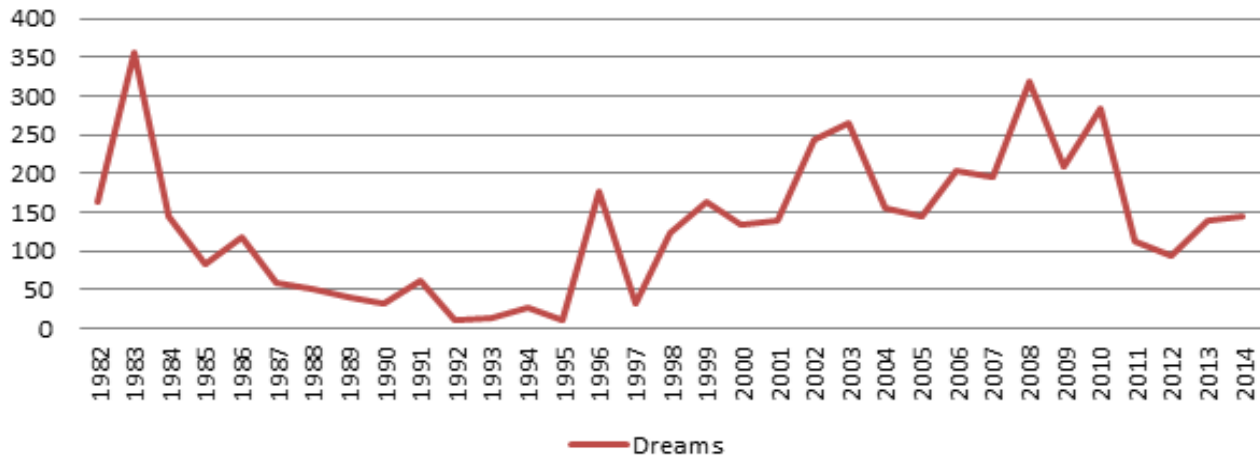


Figure 1. Remembered and journaled dreams from 1982 – 2014: $\Sigma 4453$; mean: 135/year

2. Lucid Dreams

As already mentioned, in 1972 I had a very impressive dream as an adolescent. It was more than a dream; one could maybe say it was a vision. I was in an enhanced and clear mental state and the colours were very bright. Waking up from this experience was not really a waking up, because I was already awake in the vision. It was simply a change of focus from the inner world to the outer world, and in this transition I could feel vibrations all over my body, especially in the heart. I also heard a corresponding humming. This extraordinary state as well as the content of the dream forced me to conclude that within me is an incredible but unknown source of strength. My interest for dreams was greatly enhanced and lasts till now. But at that time I was unaware of the concept of lucid dreaming. Many years later I succeeded a few times in inducing such exuberant states of dream consciousness.

At the end of my first year of journaling my dreams I met a Sufi Sheikh in London. Following that, in 1982/83, I had a series of three spontaneous visions with the same quality of consciousness as described above. Now I was familiar with the concept of lucid dreaming and in that state it was easy to realize that I was in some kind of dream, although it was very real. At that time I read many books about lucid dreaming and I found a way to induce an out of body experience with very strong vibrations in my body after waking from a normal dream. All lucid dreams in the following years were spontaneous, most of them in a lower degree than described above: I was simply aware that I was dreaming, sometimes I was able to use this knowledge to act consciously and freely. I cannot explain the peaks in 1987 and 1996. Maybe I had had some lucid dreaming training already then.

As I mentioned, writing my book in 1998 was a trigger to remember more dreams and I thus also remembered more spontaneous lucid dreams. But then I began systematic lucid dreaming trainings, first several times in online classes and later alone. Usually I trained for one or two months by keeping an additional training journal, by reality testing during the day, by using autosuggestions before sleep, by interrupting my sleep between 1 and 4 am, and by doing MILD

according to LaBerge and Rheingold (1992). With this training I was able to raise my lucid dreaming frequency more or less. But usually, after some weeks, I came into a state which is known among lucid dreamers as a dry spell: I could train as diligently and as long as possible but I no longer had any lucid dreams. Once I continued for one year and could not overcome the dry spell, which was quite frustrating. I would like to mention here that lucidity trainings can be quite draining, especially if there is no success at all over a longer period of time. So the best method for me is to do a training for a limited period and then to stop it. Sometimes I had lucid dreams after I stopped the training because of a dry spell.

