

LLEWELLYN'S

— — — COMPLETE BOOK OF — — —  
LUCID DREAMING



A Comprehensive Guide to Promote Creativity,  
Overcome Sleep Disturbances & Enhance Health and Wellness

CLARE R. JOHNSON, PhD

## About the Author



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British lucid dream researcher Clare R. Johnson, PhD, is Board Director and current Vice President of the world's biggest dream organisation, the International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD). A lifelong, frequent lucid dreamer, she did undergraduate work on lucid dreams in 1995 and later became the first person in the world to do a PhD on lucid dreaming as a creative tool. She has researched lucid dreaming for twenty-two years, and for the past twelve years she has taught practical courses on how to access the deep creative and healing potential of the unconscious.

Her work on lucid dreaming has been featured in documentaries, magazines, anthologies, radio shows, and television. Clare regularly speaks at international venues on topics as diverse as lucid dreams for the dying, sleep disorders, and how to overcome nightmares.

A novelist, prize-winning short story writer, and poet, Clare is the author of two lucid dream-inspired novels (as Clare Jay). *Breathing in Colour* looks at how lucid dreaming can heal trauma, and *Dreamrunner* explores lucidity as a potential cure for violent moving nightmares. Her nonfiction book, *Dream Therapy: Dream Your Way to Health and Happiness*, explores the transformative effect that dreamwork can have on our lives. One of Clare's greatest joys in recent years has been empowering her young daughter to have a happier dream life and helping her to recreate her dreams artistically. To inspire others to do the same, she co-edited a book on children's dreams and nightmares, *Sleep Monsters and Superheroes: Empowering Children through Creative Dreamplay*.

Clare is the creator of [www.DeepLucidDreaming.com](http://www.DeepLucidDreaming.com), where she can be contacted for advice on lucid dreams and nightmares.



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CLARE R. JOHNSON, PHD

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I feel very lucky to be part of a global family of dreamers: the International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD) has always encouraged and inspired my work. I am grateful for every dream and every conversation that has led me deeper into the mysteries of lucid dreaming.

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I'd like to thank my wonderful family and friends for all their support and encouragement. My husband, Markus, was the one who first suggested that I do PhD research into lucid dreaming, and he has accompanied me through twenty-one years of lucid dream exploration. One of my greatest pleasures has been teaching our little daughter, Yasmin, about lucid dreaming and empowering her to create a happier dream life. Her early war cry still echoes in my ears:

“This is MY dream! I am STRONG!”

Yes!

# Dedication

*For intrepid lucid dreamers everywhere*



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# *Foreword by Dr. Keith Hearne, BSc, MSc, PhD*

*Dr. Keith Hearne conducted the world's first sleep-laboratory research into lucid dreaming,<sup>1</sup> discovered the ocular signalling method of communicating from within the lucid dream, and invented the first "lucid dream machine." <sup>2</sup>*

**D**r. Clare Johnson has energetically led the way in revealing the limitless practical and spiritual potential of lucid dreaming, so far-reaching it can change the world. Her clearly written book is destined to become essential reading for all those interested in lucid dreaming. It is based on her own and others' research, and her extensive personal experience of the paradox of becoming conscious in dreams.

Let us be certain that a lucid dream is more than just a vivid dream—there occurs an astonishing and insightful realisation of being in the made-up, realistic scenery of a dream. The presence of a glaring incongruity in the dream, such as speaking to someone you know to be dead, can trigger lucidity. It's like suddenly becoming awake but knowing, with your full critical faculties, that the world around you is completely illusory. The other, incredible main component of lucidity is the operation of the basic law of dreaming: What you think you will then dream. The dream's events can be controlled by mere thought.

Clare is a diligent and professional academic who can provide a measured scientific description of the flow of research and developments. Her

perspective is even more greatly enhanced because she has herself utilised the lucid state for many years to encourage her own literary creativity (her novels are beautifully formed and worded) and to help people heal themselves using the huge untapped power of the unconscious mind within such dreams.

Her lifelong personal experience of lucid dreaming, along with accounts of my research into lucid dreams, stimulated Clare to study them for her PhD. I was the first person in the world to conduct sleep-laboratory research into lucid dreaming. At Hull University, I discovered a way of getting lucid dreamer subjects to signal out from within the dream.

I wired up a lucid dreamer subject and instructed him to make a sequence of eight left-right eye movements on becoming lucid. The technique was highly successful. Near 8:00 in the morning on April 12, 1975, the subject was in indubitable REM (dreaming) sleep when, suddenly, the set of regular ocular signals appeared on the paper-chart. It was so astounding—there in front of me was a clear communication from someone in his own vivid dream world. He had become fully knowledgeable that the dream was a vivid artificial construction, and was signalling consciously in the way he had been told. It was like receiving a communication from another galaxy! A method had been devised enabling dreams to be explored from within.

At Liverpool University, I invented the first ever “lucid dream induction machine,” which delivered electrical stimulation to the user’s wrist when they were detected to be in REM sleep. The scientific tools for a deeper exploration of lucid dreaming territory had been found.

Today, Clare’s book establishes the extent of that territory: it points out the essential phenomena of lucid dreaming and then amazes us by opening its extraordinary major vistas to us that reveal the true glory and limitless potential of our inner universe.

In part 1, she makes the point that simply being passively aware of dreaming, with lucid insight, is a wonderful enjoyment in itself. Having experienced dream lucidity makes many people question the very nature of the world in which we find ourselves in wakefulness. Could life be a Great

Dream? It encourages us to think the unthinkable and wonder if science operates under the wrong paradigm completely. I think it inevitable that the ultimate understanding will be that we exist in an illusory non-material “universe.” Lucid dreaming is not a trivial subject!

Clare compassionately recommends the wonderful recreational aspect of lucid dreaming for people with disabilities to transcend their physical limitations. We can all become “superhuman” via dream lucidity—say, flying anywhere, even through solid walls. It may be that lucid dream Olympic competitions may be feasible one day. I suggest that lucid dreaming (a richer multi-sensory experience than virtual reality) be an essential skill for future space travellers, to alleviate the tedium of long-duration journeys to other planets and thus aiding the mental health of the crew. Clare’s ponderings will undoubtedly stimulate readers to come up with new possibilities for the state, and how they might be achieved practically.

In part 2, Clare excites us with examples of the enhancement of creativity through lucidity. As a composer as well as psychologist, I have heard original music in dreams (lucid and ordinary) on many occasions. Some items have been used in my works. Clare uses a method of waking lucidity in order to encourage creativity in writing. Interestingly, I have also entered art galleries in dreams and seen amazing paintings but could not reproduce them upon waking—it is not (yet) an area of creative skill for me, but I can see now from Clare’s work that the learning can be acquired within the special state of dream lucidity. Another area covered is that of various delights that may be enjoyed in lucid dreams. Some people, especially those new to lucid dreaming (in the “id” stage, we might say), direct the activity into scenarios of intense sexual pleasure. It is of course the safest sex imaginable!

In part 3, Clare describes how nightmares in adults and children can be dealt with through lucid dreaming. I found in my PhD work that nightmares could be abolished in sufferers by changing the mindset so as to actually welcome the onset, because it shows that they are really dreaming and that

dreams can be controlled. The nightmare, then, can be used as an unexpected portal into our inner world.

Part 4 covers the absolutely fascinating field of physical and psychological healing brought about in lucid dreams. The much observed mind-body link can cause an illness (e.g., a situation that a person “cannot stomach” may result in a physical gastric condition), but the symbolic link can be understood and uncoupled by the unconscious. The concept of healing others—with the intention coming from within the healer’s lucid dream—is one that challenges conventional medical science to the core. These are powerful fields.

In part 5, Clare takes lucid dreaming into a beautifully spiritual region by concentrating not so much on strong imagery but on topics such as dream telepathy, out-of-body experiences, and meditation in lucid dreams, even exploring the black void and the reportedly imageless state of interconnectedness, and using lucid dreaming to help the dying and bereaved.

This is a significant book. Lucid dreaming has grown up beyond the gee-whiz level and can now be seen as a universal way of attuning to all that is exquisite and good and deeply felt between all of us. That touches my heart.

—Dr. Keith Hearne, BSc, MSc, PhD London, England 2017

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1. Hearne, “Lucid Dreams: An Electro-Physiological and Psychological Study.”
  2. Hearne, *The Dream Machine: Lucid Dreams and How to Control Them*.

## Disclaimer

This book offers techniques for working with lucid dreams. It is not a substitute for psychological counselling or medical advice. If you have any physical or mental health concerns, you must consult your doctor or other medical practitioner. The author assumes no responsibility or liability for the actions of the reader.

The author would like to clarify that she does not intend to provide a complete and exhaustive scientific, academic, psychological, spiritual, or historical perspective on lucid dreaming. The word “complete” in the title of this book merely reflects that it is one of several big, informative books chosen for the wonderful Llewellyn’s Complete Book series. The book itself was written long before the publisher decided to include it in this series. The book title is therefore simply the name of a book series. A wealth of information grounded in science, psychology, history, and diverse academic sources is present throughout the book, along with rich accounts of lucid dreams, personal stories, and practical techniques. However, no book can hope to cover an entire field, especially not one that expands every night as we lucidly explore our dreams!

# PART ONE: How to Lucid Dream

Lucid dreaming is a learnable skill. This section takes a highly practical, in-depth, scientific approach to help you experience the tremendous excitement of waking up inside your dreams and increasing your lucid dreaming frequency. In [chapter 1](#) we look at the importance of daytime lucidity training to cultivate a lucid mindset, and in [chapter 2](#) we move into how we can use our sleeping bodies to trigger lucidity, with tips for the best reality checks. The nightly gateway to lucid dreams is explored in [chapter 3](#), where we'll look at how to navigate through bizarre pre-sleep imagery and sensations to fall asleep consciously. But once we become lucid inside a dream, how do we stay lucid for long enough to experience all we desire? [chapter 4](#) shares my CLEAR stabilisation technique and explores many different ways of hanging on to dream lucidity.

Should we control our dreams? Lucid dreaming does not have to be about dream control, and [chapter 5](#) shows how to passively engage with lucid dreams and rejoice in their vast creativity without overtly controlling them. Then [chapter 6](#) takes us on a journey into becoming a “dream magician,” exploring the ways in which we can actively guide lucid dreams and discover how our thoughts, emotions, and desires shape the dream reality.

In [chapter 7](#) we get up close and friendly with the lucid dream body. How does it feel? What is it made of, and what can we do with it? We look at how disabled people can benefit from lucid dreaming, and examine how to transcend the laws of physics that exist only in our minds when we are dreaming. To complete this first part of the book, we move into the fascinating territory of lucid dream figures in [chapter 8](#). How

should we interact with the people we meet in our dreams? What are the pros and cons of lucid dream violence? We'll look at how conscious lucid dream figures are, from the zombie-like ones to the super-aware ones, and consider the value of lucid dream mentors or guides.



# INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to become “lucid” inside a dream? Lucid dreaming begins when we know that we are dreaming while we are dreaming. Yet lucidity itself goes much deeper than this simple definition.

When I was a child, dreams were barely mentioned in my home, let alone lucid ones. I didn’t know that lucidity could help with fearful dreams. When I was three years old I had my first flash of dream lucidity when I had a nightmare in which I was drowning. All my life I’ve carried with me the memory of this dream and can still see the beautiful light-filled turquoise water in the swimming pool. I was happily playing until suddenly I was below the surface, sinking ever deeper, and despite my struggles I began to drown. In an adrenaline-fuelled panic, I realised I would never reach the surface in time.

Then, just like that, I knew I had two choices: either I could stay in this dream and drown, or I could wake up. I decided to wake up and did this by rolling over so violently in the pool that my physical body actually rolled right out of bed and fell on the floor with a thump, bringing my mother running. She comforted me with the words, “It wasn’t real. Just a bad dream, Clare. Go back to sleep.” But for me, it was more real than reality. The memory never faded. How can we say that an experience that impacts us emotionally and becomes part of our permanent life memories is not real? On an experiential level, dreams *are* real!

This shrugging off of a super-realistic dream experience struck me as strange back then. I learned not to share with my parents my later childhood experiences of flying over the house in lucid dreams, as they would just laugh and change the subject. It still strikes me as strange today that we live in a culture that seems on the whole to have so little time for dreams. Now,

with many more people interested in lucid dreaming, the tide is turning, as one of the keys to lucid dreaming is paying attention to our nightly dreams—the non-lucid ones. These dreams, along with pre-sleep visions and sensations, are the gateway to lucid dreaming. If we ignore them, how can we ever hope to get lucid?

## What Can We Do in Lucid Dreams?

People ask me, “What can I do when I become lucid in a dream?” The liberating answer is that once you have learned how to stabilise the dream, you can do pretty much anything you like. Waking up in a dream usually means finding ourselves in an environment that is as super-real as that of waking life, where thoughts can change reality, gravity can be weak or strong, and time is not linear. This means we can imaginatively create whatever we like by thinking about it with intent and expecting it to happen. It means we can have conversations with dream figures without opening our mouths, revisit our childhood home, or spend time catching up with friends who died long ago. In lucid dreams we can transcend the usual restrictions of the laws of physics by walking through walls, flying Superman-style, or teleporting to a new dream scene.

We can have fun in lucid dreams. We can find a beautiful, willing partner to have sex with, fly to the top of a mountain to soak up the stunning views, breathe underwater, invent a creature never seen before, practise our ice skating skills, or just reach out and touch a dream tree to feel the roughness of its bark. We can heal past traumas, hone physical skills, and turn ourselves into eagles or tigers. If we encounter a frightening monster, we can face it and transform it with love so that it becomes our friend, or ask it what it represents and learn something valuable about ourselves and our dream world. Lucidity gives us the option of guiding the dream to a more pleasant conclusion. And beyond all of that lies what I call “deep lucid dreaming”: when all the usual dream imagery falls away and we float

lucidly in deep dream space, we can have transformative experiences and gain profound insights into the nature of conscious experience.

## My Journey into Lucid Dream Research

My lucid dreaming practice exploded in 1994, when I was an undergraduate at Lancaster University in the UK. At that point, I had yet to read a single nonfiction book on the subject, so I was exploring this inner territory with no help other than my own resources and the advice and suggestions of my friend and fellow lucid dreamer Rich Brain. I developed my own techniques for inducing and guiding lucid dreams, and had around 150 in the first year. The following year, I was lucid almost every night. When I moved to France in 1995 to study philosophy in Montpellier, I was delighted to discover psychophysiolgist Dr. Stephen LaBerge's book *Lucid Dreaming: The Power of Being Awake and Aware in Your Dreams*. In the first magazine dedicated to lucid dreaming, the Paris-based *Oniros*, I wrote that in his book I had found a kind of echo of all my own conclusions and thoughts about lucid dreaming.<sup>3</sup>

Twenty years earlier, on April 12, 1975, British psychologist Dr. Keith Hearne had conducted a pioneering experiment that provided the first scientific proof of lucid dreaming. His subject, Alan Worsley, became the first person to successfully send a deliberate message—in the form of ocular signals recorded on a polygraph machine—from a lucid dream.<sup>4</sup> Many years would pass before I would meet and work with Keith Hearne, but I first heard of Alan Worsley when I read an interview with him in the forty-fourth issue of *Oniros*. By chance, in that very same issue I'd written a piece in French about my experiences with lucid dreaming. I wrote about how I'd learned to switch the dream scene by blinking, created surreal and magnificent landscapes, improved my flying, asked dream people for advice, and experimented with shrinking or enlarging my dream body or making it disappear altogether. I noted that meditating in a lucid dream had triggered astounding experiences.<sup>5</sup>

The exploration of this inner world was so compelling to me and seemed so intrinsically creative that I began an academic investigation of lucid dreaming in the form of an undergraduate project that I called “Rêves Tangibles,” or Tangible Dreams. I eventually became the first doctoral researcher in the world to investigate the role of lucid dreaming in the creative writing process. In 2003, when I began my doctorate at the University of Leeds, UK, academia wasn’t a particularly hospitable environment for lucid dreaming. I was lucky to find open-minded supervisors who didn’t get overly flustered when I shared with them my experiences of disappearing atom by atom in a lucid dream, or hanging out with my novel characters in dream space! When I spoke at conferences about how my lucid dreams were inspiring my novel-writing process, I encountered plenty of scepticism.

At the 2005 Dream Writing Conference in Kent, England, there was a huge audience eruption after my talk. I’d had the nerve to say—in all honesty—that I was “researching my PhD topic while asleep, in my lucid dreams.” It appeared that this sounded like preposterous nonsense (or preposterous laziness!) to skeptics of lucid dreaming, some of whom leapt to their feet to demand, “What proof is there that lucid dreaming even exists?” I told them it was an English man who had provided the first scientific proof of lucid dreaming back in 1975, and that an American, Stephen LaBerge, had independently repeated the experiment in 1978 and had gone on to write popular books on the subject.

But the skeptics—who were psychotherapists and psychoanalysts—calmed down only when I asked the audience to raise their hands if they had ever been aware that they were dreaming. Fully half of the hands in the room shot up!

In that auditorium, facing some fairly outraged people and armed only with a bottle of water that I kept taking nervous gulps from, I was amazed that these professionals who worked with dreams every day seemed so resistant to the idea of lucid dreaming. I was really touched when a few people approached me after my talk to say that they had never known about

lucid dreaming before, but that they intended to find out more and try to incorporate it into their therapy sessions or creative writing courses. Others came up to tell me that they'd had these special dreams all their lives without ever knowing there was a name for them.

These days, things are different. Lucid dreaming is a hot topic. Many people are aware of its potential for everything from psycho-spiritual growth to skill rehearsal and nightmare transformation. Lucid dreams can help us make life decisions, test different possibilities, and act in the face of fear.

## Taking the Plunge

A rich chain of lucid dreams pointed out my path with this book, highlighting my fears, helping me to make decisions, and presenting me with wonderful gifts. The following dream came along in 2015, at a time when I was very focused on the creative journey of writing down the two decades of intense work I had then done on lucid dreaming:

I'm cycling up a two-mile-high mountain. The views are breathtaking, but towards the summit the path grows narrow and there's a sheer drop to my right: one false move and I'll fall off the edge. I start to feel seriously scared. My fear triggers me to become lucid, and I decide to face my fear: I turn the wheel of my mountain bike to the right and cycle off over the edge of the sheer drop.

Since gravity is different in lucid dreams, my bike wheels stay in contact with the side of the mountain despite the sheer angle, so I go bombing down. This is the most exhilarating ride of my life! Finally, I come to a halt. I yell out to the dream, "Why is lucid dreaming so amazing?" The answer booms out: "Because you can experience the beauty of the entire universe."

To my astonishment, I realise I'm standing on the very edge of this lucid dream world, which is a tree-shaped planet. Curious, I peer over

my handlebars and see a gigantic drop into deep space. Swirling, coloured mists layer down and down. “Okay,” I think, “let’s do it!” I release my brakes, kick down hard on my right pedal, and go sailing off the edge of the world. As my bike and I plummet through luminous mists, we dissolve blissfully into tiny points of light.

The mountain was two miles high to reflect two decades of work into lucid dreaming, and the dream presented me with a challenge: it was time for me to take the plunge and get the book published instead of struggling uphill, turning it into a bigger and bigger mountain! In the lucid dream, when I took the plunge it turned out to be an exhilarating journey, followed by an unexpected, even deeper plunge. Mere weeks after this lucid dream, I took the plunge in my waking life: I signed with two literary agents simultaneously on different sides of the Atlantic. My US agent quickly found a publisher for this book, while my UK agent shared her vision of me authoring a short but deep book on healing dreams, which turned into *Dream Therapy*.

## Non-Lucid Dreams: The Way into Lucid Dreaming

In the buzz about getting lucid, it’s good to remember that non-lucid dreams can be immensely valuable and creative. If we work with non-lucid dreams while awake in trance states, we can reenter them with full lucidity to explore them further, change them, or consciously absorb their energy and imagery. I call this lucid reconnection with dreams “Lucid Dreamplay.”<sup>6</sup> When we practise Lucid Dreamplay by working with a dream in ways that mirror the possibilities of lucid dreaming, we learn to lucid dream while awake. This is not only helpful in itself for triggering psychological insights and deepening familiarity with our dreaming mind; it also trains us to get lucid in our dreams.

Engaging with non-lucid dreams is *the* way into lucid dreaming: keeping a dream journal, thinking about our nightly dreams during the day,

recognising our personal dream imagery, and embodying the dream with creative action as described in many of the practical techniques in this book are all ways of raising our lucidity frequency so we will be much more likely to become lucid in a dream. When we shower dreams with respectful attention, lucidity will not be far off. Once dream lucidity comes regularly, each lucid dreamer will naturally experiment in different ways depending on what excites them most.

Lucid dreaming is interesting for individuals seeking to explore the depths of their psyche and beyond; for therapists who want to help people resolve trauma; for artists and writers seeking creative inspiration; for those who want to experience the thrilling freedom of becoming conscious in a malleable dream world; for athletes who want to improve their sports skills by practicing in the dream state; for those seeking a happier, more creative life; for scientists, philosophers, and neuroscientists; and for those aspiring to reach a higher level of mindfulness not only in waking life but also in sleep.

In lucid dreams, the (dream) world really is your oyster.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the remarkable freedom available to lucid dreamers, there are a couple of questions and concerns about lucid dreaming that I’d like to address, the first of which is whether or not it’s a good idea to “control” our dreams.

## Should We Control Our Dreams?

Some people are resistant to lucid dreaming because they don’t want to change the dream. Yet as we’ll see in more detail in chapter 5, lucid dreaming does not need to go hand in hand with dream control. A woman who came to one of my lucid dream workshops told me that if she became lucid in a dream, she would stand stock-still because she was terrified of influencing anything in the dream. When I asked her why this was, she said it was because she had the idea that the dream was sacred and nothing should interfere with its message. After some discussion it emerged that she

changed her dreams all the time in waking visualisations, and I teased her good-naturedly, “So what difference does it make which state of consciousness you do it in?” She laughed at this and we left it there, but after the workshop I wondered, why might it seem okay to somebody to act in waking life but not when lucid in a dream? After all, we are conscious in both states.

Freezing in a lucid dream for fear of changing anything seems to overlook the fact that dreams are incredibly sensitive thought-responsive environments, so the simple act of *observing* the dream and involuntarily having thoughts or emotions about it will trigger a reaction in the dream imagery. We are not separate from our dreams! Dream imagery and events seem intricately bound to the dreamer’s state of mind at the moment of dreaming. *The simple fact of becoming lucid can instantly change the dream imagery as our perception of reality changes.*

Most of us are lucid for an incredibly small percentage of the many thousands of hours we spend sleeping, so it seems a pity to restrict ourselves to a particular way of interacting with our dreaming mind when we do finally become lucid. Why not just be open to whatever happens in the dream and react intuitively depending on how we feel at the time? After all, that’s generally what we tend to do in our waking lives, and who is to say that waking consciousness is any less sacred than dreaming consciousness? Personally I don’t see a big distinction: consciousness is on a continuum that ranges across the full rainbow spectrum of states, including deep sleep, non-lucid dreams, pre-sleep visuals, lucid dreams, daydreams, trance states, full waking awareness, and many others. Modern sleep research has shown that parts of the brain can be awake while other parts are asleep, so states of awareness are not separate from one another; each blends into the next in complex and fascinating ways that we are only just beginning to learn about.

If we view lucid dreaming as simply one of many natural states of consciousness that we can all experience, such as daydreaming or deep relaxation, perhaps we’ll feel less inhibited about engaging actively with



our dreaming minds once we get lucid. Reacting in a lucid dream or changing a nightmare can be immensely powerful and healing. Yet sometimes there is still concern, with people wondering if becoming lucid in a dream might suppress the “message” of the dream.

## Does Lucidity Interfere with the Message of the Dream?

Dreams communicate in symbolic language. Ever since Sigmund Freud, MD, demonstrated in his seminal 1899 work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that dreams are psychologically significant events with inherent meaning, the idea of dreams carrying messages has grown in the West. If a dream does have something important to tell us about our life, our relationships, or our health, it will very likely be repeated even if someone wakes us up in the middle of it, or if we forget it upon waking, or if we become lucid and decide not to stay with it. Dream messages repeating themselves can be clearly seen with recurrent nightmares, or a series of bad dreams that turn around the same theme. If the lucid dreamer decides to fly away from a dream monster or wake herself up, she’s effectively making a date to meet that same dream situation again another night. Our dreaming mind won’t stop trying to bring emotional conflicts to our attention until we’ve faced them.

If we become lucid in a dream, we can intensify or deepen the message of the dream if we wish to by consciously interacting with our dream imagery, asking the dream a question such as “What do you represent?” or “Do you have a message for me?” or simply remaining present to the developing imagery and sensations.

Lucidity itself may be the “message” of a particular dream, particularly if lucidity arises spontaneously, and is not prompted by taking herbal supplements or using a dream mask or other external trigger. Spontaneous lucidity is a way of us waking up to the dream at that particular point in its

development and shining a light onto it. Perhaps we become lucid in our dreams *for a reason*—whether to enable us to focus more intently on that particular dream or to allow us to enter into a conscious conversation with it, or because our dreaming mind is intrigued to see what we will do if we become aware that we're dreaming!

Dreams *want* our attention—look at the way that, when we start journaling our dreams, they get more interesting and soon begin to dazzle us with their amazingness. Look at the way dream figures sometimes fall over themselves to help us get lucid. Look at the way the whole dream scene brightens when we become lucidly aware. Lucid dreaming is a conversation, whether we're actively trying to change the dream or simply going with the flow. We're in a thought-responsive environment: we cannot be separate from our own dream. We are the dream and it is us. There's no distinction once we get down to the basic nature of conscious experience, so why not relax and engage with our dreaming mind in creative, spontaneous, and intuitive ways? It could be the beginning of an astonishing journey. Highly experienced lucid dreamers know that bringing lucid awareness into a dream enables us to heal ourselves or integrate the message of the dream while we're dreaming. Dream lucidity is a natural part of human consciousness and has been for millennia. If we cultivate a spirit of curiosity and adventure, we're likely to discover just where it can take us.

Lucid dreaming can be a step to waking up to all aspects of our inner and outer lives and can act like a light switch, illuminating dark and forgotten parts of our psyche. But what happens when we illuminate our inner darkness? This leads me to another concern that some people have about lucid dreaming.

## Is Lucid Dreaming Dangerous?

This is one question I still get asked regularly. In the eighties, there was a fair bit of debate around this topic, with therapists arguing that people may not always be ready to face suppressed aspects of their psyche without

therapeutic support, while experienced lucid dreamers pointed out that lucidity is a naturally occurring phenomenon of sleep and we can use lucidity to guide the dream towards a healing conclusion. Nowadays, studies into the effectiveness of lucid dreaming as a nightmare reduction method, combined with the overall increase of knowledge about its healing potential, means that lucid dream therapy is on the rise, with therapists now combining it into their practice when appropriate.

Personally, based on my forty years of lucid dreaming experience, twenty years of research, and over ten years of teaching lucidity workshops and hearing countless other people's experiences, I don't think that lucid dreaming is dangerous.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it can be incredibly beneficial. That said, it can be a shock to come face to face with the dark and disturbing aspects of our psyche; anyone who has ever woken up screaming from a non-lucid nightmare knows that! As we'll see, although the fact of becoming lucid can instantly and spontaneously transform negative dream imagery, there are other cases where the imagery remains frightening even though we know we're dreaming, and this can feel very unsettling. For people who are feeling psychologically fragile or going through a difficult period in their lives, it's clear that such experiences are far from reassuring. In such cases, talking to a supportive person who knows about lucid dreaming and related sleep experiences will be of immense value.

People need to be offered various options for how to react if things get scary in a lucid dream. This aspect of lucid dreaming does need to be talked about, or else people may think they are the only ones to encounter negative lucid dream figures or dark presences. This can leave people feeling isolated and panicked. Sleep paralysis and lucid nightmares are still seen as somewhat taboo subjects. Part 3 of this book explores these topics, giving options and practical tips. As with any situation, in waking life or in dreams, knowing our options and knowing we are not the first person this has happened to can be empowering and help us to work with such dreams in the right way for us. Often the initial shock of being confronted with deep psychological material is worth it in the end for the insight and clarity

we gain. Scott Sparrow, EdD, author of *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light*, shares an example of a psychologically shocking insight discovered in a lucid dream:

A client of mine reported that she had to take a day off from work two weeks ago after having a lucid dream. True, it was “wonderful” from my standpoint, but it shook her to the foundations of her self-concept. In short, she found an old flattened doll beneath a pile of rubbish, picked it up, and pre-lucidly thought, “If I was this doll, I know what I’d like.”

She began hugging and stroking the doll, and it came to life! As it dawned on her that she was dreaming, she nonetheless felt deeply disturbed to realize that this “doll” was indeed alive in some sense. One can appreciate the significance of her finding out that her abused child (very abused) was still alive, but it was a fact that went against her ego definition. Wonderful facts can be devastating from the standpoint of a well-fortified ego.<sup>8</sup>

It’s true that the realisations we make in lucid dreams can shake us, but perhaps no more so than dreamwork we do when we wake up from the dream. This lucid dream scenario could also happen in the moving inner imagery we see when we reenter a dream while awake and allow it to spontaneously develop. In my Lucid Writing workshops, people regularly become emotional after using the technique, because it has illuminated an aspect of the dream they weren’t yet aware of. The emotions that come up can be powerful, especially if this is a long-term dream they’ve been trying to unwrap for years. The main thing is to approach lucid dreaming practice with a great deal of respectful compassion towards ourselves and towards the imagery and dream figures we encounter. As my driving instructor used to say, “Expect the unexpected, hope for the best, and take what comes in good spirit.” It’s a good maxim for all sorts of things, not just for driving a car. To that I’d add: If at any point you feel that things are getting to be too much, seek help from a supportive friend, counsellor, or dreamworker.

## Assumptions about Dreams and Reality

Lucid dreaming gives us a means of exploring a different layer of reality: dream reality. We can directly enter this multisensory world where the laws of gravity are flexible or nonexistent, where animals might talk and we can fall from the sky and not die. Recently, philosophers have begun to take lucid dreaming seriously as a tool for consciousness exploration. In his book *The Ego Tunnel*, Professor Thomas Metzinger explains why it's important to pay attention to lucid dreaming and related experiences:

Altered states of consciousness (such as meditation, lucid dreaming, or out-of-body experiences) ... should not be philosophical taboo zones. Quite the contrary: If we pay more attention to the wealth and the depth of conscious experience, if we are not afraid to take consciousness seriously in all of its subtle variations and borderline cases, then we may discover exactly those conceptual insights we need for the big picture.<sup>9</sup>

What is the “big picture”? It might be defined as the nature of reality and consciousness, our place in the unfolding universe, and the meaning of this life we lead. Lucid dreaming is a personal tool we can each use to search for the big picture if we want to see it. Wherever our own particular interests lie, lucid dreaming is a state with huge potential, and it's within our reach every single night when we lie down to sleep. Why sleep our lives away when we can wake up in our dreams and live them moment by moment with conscious awareness?

Some biologists might say that dreams are meaningless nonsense, the random firing of neurons in the brain as we sleep. Swiss psychiatrist Dr. Carl Jung was convinced of the significance of dreams and came up with the concept of the “collective unconscious,” which goes beyond the individual personality, encompassing ancestral memories and archetypal images that emerge in dreams. Many psychologists believe that every element of a dream is created by the dreamer and represents aspects of the psyche. Deep lucid dreamers who have experimented with different types of

lucid dreaming (such as exploring the void and bodiless lucid states) and who have carried out experiments with the fabric of dream space and physics might reply: “The dream is a co-creation, brought to life by both the dreamer and the dream itself, which is animated by the underlying universal awareness that resides in everything.”

## What Are *Your* Assumptions and Beliefs about Dreams and Reality?

Are you aware of your own basic assumptions about dreams and reality? Knowing what your core beliefs are will help you to iron out any kinks in the process of lucid dreaming. Many would-be lucid dreamers stumble over their own belief system early on in the form of psychological barriers to lucidity or mental blocks about what is possible in their dreams. It’s good to have clarity, so if you like, you can test your assumptions by answering the following questions:

- Do you make space in your life for your dreams? If not, ask yourself why this is.
- Do dreams have any kind of cultural or personal importance for you?
- Do you think dreams are the product of our brains or part of the vaster mind?
- Do you feel that dreams have meaning? (Symbolic, psychological, spiritual)
- Do you think that something that happens in a dream can affect your waking life in any way? (Mood, body, emotional reactions, life events)
- Which assumptions do you have about lucid dreaming? (Difficult, easy, dangerous, transformative)
- What expectations do you have about the possibility of guiding dreams with your thoughts?

- Do you believe that waking thoughts, beliefs, and intentions have an impact on the physical universe?
- Do you believe that the laws of physics as we know them today are absolute?
- What do you believe happens when we die?
- Is dreaming separate from our waking experience? Is there any overlap?
- Who is the dreamer of your dreams?
- How do you know you are not dreaming right now?

Lucid dreaming can reconfigure our habitual assumptions and beliefs. This is part of the reason why I say lucid dreaming goes way beyond the simple definition of “knowing that you are dreaming while you are dreaming.” It can change the way we see ourselves, the world, and our place in the universe. Some lucid dreamers develop greater compassion and empathy for others. Others acquire profound psychological self-knowledge. Some of the deepest explorers develop a greater understanding of the nature of reality.

## The Scope of This Book

No book can ever be a “complete” representation of a field. As I point out in the disclaimer at the front of this book, it was never my intention to try to write such a book: in fact, this book was written long before my publisher decided to include it in the popular Llewellyn’s Complete Book series. However, despite having no pretensions of “completeness,” this book in many ways goes well beyond the scope of other books on the subject. It digs into the role of lucidity in sleep disorders. It gives care and attention to children’s nightmares. It shares my original methods for deepening creativity in lucid trance states. It tackles sticky subjects such as the ethics of lucid dream violence and sexual behaviour. It explores the scientific and practical aspects of lucid dream healing. It offers a wide range of useful techniques for engaging with lucid dreams. It takes a scientific and personal

look at out-of-body experiences. It asks what the lucid dream body is made of and introduces a new theory of dreams and reality. It faces death and dying head-on.

Not only does this book cover the how-to of getting lucid, guiding dreams, and enabling lucid dreaming to enrich our waking life, but it also explores deep lucid dreaming—the profound experiences that lucid dreaming can open up for us, such as being bodiless in dream space, travelling at incredible speeds in white light, dissolving into blissful oneness in the sparkling black void, and connecting with a baseline state of consciousness that may be the bedrock of reality and the universe. I call this super-creative baseline state “Lucid Light.” <sup>10</sup>

The world of lucid dreaming can be explored by anybody, and I encourage all lucid dreamers to discover their personal answers—and ask new questions—in their own lucid dream explorations.

Life is an unfathomable gift.

Lucid dreaming can help us to unwrap the gift of life.

What are we waiting for? Let’s get lucid!

[contents]



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3. Johnson, “Le Courrier des Lecteurs: Compte Rendu des Techniques pour Provoquer les Rêves Lucides,” 35–37.
  4. Hearne, “Lucid Dreams: An Electro-Physiological and Psychological Study.”
  5. Johnson, “Le Courrier des Lecteurs: Le Rêve Lucide—Quelques Experiences,” 35–36.
  6. Johnson, “Dream Magicians: Empower Children through Lucid Dreaming,” 238.
  7. For a playful take on this subject and an invitation to dream lucidly, see [Appendix II](#).
  8. Sparrow, “Letter from Scott Sparrow [On the Advisability of Widespread Lucid Dream Induction].”
  9. Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel*, 2.
  10. Johnson, “Dream Magicians: Empower Children through Lucid Dreaming,” 231.

# CHAPTER 1

## *Wake Up: Three Golden Tools for a Lucid Mindset*

Imagine tunnelling through a glutinous wall to enter a different dream because it's snowing in the first dream and you'd rather be on a sunny beach. Or floating blissfully among a zillion stars. Or galloping over green hills on a stallion's back, knowing that if you fall off you won't hurt yourself because you're dreaming. When you know that you are dreaming, you can consciously experience the dream as it unfolds, and guide it if you want to. Dream lucidity is so exciting that many people are keen to experience it for themselves, or increase their lucid dream frequency.

Yet often people struggle to wake up in their dreams. What's stopping them from becoming lucid? It may be an ingrained belief that lucid dreaming isn't possible, a self-professed inability to remember any dreams, a lack of practice at identifying their present state of consciousness, or simply the desire to sleep deeply instead of fussing around trying to get lucid. Before we explore the three golden tools needed to cultivate a lucid mindset and increase lucid dream frequency and duration, let's take a look at how to overcome psychological resistance to lucid dreaming, why dream journaling is important, and the scientific evidence for lucid dreaming.

# How to Overcome Psychological Resistance to Lucid Dreaming

Lucidity is not always as easy as it may sound. Sometimes it seems we'd do anything to avoid becoming lucid, including accepting outrageous events and even coming up with clever reasons to convince ourselves that this is in fact no dream but stone-cold-sober waking reality. German sports psychologist and lucid dream researcher Dr. Paul Tholey recounted one dream in which this happened to him when he noticed that objects such as trees and houses were upside down.<sup>11</sup> He immediately wondered if he was dreaming, but because he was wearing glasses in the dream, he deduced that these must be special glasses equipped with reversing lenses of the type sometimes used in psychological perceptual experiments. To check his theory, he whipped off the glasses only to discover that his surroundings were upright and normal-looking again. Of course, this only served to convince him that he couldn't be dreaming! How annoying it is to wake up from this type of dream and roll our eyes at how near—and yet how far—we were from becoming fully lucid in our dream.

Why would anyone have a psychological resistance to lucid dreaming? Sometimes it's down to personal beliefs about dreaming: some people think the dream shouldn't be tampered with through becoming lucid. But as we'll see in the dream control chapters, lucid dreaming doesn't go hand in glove with dream control, and lucid awareness occurs on a continuum of conscious experience. Lucidity is not a black-and-white concept, but manifests in varying shades of Technicolor that are present to a greater or lesser degree in all dreams.

## Resistance Rooted in the Past

Other resistances to lucidity have their root in a person's past. The unconscious can be quite the expert at hiding past traumas or difficult memories from us, and when we begin to pay attention to our dreams and unwrap their messages, we get closer to this hidden stash. At this point,

unconscious defence mechanisms may kick in in the form of resistance to getting lucid. One man who came to me for lucid dream mentoring admitted he was experiencing enormous resistance to doing reality checks and other lucid dream induction techniques. My response was simple: “Stop it all. Nothing in this process should be forced; it’s counterproductive. Try to let go of the idea of getting lucid.” Instead we focused on regular psychological dreamwork to deal with a past trauma, and once he’d learned new ways of relating to his dreams and acting on their wisdom in his waking life, he had his first lucid dream, followed shortly by his second one.

If you feel you’d love to experience lucid dreaming and have tried and tried but there seems to be an inner barrier to getting lucid, it might be worth working out what this barrier is. Of course, it’s not necessarily going to be because of some deep, dark trauma in your past; if there *is* some kind of internal resistance, it could be as simple as not wanting lucid dreaming to disturb your sleep. Writing down and examining your dreams could point you to the reason for any resistance, and another transformative practice is my Lucid Writing method. There’s a whole chapter on this, but it’s basically writing from vivid dream imagery without stopping to think so that your unconscious slips onto the page with all its rich surprises. Another technique to help dissolve psychological blocks to getting lucid is the simple yet powerful practice of visualisation.

## The Power of Visualisation

All hypnotherapists know the importance of visualisation. Smokers who want to quit can rehearse “a day without a cigarette” in a hypnotic trance to show themselves that such a thing is possible. Once they’ve done this, as far as their unconscious is concerned, they have already achieved it. This unconscious acceptance makes it so much easier to actually go for a whole day without smoking. People with a fear of public speaking can rehearse a successful presentation under hypnosis, and the message to their unconscious is this: it is perfectly possible to speak calmly in front of an

audience. The next time they try it, they're not as nervous, because on an unconscious level they've already done it.

It works the same way with lucid dreaming, and you don't need a hypnotherapist to help you. You can be your own hypnotherapist by choosing a calm moment to relax, close your eyes, and visualise the exciting moment of becoming lucid in a dream. *If you visualise yourself successfully becoming lucid, then as far as your unconscious mind is concerned, you have already become lucid!* It can be helpful to repeat this visualisation with different dream scenarios; before going back to sleep with the intention of becoming lucid in the next dream, take a recent non-lucid dream and relive it as if you are lucid in that dream. The act of visualising yourself happily lucid dreaming should help to dissolve any mental blocks or impediments to lucidity.

## Why Dream Journaling Is Important

Keeping a dream journal is a core lucidity practice. It is vital to establish a connection with your dreaming mind, because the weaker this connection is, the less likely you are to have a lucid dream. Whether you recall virtually nothing of your dreams or you remember ten a night, jotting them down is a way of showing interest. Your attention, appreciation, and interest act on the dreaming mind the way that water, soil, and sunlight act on a seed. Even if all you can recall at first is a colour, scribble that colour in your dream journal and congratulate yourself—you have brought back something from your dream world!

The more attention you pay to your dreams, the more they respond with brighter, more interesting, more memorable imagery. Dream journaling is a conversation, and dreams are polite that way: they always reply. They like to point out home truths, they love to play, and they sometimes even flirt. Dreams can come in series, leading you from one realisation to the next, and if you have a problem, they'll point it out and help you solve it. Your dreaming mind will be your best friend if you allow it to be. It will be your

wisest friend, the most tolerant, forgiving one you have—even at 3:00 a.m.! Befriending your dreaming mind is very much worth the effort, and not just because it is an essential stepping stone to lucid dreaming.

When trying to recall a dream immediately after waking, lie very still, in the same position that you woke up in. Keep your eyes closed. Think back and ask yourself, “What was I just doing? What did I see?” Maybe you’ll only recall a feeling or a single image. That is already an excellent start, so write it down, along with the date and any associations that come up. When you record a dream, it can be helpful to write it in the present tense, as this can help you to reenter it and relive it. Some people worry about waking their bed partner by turning on lights or leaving the bed to sneak into the bathroom to write. If you don’t want to disturb anyone, why not stay in bed and mumble your dream into a dictation device? Don’t worry if at first the dreams seem to be only scraps; you can get a lot out of a dream scrap, and dream recall will grow as you tend to your dream journal. Giving the dream a title really helps to root it in the memory.

As you write down or sketch your dreams, you’ll start to see patterns of emotions, imagery, personal symbols, and themes. These, along with any strange and dreamlike events such as floating instead of walking or finding yourself back in your childhood home, are dream signs. Dream signs are clues that *this is a dream*. A dream sign is anything that can—or should!—cause us to question reality. If you are walking along a perfectly normal street and look up to see a flying pig in the sky, with any luck your critical reasoning will kick in: *Hang on a minute. Pigs don’t fly ... except in films ... oh, and in dreams! Aha, I’m lucid!* Dream signs are not always so dramatic. A shift in your perception can be caused by the bizarreness of a situation or the unusual strength of a dream emotion, but it can also be triggered by the tiniest detail, like the unusual pattern of veins on the underside of a dream leaf.

The more you think about your dream signs and dream images during the day, the more likely it is that you’ll recognise when you’re dreaming, especially if when you think of your dream images you imagine yourself

becoming lucid in that particular dream and doing something exciting. In time, your familiarity with your personal dream symbols will act as a reliable lucidity trigger: *Oh, another pink car—I must be dreaming!*

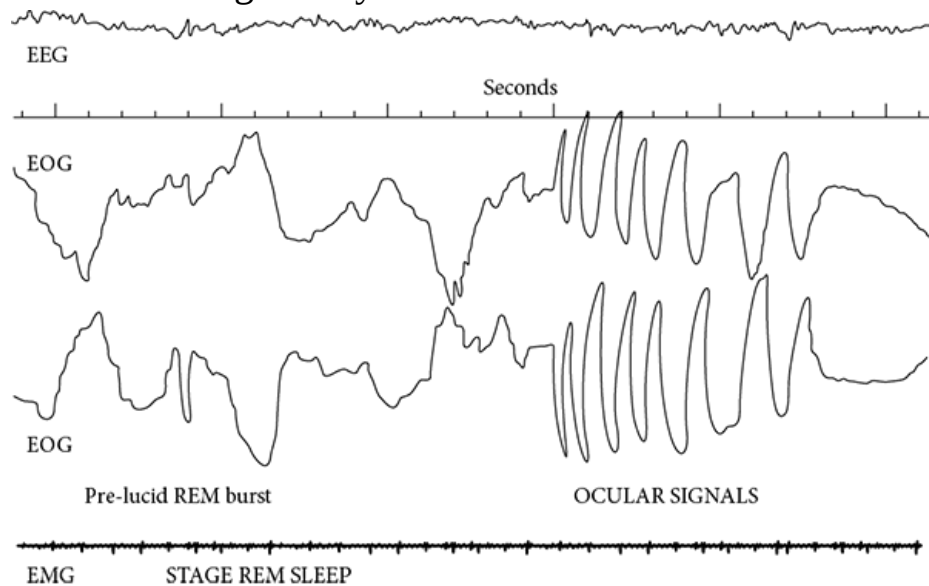
## Scientific Evidence of Lucid Dreaming

For anyone sceptical about whether lucid dreaming is actually possible, it's helpful to take a look at the hard science.<sup>12</sup> For the past few years I have had the great pleasure of giving talks and workshops on lucid dreaming with British psychologist Dr. Keith Hearne, the pioneer whose 1975 experiment provided the first scientific evidence of lucid dreaming.

Keith was doing research into visual imagery and brain activity for an intended PhD at Hull University in England. As a separate piece of personal research, he was trying to work out how a lucid dreamer might successfully signal to an experimenter. The body is profoundly paralysed in rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. After various fruitless attempts to obtain physical signals, it occurred to Keith that it should be possible for a sleeping, dreaming subject to make deliberate eye movements, because the ocular muscles are not inhibited during REM.

Anyone can make such deliberate eye signals when wired up to an electroencephalogram (EEG) machine—if they are awake. Keith's subject, Alan Worsley, was asleep. He was dreaming in rapid eye movement sleep, where eye movements are characteristically short and rapid, hence the name. Yet he had woken up inside his dream. Lucid, he was able to remember that he was in the sleep lab and that he needed to make sweeping left-right eye movements in his dream to signal to Keith that he was lucid dreaming. These were signals coming from another world: the world of sleep, a world in which scientists considered conscious awareness to be impossible. Keith watched, spellbound, as Alan Worsley bridged the gulf between the dreaming and the waking worlds. Keith's experiment had succeeded in providing the first proof that it was possible to wake up in a

dream! Philosophically and scientifically it was mind-blowing. In that moment, lucid dreaming history was made.



*Dr. Keith Hearne's EEG record of the first eye signals successfully sent from a lucid dream*

Sleep and dreams expert Professor Allan Rechtschaffen at the University of Chicago gave his personal seal of approval to Keith's findings. Keith was offered his own sleep lab at Liverpool University to complete the first-ever PhD on lucid dreaming. He further developed his technique—for instance, subjects could signal before and after performing specific actions, like flying. The corresponding brain waves could be recorded and analysed. Several consistent effects between lucid dreamers were discovered, including a “light-switch effect” indicating a ceiling limit on subjective brightness in dream imagery. The considerable findings from Keith's PhD work, which covered three years, proved that lucid dreams are genuine dreams that occur in REM sleep (it had not been proved before) and happen mostly in the REM-dense second half of the night. They were also shown to be experienced in real time, rather than being over in a flash.

## Lucid Dreaming as a New Scientific Field

By 1978, Keith Hearne had finished his thesis<sup>13</sup> and published his findings.<sup>14</sup> Over the next couple of years, he published more widely.<sup>15</sup> Since



these were pre-internet days, news travelled slowly. At that time in the US, apart from Professor Allan Rechtschaffen, only a few scientists knew about Hearne's groundbreaking scientific discovery, including Dr. William Dement at Stanford University. In 1981, Stanford psychophysiological Dr. Stephen LaBerge presented his own similar, independently evolved doctoral research findings at an annual meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies (APSS) in Massachusetts. The word was getting out about lucid dreaming as a new scientific field of enquiry, and more books on the subject began to spring up. Keith Hearne's initial, groundbreaking lucid dreaming experiment is often mistakenly attributed to Stephen LaBerge, even though LaBerge makes it perfectly clear in his 1985 book, *Lucid Dreaming*, that Hearne's work preceded his own.

To date, there have been many sleep laboratory studies replicating Keith Hearne's initial experiment, as well as large-scale empirical studies,<sup>16</sup> so these days it is accepted that waking up inside a dream is perfectly possible and natural. EEG monitoring of lucid dreamers' brains shows that the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain linked to self-reflective awareness—becomes active when they become lucid, and gamma waves increase. Everyone dreams every night, and everyone is awake during the day. Lucid dreaming happens when we mix these two ordinary abilities and *wake up inside a dream*.

