The Reimagination of Death: Dream Yoga, Near-Death, and Clear Light

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ABSTRACT: This article brings together three areas of research on disembodied consciousness: death, near-death, and dreaming. Research on lucid dreaming suggests that there is a close connection between consciousness in the dream state and that experienced in dying. More specifically, it is dream yoga as a special form of lucid dreaming that relates to the near-death experience (NDE) as the occasion for encounter with the clear light. I discuss the meaning of the clear light in dream yoga and in the NDE in order to inquire into the interpretation of its role in spiritual emancipation.

KEY WORDS: near-death experience; dying; dream yoga; clear light; Tibetan Buddhism.

Death terrorizes and fascinates us regardless of race, creed, or religion. The terror of death keeps us in denial of our inevitable demise. At the same time, it thralls us with its mysterious power to take us beyond this life. Reports of the near-death experience (NDE) have given us a brief insight into this power. The NDE reinforces the view that dying is not the end of life but a transition to new levels of existence. It allegedly provides a glimpse into the meaning of self-renewal in other dimensions of existence. The old physical self is left behind but the new self enters other worlds to gain nonphysical perspectives of existence. However, the NDE is only a temporary sojourn to the other worlds because the new self soon returns and reverts to the old physical self. It is like entering a dream to experience unusual worlds and then waking up to a life of mundane routines.
Unlike dreaming, however, the NDE empowers a radical transformation in a person’s life.

In a contemporary spiritual classic *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, the Tibetan lama Sogyal Rinpoche (1992) devoted an entire chapter to the NDE (pp. 319–336). He explained that his teacher, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, referred to the NDE as belonging to the “natural bardo of this life” (that is, our lifetime between birth and death) because the consciousness of the near-death experiencer (NDEr) was still tied to this world and wandering temporarily in other realms. Moreover, the NDEr was merely standing on the threshold of the other bardos without actually entering them and returning to this life (Rinpoche, 1992). According to Tibetan Buddhist teachings, the bardos are the intermediate states experienced during and after dying (Rinbochay and Hopkins, 1979; Lama Lodö, 1987).

By comparing the NDE to the bardo states, Rinpoche (1992) came to see many similarities between the NDE and the bardo of becoming (*Sipai Bardo*), the bardo that occurs just before a deceased person takes rebirth in one of six realms (gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings). These similarities include out-of-body experiences, invisibly watching living relatives, clairvoyance, meeting dead people, and so on. Like the deceased person, the NDEr is exposed to the clear light or ground luminosity (*dharmakaya*) but if he or she is not trained to recognize it as the natural or primordial mind, then the experiencer will not attain ultimate liberation. The deceased person moves on to other bardo states and eventually takes rebirth in one of six realms. The NDEr, on the other hand, returns to the human realm but does not forget the encounter with the clear light. Rinpoche (1992) explained that the clear light is the all-encompassing space of truth that is beyond birth and death, signaling the supreme moment for liberation from all worldly existence. His explanation suggests that the NDE does not represent a merging with the clear light; otherwise it would not be considered an NDE but a death experience resulting in liberation.

Since the NDE is, according to the Tibetan Buddhist perspective, merely a peripheral experience of death and the clear light, it is actually like an unplanned expedition into the bardo realms. For that reason, such an experience is somewhat akin to dreaming where the dreamer wanders into uncharted territories of consciousness. In fact, Rinpoche (1992) pointed out that “How your mind is in the sleep and dream state indicates how your mind will be in the corresponding bardo
This is why the yoga of sleep and dream plays such an important part in the preparation for death" (p. 108). In other words, there is something about dreaming and near-death that connects to the consciousness in dying.

We often hear of people dying in their sleep as if they departed in their dreams. If these people had generally been in good health and there was no specific medical reason for their deaths, the most logical conclusion would be their hearts stopped functioning; that is, they experienced a fatal heart attack while asleep. Assuming that their consciousness was not interrupted by the trauma of heart failure, would this suggest that their consciousness in dreaming could have converged with their consciousness in dying? If we take all the studies of the NDE as plausible evidence for the survival of consciousness after death, we can reasonably speculate that the state of mind in dying and that in dreaming are of the same mental continuum since both are consequences of the disembodiment of consciousness.

