

The difference of modern lucid dreamers

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Summary. The article examines the phenomenon of lucid dreaming within a broader framework of other states of higher awareness, popularized mostly (but not only) within Hindu-Buddhist tradition. The author assumes that lucid dreaming may have more in common with Gurdjieff's remembering oneself and mindfulness than with the normal waking state. Based on the survey of modern western lucid dreamers and previous researchers done in this field the author comes to the conclusion that we can talk about an autonomous face of a modern lucid dreamer who is not much connected with Hindu and Buddhist concepts. Lucid dreaming, as practiced by modern lucid dreamers in the West, does not seem to have a goal of transcending one's ego and achieving non-dual awareness, but it does have that general goal for some practitioners of Hindu and Buddhist philosophies. Many modern secular lucid dreamers in the West and other regions of the globalized world which have close cultural ties with the West do not practice any Hindu or Buddhist practices of witnessing and non-attachment in lucid dreams, and often see lucid dreaming as a fun activity for personal enjoyment and creativity.

Keywords: lucid dreaming, awareness, mindfulness, Dzogchen, dream yoga, Buddhism, Gurdjieff

1. Introduction

The article will examine the phenomenon of lucid dreaming within a broader framework of other states of higher awareness, popularized mostly within Hindu-Buddhist tradition. Some of these states, such as lucid dreaming, are now widely discussed in the scientific world and others are mostly referred to by meditation practitioners and spiritual teachers. Experiencing altered states of mind has been inspiring for mankind throughout time. Myths, mystical explanations, and exaggerations of their significance and even declarations about their achievement being the ultimate purpose of human evolution (e.g. moksha, nirvana, self-remembering, et c.) have been built around these altered states.

The phenomenon of lucid dreaming can surely be referred to as a state of higher awareness, which I will explain later in this article. It has been given great attention by the scientific community, new age practitioners, and common lucid dreamers during the last decades.

The term 'lucid dream', which refers to the dream in which the dreamer is aware of the fact that he or she is dreaming was introduced by a Dutch psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden in his 1913 article 'A Study of Dreams' (Eeden, 1913). The phenomenon was known already by Aristotle in the 4th century BC and mentioned by St. Augustine, and later by

an English physician Sir Thomas Browne, (Browne, 1613), English M.P. Samuel Pepys (Pepys, 1665) and many others. In Hindu tradition practical ways to achieve a similar state (but not identical) were elaborated by yoga nidra practitioners. In Tibetan Buddhism, dream yoga has the goal to attain awareness in a dream state, and has been practiced for centuries. Practices for developing the ability of lucid dreaming can be found not only in oriental cultures. One of the prominent examples is Carlos Castaneda's book 'The Art of Dreaming' (Castaneda, 1993) which popularizes the approaches to the lucid dreaming specific to the Toltec culture.

Lucid dreaming techniques, once being a practice in deeply esoteric doctrines, are now widely practiced by people who have limited interest in religion or spiritual issues. They may be developing lucid dreaming skills just out of sheer desire to have some fun (Schädlich & Erlacher, 2012). Many are motivated by the possibility to have lucid dream sex (Stumbrys et al, 2014), which would be very difficult to imagine if the practice of lucid dreaming remained accessible only to religious practitioners. Robert L. Rider supports this view by claiming that the growing interest in lucid dreaming may be caused by the fact lucid dreamers can utilize their own private, sensory-realistic environment that is not subject to societal or physical limitations (Rider, 2012).

Thomas J. Snyder in his research 'Individual Differences Associated with Lucid Dreaming' (Snyder & Gackenbach, 1988) concluded that 57.5 % of the population has experienced a lucid dream at least once in their life. The proportion depends little on race, education, average income, sex, religion or political views; although fewer older people report they have lucid dreams (Hurd & Bulkeley, 2014). So lucid dreaming has really become a widespread phenomenon.