## Lucidity Triggers

Ever since 1979, when Keith Hearne invented the Dream Machine,<sup>17</sup> which delivered electrical impulses to the wrist during sleep, more and more effort has been going into developing devices to trigger lucidity. A pioneering scientific study led by German psychologist and lucid dream researcher Dr. Ursula Voss in 2014 found that a 40 Hz electrical stimulation of the scalp during REM sleep triggered lucidity in a whopping 77 percent of subjects, even though none of them had experienced lucid dreaming before and were not used to recalling their dreams.<sup>18</sup> So far, triggering lucid dreaming through electrical stimulation of the scalp can be done only under close

supervision in a high-tech sleep laboratory, and Voss points out that any device that uses electrical stimulation should always be monitored by a physician.

Lucid dream masks that can be used by individuals at home are gradually becoming more comfortable and sophisticated, and it seems that we are edging closer to finding an effective device for triggering lucid dreaming externally. These days, lucid dream masks have evolved from the clunky, heavy headsets of the past to resemble regular sleep masks. A typical mask such as the NovaDreamer developed by Stephen LaBerge uses infrared sensors to attempt to detect REM sleep, and then it beeps and flashes to remind the wearer that he is dreaming. Some people report that if this activity doesn't wake them up, and if they manage to recognise it as a lucidity cue, it can be quite effective. Although it may be tempting to jump at the idea of dream masks, herbal supplements, or electrical impulses as gateways to lucidity, much of lucidity comes down to *mindset*. If we haven't cultivated a lucid mindset, then even if a dream mask does flash its lights at the right moment and get us lucid, we're likely to flounder and lose lucidity quickly.

## How to Cultivate a Lucid Mindset

Aside from the core practice of keeping a dream journal, there are three golden tools every lucid dreamer needs to be able to get lucid naturally, maintain the lucid state, and guide the dream. The three golden tools of lucidity are the use of the potent mix of willpower and desire known as *intent*, continuous mental focus or *clarity*, and the belief implied in *expectation*. These lucidity tools can be practised while awake, to encourage a lucid mindset. They can also be practised while dreaming, to stabilise and prolong the lucid dream and support dream control. Intent, clarity, and expectation (ICE) are core lucidity practices, and when they are combined with your personal favourites among the practical lucidity induction techniques described in the next chapter, they will increase the

likelihood of dream lucidity and lead to more frequent, longer, and more stable lucid dreams.

## Three Golden Tools for a Lucid Mindset

### The First Golden Tool: Intent

If you've never had a lucid dream before or are having a dry spell, it's important to decide what you'd like to do or experience when you next become lucid in a dream. This is not because it actually matters what you do, but because having an idea that excites you will help to cement your intention. Simply saying "I want to have a lucid dream" is like hankering after an empty concept. The trick is to make this concept real! Get proactive and specific; bring colour and life to it. Experiences that feel emotionally charged for you are the most effective. Add a further dimension to your excitement by investigating the action you'd like to take and spending time thinking about it while you're awake.

If you decide you want to fly through the Grand Canyon in your next lucid dream, find a YouTube video of the Grand Canyon filmed from a helicopter so that the visuals soak into your mind. If you think you'd like to see your deceased grandmother again, pore over old photographs of her while verbally setting your intention: "I'll see Grandma in my next lucid dream." If you want to improve a sports skill, such as swimming or martial arts, find out what other athletes have been able to do in terms of improving their performance in their lucid dreams (see chapter 10 on improving physical skills for more on this). Or maybe you'd like to experience a superpower, such as X-ray vision, turning yourself invisible, or stopping time.

### Visualise It Happening

If you lie quietly before you go to sleep and imagine yourself successfully experiencing these powers in a lucid dream, you're setting a strong lucid dream intention and you're also far more likely to find it easy to replicate the experience when you become lucid. If you'd rather not change the

dream or impose your will on it, then simply imagine how amazing it would be to explore details of dream texture and vision. Practise doing this in waking life; feel the wonder of discovery as you gaze at a flower in the garden or watch a daddy long-legs spider tumble along the balcony.

### Engage Your Willpower, Curiosity, and Enthusiasm

Drawing a picture or making a collage of your intended lucid dream action is also a great way of setting intent. Perhaps what really inspires you about getting lucid is the idea of having sex with a film star. Watch a film with that person in it before you go to sleep. The more time you spend imagining your first (or next) lucid dream while you're awake, the more likely you are to make the leap of realising that you are dreaming. This is not only because what you spend time focusing on in your waking life tends to seep into your dreams, but also because you will have engaged your willpower, curiosity, and enthusiasm: a powerful combo. When we truly desire something and vividly imagine it happening, it is much more likely to happen. If you feel your intention grow stale, it's time to think up a new lucid dream action that excites you, and put your energy into bringing it to life in your imagination.

### Ask Your Dreams for Help with Getting Lucid

Part of setting the firm intention to have a lucid dream involves a deeper agreement with the dreaming mind: elicit the help of your dreams in getting you lucid and reminding you to stay lucid. In meditation or in a very relaxed pre-sleep state, elicit the help of your dreaming mind by striking a deal or simply offering gratitude. This needs to be done in simple language and it needs to be repeated often to get the message through. It may sound a bit silly, but if I want to incubate a dream or ask something specific of my dreaming mind, I grab its attention by shouting inside my head, "Dreaming mind! Dreaming mind!" For me, this works brilliantly. Make up your own request or deal for added power, remembering that dreams respond like magic to attention: "Help me to become lucid in my dreams. In return, I'll keep a dream journal."

Soon you'll start to notice all the times your dream tried to help you get lucid. At first you may kick yourself for missing the lucidity cue, but persevere and it will become second nature to work in tandem with your dreaming mind to have more lucid dreams. In 1996 I began making bright mixed-media collages using magazine pictures, photographs, and a marbling technique in an attempt to bring back something of the visually startling and impactful imagery I was experiencing in my lucid dreams. Soon enough, these lucid dream collages began to turn up in my dreams to cue me to become lucid or to remind me to stay lucid if I started to get distracted and lose lucidity. My dreams have prodded me to become lucid in many ways over the decades, from sly allusions spoken by dream figures to deep discussions of dream lucidity to visions of the frankly impossible. Here's a very obvious lucidity trigger I had:

I'm standing around with people at a party. "Of course," says a young man in a brown leather jacket, "in dreams, you *can* float." I immediately glance down at my feet and see I am floating several inches above the ground. *Well, I think, this is a lucidity cue I couldn't miss even if I wanted to.* I instantly propel myself upward and out of the window, moving my feet and arms in the way I would when swimming up to the surface of a pool after diving in. I shoot up into a beautiful sky overlooking grassy lawns with wooden picnic tables and people drinking in the sun. It's very detailed, with vivid colours, as real as waking reality—except I'm hovering about fifteen metres above it all.

Along with setting intention and enlisting the help of your dreaming mind, you'll need to get yourself into a lucid mindset before you sleep, through meditation or visualisation. Vividly imagine becoming lucid and having beautiful dreams. Your state of mind as you fall asleep can be very powerful: it can determine not only the direction of your dreams, but ultimately, as a knock-on effect, the direction of your whole life.

## The Second Golden Tool: Clarity

Lucidity is all about waking up, being alert through all of the senses, being aware in the moment, and *noticing life as it happens*. Developing a lucid mindset by day is crucial; the more mental clarity and state awareness we cultivate while we go about our regular waking lives, the easier it is for us to recognise the dream state and become lucid. *Practising waking lucidity leads to dream lucidity*. In 1995 I was asked by Roger Ripert, editor of *Oniros*, the first lucid dream magazine, to share my lucid dreaming induction techniques. Back then, I wrote that my techniques were for the most part a way of life and not just a method that could be learned in two minutes. I described how I had trained myself to concentrate on each second of my daily life and observe myself living. This attitude of observation and awareness becomes natural in time; it's an intrinsic part not only of my waking life but of the consciousness that I take with me into sleep, so lucid dreams come more easily.<sup>19</sup> Decades later, I still practise this same clarity of mind.

## Meditate

What I refer to as waking lucidity is often known as mindfulness, and it can be greatly enhanced through daily meditation. Just ten to twenty minutes of meditation a day gets us into the habit of slowing down and *noticing* our thoughts, sensations, and mental imagery, and it's exactly this power of noticing that is so useful when we're dreaming, as it will lift us time and again to lucidity. Too often we spend our time worrying about the future or agonizing over the past. What we must learn to capture is the present moment. The more we practise paying attention to the here and now while awake, the more likely we are to notice when we are dreaming. It works both ways: in lucid dreams we are immersed in the here and now, watching in wonder as each moment unfolds, so time spent lucid dreaming is an excellent reminder for us to focus on waking life with the same intensity and freedom. *The more we wake up in life, the more we wake up in our dreams. And the more lucid dreams we have, the more we experience*

*waking lucidity*. Once the wheel gets rolling, we find ourselves waking up more and more in both dreams and waking life.

### View Life as a Dream

It can help to view everyday scenes as though they are dream scenes. I like to ask myself, “If this were a dream, what would this imagery mean, and what would I do next? What if everyone I meet today is part of a dream I’m in and thus perhaps represents a part of me or has a message for me?” This attitude that “you are me and I am you” can help when we encounter rude or aggressive people. Once, my three-year-old daughter had a fever. I drove her to the doctor’s office in heavy rain. She was wailing in the back, and I was tense and distracted. In the car park, I spotted a parking space and swung into it.

As soon as I stepped out of my car, an angry man leapt from his car and asked sarcastically if I knew what an indicator was! Apparently he’d nearly driven into the back of my car. As he ranted, I was tempted to point out that in car parks it’s fairly predictable that cars will find parking spaces to turn into and that he should keep his distance, but I found myself noticing his red face against the rainy sky and his car door hanging open. What if this was a dream and this man a dream figure? Something Carl Jung once said came to me: “We meet ourselves time and again in a thousand disguises on the path of life.”<sup>20</sup> I looked the guy in the eye. “Calm down,” I told him. There seemed nothing else to say after that, and we were both getting soaked. He got back in his car and drove off.

The reminder to calm down was as much for me as for him. The confrontation left me feeling super-aware of being here, now, as if a spotlight had just been shone on that instant of my life. The wet tarmac gleamed. I could feel my beating heart. I wasn’t stressing about getting to the doctor’s office anymore: I was alive in the here and now. These moments are precious; they are moments of waking lucidity, and the more we have them in waking life, the more likely we are to become lucid in a dream. The more lucid dreams we have, the more we notice the imagery,

patterns, and synchronicities that bind our lives together, and the more aware we become in waking life.

### Cultivate Waking Lucidity

A few weeks after I'd shared lucidity tips with consciousness researcher Dr. Sue Blackmore, author of *Consciousness: An Introduction*, she reported a moment of waking lucidity she'd subsequently had while on a skiing holiday:

The first morning when I was out on the slopes I had a most strange sensation that I have never had before. I asked myself whether I was dreaming and had a very real sense that I might have been. I knew I was not. I could look around and test things and was sure I was not dreaming but this very strange sensation lasted about half an hour or maybe a little bit more. It was a rather joyful feeling as though I was half dreaming and half awake—in some state free from either.

Whenever we have a recurrent dream theme, such as skiing, we can use it as a lucidity trigger, visualising ourselves becoming lucid whenever we engage in that activity. In Sue's case, an inversion of this happened in her daytime lucidity on the ski slope—since she so often dreams of skiing, skiing in waking life made her feel like she was in a dream! These lucid moments in the waking state are wonderful, and I wish that more people would covet them as much as they covet dream lucidity. When I told Sue about waking lucidity, she remarked that it helped her to think of this odd state as having its own name, and that she was finding it happening and encouraging it more often now.

Mental clarity helps us to live our waking lives more consciously and also helps us to recognise when we're dreaming. Instead of blindly accepting bizarre or outrageous events, we notice their strangeness and question our reality. In his book *The Sun and the Shadow*, Kenneth Kelzer describes this happening to him:



I looked into the mirror and noticed that my beard was gone. The incongruity shocked me into questioning my experience and eventually led me to think that I must be dreaming. At this point I obtained the full confirmation of lucidity for myself by holding up my hands before me and gazing at them steadily. When I saw my hands, I became fully lucid and felt great pleasure and joy in seeing the luminous, ethereal rays of light, sparkling all around and emanating from my hands.<sup>21</sup>

Anything that snaps us into the present moment jolts us into a higher level of awareness. Consciousness-jolting events don't always have to be major; nobody has to die. You can get a pretty rich consciousness jolt by unwinding the car window to let a shock of cold air pour in, standing in front of mind-blowing artwork, kissing someone you're in love with, or realising that you're dreaming.

Waking lucidity can be cultivated in the simplest ways—at first with intentional prompting, such as doing a reality check (asking yourself if you are dreaming) every time you look into a mirror and touching the mirror to see if your finger goes through it. Tuning in to dreamlike moments and getting into the habit of linking them with reality checks increases waking lucidity in the form of a mild consciousness jolt. Over time, anything particularly dreamlike, strange, surprising, ugly, or beautiful should automatically trigger heightened awareness and the impulse to ask, “Am I dreaming?” The more we do this by day, the more likely we are to do it in a dream ... and discover that we are in fact dreaming!

### The Third Golden Tool: Expectation

Expectation can work like magic in lucid dreams, as the dream is a thought-responsive environment, so if we fully *expect* the dream cliff across the valley to tumble down, it likely will. [chapter 5](#) and [chapter 6](#) on dream control explore the uses and value of expectation in lucid dreams, so here I'll focus on *expectation as a tool to trigger lucidity*. Just as when we're performing a reality test we should expect to discover that we're dreaming

(in order to train the mind to the possibility of that discovery within the dream state), so do we need to marry expectation to our intent to become lucid in a dream. Expectation involves not only anticipation but also belief. Have faith that what you imagine and wish for will easily come to pass. Brush away any doubts and firmly imagine yourself becoming lucid in a dream.

The most successful lucid dream induction techniques are those that work in tandem with brain chemistry. Lucid dreaming is more common during lighter stages of sleep, which is why afternoon naps are great for lucid dreams. In the 2014 research study by Ursula Voss and colleagues that triggered lucidity in 77 percent of subjects,<sup>22</sup> subjects were allowed to sleep until 3:00 a.m. to get the deeper sleep stages over with before lucid dreaming was attempted. Electrical currents were applied once subjects had been in uninterrupted REM sleep for at least two minutes, which goes to show the importance of brain chemistry in lucid dream induction. When you actively pursue lucid dream induction techniques, you are automatically enlisting the powerful force of expectation: you *expect* to get lucid, and this alone makes it far more likely that you will become lucid in your dreams.

## Activate All Three Golden Tools of Lucidity

One way of activating all three golden tools of lucidity is through morning meditation, which effectively combines intent, clarity, and expectation with propitious brain chemistry. Psychotherapist Scott Sparrow, author of the 1976 book *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light*, discovered that doing a meditation practice for fifteen to thirty minutes at 5:00 a.m. each morning and then imagining becoming lucid in a dream on returning to bed had astounding consequences, resulting in many lucid dreams.<sup>23</sup> One of my Twitter followers who had been trying to get lucid for three months contacted me to ask for lucidity tips. When I mentioned this morning meditation technique, which I've also found very effective, she wrote

excitedly the next morning to say she'd done what I suggested and had just had her first lucid dream. After months of effort, she was ripe to experience lucidity. Let's look at several other tried-and-tested lucidity induction techniques.

### **Practice #1: Intent, Clarity, and Expectation (ICE)**

1. Focus your intention to get lucid in your dreams by deciding what you want to do in your next lucid dream and visualising it vividly. Ask your dreams to help you to get lucid, and engage your willpower, curiosity, and enthusiasm. Believe it will happen!
2. Develop greater mental clarity for a lucid mindset by paying conscious attention to the here and now. Meditate regularly, and notice the thoughts that run through your mind during the day. Be alert. Notice beauty and strangeness. View life as a waking dream and ask yourself regularly, "Am I dreaming right now?"
3. Expect to become lucid in a dream. We all dream every night, and we are all conscious during the day. To lucid dream, we simply need to combine these two natural abilities. Dream lucidity is a natural and learnable ability. Train your mind to expect that you will become lucid in your dreams. Have faith that it will happen.
4. Activate these three golden tools of lucidity by combining them with any of the lucid dream induction techniques in this book, such as the ones in the following practice.

### **Practice #2: Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams (MILD)**

American psychophysiological and lucid dream researcher Stephen LaBerge developed the Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams technique (MILD) <sup>24</sup> in the seventies to teach himself to lucid dream at will. MILD has five steps:

1. Develop your prospective memory by day; i.e., your ability to remember to perform a preset task.

2. Set up dream recall before bed by resolving to recall your dreams that night.
3. Recall a dream in vivid detail upon awakening.
4. Focus your intent by repeating, “Next time I’m dreaming, I’ll know I’m dreaming.”
5. See yourself becoming lucid in a previous dream and imagine this in detail as you fall asleep.

## Lucid Mindset + Lucid Dream Induction Techniques = Lucid Dreams!

It’s a simple equation, and very rewarding to carry out, so why not try it?

Both MILD and the morning meditation technique have clear links to the popular Wake Back To Bed (WBTB) lucid dream induction technique, described in the next practice, which has been developed and refined by a range of dream explorers over the years. At the 2012 regional conference of the International Association for the Study of Dreams in Switzerland, Dr. Daniel Erlacher and Dr. Tadas Stumbrys shared findings from their laboratory study in Heidelberg, Germany, where over 50 percent of subjects became lucid after following the WBTB method.<sup>25</sup> These results are highly impressive, and the good news is that WBTB is something anyone can try at home. Often dreamers who practise the WBTB method will go straight into a lucid dream, where they remain consciously aware *as they fall asleep*; either the visualised lucid dream scene will become an actual dream scene or the dreamer will follow hypnagogic imagery into a new dream scene.

The Wake Back To Bed method is successful because it combines intent, clarity, and expectation with favourable brain chemistry. If it is done with heart, it creates real excitement and the expectation of a lucid dream. Lucid dreaming is a learnable skill. A study by Lapina, Lysenko, and Burikov<sup>26</sup> found that teaching a sample of secondary school pupils lucid dream induction techniques such as reality checks and MILD over a six-week period resulted in 92 percent of them having at least one lucid dream. In

2012, a systematic review of lucid dream induction methods by Tadas Stumbrys and colleagues highlighted the most effective techniques.<sup>27</sup>

Any lucid dream technique can turn out to be the one that tips the balance from non-lucid to lucid, and there are many others in this book to choose from. The key is to build up your lucid mindset every day by keeping a dream journal and cultivating intent, clarity, and expectation. Then dabble with whichever techniques appeal to you most until you find the one that works best for you.

### **Practice #3: The Wake Back To Bed (WBTB) Technique**

1. Go to sleep as normal, but set your alarm for around four to six hours' time. You'll need to adjust this to your own sleep cycle, depending on how many hours of sleep you get and how long it generally takes you to fall asleep. This is so that the deep sleep stage will be over and you'll be due for a nice long cycle of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, in which the brain is highly active and vivid dreams occur.

2. When the alarm goes off, get out of bed, write down any dreams you remember, and identify any odd dream image or event that could/should have triggered lucidity. What would you have done if you had become lucid in these dreams? Read about lucid dreaming or watch a short video on the subject to immerse your mind in it. One laboratory study showed that lucidity is more likely if the time awake is spent doing dreamwork and practising MILD.<sup>28</sup> Stay awake for thirty to sixty minutes. This step combines intent and clarity.

3. Go back to bed; meditate if you feel too awake. Once you're deeply relaxed, visualise yourself becoming lucid in one of your previous dreams. As you mentally rehearse the scene, really imagine the excitement of realising that you are dreaming. Fully expect and believe it will happen.

4. Set a firm intention to recognise that you are dreaming. Observe your hypnagogic (pre-sleep) imagery as it arises, and if your mind drifts, do the lucid dream rehearsal again. *Expect* this tried-and-tested technique to work for you.

#### Practice #4: Incubate a Dream

Incubating a dream simply means asking for a dream. Dream incubation is a simple but powerful technique that has been practised for millennia. In ancient Greece, the ruins of dream incubation temples show that the practice endured as an institution for a thousand years. In those times, the wisdom of a deity was invoked in dreams to provide healing or protection in childbirth or to help recover a “lost” soul. These days, people are likely to ask their dreams for help with problem solving, health issues, or relationship questions.

Dream incubation can also help you to become lucid. If you set the firm intention to dream of, say, horses, and focus on this desire and visualise it happening, when you do dream of horses, you will very likely recognise that you are dreaming.

To incubate a dream, you have to really *want* it: willpower is a key tool. Some people find it helpful to put a visual representation of what they want to dream about (a photo, drawing, or object) under their pillow or beside their bed. Others ritualise the experience by having a candlelit bath before bed, meditating or praying, and sleeping in a different place. Everyone is different, so experiment to discover what works best for you.

My way of incubating a dream is simple. I carry out no rituals, but as I close my eyes to sleep, I shout inside my head, “Dreaming mind!” Then I clearly formulate a single question or request, such as “How can I get past my block with this novel?” or “Let me fly to the stars in my dreams!” That’s it. Then I sail off to sleep and pay special attention to dreams I have over the following nights. (I repeat my call nightly until a dream comes.)

If you want to keep dream incubation simple and are neither ritualistic nor much of a shouter, write a sentence on paper stating what you would like to dream about. Keep it simple. Then stay alert to the dreams that come along.

When you successfully incubate a dream, you are already more than halfway to becoming lucid in your dreams. You have communicated with your dreaming mind and received a response! You have successfully influenced the content of your dreams. If you combine dream incubation with a lucidity induction technique such as WBTB, you could soon find yourself lucid in the dream of your choice.

[contents]

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11. Tholey, "Overview of the Development of Lucid Dream Research in Germany," 1–30.
  12. For a brief overview of the history of lucid dreaming, please see [Appendix I](#).
  13. Hearne, "Lucid Dreams: An Electro-Physiological and Psychological Study."
  14. Hearne, "Eye-Movement Communication from Lucid-Dreams."
  15. Hearne, "Insight into Lucid Dreams," 20–22, and "Control Your Own Dreams," 783–785.
  16. Schredl et al., "Lucid Dreaming in Children: The UK Library Study."
  17. Hearne, *The Dream Machine*.
  18. Voss et al., "Induction of Self Awareness in Dreams," 810–812.
  19. Johnson, "Le Courrier des Lecteurs: Compte Rendu des Techniques pour Provoquer les Rêves Lucides," 35–37.
  20. Jung, *The Practice of Psychotherapy: Essays on the Psychology of the Transference*, 534.
  21. Kelzer, *The Sun and the Shadow*, 26.
  22. Voss et al., "Induction of Self Awareness in Dreams," 810–812.
  23. Sparrow, "Early Morning Meditation."
  24. LaBerge and Rheingold, *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*, 78.
  25. Erlacher and Stumbrys, "Wake Up. Back to Bed."
  26. Lapina, Lysenko, and Burikov, "Age-Dependent Dreaming," 287.
  27. Stumbrys et al., "Induction of Lucid Dreams," 1456–1475.
  28. Erlacher and Stumbrys, "Wake Up. Back to Bed."



## CHAPTER 2

### *How to Trigger Lucid Dreaming*

Much of lucidity comes down to *noticing*. Many dreams have elements that are strange or surreal: they take place in houses we haven't lived in for decades, present us with impossible situations like breathing underwater unaided, or involve people we don't see anymore in waking life because they've died. Yet we don't *notice* that this can't be a waking life experience, and so we don't become lucid. If we write down our dreams and identify our individual dream signs, such as often dreaming of flying, being chased, or being back in a childhood home, we can prime ourselves to notice when we are dreaming. In the following dream, I noticed that jumping so high was unusual, that the air itself was pulling me in a nongravitational way, and that this was not something that happens when I'm awake—ergo, I must be dreaming.

I'm jumping astonishingly high and feel the very air pulling me up like a force field. I must be dreaming. What will the residents of this dream village think if they see a lucid dreaming Clare pop up next to their bedroom window? The thought makes me smile. I develop a new dream flying technique by grasping the air as if it's an invisible pole and letting it pull me up, then using the other hand to reach forward and grab another invisible pole. It's like on a merry-go-round, where the poles with horses on them rise and fall. Then I spontaneously begin to swim

mermaid-style through the blue air; it's sensual and freeing, like skinny-dipping.

This chapter is packed with practical techniques that can be practised during the day to raise awareness and trigger more lucid dreams, as well as to explore the ways we can use our physical bodies while we sleep to remind us that we're dreaming.

## Reality Checks: What Are They and How Many Checks a Day Is Enough to Get Lucid?

The reality check is a way of pausing to work out what state of consciousness you're in: "*Does this moment right now feel like a dream? How do I know I'm not dreaming right now?*" In our nightly dreams, we usually don't notice we're dreaming, as we're not in the habit of questioning our reality. In 1959, German sports psychologist and lucid dream researcher Paul Tholey was the first to develop this method specifically for inducing lucid dreaming. He called it the Reflection Technique,<sup>29</sup> and it involves developing a critical attitude towards the state of consciousness we currently find ourselves in by asking ourselves several times a day, "Am I awake, or am I dreaming?" When we notice that something unusual is happening, we are then more likely to conclude that we are dreaming.

People often ask me how many reality checks they should do per day to get lucid. But reality checks aren't about numbers. When it comes to cultivating waking lucidity, quality beats quantity hands down. People who force themselves to carry out a certain number of reality checks a day will likely end up bored of it very soon—I know I would—and boredom is the least productive emotion when it comes to lucid dream induction. It's much better to let reality checks arise naturally as we go about our day with an alive, curious, alert attitude. If we get into the habit of living consciously and being aware of the here and now, we'll notice strangeness and beauty

all around us, and reality checks will automatically follow from these moments.

To make sure reality checks don't become irritating or boring, link them to dreamlike imagery or synchronicities you notice throughout the day. Be alert for bodily sensations such as floatiness or not feeling your feet on the floor, odd synchronicities, lack of physical aches and pains, surreal events, and moments of startling beauty. The minute something seems unusual, ask yourself, "Am I dreaming?" Let strangeness be your lucidity cue, day and night. Test your reality, both when you're awake and when you're dreaming, by doing one or more of the following checks. With practice, you'll discover your favourite, most effective reality checks. Here are my top ten.

#### **Practice #5: Top Ten Reality Checks**

1. Does gravity seem different? Jump in the air and see if you float; notice if it seems to take longer for you to return to the ground.

2. Ask yourself what you were just doing—how did you come to be right here, right now? Lack of temporal continuity is a sign of dreaming, so mentally retrace your steps and see if the dots join up. If you're in a supermarket and the last thing you recall doing was swimming with deep-sea fish, you're dreaming.

3. Consider your surroundings and look closely at any people you can see. Are you in a childhood place you haven't visited in years? Is there someone present whom you haven't seen in years or who you know is in fact dead?

4. Are you aware of being free from aches and pains, as though you've left your physical body? Look down and see if you have a dream body.

5. Try to put a finger through the palm of your hand. Lucid dreamer Peter Maich describes what can happen with this reality test: "I put my left middle finger into and through my right palm; it hurts a little and is also accompanied by a strong vibrating sensation like an electric curtain. This is very common on testing solid matter in a dream for me."

6. Find some written text and reread it while mentally willing it to change. In a dream, it will almost certainly change, as rereading dream text is notoriously hard to do; it tends to morph spontaneously into gobbledygook. People who wear wristwatches in their dreams can check the time: the numbers are sure to morph, or the seconds will whizz along too quickly.

7. Do you remember waking up this morning? What day of the week is it? Are you where you're supposed to be, doing what you're supposed to be doing, or is everything a bit odd?

8. Pinch your nose closed and try to breathe through your nostrils. If you're dreaming, you'll still be able to breathe easily.

9. Raise your hands to your face and examine them. Then lower them. When you look at them again, see if they've changed.

10. Turn a light switch on and off—in lucid dreams there's often a delay before the light changes, or else the switch simply doesn't work. As you do so, ask yourself with focused attention, “Am I dreaming?” Expect the answer to be yes.

## Expect to Discover That You Are Dreaming

There are all sorts of strange things in everyday life that we tend to dismiss, but if we allow them to stop us momentarily so we can carry out a reality check, we'll carry this habit with us into the dream state and will hopefully then conclude that we are indeed dreaming. When you do a reality check, *expect to discover that you are dreaming*—this is crucial. If we carry out reality checks in a mechanical way, knowing full well that we're awake, then it won't be surprising if we automatically assume we're not dreaming when we ask the same question in a dream. With reality checks, it can be helpful to imagine yourself “becoming lucid” in that moment and doing something you'd really like to do in your next lucid dream.

When I woke up today, I saw a baby blackbird perched on our balcony railing in the early morning mist, dreamlike. Automatic reality check. Later

in the kitchen I noticed something strange—a green caterpillar on the wall. When I investigated, it turned out to be a tiny curl of popped balloon. It must have got stuck there when my daughter’s balloon popped the day before. My eyes had fooled me, and automatically I thought, am I dreaming? And so it goes. Every time I look deeply into someone’s eyes, my consciousness is raised as I register the other person’s awareness and this moment of connection. Each time I see something unexpected, like a child’s glove floating in a puddle like a starfish, my awareness clicks up a notch and I ask myself if I’m dreaming.

## **Is There Any Such Thing as a Fail-Proof Reality Check Technique?**

Realising we’re dreaming shouldn’t be hard, should it? Surely it’s the easiest thing in the world to accept that we’re dreaming when the walls are spongy, there’s a mooing cow in the living room, and Auntie Jean, unperturbed, sits in a corner knitting the longest scarf in the world, right? Yet we are so often deceived by the reality of the dream, and even reality tests can fail if we’re not vigilant. In this dream reported in Paul Tholey’s book *Schöpferisch Träumen (Creative Dreaming)*, the dreamer struggles with a failed reality test before finally becoming lucid.

When I saw the candle, I thought, ‘I dream so often of burning candles, now I’m going to do a reality test!’ I pass my forefinger through the flame. The sudden pain makes me jerk away. It really hurts, and I’ve burned myself. So I’m not dreaming, then. As I continue to feel annoyed about my hasty test, my forefinger begins to swell up and soon becomes bigger than my whole hand. This can’t be happening. After all, I only put my finger into the flame very briefly. I can’t have burned myself doing that! So I must be in a dream ...<sup>30</sup>

Sometimes dreamers get as far as recognising the general strangeness of the dream, but rather than become lucid, they explain it away by assuming they are tipsy or high. One lady recalled a dream where she was talking to her mum on the phone and it seemed all wrong, but in the dream she explained this as being because she had been smoking pot.

If part of us is resistant to becoming lucid in a dream, we are capable of missing or misinterpreting even the loudest lucidity triggers and kicking ourselves in frustration when we wake up. The dream itself might seem to want to fool us—the finger test may not work or the palm may seem solid, leading us to conclude we’re not dreaming. We may jump in the air in a dream, but instead of floating, we return to the ground with a realistic jolt. Lucid dream researcher Melanie Schädlich, well used to demonstrating reality checks, told me she had dreamed the following:

I tell the interested and excited students what lucid dreams are and that you can do reality checks to test whether you are awake or asleep. I explain and demonstrate several reality checks to them, including counting my fingers and pinching my nose to see if I can breathe through it. I am so totally focused on explaining things and motivating the students that I don’t pay any attention to the outcomes. Therefore I do not become lucid, which is a paradox if you think about it.

Of all the reality checks, I think the one least prone to dream trickery is the rereading text one. While writing this book, I tested this again in a lucid dream by reading a huge advertising billboard, looking away, and reading it again. Even though I felt open to the text remaining unchanged, when I looked for the second time, not only had the words turned to nonsense, but they were also beginning to slip down the surface of the billboard!

The thing that works best for me personally is simply recognising that if I’m truly unsure about whether or not this is a dream, then it probably is. These days I rarely, if ever, question my state in the dream or feel the need to carry out reality checks—the act of questioning my reality is instantly

followed by recognition that this is, of course, a dream. It all fits together in an instant: the act of questioning, the sense of my light dream body, the slightly liquid quality of the dreamscape, the bizarre circumstances I find myself in. There's often no big WOW! to discovering I'm dreaming. For me, the best ways of recognising the dream state are as follows:

- Practise waking lucidity and reality-questioning until these become a natural part of your mindset. (Develop the three golden tools of lucidity from [chapter 1](#): intent, clarity, and expectation.)
- Familiarise yourself with your personal dreamscapes and imagery so that you instantly recognise them. This means paying close attention to all of your dreams, lucid and non-lucid.

Another simple but effective way of getting lucid is by marrying our expectation to our body so that our physical body prods us to become lucid in the dream. Here's how.

#### Practice #6: The Body as Lucidity Trigger: Ten Physical Tricks to Help You Get Lucid

1. Drink plenty of water before you sleep and prime yourself to recognise that you're dreaming when you find yourself visiting the bathroom in a dream. This is a good trick because even if you miss any dream cues and simply wake up at 3:00 a.m. needing to pee, while visiting the bathroom you have the perfect opportunity to recall your dreams and set the firm intention and expectation to have a lucid dream when you go back to sleep. If you're focused and determined, you may even go directly into a lucid dream as soon as you drop off. Wake-induced lucid dreams (WILD) are common after four to five hours of sleep, as the deep sleep hours have passed and the brain is more active.

2. Go to bed hungry. For me, going to sleep with a rumbling belly automatically results in dreams of eating chocolate and other sweet foods. When I try this, I tell myself, "If I find myself eating sweets, I'll know I'm dreaming." I've become lucid in banquet dreams, country picnic dreams,

and dreams of rows of fairy cakes. It may not be fun to go to bed hungry, but a lucid dream banquet is a wonderful thing!

3. Abstain from orgasm. This works on the same principle as the hunger technique: if your body wants sex, you're far more likely to dream about it and this can work well as a lucidity trigger. Combine it with a firm intention: "The next time I find myself in an erotic situation, I'll recognise I'm dreaming." Depending on individual sex drive, the length of abstinence will vary; for some people just a day or two without an orgasm will lead them to dream about sex, but for others it may take a week or more.

4. The Finger-Induced Lucid Dream (FILd) technique. This is a deceptively simple technique that some people find quickly gets them lucid. It needs to be done when you're really tired, so a good moment would be when you awaken briefly in the night after four to five hours of deep sleep. Lie very calmly with closed eyes, and very lightly waggle the forefinger and middle finger of one hand as if you're pressing the keys on a keyboard or playing two notes on a piano. Reduce this repetitive movement to the point where your fingers are barely moving. Your finger muscles are receiving a signal from your brain but the movement is barely raising your fingers. Keep completely focused on this almost-movement as you fall asleep. Then do a reality check: try pushing your fingers through your body or breathing through closed nostrils. Are you dreaming right now?

5. Begin a yoga, tai chi, or qigong practice. Any practice that increases body awareness is excellent for lucid dreaming, as this awareness will continue into the dream state. Chapter 7 explores the dream body and dream physics, but the main point here is that the more we familiarise ourselves with our waking bodies and the natural flow of energy we all experience, the easier it is to identify the dream body and dream movement, and so become lucid. In dreams we typically feel lighter, have



greater ease of movement, and are pain-free. These differences make for great lucidity triggers.

6. Set up a musical trigger. Pick a piece of music that resonates with you and isn't too lively. Whenever you listen to it during the day, do a reality check and "realise" that you are dreaming; look around in awe and vividly imagine that this is a dream. Then set the music to play while you sleep, to trigger lucidity. Check out the latest lucid dream apps; some can be set to play when you think you'll be in REM sleep.

7. Smell your way to lucidity. The Marquis d'Hervey de Saint-Denys was the first Western lucid dream explorer to write a book on the subject in 1867: *Les Rêves et les Moyens de les Diriger* (republished in 1982 as *Dreams and How to Guide Them*). He had the idea of triggering a dream about a particular place by smelling a particular scent and then dabbing the scent onto his pillow before he slept. In the same way, scents can be linked to lucid dreaming—over a day or two, each time you do a reality check and ask, "Am I dreaming?," sniff a little vial of perfume or essential oil. Put a few drops on your pillow on a night when you want to induce a lucid dream.

8. Practise a sport before bed. Whenever my husband plays tennis in the evening, he ends up dreaming that night about playing tennis. Other people find that just watching a sport like football will lead to football dreams. If you know which sport you're likely to dream about, you can plant the idea in your head to ask yourself if you're dreaming the next time you find yourself doing that sport.

9. Bite your tongue. Try sleeping with your tongue sticking slightly out of your mouth. It won't look too pretty, but if you manage to keep it there, at some point you'll bite it a little bit in your sleep. Use this as a lucidity trigger. Practise before you sleep by biting it gently and thinking, "I'm dreaming!"

10. Lie on your arm. One technique I find helpful is to go to sleep lying on my belly with one arm trapped underneath it (comfortably, of course).

Then I say to myself, “The next time I move this arm, I’ll know I’m dreaming.” When you do this, visualise yourself swinging that arm around, picking something up, pointing at the sky, and realising through this that you are dreaming. Fix your awareness on your arm as you drop off to sleep, and hopefully soon enough you’ll notice it reaching for something unimpeded by the weight of your body: you’re dreaming.

## External Lucidity Aids

### Lucid Dream Masks

Lucid dream researcher Melanie Schädlich told me about her experience with Stephen LaBerge’s lucid dream mask called the NovaDreamer. She would put on the mask after six hours of sleep, knowing that she would then enter REM sleep and be more likely to become lucid. The flashing lights on the mask often woke her when she was just dozing off, as the mask could not recognise the onset of REM sleep, which she found annoying. But one morning she pressed the test button on the mask (which would normally respond by emitting flashing lights), only to find that it was not working—she was dreaming! Here’s her account of the ensuing lucid dream:

I realized that I was dreaming and took the mask off in the dream, because it annoyed me. I took it off, but then I had another one on! I took it off again and had another one on, and it went on like that for a bit before I had visuals. Then my sister was there and several NovaDreamers lay around the place. I told her, “As you can see, I am producing NovaDreamers here, but I’ll explain that to you later, since you are not real anyway.”

As the technology advances, we can expect lucid dream masks to become more popular. Since the 2014 discovery by Ursula Voss and her colleagues that lucid dreams can be triggered when the brain is electrically stimulated at 40 hertz during REM sleep,<sup>31</sup> perhaps light-stimulating masks will

ultimately be replaced by masks that can emit electrical currents of 40 hertz at the most propitious moments in the sleep cycle.

## Supplements

Galantamine, which is used for Alzheimer's patients, and the amino acid choline are supplements that could help with dream lucidity by increasing cognitive functioning and dream recall and causing vivid dreams. In 2003, Dr. Stephen LaBerge applied for a patent for the use of galantamine as a lucidity enhancer, and his 2012 study with clinical psychologist Dr. Kristen LaMarca shows that galantamine increases lucid dreaming frequency.<sup>32</sup> Research into galantamine is taking off in interesting directions. When this book went to press, Scott Sparrow and Ryan Hurd were working on a comparative study of galantamine versus other lucid dream induction techniques such as meditation and dream reliving. For some, supplements can enhance ongoing lucid dreaming practice. I have yet to try any myself. This is not because I have anything against exploring other pathways to lucidity, but rather because I've developed natural ways to become lucid, by cultivating waking lucidity and using the methods in this book. If you wish to pursue the supplements path, for safety's sake do research any physical and psychological side effects and check with your doctor first. David Jay Brown's book *Dreaming Wide Awake* offers a deeper exploration of the relationship between lucid dreaming and nutritional supplements, over-the-counter drugs, psychedelics, and herbs.

## Immerse Yourself in the Subject

Read widely on lucid dreaming: nonfiction, novels, blog posts, online forums, magazine articles—every author offers something different. I've included the dreams of many of my lucid dream friends and respected colleagues in this book, and I recommend checking out their excellent work in the field. Also, the better you get to know a particular researcher's work, the more likely they are to pop up in your dreams, providing effective lucidity triggers! Over the two decades of my intensive exploration of lucid

dreaming, various lucid dream researchers have appeared in my dreams to remind me to get lucid, or I've remembered the work of deceased authors (such as Hervey de Saint-Denys, Sigmund Freud, or P. D. Ouspensky) while dreaming, and this has triggered lucidity.

Lucid dream videos are great, both the imaginative storylike ones and the plain how-to or interview types. Images are powerful and stick in the mind, so it's worth watching a broad range of videos to discover which approach resonates most with you. One lady, Katriona Guild, wrote this to me: "When I saw your YouTube interview before the Gateways of the Mind conference, I had a lucid dream! I felt much more accepting and sort of artistic, caught the 'explore gently' feel; the way you talked was very soothing and helped me relax and go with the ideas I found." If you are ripe for lucidity, any input can trigger it. There are thousands of lucid dreaming videos on the internet, and the more we think about lucid dreams in our waking hours, the more likely we are to have one.

## Sleep in a Different Bed

Whether this means staying at a friend's house, spending the night on your own sofa or in the spare room, pitching a tent in the garden, or just waiting for the next holiday or business trip to come around, sleeping in a different environment tends to result in lighter, more disturbed sleep and a more active brain. Combine this with the clearly formulated intent to recognise you're dreaming, and you'll increase your chances of getting lucid.

## Ritual

Ritual holds an ancient power. Weddings, funerals, and sports tournaments are steeped in ritual, and we all unconsciously use ritual every day, in the way we make a cup of coffee or the steps we follow as we get ready for bed. Some lucid dreamers like to make a little ritual around the nights when they want to become lucid, and this can involve taking a relaxing bath, meditating in candlelight before bed, or slipping a particular stone, crystal, or other personally meaningful object under the pillow. Listening to

calming music or a lucid dream induction visualisation can also provide a sense of ceremonial induction into dream awareness. When used along with the intention to become lucid in a dream, ritual acts can help people to get lucid, as they help to cement intent.

## Magical Objects

These can also form an effective part of daily lucidity practice. A small, personally relevant object, such as a seashell found on holiday, can be slipped into a pocket and act as a reminder to do a reality check whenever it's touched. From around the time I first started to explore consciousness in earnest, at the age of seventeen, I've been wearing an amethyst crystal necklace. At first it was mainly because purple was my favourite colour, but over the years this crystal has become entwined with my dreams, probably because it's around my neck day and night and is so deeply familiar that it's sort of like an extension of my body.

Amethysts have been known to appear in my dreams as markers of awareness or to announce the start of a more spiritual type of dream. I often go to sleep holding my crystal in my fist when I set my intention to have a lucid dream—and sometimes find myself still holding it in my dream hand when I become lucid. If you're particularly attached to a ring or a watch, these objects may work too. Try to find an object that you can engage with on an imaginative level, such as a knickknack from an antique shop or a fossil—something that seems to have its own story or energy or seems imbued with magic. These objects are perfect for lucidity practice, day and night. Try sleeping with your object in your hand and taking it into the dream with you as a lucidity cue.

## The Alarm Clock Method

This method is only for the truly tenacious. Lucid dream researcher Daniel Erlacher describes in his book *Anleitung zum Klarträumen (Guide to Lucid Dreaming)* how he was determined to become lucid in a dream, so one night he set the alarm clock to go off at hourly intervals. After eight long

hours and precious little sleep, without so much as a hint of lucidity, he yanked the plug of his alarm clock out of the wall in frustration and went back to sleep ... only to wake up an hour later with a big grin on his face: he'd just had his first lucid dream! It's interesting that it was only when Daniel gave up that the lucid dream happened. Often it seems that if we try too hard to become lucid, it's like banging our head against a brick wall. If after priming ourselves to become lucid we relax and go with the flow, lucidity may come more easily.

## Tattoos

Some lucid dreamers choose tattoos as lucidity triggers or as in-the-dream protection. Daniel Love, author of *Are You Dreaming?*, has the one-word question "Dream?" tattooed on his inner right wrist, which reminds him to do reality tests by day and also gives him a way of reality testing in a dream, as when he rubs it the dream tattoo smears or becomes distorted, thus confirming that he is dreaming. A former European gold medallist in competitive sparring, Dr. Rory Mac Sweeney wanted to give himself a personal weapon in his lucid dreams, so he got two crossed Japanese sai swords tattooed on his back; this way they're always there when he needs to draw them in a dream:

I can remove them from my back and use them fairly easily. I have experimented with them as weapons, but now I tend to use them as part of an elaborate meditation, whereby I levitate them and try to hold them in midair as I sit floating. I've experimented with trying to make them swap sides, invert, spin, and the like—very tricky stuff to perform, as the whole mental apparatus tends to fall apart.

## Mantras

Mentally repeated with meaning and emotion attached to them, mantras can be used while falling asleep so that they are the last thing you consciously think about. Here's an incredibly simple one that works for me: "I am dreaming—this is a dream." Play with the rhythm of the words to increase

the “hook” they’ll form in your brain. Make up a mantra that pleases you, such as “The next thing I see will be a dream” or “I am lucid in my dream.” Put the words to music and sing them to yourself. Every time you feel your mind wandering, bring it gently but firmly back to the mantra. The aim is to carry your mantra into the dream state so that you find yourself mentally saying it in the dream. As you look around and recognise your familiar dream symbols or register the lightness of your dream body, awareness blooms.

### **Practice #7: The “Everything’s Happening Now” Reality Check**

The way into awareness is through the breath. Close your eyes and feel the breath move in and out of your body. Is your spine straight or are you slouching? Become aware of your sensory perceptions: What can you see behind your closed eyelids? What does the air smell like? What is the taste in your mouth? What noises can you hear? Feel your feet on the ground, your breath rising and falling. Be aware that *you are conscious in this moment in your life*. Everything is happening now! Everything is in this one moment of conscious awareness.

And now ask yourself, “Am I dreaming?” Expect to discover that the answer to this question is yes. Ask yourself, “How do I know I’m *not* dreaming?” One fast way of checking is holding your nose and trying to breathe through it. If you’re dreaming, you can still breathe freely. Hold this moment of conscious awareness as long as you like and imagine what you’d do if this were a lucid dream. Would you fly out of the office window? Or grow bulging Popeye muscles? Take a moment to vividly imagine yourself lucid. Then open your eyes and notice the colours, shapes, and beauty all around you.

The more we experience moments of focused conscious awareness while awake and question whether we are dreaming, the more likely we are to do this in a dream ... and so become lucid.

[contents]



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29. Tholey, “Overview of the Development of Lucid Dream Research in Germany,” 1–30.
  30. Tholey and Utecht, *Schöpferisch Träumen*, 51–52.
  31. Voss et al., “Induction of Self Awareness in Dreams,” 810–812.
  32. LaMarca and LaBerge, “Pre-sleep Treatment with Galantamine Increases the Likelihood of Lucid Dreaming.”

## CHAPTER 3

# *Your Gateway to Lucid Dreams: Sensations While Falling into and Waking from Sleep*

Imagine you are tucked in bed, duvet snug around your ears, eyes closed. It's so warm and lovely you can barely feel where your body begins and ends. Your breathing slows, your mind relaxes. Then out of the blue and very close to your face, you hear the sound of a high-tech camera shutter: someone is taking a photo of you. How cheeky of them to photograph you while you sleep! The shutter clicks again and again. Who is this irritating person? Annoyed, you rouse yourself and it's much harder to do than you expect, because your body is nearly paralysed by the onset of sleep. When you finally manage to open your eyes, there's nobody peering at you down a camera lens. The bedroom is dark and empty. In your initial confusion, it's hard to believe that such a super-real noise wasn't external, but internal.

*Hypnagogia* comes from the Greek *hypnos*, meaning “sleep,” and *agōgos*, meaning “leading” —“leading to sleep.” *Hypnagogia* can be defined simply as “pre-sleep sensory experiences.” Auditory hypnagogia is an element of the strange and wonderful mix of multisensory perceptions that occur as we transition from waking consciousness to sleep. I had this auditory hypnagogic experience in 1995 while I was living in the south of France and writing my undergraduate dissertation on lucid dreaming. When I heard

the camera shutter, I was convinced my flatmate or one of our friends had crept into my room to play a prank on me. Finding the room empty was a very strange feeling, as the gap between what seems real and what “is” real can be hard to bridge. I call this “misplaced lucidity,” and it occurs when we have a convincing experience in one state of consciousness while believing ourselves to be in another state of consciousness. While hearing the camera shutter, I believed it was actually occurring in the waking world and had interrupted the onset of sleep, when in fact it was the onset of sleep that had produced the sound of the shutter. This kind of disorienting realistic perception leaves people wondering what they have really witnessed or experienced.

Perhaps it wouldn't much matter, if hypnagogic perceptions were only ever as disturbing as the sound of a camera shutter. But some hypnagogic and hypnopompic experiences can be terrifying, involving ominous presences, threatening figures, and even the physical sensation of being pinched or pulled around. Chapter 15 on sleep disorders shines a spotlight on these difficult experiences and gives practical tips on how to cope with them and move fearlessly from them into lucid dreams.

*Hypnopompia* is “post-sleep sensory experiences,” from the Greek *pompē*, or “sending away,” as it occurs when we are waking up from sleep. Hypnopompia can involve three-dimensional dream imagery floating in the bedroom. This can be alarming, as we may be momentarily convinced there is somebody in our bedroom. Once, I woke up to see the dark shape of a man crouching at my bedroom door. I tried to sit up and shout, but my body was sluggish and very hard to move because I was in a semi-sleep state. As soon as I recognised that I was in a sleep state, I understood that this was likely either a sleep paralysis experience or hypnopompic imagery. Either way, I calmed myself down and relaxed. A moment later the man vanished into thin air.

