

Dreaming with Awareness: Exploring Lucid Dreaming as a Bridge Between Reality and Meditation

Sergei Kukhareno^{1*}

¹ Blagoveshchensk State Pedagogical University, Blagoveshchensk, Russia

ABSTRACT

The article examines the phenomenon of lucid dreaming, which means a dream where a dreamer is aware of being in a dream state and can often influence the course of the dream to some extent. While some researchers of lucid dreaming compare the lucid dreaming state to a waking state and claim it combines cognitive elements of waking consciousness with the hallucinatory quality of dreaming, most recent researches suggest that some types of lucid dreams might be seen as a spontaneous meditative state. The research question for this article is if modern practice of lucid dreaming is a separate phenomenon that shares some characteristics of meditative experience. In order to answer the research question, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. Data collection was done with the help of online surveys. The author chose random sampling to sample a group of lucid dreamers. One hundred sixteen surveys were completed. Based on the research done, the author comes to the conclusion that lucid dreamers share the experiences typical of meditation practice. The author points out that lucid dreaming is not identical to being mindful in the dream state as well. Such commonly experienced sensations during a lucid dream as desire to control, desire to fly, and euphoria differ it from the state that 'dream yoga' or similar states in other religious traditions try to achieve.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Awareness, Dream Yoga, Lucid Dreaming, Mindfulness, Sati.

Article History:

Received 18th May, 2023

Revised 28th Jul, 2023

Accepted 15th Aug, 2023

Published 31th Aug, 2023

How to Cite in APA Style:

Kukhareno, S. (2023).

Dreaming with Awareness: Exploring Lucid Dreaming as a Bridge Between Reality and Meditation. *Smaratungga: Journal of Education and Buddhist Studies*, 3(2), 91-102. doi:

10.53417/sjeb.v3i2.108

*Corresponding author: author email address: kukhareno_s@mail.ru

Published by Center of Research and Publication of Smaratungga Buddhist Collage

Introduction

The term 'lucid dream' means a dream in which a dreamer is aware of experiencing a dream and can often influence the course of the dream to some extent. In the western philosophical thought, the references to the phenomenon can be found as early as in the 4th century BC. Aristotle in the treatise *On dreams* of his 'Parva Naturali' states: "often when one is asleep, there is something in consciousness which declares that what then presents itself is but a dream" (Aristotle, 1941). In Tibetan Buddhism, dream yoga which has the goal to attain awareness in a dream state, has been practiced for centuries. There is also the Practice of controlled Dreams in the alchemical tradition of Taoism (Maslov, 2021). In Hindu tradition, practical ways to be aware in the dream were elaborated by yoga nidra practitioners.

Although the term 'lucid dreaming' was introduced by a Dutch psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden in his 1913 article 'A Study of Dreams' (Eeden, 1913), real academic and popular interest to it was brought by the works of a Stanford University professor Stephen LaBerge only in 1980-90-es. It happened no earlier than in the 21st century that lucid dreaming became really a popular movement in the West, still related to new age movement and Hindu and Buddhist ideas, but definitely a separate secular one, practiced by common people and having a number of characteristics that make it different from the dream yoga and other traditional dream practices (Kukharenskiy, 2017).

According to Freud's theory of dreams, day's residues are memory traces left by the events and psychic processes of the waking state; they are used as raw material by the dream-work and the latent thoughts bubble up during the dream (Freud, 1983).

Continuity hypothesis of dreams states that most dreams are a continuation of what is happening in everyday life. The 'continuity hypothesis' suggests that dreams often reflect or represent current or recent waking experiences, including waking emotions (J. E. Malinowski, 2012). It posits that dream content is psychologically meaningful in that it reflects the dreamer's current thoughts, concerns and salient experiences. It has been shown that certain types of experiences are more likely to be incorporated into dreams than others, such as emotional experiences (J. Malinowski, Fylan, & Horton, 2014), and this may indicate that dreams serve an emotional-processing function (Walker & Stickgold, 2004).

According to recent researches around 80% of our dreams are experienced from a first-person perspective. They tend to involve ordinary situations that we find ourselves in during day-to-day life various "statistical markers" in dream reports showed a reflection of dreamers' daily lives. (Revonsuo, Tuominen, & Valli, 2015).

