

Announcing Dreams and Related Experiences

Announcing dreams are pregnancy dreams about the child a woman is carrying. They may be had by expectant fathers and other persons close to the mothers, and they may occur before conception and after birth as well as during pregnancy. Related to announcing dreams are a variety of other extraordinary experiences, such as visions, apparitions and messages passed through mediums. When they occur in reincarnation cases, these experiences allow parents to infer the past-life identities of their unborn children. Critics interpret announcing dreams and related experiences as psychological projections by the dreamer, rather than communications from unborn children. Regardless of how they are understood, the announcements help parents prepare for the unexpected and can lead to life-changing decisions.

The Nature of Announcing Dreams

Apparent Contact with Unborn Children

Announcing dreams are sometimes defined as dreams that herald any sort of life transition,^[1] but more often the term is used in reference to dreams that appear to ‘announce’ the birth of a child. Announcing dreams usually occur to pregnant women, but they may precede conception, and they may occur to fathers as well as to other relatives or close acquaintances of the mother. Non-human spirits sometimes deliver the announcements. When they occur in reincarnation cases, announcing dreams may help the dreamer ascertain the unborn child’s past-life identity.

Announcing dreams have been reported throughout history and from many different cultures. That recounted by the Apostle Matthew in the Christian Bible is perhaps the most famous. Joseph and Mary were engaged, but when he discovered that she was pregnant, he began to waver in his marriage commitment. Then he dreamed that an angel told him, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’^[2]

An announcement from a spirit figures also in a Burmese reincarnation case studied by Francis Story and [Ian Stevenson](#). Shortly before she became pregnant, a woman dreamed of an elderly sage dressed in white who came to her house and told her that he was ‘entrusting’ to her a recently deceased man, whom he named. The sage went out of the house and returned with this man, left him there, and vanished. The day after this dream, the deceased man’s widow came to tell the woman that she had dreamed of an elderly sage dressed in white, who had informed her that he was sending her late husband to be the woman’s child.^[3]

Pregnancy dreams are often said to be more vivid and realistic than other dreams. This is true of announcing dreams in particular, which tend to be highly significant for the dreamer. In announcing dreams, dreamers see and embrace loved ones as in life. When there are symbolic elements they are easily and intuitively understood; they do not require interpretation, as ordinary dreams often do.^[4] Announcing dreams are not exclusively visual, but may have sensory or auditory dimensions as well.^[5] Some are lucid.^[6]

Several volumes of prebirth communications including announcing dreams have been published in recent years,^[7] but for the most part, the dreams are strictly anecdotal, collected from the dreamers without follow-up investigations or analysis. Serious research with announcing dreams is only beginning.^[8]

Announcing Dreams and Reincarnation

In the 1870s, the founder of cultural anthropology, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, pointed to announcing dreams among the Koloshes (Tlingits) and Lapps as helping to identify the spirit being reincarnated in a child and argued that these dreams were among a set of empirical signs that had originally suggested the belief in reincarnation.^[9] Indeed, it is easy to see how announcing dreams could have led to that conclusion, because they seem to depict a deceased person asserting his intention (or less commonly, requesting permission) to be reborn to a particular woman.^[10]

Thanks to the research of Ian Stevenson and his colleagues, announcing dreams in reincarnation cases are the most closely studied of announcing dreams. [Jim B Tucker](#) reported in 2005 that 22% of 1,100 cases in a computerized database at the University of Virginia had announcing dreams.^[11] In the majority of these dreams, the person making the announcement was known to the parents-to-be. Often, it was a deceased relative of the dreamer. When the person in the dream was not recognized, the dreamer typically realized after the child was born that he or she resembled that person.^[12]

Announcements may be complex, involving more than one person and experiential modality. An American girl called Susan Eastland remembered being her elder sister, Winnie, who had been fatally injured when she was hit by a car. Winnie's sudden death devastated her family, who although they had only the vaguest ideas of reincarnation, hoped that she would return to them. About six months after the accident, Winnie's surviving sister dreamed that she was coming back to the family, and after she became pregnant two years later, her mother also had such a dream. In the delivery room at Susan's birth, her father heard Winnie say, 'Daddy, I'm coming home.'^[13]