Sensory perceptions are so convincing! Dreams can seem as real as waking reality while they're happening, so real that we rarely question that this might be a dream. This is why one of the most powerful gateways to

lucid dreaming is through learning to observe hypnagogic or pre-sleep imagery with detached awareness, no matter how weird things get. Dr. Johann Stoyva, researcher of the psychobiology of consciousness, describes some of the strange sensations linked to the transitory stages of sleep to waking and back again:

In deep relaxation, sensations of heaviness and warmth are common—probably related to a shift toward parasympathetic dominance in the autonomic nervous system. Distortions or changes in body image are likewise common—feelings of floating, of turning, of a limb moving, or disappearing, vivid visual images, often of a hallucinatory intensity, frequently appear.<sup>33</sup>

How can these surreal images and bizarre sensations help us to have a lucid dream? As always, the key is awareness. We can think of the mindset, sleep habits, and blocks that stop us from becoming lucid in a dream as being like the threshold guardians of ancient mythology—gatekeepers who try to stop the hero or heroine from entering the special world. Christopher Vogler, author of *The Writer's Journey*, remarks:

The task for heroes at this point is often to figure out some way around or through these guardians. Often their threat is just an illusion, and the solution is simply to ignore them or to push through them with faith ... The trick may be to realize that what seems like an obstacle may actually be the means of climbing over the threshold. Threshold Guardians who seem to be enemies may be turned into valuable allies.<sup>34</sup>

Luckily there are plenty of ways of outsmarting or befriending the gatekeepers of lucid dreaming. Becoming aware of hypnagogic sensations helps us to slip through a natural gateway into lucid dreaming that is available to us every single time we fall asleep.

# Lucid Sleeping: The Art of Falling Asleep Consciously

Conscious sleeping has been the goal of Tibetan Buddhists for thousands of years. When we are able to remain conscious while our body falls asleep and dreaming begins, we open the door to lucid dreaming. Rooted in the Hindu tradition is a practice called “yoga nidra,” where one floats on the cusp of sleep in deep relaxation. The experienced yoga nidra practitioner can carry this conscious awareness right through the sleep cycle and effectively stay lucid all night long while the body sleeps. One afternoon in 1993, I lay down, closed my eyes, and focused on my hypnagogic imagery and sensations. After a short time, I lucidly realised that I was falling asleep:

From the perspective of my bed, I see a double of myself across the room hovering about three feet in the air. The other Clare is lying horizontally on her back, arms folded across her chest as she floats off into the light, like a coffin-less corpse moving into the fire at a crematorium, only nothing morbid about it, just a marvellous warm glow. I watch from the bed and think in awe, “I’m falling asleep!”

Whenever we decide to stay awake as we fall asleep and observe the hypnagogic imagery, sounds, and physical sensations that arise without losing our awareness, we are practising yoga nidra: lucid sleeping. A longtime yoga teacher and practitioner, I have had many beautiful yoga nidra experiences, and I’ve also had the honour of guiding many people into yoga nidra in yoga classes and on retreats. The more we practise and play with states of deep relaxation and hypnagogia, the easier it becomes to enter them. You may find that certain imagery accompanies your own experience. I have a luminous purple sphere that I see the moment I relax and close my eyes. Here’s an example of what can happen if I lie down on my yoga mat, wide awake in the middle of the day, and play a little with hypnagogia:

I close my eyes and the purple dot takes form. It's so beautiful, filled with light. As I concentrate on and appreciate it, it grows to fill my entire mind and it's like being in the void, only a very pretty purple void. I am bathed in this luminous purple and recognise this is a highly creative state. I need to keep my mind quiet and focused so as not to lose it, because technically I am still more awake than asleep, but I luxuriate in it and also form a quiet, open intention to send out to the universe, about my dreaming, my lucid dream book, my life.

After a while I see the purple change to green, then back to purple again, and it strikes me that I can guide the colour of this state. I get the purple back and marvel at how light it is, how radiant. Maybe I need to paint this someday. I notice the dots of pure light, the radiant purple. The edges of the circle (it's a circle again now) glow white and the background is greenish yellow.

Sports psychologist Paul Tholey was an avid practitioner of lucid dreaming and carried out many experiments with his students. One of his sleep laboratory experiments attempted to show that it is possible to remain consciously aware throughout total sleeping states. Tholey notes that "only hypnagogic techniques made possible a 24-hour period of lucidity that included the total sleeping state."<sup>35</sup> He personally experienced twenty-four hours of lucidity twice, which included around five hours of lucid sleeping. His muscular system was totally relaxed during this period, as evidenced by EMG measurements, and he woke up feeling no physical or mental fatigue.

It may be one thing to achieve this feat while hooked up to monitoring machines in the expectant atmosphere of a sleep laboratory, but how do we manage to stay consciously aware when our bed is so cosy and it's deliciously easy to succumb to sleep? We need an enlivening dose of ICE to wake us up, in the form of the three golden tools for a lucid mindset: intent, clarity, and expectation. If we *intend* to stay aware, actively retain mental *clarity* in the form of self-awareness, and fully *expect* to succeed in entering

a lucid dream directly from the waking state, we will have already greatly increased our chances of success.

## How to Find the Gateway ... and Slip Through It

Imagine an actual gateway for a moment. It could be an imposing brass one or a simple garden gate. Imagine it emerging from thick fog for just an instant. Now is the moment to walk through it, before it gets swallowed up again. This is a little what it's like to enter lucid dreaming via hypnagogic imagery. The imagery is there, clear as can be, but it is prone to sudden collapse, and then you're right back where you began. Staying alert and watching hypnagogia build and morph is excellent practice for learning the art of entering a lucid dream from the waking state, and it also helps you to stay lucid in a dream when the scene starts to flicker or dissolve. Hypnagogia-watching is one of the deepest mindfulness practices there is. It teaches steadiness of the mind in the face of change and instability. It teaches us to be fully present in the now. It teaches patience, because if we lunge at one of those ultra-real images and try to grab it too soon, it will vanish in the blink of an eye. Dream researcher Dr. Bert O. States describes the fickle nature of pre-sleep imagery:

In pre-sleep darkness my mind can conjure and alter a face into monstrous disproportions on the slightest commands. It is a fickle skill at best, lasting perhaps twenty seconds before the image collapses completely. But it always astonishes me because I have the unique impression that I am watching my mind playing with its own contents at an elementary level.<sup>36</sup>

Even just altering the direction of your gaze while hypnagogia-watching can be enough to send all the images scattering like frightened fish. If the image is stable enough to withstand your direct, conscious gaze, it will likely grow stronger and even stranger, and you'll be able to guide its development with your thoughts and expectations. If you stay calm and

focused, the imagery will take the leap into three-dimensionality and you'll be awake inside your dream.

## The Building Blocks of Dreams

As we fall asleep, if we stay aware, we can notice the building blocks of dreams appear one by one. It's quite something to pinpoint the moment dreaming begins; static, surreal imagery morphs into moving scenes that draw us into an all-encompassing sensual reality. The twilight zone of falling asleep or waking up is recognised as highly creative. If you learn to go there, you can tap into your most original, creative thoughts and bring them back with you to the waking state. This twilight zone is also a gateway to lucid dreaming.

The lucid dreamer can practise essential skills of mindful awareness every time they fall asleep simply by observing hypnagogic imagery. I must have clocked up thousands of hours of lucidly observing hypnagogia and hypnopompia over my lifetime, as it has become a regular sleep habit for me and in the past two decades I've done it for at least twenty minutes per twenty-four-hour period: at the start of every night's sleep, following nighttime awakenings, and as I enter or emerge from afternoon naps (if I'm lucky enough to squeeze one in). Observing hypnagogia is such a useful practice for lucid dreaming, as it builds up the skills of attention and mental clarity, which are so important if we want to learn to have long, stable lucid dreams.

Dr. Andreas Mavromatis of Brunel University wrote his doctoral thesis on hypnagogia in 1983. He reports that "hypnagogic images form themselves too quickly for the relaxing consciousness to be able to observe their formation."<sup>37</sup> What happens if we don't relax our consciousness as we fall asleep, but stay vigilant and alert? What do we see when we manage to fix our lucid attention on hypnagogic imagery? Here's an extract from my dream journal in October 2013, where I experimented with observing the



formation of hypnagogia, both to induce lucid dreams and for its own curious, shapeshifting sake:

Lucid visual hypnagogia. Tiny geometric lights appear as from a distance. Gradually turn into moving shapes, very weird, random stuff—metal instruments/sculptures; burgundy and mauve stripes. Then an entire screen full of numbers, and it moves; a scroll-down screen of tightly packed numbers that squash and twist and morph into each other, then turn into scrawled hearts (a few lines of these) then graffiti ... I watch it all and wonder at it. Still 2D and sucking me in as it morphs, but I stay aware. Every now and then it leaps into a 3D moving scene, and as soon as I notice this, it destabilises a little and reverts to 2D or even to the initial flashing lights/random shapes of light, then it builds up again as I watch.

After writing down my observations and considering my own and other people's experiences with lucid hypnagogia, I noticed that there are six distinctive stages to the visual hypnagogia that arises while falling asleep.

## Six Stages of Visual Hypnagogia

### 1) Formless Hypnagogia

This may appear as white clouds or waves of pure colour. Psychologist Andreas Mavromatis remarks of formless hypnagogia:

This phenomenon known variously as ideo-retinal light, luminous dust, entopic light ... has been argued by various researchers to be the stuff out of which hypnagogic and sleep-dream visions arise.<sup>38</sup>

This is an entry point into what I call the Lucid Light, my theory being that this light is not only “the stuff that dreams are made of.” At its deepest manifestation, in bodiless lucid states, this formless luminosity could be the stuff from which all of life arises. These ideas are explored in [chapter 21](#).

## 2) Initial Light Forms

Initial light forms move in non-complex ways; e.g., forward or backward as they approach or recede. At this stage I also often see a luminous purple sphere form before my eyes. Others report glittering stars, sparks, and golden dots.

## 3) Static Two-Dimensional Imagery

This imagery arrives in brief flashes yet typically contains intricate, surreal detail. I sometimes see the innards of complex machines at this stage, or images too alien to grasp. Others report geometric shapes or grotesque faces.

## 4) Morphing Two-Dimensional Imagery

This imagery begins to remain a little longer in the visual field; a couple of seconds. It moves and blends into scenes. It leaps into 3-D, then relapses to 2-D, then leaps to 3-D again. This seems the least stable stage of hypnagogia, and it has high levels of bizarreness: I once saw a Friesian cow leap off a grassy cliff and soar through the sky before the hypnagogia reverted to unrelated static 2-D flashes. Hypnic jerks (when one wakes suddenly with a physical jolt) may occur at any of these stages, as the body relaxes into sleep paralysis.

## 5) Three-Dimensional Moving Scenes Emerge

These involve actions, people, and landscapes, and are dreamlike, with a sense of (senseless) narrative. People also report hearing music or loud buzzing and feeling floating or falling sensations. At this stage, the physical body is usually no longer perceived and the process of falling asleep is well under way.

These moving scenes have a tendency towards stability, but although they have visual depth, the dreamer does not yet feel she is completely “inside” the scene. It’s more like watching a bizarre film that could switch itself off at any moment and revert to a previous stage, such as the initial light forms.

It is possible to influence the imagery by thinking guiding thoughts, such as “Now the apple flies up into space” or “The trees turn pink.” Be extra careful to remain calm, detached, and lucid when this morphing process is happening, as the imagery is so beguiling that it will suck you in if it can. Stay aware.

## 6) All-Encompassing 3-D Scenes

The moment these 3-D scenes encompass the dreamer’s perception, actual (lucid!) dreaming begins.

These stages will differ to some extent for everyone, and for some people they will be interspersed with physical sensations, noises, and even smells, so why not set out to discover your own stages? The beauty of all areas of lucid dreaming and sleep is that we can make our own observations and do our own experiments until our dream world becomes as familiar to us as our waking world. That’s when observing hypnagogic imagery becomes as natural as summoning the relaxed concentration we need for activities such as driving a car, knitting a jumper, or skiing. Here are my best tips for watching and playing with pre-sleep imagery.

### Practice #8: The Lucid Hypnagogia Technique

1. Play with imagery. Lie down or sit comfortably, relax your body, and observe. As you calmly notice the depth of the blackness behind your eyelids, things will start to appear: swirls of light, blobs of colour, geometric shapes. If you want to practise playing with the imagery, say, “Now I see waves on a beach” or “Here comes a yellow balloon.” Don’t get attached to making these images appear; engage with playful curiosity but also with a sense of detachment.

2. Experience without worrying. You may experience sensations involving movement, balance, spatial orientation, noises, or even the feeling of being touched by someone. In the face of weird hypnagogia, instead of obsessing about your physical body (“Is that *really* someone’s

hand I feel on my chest?”) or trying to work out if what you hear is actually happening in waking reality (“Is that *really* some cheeky person clicking a photograph of me?”), just smile to yourself and think serenely, “Aha, I’m falling asleep.” Otherwise you’ll likely find yourself waking up but caught in sleep paralysis, and although this is interesting to experience, you’ll need to work again at entering a lucid dream. These sensations are a perfectly normal part of transitioning from the waking state into sleep. We just usually don’t notice them, as we are not alert enough to.

3. Float into a scene. Make use of any floating sensations, numbness, vibrations, or buzzing sounds that occur in the hypnagogic pre-sleep state. These indicate that you are entering a dream body as your physical body enters sleep paralysis. If you have visual imagery at this stage, try gently floating into the scene, and if this works, you will be lucid dreaming. If there is no imagery, you can try rolling over (not with your physical body, but with your dream body) and simultaneously imagine yourself rolling into a field of flowers, or through a window, or into a swimming pool. It’s a lovely feeling, rolling into a lucid dream!

4. Immerse yourself in dream imagery. Whenever you feel yourself beginning to wake up in the night, do not open your eyes or move your body. Instead, keep your mind’s eye focused on the dream you were just dreaming. Try to see the hypnopompic imagery. This is the perfect moment to enter a lucid dream; simply reimmerge yourself in the dream imagery. Experience the dream’s energy and allow it to surround you again. If you feel your awareness slipping, remind yourself calmly, “I am lucid. This is a dream.”

5. Rest in pure awareness. If you can’t recall any dream imagery in the hypnopompic state, you could relax into a deep awareness of this expansive state of consciousness by initially keeping your focus on your breathing, before falling more deeply asleep but remaining consciously aware. This is a wonderful mindfulness exercise in itself, and dream yogis

call this the “clear light sleep,”<sup>39</sup> where the body is sleeping but we are not dreaming; instead, we rest in pure awareness. It is incredibly refreshing and peaceful.

6. Imagine a scene or a portal. Alternatively, you might prefer to imagine a new scene: swooping through a starry sky or driving a fast car. Imagining movement can be helpful, as it connects you to your dream body and helps you to dive effortlessly into the dream world before you have a chance to fully awaken. Imagining a mirror to jump through, or any other sort of “dream portal” such as doors, windows, and pools, can be an exciting way of falling asleep consciously.

Mixing the Lucid Hypnagogia Technique with the Wake Back To Bed technique described in chapter 1 is extremely effective. If we have already slept for a few hours and have got most of our deep sleep out of the way, we are not so tired, and we are ripe for a long period of REM sleep, in which many dreams occur. Practising during an afternoon nap is brilliant for the same reasons. It becomes much easier to balance consciously between waking and sleeping states, before gently allowing the dream world to surround us, or moving delicately into it with strong, stable lucidity.

## The Elevator Hypothesis for Hypnagogic States

Many people overlook the number of possibilities that open up when we explore hypnagogic states. Hypnagogia is not only a gateway to lucid dreaming; in actual fact, it seems that hypnagogia is a stepping stone to a vast array of states of consciousness.

Let’s say the gateway to lucid dreaming that we spy from time to time through the fog when we consciously observe hypnagogia is in fact the door of an elevator. This elevator has the ability to ride directly to almost any state of consciousness and let you out on that level. My “Elevator Hypothesis” goes like this:

Hypnagogic and hypnopompic states are hybrid states of consciousness that allow us to access almost *any state of consciousness*. They can be compared with an elevator that can let you out on any “floor” of consciousness. The buttons on this elevator are hidden, so you may not know which floor you’ll end up on unless you are an experienced elevator rider and know how to find the button you’d like to press. The whole spectrum of consciousness (apart from states of shock caused by trauma or physical injury, and any drug-induced state) is available from this relaxed, dreamlike state, with its hyper-bizarre imagery and peculiar sensations. Hypnagogic and hypnopompic states are just one step away from any of these: the waking state; non-lucid dreaming; lucid dreaming; sleep paralysis, out-of-body experiences, the void, trance states; meditation; daydreaming; bodiless lucid experiences (BLEs, as discussed in chapter 20); and deep relaxation.

When I say hypnagogia is “one step” away from these other states of consciousness, I mean that there is no need to experience other intermediary states of consciousness before arriving at them—although this can of course happen, as someone could quite plausibly go from a waking state to hypnagogia, then enter sleep paralysis before winding up in a lucid dream. But equally, that person could transition directly from hypnagogia into a full-blown lucid dream. Hypnagogia is an intermediary state of consciousness that links waking physical reality with a whole spectrum of sleep- and dream-related states.

This is what makes hypnagogic states so precious to anyone interested in exploring the nature of consciousness. Their uniqueness is that they lie on the cusp of waking and sleep, and their beauty is that we can access them several times in every twenty-four-hour period, thus giving us a wonderful opportunity to explore different states of consciousness. Every time we are about to fall asleep—when we settle into bed at night, snooze on the train, or have our after-lunch nap—we have the opportunity to explore the entire spectrum of conscious experience. How’s that for a lofty excuse to offer the boss when we’re caught snoring in a meeting?

If we want to direct the hypnagogia elevator to a particular “floor,” we need to know how to find those hidden buttons. Here are some tips so that nobody gets stuck. But if you do end up on a floor you weren’t expecting, my best advice is to relax, adopt an attitude of calm curiosity, and go with the flow.

### **Practice #9: How to Reach Different States of Consciousness**

- To reach the waking state, open your eyes, wriggle your fingers and toes to ground yourself in your body, and take a deep, refreshing breath of oxygen.
- To reach non-lucid dreaming, relax your desire to stay alert and allow the imagery to suck you in. This is pretty easy, as it’s what most of us do every single night.
- To reach lucid dreaming, continue to observe imagery and sensations with alert attention, and from time to time state your intention to stay lucid.
- To reach sleep paralysis (which can be an excellent opportunity to then transition into a lucid dream), ignore the pre-dream imagery but maintain conscious awareness by focusing on a point in your mind’s eye—perhaps a colourful dot of light—and allow your awareness to move away from physical sensations.
- To reach an out-of-body state, ignore the pre-dream imagery. Use buzzing sounds, floating sensations, and vibrations as triggers to remind you to focus on a single, powerfully imagined picture or sensation of yourself rising into the air like a feather on a breeze. [chapter 20](#) on out-of-body experiences has more tips.
- To reach the void, ignore the pre-dream imagery and direct your attention to the emptiness in your visual field. Allow it to swell and change as it wants, but do not project thoughts and desires onto it. In this hypnagogic backdrop lies pure consciousness, or the Lucid Light, and it can be a slippery fish to hold onto, so it’s best to relax deeply and not make any fast moves. Imagine yourself floating in or falling through

endless, calm space. You'll find more advice on navigating the void in [chapter 21](#).

- To reach trance states from the hypnagogic state is easy, because if you are witnessing hypnagogic imagery, you are already in a pre-sleep trance. Trance states are exceptionally creative, and if you have any problems to work on, now is the best time to toss them lightly into the creative soup and see what emerges. Artists, inventors, writers, and scientists have all reported huge breakthroughs in hypnagogic trances.

- Observing hypnagogia is a form of meditation, only instead of releasing the chatter of our mind, we are watching it unfold in odd bits and pieces as if we're watching a surrealist play. If you can be deeply relaxed and yet maintain awareness, allowing the imagery to play out without getting attached to it, you are strengthening your waking meditation skills.

- Daydreaming—this is like using my Lucid Writing <sup>40</sup> technique without the pen. Creating fictional scenes in the hypnagogic state is wonderful, and can be easily begun simply by thinking about something that interests you, from a romantic encounter to the plot of a short story.

- Bodiless lucid experiences (BLEs) are my term for lucid experiences while asleep where there is no sensation of inhabiting a dream body. These can be entered from hypnagogia in the same way as the void can be. Relax, release your attention from your physical body, and focus on a sensation of falling into deep space.

- To reach deep relaxation while in a pre-sleep state can be hard for some people. If you are one of these people, it's very worthwhile to learn a simple limb-by-limb relaxation technique like the one in [practice 10](#), which follows. This will help you to relax and will make it easier for you to let go of waking consciousness and float on the cusp of sleep, where hypnagogia rules. Let yourself go deeper, then release your hold on the imagery once you feel ready, and succumb to deep relaxation. If you are



sufficiently mentally alert, you'll still remain lucid while your body falls asleep.

### **Practice #10: Limb-by-Limb Relaxation**

This is one of the simple relaxation techniques I teach in yoga classes, modified slightly to take you directly into lucid dreaming. At first, it's a good idea to try it on a yoga mat rather than a bed, as a bed can be a little too comfy for yoga nidra practice. Lie on your back in *savasana* (legs slightly apart; arms slightly away from the body, palms upturned). Close your eyes and relax. Starting with your feet, go up through every part of your body, repeating mentally twice, "My (name of body part) is relaxed."

You might want to include your feet, knees, hips, belly, chest, left and right arms, fingers, shoulders, neck, ears, eyes, tongue, jaw, nose, scalp, and head. This naming of body parts is flexible and can be changed a little every time, if you like. As you go along, notice your bodily sensations. Be alert for sensations of floating or numbness and odd sounds. These are all natural elements of the hypnagogic state, and they can tell you how close your body is to falling asleep. When you have reached your head, mentally repeat each of these phrases twice: "My whole body is relaxed ... My mind is relaxed ... Thoughts and mental images float by like clouds in the sky ... I am deeply relaxed."

At this point, one of my yoga students may already be snoring gently, which isn't the goal of yoga nidra, so make sure you hold on to your awareness, reminding yourself, "I am lucidly aware as I watch the images. I am about to enter lucid dreaming." Or simply repeat, "I am lucid, I am lucid." If there's a sudden lurch or you have the feeling you are falling, embrace this but hold on tightly to your awareness, as this is the moment of falling asleep.

You should soon experience the wonderful sensation of saying, "I am lucid ...," and realising that you are, indeed, lucid in a full-blown

dream.

### **Practice #11: Lucid Slumber with a Key**

Surrealist artist Salvador Dali used to sit in an armchair with his hands hanging over the ends of the arms and fall momentarily asleep to capture bizarre hypnagogic imagery:

You must hold a heavy key which you will keep suspended, delicately pressed between the extremities of the thumb and forefinger of your left hand. Under the key you will previously have placed a plate upside down on the floor. ... The moment the key drops from your fingers, you may be sure that the noise of its fall on the upside-down plate will awaken you.<sup>41</sup>

Whereas Dali used to then leap up and get back to work on his paintings, this basic technique can be adapted for lucid dreamers who wish to stay asleep and explore more of the dream world. Instead of sitting in an armchair, lie in bed or on the sofa with an arm hanging out over the edge and close your fingers around a key or a spoon. When it drops, allow the noise to remind you, “I am dreaming!”

### **Practice #12: Talk Yourself to Sleep**

When you're ready to sleep, lie down, close your eyes, relax ... and talk! Or rather, mumble, so you don't stay too awake. Let images arise in your mind as you speak, take your cue from them, and describe what you see. Listen to your voice with half an ear, watch your internal imagery grow stronger, and try to pinpoint the moment you start talking utter nonsense. This is true confabulation, surrealist-style, as in the key-drop method just described.

I've had this experience when falling asleep while telling my child a made-up bedtime story in the dark. I'll suddenly hear myself mumble something completely unrelated to the plot, a nonsense sentence, often accompanied by bizarre hypnagogic imagery. This is the

moment of starting to dream, and with practice (as long as you aren't forced by an outraged toddler to struggle awake in order to finish telling your story) you can learn to maintain conscious awareness as you fall asleep so that you immediately go into a lucid dream.

[contents]

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33. Stoyva, "Biofeedback Techniques and the Conditions for Hallucinatory Activity," 394.
  34. Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 129.
  35. Tholey, "Overview of the Development of Lucid Dream Research in Germany," 1–30.
  36. States, "Dreams, Art and Virtual Worldmaking," 3–12.
  37. Mavromatis, "Hypnagogia: The Nature and Function of the Hypnagogic State," 25–26.
  38. *Ibid.*, 25.
  39. Wangyal, *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*, 146.
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## CHAPTER 4

# *Stay Lucid: The CLEAR Stabilisation Technique*

Let's assume you've managed to become lucid in a dream. What next? People commonly report a change in the visual properties of the dream when they become lucid: the imagery comes into sharp focus, glows with colour, and seems brilliantly alive. Realising that you're conscious in the unconscious—here and now—is an intoxicating moment. The bad news is that inexperienced lucid dreamers often get so excited that they immediately wake up! The good news is that this stage won't last forever; the more often you become lucid in a dream, the faster you'll learn the most effective way to prolong the dream. The challenge is to avoid getting so sucked into the dream action that you either lose lucidity or wake up. Staying lucid may feel a little like walking a tightrope at first, but it is a learnable skill.

When an electrical current of 40 hertz was applied to subjects during REM sleep, it triggered “self-reflective awareness,” or lucidity, as defined by the researchers' LuCiD scale, in 77 percent of subjects.<sup>42</sup> This 2014 experiment by Ursula Voss and colleagues marked a huge step forward in terms of understanding brain activity during lucid dreaming. Potentially it could pioneer lucid dream induction for the healing of trauma in the nightmares of patients suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It's a step on the path towards helping many more people to become lucid in their

dreams. But without knowledge of how to stabilise the dream once lucid, such externally induced lucid dreams are destined to be short-lived. None of the volunteers for this experiment had experienced lucid dreaming before, so they had no experience of maintaining awareness. Of course, it didn't help that they were woken up by researchers just five to ten seconds after the application of the electrical current! To determine whether externally induced lucidity can naturally be prolonged by the dreamer (and I see no reason why it shouldn't be), this experiment needs to be repeated with experienced lucid dreamers who can signal the onset of lucidity with prearranged eye movements and wake themselves up to report their dream as they feel lucidity fading.

A 2014 study of 571 lucid dreamers showed that the average lucid dream lasts about fourteen minutes. The researchers, Tadas Stumbrys and colleagues, found the following:

Lucid dreamers are likely to be active in their lucid dreams and plan to accomplish different actions (e.g., flying, talking with dream characters, or having sex), yet they are not always able to remember or successfully execute their intentions (most often because of awakening or hindrances in the dream environment).<sup>43</sup>

The fact is that lucidity is not just about that moment of realising, “Aha, this is a dream!” That's just the beginning of the story. Skills are needed to maintain awareness and avoid waking up too soon. While we're awake, minutes and even hours can pass without us really noticing which state of consciousness we're in. Are we daydreaming? Are we highly focused and alert? Are we sleepy, bored, or drifting in and out of a light trance? “Being awake” is not the single, constant state of consciousness it sounds like it is. It's the same with dreaming. When we have moments of reflective self-awareness in dreams, these sometimes (but not always) lead to lucidity, but they can just as quickly be lost again. Within just one minute of dreaming, we might be non-lucid, then pre-lucid <sup>44</sup> (wondering if this is a dream and

performing a reality check), then fully lucid, and then lose lucidity. Within a lucid dream, awareness also fluctuates. Effortlessly lucid awareness may slide into flawed reasoning (like deciding to take a photo of something in the dream to show it to someone when you wake up). When we feel lucidity slipping, we may find ourselves engaged in a real struggle to maintain awareness and stabilise the dream.

Raising our overall awareness by noticing the state of consciousness we're in at various points during the day (and there are many states: daydreaming, trance, high focus, sleepy, alert, experiencing hypnagogia, spacing out, and so on) will help us to recognise when we're dreaming and learn how to stay mentally alert to stabilise and prolong the dream. Meditation and mindful living are extremely useful lucidity practices, and I recommend further investigation of these practices to anyone serious about lucid dreaming. But what can we do to stay lucid *while we are dreaming*? Here are fifteen techniques for you to test out at your leisure.

### **Practice #13: Stay Lucid in Fifteen Different Ways**

#### **1) Calm Your Emotions**

Just as beginning lucid dreamers tend to wake within seconds through the pure joy and excitement of finding themselves aware in a dream, any strong emotion in a lucid dream may potentially stir the dreamer into waking up. However, this does not have to be the case. Experienced lucid dreamers can experience mind-blowing orgasms and still remain asleep but fully lucid, as clinical psychologist and well-known dream author Dr. Patricia Garfield points out in her 1979 book *Pathway to Ecstasy*. Learning techniques for staying calm in a dream is important so that it becomes second nature to activate these techniques if lucidity starts to get shaky.

Practise by day: being familiar with a calming technique and confident of its effect is key. Notice when you're getting wound up or emotional and take a couple of deep breaths to calm yourself. Count to ten. Smile. Use an affirmation, such as "I am calm and all is well."

I've found it useful to link an affirmation and breathing to a particular gesture that can be used in the dream: clench then unclench a fist, for example, to symbolise letting go of the emotion, or clap your hands. The more you work on finding an effective way of calming your emotions in the waking state, the easier it will be to fall back on these techniques in a dream, and they should work faster in the dream state because you'll have the powerful tools of expectation and intent on your side.

Even experienced lucid dreamers lose lucidity, of course. If we didn't, we'd be lucid all night. (This can happen, but it's a very rare event.) How come we lose lucidity? Generally our mental focus slips because we get so caught up in the dream action that we forget we're dreaming. Other times, we naturally rise from lucidity into waking. Sometimes maintaining lucidity seems like too much of an effort at the end of a long lucid dream, so we just let it go. Occasionally, something so surprising happens that we are shocked into waking up, so again emotion is the culprit, as in this lucid dream shared with me by Daniel Love, author of *Are You Dreaming?*

For a while longer I play with freezing, fast-forwarding, and reversing the scene around me, occasionally attempting to catch dream characters in a particularly amusing frame. I eventually float down amongst the frozen crowd and decide to walk amongst this forest of statues. I take a while just to soak up this bizarre experience, all the while looking for inconsistencies or the unexpected.

I spot one man frozen in the act of throwing an apple core into a bin. The core is suspended in midair. I flick it with my finger and watch as it rotates suspended in the air. It creates an extended high-pitch "ping" sound, similar to the noise one would expect flicking a wine glass. It's all wonderful yet at the same time a little "spooky." As I look to study the expression on the face of the man



discarding the apple, I get the sudden thought that the dream characters are all just playing along, almost like the childhood game of musical statues.

The moment the thought enters my mind, this old man, still frozen still as a statue, winks. It takes me completely by surprise, and the sudden shock wakes me.

## 2) Eye Movements and the Lucid Gaze

In lucid dreams, if you stare too long at something, sometimes the dream dissolves. It's one way of waking yourself up from the dream if you want to. In the nineties, those books of three-dimensional images were popular, the ones where at first the image seems an abstract jumble of colours and shapes, but when you go a bit cross-eyed, you suddenly find yourself inside the picture and can see what you couldn't before: three footballers kicking a ball, or an alligator by a river. Back then, I discovered for myself that visual lucid dream stabilisation when the dream is slipping is like looking around inside a 3-D picture: if you aren't careful, you might leap out of the picture; to stay in it, you have to look a certain way and keep your eyes flicking here and there. If lucidity seems stable, there's no need to worry about eye movements, but when the dream begins to fade in colour, wobble, or dissolve, it's time to get looking around!

While you look around your dream, try to foster a sense of keen awareness and alert attention. This will sharp-focus the dream. I call this keen, alert focus "the lucid gaze," because it helps to stabilise the dream scene and makes me feel ultra-lucid.

## 3) Look at Your Hands

This is the classic lucidity reminder mentioned in the novels of Carlos Castaneda. Hands are great because most beginning lucid dreamers and many experienced lucid dreamers tend to have a dream body, so hands are usually available and can double as a lucidity trigger—remembering to find your hands in a dream reminds you that this is

indeed a dream—and they also act as an effective stabiliser. Hands are also useful for the reality check of trying to put your finger through the palm of your hand.

This is one method I used for years in my early twenties as I dove deep into lucid dreaming. My favourite technique for stabilising a dream when it started to waver was to raise both my hands in front of my face, announce, “I am dreaming,” and keep my hands there while I looked back and forth from them to the dream scene, which would invariably grow sharper and more solid in response. If your dream hands look distorted, have extra fingers, or are covered in fur, don’t let this distract you! Rubbing your hands together is also an excellent way of grounding yourself in the dream and stabilising lucidity.

#### 4) Spinning

Stephen LaBerge reports that spinning around in a circle as soon as he feels the dream scene begin to fade is a good way of entering a new dream scene but staying lucid all the while. He speculates as to why this works:

When you imagine perceiving something with one sense, your sensitivity to external stimulation of that sense decreases. Thus, if the brain is fully engaged in producing the vivid, internally generated sensory experience of spinning, it will be more difficult for it to construct a contradictory sensation based on external sensory input.<sup>45</sup>

Not all lucid dreamers find that this technique achieves the desired effect. As with anything, it’s good to test out what works for you personally. I find that when I spin in a lucid dream, everything tends to go black and I end up floating in black space, which can be a wonderful experience. (Chapter 21 explores the potential of the lucid void.) Experiment and see what happens when you spin inside a lucid dream!

## 5) Tap Your Chest

Maria Isabel Pita, author of *Dream Partners: An Ongoing Experiment in Lucid Dream Sharing*, told me that she often taps her chest on becoming lucid:

I did not intend for that to be a dream-deepening technique; it just came naturally, lucidity often resulting in heightened sensuality, and in waking reality my breasts and nipples are very sensitive. I often feel my nipples against any clothing I'm wearing in the dream. I think feeling your body, planting your dream feet on the floor or ground, overall helps root you into the dream.

## 6) Ground Yourself

It might seem a strange idea to ground yourself in a dream, but this is one of the central methods I use to stay lucid and stabilise the dream, particularly when I'm not practising active dream control and am at risk of being sucked into the dream and losing lucidity. Choose a simple grounding technique that you like and practise it while awake so that if you feel lucidity slipping, you can easily recover your mental clarity. One grounding technique that works well for me is standing tall in my dream body and breathing deeply from my belly:

- Breathe in lucidity, clarity!
- Breathe out doubt.
- Feel yourself gaining focus; notice the resulting perceptual clarity of the dream.
- Remind yourself, "I am dreaming."

For me, one in-and-out breath is usually enough to stabilise the scene and reestablish high lucidity. The more you practise this technique by day, the more effective you'll find it by night. Imagine yourself doing this grounding technique successfully and with the desired results in your next lucid dream. It's a great way of setting a mind-body intention.

### 7) Put Your Hand Through a Wall

Experienced lucid dreamer Peter Maich inserts his hand into walls or furniture, or punches through them as a way of combining a reality check with physical engagement with the dream scene. In this lucid dream, Peter grounds himself by engaging with dream matter:

I decide to see if I am dreaming and put my fingers into a kitchen bench. Great—a soft, pliable surface, so I am dreaming. I look for a wall and move over to it, place my hand on the surface, and feel it. I gently push and work my way into and through the hard, pliable surface. I love the feeling of energy mixing and going into solid matter. I imagine the atoms mixing, touching each other, and the attraction and repelling of each tiny contact. It's a magical feeling that thrills me.

### 8) Sing

I know of many lucid dreamers who sing to stabilise their lucid dreams. Sometimes a religious song is chosen, and other times the dreamer makes up a tune as they sing a kind of dream narration: “I’m dreaming, going to fly to the stars, swooping up now, feeling the cool rush on my skin, the tingle down my spine, resting now on a carpet of dream stars ...” This fortifies the dreamer’s second-by-second awareness. Of course, if you’re not the singing type, dream narration can also be done just by talking. I’d recommend trying out dream singing for the pure energy rush of it: you can sing way better in a lucid dream than in waking life—opera, rap, or in the voice of your favourite singer, male or female. A dream voice can fill the entire dream with reverberating sound energy.

### 9) Fly

Flying or any other kind of movement can help to root the dreamer within the lucid dream. Flying in dreams is a deeply sensuous activity.

When I fly, I feel my entire dream body tingling from head to toe, and many other lucid dreamers report similar rich kinaesthetic feelings.

#### 10) Do Some Simple Math

Doing a bit of mental arithmetic in a dream activates the conscious brain and increases mental alertness, which in turn can help stabilise the dream. Don't worry too much if you can't seem to get the right answer, though. Studies by German researcher Paul Tholey have shown that doing math in lucid dreams requires much more concentration than identical sums in waking life.<sup>46</sup> It's best to keep the sums very simple, or you risk getting so entrenched in mathematics that you slip too far in the other direction and lose lucidity. Rebecca Turner, founder of the World of Lucid Dreaming website, told me her personal routine for staying lucid and focused:

When I first become lucid, I have a fixed routine of rubbing my hands together, doing my favourite reality check of trying to push my fingers through my other palm, and saying, "I'm dreaming." If I need to stabilise it further, I do simple maths, like  $5 + 4 = 9$ , and study close-up objects, which I find really grounding in itself. It's important to stay calm—and that's much easier to do once you've had a number of lucid dreams. I got way too excited in the early days and blew many good opportunities. Calm and focus are key.

#### 11) Chat to a Dream Figure

If the dream starts to lose colour and presence, go up to the first person, animal, or object you see, and ask something like, "What do you represent?" Or pay them an honest compliment, such as "You have such colourful feathers!" Engaging with dream figures helps to focus your mental clarity and binds you to the dream. It can also be illuminating to see how they react.

#### 12) Announce "I'm Dreaming"

This is a technique that most dreamers will automatically think of by themselves as they begin to navigate the dream space. It's tremendously helpful, as it roots us in the knowledge that this is a dream, reminding us not to let lucidity slip. Dreams, non-lucid and lucid, are so alive and fascinating, so surprising and creative, that it's easy to get sucked into their compelling emotional story. Saying aloud calmly, "This is a dream," every five to ten seconds or so (for beginning lucid dreamers) is like touching the wall for brief support while tightrope walking—it keeps you balanced on the right side of lucidity.

### 13) Create a Lucidity Reminder

While in the dream, it can be helpful to pick up an object and hold it in your hand as you continue to dream; squeeze or look at it now and then to remind yourself that you are dreaming and that you need to maintain conscious awareness. You can spontaneously create a lucidity reminder for yourself depending on what's available in the dream—or magic a reminder out of thin air, as Robert Waggoner, author of the fascinating book *Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self*, once did: "In one lucid dream, I magically created stickers that read, 'I am lucid.' Then I spent the dream placing the 'I am lucid' stickers on items in the dream!"<sup>47</sup>

Scott Sparrow linked his intention to stay lucid with a star in his dream:

I am astounded by the clarity of the stars. They seem so close. At this point I become lucid. The dream "shakes" momentarily. Immediately I look down at the ground and concentrate on solidifying the image and remaining in the dreamscape. Then I realize that if I turn my attention to the pole star above my head, the dream image will further stabilize itself. I do this; until gradually the clarity of the stars returns in its fullness.<sup>48</sup>

#### 14) Recall a Dream Goal

Lucidity is a funny thing. It can seem fragile and unstable, like walking along a tightrope, but as your mental focus increases, it can broaden and seem as wide as a desert, impossible to fall off. It makes me think of the tree yoga pose where you stand on one leg, place the other foot flat against your knee or thigh, and raise your arms in the air. This pose is strongly related to inner focus. Some days I feel I could stay in tree pose for hours, as my balance seems effortless. Other days, when I'm tired or distracted, I wobble like crazy! On wobbly tree pose days, it helps me to breathe from the belly, fix a point with my eyes, and visualise myself standing steady.

In dreams, mental clarity is also maintained through calmness, and having a fixed goal of what we'd like to do can be useful as our intent grows firm and clear and we have less time to worry about losing lucidity—if we worry about it, we're half expecting it, and in a thought-responsive environment, expectation can make or break. The golden rule of expectation says that the more confident you are that you'll be able to swiftly stabilise your lucid dream, the faster this is likely to happen, so it's good to visualise yourself doing this successfully.

If your lucidity wavers, remind yourself emphatically of your dream goal: “Ah yes, I wanted to dance on the highest mountain in the world. Let's do it!”

#### 15) Recognise the Feel of a Dream

Lucid dreams feel different from waking reality; paradoxically, they can seem *more* real, more intense, because we experience a heightened state of consciousness through being rooted in the here and now in dreams in a way that we all too rarely are in the midst of waking life. Often in lucid dreams there's a feeling that a millisecond before you look at them, forms are deciding on the exact shape they're going to take. They coalesce into solidity only when your

gaze is fully upon them. Potentiality shimmers in the dream air. Sometimes this is perceived as a liquid quality of the dream scene, as if you are seeing underwater.

The moment you start to doubt, the moment you begin to ask, “Is this a dream? Am I dreaming now?” is the moment you’ll need this skill of recognition. The more attention you pay to your non-lucid dreams, the more easily you’ll be able to recognise your own personal dreamscapes and symbols, and the feel of inhabiting your dream body. But it’s easy to be duped, and sometimes on the cusp of lucidity, we convince ourselves that our dream is in fact waking reality!

#### **Practice #14: Staying Lucid: The CLEAR Technique**

Back in the nineties, as I intensified my own explorations into lucid dreaming, I discovered what worked best for me personally. During the first year of my lucid dream research, I had around 150 lucid dreams as I taught myself to lucid dream at will. The following year I was lucid almost every night and had epic, long-lasting lucid dreams. Here are my top tips from that time, in the form of my CLEAR lucidity stabilisation technique. I find the name particularly easy to recall, as it’s an anagram of my name, but in any case the word “clear” is a fitting one for lucidity. Tibetan Buddhists refer to advanced lucid dreams as “clear light dreams,”<sup>49</sup> and in German, lucid dreams are known as *Klarträume*, or clear dreams. In addition, visual and mental clarity is often a key feature of highly lucid dreams, and the most popular synonyms for “lucid” are shining, luminous, and clear.

1. Calm down. It can be hard not to be bowled over by the intense realisation that you are awake inside a dream, so the most important thing to do first of all to avoid losing lucidity is to *calm down*. Practise ways of calming strong emotions while you’re awake. Taking a deep yoga breath helps, as does relaxing the belly by placing a hand on it



and counting to three. Find a way that works for you and bring this into the dream state.

2. Look around. When you're calm (and while you're calming yourself), *look* around you. Look at the dream scene, move your eyes, and engage with the dream by noticing detail. This will sharpen your awareness. Many people find that if they fix their gaze for too long on an object in a dream, they wake up, so keep those eyes moving curiously over what you see. Look at your hands briefly (no staring!) and then shift your gaze to the dream scene, then look at your hands again, and so on, until your surroundings are super-clear.

3. Engage with the dream. It's vital to engage with the lucid dream. Movement stimulates the conscious brain, so touching a dream wall or stroking a dream leaf is a great way of maintaining lucid awareness. Stamp your dream feet or rub your dream hands together. Engage your senses: listen to someone speaking, smell a dream flower, or jump in the air to feel the floatiness. If being more active helps, then keep on the move: walk, fly, do a sky somersault, or bounce like an astronaut. Discover what works best for you.

4. Announce that this is a dream. Use a helpful affirmation, such as one of these: "I am lucid." "This is a dream." "Everything in this dream is clear." "Lucidity is easy." If you feel the dream is becoming unstable, this can also take the form of a command, such as "Clarity now!" Make such announcements *with great conviction* and fully expect them to have the desired result. You can also narrate (out loud or in your head) what you see or what you're doing to help you keep your focus. Remember to use the word "dream" a lot so you don't get so caught up in the imagery that you forget you're dreaming: "I'm standing on top of my house and there are purple-bellied dream clouds above me. Oh wow, a lucid dream bird just appeared and it's got wings made out of string ..."

5. Recall what you'd like to do. Once you are calm and have made your affirmation, it's a good time to *recall* your dream goal. What would you like to do? Fly above the Mississippi River? Grow a Mr. Tickle arm? Stand and admire the dream in all its splendour? Keep your goal lightly in your mind to focus your awareness. Once you are calm and fully engaged with the dream, anything is possible.

All of these five steps can happen in the space of a few seconds, or they may take longer if it seems hard to maintain lucidity. Don't panic; go back to the first step of calming down. It doesn't matter if you don't "do" anything in the dream; prolonging the seconds or minutes that you are conscious in a dream seems more worthwhile than scrambling to carry out a dream goal before lucidity is stable and waking yourself up in the process.

## Keep a CLEAR Head

It's wise to keep the CLEAR steps in mind no matter what you're doing in your early lucid dreams. In other words, while recalling your goal of climbing a dream tree, continue to stay calm and at any moment remember to sharpen your focus by announcing, "This is a dream. I am lucid." After you experience a certain number of lucid dreams, these steps should automatically form part of your lucid mindset. As my own experience and that of other highly practiced lucid dreamers shows, the knowledge of lucidity and the focused awareness necessary to maintain it spring into being the moment the dreamer realises she is dreaming. In the same way, basic dream control, which may seem so complicated for beginning lucid dreamers, also becomes second nature.

I think of learning to stay lucid in a dream as being like learning to drive a car. The first time you sit behind the wheel, there seems to be so much to think about. At first your cherished abbreviations are talismans against the hectic world of motoring: ABC: Accelerator-Brake-Clutch! MSM: Mirror-

Signal-Manoeuvre! But with time, you know instinctively how to change gears and judge the right moment to apply the brakes when making a turn. It's good to have patience at the start of the lucid dreaming process and remember the basic steps for getting and staying lucid. Each time you succeed, you're cementing the practice. Alan Worsley describes his experience:

Habitual familiarity with the implications of the fact that I am dreaming now enables me to act quickly and incisively whereas before I would dither and get involved in useless side issues. For instance I remember once many years ago trying to go to a different scene in a lucid dream by hitching a lift. Now I can change the scene by simply closing my eyes and imagining the next scene.<sup>50</sup>

Once you've got the hang of stabilising the dream in the way that works best for you personally, you'll be able to stay lucid for much longer and begin deep explorations of the dream world. Lucid dreamer Rebecca Turner reports the difference she experienced when she learned how to stay lucid:

On a number of good days (and nights) I have had lucid dreams around the 45–60 minute mark. Sometimes I can chain lucid dreams together, with momentary awakenings, diving straight back into the same dream scene to create this effect. In one spectacular lucid dream, I escaped from a nightmare, flew to outer space, time traveled to an ancient civilization, explored a mansion, passed through walls, flew over mountains, played the piano, and ate delicious food. I was fully lucid the whole time, guiding the dream and letting the dream guide me.<sup>51</sup>

## Myths About What You Can and Can't Do in Lucid Dreams

Test everything! If someone says something is impossible in a lucid dream, go straight ahead and try it for yourself the next time you get lucid. There are some myths about lucid dreaming, such as that light switches never

work. I agree that light switches can behave in difficult ways in lucid dreams, such as by only providing very dim light, only reacting with a delay, or simply not working, but I have also flipped light switches on and off in dreams and had corresponding floods of light followed by darkness; light, dark. Another myth I once read was that lucid dreamers can't speak their own name in a lucid dream without waking up. This immediately struck me as nonsense, but I was intrigued, so I tested it in this lucid dream from 2003:

I remember my decision to meet Alida [the main character from my novel *Breathing in Colour*] in my next lucid dream, and taking a deep breath, I shout at the top of my lungs, "ALIDA!" It is hugely liberating to shout like this in the fresh air. ... I recall reading the other day the opinion of Russian philosopher Piotr Ouspensky that lucid dreamers cannot pronounce their own names in a lucid dream without waking up. This scene is so solid and my lucidity so matter-of-fact that I decide to try it. Deep breath. Then I shout my name on a long breath, as loudly as I can: "CLARE!"

Nothing happens, not even a tremor in the scene. I laugh and do it again. It feels so totally as if I'm really shouting that I wouldn't be surprised if my body in bed was also shouting something in my sleep. Still hovering, I wonder if perhaps what Ouspensky meant was that lucid dreamers can't say their names in a dream and simultaneously sleep-talk the word aloud in their bedrooms without waking up. This idea intrigues me, and I ponder it until I realise that the thought of my real mouth and vocal cords is now making me feel less lucid. The scene has grown sparser and less colourful. I pull myself together abruptly by concentrating on two men below me who are chatting. I swoop in low and eavesdrop on their conversation, which is in German. I then soar over the picnic area asking random people, "Have you seen Alida?" Nobody has. This is the same lucidity I had in a dream a week ago; strong and sure and effortless ...