In our everyday lives, we tend not to make any connection between dreaming and dying. Rather, we expect to awake from dreaming but not from dying. This expectation is ingrained in most people because of the naïve assumption that death marks the end of consciousness and therefore cannot be seen as continuous with dreaming. The NDE provides a very strong case against such an assumption. Since the NDE demonstrates the dynamism of consciousness without active support of the physical body (Sabom, 1998), it is not too farfetched to imagine its parallel with dreaming which is possible only under conditions of physical inertiess. The stilling of the physical body in near-death and sleep is, perhaps, a necessary condition for the increased activation of consciousness to levels not usually experienced in ordinary waking life. This is not a new observation. In many shamanic cultures, dreaming and dying are not sharply distinguished to produce a compartmentalized view of life and death. Shamans in these cultures may enter a trance comparable to an NDE for several hours or days in order to empower their consciousness to reach other realms of existence (Eliade, 1964).

What makes near-death comparable to dreaming is that both phenomena are experienced under conditions in which reality is perceived without reference to the physical body. The consciousness of the NDEr and dreamer continues to function, perhaps even in an enhanced mode, as if it were totally independent of the physical body. This apparent separation between body and mind in the NDE and dreaming suggests the possibility of disembodied consciousness as an
alternative source of reality formation. Parallels between the NDE and dreaming can be thought of as the perception of reality by disembodied consciousness not dissimilar to the Tibetan Buddhist theory of bardo consciousness. The aim of this article is to explore these parallels in order to address the continuity of states of mind experienced in waking life, dreaming, and dying.

The Stuff of Dreams

Like death, dreams fascinate and terrorize human beings. We are intrigued by the surreal nature of dreaming and frightened by nightmares. This ambivalence toward dreaming is partly influenced by the way the modern mind bifurcates consciousness into a waking state defined as the embodied reality and a dreaming state construed as far from real.

The Freudian analysis of dreams exemplifies this bifurcation (Freud, 1954/1900). Dreams represent the unspoken, repressed aspects of the waking state. They are formed in the unconscious moments of sleep, their contents derived from inexpressible desires not monitored by the sleeping mind. Unlike the rational processes of the waking state, dreaming disguises all sorts of thoughts that seek expression during the mentally unguarded hours of sleep. These thoughts include a combination of recent and distant memories of events that are warped in such a way as to give unconditional release to repressed impulses in circumstances where consciousness cannot function as a watchdog. Thus, dreaming is not considered real in the sense that the dream referents, while grounded in the events of waking life, are not logically related as in the mundane relations of everyday life. Put another way, dreams are bizarre movies about our hidden motives in the ordinary waking world. Fascination with dreams is, therefore, a way of dealing with the meaning of dreams for the accomplishment of social relationships in the physical world. But the terror of dreaming, especially nightmares, lies in the unreal or surreal nature of dreaming where control is lacking for interpreting or manipulating events.

This type of theorizing about dreams has already been challenged by the work of David Foulkes and other dream researchers in the 1960s (Foulkes, 1964). Basically, the challenge lies in the contention that it is naive to assume clearly discrete moments of pristine conscious activity as found in the waking state and of vague, unrealistic thought processes as found in the dreaming state. Research from that period
suggests that differences in consciousness between waking and sleeping moments cannot to be taken as absolute. In the words of Foulkes (1964, p. 240): “Apparently no point of absolute dream onset exists, in the sense that there is no point in the sleep cycle at which consciousness suddenly appears. It seems to be there all along.” Empirical findings from this research have shown that background thoughts in waking experience come to life as dreams not during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep but rather in non-REM sleep, in the period preceding REM sleep associated with fertile dream activity. However, dreaming in early REM sleep may contain distorted elements of waking experience but not necessarily related to unfulfilled desires or personal problems. In short, dreaming is a complex unfolding of consciousness in multiple directions that are not yet fully understood.

In the light of the above challenge, the question of dream consciousness has become even more intriguing because we can now ask whether dreams can be manipulated at will, since the difference between waking and dreaming moments need not be perceived as absolute. Charles Tart, a well-known psychologist in sleep and dream research, reported a type of dream he called “high dream” that dissolved boundaries between sleep, dreaming, and waking. Tart defined the “high dream” as

an experience during sleep ... in which you recognize during the dream that you are in an altered state of consciousness which is similar to (but not necessarily identical with) the high induced by a chemical psychedelic. It is important to emphasize that it is not the content of the dream, but what is dreamed about that distinguishes the high dream from the ordinary dream: one could dream of taking LSD, e.g., without the change in the mental processes that constitute the high dream, just as one can dream of waking up without it being a lucid dream. (Tart, 1972, p. 174).

