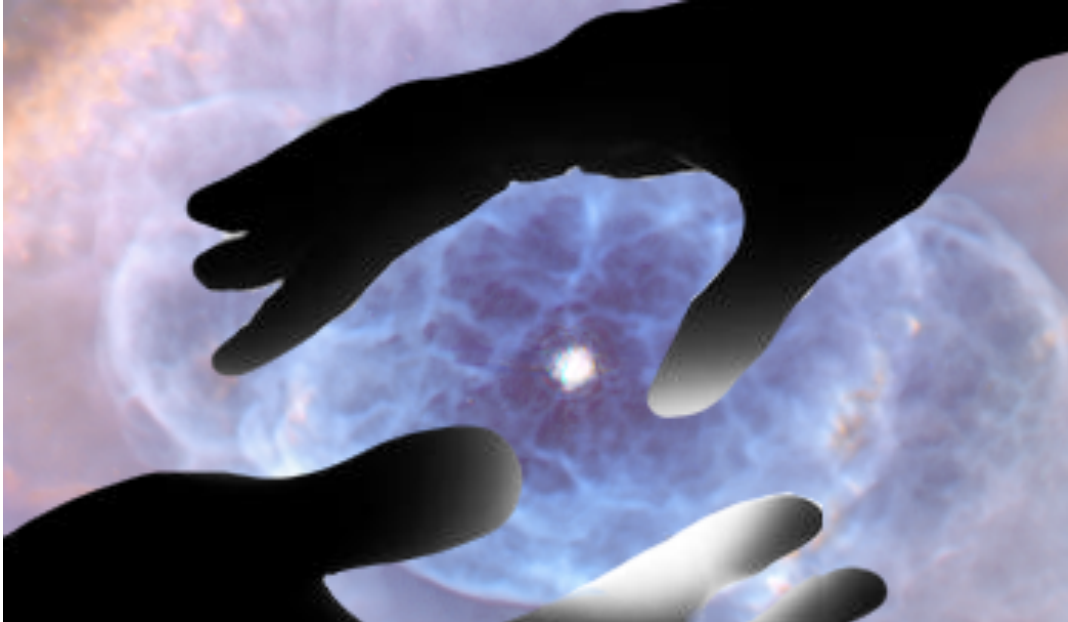
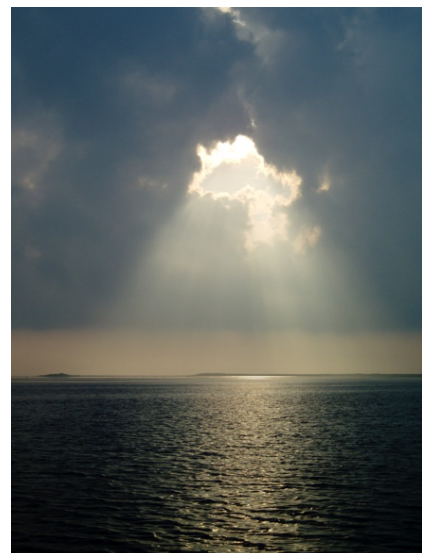


***The Lucid Void***  
**by G. Scott Sparrow**



Many of you have experienced a pervasive darkness during your lucid dreams, either before the dream imagery actually manifests in the Waking-Initiated Lucid Dream (**WILD**), or during a transition between dream segments. It has been called by various names, including the “lucid void” and the “black light” (Powell, 2022), or the “gray void” (Kellogg, 2006; Waggoner, 2006). After having dozens of experiences of this imageless state during lucidity, I now believe it offers us insights about the arousal of dreaming in specific, and the evolution of consciousness in particular.

Most of my own experiences of the lucid void have occurred in the past decade, after starting to use the supplement galantamine--an extract from the snowdrop lily plant that increases the availability of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. You may be aware that our research team, after conducting a preliminary study establishing that galantamine is considered safe and effective by



experienced lucid dreamers (Sparrow, Hurd and Carlson, 2016), published the first peer-reviewed study on the efficacy of galantamine for lucid dream induction (Sparrow, Hurd, Carlson and Molina, 2018). In our study, we added galantamine to an established lucid dream induction protocol combining middle-of-the-night meditation and dream reliving (Sparrow, 1982; Sparrow, Thurston and Carlson, 2013), hoping to create optimal conditions for the arousal of lucid dreams and nightmare engagement/resolution.