Gender and Announcing Dreams

Dream researchers have documented differences in dream content between men and women, but interestingly, these differences largely disappear during pregnancy. In addition, expectant fathers report more dreams than non-expectant fathers, consistent with the experience of their partners. The pregnancy dreams of both sexes contain more imagery related to the unborn child and feature a greater proportion of family members than do dreams occurring at other times. Some pregnant couples have reported shared dreams.^[14]

None of these dream studies have focused on announcing dreams and we have no firm data on gender-related features of announcing dreams specifically. However, there is no reason to believe that the patterns of announcing dreams depart from the patterns of pregnancy dreams in general. One study of the dreams of expectant fathers found that 21% recorded dreams of babies over a two-week period. Anecdotal reports show that expectant fathers sometimes dream of their unborn children before their partners do. The announcing dreams of men and women have no apparent difference in content.^[15]

Culture and Announcing Dreams

Little attention has been paid to the influence of culture on announcing dreams, apart from those that appear in connection to reincarnation. Reincarnation-related announcing dreams reveal cultural impacts on several dimensions.

The prevalence of reincarnation-related announcing dreams varies widely cross-culturally. Stevenson heard about them in every society in which he studied cases, but they were more common in some places than in others. They were especially frequent among the Burmese, the Turkish Alevi, and indigenous peoples of northwestern North America. They were reported rarely from the Sinhalese of Sri Lanka, from the Druze of Lebanon, and the Igbo of Nigeria, all of whom have abundant reincarnation cases.^[16]

Because announcing dreams are more likely to be recalled (on waking, and long enough to be reported to a researcher) when the person dreamed about is recognized, they frequently accompany reincarnation in the same family.^[17] This may help explain why there are few announcing dreams in Sri Lanka, where family cases are unusual, but many in Burma, where they are much more common.^[18] Almost all of the announcing dreams studied by Stevenson in India occurred in family cases.^[19]

The timing of announcing dreams is related to beliefs about reincarnation in different cultures. In America, where there are no definite ideas, announcing dreams usually accompany pregnancy, although they may precede it. Burmese announcing dreams tend to occur shortly before conception, in line with the Buddhist expectation that reincarnation occurs at conception.^[20] Among the indigenous peoples of northwest North America, the dreams usually come in last trimester, sometimes in final days of pregnancy.^[21] The few Druze announcing dreams Stevenson learned about occurred after birth, consistent with the Druze belief that a spirit reincarnates immediately at death into a child born at that moment.^[22]

The content of announcing dreams may be culturally influenced as well. Tlingit announcing dreams generally depict arrivals – at the dreamer’s home, at a dock, et cetera.^[23] Although the Sinhalese have few true announcing dreams, they may interpret animals such as snakes or elephants in dreams as signaling rebirth.^[24] Burmese announcing dreams tend to depict a person requesting permission to be reborn in the family. Stevenson heard about an amusing pair of petitionary announcing dreams in Burma. A woman whose husband was away from home on a long journey dreamed that a deceased friend asked to be reborn as her child. She did not wish for this, and (in the dream) told the man not to come to them. When her husband returned from his trip, he told her he had dreamed of the same old friend, making the same request, but he (in his dream) had told the friend that he would be welcome in their family. Their next child in due course related memories of his parents’ friend, suggesting that his father’s acceptance had prevailed over his mother’s rejection.^[25]

Occasionally one finds cultural dissonance in announcing dreams. In another Burmese case, [Ma Tin Aung Myo](#) recalled having been a Japanese army cook killed in Burma during World War II. During her pregnancy with Tin Aung Myo (rather than before it), her mother on three occasions dreamed of a stocky Japanese man wearing shorts and no shirt who said that he would come stay with her (rather than requesting her permission to do so). Tin Aung Myo’s mother recognized the man as a soldier who had been encamped near her house. She had traded and discussed foods and cooking techniques with him. She had not known that he had died – much less how he had died – so Tin Aung Myo’s later claim that he had been killed by strafing from an aircraft could not be confirmed, nor could her memory that the man was shirtless and wearing shorts at the time of his death, as depicted in her mother’s dreams.^[26] Experiences contrary to cultural expectations such as this might be explained as an influence of the person dreamed about, if he was of a culture different from the dreamer, as in this case.^[27]

Veridical Announcing Dreams

The details of Tin Aung Myo’s mother’s dream could not be verified, but other announcing dreams include correct information not known to the dreamer at the time.