My own view after a lifetime of lucid dreaming is that nothing is impossible in a lucid dream. What makes things “impossible” in the dream world are our own limitations in terms of what we believe or expect to be possible. Since these limitations belong to us, we can change them! I’ve heard people say, “Oh, the only limit in a lucid dream is your imagination.” I disagree—this statement assumes that the dream is produced only by our imagination, but there is more to dreaming than that: in lucid dreaming, we can go beyond our imagination in ways that are explored later in this book.

As lucid dreamers, we can have “unimaginable” healing and spiritual experiences that impact our waking lives and attitudes. Lucid dreaming is special because it’s a state of consciousness in which we can easily shake off our limitations as long as we are aware of what they are and have the clarity of mind necessary to release them.

#### **Practice #15: Mix and Match**

Try the CLEAR stabilisation technique the next time you become lucid in a dream and see how it works for you. After you wake up, make a note of what happened. The more note-taking you do about your own experiences of dream lucidity, the more you will begin to see a picture forming of your own mental clarity, the things that distract you easily, or the most common ways that you lose lucidity (such as getting over-excited, or panicking when the dream goes black and you are left hanging in nothingness).

This chapter is almost completely made up of practical techniques, so why not pick one you like the sound of and plan to try it out in your next lucid dream? Note the results and swap it for a different technique whenever it feels right, or mix two techniques together. If you take a methodical approach to stabilising and extending your lucid dreams, you will make fast progress because you’ll soon identify the best techniques for you. You’ll get good at combining them in ways that result in long, stable, fabulous lucid dreams. Enjoy the journey, and stay lucid!

[contents]

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42. Voss et al., "Induction of Self Awareness in Dreams," 810–812.
  43. Stumbrys et al., "The Phenomenology of Lucid Dreaming," 191–204.
  44. Celia Green, *Lucid Dreams*, 23.
  45. LaBerge and Rheingold, *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*, 143.
  46. Tholey and Utecht, *Schöpferisch Träumen*.
  47. Waggoner, *Lucid Dreaming, Plain and Simple*, 280.
  48. Sparrow, *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light*, 43.
  49. Norbu, *Le Yoga du Rêve*.
  50. Worsley, "Dream Lucidity Induction and Control."
  51. Turner, "How To Make Lucid Dreams Last Longer."

## CHAPTER 5

# *Should We Control Our Dreams? Going with the Flow*

Waking up inside a dream feels like a magical act. With a shock of consciousness, we discover that this super-real, colourful world is a dream: our body is asleep in bed even while we fly around having dazzling adventures. The sense of wonder is part of the magic, and the other part is simply being in the dream; observing it, participating in it. Sometimes people object to lucid dreaming, assuming it's all about controlling and manipulating the dream. They ask: What if important unconscious messages get ignored because the lucid dreamer simply teleports himself away from his dream monsters? Could controlling the dream be psychologically damaging?

Such objections overlook five major points:

1. Reports of recurring dreams or nightmares suggest that dreams *tend to recur* if their message has not been received or acted on. If you don't face the shadow side of yourself in a lucid dream but flee it instead, you can be pretty sure it'll pop up again in a future dream.
2. Lucid dreaming does *not* always involve deliberate dream control. It's perfectly possible just to go with the flow, as we do in non-lucid dreams.
3. The majority of people are lucid for such a small percentage of their dream lives that it seems overly restrictive and fearful to worry about a smidgen of dream control every now and then.



4. Even in the most determinedly controlled lucid dream, there are always uncontrollable elements, so that the spontaneity of the dream never disappears completely.

5. Dreaming is a thought-responsive environment. Even the most seasoned meditator, well versed in not engaging with her thoughts, would be hard-pressed not to influence her own dream. This is what I call the “observer effect of lucid dreaming.”

## What Happens if We Go Overboard with Dream Control?

Having said all that, I’d like to have a look at the sort of thing that can happen if we become overly keen to control our dreams. It can be so frustrating to try and try again to get lucid and wake every morning realising we haven’t managed it. One of the founders of the Society for Psychical Research, Frederic W. H. Myers, succeeded only three nights out of three thousand! <sup>52</sup> If lucid dreaming seems this rare for some people (although bear in mind that Myers was trying to get lucid back in 1887, when much less was known about lucid dream induction techniques and brain chemistry), then it’s no wonder that when we finally get lucid, instead of simply enjoying the dream, we put ourselves under ridiculous pressure to experience certain things.

Jeff Warren, author of *Head Trip*, attended a lucid dream camp with Stephen LaBerge where participants set goals for what to do once they realised they were dreaming. When Warren became lucid in a shopping mall, he naturally wanted to carry out all his dream goals, which were examining texture, engaging in conversation, having sex, and flying. With characteristic humour, he reports how the dream responds to his attempts to force his own agenda onto it. First he races along knocking shoppers out of his way and crashes through a plate-glass window before successfully carrying out his first goal by rubbing the pavement and hugging an oak tree.

Then he tries to talk to a security guard who is walking six scary, barking dogs. The guard ignores him, so he goes on to goal three: dream sex, and finds his third-grade crush (now all grown-up):

It was like kissing a zombie. Her head lolled to the side and her eyes were blank. Man, my characters were *terrible*, what the hell was wrong with me? I was disgusted with myself. No wonder I wrote nonfiction.<sup>53</sup>

Determined to get through all his goals, Warren moves on to goal four: flying:

About ten feet above the ground my feet overtook my head and I flipped upside down, arms and legs windmilling madly. I drifted into the cement wall of an old theatre and flopped to the ground.

Warren's dream didn't submit itself to his total control by any means, no matter how determined he was. As if in defiance of his single-minded pursuit of his dream goals, the dream created a series of obstacles, from aggressive dogs to a zombie lover and a frustrating dream flight. Was it worth ticking off his dream goals in this way? Warren reflects: "I thought it was a good example of how to degrade an interesting dream experience with an aggro waking-style fulfilment schedule."

Never mind—at least he managed to hug a tree! Every early experience of lucid dreaming teaches us something new. Lucid dreaming is a conversation: we can use our lucidity to *respond* to our dream. In theory, when we become lucid in a dream we can do whatever we like, but in practice this simply isn't always the case; dream control is far from being a given, as we're in a thought-responsive environment and if we are feeling stressed and aggressive, the dream will not always happily fall in with our master plan of action. Lucid dreaming is a creative process, especially when we engage with the dream environment, ask it questions, and experiment with different possibilities. Working *with* the dream is key. If we give the dream the space and freedom to form a creative response, we're far more

likely to benefit from its wonderful quirkiness, wisdom, and beauty than if we force our agenda onto it.

But every dreamer is free to experiment, and experimentation is a good thing! The more we engage with our dreaming mind, the sooner we'll come to a personal understanding of what works and what doesn't work when we're lucid in a dream. The great thing is, we have choices, and in the dream we can generally decide for ourselves how much or how little we'd like to attempt to influence the dream.

Melinda Ziemer of the Dream Research Institute in London told me this lucid dream where simply controlling her fearful reaction seems to free up the dream to create an astonishing musical experience:

With a start of fear and curiosity, I see a creature that appears to be a cross between a solid black-blue shiny dragon, butterfly, and swan. At first my mind thinks, "A demon!" but then the creature has such a strange beauty and bows its head before me in such a sweet, intelligent way, I think to myself, "Oh, stop thinking such things!" As I look at the creature, I realize we seem suspended in the air of this vast hall. Music starts up and he takes off flying, clearly beckoning me to follow. I do so and see that a cloud of such creatures flies about the vast hall like a flock of birds, moving in great swirling circles with the music.

## Judging the Buttercup: The Observer Effect of Lucid Dreaming

I always think a far more interesting question than "Is dream control a good idea?" is "Can we actually *avoid* influencing the dream?" Who controls what in a lucid dream seems to hinge on three elements:

1. Dreamscapes, events, and actions created by the dream itself, independently of the lucid dreamer's intent
2. Dreamscapes, events, and actions the lucid dreamer intends to change or invoke

3. Dreamscapes, events, and actions the lucid dreamer *does not consciously intend to change* but inadvertently does, by thinking thoughts that the dream environment responds to in surprising ways

The “observer effect” has been noticed on the quantum level of physics, where the measurement or observation of particles appears to influence their behaviour. In lucid dreaming, an observer effect is directly perceivable. When I was experimenting intensively with dream control as part of my doctoral research, I tried on several occasions to do absolutely nothing to change the dream on becoming lucid. I would become lucid, remember my task, and then still my mind as much as possible, trying to reduce my thoughts.

Did it work?

Well, no! No matter how well I felt I was doing—the lucid dream environment was stable; nothing much was happening; I felt confident that I’d become “just a pair of eyes” <sup>54</sup>—the sense of succeeding in *not* influencing the dream never lasted more than a few moments. Simply becoming aware that we’re dreaming affects dream content. The fact of perceiving unconscious imagery changes it, and so does the act of evaluating or judging it. Whether we like it or not, our minds continually assess, judge, and file away our experiences. We each have a massive database of expectations of how the world should be.

In one dream, I became lucid in some beautiful woods. I was determined not to influence a single thing in the dream, so I simply stood still and looked around. Birds sang and a breeze stroked the leaves. The light was wonderful. On the ground there were wildflowers dotted about, tangles of starlike white flowers, bluebells, a red buttercup ... wait, a red buttercup? *That’s funny*, I thought. *Buttercups aren’t normally red*. Calmly, I looked away, mindful of not thinking too much. The trees were covered in green vines. As my gaze meandered back over the scene, guess what I saw? That’s right—the red buttercup had turned yellow! The simple fact of observing (in a very quiet, non-intending way) that buttercups aren’t

normally red had prompted the dream to alter in response to my unspoken expectation and “correct” the visuals.

Who does the “correcting” in such dreams? Did I “control” the colour of the buttercup by involuntarily judging it? The more lucid dreaming we do, the more we see evidence of the remarkable sensitivity of the dream. Our thoughts, desires, and expectations are almost instantaneously transformed by the dream into imagery. Dreaming is a highly thought-responsive environment. It works like an extremely pure form of telepathy between the dreamer and the dream; every thought we think and every emotion we feel is picked up on because these are our thoughts and emotions, and the dream is us.

My experiments led me to the conclusion that *I am the lucid dream and it is me*: we are not separate from each other. The dreamer is the dream. Who was I trying to kid, thinking I could show up lucid in a dream and *not* engage with it? Or rather, not let it engage with me? In a lucid dream, we are entirely transparent—we can’t hide from the dream, we can’t fool it. Ultra-sensitive to our expectations and judgments, the dream scrambles to fulfil them. Frederik van Eeden, a Dutch psychiatrist who examined his lucid dreams in a 1913 paper, once tried to smash a claret glass in a lucid dream, but it didn’t shatter. When he looked at it again, he found that it had belatedly responded to his expectations: “It broke all right, but a little too late, like an actor who misses his cue. This gave me a very curious impression of being in a fake-world, cleverly imitated, but with small failures.” <sup>55</sup>

## The Different Levels of Lucid Dream Influence

One lovely way to engage with lucid dreaming is to make our thought process highly conscious when we get lucid and watch the way our thoughts impact the dream environment and influence the imagery. It’s like being the co-creator of a magical, multisensory movie. So the trick is not to be too restrictive about what dream control is or isn’t, and just go with the

flow. After all, if we try too hard not to control the dream, we simply end up controlling our own thoughts and kind of mentally holding our breath, trying not to influence the dream. This can be pretty fun to try, and emptying the mind of thoughts is a useful skill when lucid dream meditation is on the cards; but when we are surrounded by vivid, multisensory imagery, “not thinking” is almost impossible, as it goes against the natural tendency of the mind to cogitate and react to sensory input.

When we relax and enjoy the lucid dream, we are bound to “control” some elements of the dream unintentionally, just by thinking about what we see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. This is entirely natural. The lucid dreamer’s consciousness interacts with the consciousness of the dream, and when each is receptive to the other, the most marvellous creative experiences can occur.

In just sixty seconds of dreaming, we might first be non-lucid, then pre-lucid (wondering if this could be a dream, testing the dream reality, and possibly reaching the wrong conclusion at first), and then become fully lucid, before losing lucidity again. Within a lucid dream, lucidity fluctuates, and this can determine the influence we have on the dream. In a single lucid dream, we can activate different levels of influence. In 2003, when I began my doctoral research, I identified four levels of lucid dream influence.<sup>56</sup> In this chapter, I’ll be looking at the two passive ones: the Passive Observation Technique and the Passive Participation Technique. Here are the steps for the first of these.

### **Practice # 16: Dream TV: The Passive Observation Technique**

1. When you get lucid, become calm and still. Relax and breathe.
2. Slow your thoughts and become fully present to the dream imagery and environment. Practise an attitude of detached awareness and make no intentional attempt to influence the dream. Don’t get involved with dream figures or objects.

3. Stopping thinking altogether in order to avoid influencing events is pretty impossible, but with this technique it's important not to project guiding thoughts onto the dream: the thought "It'd be so much fun to see my friend Jack in this dream!" could well result in Jack's appearance, thus changing the course of the dream.

4. Steer your mind gently but firmly away from excitable thoughts, emotions, and expectations. Return always to observing the dream as if it's TV.

5. Gradually you'll feel yourself becoming "just a pair of eyes," able to focus on observing the dream as it unfolds around you. Soak up this amazing feeling of being awake in your dream, able to appreciate your unconscious imagery with full conscious attention.

## The Lucid Dream Movie

Our waking minds tend to rush along thinking, obsessing, and imagining. Our dreaming minds do something similar—they churn out a Technicolor movie reel of animated imagery, inventing epic stories and bizarre scenarios. Of course, there are exceptions: just as our obsessive waking mind stills in deep meditation, so in some lucid dreams does all imagery fall away and we are left floating, bodiless, in what seems to be infinite space. Ways of engaging with or surrendering to these lucid dreams are discussed in [chapter 21](#) on the void.

The majority of lucid dreams are packed with what I call "Archetypal Lucid Idea Images" (ALI-Images).<sup>57</sup> Archetypes are universal energies that arise in all cultures throughout time. They appear in anything from myths to comic books, and are the beating heart of all stories. We all recognise archetypes such as the Hero or the Divine Child. Carl Jung believed dreams to be embedded in the collective unconscious: the universal part of the unconscious mind that is derived from ancestral memory and experience common to all humankind. Others have also underscored the connection between dreams, mythological symbols, and archetypes. Jung describes

archetypes as “universal images that have existed since the remotest times” and points out that in dreams these universal images are personalised: “[The archetypes’] immediate manifestation, as we encounter it in dreams and visions, is much more individual, less understandable, and more naïve than in myths.” <sup>58</sup> Archetypes that appear in dreams are particular to the dreamer’s personal experience, informed by elements from the dreamer’s life and memories so that they emerge as highly individual, numinous imagery. Lucid dream imagery is often not only seen but felt, due to its emotional impact on the dreamer.

Frederik van Eeden spoke of seeing “different luminous phenomena, sunlight, clouds, and especially a deep blue sky ... [accompanied by] a feeling of deep bliss and gratitude.” <sup>59</sup> My PhD case studies reported lucid dream imagery such as the approach of “a bruised and bloody wave,” “a painting of four chickens running,” “millions of minnows ... brilliant red spots beside the gills,” and “a hummingbird dipping its beak into a rain-filled morning glory.” <sup>60</sup> These multisensory, kinaesthetic, numinous, emotive Archetypal Lucid Idea Images often form the central image of the lucid dream, and such images can lead to ideas for artwork, sculpture, and creative writing. I created lucid dream collages composed of these images, which were exhibited at the IASD Dream Art Exhibition in 2005 in California.

In one lucid dream I saw vivid orange flowers with blue spots at their centres, and when I got closer, these blue spots turned out to be eyes that were watching me with intelligent, autonomous consciousness. I felt a lump in my throat as if I was going to cry. When I woke up, both the image and the feeling in my throat were imprinted on my mind, and I turned this ALI-Image into the first lucid dream in my novel *Breathing in Colour*, in the form of watchful marigolds floating down a river.

In passive observation lucid dreams, we can explore the intimate relationship between our thoughts and emotions and the response of the dream. We can observe this thought-responsive environment and experience the pleasure and surprise of watching our own personalised archetypal



imagery unfold around us like a virtual reality scene that we are simultaneously observing and co-creating. This level of dream control is like watching a lucid dream movie. The dream is allowed to pursue its natural course and a high degree of lucidity isn't necessary, but it's important to keep reminding ourselves that we're lucid, as it's easy to get sucked into the dream action and lose lucidity. This is a lovely, peaceful way of engaging with the lucid dream, and if we don't want to do anything more than this, we'll still benefit from the magic of being aware in our dream.

As virtual-reality technology progresses, we're taking strides towards an immersive entertainment experience. Ultrasound haptic devices allow movie viewers to experience sensations such as falling rain, solid objects, or a breeze simply by placing their palm over the device. Haptic devices can even prompt emotional experiences such as sadness or excitement. It seems in waking life we're doing all we can to get closer to a dreamlike experience! If you want to do more than watch regular dream TV and increase your level of experiential engagement with the lucid dream world, this option is open to you at any time. Here's how.

### **Practice #17: Going with the Flow: The Passive Participation Technique**

1. When you become lucid, simply continue what you were just doing. If you were climbing up the mast of a ship, keep climbing! If you were prodding around in the ground looking for earthworms, keep looking!
2. This is the type of lucid dream most similar to non-lucid dreaming, because despite your conscious gaze and access to waking life memories, you surrender completely to the action of the dream and engage with it spontaneously as it unfolds.
3. Make no overt attempt to control anything in the dream. Just join in with the naturally occurring action. It's that simple.
4. Remind yourself often that you are dreaming, as the biggest difficulty with passive participation dreams is that of getting sucked into the dream

action to the point that you forget this is all a dream.

## Riding on the Dream Rollercoaster

When we engage physically with a lucid dream, we open ourselves up to a whole range of sensory input, such as sliding across an ice floe or hugging a friend who died ten years ago. We can experience in full conscious awareness things that we've never done in waking life and thus *surpass our waking life experience*. Writer John Locatelli reported the sensation in a lucid dream of “moving upward, away from the earth at enormous speed” and “the amazing physical effort it took to move my arms outward as they seemed tied to my body with strong elastic bands.”<sup>61</sup> He was able to integrate these lucid dream experiences into his writing. Because lucid dream sensations are so real and take place in a three-dimensional, multisensory, highly realistic environment, the adventures we have become part of our life memories.

Melinda Ziemer's dream earlier in this chapter, where she encounters a strange flying being and follows it when it beckons to her, is a lovely example of the way that being open to going with the flow of a lucid dream can lead to magical experiences. In terms of creative inspiration, these experiences can be influential. Russell Ruskin, one of my PhD case studies, remarks, “I've never been skydiving but I could paint an image from my direct experience of the replication of the experience in a lucid dream.”<sup>62</sup>

Through a passive participation lucid dream in which I interacted with the dream environment, I spontaneously experienced synaesthesia, a condition where the senses are mingled so that people see musical notes as colours, or experience a certain sound as the feel of raindrops on bare skin:

I realise I am dreaming and pick up a handful of sand in my fist to test how real it feels. As the grains slide through my fingers I experience the texture as a colour and a taste; deep orange. I look at my hand and it is full of this luminous orange.

How had I *felt and tasted* a colour? I researched this union of the senses and discovered for the first time a neurological condition called synaesthesia. The dream made me understand what was missing in one of the main characters in my novel *Breathing in Colour*: eighteen-year-old Mia, who goes missing while backpacking in India, needed not only a unique voice, but a unique perspective on the world. Now I knew what this would be—she had synaesthesia! Mia’s colourful associations and multisensory connections defined her voice in the novel and even led me to the exact sequence of events behind the death of her baby sister.

Dr. Beverly D’Urso was one of Stephen LaBerge’s primary lucid dream subjects in his sleep laboratory experiments in the early eighties, and her preferred technique for lucid dreaming falls into the category of passive participation:

I focus on maintaining *awareness* of dreaming rather than *control* in my lucid dreams ... I find myself fully “in the dream and yet not of it,” meaning that I know while dreaming that part of my *self* exists outside of the dimension of the dream. ... Participating in a lucid dream feels like *acting* in a play in perfect character, having all the character’s feelings and consequences, while still identifying myself as an actor, and possibly the producer and director as well.<sup>63</sup>

Participating in the rollercoaster of events in a lucid dream can be stimulating, offering the lucid dreamer valuable insight into the workings of her own dreaming mind. Strong lucidity isn’t necessary, but the challenge with passive participation lucid dreams is that the dream action tends to become so compelling that we get caught up in it entirely and lose lucidity, so it’s helpful to remind ourselves regularly, “This is a dream. I am lucid!”

### **Practice #18: Guided Visualisation**

This visualisation is based on a powerful passive participation lucid dream I had in 2003. Mentally participating in any beautiful, dreamlike vision will help you to practise going with the flow of your

next lucid dream. You could create your own visualisation based on your favourite lucid dream, or ask a friend to read this one out loud to you. You could also record yourself slowly reading it out loud, or read it through once and then recreate it in a relaxed state with your eyes closed. Here is the meditation:

You are walking effortlessly up a sloping meadow on a sunny day. You notice how green the tall grass is, how blue the sky is, how luminous the day is. Everything shimmers with life. There is something so compelling about this shimmering aliveness that you wonder if this might be a dream.

As soon as you think that, you see that it is true. Everything around you seems imbued with conscious awareness, and the colours are so vivid that you can taste them on your tongue: strawberry, lemon sherbet, apricot.

“I’m dreaming!” you think, and you experience a rush of delight. “All of this is a dream!”

Energised, you walk easily up to the very top of the hill, breathing in the warm, fragrant air. As you reach the top, you see an astonishing sight. In front of you is a stone temple, ancient and imposing. Its walls are decorated with intricate carvings and there is water cascading down one wall. As you step closer, you see that underneath the clear water is a broad stone disc with a face carved into it. The water flows over the face, bringing it to life. You come to a halt and place your hands over your heart in wonder.

“This,” you say, “is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in my entire life.” As you speak the words, you know them to be true. Here on this hilltop, in this lucid dream, you have come face to face with something that resonates with you so deeply that it’s as if you have known it forever. It’s like meeting the other half of your soul.

You stand there, lucidly aware that this is a dream. The water sparkles in the sunlight and the disc face beneath it reflects your

emotions with perfect empathy. You feel understood. You are filled with joy and a sense of deep peace.

Stay there for as long as you want, and when you are ready to come back, wriggle your fingers and toes, take a deep breath, and open your eyes.

[contents]

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52. LaBerge, *Lucid Dreaming*, 28.
53. Warren, *Head Trip*. All quotes taken from pages 152–154.
54. Johnson, “The Role of Lucid Dreaming in the Process of Novel Writing.”
55. Eeden, “A Study of Dreams,” 431–461.
56. Johnson, “The Role of Lucid Dreaming in the Process of Creative Writing.”
57. *Ibid.*, 4.
58. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 5.
59. Eeden, “A Study of Dreams,” 449.
60. Johnson, “The Role of Lucid Dreaming in the Process of Creative Writing,” 20.
61. Johnson, “The Role of Lucid Dreaming in the Process of Creative Writing,” 20.
62. *Ibid.*, 23.
63. D’Urso, “Over the Waterfall and Gently Down the Stream: Surrendering to the Lucid Dream.”

## CHAPTER 6

# *Using Magic in Dreams: Active Ways of Guiding Dreams*

Dream magic, or guiding the dream, is similar to the artistic process. Imagine an artist working on a clay sculpture. She channels her intent through her hands while remaining receptive to the clay. As she does so, the interplay between her hands and the clay merges to form a new creation. When lucid dreamers activate their intent and guide the dream in new directions while remaining receptive to the dream, startling new creations emerge.

What can lucid dreamers do with their dreams? We hear stories about how some lucid dreamers are in total control of their dreams, but is this really the case? And what happens when we decide to perform actual magic while lucid in a dream? We've explored passive forms of dream control, including watching dream TV in passive observation lucid dreams and going with the flow like a fish in a stream with the Passive Participation Technique. In this chapter, we'll look at the active forms of dream control that I identified in 2003: the Sporadic Control Technique and the Continuous Control Technique.<sup>64</sup> These involve actions such as asking the dream a question, deliberately changing the dream, or playing God. We'll explore how to be a dream magician, and I'll give you my best tips for lucid dream magic.

## How to Guide Dreams

What happens when we decide we want to engage more with our dream world? Let's look at some of the experiments we can do and the experiences we can have when we move away from the passive approaches to lucid dreaming and use a more active level of dream guidance.

The Sporadic Control Technique is really a combination of active and passive dream control techniques, moving from an active nudge to a “go with the flow” attitude. It requires a certain amount of lucidity and clarity of intent. When a minimum of dream control is combined with passive engagement, this creates a highly flexible state of consciousness. Since the lucid dreamer can ask subject-specific questions directly of the unconscious, this level of dream control tends to unearth subject-specific dream responses, which can be not only useful and creative but also enlightening.

Sporadic dream control allows the dreamer to guide the dream towards a particular goal while allowing the dream complete freedom as to what happens next. I love this technique because it feels like a true conversation with the dreaming mind. I ask a question, and it answers with an image or a voice booming an answer, or it catapults me into mind-blowing spaces. Anything can happen! Sometimes absolutely nothing happens and you stand there feeling a bit silly, but the hiatus never lasts long because it's the nature of the dreaming mind to move and change like a morphing machine. If nothing happens, change your question. It's exciting to interact in this way with the fabric of your unconscious mind. Dreams may be deeply wise, but they also have their own capricious, spontaneous humour and it's fascinating to see what is created when we engage consciously with them.

Although Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalytic theory, paid no serious attention to lucid dreaming, he was aware of the possibilities of influencing dreams:

There are some people who are quite clearly aware during the night that they are asleep and dreaming and who thus seem to possess the faculty



of consciously directing their dreams. If, for instance, a dreamer of this kind is dissatisfied with the turn taken by a dream, he can break it off without waking up and start it again in another direction—just as a popular dramatist may under pressure give his play a happier ending.<sup>65</sup>

Freud was right that lucid dreamers can change the storyline of their dream. When I think of the Sporadic Control Technique, I see a film director who gives her actors the creative freedom to improvise, but intervenes occasionally to nudge them in a particular direction. With this technique, the dreamer exerts his will on the dream to varying extents, perhaps through the asking of questions or through summoning dream characters. But he does not attempt to control the dream continuously; rather, he provides an initial impetus and then waits to see what the dreaming mind will come up with by way of a response. At any time the dreamer may decide to ask a new question of the dream or try to make something happen, but the main point about this level of dream influence is that the dream is allowed to take its course between bouts of direction on the part of the lucid dreamer.

## Ask the Dream a Question

Have you ever tried asking the dream a question? Dreams are incredibly responsive and, as we saw in the previous chapter, they naturally tap into our thoughts, fears, and expectations. If you see the dream as part of your mind, this makes perfect sense—you are the dream and the dream is you, so there is bound to be fluid thought communication.

However, since the times of the Askleion temples in ancient Greece, around 375 BCE, when people ritually dreamed to receive solutions to health problems, dreams have also long been considered to be able to tap into a deeper wisdom that is less available to us in the waking state. Carl Jung theorised that dreams are part of a vaster mind—that of the collective unconscious. Spiritual and transcendent dreams seem to support this theory that dreams are vaster than the individual, as do the experiences reported by

many lucid dreamers who have asked the dream a question and received an answer that astonishes them and illuminates their understanding of their situation.

One of the major archetypes identified by Jung is that of the *shadow*, the dark side of ourselves that we reject or deny. Facing the shadow while lucid can be a very powerful and therapeutic practice, as we'll see in chapter 13 on nightmares. The Sporadic Control Technique enables lucid dreamers to face negative dream imagery or figures fearlessly, knowing that this is a dream. We can then ask the nightmare figure, "Who are you? What do you want? Do you have a message for me?" or whatever else we feel inspired to ask. Then we wait for the response. Using this approach, lucid dreamers generally find that the negative images lose their fearful aspect and transform immediately into much friendlier dream beings, often revealing themselves as dream allies in disguise and providing the dreamer with insights.

In the 1980s, German sports psychologist Paul Tholey undertook empirical investigations into the results of asking the dream for help, clarification, or guidance and facing nightmare images, with his undergraduate students as lucid guinea pigs. Chapter 8 on dream figures looks at his research in more detail. Before I'd ever heard of Paul Tholey or learned the language necessary to read his excellent book, *Schöpferisch Träumen*, which was available only in German, I was practising asking for help in my lucid dreams.

As part of my doctoral research I wrote a novel, *Breathing in Colour*, drawing on my lucid dreams for help at every stage of the writing process. In one lucid dream in 2003, I asked, "What kind of lucid dreams should Alida have in the novel?" Following my question, which was directed to the dream landscape in general, a scarecrow-like figure appeared, standing some way off in the same field I was in. "What happens next?" I wondered, and the grass turned to quicksand into which I began to sink. I woke up. The silent figure in the field, combined with the sensation of sinking into something deep, convinced me that Alida needed a mysterious figure to

interact with in her lucid dreams. When I explored this lucid dream image further in *Lucid Writing*, he morphed into Alida's disc-headed man, who became a major character in the novel.

I discovered that the Sporadic Control Technique helped me most in terms of my research because by nudging the dream in a particular direction, I would experience *project-specific creative responses* from my dreaming mind. The beauty of nudging the lucid dream is that the spontaneity and freedom of the dream isn't suppressed; it's only guided with an initial impulse. This means the "answers" we receive can be both unexpected and relevant.

### **Practice #19: Director's Chair: The Sporadic Control Technique**

When you get lucid, stabilise the dream and try any of the following techniques to actively nudge the dream in a new direction. Then return to a more passive level of engagement with your dream, and see what happens!

- Ask a question: Ask the dream environment or a dream figure something. These questions can range from micro to macro, from "Why is that dream penguin staring at me?" to "What is the meaning of life?" Have a conversation with your dreaming mind—this is magic in action.
- State an intention: Say aloud in the lucid dream, "I'd like to meet Marilyn Monroe." Or "I'd like to fly to the stars!" Or "I'd love to see my mother again, as she was before she got sick." Or "I need an idea for my next story." Then sit back and wait and see what the dream delivers.
- Request help: If you have a relationship problem, you're sick, or you can't make an important decision, ask for help in your lucid dream. It's a good idea to formulate your question when you're awake to make sure it's clear and simple: "How can I help this relationship to flourish again?" or "Should I accept this job offer?" Visualise yourself asking

this question the next time you get lucid and then receiving a clear response.

- Carry out a preset task: Many lucid dreamers decide while awake what they'd like to do when they next get lucid. You might want to have dream sex or experiment with dream magic. Go into the dream with this task in mind, by all means, but don't cling to it too desperately.

- Chill out: The trick is not to get so attached to your goal that you get all stressed when it doesn't happen exactly how you want it to. Negative emotions tend to destroy lucid dreams, either by waking us up or bogging us down so much that we lose lucidity. If you feel frustrated or annoyed, take a deep breath and remind yourself, "I'm lucid and everything is as it should be." When you relinquish control, you relinquish expectations, and this could free up the dream—something astonishing may happen.

- Be flexible: If your "dream nudge" isn't having any effect, look around, engage with the dream environment, and admire the scenery. Either something will happen or it won't. You can always change your question or intention and see how that goes. It's a bit like wishing on an eyelash: my young daughter and I go by the rule that if the eyelash doesn't fly straight off the hand when blown at, this means the wish isn't properly formulated, so it needs to be changed and tried again.

- Nudge when it feels right: At any stage in the lucid dream, give another nudge or impetus to the action if it feels right. Trust your intuition and be alert to what is happening both in the dream and in your thoughts. For example, if you find yourself in deep space feeling a little bored, see if you can enter another dream. Try out a power word, or do a somersault.

## How to Become a Dream Magician

Having seen the advantages of sporadic control, we might ask, is it worth *continuously* trying to influence a lucid dream? After all, if we were always to change the action, we might miss out on some interesting experiences. I define continuous control as being when the lucid dreamer *continually tries to shape the dream reality*. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche remarks: “A magician can make a single stone appear first as an elephant, then as a snake, then as a tiger. But these different objects are illusory, like the objects in a dream that are all made from the light of the mind.”<sup>66</sup> The lucid dreamer practising continuous control over illusory objects and events becomes a “dream magician,”<sup>67</sup> a term I use to conjure the sensation of magic-making in dreams where the action is continually steered.

But becoming a dream magician is not always quite as easy as it may sound. As we’ve seen, it’s difficult *not* to influence a dream because the dream can read us like a book, but paradoxically it’s not always easy to continually control a lucid dream. Even if we control the action and events of the dream, not every element of the dream will be rigidly controlled; the colour of the sky or the words spoken by a dream figure may well remain undetermined by the lucid dreamer. It’s exactly these undetermined elements that make interaction with the dream world so gorgeously creative. We may deceive ourselves that we’re in control when we’re lucid in a dream, but who or what created those maroon clouds over there, and why on earth do these dream apples taste of custard? And where’s that curious whirring sound coming from? We stare into the sky and see the weirdest creature flapping towards us on mechanical wings ... You get the picture.

Studies show that athletes can enhance sports skills by recalling and acting on their intention to practise when they become lucid in a dream.<sup>68</sup> This can require enormous concentration and high lucidity. Doctoral research by Melanie Schädlich shows that some athletes are able to slow time to repeat movements that would have to be much faster in the waking state. In this way they are able to make minute adjustments to the angle of their limbs, their balance, and the exact sequence of movements. One swimmer even

created a pool filled with honey to experience how it felt to swim through liquid of a thicker viscosity than water.<sup>69</sup> For this type of motor skill training in lucid dreams, which impacts positively on waking performance, continuous control is an ideal technique.

In some lucid dreams, lucidity seems effortlessly stable; the colours are bright, the textures are super-real, and we have no sense of struggling to stay lucid—it's as easy as wandering around our own living room while awake. The dream stays there, apparently stable and solid. In my experience, these are the longest lucid dreams and they can seem to go on for hours. Dreams like this, where lucidity is strong and effortlessly natural, provide a perfect platform for experimentation with dream control if this is something the dreamer fancies trying.

Since lucid dreams are thought-responsive environments that don't follow the laws of physics we're used to in the waking world, we can experience everything *now*—in other words, there's no need to move in order to be in a new place; we can simply imagine ourselves on a lonely prairie and it manifests all around us. Or (this option is more appealing, at least to me!) we can decide to find ourselves on a beautiful beach with warm sand, rock pools, and sparkling waves. No sooner said than done, we're on lucid dream holiday! Sure, we won't necessarily find the scene exactly as we pictured it, but when things go this smoothly, who's going to quibble, "Hey, I didn't order that sun lounger or that cocktail! Oh, wait, maybe going with the flow of the dream isn't such a bad thing after all ..."

## Dream Control and the Creative Unconscious

On a creative level, continuous control can provide regular inspiration. Artist Epic Dewfall simply walks into an art gallery in his lucid dreams and memorises the best paintings, then wakes himself up in order to reproduce them.<sup>70</sup> I've flown through bright hallways hung with my lucid dream collages, which look more luminously psychedelic and three-dimensional in my lucid dreams than they do in waking life. The majority of my PhD case

studies who drew on their lucid dreams for creativity preferred the sporadic control method, where the dream is nudged from time to time, as they felt continuous control might be repressive of the natural creative manifestation of the dream, or even confront the dreamer with unconscious archetypal material that he's not yet ready to handle.

Author Kenneth Kelzer observes that “lucidity does not seem to act as an inhibitor of the unconscious.”<sup>71</sup> On the whole I agree with this, *unless* we push dream control to its limits, imposing our will like a bull in a china shop, bucking from one dream goal to the next and repressing any spontaneous imagery the dream comes up with. But it really is up to the dreamer how he chooses to engage with the dream, and initially many of us may need to make these kinds of dream control attempts to find out where we stand and how far we can comfortably go in the curious and wonderful dream world. After all, if we don't experiment, how will we discover the full range of possibilities of lucid dreaming? While we can do amazing things in our dreams that we can't while awake, it may be wise to calm our ego a little and cultivate a balanced attitude of curiosity and respect—stamp on the dream too hard and it may well turn around and stamp back on us! Dr. Jayne Gackenbach has dedicated much of her life to lucid dream research, and wrote her thesis on lucid dreaming back in 1978. Her research into video gaming and lucid dreaming is well known, and she is the author of *Play Reality*. She shared the following dream with me:

I knew I was dreaming and was in Central Park in NYC. A beautiful woman with a wide-brimmed hat came up and I told her to change into a monster and she said no. We went back and forth a few times with me insisting it was my dream so I could do what I wanted. Finally she turned into a wolf and bit my hand. Needless to say, I took from that: watch what you ask for or demand!

Dream control attempts are in themselves *a useful reminder* that this is a lucid dream. Influencing the dream can help us to stay lucid longer as long

as we don't get too attached to what we're trying to achieve in the dream. Too much emotion in lucid dreams tends to disrupt lucidity, especially when it's negative, like frustration or annoyance, as we forget to focus on remaining lucid and exploring the dream.

Although it can seem rigid and inflexible (when used rigidly and inflexibly), continuous control doesn't have to be like this! I found it very useful when I was in my most intense research phase. I would decide to meet with my novel characters as soon as I got lucid, or experience synaesthesia, the neurological condition I needed to know more about for my novel. This level of dream control can be very useful for targeting direct creative inspiration, improving sports skills, freeing creative blocks, experimenting with the dream environment to learn more about it, and working on a current project while actually in the dream. It's probably safe to say that each dreamer will naturally work out for themselves the level of engagement and influence they feel happiest with when they become lucid.

#### Practice #20: Dream Magician: The Continuous Control Technique

1. Stabilise the dream using the CLEAR stabilisation technique or your favourite technique from chapter 4: look at your hands, focus on your breath, touch something in the dream, sing, etc.
2. Mindset is key! Stay focused and playful; don't worry if your dream control gets a shaky response at first.
3. Experiment: Decide while awake what you'd like to try in your next lucid dream, but try to stay relatively detached from achieving your goals; otherwise you run the risk of adding stress to what could be a beautiful lucid experience.
4. Use simple commands or requests to change elements of the dream, such as "Take me to my girlfriend's bed!" or "I'd like to ride the fastest motorbike in the world!" Try the following techniques to change the dream.
5. Spin in a circle: This often makes new places, objects, and people appear in the dream. Picture where you want to teleport to while you



spin. Expectation is important—*expect* to be in a different place when you stop spinning.

6. Open a door or turn around: These are simple ways of changing the dream: expect to find what you want when you open that door, or imagine it right behind you and turn to face it.

7. Jump into a picture à la Mary Poppins: Fully expect to find a picture or painting. Then jump into it and you'll be transported to the scene it shows.

8. Cultivate a balanced attitude of curiosity and respect for the best lucid dream experience.

## Magic: Lucid Dream Spells and the “Scourgify!” Experiment

Lucid dreaming is itself a form of magic. I call lucid dreamers “dream magicians” because as we familiarise ourselves with varying levels of dream control, we learn to test the responsiveness of the dream and develop ways of interacting with it. Rory Mac Sweeney, author of *The Paradox of Lucid Dreaming*, used to work as a magician and he once remarked to me: “Now magic, to me, is a very serious subject. ... Suffice to say I felt I had finally uncovered real magic the day I found lucid dreaming.”

What is lucid dream magic, and what happens when we experiment with magic in lucid dreams? In the 1930s, German physician Dr. Harold von Moers-Messmer reported the following lucid dream, and it seems that “magic” for him was synonymous with focusing his intent to change something in the dream:

After some consideration, the word that I have long borne in mind occurs to me: “Magic!” [He finds himself looking at two gateway pillars, each composed of five stone blocks.] ... I cry out, “This will all grow much larger!” At first nothing happens, even while I fixedly imagine that the gateway is larger than the way I see it. All at once, a

great number of little pieces of stone come crumbling out of the second highest block on the left ... On the ground there now lies a whole pile of rubble. Through the open space that has thus resulted, I can see a gray wall.<sup>72</sup>

My own experience with lucid dream magic comes not only from years of actively exploring the dream environment but also from experiments and discussions with long-standing dream friends. Beverly D'Urso was one of Stephen LaBerge's lucid dreaming research subjects in the 1980s, and she and I met at the 2004 IASD dream conference in Copenhagen and experienced an instant connection (more on that in chapter 19 on lucid dream telepathy). A year later, at the California dream conference, I met lucid dream researcher Dr. Ed Kellogg, who has done many personal experiments with lucid dream healing. Beverly, Ed, and I had a lot of intensive lucid dream discussions over those five days of the conference. On the last night, I had a semi-lucid dream that we were standing close together and I looked down and saw that all three of us were wearing very shiny black shoes. When I told them the dream, someone chipped in that shiny black is linked with consciousness. This made sense to me—the three of us were consciousness explorers and we had the footgear to prove it! Our discussions continued via email after the conference. One day Beverly wrote to me:

Ed gave me a lucid dreaming task yesterday to try as a healing. This morning I did it and got results remarkably similar to his. We won't describe what happened yet, in case you'd like to try it ... You point your index and middle fingers only of your right hand at the body part, chanting a Harry Potter spell called "scourgify." If you do it, let us know what happens.

I was curious. I'd just promised a friend I'd send her sick mother healing energy in a lucid dream, and Bev's suggestion seemed to tie in nicely with my intention. That night when I became lucid, I located my friend's mother

and attempted a healing. The following day, the three of us compared our lucid dreams and were dazzled by the similar results we got.

***Ed's dream, July 15, 2005:*** In a corridor, I become fully lucid and remember my task. I take off my left sock and point my right hand, using my index and middle fingers, at the [cat] bite and emphatically say "SCOURGIFY!" A yellow mustard-colored mist comes out of my extended fingers, spraying the bite and surrounding area with a yellowish liquid. It thoroughly covers my ankle and foot but does not stop spraying. ... Finally, I say "CANCEL!" out loud while looking at my fingers, and the spraying stops. I see a drop or two of yellow liquid on my fingertips.

***Beverly's dream, July 16, 2005:*** I quickly chant "scourgify!" and point the index and middle finger of my right hand [at the burn on my leg] ... A three-inch diameter area raises up like a volcano about two to three inches high. The very tiny apex of the "bell-shaped" area appears red. An invisible force from my fingers seems to pull the "volcano" up and out. A lemon-yellow liquid-like substance surrounds the volcano, like a puddle of lava.

***Clare's dream, July 17, 2005:*** I lay my two fingers against her neck and concentrate on the flow of energy. I remember that I need to observe what happens at the moment of healing, and shift my gaze to my fingertips. From them comes a bright orange stream, rather like a spurt of fluorescent orange liquid soap. As I watch, it changes, glowing and flickering, and suddenly I see that it has become a fire—tiny leaping orange flames. I look at L's mum's hair and skin, but they are perfectly unharmed. After just a few seconds, the flames vanish and my hand can "unstick" and move away.

We wondered, what was with this weird liquid that spontaneously appeared in our dreams? What was it linked to, and was there perhaps some rule of

lucid dreaming that decided when this sort of thing happened? We all used the same hand gesture to direct our intent, but I didn't use the spell because I'd never read the Harry Potter books and was unfamiliar with the word *scourgify*. As I explained to Bev and Ed afterwards, "being lucid" implies clarity of thought and awareness, which also means knowing as far as I can the implications of my actions and not bandying around other people's magical words. This led us to a discussion of magical words.

## Using Magical Words in Lucid Dreams

Magical words can have both subjective and archetypal power. If a word has a powerful subjective meaning for the user—if we tie it to an emotional childhood memory or a figure we deeply respect, and keep the word secret—it might be more likely to work effectively in the lucid dream.

Ed Kellogg remarked that some words, on the impersonal or archetypal level, may have an intrinsic power that the user only taps into: magical words or phrases that release archetypal energies, or energies stored in the collective unconscious. He gave two examples: (1) mantras or god-names known and chanted with purposeful intent by generations of monks, nuns, yogis, and other mystics; and (2) the Harry Potter spells—known and uncritically believed in by millions of children.<sup>73</sup>

"Scourgify!" is used in the Harry Potter books for cleaning up messes, and funnily enough, knowing this seemed to help me make my peace with the spell, as a month or so later I found myself in a revolting mess in a lucid dream and spontaneously used "scourgify!" to clean things up. This is just one scene from that lucid dream that seemed to go on for hours as I was minutely examining all the dream imagery I saw. At one point in the dream,

I am in an adventure playground, kneeling down on the ground and examining the woven bamboo edging of a hammock. When I stand up, I see that there's thick black mud all over my bare knees. I try to flick it off with my fingers, but it doesn't work, and suddenly I realise that it's

quite repulsive mud, all mixed up with bits of chopped-up worms! I try to get it off again, but it just sticks to my fingers in clumps. How disgusting!

I stand there feeling dismayed, but then I remember that the “scourgify” Harry Potter spell is used to clean up messes. I feel I would try anything to get this wormy mess off my knees, so I shout “scourgify!” at them. Nothing happens. “Why isn’t it working?” I wonder. “This has to work and I know it works because it’s been done before.” I realise that it might be better to chant it or make up a rhyme rather than just yell it. So I sit down with my knees drawn up. I chant twice, very slowly and deliberately, “Scour-gi-fy!”

Saying the word really focuses me. I can feel my will amplified in my chest and head. I focus on my knees and fully expect the mess to just vanish. But instead, to my surprise, a fizzing, white bubbly substance covers my kneecaps. I scoop some of it off and note that the mud underneath it has completely disappeared, leaving my skin pale and gleaming. The white stuff is exactly like bubble bath, light and foamy, the bubbles dissolving with a faint crackling sound on my hand. “Now that’s interesting,” I think. “I wasn’t expecting that at all, so it’s not like I made it happen just by thinking about it. I should tell the others about this when I wake up.” I get up and continue to explore the playground. My knees feel exceptionally clean and shiny.

Gestures and words can act as props to help focus our intent. In this dream, I used a power word but no specific hand gesture: I focused my intent with my eyes, simply by looking at my knees. There seems to be no hard and fast rule linking hand gestures and power words with what happens next. Spells in lucid dreams may be as capricious as other elements of the lucid dream world can be. Ed told me that even in the same dream, he has found that some spells work better than others, and that sometimes the manifested phenomena do not match the wording of the spell. On two occasions he chanted: “From my hand shoots an energy beam / to heal B. with power

supreme.” On the first occasion his hand emanated red/amber light globules, and on the second occasion a spray of green-gray clear fluid came out of his index fingers. This happened for the first time in 1988, and Ed felt quite surprised, as he’d had absolutely no expectation that this kind of thing would happen.

## Lucid Dream Magic for Nightmares

Lucid dream magic can be used for fun, experimentation, and perhaps healing. It can also help with nightmares. When my daughter Yasmin was four, she had a few dreams about nasty witches who seemed intent on gobbling her up. I worked on empowering her by suggesting several options (described in chapter 14 on kids and bad dreams), one of which was that she could use magic to change bad dreams. Shortly afterwards, she reported the following breakthrough lucid dream:

I saw the witches in my dream again but I knew it was a dream so I wasn’t scared because I knew they were only lonely and wanted to be my friend, or they wanted something to eat or something to play with. So I used the Abracadabra spell to magic a witch doll for them to play with. Then the doll came alive! It was a real witch baby and the witches loved it! Then I turned them all into princesses and later on back into witches again. We all had a lovely time playing.<sup>74</sup>

Yasmin’s spell created a positive new element to the dream, and the eternal creativity of the dream responded to this by bringing the doll to life. This lucid dream marked Yasmin’s understanding of the witches and her knowledge of her own power as dreamer, and gave her a wonderful resolution in which she made a whole gang of new friends. This was the end of her witch nightmares.

If becoming a dream magician appeals to you, throw on your invisibility cloak, grab your wishing ring, and see what happens in your next lucid dream! The main thing is to be aware of the possibilities for directing intent

and experimenting with magic in lucid dreams, and then you can intuitively decide which method to choose in the dream itself.

### **Practice #21: How to Create Lucid Dream Magic**

- Familiarise yourself with magic: Look out for magical acts while awake: someone falls badly and gets up unscathed, or your lost wallet shows up intact. Engage with magic: plant a flower and watch it grow, paint a picture in the dark, or search for faces and animal shapes in clouds. Watch fantasy films and magic shows, or read a magic realism novel.

- Choose a power word: You can be J. K. Rowling for ten minutes or so and invent one or more power words, chants, or spells you'd like to try in a lucid dream. Make sure it means something on an emotional, subjective level. Have fun with it. When I was six, I invented words all the time with my best friend, Hannah. One I particularly liked was "Ponkaladinkala-Dinkalaponk." I've never tried this out in a lucid dream, but I imagine it would cause all sorts of childlike magical imagery to emerge because of the strong resonance it has with my childhood. When you have your power word, decide what function it has—will it materialise an ally for you in the dream? Power words can have different purposes or a "one size fits all" purpose, where it will simply help you to do whatever you need to do at the time.

- Look at a postcard: Just before you sleep, focus on a postcard of a landscape that intrigues and excites you. Close your eyes and visualise yourself walking or falling into the scene. Be persistent. Keep rewinding the scene until you find yourself actually inside the postcard scene, lucidly aware. The scene may also turn up in a later dream: prime yourself to recognise it and thus become lucid.