This state of high feeling may not vanish at the end of dreaming but actually carry over into the waking state. To what extent a high dream can be manipulated by a dreamer who is aware of the condition is an area open to investigation.

Although a high dreamer may recognize his or her peculiar condition, it is the lucid dreamer who simultaneously becomes aware of dreaming and involved in testing and changing the dream environment. Lucid dreaming differs from the high dream in the way rationality spontaneously enters the dream state to affect the dreamer’s perception so clearly that the dreamer is not only awake in his or her dreams, but is also emotionally high without necessarily
making any reference to chemical psychedelics or hallucinogens. Waking up in one's dreams introduces a type of consciousness that is exhilarating and receptive to the continuity between sleeping and waking. There is a growing literature in this field of dream research and practice (Green, 1968; Green and McCreery, 1994; LaBerge, 1985; LaBerge and Rhinegold, 1990). What is important to note in this literature is the emphasis on the high degree of freedom available to the dreamer to test and change the dream scenarios. Lucid dreaming opens up new dimensions of consciousness previously unknown to most people who assume dreaming to be unreal or lacking in substance as compared to the embodied experiences of waking life.

The quest for lucid dreaming is, on the one hand, a concerted effort to master the intricacies of inner space and, on the other hand, a continuing search for the meaning of higher consciousness. Mastering inner space has been a long-standing goal of humankind to probe and control the workings of the mind through various mystical and shamanic techniques. There is no systematic science of inner space in the same sense that one speaks of a medical science, physical science, or behavioral science. Because the mechanism of inner space draws upon the subtle qualities of the mind, any attempt to understand and manipulate it cannot be privileged by reductio ad absurdum methodologies. One cannot prove the falsity of walking through a mountain in a dream any more than one can disprove water is liquid. In other words, mastery of inner space does not comprise an exact science in the same manner as the methodologies of the natural sciences. For that reason, lucid dreaming is more appropriately defined as an art of dreaming that activates new patterns of mindfulness or awareness reaching into the unconscious.

In a lucid dream that I experienced, I was walking on a narrow garden path surrounded by high walls with no exits. As soon as I became aware that I was dreaming, I told myself that I should be able to walk through the wall. On my first attempt I knocked myself against the wall. Then I tried a different approach. I closed my eyes, relaxed and merged with the wall. I felt myself going through the wall, my dream body tingling with a strange sensation. Then I was on the other side of the wall. I was on a busy street and it was night. In becoming lucid I attempted to test the dream environment, as suggested by researchers of lucid dreaming, to assess the new levels of freedom in movement. Walking through walls was indeed a way of mastering inner space by experimenting with the newfound potential of disembodied consciousness.
The exploration of inner space through lucid dreaming provides a new view of reality concealed from the embodied perspectives of waking life. This new view of reality does not imply that the dream world is more real than the ordinary world in waking life. Rather, it demonstrates that a radical change in consciousness redefines the very nature of reality. Awakening in a dream leads to another level of consciousness that can turn surrealism into a living experience, just as being in a stupor has certain experiential consequences in waking life. A task of lucid dreaming is to attain realization of consciousness as an independent variable capable of penetrating the constructed nature of reality. The lucid dreamer should come to realize that walking through walls in a dream merely represents a way in which disembodied consciousness apprehends dream reality. This too is the aim of dream yoga, the technique for manipulating dreams in order to achieve a state of mind that transcends the compartmentalization of consciousness. In recent years, dream yoga of the Tibetan Buddhist variety has received wide attention (Norbu, 1992; Rinpoche, 1998). The Tibetan practice of dream yoga is not only meant to develop mindfulness in dreaming but also to rehearse for the moment of death. In Tibetan Buddhist teachings, there is a correspondence between sleeping, dreaming and dying. Thus, knowing how to dream provides the basis for knowing how to die. Manipulation of dreams is secondary to the higher goal of directing consciousness toward the clear light of death.

Dream Yoga and Clear Light

Dream yoga comprises special techniques for training the mind to develop awareness in dreaming in order to attain spiritual liberation. It is a method of meditation for cultivating disembodied consciousness to reach a state of realization that recognizes the clear light of sleep. In the Tibetan Buddhist system, sleep is regarded as analogous to death since it is taught that the primordial mind manifests as clear light during sleeping and dying moments. Although the clear light manifests in sleep, it is not considered as profound as the clear light encountered in death. According to the Dalai Lama,

the clear light of sleep is not as deep as the clear light of death. Vajrayana [Tantric] Buddhism speaks of five primary and five secondary types of vital energy, as well as gross and subtle aspects of these two sets of five. In the clear light of sleep, the grosser forms of these various energies dissolve, or withdraw, but the subtle forms do not. (Varela, 1997, p. 44)
In other words, practicing dream yoga to experience the clear light of sleep is a preparation for the more profound recognition of the clear light of death, when all the vital energies dissolve.