The first indication that they are pregnant, or might be, comes to many women in announcing dreams. Announcing dreams also inform women of their children’s sex, often before this has been determined by tests. Over 20% of the women surveyed by Kimberly Mascaro had dreams in which the child’s sex was unknown at the time, but later confirmed as correct. One woman dreamed that she was playing with a male child, a few weeks before a sonogram showed that she was carrying a boy. When she was ten weeks’ pregnant, another woman dreamed that the twins she was carrying were boys, as was confirmed at twenty weeks.^[28]

‘My dreams have never come true in real life, except for [those] concerning my unborn children’, one woman told researcher Sarah Hinze. With her first pregnancy, she dreamed three times that her baby was a boy with blond hair, born two months premature, yet perfectly all right. Indeed, her baby was born at 33 weeks, a blond and healthy boy. Before she knew she was pregnant a second time, she dreamed that she had twin girls, as was later confirmed by the doctors.^[29]

Many other physical and behavioural details about unborn children may appear in announcing dreams. Not uncommonly, the visions prove to be so accurate, matching the appearance of the child after birth, that parents are convinced that they had been given a prebirth glimpse of their children.^[30] In her book *Stories of the Unborn Soul* Elisabeth Hallett includes a case in which a woman dreamed that the son she was carrying was about two years old. She was sitting on the floor playing with him. He told her he was going to build her a castle with blocks, and giggled. When the boy was born, he turned to have exactly the physical features as in the dream and he had the same giggle as she had heard in the dream.^[31]

Parental Responses to Announcing Dreams

Announcing dreams can influence parental behaviour in many ways. One of the most common is to give a child a name heard in a dream. Shortly before she became pregnant, an American woman dreamed about a boy, whose name impressed her as Stephen. She took the dream as a sign that she would deliver a boy, which she did. She named him Stephen, although this was not a name she and her husband had been considering before her dream.^[32]

Announcing dreams can affect a woman’s personal belief system as well as decision-making and can motivate meaningful behavioural and attitudinal change. Mascaro concluded that the presence of the unborn child in the dreams of pregnant women was linked to confidence and affirmation (particularly in unwanted pregnancies), bonding and sense of connection with their children in utero.^[33] Similarly, reincarnation researcher Carol Bowman noted, ‘The dreams may give specific information about the child’s identity, past life history, and advice on how to care for the child’s special needs after it is born. The messages help the family prepare’,^[34]

Some women have decided against pregnancy termination after announcing dreams.^[35] This occurred in the Finnish reincarnation case of Samuel Helander studied by Stevenson. Samuel’s mother became pregnant shortly after her stepbrother died unexpectedly. The pregnancy was unwelcome and she was considering an abortion when she dreamed of her stepbrother, who told her, ‘Keep that child!’ She did, and after he was born, Samuel displayed a variety of behaviours reminiscent of the stepbrother. He began speaking of memories of his life when he was about eighteen months old and continued to do so for several years.^[36]

Experiences Related to Announcing Dreams

Departure Dreams

Closely related to announcing dreams are departure dreams, in which members of a deceased person’s family dream that he tells them where to find him reborn. Jürgen Keil studied a case like this among the Turkish Alevi. The previous person’s mother dreamed that he had been reborn in a certain house in a neighbouring village. She and later two of his brothers went there, but they were not allowed to see the boy, and only confirmed his identity years later, when he began to speak about the previous life.^[37]

In some departure dreams, the reincarnated child complains (to his previous family) about his present circumstances. ‘Help! I have got myself in a poor family. Come rescue me,’ one mother

dreamed her deceased son told her. A member of another family dreamed of being told that the new infant's father was drinking alcohol excessively, and in a third instance, the previous person (as he appeared in the dream) alleged that his new mother was feeding him at her convenience, rather than when he needed sustenance, leaving him hungry.^[38]