We discovered that galantamine increased the frequency of lucidity by about 2.5 times in our experimental participants over placebo conditions—a significant increase that, perhaps for the first time, establishes the availability of lucid dreaming for the general population through combining cognitive strategies with supplements or sensory signaling, as suggested by Stumbrys, Erlacher, Schädlisch, & Schredl (2012) in their extensive review of lucid dream induction research.

I started having lucid dreams when I was 19 and within four years had completed a master's thesis on the topic, and written the first book published in North America on the topic. During my early years as a lucid dreamer, my lucid dreaming was highly correlated with meditating in the middle of the night and then returning to sleep (Sparrow, 1974; 1976; 1983). When I learned of galantamine in 2009, I added it to my nighttime meditation/lucid dreaming practice, usually ingesting 8 mg. after awakening around 4 am. I only use

galantamine about once or twice a week, having discovered that the effects are more noticeable if I take a break between use.



As you may know, galantamine takes about 45 minutes to an hour to exert its effects, which last for a couple of hours before subsiding. But instead of merely staying awake for 45 minutes to an hour—which has been called “Wake Back to Bed” (**WBTB**)—I use the time to meditate. Toward the end of the meditation period, I will sometimes re-live an unpleasant dream in fantasy as though I were lucid in order to “seed” my subsequent dreams with an attitude of “positive engagement.” I have found that this two-fold preparatory activity of meditation and dream reliving greatly deepens the quality of my subsequent dreams.

Upon returning to bed after meditating, I employ a lucid dream induction method, which seems to reliably facilitate a fully conscious transition from waking to lucid dreaming.

### **The method is as follows:**

- After meditating, I lie down, and begin counting backward from 100 slowly.
- I keep my mind on my intention to become lucid, and try to put everything else aside.
- I anticipate the onset of a fluctuating high-frequency vibration that typically commences as I become drowsy.
- At the onset of the vibration, I am free to lift or roll out of my body, without a break in consciousness.

Here is an example of one of my lucid dreams that involved the lucid void:

After meditating, I lie back down and begin counting backward from 100. I get drowsy, and feel the energy that announces my ability to separate from my body. I roll over and begin flying into darkness. After a while, I seem to be in a dark room standing on a rocky ledge next to a stone or cement wall that I can feel. I run my hands up and down the wall, and sense that it curves around to the left, perhaps defining a circular room. I come down off the ledge and find myself lying on a firm bed or platform with someone who I can sense is a woman, with whom I immediately feel a profound, almost overwhelming connection. It's as if we have known each other for all eternity. We lie beside each other, holding each other in the dark. As the room becomes brighter, I look more closely and see that her face is covered by what appears to be a close-fitting black leather mask. I think, "It doesn't matter how she looks beneath the mask: I love her anyway"...Then there's a shift. I leave the room and see another woman, who seems to be my guide in this realm. Sometimes she seems to be with me, and sometimes she leaves me for a while. At one point, I am in a room full of brilliant jewels and light sources, so I try to commune with the light. I try to open myself to it, and my vision starts to brighten until my whole visual field is bright white with a subtle pattern throughout. I realize that I've been in the lucid dream for a very long time, and wonder when it will come to an end. Then suddenly, the woman reappears right before my face, and kisses me goodbye. Then I find myself back in bed.

## **Entering the Void**

The lucid void state commences as soon as I separate from my body. As I move slowly away from my sleeping body, I enter a uniform darkness that may last for several minutes. The darkness is usually permeated by a degree of illumination, as if a light just outside of my peripheral vision is shining through the darkness. Since the light usually seems to be coming from just beyond my gaze, I often turn toward it, hoping to meditate on the source. Sometimes I

encounter a brilliant orb resembling the sun just beyond the edge of my peripheral vision. But in most cases, the actual source of the illumination moves away or disappears as soon as I see it.

Some people refer to this darkness as the “black light” (Powell, 2022) or “gray void” (Waggoner, 2006; Kellogg, 2006). I tend to refer to it as the lucid darkness, or void, because it seems to represent a pre-dream, or non-phenomenal state. Intriguingly, I am never afraid in the darkness. In fact, I find it comfortable, even comforting, to be there. On occasion, I have experienced very pleasant, even ecstatic feelings if I have been able to meditate on the source of the light. On one occasion, the blackness transformed into a opalescent cloud of black light, and the ecstasy I experienced approximated the experience of the white light—but most of the time, I simply I fly into the darkness, experiencing a warm breeze, as if to signify my movement through space. Meanwhile, I wait expectantly for the arousal of dream imagery.