- Foster kind intent: When using magic in lucid dreams, treat others as you would wish to be treated. If you run around vaporising rabbits or blowing up dream figures, ask yourself who your dream figures are: Are they separate from you? Are they part of your personal psyche?

Part of the collective psyche? For the tiny minority of lucid dreamers who might want to try and “hex” somebody from their waking life in a lucid dream, remember that *dreams are mirrors*. Where is that nasty intent really going to end up? To find out, just look in a mirror. Also, people have strong unconscious psychological defences; even when healing has been the only intention of a lucid dreamer, shields have been seen around dream figures who seem to refuse the healing at some level (see [chapter 18](#)).

- Magic as a lucidity trigger: Noticing “magical” occurrences or changes or doing something magical in a non-lucid dream can trigger lucidity, as I found in this 2013 dream:

There’s a big cushion on the floor, blue, fluffy, and cloudlike. I notice it rises into the air a little as soon as the cloud association comes to me. I wonder if I can make it levitate with my intent. I focus on it and it rises easily into the air. Markus thinks there’s some hidden mechanism in the cushion making it levitate, so I look for a different object—it needs to be something fairly light. I see a box of matches and open it to show him it only has matches in it. Then I set it on the ground and as I direct my intent I become lucid.

Be on the lookout for inconsistencies: A broken jar suddenly appears whole again. We jump in the air and it takes ages to land on our feet again, as gravity is weaker. We think of a person and *ding!* they materialise before us. We have superhuman strength. Our body lengthens like elastic to allow us to reach something. We are in a peculiar place surrounded by strangers—how did we get here? Question everything! *Self-reflective awareness and curiosity are key to recognising we’re dreaming.*

- Experiment with different spells: Flexibility is important in lucid dreams, so if a particular spell doesn’t work, don’t stress about it; just



try something different. Gradually you'll build up an array of magic tools that work well just for you.

- Create a magical object in the dream: It may help you to focus your intent and stay lucid if you have a magical object. This can be found by looking in your pocket in the dream and expecting to find it there, or opening a door with the same expectation, or simply looking for it nearby. Anything can work—a magic ring to help you fly, a ball of light to bring you strength, or a carved rock for wisdom.

[contents]

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64. Johnson, "The Role of Lucid Dreaming in the Process of Creative Writing," 24–32.
  65. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 611.
  66. Wangyal, *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*, 55.
  67. Johnson, "Lucid Dream Your Way to Creativity."
  68. Erlacher and Schredl, "Practicing a Motor Task in a Lucid Dream Enhances Subsequent Performance," 157–167.
  69. Schädlich, "Darts in Lucid Dreams."
  70. Johnson, "The Role of Lucid Dreaming in the Process of Creative Writing," 28.
  71. Kelzer, *The Sun and the Shadow*, 231.
  72. LaBerge, *Lucid Dreaming*, 39.
  73. Kellogg, "LDE Quarterly Lucid Dreaming Challenge: Harry Potter and the Lucid Dream Exchange Challenge."
  74. Johnson, "Dream Magicians: Empower Children through Lucid Dreaming," 227.

## CHAPTER 7

# *Understanding Your Dream Body and Lucid Dream Physics*

The lucid dream body can be sensationally light and flexible. It can fly, it can teleport. It can be flung down wormholes, shrink to the size of a pinhead, become as vast as the universe. It can disappear and leave us existing as a bodiless point of conscious awareness. In a dream body, we can experience intense sensations, including ecstasy and pain. When I fly in a lucid dream, every pore of my skin tingles and sings; it's like having a head massage—energy flows through me and it feels amazing. The dream body can also seem realistically solid, making it possible for us to practise sports skills and acts of motoric precision, as shown in scientific research studies described in [chapter 10](#). We can transform the dream body into non-human forms and become a dream giraffe or a dream waterfall.

The lucid dream body has lessons to teach us, and perhaps the first is mental flexibility, since its only limits are those that we impose with our limiting expectations and beliefs. If we take a flexible attitude towards the dream body, we'll get to experience much more of its potential.

### How to Recognise the Dream Body

When we inhabit the dream body, it can feel astonishingly real, albeit with its own peculiarities. Recognising the feel of the dream body can act as a

highly effective lucidity trigger. The lucid dream body may well feel slightly different for everyone; some people report “chills” or an all-over tingling feeling upon becoming lucid. Just as intense emotion and an adrenaline rush can make our physical body get goose bumps, so the lucid dream body seems to react to the excitement and pleasure of realising we’re dreaming. For some people, becoming lucid sends an instant erotic signal to the dream body and they find themselves close to orgasm. Others feel alive and light.

One prolific lucid dreamer told me she feels intense tingles going down her scalp and spine during lucid dreams. Both of us also regularly experience head tingles while awake—this is known as *autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR)*—and for me these head tingles extend to become full body sensations when kinaesthetic movement in a lucid dream is especially intense, for example, when I’m flying. If I do yoga in a lucid dream, my whole dream body buzzes and seems infused with light, and these wonderful sensations often persist for a time in my physical body after I wake up. Most often, when I’m in the dream body I simply feel floaty, and will often realise I’m dreaming because my feet drift slightly off the ground. Ask yourself how your own lucid dream body feels. Does anything you do in the waking state remind you of being in your dream body?

## The Prana Dream Body Hypothesis

Over decades of experimentation with the lucid dream body, I have developed the *Prana Dream Body Hypothesis*. *Prana* is the Sanskrit word for the life force we all have flowing through us, whether we are awake or asleep. Prana goes by many other names: the Chinese call it *chi*, the Greeks call it *pneuma*, and the Japanese refer to it as *ki*. Anyone who does yoga, tai chi, qigong or other bodywork/breathwork practices will have an idea of how prana feels: a warm flow of energy around the body. This is sometimes experienced as a gentle tingling or buzzing, or the sense that one is glowing

with life. You can get a pretty good idea of what a prana flow feels like simply by rubbing the palms of your hands together really hard until they grow warm, then holding them half a centimetre apart from each other and bringing your attention to the space between them, which will tingle and grow warm. Move your palms farther apart very gently, then closer together again, playing with the sensation.

As a yoga instructor who has practised yoga for nearly twenty-five years, I have observed that there is a strong connection between the sensation of prana flowing in a warm tingle through the waking physical body and the feeling I get when moving and especially flying in lucid dreams. Reading thousands of lucid dream reports from other people and interviewing experienced lucid dreamers has confirmed that such sensations also seem common for others. My hypothesis is this:

The dream body is an innate body image animated by *prana*, or life force. An innate body image manifests naturally when we dream (as postulated in psychiatrist J. Allan Hobson's protoconsciousness theory for dreaming <sup>75</sup> and as evidenced by Ursula Voss and colleagues' study of paraplegics dreaming <sup>76</sup>). Despite the highly realistic physical sensations the dream body is capable of conveying, it is different from the physical body we inhabit in waking life not least because it is made from pure prana (also known as chi, pneuma, or ki). When we are lucid, we know the possibilities of the dream body: it can shrink down to a speck of light or grow tall as a giant; it can float or fly; it can transform into the form of an animal or bird. An innate body image animated by prana, the dream body is a flexible entity that responds creatively to the thoughts, intentions, and expectations of the lucid dreamer.

My approach to lucid dreaming is both academic and phenomenological, which is to say that not only do I like to read widely and be meticulous about the study of lucid dreaming, but I also set a great deal of store in the *actual conscious experience* of something. How does it feel? What is happening right now, in the moment of experiencing? How does the experience change if I change tactics or experiment with something

different? How does my volition, emotion, and thought impact this experience? Since lucid dreaming is such an intensely here-and-now experience, it is easy to focus on the phenomenology while consciously aware in the dream state. The lucid dreamer is conscious of being conscious and is able to critically analyse her experience while it unfolds moment by moment.

The Prana Dream Body Hypothesis is a starting point for further investigation. Currently we do not have the scientific instruments necessary to measure the composition of the dream body. It is noteworthy that the feelings of the buzzing, light dream body can persist upon awakening, and this may be a key to how to measure what happens on the biochemical and energetic levels when we fly or do yoga in the lucid dream body. Just as lucid dream orgasms have clearly measurable effects on the sleeping physical body, so other lucid dream activities may affect our bodies more than we realise. Possibly an electrophotonic imaging technique similar to Kirlian photography might be used to observe the body when a lucid dreamer signals that he is actively creating a buildup of prana in the dream body, through doing yoga or tai chi in the dream.

One thing is certain: experiences of flying in dreams are overwhelmingly positive and nearly always leave the dreamer with an enormous sense of wellbeing. Whatever the dream body is made of, it is a delightful vehicle with which to explore non-gravity, yogic harmony, and dream-shattering lucid orgasms. Befriend your dream body and you will wake up with a smile on your face.

## Why Yoga and Lucid Dreaming Go Together

The idea of the dream body as an innate body image animated by prana highlights another gateway to lucid dreaming. If we do a bodywork practice while awake, this puts us in closer contact with our dream body. Yoga, tai chi, qigong, and other such disciplines help with balance and breathwork, and these can be used to enhance the stability of the lucid dream. If we have

built up a buzzing flow of energy through yoga, shiatsu massage, or other energy-work therapies, lucid dreaming seems more likely to occur. Personally I find that yoga and lucid dreaming go together, the waking yoga inspiring the dream yoga, so to speak. Similarly, when clinical psychologist Patricia Garfield did a course of acupuncture for the first time, she recognised the buzzing, tingling sensations that the acupuncture brought on because they were the same as the vibration of lucidity. Not only did this feel like being in her lucid dream body, but she noticed that it actually triggered lucid dreams. She writes:

I could still feel the whir-tingle intensely. At first I thought it was a remnant feeling from the dream. Then I realized it was the acupuncture buzzing. There could be no doubt. My previous dream discovery was true: the feeling was the same. And it was inducing lucid dreams! <sup>77</sup>

If we cultivate waking practices that release the same or similar energy to that which we experience in a lucid dream, we carry our body awareness and our sensitivity to our internal energy flow into the dream state, and it becomes easier to recognise that we are dreaming. We're likely to find ourselves doing energy work in our dreams, just as in waking life, as I did in this dream:

Standing together outside with many IASD dreamers, next to a long dining table. I notice the woman in front of me opening her arms slightly. When I see the open tilt of her palms, I automatically straighten my spine in response as I recognise she is sending energy. I open my own palms and feel the prana moving through my dream body.

We all turn towards each other, sending and receiving energy in this spontaneous way. I think to myself that the waiters must be surprised—only a group of dreamers would do this silent, spontaneous energy work! I become fully lucid and carry on being present to this wonderful community energy exchange. It ends as spontaneously as it began, and the lucid dream continues.

If the idea of doing yoga or other bodywork doesn't inspire you, or if you are disabled, shiatsu massage, craniosacral therapy, acupressure, and many other practices that get the energy flowing freely around the body could help deepen the connection with your lucid dream body so that you become more likely to notice when you're dreaming. Doing energy work in the lucid dream body can be immensely powerful and beautiful, and can bring not only psychological and spiritual benefits but also physical ones.

Rory Mac Sweeney is a black belt in karate and has been doing martial arts for over twenty-five years, from kickboxing to competitive sparring, for which he won European gold. He then moved on to kung fu and tai chi. He practises tai chi in his lucid dreams, and told me that this dream changed his body-feeling:

As I perform the tai chi form, behind me I sense a blue luminescent glow. I turn to look and see that it is actually reflecting off my Maximus mask (a silver ornamental helmet). I now look back and see that it is I who am glowing with a blue aura-like activity. Now I am terrifically intrigued, and moreover, I feel like time has ceased, that the world has become very still and stable. It's as if I am not dreaming, that it is somehow more stable. I continue my form, and in contrast to the rest of the room my body feels very light. The next morning, I discover a sense of emptiness in my body, like I am 20 percent lighter.

This lightness stays with me for a couple of months and gradually wears off until I decide to look deeper into the process and repeat it. The same thing happens to me again and I still feel lighter and have now made it a part of my practice. I perform waking and dreaming tai chi, and they both inform each other in different ways. My practice now keeps my body and mind lighter, allowing me to flow with whatever circumstances evolve in my world. The feeling of emptiness behind form now pervades my being like never before, and I am working with this hybrid tai chi/lucid dream practice.



In my own lucid dreams, doing yoga leaves me with a waking residue of the practice: upon awakening I'm aware of the spaces between my vertebrae as if I have practised in the waking state, or I feel a smoother, more vital flow of energy around my body. If we become more aware of our physical body and the subtle energies that run through it while we're awake, and also spend time exploring the dream body, we're much more likely to recognise which body—physical or dream—we inhabit at any given moment. With this recognition comes lucidity.

## Transform the Lucid Dream Body

One of the many wonderful things about the lucid dream body is its ability to shapeshift. Many lucid dreamers have experienced themselves as different animals, plants, or geographical features. It's quite something to feel your human shape transform into something else, and it can be startlingly realistic on a sensory and kinaesthetic level; as a lucid dream eagle I've felt the weighty flap of my wings at takeoff and my body balancing on the air currents. In a lucid dream where I transformed into a dolphin, I experienced the powerful surge of my body underwater and the sun glinting on the tops of the waves as I leapt out of the sea.

I've lucid dreamed of being a bouncy ball, a point of light, an expanding star, and a floating eye, and I've had many entirely bodiless lucid dreams. Once while dreaming I recalled a friend of mine saying, "Freud says everyone has an inner tree." Wondering what my inner tree looked like, I glanced down at my dream body and saw a vibrantly glowing green tree inside it! I breathed through that tree; it was a fully oxygenated, alive part of my body, inseparable from my cells and my blood. I was the tree and the tree was me. "Wow," I thought. "Freud was right!"

On rare occasion, we can even find ourselves inhabiting two different dream bodies simultaneously. Once at university, I was working on an essay at my desk and felt so bored of it that I rested my head on my arms and began to fall asleep. After a bit, I forced myself to my feet and lay down on

my bed instead, where I instantly fell asleep. But after minutes or hours, a curious feeling stole over me: I had two bodies! One was slumped at my desk, and the other was lying on the bed. I could feel the weight of my head on my arms and the coolness of the floor under my feet. Simultaneously, I could feel the length of the bed beneath my stretched-out body and the pillow under my head.

Had I really made it to my bed earlier, or had that been a dream—was I in fact asleep at my desk? For what seemed like many minutes, I experienced this dual-body awareness. I got flashes of imagery of my room, but from two different perspectives. Was I at my desk or on my bed? Intrigued, I experimented with tipping the balance and managed to become more my body at the desk for a moment, while the body on the bed lost reality slightly. Unable to decide where my physical body actually was, I dragged myself from this pleasant but perplexing state to find out. It was hard to wake myself up, as I was in sleep paralysis, but with a bit of concerted toe wiggling, I woke up to discover that I was ... on my bed!

## Shapeshifting

Sometimes lucid dreamers actively induce experiences of shapeshifting by intending to become a bird or a river. Other times the transformation is entirely spontaneous and surprising. One man I know is highly creative with his dream body and has experimented with shapeshifting in his lucid dreams to help him create and develop original sci-fi characters. He told me a lucid dream in which he imagines himself in the body of a “Lakjran”:

I realized that this would be a perfect situation to test the limits of Lakjran agility. I stopped and imagined the changes, trying to feel my new anatomy as it appeared. The first thing I noticed was my shadow, a perfect silhouette of what I imagined a Lakjran to be. ... Next I tried moving, which was a new challenge. These long, elastic legs are good for hopping and not much else. As a human, I’m used to using my arms to help me jump, but that wasn’t an option here. Instead I leaned

forward, the way I would if trying to get distance on a trampoline, and pressed all of my weight down. My legs bent, and I pushed off the ground like a coiled spring. I was sent high into the air.

## Dissolving the Dream Body

Dream author Jean Campbell, with whom I co-edited *Sleep Monsters and Superheroes*, remarked to me once that “the lucid dream body is made of atoms and molecules just as our waking bodies are, but we perceive the abilities of consciousness to be much broader and more flexible.” This broader perception of our abilities enables us to experiment with the lucid dream body and have astonishing experiences, as in this lucid dream where I deliberately created a fairy tale and acted it out, with the interesting side effect of experiencing the total, wilful dissolution of my dream body.

The castle doors are shattered with a battering ram and the fire brigade stream in. They are looking for me; my life is in danger. The voice says, “The princess must summon her powers and escape.” I know I must vanish from this dream and I compose myself, quietening my mind and my breath. With supreme psychical concentration, I manage to fold into myself and disappear from the scene, atom by atom, just as the chief fireman spots me on the staircase and starts charging towards me. I know that through disappearing in this way, the castle will be saved for once and for all.

Up until I had this dream in 2004, I’d had many spontaneous bodiless lucid dreams yet had never consciously tried to make my dream body vanish in such a spectacular fashion—and under pressure from a charging fire brigade too! My final moment of consciousness on the castle staircase had strong kinaesthetic properties and super-bright reality. It was like nothing I had ever experienced or imagined in waking life, and it woke me up.

## Who or What Am “I” When I Dream?

I've experimented with shutting off physical sensations in a lucid dream, moving from sense to sense and willing each to stop functioning so that first my vision went, then my hearing, and so on. Eventually my dream body vanished too, and I was a non-sensory, floating point of consciousness. I did this out of philosophical curiosity when asking myself, what is the dream "I"? Well, whatever the dream "I" may be, it's definitely *not* the dream body. Just as in waking life we are more than our physical body, so it is in dreams, only in dreams this is much more easily verifiable.

In lucid dreams, we can change our body, our gender, our relatives, our age—such things are entirely fluid in the dream state. When my daughter was four, she reported a lucid dream of being “a 91-year-old in a wood with lots of trees.” Many adults dream of being a child again. Shapeshifting is not always experienced as a Kafkaesque transformation—we may simply dream we are in a different body, as in this lucid dream reported by Patricia Garfield:

Instantly I know I am dreaming. Then I realize that I am no longer myself—I am an earthworm crawling across a thick deep-blue carpet. I feel the plumpness of my earthworm hips as I sashay side to side across the plush carpet. Looking out through earthworm eyes, I feel the fuzzy pile of the carpet tickle my body.<sup>78</sup>

What is the point of shapeshifting in lucid dreams, some may ask? It expands our human experience, offers us new perspectives, and may inspire us to ask philosophical questions: Who or what am “I” when I dream? What can lucid dreaming teach me about the nature of reality? And also: What can it teach me about mental flexibility, the imagination, empathy, creative thinking, and the complexities of dreamed sensory perception? Lucid dreaming can help us to expand our idea of who and what we are. It can dissolve the boundaries set up by rigid belief systems (“I am just a body and a brain; I cannot change; gravity exists as an absolute law even in the dream state; my thoughts have no effect on my reality”). Understanding that we

don't have to adhere to these beliefs is a step on the path to freedom—and a step towards becoming an experienced lucid dreamer.

### Practice #22: Get in Touch with Your Dream Body

1. Cultivate body awareness: Ask yourself during the day, “How does my body feel right now?” Bring your attention to your body. Notice pain or discomfort, and move on: Do you feel heavy, light? Stiff-limbed, loose-limbed? How is your posture? Stretch tall and notice any clicks in the joints or vertebrae. Feel the breath move in and out of your lungs. Spread the fingers on both hands wide, then relax. What does it feel like to be in this body, here and now? Is your body warm, cold? Tingly, floaty? Is this a dream body?

2. Take up a body practice such as yoga or tai chi: These help with balance, concentration, and mental calm, all of which are great tools for lucid dreamers. Additionally, these practices may even trigger more lucid dreams because they help you to identify *prana*, or the life force, and the lucid dream body may be made of pure prana. If you are disabled and can't do active yoga, then shiatsu massage, acupuncture, craniosacral massage, and other therapies may enable you to experience the flow of prana and possibly even induce lucid dreams.

3. Visualise yourself shapeshifting: Are you a speedy, nervy type who runs from one activity to the next with barely a pause? Try turning yourself into a tree or a stalagmite in your next lucid dream and connecting with your core stillness. Are you someone who finds it hard to drag yourself out of bed and whose idea of bliss is to chill out in front of the TV? If so, it could be fun to turn yourself into a waterfall or a cheetah when you get lucid. Experiment in your imagination and expect dream body transitions to occur easily. Then set the intention to shapeshift in tonight's dream.

4. Practise staying aware as you fall asleep and notice all the physical, auditory, and visual phenomena, such as your body going numb as it enters sleep paralysis.

5. Choose a part of your dream body to focus on in your next lucid dream. Hands are easy, and so are feet. Don't be alarmed or distracted if your body part looks freakishly different when you look at it in the dream! Just notice the difference and stay calm. Glancing at your hands every now and then can be good for stabilising lucid dreams.

## Transcend the Laws of Physics in Lucid Dreams

Just as we can change the dream body, so we can play with the laws of physics in our dreams—and we do this regularly without even trying, as dreams jump forward and backward in time, or we find ourselves doing impossible things: we breathe underwater, we turn into our ancient auntie, or we snowboard on a cloud. In a lucid dream, linear time and gravity are all in the mind. They are mental constructs that we can transcend. Psychologist Christoph Gassmann explains:

In dreams people can morph from one character to another, or they can display characteristics of two people. The same applies to dream places. If, for example, a certain place reminds the dreamer of another place, he is immediately transported to that place. To be correct, he is not transported, but he is there as if he were always there, because space is only a backdrop and not a basic law on which the dream world is built ... Such changes are normal and quite automatic in the dream world, as breathing is in the waking world.<sup>79</sup>

The more time we spend in our lucid dream body, the more at home in it we feel. It's exactly the same with lucid dream physics—the more we play around and explore the possibilities, the more comfortable and confident we become. Lucid dreaming is an entire world, an entire universe. It takes time to explore it. It also takes curiosity and a certain spirit of adventure. The lucid dreamer has the perfect opportunity to explore the nature of lucid dream physics through conscious interaction with the dream world and by observing the effects and limitations of her own thinking. Expectation is an

extremely powerful force in lucid dreaming, and if we are able to release our habitual beliefs—such as “time is linear”; “gravity exists”; “if I want to travel somewhere I must open doors, descend stairs, catch a bus”—then we will find the dream world opening up to us in wonderful ways. Luigi Sciambarella of the Monroe Institute shared his thoughts on this with me:

The environment is thought-responsive, so just thinking about being somewhere is enough to put you there. Once you drop the idea of form, you can easily drop the idea of distance, because you can comfortably become the environment and everything contained within it.

Experienced lucid dreamers find they can change the dream scene with a snap of the fingers or by spinning around. They don't feel the need to open doors; they simply fly through them or imagine themselves being where they want to be. They can travel through time and space, and they understand the thought-responsive nature of the dream and draw on this knowledge to create anything they want. Of course, even at high levels of lucidity and control, the dream is always capable of surprising responses, which makes it all the more exciting to explore.

## Getting Airborne in Lucid Dreams

Some people report being unable to fly in their lucid dreams. Either they take off weightily and bounce off walls before slumping to the ground again, or they lose faith in their ability once high up and plummet down, or they jump and jump but nothing happens; they stay rooted to the dream ground. Former parapsychologist Sue Blackmore shared a lucid dream with me in which she could swoop and fly during the first part, but she lost the ability following a scene change:

When I tried to fly again I could not. I became terribly frustrated. “It's a dream. I should be able to fly,” but I could not. I tried launching myself off high objects but ended up just sliding along the floor, unable to take off, trying again and again until I slipped back into ordinary dreaming.

The fact that Sue then lost lucidity suggests that her lucidity was less stable in this part of the dream, which could have been why she could no longer do something she had just done with ease. I've found that frustration is not a helpful emotion when trying to do something in a lucid dream; remaining calm simultaneously steadies both the dreamer and the dream, so that lucidity is less likely to be lost. Sometimes an inability to fly is linked to confused intent or high emotion, but more often it seems linked to expectation. We all experience gravity in waking life; it's a testable law of physics and such an accepted norm for us that it can be hard to give up the idea, even when we become lucid in a dream. In lucid dreaming, gravity is all in the mind! If we can refine our expectation by visualising ourselves flying freely and fearlessly in our dreams, we are much more likely to succeed in getting off the ground when we next go lucid.

Fear can be used as a lucidity trigger or as a reminder to stabilise the dream. If we grow fearful while flying in a lucid dream because we suddenly believe we might hurt ourselves if we fall, we can use this doubting voice in our heads as a reminder that we are losing lucidity, and take action to stabilise the dream by announcing, "This is a lucid dream," or "Flying is safe in dreams," or demanding "Clarity now!" or any of the other stabilising techniques from [chapter 4](#). Lucid dream author Daniel Love shared with me a lucid dream where he initially had trouble flying:

My attempts to fly to my destination are met with difficulty: for some reason, perhaps partly due to the high levels of clarity and realism in the dream, my mind struggles with accepting the malleable nature of the dream world and insists on stubbornly sticking to a replica of waking life physics. I attempt to jump into flight, only to be met with the same results should I have jumped whilst awake, namely an abrupt and ungraceful return to terra firma.

In this dream, being an experienced lucid dreamer, Daniel took a moment to remind himself that he was dreaming before singing at full volume (to the



tune of “Yellow Submarine”): “This is all the product of my mind.” Although some lucid dreamers would question the basis for this assumption, voicing it certainly had the desired effect: having managed his expectations in order to convince himself that gravity was not an issue, Daniel then found it easy to float to where he wanted to go.

## The Nature of Time in Lucid Dreams

Just as gravity doesn’t have to be an issue in lucid dreams, neither does time. Our waking lives are so tightly ruled by linear time—we have to be at work at a certain time, pick up our kids at a precise time, send off a birthday card the right number of days in advance so it arrives on time. Research into lucid dreaming has shown that linear time can exist quite comfortably in lucid dreams. Psychophysicologist Stephen LaBerge asked lucid dreamers to count off ten seconds and then signal with their eyes when they’d finished. The results were very similar to when the same people were asked to count off ten seconds while awake.<sup>80</sup> Other research has shown that time can be manipulated in lucid dreams. German doctoral researcher Melanie Schädlich interviewed athletes who deliberately slowed down time so that they could more precisely rehearse sports skills in their lucid dreams.<sup>81</sup>

Further along in the lucid dream just described, Daniel Love decides to experiment with the fluid nature of time:

I decide it’s time to perform some simple experiments in “time control.” First I attempt to pause time, simply by shouting “freeze time!” I watch the crowds of people flow past, and as I shout, for a moment there is a glitch in their flow, but nothing else. I think to myself how this is a particularly stubborn dream, so I decide to try again, this time with the full expectation I’ll succeed. I once again shout “freeze time!” only now I employ another mental trick: I try to imagine that what I am viewing is a video recording, to give context to my expectations (something I call “reframing”). This time the entire scene freezes.

I look around, people are caught in mid-stride, mid-conversation. I notice the seagulls in the sky frozen in place. It's all quite a sight to behold. It's fantastic. Also, unexpectedly, there is a sound that accompanies this freeze, a long drone consisting of snippets of all the noises that were frozen in time. It's quite eerie. I then shout "reverse!" and on command the entire scene plays in reverse. Of course experiencing this in the full three-dimensional world of a dream is quite astounding and not something I am completely prepared to witness.

It can be exciting to manipulate the dream, and it can be exciting to go with the flow too. Travelling in lucid dreams is not the same as travelling through physical spaces. We don't need to run, open doors, or catch a plane. We can imagine ourselves somewhere, and be there in the blink of a dream eye. We can simply let the dream fall away and then fall away ourselves, into a different dream or into the infinite black light of the void. Lucid dream travel can be pretty rambunctious if we let the dream take us where it will, so it's good to be prepared for high speed, spinning, and whirling through space. Here's what happened once when I became lucid and let the dream do its thing with me:

I stop levitating the matchbox and float a little. The visuals start to fade and I do a back-flip. I know I'm going to end up in the void. I'm sucked backwards and downwards at giddy speed and I laugh, enjoying it. This is a dream rollercoaster! From far above in the dissolved dream, which looks like an upside-down volcano crater with light emanating from it, I hear Markus remark, "That's not flying." "No," I agree, "it's falling!"

What about when the dream body disappears? What's left then? At the 2013 online PsiberDreaming Conference, Christoph Gassmann remarked:

I have had the experience that a lucid dream collapses. Then I "sit" in the void and scratch my non-existent head with a non-existent finger

because I do not know what to do ... I usually wait until a new dream unfolds or, if it lasts too long, I fall asleep or I wake myself up to write down the dream before I forget it. This situation is interesting because the identity of the “I” still exists in spite of the fact that nothing else is there. But this identity has nearly no characteristics and surely no body.<sup>82</sup>

There’s no need to wonder what to do when both the dream and the dream body disappear: bodiless lucid dreams are so captivating and have such enormous creative potential that I’ve devoted the whole of chapter 21 to exploring the void.

## Disabled People Dreaming

What benefits might lucid dreaming bring to people with physical disabilities? Lucid dreaming widens the scope of our experiences. Disabled or not, none of us can simply flap our arms and fly in the waking state. We can’t turn ourselves into a star or become invisible with the snap of our fingers. In lucid dreams, we can do these things, and we can experience different bodies. If we have a broken leg in the waking state, we can still run in our dreams. Perhaps one of the most valuable and largely overlooked functions of lucid dreaming is that *disabled people or those who are ill or elderly can experience themselves in a healthy body in their lucid dreams.*

From the age of nineteen months, Helen Keller was deaf and blind. In her dreams, she could see and hear again. She wrote: “Blot out dreams, and the blind lose one of their chief comforts; for in the visions of sleep they behold their belief in the seeing mind and the expectation of light beyond the blank, narrow night justified.”<sup>83</sup> Scientific research has been done into the dreams of people who have been paraplegic from birth. Interestingly, their dream reports were not noticeably different from the reports of physically healthy people. In their dreams they flew, walked, swam and ran even if they had never done these things in waking life. If a body part was

mentioned, it was intact. Similarly, deaf-mute subjects reported hearing sounds and talking in their dreams. But how do people know what it feels like to speak and listen if they have never done these things before? Ursula Voss reports:

As pointed out by one of our deaf-mute subjects, speech in dreaming can be experienced without sign language and without speech. Our subject referred to it as “telepathy” and we are inclined to think that this explanation makes more sense than the assumption that we really speak and really hear when we have never been able to experience this sensation in waking life.<sup>84</sup>

Dream researcher Allan Hobson, MD, developed the protoconsciousness theory for dreaming in which REM sleep is seen as a virtual reality template in which the body image is intact. Voss and colleagues go on to explain: “Our findings fit well with the idea of the protoconsciousness theory ... which makes the assumption that dream content feeds itself from an innate—and thus intact—body scheme ... Our hypothesis is that our deaf-mute and paraplegic subjects are tapping into this process when they have REM sleep dreams.”<sup>85</sup>

The good news here is that the protoconsciousness theory suggests that each and every one of us, whether we were born with disabilities or not, has access to a healthy body image every night in our dreams. How we choose to engage with this body image when we become lucid is up to us. Highly experienced lucid dreamer Aiha Zemp was born without forearms or legs. She worked on her dreams with her Zen meditation teacher, Dr. Peter Widmer. He told me that in 50 percent of her lucid dreams, Aiha experienced herself with “ordinary” limbs. Her waking phantom limb experiences were scientifically researched, and Peter explains:

In real, everyday life she [Aiha] could sense and feel her phantom limbs and she also could contract and expand them. For instance, when she sat in a car and someone put a bag on the floor onto her phantom feet, she

felt uncomfortable and contracted the size of her legs. Also, when she used her iPad with her arm stumps, when she focused on her phantom fingers she could write much better with her stumps on the iPad.

In the case of Aiha's phantom limbs, there seems to be a connection with the lucid dream body. The ability to expand or contract her phantom limbs at will seems particularly dreamlike, as if the same process is taking place as when a dream body is manipulated by the lucid dreamer's intent. Again, the experience of hallucinated forearms and legs while awake seems to support the idea of an innate body model.

### Experience Health and Freedom of Movement in the Dream Body

For all of us, whether we're disabled or old or ill or just suffering from minor ailments, the magic of lucid dreaming is such that we can tap into a wholly healthy dream body and experience ourselves as light, young, pain-free, vigorous, and agile. The way I see it, the moments we spend in this state of physical freedom can help us, as they offer valuable moments of respite and also in some cases the possibility for healing. When I was in labour, the pains were great, but between the contractions I was miraculously pain-free, and these (ever briefer!) moments of respite allowed me to gather my forces for the next wave. In the same way, lucid dreaming can give us a break from the aches, pains, and restrictions of our physical body.

Yes, it's bound to be hard to wake up from such lucid dreams and remember we are recovering from a hip operation and are in pain, or we are paralysed or blind. But if we look on the bright side, surely those few precious moments of experiencing health and agility in the full conscious awareness of a lucid dream will have helped us in some way, perhaps on the level of brain chemistry or hormonal balance, or more tangibly through a renewed sense of peace and a new memory to cherish. Being in the lucid dream body reminds us that this heavy, sometimes painful physical body we are tied to by day is not the only one we have. What a relief! What freedom.

Of course, philosophers might argue that we are never in direct contact with our own body and that all conscious experience is simply a possibility, a virtual reality. Thomas Metzinger remarks: “Strictly speaking, and on the level of conscious experience alone, you live your life in a virtual body and not in a real one.”<sup>86</sup> Perhaps, then, the dream body is not so different from our physical body. Perhaps both dream body and physical body can be changed through the thoughts we think and the images we conjure.

## Lucid Dream Therapy to Aid Recovery from Accidents

What if those recovering from accidents practise moving their affected limbs in their lucid dreams—might this help? It is not as far-fetched an idea as it may sound. Studies show that athletes can enhance waking sports skills by practising in their lucid dreams, because the lucid dream practice is more realistic than simply imagining it. Lucid dreaming could help patients in the same way that virtual reality therapies can. A physiotherapist friend emailed me after seeing a YouTube video where I talk about this in relation to lucid nightmares and PTSD:

It made me think of a technique we use in physio for badly functioning limbs, e.g., unable to grip fingers into a fist. You place the affected hand into a mirror box so it's out of sight and get the patient to focus on the reflection of the fully functioning hand in the mirror and make a fist. The brain can be fooled into thinking it is looking at the hand that cannot do the task; it therefore sees it being done and thinks it can. Research shows that the disabled hand starts to improve.

Lucid dreaming is like a multidimensional, multisensory virtual reality machine. The lucid dream body has definite connections with the physical body, as scientific studies into lucid dream orgasms, fist clenching in lucid dreams, and sports skill practice demonstrate. Why not make the most of the nightly opportunity to engage in “lucid virtual reality therapy”? If one recreates a healthy limb in the lucid dream body (the innate body image will probably do this for the dreamer anyway), and practises using it at first for

simple tasks such as picking up dream objects and then progresses to using it with greater dexterity, it is possible that these actions will send signals to the brain that these things can be done in the waking state, too.

Lucid dreaming isn't the only way to experience the freedom and malleability of the dream body; carrying out your own tailored visualisation while awake can also be helpful. In their study of paraplegics dreaming, Ursula Voss and colleagues remark that more questions need to be asked of disabled people with regard to their dream life: "Is dreaming a relief of handicap only because it allows you to have the freedom of your fantasy? Or is there more to it than that?" <sup>87</sup>

I believe there's more to it than that, and I hope people who are disabled, elderly, and ill will feel inspired to explore the wider possibilities of lucid dreaming. The world needs to know more about the ways in which engaging with the lucid dream body could help and relieve physical ailments and perhaps improve the quality of people's inner and outer lives.

### Practice #23: Transcend the Laws of Physics

1. Be critical about your reality: Observe and question everything: the speed at which water comes out of the tap, the angle at which the sun bounces off a car bonnet, the echo of your own footsteps, or the length of your shadow. Are the laws of physics as they usually are, or has something changed? Ask yourself, "Is the world behaving as it does during waking physical reality? Is this a dream?" If the answer seems to be no, then ask, "How do I know it isn't?"

2. Choose an anchor: Decide on a key word or phrase to say aloud in the dream and anchor this to your knowledge that in a dream, the dream body is mutable, and gravity and time operate free from the usual laws. Set the intention that the act of voicing this phrase in the dream state will open your mind and free you from restrictive thinking.

3. Learn how to fly: If you have chosen an anchor word, this will help you to fly rather than getting bogged down with limiting beliefs and not managing to take off, as sometimes happens. Try a suggestion

specific to flying to help you achieve this: “As I sing, I rise into the air.” Suggestions are very powerful in lucid dreaming, so choose a positive one like this and let it work its magic.

4. Find a mirror: Lucid dream mirrors can act as portals, so if you are curious about exploring dream physics, try diving through one. It might turn into a wormhole and send you spinning through space, or you might end up in a different dream. It can also be fun (or a big shock!) to look at your reflection in a dream mirror and ask, “Who am I in this dream?”

[contents]



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75. Hobson, "REM Sleep and Dreaming: Towards a Theory of Protoconsciousness."
  76. Voss et al., "Waking and Dreaming: Related but Structurally Independent. Dream Reports of Congenitally Paraplegic and Deaf-Mute Persons."
  77. Garfield, *Pathway to Ecstasy*, 161.
  78. Garfield, *Pathway to Ecstasy*, 156.
  79. Gassmann, "Identity of the Dreaming 'I.' "
  80. LaBerge, "Lucid Dreaming: An Exploratory Study of Consciousness During Sleep."
  81. Schädlich, "Darts in Lucid Dreams."
  82. Gassmann, "Identity of the Dreaming 'I.' "
  83. Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel*, 137.
  84. Voss et al., "Waking and Dreaming."
  85. Voss et al., "Waking and Dreaming."
  86. Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel*, 114.
  87. Voss et al., "Waking and Dreaming."

## CHAPTER 8

# *The People You'll Meet: Lucid Dream Mentors, Puppets, and Psychological Projections*

Lucid dream figures are deeply intriguing. Sometimes when we become lucid we notice that they seem less aware than we are; we feel we can direct their actions and even fill their heads with thoughts and words, which can make conversing with them rather predictable; they seem to be dream puppets and we are the puppeteer. Other times it feels like the joke is on us; they know far more than they're letting on while we blunder around the dream bogged down by our assumptions and perceived limitations. Dream figures can also seem super-aware, as if they're just as conscious and intelligent as we feel ourselves to be. They sometimes take on the form of guides, mentors, or gurus who seem to know far more than we do and who share their insights and teachings with us. Dr. Tadas Stumbrys and Dr. Michael Daniels carried out an exploratory study of creative problem solving in lucid dreams and found that dream figures could be helpful in this process. Of the participants in the study, they write:

They were encouraged to believe that there is someone in their dream who knows answers to many questions and is willing to help the participant. It was suggested that it may be an old wise man or woman, a "guru" figure or a "guide." The participants were asked to find this

dream figure or to call him or her to appear ... The answers provided by the dream “guides” surpassed the answers of the control group on overall evaluation.<sup>88</sup>

It seems that for dream figures (as for us), awareness moves across a spectrum, from largely unconscious to superconscious. But whose awareness are we talking about here? One question I get asked at conferences is: Are all lucid dream figures part of our own psyche or are some of them autonomous beings? They can seem utterly external to us, occasionally in disturbing ways. Other thought-provoking questions are: Can lucid dream figures help us become wiser and more creative and help us to solve dilemmas? What are the most beneficial ways of interacting with them? If they have their own awareness, what happens if we are violent with them?

Lucid dream figures are not always people by any means: they can take non-human forms, such as mythical beings, trees, “magical” objects such as mandalas or crystals, or animals. Some of my most highly conscious dream figures have been animals. Once I dreamed of a white wolf lying stretched out on a high shelf in my bedroom. I could see her flanks moving with her breath. I felt completely awake, but since it seemed unlikely that a wolf would appear on a shelf that—I suddenly realised—I didn’t even have in waking life, I realised I was dreaming. As soon as I knew this, the wolf raised her head and looked at me with searing conscious intelligence. I was stunned and simply looked back at her. This was clearly a dream ally of sorts, and I felt honoured by her presence but also thrilled in a slightly scared way as she seemed to be *as conscious as I was* and by nature she was a wild beast. Very slowly, I floated up to her eye level (keeping a respectful distance) and saw the liquid fire of her irises, like pools of burning light with images moving and shifting beyond. I don’t know how long we gazed at each other, but I went into sleep paralysis before I woke up.

Different traditions might offer different explanations for this type of dream. It might be described as a meeting with a spirit guide or animal totem, or a shamanic dream, or a dream of connecting with one's instinctual self. Regardless of the framework within which this dream is understood, I can vouch that it was one of many deeply significant steps on my path into lucid dreaming and it taught me that superconscious dream figures deserve the utmost respect because, frankly, who are we to say to them, "You're just a dream"? Opening up to the awe of such encounters and being lucidly present to them in the here and now of the dream treats them as the real (yet surreal) event they are and allows their significance to swell and enrich our life experience.

Objects, people, animals, or presences that show up in our dreams are often imbued with psychological and emotional significance. Dreamwork with lucid and non-lucid dreams can reveal the depth of personal associations we have with dream figures, objects, and other symbolic imagery. A big part of how we choose to act in our lucid dreams depends on how we view dreams and dream figures: are dreams purely personal, interior events, or do they transcend the individual psyche? Let's have a look at this question through an exploration of just how conscious lucid dream figures are.

## How Conscious Are Lucid Dream Figures?

People ask me if the relative level of awareness noted in dream figures reflects the dreamer's own level of awareness. The funny thing is, it feels as if this should logically be the case, so that the more lucid the dreamer is, the more aware all the dream figures become. But *the level of conscious awareness we notice in our lucid dream figures isn't always reflective of our own level of lucidity*. In highly lucid dreams, although I'm unlikely to come across a deeply unaware dream figure, sometimes if I talk to an awake-seeming one, I'll get the impression I'm putting words into his mouth. He's responding but saying exactly what I'd expect him to say. He looks and

sounds perfectly realistic, but he's basically a puppet. In other lucid dreams there may be several dream figures milling around and although most seem to have regular awareness—*bam!*—I'll spot one looking right at me with direct, aware intelligence.

When one of these dream figures makes eye contact, you notice! It jolts your own awareness because they seem like conscious equals. It's like when you're walking along a crowded city street on a busy Saturday and there are so many faces, so many eyes, but nobody really seems to *see* you, and then suddenly your gaze locks with someone coming your way and he or she is highly conscious and really *sees* you. It's a shock, and it makes you conscious of being conscious. It works the same way with dream figures, and despite the jolt, I'm always grateful to them because either their conscious gaze triggers lucidity for me or, if I'm already lucid, it ratchets my level of awareness up a notch. These are the dream figures we might usefully engage with by asking them a question. These are the ones who are likely to have an answer that surprises and enlightens us. Finally, there are super-aware dream figures who often don't appear in human form and seem to have a *higher* awareness than we ourselves do. They seem autonomous and intelligent in ways beyond our knowing.

Sometimes dream figures may object to certain actions the lucid dreamer takes, and attempt to teach them about the nature of lucid dreaming, as happens here to German lucid dreamer Eric Tröger:

I decided to make a hole in a window pane with my finger, and it worked, so I walked right through it. A dream figure noticed this and went to get help. A man in a black suit came and told me that I couldn't just do things like that. So I made a hole in his leg and said that it wasn't a problem; it hadn't bothered him. Then he wanted to explain to me what lucid dreaming is, and the words "immune system" came up ... I told him I'd like to have more lucid dreams, and he said that when people dream normally, they dream about their own environment, but when they dream lucidly, they might, for example, dream of Valhalla

[the Hall of Slain Heroes in Nordic mythology]. Then he said, “And we must then decide if Valhalla exists or not.” I woke up immediately.

It may be the case (or part of the case) that dream figures tend to exhibit a range of awareness because they represent aspects of our psyche that are either more or less conscious. In this psychological approach, dream figures are seen as psychological projections. The more repressed aspects of our psyche might be embodied as less conscious dream figures, while aspects that we’re very aware of or currently working on might appear as more “illuminated” dream figures. Psychiatrist Carl Jung developed the active imagination technique,<sup>89</sup> where inner imagery or emotions are reentered imaginatively in the waking state and can be actively engaged with, for example, by striking up a dialogue with the wicked witch who was chasing you through the forest in a dream, or asking the dead lamb why it had to die. Jung found that leaps of understanding were gained through active imagination as inner figures responded from their own perspective, shedding light on hidden attitudes, feelings, and expectations.

Lucid dreamers can follow a similar process while actually face to face with dream figures, and this can result in powerful insights, particularly if we choose a highly conscious dream figure to engage with. For clarity, I’ve divided the different awareness levels of lucid dream figures into four basic categories.

## Four Levels of Awareness in Lucid Dream Figures

1. Zombies: These dream figures seem deeply unconscious, a bit like mindless “film extras.” They’re there as part of the scene but have no more essence than a picture. If you try to talk to them, they generally don’t react and social norms quickly collapse, as Jeff Warren found when he tried to have lucid dream sex with one: “It was like kissing a zombie. Her head lolled to the side and her eyes were blank.”<sup>90</sup> In my experience, the more

lucid you are, the fewer of these unresponsive dream figures you'll encounter.

2. Puppets: They look, sound, and feel realistic, but when you try to talk to them they often hesitate before speaking the exact same words you were just thinking. If you expect them to scratch their head, lo and behold, they scratch it! They may be adept telepaths, but telepathy in the dream state is a pretty mundane form of communication. At this level of awareness, dream figures do their best to fool us that they think their own thoughts, but it quickly becomes apparent that they don't. Puppets can be present at any level of dream lucidity, but you'll get faster at identifying them the more lucid you are.

3. Conscious equals: You get the feeling these dream figures are as conscious as you are. They seem to think their own thoughts (rather than regurgitating yours) and are capable of answering questions in surprising and sometimes deeply insightful ways. They have a robust level of autonomy and often take the form of dream guides or mentors who seem keen to initiate the dreamer into the complexities of lucid dreaming. This level of dream figure will likely not appreciate being told, "You don't exist—you're just a character in my dream!"

In the introduction to the 1982 English translation of Hervey de Saint-Denys's book on lucid dreaming, a lucid dream figure objects to being treated as imaginary. The dreamer says, "He is just a figment of my imagination because this is my dream." The dream figure retorts, "Don't listen to Morty. If I am a figment of his imagination, so is he who is saying that." Their argument continues until the dreamer wakes himself up to "make you all disappear."<sup>91</sup> Who won that argument? Some lucid dreamers loftily inform dream figures as soon as they become lucid, "You're dreaming, too!" and this can lead to a kindergarten-level argument along the lines of "No, I'm not!" "Yes, you are!" with both parties becoming irate, at which point the dreamer tends to wake up.

But why waste a good lucid dream arguing? And why assume that dream figures are dreaming just because you feel that you are? If they say they aren't, they may be right—who's to say we're the ones who know everything? One dreamer who asked a dream figure if he was conscious received this answer: "I am sure that I have a consciousness, but I doubt if you have one, because you ask me such stupid questions!"

<sup>92</sup> Rather than argue about it, why not ask them which reality they feel themselves to be in and why? We take all kinds of assumptions into the dream with us. Releasing preconceived ideas about reality and consciousness and listening respectfully to what dream figures have to say can be more beneficial and ultimately more enlightening than clinging to tired waking life arguments.

4. Super-aware: These lucid dream figures strike us as being more conscious than we are! They seem to have a higher awareness or knowledge and appear completely autonomous, as if their thoughts and actions are their own and have nothing to do with us, the dreamer. Often they manifest as non-humans and they may take on an unfriendly or friendly aspect. At a 2005 IASD conference in the United States, I was on a lucidity symposium with consciousness researcher David Pleasants, and his talk was on the agency of lucid dream figures. He spoke of one frighteningly real-seeming "devil" he met in a lucid nightmare.<sup>93</sup> You'll find empowerment techniques for lucid nightmares in chapter 13. Lucid dreams with super-aware dream figures are unforgettable experiences that can be terrifying or awesome—and a great deal depends on our reaction to them.

In one lucid dream from 2013, I found myself standing before columns of blue light that were taller than the sky. I was utterly dwarfed by these columns and entranced by them; they were alive in a uniquely conscious way, like gigantic pillars of wisdom made of light leading to more light. They were my friends and I felt so lucky to be in their presence. The golden rule when encountering super-aware lucid dream figures is to *be respectful and do not fear!* Fear in dreams makes everything worse.



Calmness is the way through—and if this seems impossible and you’re shaking in your dream boots, remember you can always press the Game Over button and wake yourself up ... though you may later kick yourself for a missed opportunity to find out more.

## Are We Separate from Our Dreams?

A big factor in interactions with dream figures seems to be whether or not we see ourselves as being separate from them. The kind of natural telepathy that occurs in dreams, where we communicate with dream figures without actually voicing words, or we “just know” something about them, may be more likely to surface in interactions with lucid dream figures for those who take the psychological approach to dreaming and believe that all aspects of the dream, including the scenery, the sounds, and the dream figures, are psychological projections that reflect aspects of their own psyche. Following this line of reasoning, it makes sense that some dream figures will seem more conscious than others, as some aspects of the psyche are more “awakened” than others.