In this system of meditative realization, attaining the state of clear light is considered the highest spiritual goal because the clear light is asserted to be the ultimate reality that frees us from all worldly illusions and delusions. The doctrine of the clear light forms part of the Yogini or Shakti Tantras, which is traceable to Lawapa of Urgyan (now a region in Afghanistan) and later to Padmasambhava who introduced Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th century (Evans-Wentz, 1958). The clear light has been described in the following terms by Walter Evans-Wentz (1958, p. 166): “As being colourless, without qualities, It is the Clear Light; as being without limitations, It is All-Pervading Intelligence; as being unknowable in terms of sangsaric [phenomenal] consciousness, and without form, It is the Formless Void.” Furthermore, Evans-Wentz explained that the clear light is momentarily experienced by all human beings at the time of death, but for Buddhas and masters of yoga the experience of clear light can be willed and maintained indefinitely. From the soteriological point of view, the opportunity to cultivate realization of the clear light while alive should not be ignored because in death this realization would not be available for the untrained mind.

The clear light also manifests in sleep but it is generally not noticed by the ordinary mind. The purpose of dream yoga is to awaken the sleeping mind in order to cut through the illusory nature of dreams, thus preparing the dreamer to encounter the clear light of sleep. In the words of the Dalai Lama:

In Tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana, there are four stages in the process of falling asleep, culminating in the so-called clear light of sleep. ... [A] person who is well trained in Vajrayana meditation can recognize a strict order in these four states of falling asleep, and is well prepared to ascertain an analogous order in the dying process. ... If you can recognize the dream state while in it, then you can visualize and deliberately reduce the grosser level of mind to return again to clear light sleep. At that point the subtlest level of mind—the clear light of sleep — is easier to ascertain. (Varela, 1997, p. 40)

More specifically, the Dalai Lama pointed out that:

The main purpose of dream yoga in the context of tantric practice is to recognize the dream state as dream state. Then, in the next stage of the practice you focus your attention on the heart center of your dream body and try to withdraw the vital energy into that center.
That leads to an experience of the clear light of sleep, which arises when the dream state ceases. (Varela, 1997, p. 129)

The Dalai Lama’s exegesis on dream yoga is congruent with the doctrine of dreams as explicated in the Yogini Tantras. As Evans-Wentz (1958, p. 166) put it, “The whole purpose of the Doctrine of Dreams is to stimulate the yogin to arise from the Sleep of Delusion, from the nightmare of Existence, to break the shackles in which mayā [illusion] thus has held him prisoner throughout the aeons.”

Hence, dream yoga as taught in these tantras is meant to train the practitioner to realize the dream state is no more illusory than the waking state. Once the practitioner is able to cut through the inauthenticity of both these states, realization of the clear light becomes possible:

By concentrating the mind upon the forms of the deities seen in the dream-state, and by keeping the mind free of thoughts, in the quiescent condition, the forms of the deities are attuned to the non-thought condition of mind; and thereby dawnethe Clear Light, of which the essence is of the Voidness. (Evans-Wentz, 1958, p. 222)

In the contemporary practice of dream yoga, techniques are taught not only for realizing the illusory nature of dreams, but more importantly to gain awareness of the clear light. For instance, Namkhai Norbu, a Tibetan master of the Dzogchen tradition, emphasized that developing clarity in dreaming helps to generate awareness of the natural light, which is similar to the clear light:

In the practice we do, there has to be an awareness of, or mastery of, the state of natural light. When one has an awareness of the presence of this state of natural light, then even if afterwards the state of dreams arises, one spontaneously becomes lucidly aware that one is dreaming while dreaming, and automatically one achieves mastery of one’s dreams. This means that the dream does not condition the person, but the person governs his or her dream. For this reason, the practice of dreams is secondary, and I cannot overemphasize how extremely important it is to do the practice of the natural light. (Norbu, 1992, pp. 48–49)