My longer lucid dreams last up to two hours, and often end because I become concerned that I may be “missed” by my wife Julie. During these lengthy lucid dreams, I may return to the lucid void several times whenever I decide to leave one domain and move toward another. Of course, the words “move toward” reflect my subjective experience. Indeed, all sense of movement should be understood as a convenience that enables the dreamer to construct or “map” the experience in three dimensions.

While it seems natural to “fly” from one domain to another, and to experience the various domains as existing somehow apart from each other, my experience of space and time may only satisfy the perceiver/embodied self’s need for an experience that unfolds in time and space, and can be summarized and recalled in narrative form. I have written about how a particular state of mind, which I call “*Relational-Immersive Awareness*,” greatly facilitates a dreamer’s capacity to move freely between and through various objects and locales. In contrast, “*Focused-Objectifying Awareness*”—which is more characteristic of waking attention—tends to result in a “hardening” of objects and a commensurate difficulty in moving from one place to another (Sparrow, 2020).

Over the course of a typical one- to two-hour lucid dream, I may visit three or four distinct stable domains, some of which seem to parallel earthly life, and some of which seem to be associated with other planetary domains, as if the beings I encounter are either embodied in those systems, or once were.

Meanwhile, the lucid void seems to be the equivalent of “interstellar space” in the physical universe. That is, it seems devoid of objects and images, at least at first. I agree with Melinda Powell that the lucid void seems to be a state in which mental projections seem to end or be withdrawn, leaving the dreamer’s lucid

awareness alone in a completely non-phenomenal, formless existence. Similarly, Robert Waggoner (2006) refers to the grey void as:

“the womb of the dreamscape--the mother of the dream and the dreaming. From the ‘gray void,’ the dream emerges, and to the ‘gray void’ the dream returns.”

And Kellogg (2006) concurs when he refers to the “gray void space” as “a discrete in-between state.” This void can precede the arousal of the initial lucid dream as the lucid dreamer transcends an exclusive body-based awareness, or it may occur in the middle of an ongoing lucid dream—as a resolution of sorts—or as a transitional state that enables the dreamer’s passage beyond and between realms of phenomenal existence.



## A State of Nonduality?

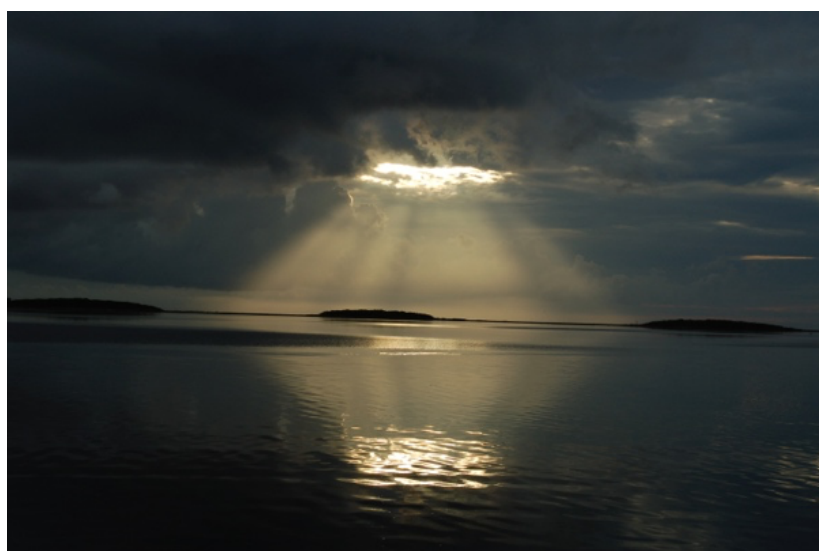
I have observed over the course of numerous experiences that I am never afraid in the darkness. When I tell people about the initial **WILD** phenomena—of exteriorizing consciousness and entering a featureless space—they often ask, “Aren’t you afraid?” Having had such experiences for half a century without (obvious) incident, I say, “No, and it’s actually pleasant.” Indeed, I often marvel at the complete absence of anxiety during the time spent in the lucid void.