No doubt there are certain common patterns of the dream plot formation that have been in the focus of those who studied the dreams from the very early periods of the human history. In a dream, there is both continuity and non-continuity between the dream-self and the wake-self (Kahn, 2019). Non-continuity is manifested in unexpected associations and in the number and kind of associations that become linked during dreaming (Cai, Mednick, Harrison, Kanady, & Mednick, 2009; Kahn & Gover, 2010; J. Malinowski et al., 2014; Stickgold, Scott, Rittenhouse, & Hobson, 1999; Wagner, Gais, Haider, Verleger, & Born, 2004).

While Sigmund Freud considered the dream function to be the guardian of the sleep from interruption (Freud, 1943), recent studies show after waking from REM sleep subjects were often able to solve problems that were intractable during the day (Wagner et al., 2004; Walker, Brakefield, Morgan, Hobson, & Stickgold, 2002; Walker & Stickgold, 2004). Horton has argued that non-continuity in dreaming has a functional role in the process of memory consolidation by separating memories from their original contextual role. They are taken out of their original context and are newly integrated with existing memories “rendering salient aspects of those memories to become available for retrieval in isolation from their contextual features” (Horton, 2017).

Lucid dream practitioners often attribute this non-continuity as bizarreness of the dream plot. Bizarreness lies at the very essence of the dream plot formation. Unprocessed new experiences that caught person’s attention are combined to make a dream plot. So the dream plot is illogical and bizarre by nature. If some thought or reminiscence of a past event had lingered into a person’s mind and is automatically repeated during the day in his mind, it may also affect the dream plot which is the case with repetitive nightmares, for example. Moreover, the present environment is affecting the dream plot too - the sounds, the temperature, humidity, etc.

Some lucid dreaming techniques are actually based on whether continuation hypothesis (e.g. MILD (Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams). Reality checks or non-continuity principle (e.g. sudden realization of being in a dream state after realizing the bizarreness of the dream plot)

Different meditation schools share two common components, which in the terminology of Buddhist psychoculture are described as: samatha, which can be translated from Pali as “serenity”, “peace”, “inner calm” and vipassana, from Pali can be translated as “awareness”, “vision of the world just the way he is.” These components are also required and necessary to achieve lucid dreaming.

Although 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, Holzmann, Tuin, & Hobson, 2009), representing a unique blend of waking and dreaming consciousness (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990), the author believes there is more to that phenomenon than just being awake while dreaming.

Many researchers of lucid dreaming mention the fact that the quality of perception during a lucid dream may actually be higher than in the regular waking state (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990). 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), “Never had I felt so absolutely well, so clear-brained, so inexpressibly ‘free’” (Fox, 2019).

Hunt and Ogilvie suggested that some types of lucid dreams might be regarded as a type of spontaneous meditative state occurring during dreaming sleep (Hunt & Ogilvie, 1988). Some skills cultivated in meditation practice, including stability of attention and the ability to monitor one’s current experiential state (meta-awareness), are thought to be useful in having and sustaining lucid dreams (Wallace & Hodel, 2012). Mindfulness meditation training can improve cognitive

skills such as attention (Lutz et al., 2009) and metacognitive ability (the ability to accurately reflect on experience or performance) (Baird, Mrazek, Phillips, & Schooler, 2014), which may be linked to lucid dreaming. Baird, Benjamin et al. also found that long-term meditators have more frequent lucid dreams compared to individuals without meditation experience, their research also supports continuity between increased awareness during waking and sleeping states (Baird, Riedner, Boly, Davidson, & Tononi, 2019).

Actually, if we look at the phenomenon within the concept of mindfulness, lucid dreaming is witnessing self's observing the flow of consciousness in the dream state. In this respect it has the same nature as a meditation experience during the normal waking state. The difference is the flow of consciousness in REM sleep is formed into a tricky plot and there's abundance of visual images and other audio, tactile, and even olfactory experiences. Following this hypothesis, it is worthwhile comparing lucid dreaming with mindfulness or even more, taking into account the properties of the realm to which the awareness of awareness opens.