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2. Method

In my research, I asked five questions to people with lucid dreaming experience. One hundred people from Russia, US, UK, Denmark, Ukraine, Estonia and Belarus were surveyed. The gender break down includes 56 females and 44 males. Their ages varied from 16 to 42. The respondents were asked questions through social networks – Facebook and a Russian popular network VKontakte from January 20, 2016 till February 25, 2016. Only people who answered positively in the groups devoted to lucid dreaming that they had a lucid dreaming experience were asked to answer the questions. The following questions were asked:

- Do you experience even greater degree of awareness and think clearer in your lucid dreams than in a normal waking state?
- What views are closer to you - Western values of individualism and diversity or Hindu and Buddhist idea of the absence and insignificance of individual ego?
- Do you enjoy video games and/or cinema?
- Do you enjoy lucid dreaming mostly because you may have some fun or because of the possibility of spiritual growth?
- Do you find the idea of just witnessing without judgment in a lucid dream absurd?

The questions were supposed to support or refute the following theses:

- Modern lucid dreamers may often experience greater degree of awareness in lucid dreams as they have more in common with mindfulness, self-remembering and other states of higher awareness than with the normal waking state.
- Modern lucid dreamers prioritize Western concepts of individualism and diversity more over Hindu-Buddhist idea of the insignificance of individual ego.
- Modern lucid dreamers enjoy modern visual art.
- Modern lucid dreamers do not practice lucid dreaming only for spiritual purpose, but also entertain themselves through lucid dreaming.
- The idea of witnessing without judgment may be difficult to understand for modern lucid dreamers.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Experiencing waking state in a dream or something more?

Some researchers of the phenomenon of lucid dreaming tend to compare the lucid dreaming state to a waking state that combines cognitive elements of waking consciousness with the hallucinatory quality of dreaming (Voss et al, 2009), representing a unique blend of waking and dreaming consciousness (Hearne, 1978; LaBerge, 1980). However many of them do mention the fact that the quality of perception during a lucid dream may actually be higher than in the regular waking state (Gackenbach & LaBerge, 1988). The descriptions of the lucid dreaming experience often outline a greater degree of awareness in a lucid dream than in the normal waking state: “Never had I experienced such clarity and perception” (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990, pp. 1-2), “Never had I felt so absolutely well, so clear-brained, so in-

expressibly ‘free’” (Fox, 1962, pp. 32–33).

In my questionnaire, I asked “Do you experience even greater degree of awareness and think clearer in your lucid dreams than in the normal waking state?”

The responses varied: 23 % answered – “Yes, always”, 54 % answered – “sometimes” while only 20 % answered – “I’m usually more aware in my waking state”. Lastly, 3 % couldn’t give an answer. So, a vast majority (77 %) experienced greater awareness in a lucid dream than in the normal waking state. Does lucid dreaming combine the dreaming state with the normal waking state? Or does it have characteristics of some other state of higher awareness that one may enjoy in the normal waking state? Actually Hunt suggested that lucid dreaming can be considered as a spontaneous meditative state one is trying to attain through meditation (Hunt, 1989). Robert Waggoner in his book ‘Lucid Dreaming: A Gateway to the Inner Self’ agrees that the awareness needed for meditation seems analogous to what lucid dreamers seek to develop (Waggoner, 2009). Gackenbach suggests that the lucid dream state is one of preliminary indicators of the development of higher states of consciousness (Gackenbach, 2006).

Moreover, the lucid dreaming experience cannot be narrowed just to higher awareness and one’s recognition of himself in the dream state. Many lucid dreamers report feeling a natural desire to fly in this state and dream euphoria, which is obviously unnatural for the normal waking state.

There are numerous examples in philosophical teachings, when the waking state is rather compared with the sleeping state and is characterized by the lack of awareness and thus opposed to higher states of awareness. One of the prominent example is Georgy Gurdjieff’s and his followers’ description of the usual state of people in their waking life as a ‘waking sleep’. The essence of his teaching can be described as becoming ‘lucid’ in the waking state, which he calls ‘remembering oneself’ (Gurdjieff, 1981). His follower, Petr Ouspensky, quoted his words – “a modern man lives in sleep, in sleep he is born and in sleep he dies” (Ouspensky, 1977, pg.66). He writes that “our science and philosophy have overlooked the fact that we do not possess this state (self-remembering or self-consciousness) of consciousness” (Ouspensky, 1977, pp.141-142).