If there is an absence of anxiety and conflict in this largely featureless ocean of dark space, one might surmise that the lucid void is the phenomenological expression of a state of non-duality. If so, then it might represent a significant arena of exploration from the standpoint of consciousness studies, because it may provide a way to track back to what happens during:



- The state of pre-differentiated awareness in infancy,
- The state of sleep just prior to the arousal of REM sleep,

By studying what happens in the lucid void, we may be able to fill in what happens in these otherwise unconscious states, and how the consciousness evolves or regresses into a phenomenal, and presumably dualistic existence. And while (returning) to a non-dualistic mindset may be a pinnacle achievement from one standpoint, one cannot expect it to announce itself in more dramatic ways for obvious reasons. In a state of non-duality, such fanfare has little meaning. If it is as valuable as I think it is, how the dreamer moves in and out of it may provide significant contributions to our understanding of how consciousness arises in the first place.



## **The *A Priori* Conditions for Dreaming**

Over the past 50 years, a parallel track in my intellectual life has been the development of an effective method of dream analysis (Sparrow, [2013](#), [2014](#), [2019](#), [2021](#), [2022](#); Sparrow and Thurston, [2010](#)), based on the co-creative dream paradigm. (**CDP**) This paradigm of dream emergence posits that dreams do not arise fully formed, but unfold in real time through the interaction between unformed content and the responsive dream ego. Since **CDP** views the dream as an encounter between two structures of consciousness, one can surmise that dreams arise from an initial “clash” of two perspectives, and that the “first cause of dreaming” could be a sense of otherness or anomaly that provokes tension and surprise.

My theorizing about the arousal of dreaming follows the lead taken by Montague Ullman (1969), who described the pre-dream state of sleep as a state of dissonance, in which tension between the dream ego and emergent,

unintegrated unconscious material is experienced as “intrusive novelty” (Ullman, 1994) in the reduced vigilance of sleep. Of course, we cannot recall this initial state of dissonance, because up to that point, we are sleeping and in a state of non-dream sleep: We only recall the resultant dream after the fact. According to this model, this felt tension creates the conditions for the arousal and “mapping” of visual metaphors that vector the dissonance between the dream ego and the “intrusive novelty” of the dream content on the visual “interface” that emerges as the dream.

The CDP, first described by Ullman and represented as well by Ernest Rossi’s seminal work *Dreams and the Growth of Personality* (1972), views dreaming as an interactive process that generates the recalled dream. I think a case can be made that the lucid void is the same state of pre-dream sleep, except that we enter it from a waking or lucid mindset. Thus, we are able to experience the stages of dream emergence, rather than merely recall the end product upon awakening.

### ***The Awareness of Otherness Precipitates the Phenomenal Dream***

It is, of course, difficult to ascertain the universal vs. idiosyncratic features of the lucid void and other features of the waking-initiated lucid dream (WILD) of lucid experience. We cannot assume that everyone experiences the void in similar fashion, even though I have begun assessing the universal aspects of these experiences (Sparrow, 2021). In my own experiences, the transition from the lucid void to a state of imagery-based dreaming usually coincides with the first observed visual phenomenon or object. It may only be the ground passing beneath me, or a door that blocks my way. Regardless, once anything is perceived, the dream world quickly manifests in full color and detail. However, the precise precursors to the perception of imagery offers intriguing insights into the way that consciousness emerges from a non-dual state to the experience of phenomenal reality.

Specifically, there is one event that predictably shifts my awareness from the void onto an emerging world of form: the general perception of otherness, specifically expressed in a *person’s touch*. Interestingly, whenever I am flying through the darkness, meditating and praying, I often feel someone’s hands touching me from behind, either on my shoulders, at my sides, or sometimes below my feet, as if supporting me in my flight. When I feel the hands, I have a choice—to continue going forward, or to turn around to face the person. At the very moment of seeing the person’s face, the dream world predictably erupts into a complete world of form and color. That is, the moment I turn to perceive the “other,” the world manifests. I have addressed the ontology of these companions (as well as dream characters in general) in a paper currently under review (Sparrow, 2023).