Departure dreams are much rarer than announcing dreams, and unlike announcing dreams, usually come after the birth of the child. Of hundreds of reincarnation-related announcing dreams, only six occurred postnatally. By contrast, of seventeen departure dreams, twelve were postnatal and five antenatal.^[39] In a Burmese antenatal departure dream, a newly deceased man appeared in the dream of a relative and said, 'I am going to live with Ma Htwe. Please look after my children.' Htwe was then a young single woman, but she later married and gave birth to a child who recalled the life of the man in the dream.^[40]

Announcements via Waking Visions and Apparitions

Most rebirth announcements are delivered in dreams but they may take other forms as well. Foremost among these are waking visions and apparitions. Bowman notes that there are many cases in which visions proved to be so accurate, coinciding with the appearance of the child at birth, that the parents were convinced that they had had a preview of their unborn children.^[41]

When apparitions appear in reincarnation cases, they typically match the deceased person whose life the child later recalls rather than the child himself or herself. Stevenson heard of nine cases with apparitions of deceased persons sighted between death and rebirth.^[42] In the early twentieth-century Italian case of Blanche Battista (not included in Stevenson's count), Blanche's mother at the end of her first trimester unexpectedly saw the apparition of a daughter who had died three years earlier. According to Blanche's father, the girl appeared 'with childlike joyousness' and quietly spoke the words, 'Mama, I'm coming back'.^[43]

Sometimes words are heard without an apparition being perceived. An example of this occurred in the case of Susan Eastland, described above. In the delivery room at Susan's birth, her father heard Winnie say, 'Daddy, I'm coming home.'^[44] Among the Beaver Indians of British Columbia, not only apparitions and voices may convey announcements, touches may be interpreted in that way as well. A young father felt someone touch his foot, but there was no one there. He and his family were certain that it was the spirit of a woman who had been murdered not long before. When his sister became pregnant shortly thereafter and his brother-in-law heard a baby crying, these things were taken as signs that the woman had reincarnated in their family.^[45]

Announcements through Mediums

There are several instances of announcements delivered through mediums.^[46] A variety of forms of announcement, including mediumistic, occurred in the 1911 Italian reincarnation case of Alexandrina Samona. Alexandrina's sister, for whom she was named, died of meningitis on 15 March 1910. Three days later, her mother Adèle dreamed that she came to her and told her not to grieve, that she had not left her and would be returning as her child. Three days after that, Adèle had the same dream again. She knew nothing about reincarnation at the time, but a friend suggested that that is what the dreams portended, and gave her a book to read. Adèle had had an operation related to a miscarriage and doubted that she could become pregnant again. But the signs continued. One morning the family heard knocks on the door and opened it, thinking they had a visitor, but no one was there. After this, they tried to contact Alexandrina through a medium. At the first séance, a communicator identifying herself as Alexandrina said that she had made the knocks and again reassured the distraught Adèle that she would be returning to her. In a later séance, she said this would be before Christmas of that year and that she would not be alone. In April Adèle realized that

she was pregnant, in August her doctor confirmed that she was carrying twins, and in the afternoon of 22 November, she gave birth.^[47]

Other Afterdeath Communications

Family members may sense contact with the spirits of deceased loved ones in a variety of other ways, such as felt presences and poltergeist actions.^[48] In *Return from Heaven*, Bowman describes a two-year-old girl named Lauren who spoke with her deceased brother Roger on her toy telephone. After a year of regular conversations with Roger, Lauren announced to her mother, 'Roger said he's coming back very soon.' Her mother tried to explain that Roger was now in Heaven, but Lauren insisted, 'But I've been talking to him and he told me he's coming back!' A few days later when shopping, Lauren wanted to buy clothes for an infant boy. Indeed, her mother became pregnant the following year. She gave birth to Donald, who when he was able to speak made dozens of accurate statements about the auto accident, other events in Roger's life, and changes in the house after his death.^[49]

Prebirth and Intermission Memories

It is surprisingly common for children to remember events before their births, in the womb or before. In about 20% of the reincarnation cases that have been studied, children remember not only previous lives, but the intermission between lives.^[50] Some children with prebirth or intermission memories recall contacting their parents in dreams or presenting themselves to them as apparitions.