Mindfulness is the practice of purposely bringing one's attention in the present moment without evaluation (Baer, 2003). The Buddhist term translated into English as "mindfulness" originates in the Pali term "sati," which is identical to Sanskrit "smṛti." Both terms mean "to remember." In the Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta the term "sati" means to maintain awareness of reality, whereby the true nature of phenomena can be seen (Sharf, 2014). Bhikkhu Analayo translates "sati" as "mindfulness" or "awareness" and Satipaṭṭhāna as "presence of mindfulness" (Analayo, 2006). Bhikkhu Analayo points out that through bare 'sati' one is able to see things just as they are, unadulterated by habitual reactions and projections. By bringing the perceptual process in the full light of awareness, one becomes conscious of automatic and habitual responses to perceptual data. Full awareness of these automatic responses is the necessary preliminary step to changing detrimental mental habits (Analayo, 2006). The practice is also based on Zen, Vipassanā, and Tibetan meditation techniques (Nisbet, 2017).

The most common unusual experiences during lucid dreaming include intense sense of presence, a desire to fly, desire to control (or rather euphoria caused by being able to control), intense feeling of joy, and lucid dreaming euphoria (Waggoner, 2008).

"Never had I experienced such clarity and perception" (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1990), "Never had I felt so absolutely well, so clear-brained, so inexpressibly 'free'" (Fox, 2019). "" I " seem to be a dot of aware perception floating through all of this - joyous, aware, and full of awe" (Waggoner, 2008). ". I'd experience a rush of exhilaration, joy, and energy", "I felt euphoric" (Waggoner, 2008). "I walk a few feet but feel an incredible urge to fly - I want to fly!" (Waggoner, 2008). "But I do control the dream! I fly. I make things appear. I dream figures to disappear and they do. I really control the lucid dream!" (Waggoner, 2008).

Love and compassion are too mentioned to be experienced in lucid dreams "Lucid dreamers repeatedly find that when compassion, and care onto unfriendly dream figures..." (Waggoner, 2008). Numerous reports of these experiences certainly allow making a conclusion that they are an integral part of a lucid dreaming state.

Is the experience obtained in lucid dreams similar to the meditative experience? Bearing in mind that 'meditative experience' is quite a broad term, the author still decided to use it not to narrow the experience to any particular tradition or denomination. The research question for this article is if modern practice of lucid dreaming is a separate phenomenon that shares some characteristics of meditative experience.

Method

Research context

to answer the problems in this study, in this case the researchers used quantitative research methods. the research method is a study that is carried out in depth with full calculation and caution in the process of extracting facts and data. while quantitative research methods are research methods in which the process uses numbers, starting from the data collection process, data processing to data interpretation. in addition to using quantitative methods as the main method in this study, researchers also used qualitative methods as the second method. this is because in data collection there are several questions that are open.

Instrument and data collection

In this study, the data collection process was carried out by creating an online survey. in the process of making the online survey, it was assisted by a platform called SurveyMonkey. From the survey that was distributed, the researcher took a random sample of people from the lucid dreamer group. the sources used as research sources in this case were taken from various Facebook social networks such as the lucid driming group, lucid dreaming, lucidity 4 ALL and the lucid hive 2.0. This data collection process was carried out by researchers over a long period of time, which was around 8 months. The people sampled in this study came from various countries such as the United States, Mexico, England, Sweden, Russia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Romania, France and Brazil.

Data analysis

In quantitative research, data analysis is an activity carried out after data from all sources or respondents have been collected. Data analysis activities in this quantitative research include grouping data based on variables and types of respondents, tabulating data based on variables from all respondents, presenting data from each variable studied and performing calculations in answering problem formulations. In its technique, this quantitative data analysis can be done in various ways such as analysing by means of descriptive statistics and also inferential statistics. As for this study, researchers used descriptive statistical analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis is a form of research data analysis to test the generalisation of research results based on the sample obtained. The purpose of researchers using these analysis techniques is in order to present data that is easily understood by readers.

