

Why Do We Dream?

Oliver W. Markley, Ph.D.

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At the end of the movie *The Sting*, the plot accelerates, unfolding at an ever-faster pace, finally moving so fast that by the end of the movie, the viewer is left breathless – with a feeling of wanting to see it again just to appreciate the rich details that were missed the first time through.

So it was for me at the end of the following dream, which answered a number of questions about dreaming that I had carried for years. Questions such as, “Where do dreams come from?” “What function do they play for us?” “Why do we dream?”

I dreamed that eight people – four men, four women – were all feuding with each other. I became lucid in the dream precisely at the point where two of them – a man and a woman – discovered that the basis of their disagreement was simple miscommunication, nothing more.

Excited and amazed at the simplicity and elegance of what they had just discovered, each of them turned to another – the man to a woman, and the woman to a man – among the feud-circle, to see if the same might be true with them as well.

It was.

Whereupon each of the four of them turned to one of the remaining four and did the same.

Which also worked.

Without delay, each of the eight sequentially cleared up the miscommunication, and hence the feud they previously had going with each of the others (some 28 pair-wise relationships in all).

And this occurred with such an exponential acceleration of simultaneous communication and emotional excitement among them that the only I know of to describe it is by comparison with *The Sting*.

For me, the lucid dreamer – taken as I was with the incredible meaning, which seemed to have obvious relevance in the waking world – most remarkable was the fact that I was *able* to dream such a detailed, coherent dream, one in which I could listen to every word of each conversation and simultaneously see the similarity of patterns in each conversation. I felt stunned that my mind was capable not only of producing such a stupendous work of art, but also of perceiving the detail of the conversations heard and simultaneously appreciating the overall patterns involved. I urgently wished that I could see the dream again, so that I wouldn't miss anything important.

Whereupon the dream started to play from the beginning again, just as if it were a movie that had been rewound!

Now I was really excited – because I was evidently going to get my wish, and (more importantly) because my mind could play it back with precision.

Alas, my excitement grew to the point that it interfered with my ability to watch with detachment – a prerequisite of successful lucid dreaming. Whereupon something really amazing happened: the dream started to dissolve in front of my “eyes.”

It was as though the dream I had been watching was a movie, and instead of looking at the screen on which it was being projected, I somehow began looking into the lens of the movie projector. As I did so, the energy of my gaze “melted” the movie that was passing through, which in turn allowed my gaze to penetrate deeper into the movie process, seeing where the movie came from. I knew that I was about to get an answer to some of my deepest questions about dreaming: What is the true nature of dreams? Where do they come from? What function do they play?

I was somehow able to see first the more superficial levels dream process within myself, and then deeper levels until the depth of my gaze revealed processes so alien that I was no longer able to understand them. At this point I returned my attention to the need to record the dream, and woke up.

There were five categories of dreams in all.

The function of the first type of dream process I saw was pure entertainment.

The second reviewed current concerns and unfinished business, and the attempt to find solutions to problems therein.

The third process involved the reception of guidance from higher wisdom sources with the mind. At a superficial level, this guidance dealt with the concerns of the second type of process; but at a deeper level, it dealt with topics that came along with the guidance process. These topics seemed to concern the future, and the evolution of the mind and soul –both individual and collective.

The fourth type answered a question about the familiar assertion that “most of us use but a small part of our mental capacities” (some “experts” say we use only about 10 percent, others that it is as small as 2 percent). I had often wondered about this, thinking that in nature, if things don’t get used, they atrophy. If we have all this excess mental capacity that we aren’t using, why doesn’t it atrophy?

The fourth one seemed to be some sort of gymnasium, with a range of mental, psychic, and spiritual exercises to keep the brain/mind fit.

The final type of dream content was totally surprising. As I penetrated deeply into my internal dream process, what I found can perhaps be best described as “being visited by aliens.” The “foreground” resembled a resort hotel, a place for sightseeing and recreation. It was benign and human feeling, although the visitors were anything but human! As I explored more deeply, however, things got so alien that I couldn’t understand them, even in the lucid-dream state.

As I reluctantly turned back from this journey, I realized that I had an answer to yet another question about dreams that had long puzzled me: “Why are our dreams so highly symbolized?”

I now understood why the deeper reaches of dream life must be camouflaged by symbols: the self-protective belief systems which dominate waking life are simply unable to accept the alien-ness of deep dreaming process; symbolic camouflage artfully bridges the gap.

This dream represents what I call “the L-Squared dream,” a lucid dream in which the dreamer is lucid about the process of being lucid. To become lucid in this way it is helpful to imagine having a miner’s lamp on

one’s forehead, a metaphoric “truth beam” that reveals the underlying truth of whatever is involved.

A number of insightful lucid dreams have occurred for me since the early seventies, when to support my work developing new methods for studying alternative futures at the Stanford Research Institute (now SRI International), I explored a wide range of methods for accessing what I have to call “depth intuition.” Lucid dreaming remains one of the most potent methods I know for this purpose.*

* Other “appropriate technologies” are reported in “Using Depth Intuition for Creative Problem Solving and Strategic Innovation,” *Journal of Creative Behavior*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1988, 85-100. Reprinted in the Creative Education Foundation’s (1992) *Source Book for Creative Problem-Solving—A Fifty Year Digest of Proven Innovation Processes*, edited by Sidney J. Parnes.