Gurdjieff describes self-remembering in the following way: “There are moments when you become aware not only of what you are doing but also of yourself doing it. You see both ‘I’ and the ‘here’ of ‘I am here’- both the anger and the ‘I’ that is angry. Call this self-remembering if you like.” (Gurdjieff, 1922. pg.79-80)

Ouspensky, the student of Gurdjieff claims that moments of consciousness are very short and are separated by long intervals of completely unconscious, mechanical working of the machine. You will then see that you can think, feel, act, speak, work, without being conscious of it. (Ouspensky, 1977, pg. 116-117) and quotes his teacher, Gurdjieff – “Your principal mistake consists in thinking that you always have consciousness, and in general, either that consciousness is always present or that it is never present. In reality consciousness is a property which is continually changing. Now it is present, now it is not present. And there are different degrees and different levels of consciousness” (Ouspensky, 1977, pg. 117).

Doesn’t this description seem similar to the one from a recent paper by Tadas Stumbrys et al? They suggest that during wakefulness, people are often not explicitly and fully

aware of the present state of awareness; in particular during mind-wandering, affective emotional states or automatic behaviors people lack explicit recognition of their present experience and suggest that dreaming may even be considered as an intensified form of mind-wandering. (Stumbrys et al., 2015, pg.416).

Like Gurdjieff Jon Kabat-Zinn too compares the normal waking state with a dream (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). However, the concepts of being non-judgmental and acceptance differs mindfulness from remembering oneself. According to him, "Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 2016).

Lucid dreaming as practiced by modern lucid dreamers and remembering oneself do not presuppose any absence of "I", which makes them very distinct from the states of higher awareness described within the Hindu-Buddhist tradition. So lucid dreaming may seem closer to this concept as it does not automatically presuppose acceptance and any transpersonal experience. On the other hand, the concept of self-remembering does not include any euphoria, feeling of happiness, etc., that are often characteristic of lucid dreaming. In this way, lucid dreaming is closer to mindfulness and meditation experience peculiar for the Hindu-Buddhist tradition.

In 2012, Robert L. Rider wrote a thesis 'Exploring the relationship between mindfulness in waking and lucidity in dreams'. He bases his research on the continuity theory of dreaming which presupposes that waking and dreaming rely on a shared set of brain-mind processes. He came to the conclusion of significant relationships between waking mindfulness and lucid dreaming. He hypothesizes that high levels of attention, reflection, self-awareness, volition, and control related to lucidity are continuous with waking mindfulness and found that better performances on two neuropsychological measures (sustained attention and behavioral self-monitoring) were moderately correlated with dream mindfulness (Rider, 2012).

According to the research conducted by Stumbrys, T, et al lucid dream frequency is more strongly associated with mindful presence rather than acceptance (Stumbrys, 2015), which supports the idea that transcending one's ego and achieving non-dual awareness are not necessary elements of lucid dreaming practice.

In 2010, a group of researchers from Finland, Switzerland and Germany in their research 'A new perspectives for the study of lucid dreaming: from brain stimulation to philosophical theories of self-consciousness' (Noreika, et al, 2010) suggested that the failure of nonlucid dreamers to realize that they are currently dreaming is closely related to the fact that the first-person perspective is highly unstable in nonlucid dreams, so they lack "stable first-person perspective that would allow them to cognitively grasp their relation to the dream world and thus become lucid" (Noreika, et al, 2010, pg.42).

Describing one's awareness in a lucid dream Stephen LaBerge and Howard Rheingold also point out "your world always includes you" (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990, p.8). "You are not what you see, hear, think, or feel; you have these experiences. You are always at the center of your multidimensional universe of experience..." (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990, p.8).

The practice described by Carlos Castaneda of finding one's hands in a dream can surely be interpreted as a way

of better feeling of one's ego (Castaneda, 1993).

For modern lucid dreamers obtaining greater awareness in a dream state normally does not go with the idea of transcending one's ego. Just the opposite, I-presence plays a crucial role for experiencing a lucid dream.

3.2. The importance of "I" for western lucid dreamers

There is a significant difference between what modern, mostly western lucid dreamers aspire to and the ideas found in Hindu-Buddhist tradition, more precisely - to transcend one's ego or I-presence in a lucid dream. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche in his book 'The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep' tells that the goal of the dream yoga practice is to achieve 'clear light dreams' which are "not defined by the content of the dream, but is a clear light dream because there is no subjective dreamer or dream ego, nor self in a dualistic relationship with the dream or the dream content" (Wangyal, 1998, pg.52).