Findings

| Answer | Number | Percentage |
|--------|--------|------------|
| Yes | 74 | 64 % |
| No | 50 | 36 % |

Table 1. Lucid dreamers practicing mindfulness on regular basis

Table 1 shows the data from the respondents when asked if they have done mindfulness meditation techniques regularly. The data above shows that out of one hundred and twenty four respondents seventy four of them answered yes. While the remaining fifty respondents answered no.

| property | total score |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| more intense sense of presence | 217 |
| Joy | 254 |
| euphoria | 227 |
| desire to fly | 284 |
| desire to control | 290 |
| stillness and peace | 237 |
| compassion | 178 |
| love | 172 |

Table 2. Experiences during a lucid dream

Table 2 shows the percentage points regarding respondents' experience of lucid dreaming. The data from respondents above shows that Lucid dreaming is more than just being 'awake conscious' in a dream state. Most lucid dreamers must have experienced meditative experiences during lucid dreams such as a more intense sense of presence, stillness and peace, joy, compassion and love. In addition the proportion of those practising mindfulness techniques among lucid dreamers must be relatively high. Lucid dreaming is also different from simply being conscious in a dream state, as it has properties unrelated to consciousness, such as the desire for control, the desire to fly, and euphoria.

The percentage was the following:

Question 2: Have you experienced more intense sense of presence than in the normal waking state during a lucid dream? never – 7%, rarely – 7 %, sometimes – 48 %, very often – 30 %, always – 11 %

Question 3: Have you experienced intense feeling of joy during a lucid dream? never – 3%, rarely – 14 %, sometimes – 28 %, very often – 48 %, always – 10 %

Question 4: Have you experienced euphoria during a lucid dream? never – 10%, rarely – 7 %, sometimes – 45 %, very often – 34 %, always – 7 %

Question 5: Have you experienced desire to fly during a lucid dream? never – 1%, rarely – 9 %, sometimes – 21 %, very often – 55 %, always – 17 %

Question 6: Have you experienced desire to control during a lucid dream? never – 3%, rarely – 3 %, sometimes – 28 %, very often – 45 %, always – 24 %

Question 7: Have you experienced stillness and peace during a lucid dream? never – 10%, rarely – 7 %, sometimes – 48 %, very often – 30 %, always – 11 %

Question 8: Have you experienced compassion during a lucid dream? never – 18%, rarely – 25%, sometimes – 46 %, very often – 11 %, always – 7 %

Question 9: Have you experienced love during a lucid dream? never – 14%, rarely – 34 %, sometimes – 34 %, very often – 14 %, always – 7 %

Lucid dreaming may be viewed as witnessing consciousness observing the flow of thoughts in the dream state. In this respect it has the same nature as a meditative experience during the normal waking state. The difference is the flow of consciousness in REM sleep is formed into a tricky plot. It is worthwhile comparing lucid dreaming with mindfulness or even more – pristine awareness. In Buddhism, the further step after acquiring *sati* (awareness of awareness) is detaching one's awareness from "mechanical impulses" to make it pure awareness, the final goal being pristine awareness (Kukharenskiy, 2020).

The realm that that is opening up with mindfulness is not limited with being not identified with one's thoughts, there is more to it. It is just through that window of awareness of awareness that the breeze of joy, peace and love come (Tolle, 2004).

Eckhart Tolle in his 'the Power of Now' although not labeling it as 'mindfulness', describes actually the same process with a deep understanding of the practice as follows: 'you draw consciousness away from mind activity and create a gap of no-mind in which you are highly alert and aware but not thinking. This is the essence of meditation (Tolle, 2004). Often mentioned element of mindfulness - being nonjudgmental simply means not being identified with one's thoughts. After learning to track one's thoughts as an observer one learns to be aware of awareness.

What are the properties of this realm? Eckert Tolle describes the enlightenment as "true wealth, which is the radiant joy of Being and the deep, unshakable peace that comes with it" (Tolle, 2004), "beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace — arise from beyond the mind" (Tolle, 2004). Eckart Tolle mentions compassion as well: "With this realization comes forgiveness, compassion, peace" (Tolle, 2004).

Stillness and peace are probably the most obvious results of the mindful mediation known. The connection between the development of stillness and peace in the result of Samatha and lucid dreaming is well-established (Wallace & Hodel, 2012). Samatha (Pāli) is a Buddhist term that is actually often translated as the "tranquility of the mind", or "mind-calmness".