I have pondered this moment of contact with the “other” considerably, and have discovered that *dissonance*, or polarity, is universally regarded as the necessary precursor of self-reflective awareness. I could cite dozens of philosophers and psychologists, including Freud, Hegel, Wilber, Edinger, and Jung—all of whom point to separation or division within the self and between the self and other, as the foundation for self-awareness.

I have also discovered that my own hands can also serve as “the other” and facilitate a similar abrupt transition from the void into a phenomenal experience. By simply holding them up in front of me during my flight through the void, the world appears at the very moment that they appear (or after a brief delay), much in the way that the appearance of my “companion” quickly precipitates the creation of the dream world. This discovery hearkens back to the works of Carlos Castaneda, in which he was told by the Yaqui “sorcerer” Don Juan to look at his hands as a way to become lucid. In trying to make sense of this puzzling directive, I once suggested that the hands provide a stable stimulus in the otherwise rapidly changing dream environment, and may serve as an anchor for fragile lucid awareness.

Now, obviously, we aren’t seeing our actual hands, but rather a mental construction of them. Thus, the choice of hands seems rather arbitrary. Indeed, one of the advanced subjects (Sparrow, [2021](#)) reported that instead of looking at his hands, he will mentally evoke an image, which then seems to precipitate the arousal of the dreams. But it could be that Castaneda was right to focus on one’s hands—that there’s something more profound, or fundamental, that accounts for why looking at one’s hands stimulates lucidity and transforms the lucid void into a fully formed lucid dream.

It has occurred to me that our hands—while they are attached to our bodies—nonetheless exist in space apart from us, and thus serve conveniently to emulate the experience of “otherness” that can, in turn, provoke a felt state of division that supports incipient self-reflective consciousness. In reflecting further on the relationship between our own hands and the nascent experience of “otherness,” it occurred to me that we, as infants, interact constantly with our hands (and feet) while alone, thus providing what might be called a “first division of the self” in the otherwise unified field of infantile awareness. Psychologists, such as Freud have conjectured that the first division is between self and mother, but let’s face it: We’re not eager to part ways with the one who gives us life. It could be that our first, more affordable experimentation with incipient separation and selfhood, takes place in the crib while exploring our own appendages.

In the gospel of Thomas, Jesus purportedly says, “When the one becomes two, what will you do?” This enigmatic question may go to the heart of the question of how we become conscious, and it may allude the problems that arise in the



journey to wholeness. The “fall of consciousness” has been regarded theologically as the fundamental error that plagues humanity; but psychologists have universally interpreted this apparent error as a necessary step in our emancipation from primitive, embedded awareness. So, too, in the lucid void, where we enter the world, once again, through the agency of perceived “otherness,” whether our hands or the hands of a stranger, we “fall” into a world of form, populated with opportunities and hazards alike.

### ***Lucidity Permits Movement In and Out of the Void***

I have found that when I am fully embodied in a particular dream space or domain, I can dissolve it by simply dropping my hands to my sides, and flying up into formless space. Intriguingly, the focus on one’s hands (or the companion), and the retreat from that image allows both the creation and dissolution of the phenomenal dream experience, and effectively allows the dreamer to transition between phenomenal states. So, in effect, the lucid dreamer can presumably move in and out of the state of non-duality by shifting one’s awareness to and from an object- or other-oriented awareness to a more immersive awareness. Again, I have previously introduced a theoretical framework based on these two states of awareness in the lucid state, which accounts for various otherwise anomalous events during the lucid dream.

Various experiments can be conducted during the lucid state that would further confirm these hypotheses. Specifically, we could ask them to search for the presence of touch during the lucid void, and direct their attention to any presences in the lucid void. Second, we could ask them to look at their hands or feet, and observe the arousal of the dream phenomenal reality.

## **Summary**

It is my hope that some of these observations may contribute to our further exploration of how the lucid void may represent a state of phenomenal nonduality, and correlates with various other states of nascent awareness, including the development of consciousness *in contexts to which we do not have direct access*: in human developmental history, in the development of consciousness in infancy, and in the arousal of normal dreaming from the state of non-dream sleep. The lucid void may be unique among these parallel processes in enabling us to *consciously track* the early stages of the development of consciousness and the unfolding stages of phenomenal reality. In doing so, we may be able to understand the arousal of self-reflective awareness from its inception in all contexts.

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