Hindu-Buddhist tradition is well-known for showing the same negative attitude to one's ego not only in the dream yoga practice.

For example, Krishnamurti, describing his 'enlightened' experience writes: "I touched this body - nothing - I didn't feel there was anything there except the touch, you see, the point of contact" (Arms, 1982. pg. 24). Another prominent teacher of Hindu tradition, Osho writes "The ego cannot be sacrificed because the ego exists not. The ego is just all idea: it has no substance in it. It is not something - it is just pure nothing". (Osho, 1980, pg.168) and 'the moment you know yourself, no ego is found' (Osho, 1980, pg. 168).

My second question to Western lucid dreamer was, "What views are closer to you - Western values of individualism and diversity or Hindu and Buddhist idea of the absence and insignificance of individual ego?" A very large proportion - 42% could not give an answer. Such great number of those who could not answer shows they have never asked that question to themselves, and it is not widely discussed. Many modern lucid dreamers have no definite attitude to this question. Thirty percent answered "Western values of individualism and diversity", and about the same amount - 28 % answered - "Hindu and Buddhist idea of the absence and insignificance of individual ego." Given the fact that the idea of 'transcending one's ego' is widely popularizes by new-age movements and spiritual teachers of different sorts, the conscious choice for the western idea of individualism is quite high, and at least is not lower than the idea of the absence of individual "I."

My other question was "Do you enjoy video games and/or cinema?" 26% answered - "Yes, a lot," 56 % answered - "Play or watch good films from time to time," and only 17 % answered - "No." One percent could not answer.

Links between computer games and lucid dreams have been demonstrated in numerous studies by Gackenbach and her colleagues (Gackenbach, 2006; Gackenbach, 2009). She found that frequent video game players report experiencing more lucid dreams than infrequent ones.

Although computer games and movies are of course two quite different things to be considered together. My question was not aimed however at finding out the interdependence between the proportion of lucid dreamers among video game players. I tried to find out how appealing modern lucid dreamers find modern visual culture, their eagerness

to absorb it, the interest for experiencing emotions from 'the art of illusion' in contrast to Hindu-Buddhist concept of non-attachment and negative attitude to strong emotions. In this context, I consider quite appropriate asking about lucid dreamers about their attitude to visual arts.

3.3. Source of spiritual growth or fun?

Another very important aspect which makes Western idea of lucid dreaming different from the dream yoga practice is what they are actually lucid dreaming about.

Robert Waggoner in his book 'Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self' writes about his experience of a lucid dream - "I'd experience a rush of exhilaration, joy, and energy. As I took in the dream surroundings, my feelings of joy rose..." (Waggoner, 2009, pg. 9). In the book 'Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming' by Stephen LaBerge and Howard Rheingold the following description of lucid dreaming experience are given "There are no words to describe the JOY I felt," "The dream, the joy I experienced, was kind of a reward, or so I felt," "The euphoria lasted several days; the memory, forever" (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990, pg.4). The case of the lucid dream euphoria is frequent for Western lucid dreamers. Western lucid dreamers surely value the idea of getting some fun out of the dream state, enjoy it, experiment, use as a source of inspiration for art, et c. Mikhail Raduga, an author of several books on lucid dreaming in Russian underlines that for many young people lucid dreaming is a kind of very high quality virtual reality where they can have fun and make all their desires come true (Raduga, 2015).

The approach in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition is quite different. Namkhai Norbu, a prominent Dzogchen teacher, even points out "there is also the danger that by becoming skilled at transformation of the dream images one may become attached. The attachment must be overcome" (Norbu, 1992, pg.30). A contemporary Western lucid dreamer would probably find his advice just the opposite from what he or she expects from a lucid dream - "First, during the day, do not dwell upon the dreams you have had. Second, while actually dreaming, watch without judging, without pleasure or fear, regardless of whether the visions seem positive or negative and thus might provoke joy or unhappiness—that is, attachment. Third, while dreaming and then afterwards, do not "clarify" what is "subject" from what is "object"—that is, do not consider which of the images that appear are real" (Norbu, 1992, pg.30).