If we see ourselves as *separate* from the dream and its contents while we’re dreaming, then we’ll likely have an experience that reflects this separation, such as dream figures refusing to cooperate with us. If we see the dream as being deeply connected with us on every level, we may be more likely to experience dream figures who seem to know what we’re thinking or expecting, or who even seem to know more than we do. One participant in the study by Stumbrys and Daniels on whether “guru” dream figures can help with creative problem solving observes:

The answers given to me by characters in my dreams were no more insightful than what I could come up with myself. But perhaps this had to do more with my belief that characters in my dreams only know what I know. Maybe others who have more spiritual attitudes about their

dreams would receive answers that they hadn't previously thought of because of their belief.<sup>94</sup>

For me, “telepathy” with dream figures works the same way that expectation does; there's a definite trend towards the more aware dream figures knowing what I know or picking up on my expectations and fulfilling or surpassing them, but—thank goodness!—there's always room in every interaction for unexpected surprises, so it's impossible to get bored.

## Lucid Dream Violence: Pros and Cons

There are still a great number of people who will dismiss even ultra-real lucid dream experiences as being “just a dream,” because in our culture dreams are often dismissed in this way right from the very beginning of our lives, when we run crying to our parents to tell them we had a nightmare. It's hard to take dreams seriously if everyone around us assumes they are random mental constructs that vanish the moment we open our eyes in the morning, rather than real psychological experiences that can contribute to our long-term memory, bring us insights and guidance, help us solve problems, and improve physical skills. If dreams are seen as “not real,” the reasoning goes like this: since dream figures are just part of a dream that we created, surely we can treat them any way we like?

The ethics of sexual violence in lucid dreams are discussed in [chapter 12](#), but the pros and cons of general physical violence towards dream figures need a mention here because things are not as clear-cut as they may first seem. I'm anti-violence in both my waking life and in my dreams: rather than martial arts, I practise yoga; I'm vegetarian; I don't go around punching adults or slapping my child; I get insects out of the house with a cup and a postcard to avoid squashing them (with the exception of mosquitoes, which I'll happily kill with my bare hands before they can suck my daughter's blood!); I'm anti-war; and so on.

But it has to be said that dream violence is not the same as waking life violence for a number of reasons, the main one being that if we punch a dream figure in the teeth, we won't wake up and find the police on our doorstep issuing us with an anti-social behaviour order, because the dream seems to be for the most part an internal world. It's a world in which we interact with deep and sometimes hidden aspects of our own personality, and in certain cases lucid dream violence can be a good thing: a step on the path to psychological healing and integration. I have seen the benefits of lucid dream violence in moving a person from a stance of helplessness to one of action—a huge and vital psychological step in moving from the role of victim to one of empowerment.

One dreamer wanted some sex when he got lucid, and decided to find himself a girl. No sooner had he formulated this thought than his mother blocked his path and fixed him with a threatening look. The dreamer asked her if she'd help him find a dream girlfriend, and at this she got really mean, accusing him of only thinking of his own pleasure and ranting at him viciously. When the dreamer remained impassive, she then turned into a witch and tried to claw at him. In Paul Tholey's book, the dreamer reports:

I grabbed her by the hair and sent her flying into a nearby bush. There she turned into a kind of monstrous predator that sprang at me with lightning speed. But prepared for such an attack, I hit the beast with all my might. It shrank, lost its menace, and finally crept back into the bush. I was overcome with a cathartic feeling of triumph.<sup>95</sup>

Following this violent lucid dream fight, the dreamer's dream life changed overnight. Threatening dream figures no longer tried to hinder him when he wanted to have lucid dream sex, and even in his waking life he reported benefits as his attitude to sexuality became better adjusted. Dream violence has its uses! Rev. Jeremy Taylor, co-founder of the International Association for the Study of Dreams and author of *Where People Fly and Water Runs Uphill*, has worked with dreams for over half a century. He

remarked to me that lucidity allows the dreamer to decide spontaneously and intuitively how to deal with threatening dream figures:

In this newly empowered state of lucid dream awareness ... turn to the dream and *do whatever seems like something I really want to do in that moment*—including “turn the tables” on my oppressors and “perpetrators” in the nightmare and visit all sorts of (symbolic) “revenge violence” on them ... It’s a *dream*, after all; and no real harm, and a great deal of unconscious good, can be done in such an act!

### Dream Aggression Emerges from Powerful Emotions

There’s only one lucid dream in which I can recall being violent. I was in my early twenties and it was right after I became lucid in a stressful dream where I felt antagonistic towards someone due to an ongoing saga in waking life. As I became lucid, I floated up into the air and, still very emotional, aimed a kick at her as I sailed up. The kick went through her like she was a ghost, but I instantly felt bad for doing it. My lucidity increased and I sent her a silent apology. If I do anything violent or aggressive in a dream, I always question myself about it when I wake up.

In non-lucid dreams I occasionally get physically violent. Years ago an annoying dream figure on a bus was talking at me, sticking her face too close to mine, and I pinched her ear to make her stop. She looked absolutely shocked and stopped hassling me. It felt satisfying to do this, but I still worked on that dream to discover what this was about, because for me, dream aggression emerges from powerful emotions. This is one area that may be a bit different for men and women—studies show that men tend to dream more often of physical aggression than women do.<sup>96</sup> A number of male lucid dreamers have told me they regularly fight battles in their lucid dreams, either “magical” battles where they try out magic swords or throw balls of fire around, or straightforward physical clashes where they beat aggressive dream figures up—or worse.

I've been a lucid dreamer since I was three, and the only time I remember getting even close to a physical fight in a lucid dream (apart from that rebellious dream kick) was during my early, bewildering sleep paralysis experiences over twenty years ago, where I would try to shove invisible "entities" away from me as they spun me relentlessly about in the void. It didn't do me any good, as it didn't stop them, and eventually I learned other tactics for escaping, like calming my emotions and waiting for a new, beautiful lucid dream to emerge from the black chaos. Speaking purely from my own personal practice, I now see no point in lucid dream violence. For me, part of the realisation of lucidity is understanding that *I am the dream and the dream is me*: we are not separate, so in that sense there is ultimately no "other" to kick at or flatten with a punch. If we want to change the dream, we must first change *ourselves* on the level of our thoughts, intentions, beliefs, expectations, and emotions. So is it beneficial to either flee from or attack "mean" dream figures as soon as we get lucid?

## Embracing the Shadow

Carl Jung's view was that we each have a shadow side to us, a side that we repress or deny. If we experienced something negative in the past, for example, and never processed it, this negative energy accumulates in the psyche. It can emerge in emotional reactions in waking life. Have you ever freaked out about something and become really emotional, and afterwards wondered why you had such an extreme reaction? Sometimes this happens because of a "final straw" type of situation, or because of being overtired, but it can also happen when a shadow part of ourselves jumps out, baring its teeth. The shadow aspect of ourselves can also emerge in dreams and nightmares. The Jungian view is that the shadow is raised to consciousness because it needs to be acknowledged and integrated. When we "embrace the shadow" by consciously reintegrating these forgotten or denied parts of the self into our psyche, we experience transformation and healing. It follows on from this that if we always run from our shadow when it arises

in the form of nasty dream figures, we will not experience transformation and healing.

Psychologically speaking, the integration of negative dream figures is seen to be the ultimate goal, and just one lucid dream might enable a dreamer to successfully integrate a dream figure by sending it love, hugging it, merging with it, or giving and receiving a gift. Other dreamers will simply not be ready to do this at first, which is entirely understandable given the extreme aggression or “evil” presence that some dream figures emanate. These dreamers may need to chip away slowly at the issue over a number of lucid dreams and combine this with dreamwork or therapy; it all depends on the nature of the underlying issue that needs to be raised to consciousness, acknowledged, integrated, and released. How do we do this?

It can be as simple as *asking the dream*. In the heat of the moment, if faced with aggression or meanness in a lucid dream, simply ask a question: “Who are you?” “What do you want from me?” “What can I do for you?” Or: “WHY am I dreaming this?” A nice example of what can happen if we find the presence of mind to talk to unfriendly dream figures can be seen in this dream reported in Paul Tholey’s book. On the face of things, nothing particularly healing happens, and the incident seems comical. But the main thing is that the dreamer’s fear has dissolved: he has entered into dialogue with something he was fleeing from in panic, and has discovered that this particular dream figure actually has no idea why he was chasing him, and certainly no master plan to annihilate him:

Suddenly I realised I didn’t need to flee at all, but could do something else. I remembered that I wanted to speak to other people in my dreams. So I stood still, let my pursuer approach me, and asked him what it was that he actually wanted. His answer was: “How am I supposed to know?! After all, this is *your* dream and besides *you’re* the one who studied psychology and not me.”<sup>97</sup>

## Violence versus Love

From a therapeutic point of view, when dream violence becomes gratuitous rather than psychologically useful, this may be a red flag saying to the dreamer, “You have issues!” Of course, not everyone is interested in the psychological approach, and some people seem to feel okay about using their lucid dreams as an outlet for violence, as one online lucid dreamer revealed when he described himself as the least violent person you could ever meet, but then went on to say that he likes to fight and kill people in his lucid dreams. He reflected that he sometimes wakes up feeling uneasy about what he did, but figures that it is really okay since ultimately nobody gets harmed.

What do you think—is it okay? Is it the case that ultimately nobody gets harmed, including the dreamer? It’s up to each dreamer to decide such things for themselves. If you feel your lucid dreams contain too much violence and you want to change this, you can do so by reframing your intent when lucid, asking the dream figures if they have a message for you, releasing your fear and aggression through deep breathing (or whatever works for you), and trying instead to feel love and compassion. It may sound glib, but since intent is such a magical tool in lucid dreaming, simply deciding (and fully expecting!) to feel love is very, very likely to result in an almost instantaneous feeling of love. Love is transformative, and the lucid dream will respond by transforming in an original and possibly quite wonderful way.

## **Super-Aware Dream Figures: Mental Constructs or Independent Beings?**

So much in our dreams seems dependent on the belief system we’re personally attached to. The question of whether some dream figures have independent awareness seems to go hand in hand with the question of whether dreams only take place inside our heads or if they have a wider reality. What about you? Do you think that dreams are produced by the

individual brain and that consciousness is nonporous, confined to the skull of the individual? If so, you are likely to find the concept of independent dream figures ludicrous. Or do you believe that dreams transcend the individual psyche? If so, you're more likely to accept the idea of independent, autonomous dream figures.

The exciting thing about lucid dreaming is that you can explore these questions yourself and reach your own conclusions. This is for the most part a still-uncharted path. Try testing the responsiveness and awareness of your lucid dream figures. Ask them questions, or give them a problem to solve. Make up your own mind about their perceived autonomy or lack of it! Like some other aspects of lucid dreaming, the idea of "independent," highly conscious dream figures can sound pretty nuts, and it's always best not to blindly accept what other people say about such things. Instead, why not take up the challenge of finding out for yourself through rational experimentation in lucid dreams?

The most exciting experiments with dream figures that I've come across in lucid dreaming literature appear in sports psychologist Paul Tholey's 1995 book, *Schöpferisch Träumen: Der Klartraum als Lebenshilfe* (this translates along the lines of *Creative Dreaming: Lucid Dreaming for a Better Life*). Elsewhere, Tholey observes that "we can never empirically prove whether or not other dream characters are lucid, only that they speak and behave as if they were ... Many dream figures seem to perform with a 'consciousness' of what they are doing."<sup>98</sup> He concludes that many dream figures behave as though they have their own memories, see the dream scene from their own visual perspective, and have independent thoughts from that of the dreamer. To whet your appetite for your own experiments, I've translated extracts from a few of the lucid dreams Tholey and his subjects reported as they tried to answer a string of fascinating questions that you can explore in your own lucid dreams if you're intrigued to find out more.

#### **Practice #24: Things to Find Out about Your Lucid Dream Figures**



### 1) Do Dream Figures Know Things We Don't Know?

Try asking your lucid dream figures for unknown information, for example, something in the future: a lottery number, the name of the next person who will telephone you, or something from your past that you've forgotten—an object you once played with or a memory of time spent with your grandparents. Ask anything you want and see what comes up. Even if it makes no sense in the dream itself, clarity often comes upon awakening. Tholey got his psychology students to ask their dream figures to tell them a word they didn't know, with some impressive results. One of them had chatted the night before with other lucid dreamers about the differences and similarities between lucid dream experiences and religious visions, and the conversion of Saint Paul had come up. He then had a lucid dream where he asked an old man if he could name a foreign word or one from a different language that was unknown to him:

The man says warningly: "IKONIUM, take good note of this word!" Although I think intently, I can't work out what the word might mean ... When I wake up I find out from a reference book that Ikonium was an Anatolian city where Saint Paul was stoned for his teachings. The meaning of the dream suddenly becomes clear.

Another student came across Paul Tholey in a lucid dream:

Then I met Tholey. When I asked him if he could tell me a foreign word, he answered: "I am NIMROD." I didn't know who Nimrod was.

When the dreamer looked the word up in the dictionary, he learned that Nimrod was a legendary Babylonian figure who travelled in the underworld and obtained knowledge from lucid dreaming. Of course, it's possible that these words had been heard at some long-ago point

in the dreamers' lives and simply buried in their unconscious and forgotten, but at the very least these and other examples in Tholey's book show that by questioning dream figures we can access such "lost" information.

## 2) Do Dream Figures Have Their Own Visual Perspective?

This time, Tholey's students were invited to get a lucid dream figure to draw or write and then check to see from whose perspective this was done. If they stood opposite each other while the dream figure drew, would the dream drawing appear on the page as if the dreamer had drawn it herself, or would it appear upside down, as if the dream figure had drawn from his own perspective? Here's what happened in one lucid dream:

Then the man takes the pencil out of my hand, and on the magazine he quickly and fluently draws the profile of a face, which from my perspective is upside down. I am stunned and turn the magazine around 180 degrees to scrutinise the face ... At the time of the dream the drawing of the upside-down head and especially the way it looked the right way up was so good that I was convinced the man had his own conscious awareness.

## 3) Do Dream Figures Have Independent Awareness and Intelligence?

In a remarkable dream experiment, Tholey arranged for a lucid dream figure to help him become lucid, which at first resulted in her misunderstanding his directive and calling his name, which woke him up. He clarified his instructions to her in the next lucid dream, and the following night she then did as he had asked, pointing out to him in a non-lucid dream that this was a dream. After this experience, Tholey notes that the fact that there can be misunderstandings between the lucid dreamer and the dream figure shows that both are able to think independently of the other. Why not try a similar experiment yourself and see what happens? Actively enlisting the help of lucid dream

figures to get us to wake up in other dreams could greatly benefit our lucid dream life, and along the way we may learn more about the independent consciousness of certain lucid dream figures.

#### 4) Are Dream Figures Any Good at Poetry and Maths?

Tholey concluded that while lucid dream figures aren't bad at producing on-the-spot poetry, they're generally pretty rubbish at maths. He asked his psychology students to check the arithmetic abilities of their lucid dream figures. In this lucid dream, the dreamer goes into a restaurant to find someone to ask a mental arithmetic question, and asks the waiter:

“What's 13 by 17?” He answers, “One hundred.” In the background a guest says, “No.” I go over to him to hear his result (I haven't calculated it myself). He says, “47, 48!” I climb out of the window.<sup>99</sup>

Tholey's research also showed that the lucid dreamer's own mathematical abilities required more concentration in the dream than in waking life. He asked them to multiply two two-figure numbers together in a lucid dream to test the short-term memory, since one has to recall the “in between” number when doing this type of mental arithmetic. The lucid dreamers all managed to get the right answer when doing this, but it was much harder for them to calculate in a dream. Their mathematical prowess in the dream was much stronger than that of their lucid dream figures. Try it for yourself!

## Dream Figures as Lucidity Triggers: Help or Hindrance?

An interesting question is whether the dreamer's lucidity automatically prompts the dream figures to become more lucid, or if it's the dream figures who are initially “more lucid” and so help the dreamer to achieve

awareness. I've found it can work both ways—sometimes the fact of becoming lucid seems to awaken some of the dream figures and they might show this by giving you a sharp, interested look when you get lucid, or make a beeline for you, as if you've just lit up in colour. But this certainly doesn't work for all of the dream figures all of the time—in highly lucid dreams you get fewer “zombies,” but this doesn't mean all the “puppets” automatically become conscious equals to the lucid dreamer. And, of course, sometimes it's the dream figures who seem more lucid than the dreamer, and who help the dreamer to realise she's dreaming!

Occasionally, perhaps embodying our own doubts, lucid dream figures can react in unsupportive ways, and in order to stay lucid the dreamer may need to make an effort not to be sucked into unhelpful feelings such as embarrassment or self-doubt. Daniel Love, author of *Are You Dreaming?*, shared a long lucid dream with me, and in this part he has to rally his forces to stay lucid in the face of sniggering dream figures:

I notice my continued attempts to fly capture the attention of passing dream characters and I'm met with bemused faces, sniggers, and the expressions of those who clearly believe I'm acting like a madman. For a moment I feel myself succumbing to a sense of embarrassment but quickly correct myself, knowing that such feelings are quite irrelevant here and giving into them is a dangerous path towards losing lucidity.

Dream figures sometimes like to take on the role of a doubting Thomas: they openly question our ability to do things in the dream, or try to persuade us this is in fact not a dream but ordinary waking reality. Sometimes we get drawn in and argue with them, become emotional ... and lose lucidity. One man tried to magic some chocolate for his highly sceptical son in a lucid dream, and when he failed his son crowed, “See! I knew you can't do magic!”<sup>100</sup> The dreamer was so infuriated by this that he woke right up. If dream figures are being argumentative or doubting, it's important to stay calm and not get sucked in, or we risk losing lucidity. In such cases it can

be helpful to remind ourselves that we are dreaming and this dream figure may simply be embodying our own inner doubts. It's good to stay focused on our own mental clarity so the dream doesn't dissolve.

### Helpful Dream Figures Can Trigger Lucidity

Often, though, dream figures seem to really want to help us get lucid! I've been helped to lucidity hundreds of times by dream figures. They might spot me looking at something and say significantly, "Very *dreamlike*!" so that I twig it, or they do something that can only be done in dreams. In one dream a bouncing yogi levitated gleefully up and down in the lotus position until I was so delighted and incredulous that I suddenly understood what he was trying to show me—we were in a dream! Other lucid dream researchers also appear in my dreams as lucidity triggers. In one dream I was walking along the road near my house when I spotted researcher Dr. Michael Schredl, who lives nowhere near me. "Oh, hello," I said in surprise. He saw me hesitating as I tried to work out my realities, and said helpfully, "That's right, this is a lucid dream!" So (now lucid) I thanked him for the trigger and flew off to practise my lucid dream reading on a huge flickering billboard.

The following example cited by Jack Reis shows how highly lucid dream figures prompt us to become lucid and can appear to know far more than we do. The dreamer meets Mr. Spock from *Star Trek*:

He told me, "There is no reason to worry because you are dreaming!" I did not believe him ... He told me he would jump up and then remain in midair, just so that I would be able to see that we were part of a dream. Only after this actually took place was I convinced that I was in a dream. Then I said that I would never have found out by myself that I was dreaming. He replied that he knew that and that was why he was there.<sup>101</sup>

Paul Tholey cites the example of someone who became lucid while running away from an unpleasant dream figure because a little man called out,

“Look at the guy more closely! You only get people like that in dreams!” <sup>102</sup>

In the course of his research into lucid dream figures, Tholey discovered that it’s possible to arrange to meet a dream figure in a future dream and get them to remind you that you’re dreaming! In this example, after an initial misunderstanding, the meeting actually happens and the dream figure obligingly provides a lucidity trigger:

I say to her: “Can you call me when I have my next dream?” She gives me a friendly nod ...That same night I had an ordinary dream that I can’t remember any more. All I know is that I was awoken from it by a loud call: “Paul!” Shocked, I ran out of the bedroom to see who had called me. Of course there was no-one there. After I went back to sleep, I had a lucid dream in which I met the woman from the first dream again. I said to her that I hadn’t literally meant “call”; what I’d meant was that she should help me to become lucid in the next dream. The following night, the dream figure appeared in an ordinary dream and explained to me that I was dreaming.<sup>103</sup>

## Initiation Lucid Dreams: Meeting Mentors and Allies

In the classic mythical or archetypal journey, Christopher Vogler explains, “The hero naturally encounters new challenges and Tests, makes Allies and Enemies, and begins to learn the rules of the Special World.” <sup>104</sup> So it is with lucid dreaming; dream figures, whether they take animal, human, or non-human form, often seem keen to initiate the lucid dreamer into the deeper possibilities of lucid dreaming. In 1994 I had the following lucid dream, which remains one of my all-time favourites for its surprise and the spiritual impact it had on me:

I announce: “This is as real as reality and I am dreaming.” As if in response to a password, a ball of light starts to form across the room by the wardrobe. I watch it swirl and then stabilise. It is beautiful. The light coming from this ball is orange and yellow, and it has a distinctive female energy. I ask it what it is and (without words) I am told it will

always be there to help me in my dreams. If I need it, I just have to call. It then gives me some sort of power word which I know I'll never forget. Then it disappears. I stare at the place where it was, and experience a rush of joy which propels me up and out of the window. I fly on the cool air and shoot up into the stars ... Then I wake up, and can't for the life of me remember the power word.

The appearance of the ball of light was completely unexpected for me; it just manifested in response to my lucidity, and the offer of help was so clear and sincere that it left me feeling as if something deeply magical had occurred, even if over twenty years down the line I still can't consciously remember that password! Lucid dream mentors, guides, guardians, or allies share knowledge and offer help. The woman whose highly lucid "Mr. Spock" dream figure went to such pains to get her to realise she was dreaming explains that he seemed to be revealing knowledge to her in gradual stages: "He explained the meaning of my path in a very plausible manner ... He told me all kinds of things and showed me things that I did not believe right away. I think it was great to have someone acting in a dream who knew much more than I did." <sup>105</sup>

## Passing Tests in Lucid Dreams

Sometimes the lucid dreamer isn't simply the recipient of knowledge—she must pass a test of some sort. When a friend of mine, Anja, was just fourteen, she flew in the form of an eagle to a high mountain with a Tibetan temple perched on top of it. There, she met some monks who were to become her teachers in a series of lucid dreams over the period of a year. The monks showed her books, symbols, and colours and explained to her that the physical body is made up of seven energy bodies. In her waking life, young Anja had never heard of energy bodies before. One of the monks told her he would like her to become his student, as she was a strong lucid dreamer, but she would have to pass numerous tests. Some were easier than others.

When she turned fifteen, Anja recalls failing an important test: In one lucid dream she was asked to walk across a bed of rainbow-coloured crystals, and she began to do so quite easily, feeling their warm glow under her feet, but halfway across she saw one crystal that was so incredibly compelling and precious to her that she stopped to pick it up and put it into her bag. She pleaded with the monk to allow her to take it home with her so that she could have it in her waking life. Of course, she woke up with no crystal, and kicked herself for being so thoughtless in the dream. She knew she had failed the test. To her chagrin, the dreams never returned.

I've had many lucid dreams that I consider to be initiation dreams, starting from when I was around seven and would lucidly fly to the hedge in our garden where unseen beings would show me books filled with symbols and what I thought of as "spells." Often my initiation dreams feature either animals or dream figures from Eastern cultures, like the ancient Chinese couple who beckoned for me to exit a dream filled with turmoil and showed me how to sit in silent meditation in their bamboo hut until I felt centred and peaceful again. Not all lucid dream mentors are necessarily zen-like and calm, though. In a lucid dream I had when I was twenty-four, three exuberant dream figures initiated me into the secret knowledge of power-passing:

In a circular glade in the woods, I see three people who are imbuing themselves with intense power, a power which gives them invincible physical strength. They are excited and happy and keep rushing into each other's arms for big hugs. They call me over and explain to me how to receive and transfer power. The trick is to imagine the power as a heavy lump inside your chest, and transferring it involves the power of thought—you simply imagine this weight shifting forward through your chest into the chest of the other. In order to render this transference more tangible to our physical minds, we hug or just bump chests while visualising the transfer of power.



We arrange ourselves in a square, facing each other. The guy on my right suddenly leans over and I feel a weight land inside my chest cavity. This is the power block. Instead of exploring the feeling of ultimate physical strength, I immediately try to pass the block on, as this seems the important thing. I rush towards the person opposite me and at the moment our chests make impact I mentally discharge my load onto him. The weight shifts forward in a strange way and I feel the transfer take place. They continue the transfer and the chief person tells us to show our “millers”—this is the name for the quantity of power we’ve managed to pass. I’m excited to show them my “miller”: a tiny, vivid blue, glowing rectangle in my hand. I just have the one. But the others have loads more! One has five and the chief has an infinite amount.

I understand that we began with a huge number of millers, but the power weakens from transfer to transfer, according to how much power each individual can take on. I see that my limited ability to take on power has depleted the energy, but this doesn’t matter—the power is not lost. This is just an exercise to get me into practice. Feeling the power move through me was great; I feel awed and honoured to have seen their secret. I wake up, still with this feeling of having been shown something of value—an ancient secret.

The feeling we have on waking up from a dream is often a big clue as to the importance of the dream. Dreams can leave us feeling depleted or energised, depressed or buoyant, sad or happy, and the stronger the emotion is, the more the dream calls to be worked on, thought about, honoured in some way, and integrated into our waking life. In initiation lucid dreams, if we feel we’ve been shown something of value, it’s good to write down the dream and spend time reliving it. What is it really showing us?

What I took away from this lucid dream was that energy work (“power” work) takes practice, and at that point in my life my own ability was pretty humble, but simply by being willing to participate, learn, and share, I’d passed the initial test. I find it significant that I chose to focus on

immediately sharing the power rather than hanging on to it to experience the sensation of ultimate physical strength. The lucid dream figures seemed to be saying to me, *We are not here to bestow our riches on you but to reveal to you your own riches*. This is a maxim I've taken with me as I've gone deeper into lucid dreaming. Through teaching, speaking, and writing, I share my experiences in the hope of inspiring others to make their own experiences and discover their own riches.

If we open our hearts to our lucid dream figures, we may find they have a great deal to teach us.

### **Practice #25: Tips for Interacting with Lucid Dream Figures**

- Show gratitude: Thank dream figures who help you to become lucid! Offer them a gift (you can just look in your pocket for one or materialise it). If they're people you know in waking life, thank them in person when you get the chance.
- Be respectful: Try not to assume that dream figures are made up solely by you and should therefore dance to your tune. Be open and respectful, and the potential for learning, healing, or understanding will automatically increase. Dreams are deeply mysterious: we do not yet know everything about them. Lucid dream figures may have plenty to teach us.
- Listen: Instead of telling dream figures that they don't exist or that they are dreaming, try listening to their point of view—it may be enlightening!
- Be brave: Try not to flee from threatening lucid dream figures, as you stand to gain much more if you can stay calm and brave and question them in a friendly manner: "What do you want? Who or what do you represent? Do you have a message for me? Can we be friends?" Appease them with a gift. Breathe deeply; this calms just as well in dreams as in waking life.
- Fight: If you need to, fight! In certain dream situations, dream violence can be cathartic and help us confront psychological issues as

an important step on the path to wholeness.

- Make friends: Follow the integration route of lucid dreaming and befriend your dream monsters. The simple act of hugging a negative dream figure in a wholehearted way can release built-up anxieties and stress, and they may even become a powerful ally. I always say a live dream friend is worth more than a dead dream enemy.

[contents]

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88. Stumbrys and Daniels, "An Exploratory Study of Creative Problem Solving in Lucid Dreams."
  89. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.
  90. Warren, *Head Trip*, 153.
  91. Hervey de Saint-Denys, *Dreams and How to Guide Them*, 8.
  92. Tholey, "Consciousness and Abilities of Dream Characters Observed during Lucid Dreaming," 574.
  93. Pleasants, "Self-Consciousness and the Sense of Agency within Lucid Nightmares."
  94. Stumbrys and Daniels, "An Exploratory Study of Creative Problem Solving in Lucid Dreams."
  95. Tholey and Utecht, *Schöpferisch Träumen*, 163. My translation.
  96. Schredl et al., "Gender Differences in Dreams."
  97. Tholey and Utecht, *Schöpferisch Träumen*, 97. My translation.
  98. Tholey, "Overview of the Development of Lucid Dream Research in Germany."
  99. Tholey and Utecht, *Schöpferisch Träumen*. Dream quotes taken from pages 226, 227, 320, and 229, respectively. My translation.
  100. Ibid., 100. My translation.
  101. Reis, in Tholey, "Overview of the Development of Lucid Dream Research in Germany."
  102. Tholey and Utecht, *Schöpferisch Träumen*, 97. My translation.
  103. Ibid., 236–237. My translation.
  104. Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 19.
  105. Reis, in Tholey, "Overview of the Development of Lucid Dream Research in Germany."

# PART TWO: Lucid Dreaming to Promote Creativity, Skill, and Pleasure

Who wouldn't wish for a creativity elixir? Well, lucid dreams offer us just that. When we wake up inside a dream, we are as close as we can get to the burgeoning creativity of our own unconscious mind. But what if you don't get lucid as much as you'd like to? Luckily, everybody can "lucid dream while awake." In [chapter 9](#), I'll share my transformative Lucid Writing technique and you will have the opportunity to discover that when we enter trance states and practise Lucid Dreamplay, we are lucid dreaming while awake to unleash creativity, overcome nightmares, and extract healing gifts from our dreams.

In [chapter 10](#), we'll dive into the highly physical world of improving sports skills through lucid dreaming and discover the science of how it works. Then we'll pull on our artist overalls and get dreamily creative in [chapter 11](#), which looks at how to turn original ideas and imagery into art, and how lucid dreaming can help us to solve problems and life issues. Anybody who is intrigued by the sexual possibilities of lucid dreaming can get inspired by [chapter 12](#), which explores everything from orgasms to ethics and from creativity to transcendence. It also offers practical guidance on how to create a fabulous lucid dream sex life.

## CHAPTER 9

# *Creativity Elixirs: Lucid Writing, Creative Trances, and Lucid Dreaming While Awake*

I remember author and speaker William Buhlman exclaiming once, “Most of us will never have an original thought in our lives!”<sup>106</sup> I expect that by this he meant that many people float around on the surface of life and don’t get around to tapping their inner potential. We’d all like to think of ourselves as original, creative, and unique, but are we really?

Personally, I believe we all have the capacity for original thinking. And I think lucid trances are a key to this. In her book *Your Creative Brain*, Dr. Shelley Carson points out that “the difference between the creators and the noncreators is the ease with which creative people can enter ... altered states of consciousness.”<sup>107</sup> I’m not convinced there’s any such thing as a “non-creator,” but Carson hits the nail on the head when she says that altered states of consciousness are important for creative thinking.

My work into trance states, combined with years of teaching people how to enter a lucid trance, has shown that entering these altered states is a learnable skill. In 2003, I created a simple technique called Lucid Writing.<sup>108</sup> It can help to resolve nightmares, trigger new ideas, dissolve creative and psychological blocks, and generate healing imagery. It’s like lucid dreaming while awake, with pen in hand. The more we practise

shifting our mind a couple of gears closer to dreaming, the easier it gets, and our capacity for sparking the free flow of creative thinking grows stronger. The more familiar we are with lucid trances, the more accessible dream lucidity becomes: *working with lucid trances can act as a dream lucidity trigger*, because we grow adept at identifying the state of mind in which we find ourselves and walking the delicate tightrope between waking and dreaming. For those who feel they don't have enough lucid dreams, happily there's an alternative gateway available to us at any time of day: when we learn to access lucid trances at will, we learn how to lucid dream while awake.

Dreams and wakefulness are so similar from a neurological point of view that wakefulness has been described as a dreamlike state modulated by sensory input.<sup>109</sup> Are we ever “completely awake” or “completely asleep”? Where's the sliding point between fantasy and reality? Do we ever really stop dreaming? When we experiment with trance states, we find ourselves balancing on the sliding point between waking and dreaming, and when we bring lucidity to this state, there is a great deal to explore.

*Trance* is a broad term, and there are many types: from hypnotic trances to waking dreams and from meditation-induced trances to out-of-body experiences where events are simultaneously verbally reported. I define “lucid trance” experiences as states where people are *aware* of being in a trance and yet this awareness doesn't catapult them out of the experience. Those who experience deeper lucid trances that might involve startlingly clear visualisation or profound insights are sometimes propelled on a quest, perhaps to work out how to access it again, or to begin a big project like a novel, or to investigate the nature of conscious experience.

Trance states have long been known as creativity elixirs. The Surrealists induced trances as a way to “unlock the door to the unconscious and to release the visual and verbal poetry of collective creativity;”<sup>110</sup> William Styron's “waking vision” of a girl named Sophie led him to write *Sophie's Choice*; Sue Blackmore became a parapsychologist after a mind-blowing “waking OBE” that she narrated to her friends as it occurred. Carl Jung's

active imagination is also a type of lucid trance. In this relaxed state, Jung interacted with the beings he met in his imaginal world and when he questioned them they'd respond.

In 1997, I was dozing in a hammock in Thailand. My boyfriend was playing the didgeridoo, and before us there was a vast orange sunset. A couple of fictional characters walked through my mind and whole scenes began to flow, vivid and coherent, like a waking dream. The girl was suffering from recurrent nightmares that she would unlock through lucid dreaming. Perhaps because my boyfriend and I had just been to a full moon party on Ko Pha Ngan island, my characters were impetuous young ravers and the story would play out in the underground party scene of the nineties with impromptu raves held in abandoned quarries or farms in the middle of Dartmoor. I could see it all quite clearly, and that was the moment I decided I was going to take those characters and write a novel, *Floating*. That novel is still tucked away in a drawer somewhere, but writing it out of the kernel of my waking dream was an eye-opening experience and equipped me with a basic tool I would use again and again in my writing life: the ability to create fiction in dreamlike trance states.

## Path to Lucid Writing

Although I had been using waking dreams in my writing process for years, in 2003 I formalised my technique and named it "Lucid Writing" when I was struggling to work out what kind of lucid dreams the main characters in my novel *Breathing in Colour* should have. The dreams had to have some kind of meaning and bring the plot forward without things getting too esoteric. What could I do? I decided that in my next lucid dream I'd simply ask the dream for help:

I become lucid standing in a field. I think of my fictional character Alida and I say aloud, "What kind of lucid dreams should Alida have in the novel?" Following my question, which is directed to the dreamscape



in general, a scarecrow-like figure appears, standing some way off in the same field I'm in. "What happens next?" I wonder, and the grass turns to quicksand into which I begin to sink. I wake up.

The silent figure in the field, which emanated a strange sense of autonomy, combined with the sensation of sinking into something deep, interested me. I was happy with the idea that Alida needed a mysterious figure to interact with in her lucid dreams. But a scarecrow? Really? I wasn't convinced. It seemed to me the lucid dream had hit on the essence of the solution, but it wasn't quite there yet. Spontaneously, I took a pen and paper, then relaxed and closed my eyes in order to reenter my lucid dream. As a writer, I was already adept at daydreaming, imagining scenes of drama and emotional depth unfolding in my mind's eye and guiding them when I wanted to. I wanted to continue my lucid dream while awake by focusing on my mental imagery in a light trance state and seeing where it led.

When the lucid dream scene was very clear in my mind, I half-opened my eyes and scribbled down what I saw, without stopping to think, so that I stayed in a non-critical mindset. The scarecrow's face was featureless, but not in a sinister way. When I focused on this featureless space, it began to grow rounder and glint like a coin. This briefly reminded me of a report of pre-sleep imagery I'd read about a few days earlier where the torso of a man was seen to rise out of the sea, and instead of a head, it had "a large golden disc engraved with ancient designs."<sup>111</sup> That seemed to decide the matter; the coin-like object solidified into a silver disc. Simultaneously, the scarecrow lost its shabby outline and firmed up into the figure of a man with gleaming dark skin and beautiful muscles. That was more like it! When I stopped writing and read my notes, the character of the disc-headed man already had a strong presence. In fact, he was so "there" already that later on in the novel-writing process, when I tried to make him speak, he strongly resisted: although he was compassionate and there to help Alida, just like the initial scarecrow image he was a silent figure.

The Lucid Writing technique was born! I honed it to include specific relaxation and visualisation techniques for maximum effectiveness and used it throughout the writing of *Breathing in Colour*. I'd discovered that inducing a daytime trance and exploring lucid dream imagery in this relaxed and thought-responsive state of consciousness could have transformative effects. At this stage I was focusing purely on the creative possibilities of trance; later I would naturally expand this into psychological healing and the treatment of nightmares as I started to teach the method. This was when I broadened Lucid Writing into other techniques that appear in this book, and I developed the blanket term of Lucid Dreamplay <sup>112</sup> to describe a whole fan of techniques for working with a dream in ways that mirror lucid dreaming. With Lucid Dreamplay, we are lucid dreaming while awake to unleash creativity, overcome nightmares, and extract healing gifts from our dreams.

The archetypal nature of the characters I developed in Lucid Writing interested me. In a lucid dream, the unconscious becomes conscious, and so it is in lucid trances where dream imagery is worked with. Carl Jung writes: "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear." <sup>113</sup> In my view, archetypes are informed not only by the individual consciousness in which they *appear*, but also through subsequent reworkings in different states of consciousness such as Lucid Writing in the creative trance. When a personalised lucid dream image is further personalised through Lucid Writing, original creations can emerge, and the disc-headed man was the first "Lucid Writing Archetype" <sup>114</sup> I developed.

Lucid dream imagery can seem super-real and scintillate with a kind of inner awareness, so recalling it in all its glory can be enough to enter a lucid trance. Writing down a lucid *or a vivid non-lucid* dream brings sharp dream images into the mind, accompanied by a mounting sense of mental spaciousness and a slowing of the heart rate and breathing. In the creative trance, it's easy to follow the images as they morph and flow, and they can

appear with such strength and presence that they can virtually be hallucinated onto the page; all we have to do is describe them. A dream image can take you anywhere: it can morph into a childhood memory, lead you to a personal insight, or allow you to reexperience a nightmare without fear. This is the key to the transformative potential of Lucid Writing: we allow the dream image to change and morph into something else. Let's take a look at the steps into Lucid Writing.

### **Practice #26: The Lucid Writing Technique**

1. Before you begin, consider which dream you'd like to focus on. It's best to choose something vivid and emotional. Focus on one core image rather than a long, convoluted plot. Not only lucid dream imagery but any vivid dream imagery is perfect as a lead-in to Lucid Writing. Dreams are our very own personalised mental imagery, and they are often emotionally charged and radiant.

2. Have a pen and notepad close to hand. Sit comfortably on a sofa or armchair. Close your eyes and keep them closed throughout the next steps.

3. Breathe calmly and deeply several times, then let your breath rise and fall in its own natural rhythm. Observe the breath moving in and out like the ocean breathing.

4. Inhale deeply, and as you do so, turn your head to the right. As you exhale, allow your head to move slowly back to the centre. Inhale as you turn your head to the left. As you exhale, your head returns to the centre. Do this combined breath-and-head movement for a while, then return your head to the centre and relax.

5. Visualise golden light cascading slowly over your body, from head to toe. Consciously relax each part of your body as the light bathes it ... head, shoulders, chest, belly, hips, legs, and feet. Focus all your thought and energy on making this bath of light come to life. Allow any unrelated thoughts to drift past without grasping onto them.

6. When you are completely bathed in golden light, create a space in your mind—a luminous, golden space.

7. Now bring your chosen dream image into this golden space. Feel it come alive with emotions, colours, and sensations. Your dream image may move and transform into something else, and you can let this happen. Stay with the flow of imagery as long as you like.

8. When you feel ready, open your eyes just very slightly, take up your pen, and write without stopping, without caring about spelling or punctuation and without judging what you are writing. Simply let it flow out without analysing it. You might find yourself writing about a waking life memory, or extending and changing the dream story. All this is good; let the writing go wherever it goes. If you ever get stuck, simply return mentally to your dream imagery and continue to write without stopping until you feel you are done.

9. If you prefer to do a variation that doesn't involve writing, continue with the medium of your choice: collaging, doodling, or speaking your observations aloud into a recording device.

## How to Stay in a Lucid Trance

Once we get into a lucid trance, how do we keep the imagery intense and spontaneous without popping back into “normal” waking consciousness and losing it all? Author Stephen King comments on his own experience:

Creative imaging and dreaming are just so similar that they've got to be related ... You're able to put yourself into that sort of semi-dreaming state—whether you're dreaming or whether you're writing creatively the brainwaves are apparently interchangeable ... I can remember finding that state for the first time and being delighted. It's a little bit like finding a secret door in a room but not knowing exactly how you got in.<sup>115</sup>

A vastly prolific creative writer, Stephen King clearly worked out how to find his “secret door” at will. The location of the door may be a little different for everyone, but the overwhelming majority of creative people and creativity researchers agree that it seems at its most accessible when we cultivate a state that mingles waking and dreaming consciousness. Just as the lucid dreamer edges towards waking consciousness while asleep, so we edge towards dreaming consciousness in the creative trance. Consciousness researcher Bert States compares lucid dreaming with the creative trance. He speaks of a “hybrid zone of lucidity” and explains that “just as the lucid dreamer is slightly awake, slightly outside the dream, while being largely inside it, so the waking author is slightly asleep, or slightly inside the fiction, while being largely outside it.” <sup>116</sup>

The connection between lucid dreaming and the creative trance doesn’t stop with this metaphor. In lucid dreams, the dreamer’s awareness that he’s dreaming permits him to guide the dream if he wants to, banishing scenes and imagery that he doesn’t want and invoking what he would like to see. Similarly, in the creative trance we have a sound enough grasp of our waking faculties to guide the imagery as it unfolds before our eyes.

In an era in which creative thinking is demanded more and more in business, the creative trance seems a sought-after experience, and plenty of people have hit on their own favourite method for getting into the zone. These methods often include a writing element: American novelist John Gardner counsels us to sit in a darkened room and engage in autohypnosis before reaching for pen and paper; authors Julia Cameron and Dorothea Brande invite us to write free-form immediately after waking up so that we are still in the more creative right-brain mode; and creative writing teacher Natalie Goldberg encourages us to write quickly and recklessly at any time of day, on any subject, to escape the censorious grip of conscious thought. Others make frequent mention of dreams—they should be remembered, recorded, and drawn on for ideas and inspiration.

In *Lucid Writing*, *relaxation, dreams, and writing without stopping are all combined.*

When we become lucid in a dream, we occasionally need to stabilise our state so as not to wake up or slip into non-lucid dreaming. In the same way, we need to learn to stabilise the creative trance. How do we stay present to our mental imagery? John Gardner writes:

In the writing state—the state of inspiration—the fictive dream springs up fully alive ...When the dream flags he [the writer] can reread what he's written and find the dream starting up again. *This and nothing else is the desperately sought and tragically fragile writer's process ... the fictive dream or vision becoming more and more lucid, until reality, by comparison, seems cold, tedious, and dead.* This is the process he must learn to set off at will and to guard against hostile mental forces.<sup>117</sup>

With Lucid Writing, the way into the creative zone is not fiction, but dreams. Since lucid and non-lucid dreams are emotionally charged imagery, they provide the perfect kickoff point for mental imaging, giving us a strong focus and utilising our natural capacity to develop internal visual imagery in the waking state. Like lucid dreaming, the creative trance can be a delicate state, easily broken by a loss of focus, or difficult to initiate in the first place.

Rereading what we've written is one way of reentering the creative trance if we lose it for a moment, but for the internal imagery to continue, the physical world surrounding us mustn't be allowed to intrude too strongly upon the inner, psychic world of visual imagery. Just as noises from the street or from members of our family sometimes become part of our dream narratives, so our perception of our physical surroundings might inform our Lucid Writing, so that a bird singing outside the window is incorporated. But the repeated slamming of a door in the wind may eject us from the creative trance. Reentering the initial dream and focusing again on its imagery is the best way of maintaining the lucid trance.

## Stabilising the Trance

Stabilising the creative trance feels a bit like looking at one of those 3-D images where at first glance the picture looks like an abstract mess of colour until you relax and look “through” this surface, and then the inner 3-D picture opens up and you can focus on the figures or objects, even moving your gaze confidently between one and the other for a time ... before suddenly losing them and finding yourself outside the picture again. But if you’ve seen the 3-D images once, it’s much easier to find them again, as your mind has learned the trick of focusing the eyes in a certain (slightly cross-eyed) way. We need to find this same “cross-eyed way” of perceiving, only with mental imagery rather than a physical picture.

With waking mental imagery, the trick is to relax your mental focus, and relaxing your vision comes into this too. Some of my workshop participants do the Surrealists’ automatic writing technique of staring into the middle distance with unfocused, blurry vision. Others half-open their eyes and gaze through their writing hand, through the page, as they keep the dream imagery alive. The golden rule of Lucid Writing is *not to stop writing even if you can’t think of anything to write*. If you’ve ever sat down and tried to empty your mind and meditate, you’ll know that the mind refills so quickly—it’s like a morphing machine, almost impossible to still. So if you don’t know what to write and you haven’t completed your five-minute writing stint yet, just start writing “I don’t know what to write,” and I guarantee that in the space of those short seconds, something else will have come to mind. The one exception to the write-without-stopping rule is if something that feels too traumatic to handle comes up. In that case, stop writing and talk to a trusted friend or counsellor.

Practising dream lucidity stabilisation can help with creative trance stabilisation—the skills from each feed into each other, as they are very similar states. The inner focus and intent lucid dreamers need when lucidity begins to slip is virtually identical to the inner focus and intent sometimes needed to keep a creative trance going. Meditation works with a similar balance: in meditation, we try to maintain inner focus without going too far in one direction and getting caught up in crazy mental scenarios, or going

too far the other way and dropping off to sleep. If we practise this kind of inner balance, we can expect to have more stability both in lucid dreams and in waking lucid trance states.

## Tackling Nightmares in the Lucid Trance

Lucid Writing is more than a creative aid; it can be useful in similar ways to lucid dreaming, and particularly in the area of transforming nightmares. Have you ever wished you could have become lucid in a nightmare? *You can add lucidity to the dream once you awaken from it.* Some people are such gifted visualisers that just writing down a dream sends them deep into the creative trance. These days, cognitive psychologists are successfully incorporating writing into the treatment of nightmares. Dr. Joanne Davis, author of *Treating Post-Trauma Nightmares*, explains how this works:

Clinically we have observed that the process of writing out the nightmare seems to take the power out of the nightmare ... One participant, after writing out her nightmare, was staring at her writing with an odd expression on her face. When asked about this, she said incredulously, “This is it? This is what I’ve been afraid of all this time?”

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Simply writing out the nightmare as it occurred might not be enough for some nightmares. Changing and *reimagining* dream images is a simple yet powerful process. Davis shares a case study of a woman, Mary, who had long suffered domestic violence and had frequent nightmares that usually followed the pattern of her lying in bed and hearing an intruder enter the house. She would be frozen with fear, knowing she was about to die, and she would peer over her blankets to make sure the door was locked even though she knew the intruder would force his way in anyway. When she rewrote the dream, she heard someone enter the house, and peered *under* the blankets—to check she was wearing her best negligee, because she knew Richard Gere was coming upstairs to join her! Humour can change



nightmares in a flash and simultaneously remove their power over us. Davis remarks:

Similar to the Riddikulus curse invoked in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999), the use of humor appears to change not only the image but also the way that we think about the object of fear ... As Professor Lupin notes, “The charm that repels a Boggart is simple, yet it requires force of mind. You see, the thing that really finishes a Boggart is *laughter*. What you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find amusing.” <sup>119</sup>

In Lucid Writing, we have the choice—just as in lucid dreams—of consciously influencing the dream material, or allowing it to develop totally spontaneously. We’ll usually know intuitively what the right approach is for a particular dream. Consciously influencing the imagery is simple—we can just think of something, and the imagery, being thought-responsive, usually reacts to this. We might think: “The men will stop fighting now,” or “That troll isn’t so frightening; it’s actually kind of sweet.” Often, there’s no need to think purposefully or direct the imagery, as it will move and change seemingly of its own accord, as in this Lucid Writing that Irishwoman Barbara Bolger did at an event I led:

I feel a presence, it’s scary. I’m terrified but don’t know why. I realise I’m standing on something, I don’t know what it is. It’s humming and vibrating and as I look around it starts to take shape. I’m standing on the leg of a huge Demon! I’m terrified but I keep looking and I don’t move and something changes. It changes colour; it’s gold and when I look again it’s a big reclining Buddha, lying with its head in its palm. It’s not that scary anymore and I’m not afraid and then it changes again. It turns into plastic and then it starts to melt or disappear and I’m not scared and now it’s gone.

After the Lucid Writing exercise, Barbara wrote to me: “So my nightmare Demon transformed with the lucid writing into a Buddha and then disappeared. I was just letting the pen/subconscious do its thing. I was amazed at how transformative the exercise was! It was lovely that this dream changed as I wrote and as I was not controlling the writing, it was a pleasant surprise. Something that had been so terrifying was now being brushed off. It changed the energy of the dream really.”

Changing the energy of the dream is a good description of what can happen in Lucid Writing; when we reexamine our nightmare images in a safe space, feeling open to change, we are effectively changing our own attitude towards the scary image. When we change our attitude from fear to curiosity in a lucid dream, the resulting transformation of the imagery is often instantaneous, and so it is with Lucid Writing.