The reason for his emphasis on the practice of the natural light in dreaming has to do with familiarizing oneself with the “mother light” or the clear light encountered in death. Thus, dream yoga prepares a person to gain instant recognition of the clear light at the moment of death, even though that person may not have achieved complete spiritual realization while alive. But practicing dream yoga in order to
establish some familiarity with the clear light is said to be an arduous process. A practitioner can develop awareness of the clear light only when he or she has become adept in non-dual perception, that is the ability to perceive without reference to a subject-object relationship. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, a lama in the Bon tradition of Tibet, had this to say about non-dual perception in dream yoga:

The clear light is generally spoken of in the teachings about sleep yoga and indicates a state free from dream, thought, and image, but there is also a clear light dream in which the dreamer remains in the nature of mind. This is not an easy accomplishment; the practitioner must be very stable in non-dual awareness before the clear light dream arises... The clear light dream, while emerging from the karmic traces of the past, does not result in dualistic experience. The practitioner does not reconstitute as an observing subject in relation to the dream as an object, nor as a subject in the world of the dream, but abides wholly integrated with non-dual rigpa [awareness]. (Rinpoche, 1998, pp. 63–64)

Although Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche construed a difference between the clear light of sleep and clear light dream, it is likely to be a difference of degree, in which the clear light dream represents a deeper experience of the clear light of sleep. To be able to remain in the nature of mind as a clear light dreamer suggests that the practitioner would face few or no obstacles in meeting the mother light at the moment of death.

Compared to dream yoga, lucid dreaming lacks spiritual direction since it is mainly concerned with manipulating the dream environment and not with training to recognize the clear light. A lucid dreamer is one who recognizes the dream as a dream but not necessarily the manifestation of clear light. Only by further training in dream yoga can a lucid dreamer possibly advance into the stages of clear light recognition. In short, dream yoga accomplishes what lucid dreaming cannot by actualizing awareness of the clear light and its variant expressions (mother light, clear light dream) as a rehearsal for death when the practitioner can gain complete liberation.

How is dream yoga related to the NDE? The experience of light is common to both dream yoga and the NDE. In dream yoga, however, the clear light represents the final stage in a yogic effort to recognize the nature of mind, whereas the experience of light is a serendipitous event in the NDE. In the literature on NDEs, no one has compared the experience of light to the clear light of sleep. In fact, most NDErs who have had such an experience referred to it as a divine light or a being of light. This difference with dream yoga needs further exploration.
Pediatrician Melvin Morse wrote: “The Light is the key element of the NDE” (Morse and Perry, 1990, p. 117), and yet brain researchers have not come close to explaining it. Like other near-death researchers, he wanted to know the location of the light experienced by many NDErs. Was it outside the body or within the brain? From his own research, he came to the conclusion that the light was located outside the NDEr’s body. He ended his chapter on the pure light by writing: “I would like to believe that the Light is where we go when we die. Like a birth into a bright new world, the Light of the NDE represents the beginning of a new beginning” (Morse and Perry, 1990, p. 134).

Morse’s optimistic conclusion focuses on the relationship between the NDEr and the light in dualistic terms. According to his interpretation, the experience of light in an NDE is alleged to occur externally, as if the experiencer as subject is separate from but perceptually responsive to the light as an object of visualization and affective attachment. Unlike dream yoga, which cultivates a non-dual awareness of the clear light, this type of interpretation in near-death research advances understanding of the light experience without inquiring into the basis for identifying it as an external source. Mark Fox warned against this unexamined assumption:

In one crucial sense ... oversimplistic attempts to claim definitive interpretations and identifications of NDE motifs ... say more about the identity of those doing the identifying than about the identity of the light itself....

... Indeed, as regards the light’s identity, we cannot even ... attempt to identify it by function, for it appears to do a number of things, as we have also noted: sometimes merely acting as a destination, sometimes lighting the way, sometimes judging, sometimes asking questions, and sometimes simply returning NDErs to where they came from. (Fox, 2003, pp. 139–140)

Even Fox himself seemed to treat the light as an external object, since he interpreted its multiple role as acting on the NDEr rather than being part of the NDEr’s own identity.

In dream yoga, non-dual awareness of the clear light implies that the practitioner does not perceive the light as being somewhere out there to be apprehended and recognized. Such awareness is internally self-contained, so no need arises to identify the light as something discrete and having a role or many roles to fulfill at that particular moment. Instead, an advanced practitioner would see no difference
between his or her mind and the clear light once the recognition is made. The differentiation between the practitioner's consciousness and the clear light collapses when the practitioner's own realization no longer supports the subject-object distinction in meditation. This is construed as the yogic liberation of mind that is no longer conditioned by dualistic categories. The mind of the practitioner becomes the clear light itself. Does this mean that the clear light experience in dream yoga is not the same as the experience of light in the NDE?