The feeling of joy which may be exactly Sukha, meaning happiness, pleasure, ease, joy or bliss in Sanskrit and Pali, which is attained during the development of *jhāna*, commonly translated as meditation, to withdraw the mind from the automatic responses to sense-impressions, and leading to a "state of perfect equanimity and awareness (upekkhā-sati-parisuddhi) (Vetter, 1988)."

Certainly 'joy' is too paid great attention in the Sufi tradition, "Freshness and a deep joy are signs of the current." (Barks & Moyne, 1997). "I broke through another layer into joyfulness" (Barks & Moyne, 1997).

Another important concept in Buddhism and Hinduism considered to be an integral attribute of enlightenment and is seen as a necessary quality that must be cultivated through meditation practice is *Karuṇā* (compassion). It has the nature of being moved by the suffering of others (Mendis, 1985).

We can't fail to mention 'love' if we try to describe the enlightened state. That is the characteristic that has been mentioned in all the denominations throughout the world history.

We may suppose lucid dreaming euphoria may be related to *Pīti* in Pali (Sanskrit: *Prīti*), a mental factor associated with the development of *jhāna* (Sanskrit: *dhyāna*) in Buddhist meditation. According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *piti* is a stimulating, exciting and energizing quality. It is opposed to the calmness of *sukha* (Buddhadasa, 1988).

It is interesting to note that the sensation of lifting the body above the ground is too mentioned in the Jhanas as uplifting joy (*ubbega piti*) as one of 5 stages of joy (Gethin, 1998).

The desire of lucid dreamers to control the dream plot and behave actively while in a higher state of awareness may be connected with cultural preference of modern lucid dreamers (Kukharengo, 2017). Although this desire may well be rather a characteristic of the beginning lucid dreamers, who later realize they can rather control their focus of attention than the whole dream plot (Waggoner, 2008).

Our research and theoretical conclusions show lucid dreaming is certainly more than becoming 'awake' in a dream state. Most lucid dreamers experience in lucid dreams more intense sense of presence, stillness and peace, joy, compassion and love. That may of course be due to the fact that the proportion of those who practice mindfulness techniques among lucid dreamers turned out to be rather high – about two thirds.

At the same time, it is worthwhile mentioning that lucid dreaming is different from just being mindful in the dream state as well. The most commonly experienced sensations during a lucid dream run as following: desire to control, desire to fly (most commonly experienced), joy, stillness and peace, euphoria, more intense sense of presence (commonly experienced), compassion, and love (quite commonly experienced). This shows lucid dreaming state is not identical with the state that 'dream yoga' or similar states in other religious traditions try to achieve.

Conclusion

Although there is a view that lucid dreaming combines cognitive elements of waking consciousness with the hallucinatory quality of dreaming shared by some researchers, most recent studies of lucid dreaming focus on some aspects of lucid dreaming typical neither of the normal waking state, nor ordinary dreaming and

suggest that some types of lucid dreams might be seen as a spontaneous meditative state. Lucid dreaming may be viewed as witnessing consciousness observing the flow of thoughts in the dream state. It would have the same nature as a meditative experience during the normal waking state then. The realm that that is opening up with mindfulness is not limited with being not identified with one's thoughts. Beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace arise from beyond the mind. with this realization comes forgiveness, compassion, peace.

The research shows some of the most commonly experienced sensations during a lucid dream are quite similar to the sensations experienced by mindfulness practitioners: more intense sense of presence, joy, stillness and peace, compassion, and love. However, some experiences are not typical of mindful practice, they are: desire to control, desire to fly, euphoria.

Some explanations were suggested, for example to compare lucid dreaming euphoria with Pīti (Pali), a, and lifting one's body in a lucid dream with uplifting joy (ubbega piti), one of 5 stages of joy, mental factors associated with the development of jhāna (Pali) in Buddhist meditation. While the desire of lucid dreamers to control the dream plot and behave actively while in a higher state of awareness may be connected with cultural preference of modern lucid dreamers.

Based on the research done, the author comes to the conclusion that lucid dreamers share some experiences typical of meditation practice, but also have some unique experience typical neither of the normal waking state, nor mindfulness practice

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