## Changing Psychological Behaviours

One of my weekend creativity courses combines yoga, creative writing, art, and dreamwork with nature walks. It’s a lovely way for people to connect with themselves and explore their creativity in an intimate group setting, but it can also be pretty intense for participants. In one of these courses there was a nice woman who seemed jittery and unsure of herself. During the yoga session when everyone was lying on their backs for the initial relaxation, I held her ankles gently and rolled them from side to side to relax her legs from the hips, as she was lying as stiff as a board. The feel of her energy shocked me—it was like handling tightly knotted bunches of electric cables. There was incredible tension but no flow. No wonder she couldn’t relax; she was holding everything in—her emotions, her memories, her very core—as if her life depended on it.

After the yoga, we talked about how we can allow dream imagery and dream emotions to transform in our mind’s eye if it feels right, and everyone chose a dream. I led them through a guided visualisation and relaxation and they began their Lucid Writing. Afterwards we shared our

experiences, and the woman was very moved and tearful. She told us of the dream she'd worked with, one where she was piloting a plane in the middle of a violent electrical storm. In the dream, even though another plane flew alongside to try to help her land safely, she was terrified and convinced she would crash and die. In her writing, something fundamental changed—*she relived the dream without fear*. Freed from her blind panic, she was able to accept help from the other plane and land safely, and as she did so, the storm receded and the skies cleared.

This enabled her to understand for the first time on a deep level that it is possible to live through difficult situations without fear, and that this can transform everything. She explained that she was being bullied at work by her boss and had developed a victim mentality that was spilling over into all areas of her life, including her intimate relationships. Now she realised it was time to stop being frozen with fear and act to transform her life into something better. In those short moments of writing, she had suddenly recognised an entire complex pattern of behaviour, and now she said she felt free to steer away from the crash course she was set on, accept help, and begin to change.

At the Gateways of the Mind conference in London in 2013, I led an auditorium of people into the creative trance. Many people approached me with open hearts throughout the rest of the weekend to share their dreams and tell me about their Lucid Writing. Katriona Guild has dreamed time and again about rushing rivers. At Gateways, she worked on a dream where she was running close to the River Spey, the fastest river in Britain. She told me about what happened in her Lucid Writing:

I went down to the river, it was rushing crashing going really fast and I didn't want to go with it but in a weird scary way it fascinated me like a monster in my dreams! I turned it into the sea. It was calmer and green-blue like my father instead of my mother: all aquamarine and sandy white beach, white birds, tranquillity. The rushing water was scary because I didn't know if it would rise and sweep me away, but the sea

energy is just a transformation of this. I can go with the river energy and get to the sea, don't need to hold on, just go with it in a giving-in sort of way.

Here is Katriona's account of the aha moment, or sudden, deep insight, that took place when she reread her Lucid Writing:

I realised when I re-read all this I have been associating my mother with the river and my father with the sea. I'm being dualistic! Whereas one flows into the other and the sea produces rivers again. They are one, can't have one without the other! I've been having river dreams as long as I can remember dreaming and have been stuck with the idea water was my emotions that I couldn't seem to control. Now this has helped me not to fear the river: I've been stuck with feeling I had to be determined not to be swept along by my mother all my life, now I feel it's okay, I can go along with it and I won't lose myself! What a relief ... It really changes so much for me.

Being led through the writing experience opened up a new approach which just worked like magic. I couldn't get over how quickly I got an immediate answer to a stuck part of me I'd been struggling with for so long without really realising the enormity of the massive big heavy immovable object I've been stuck behind ... like the men knowing how to use leverage to move pyramids into place. Looks like magic and is, but actually it's not the huge effort you'd expect!

This is an example of how psychological blocks can be released and "unstuck" when people are feeling stuck in some aspect of their lives. It's incredible how quickly we can reshape ourselves when we allow our internal imagery to go beyond where we have previously allowed it to go. The Lucid Writing exercise that Katriona participated in took only ten minutes, including the introductory visualisation. In non-lucid dreams we can put hugely powerful blocks on our psyche so that we end up rerunning the same situation in the form of recurrent dreams and nightmares. If we

introduce an element of conscious awareness and are brave and adventurous enough to allow our dream imagery to develop further, the insights we achieve can be transformative, both in lucid dreams and in waking trance states. Soon after the Lucid Writing session, Katriona wrote to tell me she was so excited about learning to go with the flow of the river that she had booked herself on a whitewater rafting trip!

## Lucid Trance as an Outlet for Trauma

Acknowledging a trauma can be a vital first step on the road to health and happiness. A scriptwriter who came to me for mentoring in the areas of lucid dreaming and creativity told me about a lucid trance he slipped into once while at the cinema. Although he reconnected to painful suppressed memories while in the trance, he described it as the most creative state he'd ever experienced and he wished he could find out what it was and learn how to recreate it. The film was shot in video, which created a pixelated effect on the big screen and so may have facilitated a lucid trance.

My attention started to drift away but my eyes kept right on the screen. One of the images came alive for me as an image of my own mind and I started to see my own film imprinted on the real film screen. These were moving images with dialogue. I allowed the story to flow easily and effortlessly and thought to myself: I'd like to remember all of this when it finishes. I was aware of being the creator of all this, but I wasn't making any effort to make it happen. The scenes were filled with very emotional content for me.

He wrote down all he'd seen in his film-in-the-head and developed it into a script, barely editing it. He'd been studying creativity from a cognitive perspective for years until this event, which inspired him to research ways to tap into the subconscious and also started him on a personal journey of discovery:

I've undergone a bit of therapy since the experience and I have discovered that I was a victim of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse as a child. I don't know the full details, but everything I know—which are just quick horrible flashes—has been confirmed to be true. This may explain why this experience took place ... My belief now is that I was using an “outside window” to unleash memories connected to trauma creatively, in dream form.

How can we be awake but dreaming? People ask this question about lucid dreaming, but we might very well ask the same question of lucid trances like the one just described, where we watch a dreamlike inner film while knowing we're creating it. Carlos Schenck, MD, author of *Sleep* and a world expert on sleep disorders, told me what he thinks:

All mammals are capable of mixed sleep and waking, and with the sleep mode in those mixed states, there can be dreaming, especially when the person is primed by prior traumatic experience. Also, if a person is sleep-deprived, then it is much easier to be sleepy during the daytime and more easily enter a trance state and waking dream state.

Remembering childhood trauma is inevitably painful, but it can also be the gateway to deep healing. As with dreams and dreamwork of any type, since lucid trances bring us into such close contact with our unconscious, there's always the possibility that repressed traumatic memories will come up. This in itself is not necessarily a bad thing, as knowing about such things gives us a chance to heal them, but it can be extremely upsetting and shocking. If this happens to you during any kind of dream or trance work, stop if it feels too much, and enlist the help of a trained psychotherapist or counsellor. The fastest way to eject yourself from a lucid trance is to stand up, walk around, breathe fresh air, and eat or drink something sweet. All these actions return you to your body and waking reality.

We all have an innate story-making ability. Working with this natural ability in lucid trance states can bring home to us the fact that we are all

extraordinarily creative in our own individual way. As we learn to guide lucid trance imagery, we can visualise healing change and provoke a profound process of integration, just as we can when we become lucid inside a nightmare. But what about those who don't get any mental imagery when they close their eyes—what can they do?

## Can You See with Your Eyes Closed?

It is highly likely that everyone who has not been blind from a young age can see with their eyes closed. When we dream, entire worlds of imagery leap into existence around us with such irrefutable realism that most of the time we don't even realise we're dreaming. Yet sometimes people find it nearly impossible to conjure up mental imagery with closed eyes while awake. Everyone is different, and when it comes to highly subjective things like the ability to be hypnotised, or the relative vividness of internal imagery, or how “good” we are at meditating, the differences seem enormous.

When I begin private mentoring sessions with a client who wants to learn to lucid dream or increase their creativity, I ask the following questions: Do you remember your dreams and how vivid are they? What happens in your head when you meditate? If you close your eyes and try to see an object like an apple, how clearly can you see it? Do you often daydream? How long does it take you to go to sleep? Do you see imagery immediately before falling asleep? How easily do you sink into a light trance? Would you describe yourself as a visual or auditory person? And so on. This is so I can build up a picture of the way this person experiences trance and dream states, before working out the best way to progress with them. Try asking yourself these questions; it's quite fun and very useful if you're serious about getting more lucid in dreams and in waking.

Sometimes when I explain Lucid Writing to a group for the first time and say that we'll be following our internal imagery, people protest that they won't be able to do this, as they are not effective visualisers: when they

close their eyes, the world goes dark and that's that. This always makes me think of lucid dream researcher Ed Kellogg's experience. Initially, he rated his visualisation skills as zero out of ten. Ed resolved to bridge the gap, and in large part attributes his success (he now rates his visualisation skills as a three or four) to writing his dreams down every day for years. If we're as determined as Ed, we can increase our visualisation skills, and recalling and writing down dreams seems one way of doing this. The interesting thing is, the workshop participants who say they can't visualise somehow often still manage to produce wonderfully flowing pieces of Lucid Writing with vivid memories and scenes. Maybe for them a similar hidden imaging process is happening as with Ed, who can draw from memory without actually visualising in his mind's eye.

Of course, some people are on the opposite end of the visualisation scale, and workshop participants often tell me they can see their dream imagery even when they half-open their eyes in broad daylight to write. Writing about her experience with Lucid Writing in one my workshops, children's author Bettina Lippenberger writes: "It was strange. When I opened my eyes to write, I could still see the moving images, the dreadful tree-birds, the mountain, the sky black and threatening. The red eyes of the birds gleamed in the dusk."

If you do find visualising very hard and no amount of effort seems to improve it, drop the visual aspect of lucid trances and focus instead on the emotions and energy of your dream. Use these as a springboard into your unconscious. Focusing on a dream figure and writing out a dialogue with him or her can also be a fascinating way of exploring the dream and taking it beyond what actually happened and into the transformative realm of the creative imagination, where there are no limits and we create our own inner reality. A quotation attributed to Pablo Picasso goes, "Everything you can imagine is real." (Notice that he didn't say, "Everything you can *visualise* is real"!) You don't need to be a good visualiser to benefit from the creativity and originality of lucid trances: Lucid Writing and its variations at the end of this chapter (such as Lucid Sound or Lucid Doodling) can act as an



ongoing way of checking in with ourselves in a lucid trance and receiving guidance and inspiration from a similar mix of conscious and unconscious processes that we experience in lucid dreams.

## Why Experiment with Lucid Writing and Lucid Trances?

Engaging with lucid trance states can help us to trigger more lucid dreams, become better at maintaining stable lucidity once we become lucid in a dream, explore our unconscious in creative and healing ways, and practise twenty-four-hour lucid dreaming. Playing with imagery in a lucid trance prepares us to guide lucid dreams if we wish to, and provides us with a powerful visualisation practice that we can use to improve all areas of our life.

For more than a decade, teaching my techniques in workshops has shown that combining a dream with a self-induced waking trance can be a gateway to unlocking the unconscious and working with it to create something new, whether this is a new perspective on a behaviour pattern, a new stream of healing imagery, or a new idea or creative concept. I always start Lucid Writing sessions with simple yoga breathing techniques to centre participants, align the left and right brain halves, and bring people into contact with their bodies and inner space. For some, though, this isn't enough. I've seen workshop participants stop writing and hunch tensely over their paper despite my reminder to "write without stopping." No matter how much they want to, some people just can't do it at first.

Sometimes any resistance we may have to facing unconscious material is easier to succumb to when we write, because when the resistance makes itself known, our body simply seizes up and stops writing, so we're ejected from the trance. When this happens, the resistance wins, and we get nowhere. If Lucid Writing doesn't work for you, it's fine, because exactly the same technique can be done in other ways. The following practice

section gives you some alternative Lucid Dreamplay techniques that I've developed and taught in group settings. For the majority of these techniques, it is helpful to focus on a vivid dream in order to kick off the process.

### **Practice #27: Lucid Doodling**

If writing is not your thing, then sketching or doodling your dream images can also be effective. The initial relaxation and visualisation described in the Lucid Writing Technique (practice 26) earlier in this chapter help the dream to become clear in your mind's eye, and then you can see what your pen or paintbrush creates. One exercise I've tried in groups is where, rather than trying to draw the dream imagery directly, you focus on the energy of the dream, and as you do, you allow your pen to spin and dance on the paper in a free series of loops, squiggles, shapes, or whatever it wants to do. You can do this with eyes open or closed, whichever feels best. Holding the pen in the non-dominant hand can be a good way of communicating more directly with the unconscious, as it removes the element of critical judgment. When you feel you've done enough doodling, look at what you've done and then, still with the dream in mind, write words here and there among your doodle, or colour bits of it in until it feels finished. Then take a look at what you've done and see if any further associations or ideas come up around the dream.

It can be good to combine writing with doodling. In 2003, when I needed to come up with a meaningful lucid dream figure for one of my novel characters, an elephant showed up in my Lucid Writing. Soon afterwards I had a wonderful lucid dream in which I saw an elephant emerging from a giant tree trunk in the centre of a roundabout in India. In the dream, the elephant was suspended halfway up the tree, emerging from it into midair. Upon waking, I wrote about the lucid dream elephant, mixed with thoughts of my novel character, until it began to morph in my mind's eye. I watched

as my tree elephant sprouted wings and flew into the sky. I sketched it on my piece of paper, then focused on my sketch to help me find out more about it. I wrote quickly and without thinking, and when I read through what I'd written I saw that the winged elephant, with its startling blue eyes, represented my character's dead baby sister. This mixture of Lucid Writing and Lucid Doodling not only honed the physical appearance of the elephant but also identified its role in the novel.

### **Practice #28: Lucid Talking**

In his book *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, psychologist Dr. James Pennebaker says that when it comes to resolving experiences that we tend to dream about or think about too much, talking into a recording device can be just as effective as writing it down.

Choose a vivid dream as a starting point. After doing an initial relaxation and visualisation technique, instead of writing you can simply speak into a recording device, describing your visual imagery, sensations, and impressions as they morph and change. This way, the eyes can also remain completely closed, which can strengthen any visual imagery. Lying down in a darkened room and doing this Lucid Talking in a deeply relaxed state can be very similar to lucid dreaming if a clear connection is kept with the internal imagery. If a recording device feels too impersonal, try it with a trusted friend instead, taking turns to listen and take notes while the other talks through their dream and beyond, into whatever magical changes may occur in the trance.

The Surrealists used to help each other out with a mixture of talking and writing; one would go into a hypnagogic trance and mumble aloud, describing the imagery that he was seeing, while someone else jotted down all that was said. Surrealists used these bizarre images and disjointed phrases to explore the unconscious and create art.

When the body is relaxed and dream imagery is played with in the mind's eye, Lucid Talking can be as easy as describing a scene. Dialogue can be included, as can emotions, colours, and actions as the inner dream plays out and transforms.

### **Practice #29: Lucid Sculpture**

Once, at an event I attended in Russia, there was a big boring dinner and I watched in fascination as a teenage boy at my table, oblivious to everyone, created a sculpture from candle wax and an apple, which he carved into a grimacing face and named “Herr Zorn” (Mr. Angry). I found his complete absorption in his task calming, and it made me smile. Here, despite all the stuffy speeches and overdressed adults, this kid had escaped into his imagination and come up with an original creation: a daydream sculpture!

The Surrealists invented many amusing games to encourage unconscious content to emerge, and one of these they called “automatic sculpture,”<sup>120</sup> where any sort of malleable material, from safety pins to paper napkins, is moulded without conscious intention while the artist rides a bus, attends a meeting, or engages in any other activity. Lucid Sculpture is different in that its starting point is a dream, so we focus on dream imagery to enter and maintain the trance, and what we are creating is dream art. Anything can be used, including clay, a bagful of sand, leaves gathered in the woods, or coloured beads.

Not only sculpture but also collaging, creating music, and dancing can be wonderful ways of engaging with dreams in trance states, as they strip away inhibitions and activate a heightened state of emotional awareness. To encourage self-understanding, it can be beneficial to combine non-language-based dreamwork with either writing or talking about the experience afterwards, as this heightens the lucid engagement with the dream.

### Practice #30: Lucid Sound

Sound can be a powerful medium for getting into a lucid trance. At the 2013 Gateways of the Mind conference in London, transpersonal psychotherapist Martin Duffy led the audience on a guided sound journey with shamanic drumming. My internal imagery grew brighter and more real in response to the music and Martin's occasional directives, and changed in utterly surprising and spontaneous ways, just as in a lucid dream:

I was on a beach and a Bengal tiger emerged from the jungle and came and stood close to me. We looked into each other's eyes for a long beat of time and then to my amazement he raised a paw and ripped me open from throat to navel. Looking down, I saw six points of light inside me, like a row of shirt buttons. I recognised these as very precious things I have lost and still grieve over. I knew I had to heal them, and tried to do this by sending energy to myself and closing the flesh back together. Then the drumming grew more intense and I danced with the Bengal tiger—boom, boom, pounding my bare feet into the sand. The music changed and beings of light lifted me under the armpits and waved me from side to side in the cool air. As the drumming died, I stood alone on the beach, naked, facing the sea and feeling deeply cleansed.

With that kind of intense internal imagery, who needs paper and pen? It was like a waking dream, shocking and healing in equal measure. Opening my eyes into the quivering silence when the drumming stopped was like waking up from a deep sleep; it felt most odd to be surrounded by hundreds of people! You don't need a shamanic drummer to get you into a lucid trance—put on some music at home (the sound of waves on the shore can be pretty effective, or just any music you love), do the relaxation and visualisation techniques

described in practice 26, then sit or lie down and reenter your dream with lucid awareness and see where it takes you. In a workshop or classroom setting, playing chill-out music or drumming can work wonders at getting participants to release their usual inhibitions and go more deeply into their minds.

[contents]

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  107. Carson, *Your Creative Brain*, 262.
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## CHAPTER 10

# *Improve Physical Skills: Lucid Kickboxing, Guitar Riffs, and Scuba Diving*

Once a lucid dreamer has grasped the golden tools of lucidity—intent, clarity, and expectation (ICE)—certain benefits seem within reach. One of these is the improvement of waking life motor skills, ranging from coin flipping to guitar playing to kung fu. But how can something we do in a lucid dream affect our waking life performance? Surely if everyone enters a natural state of paralysis in sleep, no dream action will register on our sleeping body?

Yet scientific studies show that dreamed actions *do* have a physical effect on the body. Back in 1953, Dr. Eugene Aserinsky and Dr. Nathaniel Kleitman discovered rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, and as Keith Hearne demonstrated in his groundbreaking 1975 experiment, changes in the direction of a lucid dreamer's gaze can be reliably recorded on an EEG machine, as the dreamer's physical eyes follow the same movement. In 1982 Stephen LaBerge and William Dement showed that lucid dreamers have voluntary control over their breath. Pre-agreed breathing patterns were measured in the sleep lab, with independent judges correctly identifying the particular pattern lucid dreamers were attempting.<sup>121</sup> Other studies have found evidence of voluntary control of muscle groups during REM sleep.



LaBerge and colleagues observed that a sequence of left and right dream-fist clenches resulted in a corresponding sequence of left and right forearm twitches.<sup>122</sup>

Mental rehearsal techniques have been used for years by sports psychologists working with Olympic and professional athletes. Lucid dream actions stimulate the same area of the brain that is stimulated if the action is performed or imagined while awake. In 2011, scientists from the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich asked subjects to perform a fist-clenching task first physically while fully awake, then in their imagination, and then while lucid dreaming. Using brain-imaging technology, they found that the same parts of the brain became active in each state of consciousness.<sup>123</sup> This study not only shows that dreamed action activates the sensorimotor cortex, it also uses lucid dreaming to provide the first demonstration of imaging of specific dream contents—a landmark in the scientific quest to understand how dreams work.

In 1981, German sports psychologist Paul Tholey asked lucid dreamers to practise complex sports they were familiar with in waking life, such as skiing, while they were dreaming. They did this with ease and reported that their waking skills seemed to have improved correspondingly.<sup>124</sup> Why might this be the case? Lucid dreaming can provide us with a highly realistic, 360-degree, multisensory simulation of the waking world, and science shows that actions we carry out in the dream world, in our dream bodies, leave their stamp on our brain. This means that if we practise a tennis stroke in a lucid dream, we may reasonably find that when we wake up and go to the tennis court we notice the difference. It seems that lucid dreamers can access the same neurological activity that they access when engaging in skill mastery while awake. This, combined with the power of memory, the use of the five senses, and the looser creative boundaries of the dreaming mind, makes for a powerful combination.

In this lucid dream from 1996, I practise a new skill—juggling—and understand on a physical level that all my forearms need to do is make

small circles with my cupped palms open and the balls will automatically be thrown and caught in synchrony:

I become lucid while playing with my new juggling balls. Instead of lunging erratically at the balls as they fly past my nose (as I had while learning to juggle the previous day), in the dream I instinctively relax, breathe from my belly, look not at the balls but into the middle distance, and feel my arms swing in synchrony. Upon waking up I am able to juggle three balls in long sequences, something I was previously hopeless at. Something had “clicked” in the lucid dream and my body now understood the rhythm.<sup>125</sup>

Okay, so I didn’t suddenly become a famous juggler overnight, but that was the dream where it clicked. The kinaesthetic feeling is just so strong in lucid dreams that your body remembers it when you wake up. Getting better at juggling three balls is a humble step on the way to understanding more about the connection between the dream body and the physical body.

## Is Lucid Dream Training More Effective Than Waking Imagination Training?

Why bother going to the trouble of getting lucid to practise a skill? Couldn’t we achieve the same results by lounging around in a hammock while awake and imagining ourselves playing a Tchaikovsky piano concerto or kickboxing? It seems not: the 2011 Max Planck study suggests that performing a physical action in a lucid dream has a stronger effect on the brain than simply imagining it while awake. The most active brain response was in the waking state, and researchers noted that the response was stronger during the dreamed task compared to imagining the movements while awake. Researcher Dr. Michael Czisch explains: “Our dreams are therefore not a ‘sleep cinema’ in which we merely observe an event passively, but involve activity in the regions of the brain that are relevant to

the dream content.”<sup>126</sup> A 2000 study by LaBerge and Zimbardo experimented with dreamed, imagined, and waking perception and found that lucid dream perception was much clearer than imagined perception and nearly identical to waking perception.<sup>127</sup>

The usefulness of lucid dreaming for skill learning is linked not only to visual perception, of course, but also to the “complete immersion” experience of being inside the dream world and inside a simulation of a physical body. Personally, I’ve acquired an understanding of the fluidity of body movements through experiencing yoga poses in the gravity-free, pain-free state of lucid dreaming. Never in a lucid dream have I felt overstretched in a forward bend so that the backs of my thigh muscles burn, or had a limb lock at the wrong moment. It’s all about flow, effortless and beautiful. I feel very much in harmony with my dream body, and this harmony in my limbs and muscles carries over into the waking state, like a cellular memory.

Imagine sitting effortlessly in the lotus position with no ankle strain and no backache, or holding a difficult pose without your muscles starting to tremble. This is possible in a lucid dream! The mental harmony and relaxation experienced in the lucid dream is transferred to our efforts when awake. Of course, since I have a physical body in the waking state, yoga is considerably more effortful, but I’ve noticed that the mindset from my lucid dream yoga is carried over too, so that I am more serene while holding the postures.

Lithuanian lucid dream researcher Tadas Stumbrys and colleagues compared the effectiveness of lucid dream motor-task practice to actual physical practice and to mental practice while awake,<sup>128</sup> and Tadas remarked to me that simulation in lucid dreams is much more real than in waking imagination. Of course, we have to be a little careful about what people understand by “waking imagination.” There are surface types of imagination, such as being asked to close your eyes with no prior relaxation and then trying to visualise something. You can feel your eyelids jumping because they want to open, you’re distracted by sounds and sensations from

the waking world, and the mental imagery (if there is any at all) is washed-out and jittery. Yet imagination occurs on a gradient, from “wide awake imagination” to “lightly relaxed imagination” and then down into “deep imagination,” combined with physical relaxation triggered by meditation, yoga nidra, or listening to a shamanic drumming CD.

In these deeper imaginative states, I’ve experienced for myself that visualisation can be an incredibly vivid flow of colour and movement. In fact, many of my novel scenes emerge from this imaginative state, as described in chapter 9 on creative trances. Mental rehearsal is popular in sports, but much of its effectiveness is dependent on how vivid the internal imagery is and how deeply relaxed the athlete is. Visualisations in trance states are more effective than at surface levels of imagination. Some people in Melanie Schädlich’s doctoral research sample who practised sports skills in waking meditations also showed improvement; their lucid experiences with their sports helped them with their imagined practice, and vice versa.

I like this approach of each state informing the other—dream lucidity helping waking imagination and vice versa. It seems very organic and natural and is my own favoured practice. Yet as I’ve pointed out, much depends on the individual’s ability to visualise (and relax!) while awake, and lucid dreams can be so vivid and all-encompassing that they seem more real than waking life, so they provide a perfect environment for experimentation. Since there’s general agreement among scientists that lucid dream practice is more effective than regular waking imagination practice, the next question is: How and to what extent can lucid dreaming help us to improve skills?

## How Lucid Dream Creativity Helps Improve Waking Physical Skills

Melanie Schädlich from the University of Heidelberg has carried out one of my favourite lucid dream investigations to date by interviewing a range of

lucid dreamers who practise motor skills ranging from guitar playing to taekwondo sparring in their dreams. The lovely thing about this study is the way it highlights the creative ways in which all these different athletes and musicians engage with their lucid dreams to improve their waking life techniques. Melanie generously allowed me to share her initial research findings at a 2013 conference.<sup>129</sup> Some of the examples are quite amusing, like the guy who swam through a lucid dream pool filled with honey to test the resistance! Others are mind-boggling: what's a "complicated martial arts kick combination laterally reversed"? And this guy did one in a lucid dream and was then able to do it properly for the first time when he woke up. Some are just plain cool, like the person who stood on the surface of a swimming pool and sparred with a flexible column of water. As for why lucid dreaming can help us with physical skills and performance confidence, Melanie says:

Maybe there is a better access to motor memory than in waking practice: one of my participants managed to remember kung fu sequences he wasn't able to remember in waking life. Also you can use the dream state to manipulate perspective, time, equipment, surroundings, even your own body. You can experiment with that and see if it gives you new information. Now, all this could be done in mental practice during wakefulness, but the difference with lucid dream athletic practice is that it feels real or even "super-real." These kinds of experiences can give you a new insight or new physical feelings of a movement and make you feel more confident about it.

One of the athletes in Melanie's study, football coach Mark Hettmanczyk, is a naturally prolific lucid dreamer. He told me he used to assume everyone else was lucid in their dreams too, and shared how he learned in his teens to create his own dream reality and invite his favourite film star into his dreams for fun. Later on, he practised Chinese in his lucid dreams and this improved his speaking level. He practised weight lifting, gymnastics, and

swimming when lucid in his dreams. Having been told by his teacher that he was a hopeless case and would never be any good at swimming (isn't that just the sort of teacher everyone needs!), Mark refused to be put off and diligently practised in his lucid dreams. He ended up getting the highest possible mark for his swimming. In his lucid dreams, he practised his body rolls and tried swimming through three different consistencies by turning the water into yoghurt (he reports that it was easy to stay level in yoghurt) and then honey (he had to use muscle strength to get through it). Finally, just for fun, he filled the entire pool with gummy bears because he fancied swimming through a load of sweets!

Mark's experience beautifully demonstrates the flexibility of the lucid dream world as a training ground for skills. A guitarist in Melanie Schädlich's study speeded up time to play super-fast riffs, while a scuba diver dove so deep in a lucid dream that he experienced a replica of the sensations of nitrogen narcosis that he'd had in waking life. His lucid dive helped him to get a feel for how to move underwater and react to the currents. One woman wanted to spar against someone her own size and weight, and the dream provided her with a soft, flexible "glass" image of herself. A man benefitted from his lucid dream kickboxing practice, which helped him obtain his black belt.

In lucid dreams, we are less critical and more open to new ideas and approaches. There is a tendency for dreamers not to overthink movements but to intuitively go with the flow, and the sense of freedom and possibility in lucid dreams can help us release both psychological and physical blocks. The lucid dream can be a space of learning, if we're open to that. In Melanie's study, one tai chi teacher learned a series of hand movements, or mudras, in his lucid dreams and brought them into his waking practice, even teaching them to his students.

## Feeling the Flow of Energy: Chi or Pranic Flow in and out of the Dream Body

Years ago, as my awareness of the subtle energies in my body increased during my daily yoga practice, I became aware of the correspondence between yoga poses and energy flow in lucid dreams. In lucid dreams where I practise yoga, the feeling of energy flowing through the dream body is incredibly intense and comes on very quickly. It seems that in the dream body we can tap into this energy much faster than when in a physical body. This may be because this life force or energy is the stuff that dream bodies are made of! Unencumbered by weight and pain, the dream body is made up of subtle energy mingled with our innate mental body image and impregnated with our memories of physical and proprioceptive sensations. Melanie Schädlich, speaking of the martial arts practitioners she interviewed, remarked to me, “Especially with qigong and the martial arts, it was often reported that the lucid dreamers could feel their qi flow quite intensely and that the movements felt just how they should feel.”

Some of you may be thinking, “I have no idea what ‘qi flow’ or ‘feeling the flow of energy’ means!” It can be simply a feeling of buzzing warmth, a tingling aliveness. Qigong, tai chi, or yoga classes help people to experience the way that energy moves through the physical body. Energy work with an experienced practitioner is also helpful: shiatsu massage, reflexology, and acupuncture, when done well, can help you to feel the flow of energy in your physical body if you aren’t used to feeling this. Once you’ve experienced it a few times, it can help within the dream as a lucidity trigger, as it heightens body awareness and some find it very similar to the feeling of being in a dream body. Some lucid dreamers, including myself, feel that the act of doing a deep yoga or tai chi session during the day can actually *induce* lucid dreams. For others, therapies like acupressure or shiatsu can have the same effect. The experiences we have in lucid dreams can change the feeling we have in our physical body. Just as we carry the lucid dream memory of perfectly performing a sports skill back to waking

life with us, and *feel* the action in our physical body, so when we practise energy work in dreams, we wake up feeling different.

Over the past two decades of yoga practice, I've had many experiences of waking up from lucid dream yoga to the strong sensation of prana (life force or energy) moving through my physical body. In 2007 I completed my hatha yoga teacher training course and had the following lucid dream:

I become lucid and fly over fields, a country scene, incredibly tranquil. Then I look down and see all these people doing yoga on a vast platform, they're doing the sun salutation and it looks kind of shambolic as they're out of sync with each other, but I fly down to them and join in. As I perform the flowing movements I realise that no matter how chaotic it might look from the air, we are all in perfect harmony because the harmony comes from within our centres, and all our centres are linked as we practise yoga together in this group. I feel uplifted, so happy, stretching my arms to the sky, swooping low to tuck my head into my knees. I can feel the prana flowing through my dream body. After a while I wake up very slowly, floatily. I can feel the spaces between each vertebra and my body tingles from head to toe.

The more time we spend experiencing something in waking life, the more likely we are to dream about it. The more we notice the subtle flow of energy through the physical body, the more likely we are to notice it when we feel it in a dream—and realise from the extra floatiness, the bizarre landscape, or the situation that we are dreaming.

### **Practice #31: How to Play with Movement in Lucid Dreams**

1. Movement in lucid dreams is often fluid and powerful, all the more so when the dream is stable and the dreamer's intent is steady. When I do yoga in lucid dreams, there's a feeling of loose-limbed, bendy-jointed freedom. Knowing I can do anything with my body provokes ecstatic ease and effortless movement. There are strong kinaesthetic sensations; often a tingling all over my skin as when I fly. Test out



simple movements at first, like sweeping both arms above your head, and notice how different it feels to do this in a dream.

2. Just by thinking about going faster we can go faster. Sometimes I “air-swim” in lucid dreams, moving through the dream air as though it were water. Mixing focused intent with a physical movement can be a powerful way to increase speed and agility. I have deliberately contracted my dream body’s stomach muscles and moved my arms and legs faster to air-swim faster.

3. Lucid dream movements remind you to trust your body. In a dream we can’t hurt ourselves, so we have more confidence to try anything out. Sometimes it’s better not to overthink physical stuff, but just *do* it and let it fall into place. If there’s a physical movement you’d love to master in the waking state, practise it next time you go lucid.

4. Try “body magic” in your lucid dreams: Stretch out an arm and watch it grow longer and longer like a Mr. Tickle arm, or grow huge muscles. Bounce up and down as if the ground were a trampoline and see how high you can go. Do backflips, one after the other, like a top gymnast, and know you cannot hurt yourself by doing this!

5. In yoga classes we are told that if we *visualise* ourselves doing the pose perfectly, we’ll get better. In lucid dreams we can actually *do* the pose perfectly and feel it throughout our dream body, which sends a message to the brain. Neural pathways are likely strengthened, and the dreamer wakes up with a clear and deeply physical memory of perfect performance.

## Who Might Benefit from Practising Movement Skills in Lucid Dreams?

From competitive athletes hammering along the track knees-to-elbow to those looking to enjoy walking holidays in retirement, anyone could benefit from practising their chosen movements in a lucid dream. Lucid dreaming

could also be beneficial to people recovering from a sports injury, disabled people, or those whose mobility is temporarily restricted due to an accident. Someone undergoing gruelling hours of physiotherapy could not only experience a wonderful escapism in lucid dreams but also actively practise recommended movements and dare to do things they're on the cusp of achieving in waking life, such as climbing a flight of stairs on crutches. Lucid dreams can help us improve the coordination of a movement; not only can we learn to juggle balls, we could also learn to coordinate two crutches, a healthy leg, and a thigh-high plaster cast.

In a dream, we need have no fear of falling and hurting ourselves. If in waking life someone is wheelchair-bound, they could be gifted with a freer life during their sleeping hours if they so choose. A study into the dreams of paraplegics shows that in dreams, nobody needs to be disabled:

We found ample evidence of the phenomenological experience of movement in our paraplegic subjects. They reported to fly, run, walk, swim, and the frequency and intensity of these experiences was indifferent from that of non-handicapped controls. In the few cases in which a specific body part was mentioned, it was intact! <sup>130</sup>

In this study, Ursula Voss and her colleagues attributed the ability of paraplegics to experience highly intense dreams of walking and swimming to a theory of "protoconsciousness," in which REM sleep is a "virtual reality template" guiding development and maintaining functional capacities like perception and motility. No difference could be seen between the dream reports of paraplegics and able-bodied dreamers, which suggests that all dreamers tap into an innate body image during sleep.

For paraplegics and other severely disabled people, lucid dreaming offers a virtual world where a sensation of full physical health and freedom can be enjoyed. Even though in cases of nerve damage or lack of limbs the power and precision of lucid dream movements can't be transferred to the waking physical body, emotional benefits could be had from running through a

dream jungle or swimming in cool dream waters. These lucid experiences will leave their imprint on the brain in terms of lasting memories and highly realistic kinaesthetic sensations that are unavailable in waking life.

Physical movement and intellectual development are closely linked, especially during the major developmental years of childhood. Getting more physical in lucid dreams (as in waking life) could possibly result in easier or faster acquisition of intellectual skills, or help children with learning difficulties. These are speculative areas ripe for research, and I look forward to further investigations and studies.

## Parlez-Vous Français? Oui!

There's a myth that dreaming in a foreign language means you've mastered it. But even languages I only know a few words of will come into my dreams if I'm travelling in the country, as has happened with Russian, Italian, and Thai. Still, these dreams cement my knowledge (limited though it is!) and give me the confidence to carry on happily making a prat of myself when I engage with the locals the next day. People often comment that they can speak a foreign language only when they've had a few drinks, because when our critical mind fades into the background, we feel free to experiment and string ambitious sentences together without worrying about mistakes. Similarly, reduced inhibition in lucid dreaming triggers easy learning.

We all naturally dream about skills we're trying to master in waking life. I speak five European languages and have practised all of them in my lucid dreams, especially French, as I did a degree in it. Stuck under rainy Lancashire skies as my final exams approached, I would teleport to sunny Montpellier in my lucid dreams and chat to French scholars about topics I was studying for my degree. In fact, not all my dream figures were scholars—one was a black-bearded tramp who spoke with a wonderful growling southern accent that lit up my heart with memories of my time in Montpellier. Those lucid dream figures helped me to graduate with first

class honours, a prize for best performance in the final exams, and an oral distinction. Who says dreams are useless! They provide a 3-D multisensory environment where all manner of skills can be honed in a safe, nonjudgmental space. If we learn to become lucid in our dreams, we gain precious moments of practice when most people are asleep and dreaming of something else.

Lucid dreaming is a living, multisensory, multidimensional theatre stage where people can practise speaking in public without fear, sing or dance uninhibitedly, or rehearse an important argument with a boss, spouse, or colleague. When I lived in Portugal, there was a wonderful weekend retreat in Sintra where I was going to be teaching Lucid Writing and giving a yoga session. Since at that point I hadn't taught yoga in the Portuguese language, I was a bit nervous and felt the need to rehearse. I looked at my Portuguese yoga books and ran through descriptions of postures in my head. Then I had a lucid dream where I was on a small hill above the hotel where we'd be holding the retreat, with the Atlantic Ocean sparkling beyond it. I was doing yoga sequences totally naturally and without any sense of nervousness or pressure, just knowing that everything was flowing and that my body knew what it was doing.

It was a very relaxed dream and I knew that it meant, "Hey, Clare, don't worry about the language. Your body knows what to do. Just demonstrate the postures and talk the participants through at the same time. They will look at your body, and your body will be doing it right, and then they'll be able to do it too!" It was the feeling of "trust your body," because even if you don't know the words, your body knows the movements, so that's all you need—you don't need to be a brilliantly articulate yoga teacher. When I gave the yoga session, I felt strongly that rather than my language guiding the students, my body was guiding us all. The Portuguese followed on quite effortlessly from the movements.

The kinaesthetic feeling of a lucid dream carries over into waking life experience. The body carries the memory of perfection, harmony, or flow that has been experienced in a lucid dream.

## Performance Anxiety Reduction and Confidence Training

Children, who are often spontaneous lucid dreamers, will quickly see their dreams as an arena for the practice of new skills. I know of several athletes who are natural lucid dreamers and who started practising their judo, karate, or horse riding skills in their dreams when they were children. My own daughter joined a water-play group when she turned four and was a little baffled at first by the leg movements the kids were being taught in the pool. After the third session she said, “Do you know what I’m going to dream about tonight? Something I’m learning!” She loves giving little clues, so I made a few wild guesses to satisfy her before hitting on swimming, and when she said this was right, I told her, “You know, if you dream about practising frog-scissors-pencil (leg movements for breast stroke), it’ll help you do it in waking life.” I told her about the lucid dream swimmer who swam through gummy bears, which made her laugh. One morning soon after, she woke me up and said, “I dreamed about a big swimming pool and I was swimming with no swim noodle just like you, Mummy, with nothing!”

Yasmin knew she was dreaming, she said, and so she knew she could swim with no swimming belt or swim noodle. Her dream seemed highly physical: she flung herself onto my bed and showed me how she had kicked her arms and legs furiously to stay afloat, and how she had dived and kicked up to the surface, practising all her skills and trying out brand-new ones too. Lucid dreaming allows the dreamer to perform a sport or other skill perfectly, to go beyond their waking abilities and have a full physical feeling of success along with the psychological feeling of confidence. We can learn new tricks in our lucid dreams and wake up feeling with both mind and body that *we have already done* what seemed so difficult just the day before.

## How Much Time Do We Need to Practise Sports Skills in a Lucid Dream?

Although experiments with counting in lucid dreams have shown dream time to be roughly equivalent to waking time, one study by Daniel Erlacher and Michael Schredl found that performing squats (deep knee bends) took up to 40 percent longer in a lucid dream than in the waking state.<sup>131</sup> This was measured by the lucid dreamers giving prearranged eye signals visible on the EEG monitor before and after completing the dream squats. The researchers speculate that the dream squats took longer than waking squats due to the more complex actions involved and the overall duration of the task.

In my experience, in a lucid dream the different feel to gravity can slow down dreamed movements; for me, somersaulting in midair is not the fast, ball-like spin and drop we witness when gymnasts leap off high boards, but rather a lazy tumble. Running down hills in my lucid dreams is usually not a thud-and-jolt matter, but involves light, astronaut-style leaps. A recent study into the time needed for actions in lucid dreams suggests: “Longer durations [of motor tasks] in lucid dreams might be related to the lack of muscular feedback or slower neural processing during REM sleep.”<sup>132</sup>

Whether it’s about dream physics, the dream body, or neural processing, it seems clear that being able to have long, stable lucid dreams is important for anyone serious about improving sports skills while asleep.

## Will Lucid Dream Practice Replace Waking Practice of Sports?

We’re not likely to hear of top athletes snoozing in their beds all day instead of pumping iron in the gym, but it seems that athletes may have a natural tendency to be lucid dreamers. Tadas Stumbrys told me of a study where he and his colleagues checked the frequency of lucid dreaming in a sample of 840 German athletes:<sup>133</sup>

The roughly estimated percentage of lucid dreams compared to all dreams in athletes was found to be nearly twice as high as in the general population ... 9% of the lucid dreamers used lucid dreams to practise sport skills and the majority of them had the impression that this rehearsal improved their performance in wakefulness. Overall, the findings show that motor skills practice in lucid dreams is feasible and it can improve subsequent performance in wakefulness, however these methods are not (yet) that frequently used by athletes.

Lucid dreaming can be seen as a useful complementary practice and a beneficial sports aid, and I'm confident this is an area that will kick off even more as word gets out about its potential. But we can be pretty sure that actual practice while awake in the usual world of stable gravity and regular time, working with the restrictions of a physical body, will remain the cornerstone of successful athletic practice.

In an experiment by Daniel Erlacher and Michael Schredl, participants were asked to practise tossing a coin into a pot while awake, then practise in their lucid dreams and repeat the task when they woke up to see if there was any improvement.<sup>134</sup> The lucid dreamers *did* get significantly better, as opposed to a group who did not practise at all, but the greatest improvement (marginally better than the lucid dream group) was seen in the group who practised the task while awake. Still, we can increase the amount of time we spend practising a skill without cramming even more into our day by working on it while we're dreaming! This time-saving aspect, along with the major fun factor in experimenting with our dream bodies and slowing or speeding up time, makes practising skills in lucid dreams a hugely attractive option.

### **Practice #32: How to Use Lucid Dreaming to Improve a Skill**

1. Ask yourself: "What exactly do I want to improve? My public speaking, my golf stroke, my athletic confidence?" If you want to

improve a particular movement, you need to have practised it while awake so you're familiar with it.

2. Immerse yourself in the area you want to improve: watch a video on discus throwing or read a book about leading seminars confidently.

3. Decide which lucid dream induction technique you want to use. Early morning meditation followed by a lie-in? Or an afternoon nap? Choose whichever works best for you. A mixture of Wake Back To Bed (WBTB) and the Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams (MILD), along with reality checks and lucid waking, can be a successful combo. Wake-induced lucid dreaming (WILD) also works well for some.

4. Before you sleep, relax deeply and imagine becoming lucid in a dream and practising your chosen skill perfectly and with ease and confidence.

5. Set a strong intention to become lucid in a dream. Repeat an affirmation and really believe and *expect* it will happen: "I'll recognise I'm dreaming and I will improve this skill in my lucid dream."

6. When you become lucid, use the CLEAR stabilisation technique from [chapter 4](#).

7. Once the dream is stable, focus your intent and practise your skill in whatever way seems right at the time. Remember, you can change your dream body, make it longer or lighter or faster. You can slow down time or speed things up. You can change your environment, practise gymnastics in midair, meet a revered mentor who will coach you, change perspective so that you observe yourself from a distance, and ask dream figures for help.

8. Be alert for distracting elements in the dream, such as unhelpful dream figures or conditions that hamper your practice, such as walls tumbling down or your own dream body involuntarily starting to float when you're trying to practise a sports movement. These are signs that you need to stabilise the dream and regain full focus. If necessary,



repeat the CLEAR technique to ground yourself in the dream and maintain focus before continuing to practise your chosen skill.

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## CHAPTER 11

### *Promote Creative Skill: Meet Your Inner Artist and Problem Solver*

In lucid dreams we can dance with elephants, draw like da Vinci, or create an animal never seen before. In exploring the limitless creativity available to us in dreams, we unlock the creative potential we all have inside us. Some creativity researchers suggest that some people are simply not creative types. Maybe they aren't yet, but if they took the chance of connecting more deeply with their dreams, lucid and non-lucid, I'm sure they could break free of their "non-creative" mode. After all, we all dream. Every night. And a universally acknowledged feature of dreams is their inherent creativity. Dreams invent and entertain; they speak in the symbolic language of images—the shortest dream scrap can be creative if we know how to work with it and unwrap it. Wonderful books have been written on dream creativity, but these don't put much of a spotlight on the spectacular here-and-now creativity of lucid dreaming.

When we become aware that we're dreaming, we find ourselves in the unique and exhilarating position of being able to soak up the creativity of the dream *while it's happening*, rather than simply experiencing it as a memory when we wake up. We can guide the dream in specific creative directions or ask it to help us solve a problem.

In a sense, this book is all about creativity, because lucid dreaming is a dazzlingly creative state of consciousness. Creativity isn't only about the

ability to access original ideas and imagery to turn them into art, writing, or sculpture. Creativity is a mode of being: through lucid dreaming, we can alter our thinking to encompass a looser, brighter thought process; we can call on creative energy to heal ourselves and move on from habitual emotional patterns; we can play with creative trance states and reach a deeper understanding of how to co-create both dream and reality. Creativity is the fault line that runs through this book, spanning the mind-blowing creativity of waking up inside a fully formed dream world through various experiences such as improving skills, healing trauma, living a lucid life, and even dying. This chapter focuses on lucid dreaming as an aid to artistic creativity and problem solving.

Psychologist Dr. Shelley Carson's research into creativity suggests that highly creative people have more relaxed mental filters, which means their conscious awareness is flooded with information and perceptions that other people filter out. All this extra information can be combined into creative ideas and associations. Carson puts it like this: "The highly creative person [has] access to ideas and thoughts that are inaccessible to those of us with less porous mental filters." <sup>135</sup>

I must add here that such ideas and thoughts seem "inaccessible" only in a regular waking state of consciousness, when we are wide awake. When we daydream, enter a light trance state, or float in deep relaxation, our mental filters relax. When we become lucid in a dream, we all have access to the deeply rooted creativity of our unconscious mind. We become conscious in the unconscious; we wake up mentally in the rampant creativity of the dream world and can experience the way our thoughts and emotions change our surroundings as if we are the sole creator of our environment. We can ask the dream a question and stand in astonishment as an answer forms in the air before us, is boomed from the sky like a "voice of God," or is given to us in the form of a physical experience such as being rushed off to a black sky hole-punched with stars. Whether we consider ourselves to be "creative types" in our waking life or not, *in lucid dreams we all have the capacity for endless creativity.*

In exploring lucid dream creativity, we enhance our waking life creativity. Creative thinking is powered up, and if we honour our dreams by turning them into art, we perform creative acts that open up our lines of communication with the playful child we once were. Furthermore, our creative ability to make new associations improves as we let dream imagery into our lives. After a 1999 study, Harvard psychologist Dr. Robert Stickgold commented on the heightened associative abilities of people waking up from REM sleep: “It’s as if the brain is preferentially searching out and activating weak associates, unexpected paths, instead of the obvious, normally strong associates.” <sup>136</sup>

Paul McCartney woke up from a dream of the song that became “Yesterday.” He was so convinced the song wasn’t his that he spent weeks asking around to make sure he wasn’t about to steal it. In 1844, inventor Elias Howe was struggling with the design for a sewing machine needle when he dreamed he was threatened by savages whose spears had eye-shaped holes at the tips. He awoke understanding that he needed a needle with an eye-shaped hole at the point! <sup>137</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson described himself as “consciously making stories ... whether awake or asleep,” <sup>138</sup> and when he recognised while dreaming that he’d invented a good story, he would deliberately wake himself up to record it. Dreams can be incredibly creative and help us to solve problems. The lucid dreamer has the ability to ask the unconscious—in the form of the dreaming mind—directly for instant creative inspiration, and because of this, the lucid dreamer has an advantage over the non-lucid dreamer.

### **Practice # 33: Four Core Creativity Skills and How to Use Them When Lucid**

Psychologist Robert Epstein has identified four core skills that increase creativity.<sup>139</sup> I decided to see how these relate to the practice of lucid dreaming.