Maung Yin Maung of Burma recalled appearing both as an apparition and in a dream to his mother. After his light plane crashed, he had wandered about as a spirit, he said. One night he found himself in the area of his brother's house, so he went there, approaching it just as someone exited the privy. It was his sister-in-law and he walked toward her, halting when he felt he could go no further. She seemed to see him and spoke to him, inviting him to 'stay' with them if he wished. Later that night he visited her in her sleep. His still-living mother and sister showed up in the dream, pleading with him to return with them, but he told them he would stay with his brother and sister-in-law. The sister-in-law (Yin Maung's mother) recalled seeing the apparition and inviting him to stay with them and also having had a dream in which the deceased man appeared along with his (living) mother and sister. The previous mother recalled a complementary dream.^[51]

An Indian boy, Veer Singh, recalled having been a four-year-old who died after an illness as well a period of eleven years between lives that he said he had passed in a tree in the yard of his former family. He knew that the family had purchased a camel and had been engaged in lawsuits and he stated the names of (and later recognized) two children born after 'his' death. Once, he said, he had become annoyed with two women swinging from a branch of his tree and caused the plank on which they were seated to break, an event that also had occurred. He said that he had left his tree to accompany a brother when he departed the compound alone and his previous mother recalled having a dream in which her deceased son had told her about one of these excursions and that he was accompanying his brother when he went out. When Veer was eventually reborn, it was not in his own family, however, but in that of strangers in another village.^[52]

Planned Reincarnation

Stevenson noted that the actions of spirits appearing in announcing dreams suggest that the spirits have freedom of choice and can act on their own volition. He related this feature of announcing dreams to stated intentions about rebirth before death, which likewise suggest personal control over where reincarnation takes place.^[53] Like announcing dreams, the prevalence of planned reincarnation varies cross-culturally. It is relatively common among the indigenous peoples of northwest North America, such as the Tlingit, and in Tibet.^[54] Not infrequently, planned

reincarnation and announcing dreams appear in the same case. Stevenson considered both to be features of a fully developed reincarnation case, notwithstanding the cultural variations in prevalence.^[55]

No fewer than ten (22%) of 46 Tlingit reincarnation cases studied by Stevenson included plans made before death.^[56] William George Sr, a Tlingit fisherman, told his favorite son and daughter-in-law, 'If there is anything to this rebirth business, I will come back and be your son.' He added that they would know him because he would have birthmarks similar to those he then had, one on his left shoulder and the other on the volar surface of his left forearm. He gave his son a gold watch to keep for him. Shortly after his death, his daughter-in-law became pregnant. She carried the baby to term, but during her labour dreamed about William George Sr. When the baby was born, he turned out to have the two birthmarks that William George Sr, had said he would be known by. When he grew into a toddler, he recognized the gold watch among his parents' possessions.^[57]

In some countries in which planned reincarnation is less common, such as Turkey and India, elderly people may predict a return in their families. Family cases unusual in these countries, but when a child recalls being a deceased member of his own family, that person has often predicted his rebirth in the family.^[58]

Understanding Announcing Dreams and Related Experiences

Psychological Projection

Stevenson noted that announcing dreams can be understood 'as derived from the wishes and beliefs of the dreamers'.^[59] The cultural variations in announcing dreams make this an appealing assumption for many critics, but it is hard to sustain in all circumstances. Especially when the dreams are predictive and veridical, it is difficult to view them simply as psychological projections and it becomes necessary to suppose that these cases have been wrongly remembered and reported. When children after birth are said to resemble dream children, this could be entirely illusory and due to wishful thinking or the imposition of culturally-determined beliefs.^[60]

Motivated Psi

One way of accommodating the veridical aspects of announcing dreams without rejecting the accounts as delusional is to posit psi engagement by the dreamer. The dreamer might employ telepathy or clairvoyance to learn of matters beyond normal knowledge or draw on precognition to anticipate things to come. Philosopher Stephen Braude has proposed that the motivations of living persons are decisive in explaining reincarnation cases.^[61] From this perspective, the cases require no input from a deceased person, only psi acquisitions by the living.