The zigzag curve between 2001 and 2014 can be explained by those occasional trainings. It also shows that I could not raise my lucid dreaming skill definitively. If I stopped the training, and I was forced to stop it by dry spells, the rate of lucid dreams dropped considerably. This year I trained for two months with no results. Last year, I did two trainings, one with, the other without results. I have somewhat the impression that with my age of 61, it is not easier to have lucid dreams.

Now I would like to come back to Galantamine. I also experimented with it in order to have more lucid dreams and I had mixed results. I used 4mg Galantamine with 200mg Cholinbitartrat. The dose of 8mg Galantamine recommended by Yushak (2006) was too much for me. I could not sleep any more for 6 or 8 hours. With the moderate dose I had a few lucid dreams; one was very impressive and stable. But many more times I had no lucid dream, I did not even remember a dream. A two month training for example with two Galantamine nights ended with three lucid dreams in the non Galantamine nights. When I took it shortly before I went to sleep, there was nearly no, or even a negative effect because I did not remember a dream at all. When I waited for one hour till the Galantamine effect could be felt in the brain, I could not fall asleep anymore for several hours and afterwards I slept deeply without remembering a dream. In the mornings afterwards I usually had headaches. So like with the trainings I could not produce a stable positive effect with Galantamine or reproduce a positive effect a second

Lucid Dreams

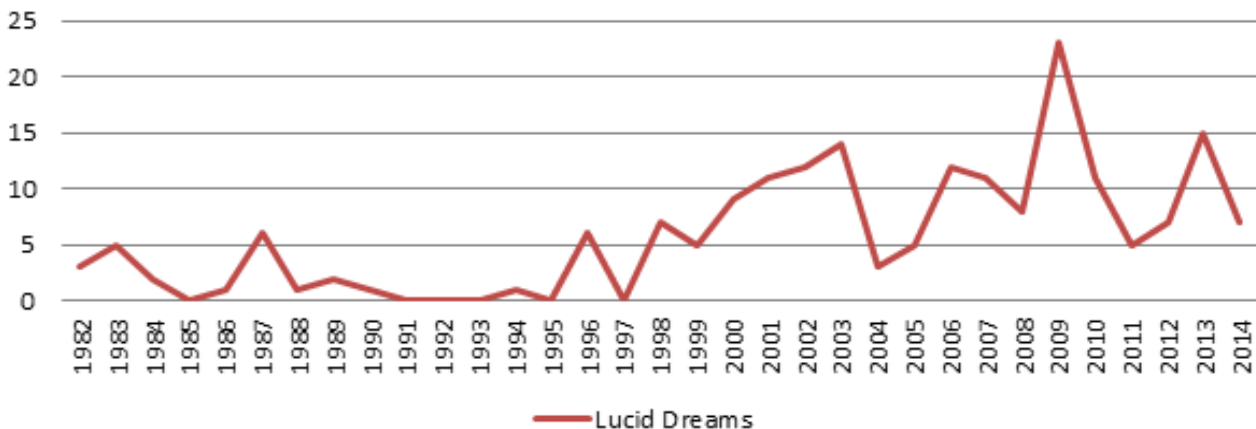


Figure 2. Lucid dreams between 1982 and 2014; Σ 193 = 4.3% of all dreams; mean 6/year

time. And it seems that I had the best effects in the very beginning of the experiments with this supplement. Today I no longer use it.

3. Conclusion

In summary, I was able to raise my skills in remembering dreams over those 32 years and I could raise temporarily my lucid dreaming level. I did not succeed in becoming generally a better lucid dreamer although I have some experience in that field. The known lucid dreaming techniques and supplements did not help consistently in becoming conscious in my dreams.

My interests in remembering dreams and having lucid dreams were kindled by impressive dreams, by reading relevant literature, by attending spiritual groups and dream groups, and by writing a book and articles about dreaming. A strong focus on the demands of the external life like professional career and family reduced the interest for dreams and the access to my inner world.

The internet is a very good tool for connecting dreamers. I was not able to find anyone among my professional colleagues, friends and relatives who were interested in dreams. Exchange, though, is important in that field to support and maintain interest in dreaming.

References

Gassmann, C. (2000). *Träume erinnern*, Walter Verlag, Zürich.
 LaBerge, S., & Rheingold, H. (1992). *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*, Ballantine Books, New York.
 Yuschak, T. (2006). *Advanced Lucid Dreaming*, LULU.