Since there is no direct correspondence between the NDE and dream yoga, one might be inclined to argue that the light of the NDE might not be experientially similar to the clear light encountered by the practitioner of dream yoga. Yet the experience of light is central to both the NDE and dream yoga, this experience being the connecting link to the clear light that supposedly manifests at the time of death. Unlike the NDEr, the practitioner of dream yoga trains to recognize the clear light in order not to be distracted at the moment of death and forgo the opportunity for spiritual liberation.

The NDEr, on the other hand, is not likely to be a dream yogi, and therefore has no prior knowledge of the clear light. The dualistic interpretation given by most NDErs to their experience of light as an encounter with a divine being suggests the absence of training that one finds in dream yoga for developing a non-dual awareness of the clear light. Such awareness does not necessarily result in an attribution of divinity to the light, but brings to attention the lack of distinction between the mind of the practitioner and the clear light. Unless the NDEr has had some prior training in non-dual recognition of the clear light, the experience of light would merely constitute an instance of ineffable awe and emotional effulgence. The experience would also create an impression of the light as something external to the NDEr, who might in turn address liberation as going toward or being absorbed by the light. For the dream yogi, a successful non-dual recognition of the clear light implies that his or her mind and the light are already inseparable.

The core of light experience in the NDE and dream yoga, therefore, suggests that it is the same experience that impacts on the NDEr and the dream yogi, but only the latter applies a non-dualistic interpretation as part of his or her spiritual training. Without such training, the NDEr cannot become cognizant of the continuum between mind and light. This does not imply that a dualistic interpretation of the light experience is less plausible than a non-dualistic one. A dualistic interpretation would merely condition the
interpreter to assume a subjective position in relation to the light as an objective thing to be scrutinized and felt. There is indeed a sense of reality to this interpretation, but it would not deliver the same profundity of truth as that sought and experienced by the dream yogi. Naturally, it is not possible to know if a complete absorption of an NDEr into the light would automatically result in a non-dual experience, since such an event is likely to mean an irreversible transition from this world with no prospects of returning as an NDEr.

Conclusion

Having brought together the question of death, near-death, and dreaming, what conclusions can we draw about the conjunction of these three areas of inquiry?

Theoretically, all three areas concern the disembodiment of consciousness. The stilling of the physical body does not produce an inertness of mind but increases the scope of consciousness to include new dimensions of mental activity not experienced in the ordinary waking state. Accounts of out-of-body experiences given by NDErs suggest that consciousness does not terminate even when the physical body stops functioning. Research on lucid dreaming has opened up new ways of thinking about the meaning of consciousness and its manipulation during sleep when the physical body is quiet. The disembodiment of consciousness in lucid dreaming and near-death provides new understanding of the mind not under the direct influence of physical processes. Under these circumstances, we can speak of the emergence of the dream or subtle body that functions independently of the physical body. The consciousness inherent in the dream or subtle body implies that the physical decline in dying is not a nihilistic event, but underlies the process in which consciousness appears to renew itself from the chrysalis of the physical form into the imago of a non-physical form. Given the cumulative data on the NDE and lucid dreaming, death should not be feared as the annihilation of the self or end of consciousness, but as a special occasion for the transformation of identity on a level of existence that transcends the physical form. The disembodied consciousness evident in the NDE and lucid dreaming provides the ground in which such a transformation can be enacted.

The disembodied state also provides the condition for the manifestation of clear light. NDErs have reported encounters with this light, although they tend to attribute a dualistic explanation to it. The
techniques of dream yoga, which constitute a special type of lucid dreaming, offer a non-dualistic approach to the clear light, so that transformation of identity is not addressed as a mere renewal of self but as liberation from egocentric consciousness. The light experience in an NDE is, therefore, an introduction to the clear light of the natural or primordial mind. Unless the NDEr is already a dream yogi, he or she will not necessarily seek a transformation based on yogic recognition of the clear light. Whether NDEs can provide the basis for future yogic training in non-dual perception of the clear light is a compelling question that remains unexplored, but which can be considered a possibility in bringing together two forms of human experience that will change the meaning of death and dying.

References