Discarnate Agency

The conclusion reached by Stevenson was that announcing dreams 'hint at an initiative on the part of at least some of the discarnate personalities in the selection of a family for another incarnation'.^[62] This of course is the way that these dreams are understood by those who experience them. There is independent support for the idea of discarnate agency from memories of the intermission, in many of which there likewise is a conscious selection of the parents for the new life.^[63] Cases of planned reincarnation supply another strand of evidence for some degree of control over the reincarnation process. When the phenomena of other experiences related to announcing dreams are brought into consideration, the impression of the survival of a mind or consciousness stream capable of deliberative thought and conscious action is even stronger. The cultural variations and dissonances in announcing dreams make sense if we assume that beliefs and convictions held in life

are carried over into death and continue to help shape the behaviours of discarnate spirits.^[64]

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Footnotes

- 1.^ Krippner, Bogzaran, & Carvalho (2002).
- 2.^ Matthew 1, 18-22, Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible.
- 3.^ Story (1975), 197-98; Stevenson (1983), 245.
- 4.^ Bowman (2001), 191-218.
- 5.^ Mascaro (2016a), 192; Mascaro (2016b), 7.
- 6.^ Mascaro (2016a), 201-2.
- 7.^ Bauer, Hoffmeister, & Goerg (2005); Carman & Carman (2013); Hallett (2002); and Hinze (2016), among others.
- 8.^ Mascaro (2016b), 7.
- 9.^ Tylor (1877).
- 10.^ Matlock (2019), 164.
- 11.^ Tucker (2005), 9.
- 12.^ Stevenson (2001), 100
- 13.^ Stevenson (2001), 80.
- 14.^ Mascaro (2016a), 195-96.
- 15.^ Mascaro (2016a), 202-3.
- 16.^ Stevenson (2001), 175.
- 17.^ Stevenson (2001), 175; Tucker (2001), 8-9.
- 18.^ For comparative statistics on family cases cross-culturally, see Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 223.
- 19.^ Stevenson (2001), 175.
- 20.^ Stevenson (1983), 245 n6. For examples, see Stevenson (1983), 236, 255-56.
- 21.^ Stevenson (2001), 99.

- 22.^ Stevenson (1980), 11-12.
- 23.^ Stevenson (1994), 251-52.
- 24.^ Stevenson (2001), 101.
- 25.^ Stevenson (1987), 100.
- 26.^ Stevenson (1983), 229.
- 27.^ Matlock (2019), 188.
- 28.^ Mascaro (2016b), 10.
- 29.^ Hinze (2016), 27-28.
- 30.^ Bowman (2001), 200-1.
- 31.^ Hallett (2002), 45-46.
- 32.^ Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 240-41.
- 33.^ Mascaro (2016a), 198-99. See also Mascaro 2016b, 2018.
- 34.^ Bowman (2001), 213.
- 35.^ Mascaro (2016a), 199.
- 36.^ Stevenson (2003), 152.
- 37.^ Pasricha, Keil, Tucker, & Stevenson (2005), 378.
- 38.^ Stevenson (2001), 100.
- 39.^ Matlock (2016).
- 40.^ Stevenson (1997), vol. 2, 1405.
- 41.^ Bowman (2001), 200-1. For examples, see the collections of Hallett (2002) and Hinze (2016).
- 42.^ Stevenson (1997), vol. 2, 2091.
- 43.^ Stevenson (2003), 22.
- 44.^ Stevenson (2001), 80.
- 45.^ Mills (1988), 51-52 n10.
- 46.^ Nahm & Hassler (2011), 312; Matlock (2019), 225.
- 47.^ Stevenson (2003), 23-27.
- 48.^ For instance, see Carman & Carman (2013), 158-59.
- 49.^ Bowman (2001), 195-97.
- 50.^ See [Intermission Memories](#).
- 51.^ Stevenson (1983), 280-81.
- 52.^ Stevenson (1975), 328-29.
- 53.^ Stevenson (2001), 39.
- 54.^ Stevenson (2001), 98.
- 55.^ Stevenson (2001), 98.
- 56.^ Stevenson (2001), 98.
- 57.^ Stevenson (1974), 231-41.
- 58.^ Stevenson (2001), 99.
- 59.^ Stevenson (2001), 243-44.
- 60.^ Matlock (2016).
- 61.^ Braude (2003).
- 62.^ Stevenson (2001), 244.
- 63.^ See [Intermission Memories](#).
- 64.^ Matlock (2016).