To my question "Do you enjoy lucid dreaming mostly because you may have some fun or because of the possibility of spiritual growth?" Twenty percent answered - "to have fun", only 12 % - for spiritual growth, 65 % answered "both" and 3 % could not give the answer. That shows that the majority of modern lucid dreamers while having an aim of spiritual growth also highly appreciate the idea of entertainment. It is worthwhile mentioning however that one of the first stages in Tibetan dream yoga is developing flexibility of the mind, which involves many of the things that we could call as having fun (Wangyal, 1998, pp. 119-126). Western lucid dreamers also most often start with having fun and gradually move to deeper realizations (Waggoner, 2009, p. 101-106).

The last question concerning their attitude to the aim of the dream yoga was - "Do you find the idea of just witnessing without judgment in a lucid dream absurd?" Quite a high percentage could not answer - 40 %, just like with question 2, concerning western ideas of individualism and oriental

concept of transcending one's ego. 46 % answered "Yes, why lucid dream then?" and only 14 % answered "That's what we should aspire to."

- The research generally supported the following thesis: Modern lucid dreamers may often experience greater degree of awareness in lucid dreams as they have more in common with mindfulness, self-remembering and other states of higher awareness than with the normal waking state.
- The research did not show however that modern lucid dreamers prioritize Western concepts of individualism and diversity more over Hindu-Buddhist idea of the insignificance of individual ego. It rather showed they are quite ambiguous about these ideas.
- Many modern lucid dreamers enjoy modern visual art. This may let us suggest they enjoy experiencing emotions in virtual reality and enjoy the plot of a film or a game.
- Modern lucid dreamers do not practice lucid dreaming only for spiritual purpose, but also entertain themselves through lucid dreaming.
- The idea of witnessing without judgment may seem strange for modern lucid dreamers. Many lucid dreamers find it difficult to answer whether they find the idea positive or negative.

So, we can talk about an autonomous face of a modern lucid dreamer who is not much connected with Hindu and Buddhist ideas. For him, obtaining greater awareness in a lucid dream does not mean transcending one's ego. Awareness and I-presence are two separate dimensions. They may or may not go together. Transcending one's separateness from the outer world is an ideological and culturally predetermined choice within Hindu-Buddhist tradition.

A person's cognitive perspective will normally determine their initial approach to the phenomenon of lucid dreaming. A scientist will take a scientific approach and investigate issues of scientific interest. A shaman will take a shamanic approach, and use lucid dreaming to seek personal power, harm enemies, transform into animals, etc. A Tibetan Buddhist in the Dzogchen tradition will use lucid dreaming as a means to see through the illusion of form, and discover inherent emptiness. And a person who practices lucid dreaming without any particular cognitive or spiritual perspective will normally use lucid dreaming as a means to have fun, avoid pain and nightmares, etc.

However it may be the case that as a Western lucid dreamer has more and more lucid dreams, then their viewpoint and understanding of lucid dreaming will change (the point being that lucid dreaming has been practiced in the East for thousands of years, and therefore they may have a viewpoint based on long experience). As a modern day example, Robert Waggoner (Waggoner, 2009) describes that after twenty years of lucid dreaming, he sought to let go of beliefs, expectations and other attachments to see if there was a source reality behind lucid dreaming. Basically, he realized that he had to let go of ego identification. On the other hand, one may also suppose that as a Western lucid dreamer has more lucid dreams, he becomes interested in oriental teachings, becomes influenced by them and tends to absorb Hindu and Buddhist ideas.

Anyway, the values of Western civilization that have probably already become the values of the global modern civi-

lization radically differ from the approach typical of Hindu-Buddhist tradition. Most of us do enjoy different forms of illusion - video games, cinema and others; and the more we associate ourselves with the main character, the better the product is. The value of individualism in the western civilization can hardly be overestimated. We would rather value the person because he or she is different, and not because he or she 'has the same Buddha nature.' This tendency is very well illustrated by the analysis of the attitudes of Western lucid dreamers. Western attitude to lucid dreaming shows that attaining higher states of awareness are possible without decreasing one's I-presence. Natural reaction of contemporary lucid dreamers to actively participate in lucid dreams and unwillingness to simply witness the dream plot indicates cultural preference to behave actively while in a higher state of awareness.

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