1. “Capture your new ideas.” For the lucid dreamer, this translates as: *Write down your dreams!* Developing good dream recall and jotting

them down is essential, as confirmed by a 2007 empirical study on dream creativity by Schredl and Erlacher, who discovered that the number of dreams recalled increased the probability of having a creative dream.<sup>140</sup>

2. “Seek out challenging tasks” that don’t necessarily have a logical solution. Epstein suggests trying to work out how to make your dog fly. Now, in a lucid dream your dog probably *can* fly, but you could ask the dream to show you how many different ways you could help it to fly. So this core skill translates as: *Ask the dream to help you with a challenge.*

3. “Broaden your knowledge” by doing things you wouldn’t normally do and learning new things. While awake, this means educate yourself by reading widely, not just about lucid dreaming but about the flock intelligence of birds, the biology of the eyeball, or telepathy in animals. While asleep, it translates as: *Broaden your life experience in your lucid dreams.* When you get lucid, do something you wouldn’t normally do! Try out glass blowing or skydiving; ask the dream a question about life, death, and the universe; do somersaults in midair (highly recommended for the otherworldly floatiness of the experience!); or experiment with seeing the dream world from the viewpoint of an ant.

4. “Surround yourself with interesting things and people.” Epstein recommends keeping your thoughts lively by taking a trip to an art museum or attending an opera—anything that stimulates new thinking. Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist’s Way*, would call this an “artist’s date,” so I propose you *go on a lucid dream date*. On a lucid dream date you can visit a different planet, alone or with a dream friend; talk to Albert Einstein or find yourself a lucid dream mentor to converse with; drive a racing car or simply float very slowly (the lucid dreamer’s equivalent of Zen walking) through whatever dream scenery you find

yourself in, soaking up the aliveness of the imagery. The purpose of the lucid dream date is to have fun and experience something new.

If we want to follow our own “road less travelled” and discover just how creative we can be, lucid dreaming seems the perfect vehicle for the journey. The ideas I’ve included here are only the beginning of what we can do inside a lucid dream and afterwards, while awake, to stimulate creativity. Discovering the creative potential of lucid dreaming is a passion of mine. My first novel, *Breathing in Colour*, is the practical outcome of drawing on lucid dreaming at every stage of the creative writing process. In tracking my own process as a lucid dreaming novelist, my doctoral thesis provides a blueprint for drawing on lucid dreams in the creative process.

The lucid dream environment is marvellously responsive—every thought we think, every emotion we feel, is reflected back to us through dream figures, action, or atmosphere. Our conscious presence evokes ripples that expand to change the colours and events of our dream world. It’s a unique possibility to watch the creativity of consciousness in action and draw from our inner creative source. Some of the many experiments I carried out in my lucid dreams during my research years include learning how to trigger synaesthetic (mixed-sensory) perceptions at will, dialoguing with my evolving fictional characters, transforming my dream body, exploring the nature of story and plot, asking questions of the dream itself to inspire creative ideas, and working out how to allow visual imagery to transform with original spontaneity both in lucid dreams and while awake through Lucid Writing and other creative trance states. I interviewed lucid dreaming visual artists, writers, and researchers to discover how they used lucid dreams in their creative process, and my study tackled questions like: *Is creativity freed or stifled through continuous control of a lucid dream? Can plot development be usefully explored in the lucid dream state? How are lucid dream creations transformed into art?* Let’s look at that last question now.

## Transforming Lucid Dreams into Art

Often people tell me their favourite lucid dreams and express a desire to make something artistic from these dreams, but say that since they aren't artists, they don't know where to start. I say, start with the dream! The dream imagery will show you where to start; it'll suggest the medium to use, whether pottery, collage, or dance. In workshops I ask participants: "What do you feel when you think about this dream? Where in your body can you feel the core emotion? What is the central image that stays with you?" Sometimes it can be useful to give a dream a title, and in choosing a title, we discover the essence, or the core energy, of our dream.

Doing creative dreamwork is a valid way of developing our waking life artistry, encouraging innovative thinking, freeing emotional and creative blocks, and having fun. Fun shouldn't be underestimated; some people shrug off lucid dreaming as being a crazed sort of wish fulfilment where dreamers simply fly about having sex or enjoying themselves—and what's the point of that, argue the critics. My feeling is that if "having fun" is all someone chooses to do in their lucid dreams, this is not a bad thing! Having fun moments in our dreams gives us a happy memory to take into our not-always-so-much-fun waking lives. Lucid dream fun can contribute to personal happiness and give people hope that all is not lost. It can also increase our creative confidence and reconnect us with our "inner child." Fun is not as frivolous as it may seem; it's a form of creative play.

A 2004 *Creativity Research Journal* study with undergraduates found that sadness inhibits new ideas.<sup>141</sup> The author of the study, social psychology professor Karen Gasper, suggests that this is because when people are sad, they feel wary of making mistakes and so exercise more restraint. Happiness is a creativity boost—people who are in a happy mood are better at creative tasks such as coming up with story endings, writing more answers to divergent thinking tasks, and generating unusual word associations. Lucid dream fun helps us to wake up in a buoyant mood,



ready to face the day, and this positive mood will also influence our creative thinking ability.

I'll share some examples of lucid dreams that have been turned into different art forms, to give an idea of the scope of possibilities. Transpersonal psychologist and family therapist Linda Mastrangelo had the following dream:

In the midst of a dream about joining a consciousness group, I became lucid ... Suddenly, a black and white creature flew from behind a giant cloud and headed straight for me! It was like an illustration from my artwork come to life, with a moon-shaped face, smiling teeth, and odd shaped bat-like wings. I was too afraid to move because I didn't want this experience to stop. As the creature headed towards me it "disappeared" and I saw "nothing," however I realized with awe it had actually manifested in my room! I knew it was there because I could hear it flying around my head, like the sound of a flying machine, clicking its gears and cogs right up against my ears. I could also hear an "air pump sound" as if it came straight out of a science fiction movie.

Afterwards, Linda recreated her lucid dream using animation. She drew the creature directly onto her computer using a Wacom tablet, then drew a series of wings in different stages of flight and experimented with shrinking and expanding the image. She explains:

Adding audio was the final touch and my husband and I got really creative with the sound design by using tissue paper for wing sound and socket wrench for mechanical gears and cogs. Overall it was a very satisfying process that has inspired me to create more dream re-enactments using animation; certainly an exciting art form for the future of dreaming.<sup>142</sup>

Some lucid dream experiences, like the following one reported by musician Pete Casale, are so enthralling that we have no choice but to honour their

creative flair by turning them into art. Before bed, Pete had been trying to create a song, but nothing was clicking for him.

I realized I was dreaming. Those chords were still playing on my brain's one-song-on-an-endless-loop radio station. Being lucid, I wiped out everything and stood in the clouds. I constructed a huge piano out of light and started conducting it. I say *conducting* rather than *playing* because I didn't have to touch the piano to make it play. I was waving my fingers at it like a wizard. Every time I played a key, that note would send light up into the sky.

Pete explains how the creative process evolved for him after this dream, resulting in an inspiring song that can be listened to online.

I woke up some time later and thought about the song I had played in my sleep. I hopped on my piano and tried to work out how I was playing the song. After I had worked out the gist of the note patterns, I got on my computer's piano and made an attempt to record what I remembered from the song. Let me tell you, most of that amazing lucid dream song is lost forever. The complexity of it was too great to remember.

The parts I did remember (and some that I embellished) went into the final recording of the track *Lucid*. So far, *Lucid* is my most successful and popular song.<sup>143</sup>

## Disturbing Dreams as Creative Gifts

Not all lucid dreams will instantly leap out as being creative. Inexperienced lucid dreamers especially may find some of their lucid dreams are over so quickly that they don't have time to "do" anything in the dream. Others may first and foremost see a particular lucid dream as bringing them a message or flagging up deep emotions. Yet if we look for the core image in any dream, no matter how short-lived, we should quickly find the experience or

emotion that we want to engage with artistically. Nightmares can be highly creative, and even if their creative potential is at first obscured by our desire to get out of the dream as fast as we can, they can mark an artistic turning point. In Deirdre Barrett's book *The Committee of Sleep*, painter and sculptor Paul Laffoley reports what seems to be a lucid nightmare where he was in an art gallery in which thirteen sculptures were exhibited. They glowed radiantly due to a light source placed between mirrors.

My first reaction was complete jealousy ... Here I was, hysterically jealous. Enraged, I stewed, "Everything in this show has completely wiped me out! ... All the forms I've been thinking about or could think about for years and years to come are expressed in this work." ... I was overcome with terror ... I knew I was trapped in the gallery and would surely die if I did not get out of this dream and out of the presence of these sculptures. That is when I did wake up, screaming.<sup>144</sup>

It took Laffoley several weeks to realise that instead of feeling cursed by this dream, he could accept it as a priceless creative gift. He understood he could learn from what he had witnessed in his dream, and the designs he subsequently produced brought him major success as an artist. He remarks: "My art began then to develop into what it is today."

In one disturbing lucid dream, I entered a state of deep meditation with an ancient, powerful female meditator and was shown some dismaying images. At the time I didn't know what these images referred to—were they symbolic of some past trauma or did they refer to something in my future? One of the images was not simply visual; I experienced it physically. It was a granite gravestone that squashed me flat. This turned out to be a lucid dream of the future; it presaged difficult events that I would need a lot of personal strength to get through. Some months later, when I was experiencing the gravestone crushing me for real in my waking life, I understood the stream of imagery in the lucid dream and wrote a poem, "Paper Girl," which appears in the anthology *The Sandhopper Lover*.<sup>145</sup>

Writing the poem wasn't only a creative act; it helped me express the grief and loss in the ALI-Image of the gravestone and imagine a way through it to solace.

Once, an experiment to play with plot development in lucid dreams turned into the most startling conscious manipulation of the dream body I'd ever attempted, and helped me to develop the plot of my own novel. In a lucid dream discussed in chapter 7 on the dream body, I mentioned that while standing on a staircase I purposefully made myself disappear from the dream scene, atom by atom. This experience helped my creative novel-writing process. I used the Lucid Writing technique to record a detailed version of the kinaesthetic feeling of making myself disappear, adding images of the unhappy child Mia (a character in my first novel) to this feeling while in the writer's trance, and watching in my mind's eye as she lay on the sitting room carpet and imagined herself invisible, shrinking in size and becoming different creatures—a bird, a fawn, an ant. I watched, and simultaneously wrote, as Mia used this state of bewitched invisibility to hide away from her mother. Mia imagines herself out of her skin, her body transforming:

Water pools on the carpet, flowing faster until the entire room is a fast-filling lake. I wait to see whether I will drown or float. I feel the changes begin; my body growing compact and powerful, feathers pushing out of every pore. My face narrows and shrinks and reforms. I am a slow bird, gliding over a lake, up a waterfall, into my cave.<sup>146</sup>

These imagined scenes became actual novel scenes that formed an integral and important element of the plot.

All of these examples of how lucid dreaming can prompt musical or video composition, sculpture, and creative writing give an idea of the scope of lucid dreams as creative inspiration. Different people find creative inspiration in different ways—even in their lucid dreams—so there are many more examples people have shared with me. One science fiction

writer uses shapeshifting as his creative muse; he becomes his fantasy creations when lucid to inhabit the weight and shape of their bodies and work out how balance is kept while walking upright, the appropriate length of claws, or how long the tail needs to be. One of my PhD case studies, artist Epic Dewfall, walks around art galleries in his lucid dreams until he finds a startling image, then focuses on it intently until he wakes up and can get down the essence of it. Others prefer a spell floating in the imageless space of the lucid void to refresh the creative mind.

## Lucid Writing Archetypes (LWAs)

When I ask my creative writing students to write about the archetypal Hero for three minutes, most of them will write a series of bland clichés about a brave warrior or conqueror. If I ask them to write about any other archetypal figure, such as the Wise Old Woman or the Trickster, the same thing will happen, because these archetypes embody the generalised characteristics of mythical figures. The secret of good writing is to go beyond stereotypes and received knowledge to *personalise* these basic archetypes and turn them into original fictional creations that come to life on the page.

In dreams the job is usually done for us: we often encounter archetypes, but for the most part since these are filtered through our individual dreaming awareness, imagery, emotions, and life experiences, they appear to us in a highly personal aspect. Of course, there are also “impersonal” archetypal dreams: the dreamer who finds himself inside a cathedral, sees a gaping hole in the centre of the floor, looks inside, and sees the Devil waving a pitchfork at him is experiencing a dream where the archetypal imagery has not been personalised: he comes face to face with the raw energy of the impersonal archetype.

In 2004, I discovered Lucid Writing Archetypes (LWAs).<sup>147</sup> These are a creative power we first engage with in our lucid dreams when they appear as multisensory, kinaesthetic, numinous, emotive Archetypal Lucid Idea

Images (ALI-Images),<sup>148</sup> and subsequently develop in Lucid Writing or other creative trance states. I define them as archetypal fictional characters that arise from the combined use of lucid dreaming and the writer's trance. As Joseph Campbell once said, "Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream."<sup>149</sup> When lucid, we encounter our own *personalised* dream archetypes with full conscious awareness, or we can purposefully nudge them into being, either in the dream or after we wake up.

Let's look at an example. I once dreamed lucidly of an intensely aware, fiery-eyed white wolf. This was an ALI-Image: a dream image that has such depth and presence that it can easily expand into a creative concept or idea. I worked with my white wolf in Lucid Writing to see how it might be adapted into a Lucid Writing Archetype for my novel character Mia as a small child. Without the tale of Little Red Riding Hood, the initial image of the wolf would have been perfect, but the archetypes of Wolf and Little Girl are so bound up with this fairy tale that I realised I needed something else. The wolf was soon replaced in my mind's eye by a bird with sharp green eyes, but it didn't seem friendly enough, so I waited for something else to come along (my hand kept writing all the time, a key element of Lucid Writing), and soon enough I was writing about an elephant that shrank down to the size of a stuffed toy and perched on Mia's bed. Its blue eyes winked at me like shiny bindis, and Mia sat up, enthralled. I had transformed an ALI-Image into fiction, and had the blueprint for the scene of Mia's first lucid dream.

One side effect of working with Lucid Writing Archetypes while writing my novel was that, once established, these creations became striking figures who tended to traverse the dream/reality boundaries I'd set up in the fiction. At times, there was a battle between myself as author and the energy of the LWAs that kept insistently popping up as I wrote my fictional scenes. The disc-headed man who was created in a lucid dream and developed in Lucid Writing had such presence for me that he began to appear to my main novel character, Alida, not only while she was lucid dreaming but while she was awake! This was not the plan. I wanted to avoid this narrative tactic, as I

preferred to represent lucid dreaming accurately in the novel and not fictionalise it. But in one Lucid Writing session, the disc-headed man's sudden appearance caused Alida to crash the car she was driving. This scene emerged in a stream of imagery so vivid and exciting that I felt compelled to include it in the novel, grasping how it could cause the plot to develop in fascinating ways.

If we engage with archetypal figures while we're dreaming, and work with them in Lucid Writing or other creative trance states, we open ourselves up to a deeper, more lucid communication than may otherwise have occurred. This gifts us with the pleasure and excitement of bringing lucid dream archetypes to life in the waking world by turning them into art.

## Solving Problems in Lucid Dreams

What kinds of problems could lucid dreams help to solve, and how? For decades, lucid dream researchers have gathered reports of this type of lucid dream creativity. Back in 1990, Stephen LaBerge and Howard Rheingold told of a computer programmer who teams up with Einstein in his lucid dreams. The two of them do flow charts together on a blackboard. When they think they've come up with a good one, the dreamer looks at the code and tells himself to remember it when he wakes up. He immediately writes it all down and takes it to work, and it's usually 99 percent accurate. In the same book, we learn of a surgeon from South Carolina who attributes his status as a fast, skilled surgeon to the fact that he practises his surgical cases beforehand in his lucid dreams, and a chemistry student who broke down molecular equations into ionic ones in her lucid dreams and woke up to discover 95 percent accuracy and a deeper understanding of the processes involved with such calculations.<sup>150</sup>

Sports psychologist Paul Tholey carried out investigations into problem solving in lucid dreams, and in his 1995 book, lucid dreamers report solving everything from relationship troubles to mathematical or conceptual problems in lucid dreams. Recent studies continue to explore the broad

potential of lucid dreaming for solving diverse problems, as well as the best ways of going about problem solving when lucid, such as asking dream figures for help and creative advice. Lithuanian lucid dream researcher Tadas Stumbrys, co-author of one such study,<sup>151</sup> told me about his findings:

All sorts of things can be trained in lucid dreams, not only physical skills but also social skills (e.g., public speaking) and creativity. REM sleep appears to be a very creative state in which our associations are enhanced and therefore could be employed for creative problem solving. Michael Daniels and I did a study in which lucid dreamers asked their dream characters in lucid dreams either to solve a logical puzzle or to create a metaphor. While dream characters were not that good with logical tasks ... the metaphors they created were better than the ones created by the participants themselves.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Gayle Delaney, co-founder of the International Association for the Study of Dreams and author of *All About Dreams*, shared her professional experience of how life issues can be resolved through lucid dreaming: “In my practice of forty years, some of the greatest breakthroughs came from an incubation about a current life issue or problem that resulted in a lucid dream where the dreamer restated the incubation question and got a very easy-to-understand dream answer.”

The first step to resolving a life issue is to acknowledge its existence. Often we don’t realise just how much energy we’re wasting worrying about something, and our failure to see what’s going on can result in nightmares—the psyche’s way of flagging up dissonance or dissatisfaction so that we become aware of it and are then able to make healthful changes. One lucid dreamer, Diane, often became lucid in her dreams while fleeing someone. In her dream group, someone suggested that when she next became lucid while running away from someone, she could stop and ask them, “Who are you and what do you represent about me?” That same night, Diane was able to put this advice into practice, as dreamworker Terri Martin reports here:



[Diane] described running down a long hallway in an attempt to get away from an old, haggardly looking woman. Diane attempted to lock herself in a janitor's closet, but the door would not lock. The old woman got into the closet with her. At this point, Diane became lucid and she asked, "Who are you and what do you symbolize about me?" The old woman transformed into a beautiful young woman. She laughed and said, "I am your fear of 'what if.' "

This made perfect sense to Diane, who was ruled by thoughts of "what if." Her husband traveled with his job, so she was often left caring for their three children on her own. Nearly all choices she made in life went through the filter of thoughts considering: "What if this happens to the kids? What if I don't get back on time? What if someone gets sick?" By asking the person in her dreams this question, she brought her habitual tendency to dwell on "what if" into the light. She also realized the tremendous amount of tension that she held mentally, emotionally, and physically with this type of thinking.<sup>152</sup>

Once the issue has been raised to conscious awareness, through lucid dreaming we can attempt to face it with the intention of solving it. Direct, simple questions are a very effective way of doing this. Whether the kind of problem we'd love to solve in a lucid dream is physical (see chapter 10 on improving skills), emotional (see chapter 16 on psychological healing), or mathematical (see chapter 8 on dream people), we need to have a clear intention about what exactly we want to know. My ISA technique (Incubate–Stabilise–Ask) provides a reliable problem-solving method.

### **Practice #34: The ISA Problem-Solving Technique: Incubate–Stabilise–Ask**

**1. Incubate a problem-solving lucid dream:** Incubation is a vital part of problem solving in lucid dreams. One prolific inventor, Thomas Edison, took afternoon naps in order to dream into a problem, but if you find you're more likely to become lucid in the early morning

hours, you could choose the Wake Back To Bed method or get up early to meditate before setting the firm intention to have a lucid dream. Identify the problem and turn it into a clear question: How can I shine in the interview so that I land this job? Or try a brain-teaser like this one that psychologist Dr. Deirdre Barrett gave to her students for them to dream up the answer: What word starts and finishes with the letters “HE”?

**2. Stabilise dream lucidity:** As soon as you become lucid, ground yourself in the dream by using the CLEAR stabilisation technique from chapter 4: calm down, look around, engage with the dream by touching something or rubbing your hands together, announce “I am dreaming,” and recall your dream goal. Be prepared to repeat your favourite stabilisation action as often as necessary. In LaBerge and Rheingold’s 1990 book, there’s an example of the recurring need to stabilise and restabilise the dream when attempting complex problem solving: a chemistry student became adept at solving multi-compound molecular equations in lucid dreams—a feat that requires a high level of concentration in any state of consciousness:

Every time I would be almost done with the problem, the scene would begin to fade and I would have to reinduce lucidity. I did this by shaking my head or spinning. After strengthening the lucid dream, I would have to rewrite the problem and do it again, only faster ... My dream answers were correct 95 percent of the time.<sup>153</sup>

When attempting problem solving in lucid dreams, it’s vital to keep aware; whenever you feel lucidity slipping or your attention being drawn in by the dream scene or events, keep your dream goal clear in your mind, engage with the dream, and repeat: “This is a dream; I’m lucid.”

**3. Ask the dream for help:** Once lucidity feels stable, ask your incubation question. A voice may boom an answer, or you’ll be shown

a scene or an image that answers your question. If nothing happens, it can be effective to open a door and expect to find the answer behind it. Stay focused even if things don't seem to be working at first. Sometimes people report feeling confused or disappointed by what happens when they ask for help solving problems in lucid dreams—but when they wake up they realise what the dream was trying to tell them! It's best not to have an inflexible idea of what should happen in your lucid dream: try to find the answer with an open mind and remind yourself that the meaning may become clear only when you wake up. The unexpected can always happen in lucid dreams, which is what makes them so delightful—or not, as the case may be. In one lucid dream, the artist in *Breathing in Colour* gave me some home truths: “You may be the writer,” he said sternly, “but you're not God!” That told me! Although in the lucid dream I felt nonplussed by his words, when I woke up I understood how strongly he felt about the female protagonist, and I changed the plot accordingly.

In the brain-teaser example of which word begins and ends with the letters “HE,” one participant dreamed (non-lucidly) he had intense chest pain and a hospital doctor irritatingly asked him to tell him without medical jargon what was wrong. “You could call it anything,” the dreamer replied, infuriated, “even heartache.” At the end of the dream, the dreamer said aloud, “Riddles give me headaches.” Despite his irritation and confusion in the dream, the dream was helping him as best it could! He woke with two answers to the brain-teaser: *heartache* and *headache*.<sup>154</sup> A good rule of thumb when attempting to solve problems in a lucid dream is to hope for the best and take what comes.

**4. Ask to “become” the problem:** Physicist Albert Einstein was a highly visual thinker and used to practise thought experiments where he would imaginatively become a photon moving at the speed of light, for instance, in order to better understand how photons might interact

and what they might do. In a lucid dream, we can ask for a direct, all-encompassing experience of becoming a beam of light (or a sausage machine, or a skateboard, depending on our interests), and this experience could gift us with insight, helping us to solve technical, conceptual, or creative problems.

**5. Ask to meet a mentor:** This problem-solving technique is certainly worth a try if you seem to be getting nowhere by asking the lucid dream for help. A mentor might be a highly creative person you admire, such as an inventor, philosopher, mathematician, or artist. State clearly who you would like to meet in this lucid dream, then announce your intention to turn around and find them standing in front of you, or else fly to where they are waiting for you. Of course, you could also try out a “surprise mentor”—this means you ask for a mentor in the dream and wait to see what the dream produces. It could be anything: an animal, a plant, a waterfall, a wise rock, a God-like presence, or a machine.

A 2004 study in *Nature* shows just how powerful sleep may be in helping people solve problems. Researchers at the University of Lübeck in Germany trained participants to solve a long, tedious math problem. Eight hours later, when participants returned for retesting, those who had slept during the break were more than twice as likely to figure out a simpler way to solve the problem than those who had not slept.<sup>155</sup> If we couple sleep with dream lucidity, the chances of problem solving must rise significantly. Lucid dreaming is a torch we can switch on inside our dreaming minds to illuminate the lively creativity of the unconscious, its original associations and relaxed thought patterns, its wisdom. When we combine lucidity with this rich resource, we can become artists and problem solvers overnight.

### **Practice #35: How to Turn Lucid Dreams into Art**

**1. Switch off your critical mind** and write down your lucid dream.

**2. Identify the Archetypal Lucid Idea Image:** The ALI-Image is the core image, the most emotional image, the one that makes you feel uneasy in your belly, or fills your heart with joy, or simply intrigues or baffles you. It could be the unexpected element in the dream: a sudden tornado, or the face you see staring at you through the trees.

**3. Choose your preferred artistic medium** for this dream. It can be as simple as a scribble on a scrap of paper. It can be as complex as making an animated film. It could also be any of the following, and more: dance, drumming, sculpting (any malleable substance can be used for sculpture, from Play-Doh to balled-up paper), painting, collage, theatre, sand play, Lego ... anything you fancy that fits the energy and emotion of the dream image.

**4. Enter the creative trance:** Remind yourself that this dream art in no way needs to be perfect; give yourself full permission to make a real pig's ear of the whole thing. If it feels right, give yourself a time limit (such as four minutes to write a poem) that makes it nearly impossible to do a "good" job—this can really take the pressure off. Relax with eyes closed and take slow breaths until you feel stillness in your mind. Then bring the Archetypal Lucid Idea Image into your mind's eye and focus on it, allowing it to morph and change if it wants to. When you feel wholly immersed in the image, you are ready to create using your chosen artistic medium.

### **Practice #36: Make the Sound of Your Dream**

Sound is a primal thing. If you were asked to make the sound of your anger, it might not sound like anger, but like sadness or fear. Sound can tell you the truth about your feelings. Allow yourself to experience the vibration of your dream in your throat, and feel free to calibrate the sound.

One fun, easy lucidity practice is to chant "Om" in the bath. Put music on if you feel shy or are worried that neighbours or family might break the door down to save you from the lowing cow they

imagine must be trapped in the bathroom. Submerge your chest and chin. Think about your dream, close your eyes, and take a deep breath. Then sing “Ommmmmmmm (Aum)” and experiment with how different it feels when you make tiny adjustments to how far open your mouth is, or modify the key of your chant. Suddenly you’ll be in a cave of sound that reverberates around and through you. Repeat it as often as you like. The acoustics of the bath tub and the fact of being immersed in water combine to create especially sonorous Omming. It focuses your awareness on the here and now and raises your consciousness.

You can also choose a sound from your dream to mimic (not necessarily in the bath) and listen to what that sound says to you. Making the sound of your dream is instant art and can lead to a string of creative actions such as painting the dream sound or dancing it.

[contents]

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  151. Stumbrys and Daniels, "An Exploratory Study of Creative Problem Solving in Lucid Dreams," 121–129.
  152. Martin, "Who Is the Person in the Corner of My Dream?"
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## CHAPTER 12

# *Sex in Lucid Dreams: From Orgasms to Ethics*

Sex is a primitive drive that sits right alongside hunger and self-preservation. Plenty of people go through a phase of having a lot of sex when they first get into lucid dreaming. And why not? Lucid dream sex has some compelling points in its favour. Not only does it feel incredibly real, but if the sex is embarrassing or bad, or both, you never have to see your dream partner again! There's no risk of sexually transmitted diseases, and you get to live out your wildest fantasies in the intimate theatre of your dreaming mind—unless, that is, you're one of a minority who suffer from *sexsomnia*, where people try to have sex with others while asleep. One woman complains of her partner, “He has this pervasive habit of dry-humping my behind in his sleep.”<sup>156</sup> If combined with sleepwalking, *sexsomnia* can result in sleep-sex with total strangers. For the majority, though, dream sex seems a private event, and lucid dreams can provide us with a picture of how we feel about our sexuality or our sex life.

A friend of mine told me about an erotic lucid dream he'd had that was so unbelievably real, he was shocked and nearly woke up from it. As he told me the dream, he kept grabbing my arm to demonstrate how real the dreamed physical contact had felt: “It was *this* real! Are lucid dreams *this* real for you too, Clare? Like this exact moment?” I laughed and said they were. In his dream, he found himself in bed with his girlfriend, who lives



abroad. They started to have sex, and although he knew he was dreaming, it was so hyper-real and she seemed so powerful and autonomous that he grew worried and nearly woke up. Then he thought, “Go back!” Once again he was taken into the lucid dream experience, as if the girl had climbed straight back into bed with him again. She once more took on a powerful presence and he stopped the dream again—it simply felt too real and confusing for it to be just a dream. On reflection, he realised this lucid dream was emphasising the uneven power balance in their relationship.

Super-real erotic lucid dreams can be shocking and they can be mind-blowingly wonderful. They can even lead to deep mystical experiences. This chapter explores everything from dream orgasms to the ethics of lucid dream rape and violence, and provides you with a guide to creating a fabulous lucid dream sex life.

## Orgasms and Sexual Exploration

Some non-lucid dreamers may wonder if something as physically intense as an orgasm can be experienced in a lucid dream without lucidity being lost. Both men and women can have actual physical orgasms in dreams, and while male “wet dreams” give external proof of this, physical female orgasm has also been recorded in the sleep lab.<sup>157</sup> Beverly D’Urso shares her experience of working as Stephen LaBerge’s research subject in the early eighties:

At one point we were attempting to record sexual activity during lucid dreaming in the Stanford Sleep Lab. I was hooked up to electrodes and vaginal probes. My goal was to have sex in a dream and experience an orgasm. I dreamed that I flew across Stanford campus and saw a group of tourists down below. I swooped down and tapped one dream guy, wearing a blue suit, on the shoulder. He responded right there on the walkway. We made love, and I signalled the onset of sex and the orgasm

to the experimenter. We later published this experiment in *Journal of Psychophysiology* as the first recorded female orgasm in a dream.<sup>158</sup>

As we can see, Beverly's lucidity was so stable that she was able not only to carry out her dream goal but also to simultaneously send eye signals that would show up on the polygraph machine. This research enabled an initial conclusion that dream actions have a physical effect on the body. When I asked Beverly about her experiences, she told me that interestingly, when she was asked by the experimenters to masturbate while awake wearing a vaginal probe in order to compare a waking orgasm with a lucid dream one, she couldn't do it. This shows that no matter how open-minded we are, in our dreams we are much less inhibited.

This lack of inhibition means that in lucid dreams we can experiment with a wide range of sexual activities if we so wish. We can practise and refine sexual techniques, heal sexual wounds, or make love with our favourite sex symbol. One young man told me laughingly that he loves lucid dreaming because he can have sex with his favourite film star whenever he wants. Confronting difficult feelings like sexual jealousy or shame in a lucid dream can be cathartic, and those who have underlying issues such as the embarrassment of being naked in front of a lover, or shame or disgust about the sexual act, are free to explore new ways of being. Experimenting with sexual partners of different genders in the safety of our dreams can help us learn more about our sexual orientation. In a 2012 study, researcher Dr. Calvin Kai-Ching Yu investigated erotic dreams, pornographic consumption, and sexual behaviours. He observes that when homosexual activities are carried out by heterosexuals in dreams, and vice versa, this may suggest that sexual desires or variations that people are not consciously aware of emerge freely in the less inhibited state of dreaming.<sup>159</sup>

The beauty of lucid dreaming is that it allows us to direct the dream consciously towards whatever we'd like to experience, and if we like we can use lucid dream "magic" to achieve this. Some people report asking a dream figure if they'd like to have sex, and then turning them into their

ideal lover in terms of physique and sexual orientation. Lucid dream sex does have its disadvantages, though. One dreamer told me that for him, the only problem with dream sex is that it's very difficult to stabilise the dream while having sex. Another commented that when he was younger and less comfortable with his body, he found that nobody in his dreams wanted to explore sex with him.

Lucidity gives us the option to do dreamwork *while in the dream*, so that if, for example, we become aware that we're dreaming while involved in an incestuous sexual act, we can ask the dream what this symbolises or if there is some psychological message for us. Simple, straightforward questions work best in lucid dreams, such as "Why am I dreaming this?" or "Do you have a message for me?" In this way, instead of feeling ashamed or horrified, we have a golden opportunity to engage directly with our unconscious content. As always, when asking questions in lucid dreams, remember that the answer could be surprising or shocking, so only ask if you really want to know. Clinical psychologist Patricia Garfield believes that incestuous sexual acts in dreams can simply be a matter of integrating an alienated aspect of oneself. When she became lucid in a dream of having sex with her father, she reports, "I had to tell myself repeatedly that his image was a part of myself that I had to integrate—the father part—to make intercourse possible." <sup>160</sup>

Erotic dreams are not always fun; they can be disturbing. Common sexual dreams include discovering your partner having sex with someone else, or having sex with a woman to find she changes before your eyes into a man or an animal. Sexual dreams can also flag up unpleasant things, like adultery in a partner. Sometimes life events that were so painful that they have been suppressed can emerge during lucid dreams, non-lucid dreams, and any type of waking dreamwork. Erotic dreams can flag up childhood sexual abuse, and these traumas shouldn't be faced alone. Please contact a counsellor for help immediately if you feel overly disturbed by your dreams. If you want to learn more about erotic dreams, one very useful book is *Sexual Dreams* by Dr. Gayle Delaney.

## Sex and Creativity

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalytic theory, saw creativity as sublimated sexuality, by which he meant that sex is a huge primal urge that requires release and, if redirected, can find fulfilment in the creative act. How can lucid dreams help us unlock the powerful sexual energy we all possess and redirect it into creativity? E. L. James, author of the bestselling erotic novel *Fifty Shades of Grey*, admits, “All my fantasies are in there.”<sup>161</sup> Fantasies come alive in daydreaming and nightly dreams, the difference being that our sexual daydreams tend to unfold predictably and have a simple plot, whereas our nighttime sexual dreams often have all sorts of twists and interruptions, and since they come to us unbidden, they can be shocking in their originality and power.

If we have erotic lucid dreams, working with our fantasies can be very easy. We could transform the central images into art by stitching them along the edges of a tablecloth (if we want to shock our mother-in-law), or render the figures in papier-mâché and hoist them into trees so the neighbours have something to gawp at ... or simply write down our sexual dreams and turn them into short or not-so-short erotic fiction. The popularity of peephole erotica and pornographic magazines is a reminder that people are easily stimulated visually, and the imagery of sexual dreams can be directly translated into erotic art such as that found at the Khajuraho temples in India, which are covered with erotic sculptures in Kama Sutra sexual positions. Research into erotic dreams has found that if people use pornography, they are more likely to have erotic dreams, and the kind of pornography they choose will influence their dream stories in precise ways.

REM sleep is in itself naturally associated with sexual arousal, and since it's likely that most lucid dreams take place during REM sleep—although not all do, despite what many people assume<sup>162</sup>—it seems safe to say that in the majority of lucid dreams, our bodies are naturally sexually aroused. We don't have to be exceptional artists to consciously access extraordinarily creative imagery and ideas; we only have to wake up in our dreams. In the

same way, erotic lucid dreams can put us into direct, conscious contact with new levels of sensuality, and inevitably this spills over into our waking creative life. In the fledgling stages of rediscovering our creativity, it's good to try out many varying forms of self-expression and give ourselves permission to create a load of rubbish first off. Only in this way will we be able to go beyond our inner censor and have the chance to create something unique and special. Even those who consider themselves “non-artistic” can benefit from creating experimental dream art, as it shakes up our usual way of doing things.

Working with sexual lucid dreams can help to free us of inhibitions, not only in our waking sex life but in other areas of life too, as we throw off outworn attitudes and embrace passion, flamboyance, and creative self-expression. Our waking daydreams and fantasies will also benefit as we become more in touch with our sexuality. Trying to keep a tight lid on our natural tendency to indulge in fantasies, whether they are about a holiday we'd love to go on or the sexy stranger on the train, is counterproductive to creativity. In terms of creative thinking and artistic freedom, it's beneficial to allow ourselves to ride the waves of our dreams and imagination wherever they take us. Who knows, we may even wash up on the beach of fame: Erica Jong's 1973 novel *Fear of Flying* broke taboos of the time by exploring women's sexual fantasies, such as “the zipless fuck.” Intelligent, funny, and sexually frank, it became an international bestseller. Try out your own erotic, creative self-expression with the following practices.

### **Practice #37: Erotic Dream Writing**

Plain language—telling a dream as though to a friend—can be an effective way of transmitting erotic detail, and a sexual dream can easily be adapted into a sex scene in a story. Of course, given the nature of dreams, we may need to remove the weird elements that we feel don't fit with our plot or characters (our dream lover's eyeballs pop out) or the embarrassing elements (we look up after an earth-shattering orgasm to find our parents staring in horror from the door).

But this editing process is swift, and now the piece can be converted into a fictional scene or erotic flash-fiction. Surreal, funny, or shocking elements can often remain to add punch to the piece, but there's a fine balance to be struck when writing about sex. In *The Joy of Writing Sex*, Elizabeth Benedict writes: "Sexual explicitness in fiction these days is so much a part of the literary landscape that there is even a Bad Sex Award ... intended to shame serious writers, not pornographers, into improving their sex scenes."<sup>163</sup> If we can't see ourselves as erotic writers, then at the very least a written description of an erotic dream can help us hang on to the details until we want to revisit it and work with it in other ways.

### **Practice #38: Create Erotic Lucid Art**

When creating art from erotic lucid dreams, it can be good to work with the sensual power of touch, using clay or plasticine, rolling and moulding your dream image without conscious intention. As crooning love songs and sex hotlines show, voices can be highly erotic. Were there any sounds in your lucid dream? Any whispered words that you could set to music or turn into erotic rap? If your erotic dream was a film, which music would it be set to? Some people report seeing vivid colours at the moment of orgasm—sunset orange, deep purple. If the physical sensations from your erotic dream had colours, which ones would they be? Try translating the energy and colours of the dream into brush strokes.

## **Sex and Spiritual Ecstasy**

Exploring our sexuality in dreams can result in transcendent, mystical experiences. Another bestselling author, Patricia Garfield, comments: "By freeing up our sexuality in dreams, ... we may be freeing creative thinking at all levels of consciousness."<sup>164</sup> She goes on to explain the range we have in sexual dreams:

At one end there is ordinary dreaming and unaware sexual arousal; in the middle we have lucid dreaming and aware sexual arousal; at the other end we have lucid dreaming and aware sexual arousal that is transformed into a mystic state ... My experience with intense sexuality in lucid dreams is a result, it seems to me, of consciousness during dreaming. Not only am I aware that my body is asleep and dreaming, but I am also aware that my body is sexually aroused ... Waves of erotic feeling wash over me until I am overwhelmed with orgasm that can truly be described as ecstatic ... My body and mind reverberate with swirls of energy. The activated sexual energy has flowed upward and transformed into mystic experience.<sup>165</sup>

The idea that sexuality can lead to spiritual or mystical experience is not new. The lingam and yoni (male and female sex organs) that adorn Hindu temples and shrines represent sexual union as spiritual union. Kundalini and Tantric yoga traditions have worked with the link between sexual and mystical energy for centuries. But not every lucid dreamer will experience the flow of sexual energy in their dreams, and clearly sexual lucid dreams are not the only way into mystical experiences. Some people may never feel aroused in their lucid dreams, so as with all dream experience, it's highly personal.

For some people, sexual and spiritual ecstasy seem to go hand in hand in lucid dreams, and the onset of lucidity can trigger spontaneous orgasm. Melinda Ziemer of the Dream Research Institute in London shared this dream with me:

I walk into a clear lake and realise I can breathe and that this is an indication that my mind is in sync with a more subtle dimension of consciousness. With this recognition, lucidity comes ... The ecstasy hits hard. Unusually, I am aware that a beam of light is carrying me like a rod down my midriff. I recognise this holy being from another lucid

dream and thank it, but the ecstatic pleasure is so intense it moves into a deep orgasm that rocks me back into waking consciousness.

Lucid dreams can be so much more than a playground if we allow them to be. They can open up paths that lead us to a deeper part of ourselves. Sex and orgasms in lucid dreams are just one way of freeing ourselves up on energetic, spiritual, and creative levels. But are there downsides to lucid dream sex? As is so often the case where dreams are concerned, any downsides are often caused by our own beliefs, fears, and misconceptions (nightmares are a case in point here), so if we're flexible and learn more about our choices, we can often change things around. Let's look at the question of unfaithfulness in lucid dreams.

## Infidelity and Betrayal: The Ethics of Lucid Dream Sex

One of the wonderful things about lucid dreaming is the lack of rules like the ones we live by while awake. Gravity, fidelity, mortality—all of these and more can be suspended in the lucid dream state. Still, in a lucid dream we can feel as conscious as we do while awake, and we've seen that lucid dream behaviours can shape the brain, so perhaps it's not surprising that people can feel morally confused about having sex with people other than their partner while in the super-real state of lucid dreaming. Some people feel really bad, as if they have betrayed their partners, when they wake up from having sex with someone else in a dream, whether they were lucid or not.

Others have such a tight hold on their waking life morals of what is allowed or not allowed that even in their *non-lucid* dreams, when arguably they are in their most uninhibited frame of mind, they always refuse sex with anyone who is not their partner. One dreamer told me he had never tried having sex in a dream, as he believes sex should be saved for marriage, and even if he is “only dreaming it,” he feels that a willingness to



have sex with a total stranger in dreams or in waking life would reflect his lack of loyalty to his future wife. (At the point of speaking to me, he didn't have a girlfriend, so this was a theoretical future wife.)

Does becoming conscious in the dream make us more or less inhibited? The answer is, of course, that it depends entirely on the dreamer. Many seem to feel that sex in lucid dreams is a fun, acceptable bonding experience, yet others refuse dream sex when lucid, as psychologist Scott Sparrow once did when he found himself riding in a car with an unknown woman, because he felt this would be cheating on his wife: "I suddenly become lucid, and then she leans over and kisses me. I become sexually aroused by her, and I know that she is available in the dream, but since I am married, I feel that I need to restrain that impulse in the dream. (What a good guy, huh?) I awaken feeling aroused and stunned by the intensity of the dream."<sup>166</sup>

This attitude raises interesting questions, since if dream sex can be termed "infidelity," then presumably so could sexual daydreams, or fantasising about someone else during sex. Is it true to say that just as we are conscious of and morally responsible for our actions in waking life, so we are in lucid dreams? Dream researcher Dr. Kelly Bulkeley notes that since lucid dreamers have an expanded awareness and the knowledge of future possibilities, they are in a stronger position to be able to make moral decisions. He remarks: "Lucid dreaming can help to cultivate just that sort of reciprocal reasoning and mutual perspective-taking that is the essence of ethics."<sup>167</sup>

With their awareness, powers of reasoning, and perspective, lucid dreamers tend to become more conscious of their interactions with dream figures and are able to reflect on the ethics of their dream actions as they might in the waking state. Yet we don't try to lay down ethical guidelines for people's waking fantasies, and it could be argued that we are more awake during these than when our bodies are asleep during lucid dreaming ... so "should" we act a certain way in our lucid dreams? A waking fantasy is not the same as actually doing something: men and women commonly

enjoy exploring risqué waking sexual fantasies, such as rough sex with strangers or even rape, even though they would be traumatised were they to suffer such a sexual attack in waking life.

Would there be any point in trying to impose a right/wrong judgment on anyone's waking fantasies? Frankly, it's nobody else's business what people daydream about, and it's the same with dreams. We each need to decide for ourselves where along the scale of waking, daydreaming, and lucid dreaming our morals stand firm, and where we allow their boundaries to blur in the name of fun and escapism. Perhaps the best way to make this decision is through examining our beliefs about the unconscious mind, for example, by asking ourselves: "What is 'real'? Are dreams as real as waking reality? How about lucid dreams?" If we have a partner, we could discuss the question of lucid dream sex to discover how we both feel about the idea of dream sex with others. Is it different from masturbating to pornographic images while happily married? Is it a natural and healthy way of fantasising so that we are more likely to be faithful in waking life, since we've let off an erotic head of steam in the dream state? Try asking yourself this: "Am I bound by the same social rules in my dream life as I am when awake?" This question leads us to the topic of rape and violence in lucid dreams.

## Rape and Other Acts of Violence in Lucid Dreams

"It's my dream, so I can do whatever I want." This is something lucid dreamers often say. The tricky question is, is it beneficial to do whatever we want if that involves violence, even if this is "just a dream"? We are more conscious in lucid dreams than in non-lucid dreams, and consciousness can bring with it a certain moral responsibility. What happens when we get aggressive in lucid dreams? Psychologist Paul Tholey remarks, "Aggressive actions in dreams are frequently met with punishment meted out by avenging figures."<sup>168</sup> He employs the following technique for creating dream figures in order to work through negative emotions: "When I am

angry or afraid in a dream, I can blow out the anger or fear through my mouth and thereby create a dream character which takes on an appearance corresponding to the emotion.” This embodied emotion can then be responded to by the lucid dreamer in whichever way they feel is appropriate. Tholey’s research with undergraduate students found that “in general, positive effects on both the dream and waking life of the dreamer accompanied interactions of a peaceful nature.”

The lucid dreamer who favours peaceful lucid dream interactions has the opportunity to gain personal insight into his emotions and integrate the shadow side of his personality. He is likely to experience positive effects in his waking life. However, some lucid dreamers are not so interested in understanding their emotions; some see a lucid dream as a kind of highly personalised video game where they can feel free to fight, kill, and rape. Let’s take a look at some of the different attitudes and experiences we encounter in lucid dreamers.

In a dream group situation, a male lucid dreamer once remarked that most of his dream figures refuse sex, so he “has to force it” onto them, which they hate. He commented that even so, the dream sex feels incredible and he has unbelievably copious orgasms. As you can imagine, these remarks triggered a lively discussion of the ethics of lucid dream sex! Here are some of the arguments that came up in this group of mainly male dreamers:

“Rape is wrong, both in real life and in lucid dreams.”

“If you rape in a dream, you’re more likely to rape someone in real life.”

“Dream rape can’t hurt another human being, and it doesn’t make people more likely to rape in waking life.”

“Raping a dream person is not the same as raping a real person. But dream figures are part of our own psyches, so you’re raping part of your psyche, and probably deserve it.”

“Dreams are not real, so even if you rape or kill someone in a dream, there are no consequences in waking life, not even on the psyche.”

“The only person who needs to consent to sex in a dream is the dreamer. Would you call it rape if someone was jerking off while thinking about having sex with someone else?”

“Dreams are real experiences; they aren’t like computer games or movies. Yes, I do things in my dreams that I would never do in real life, but I would never do something so immoral and violent as raping someone. Knowing you behave like that makes me not want to be alone in the same room as you!”

As these arguments show, each of us has our own moral compass. Some people may initially take the stand of, “It’s only a dream so it doesn’t matter how I act, because dreams are not real.” Others who have a greater degree of psychological insight might feel that “dreams are part of my psyche and I respect all aspects and manifestations of my psyche.” Still others, including myself, feel that not only is the dream part of our individual psyche, but we are all part of a universal psyche and everything we do, the energy and thoughts we create, whether in waking life or in dreams, all contribute to the state of this universal psyche.

Having said this—a dream is *not* exactly the same as waking, consensus reality! Sometimes in dreams it can be psychologically liberating to stand up and fight an enemy, just as it can be wonderful to send them love. It depends on where we are in our lives. If someone has until now been a victim in her life and in her dreams, and finally manages to stand strong and defend herself in a lucid dream, this can be a highly transformative and healing event. Sometimes the issue that presents itself in the dream is so appalling to the dreamer that she can’t at first imagine responding with anything other than violence, for example, pushing her aggressor off a cliff. The first step to psychological healing in dreams and nightmares involves recognising and *reacting to* the trauma from a place of greater strength and confidence.

If until now we always ran away screaming from a particular nightmare image, or woke up in a cold sweat, any action we take to face the image is

generally an empowering step. Whether in the first instance we choose to react with love and integration or through other means hardly matters. Dreaming is a lifelong conversation, and there will always be other dreams where we can choose to take the “peace and love” path when we feel genuinely able to do this. When we feel powerless, we remain victims. When we empower ourselves and *act* to change bad things, we begin the process of liberating ourselves, both in our dreams and in waking life.

The ethics of lucid dream rape are complex, and there are many different opinions out there. Reverend Jeremy Taylor, co-founder of the International Association for the Study of Dreams, has over fifty years of professional dreamwork behind him. I talked to him about rape and other acts of violence in lucid dreams, and his position is clear:

Seeking release and pleasure and exploring tabooed feelings and desires in the dream world is NOT a crime; I am firmly of the opinion that *there is no such thing as “thought crime”!*—even in a dream where there is the appearance of making conscious moral (or immoral) decisions ... “Violence” in the dream world may be misunderstood as somehow the same as, or at least an indicator of, tendencies toward literal violence in waking life, but *“violence” in the dream world is most importantly a very reliable archetypal marker indicating divided awareness and emotional ambivalence in the dreamer’s life and psyche.* The more “violent” the manifest content of a dream is, the more certain one can be that the dreamer is filled with deep ambivalence and uncertainty, pretty much regardless of what “ego-theater” the dreamer puts on in waking life.

Dreams are complex psychological spaces, and each lucid dreamer is free to explore and act as they like. It strikes me that in some cases the lucid dreamer who feels he “has to” rape his dream figures has simply not yet grasped one of the golden rules of lucid dreaming: the magical power of *expectation*. He’s got his intention fired up and in action, but this needs to

be coupled with the expectation of a willing dream partner. Perhaps some people simply need more information about the inner workings of lucid dreaming so that they can experiment a little and make an informed decision about how they want to behave in their dreams. I've created the following guide that I hope will help.

### **Practice #39: How to Create a Fabulous Lucid Dream Sex Life**

**1. Expectation:** This is the golden rule of lucid dreaming! Instead of forcing sex onto a reluctant dream figure just because you're determined to nail someone in your few precious moments of lucidity, why not simply change your expectation? Even if you only half expect a dream figure to refuse sex, they probably will. On the other hand, if you expect them to melt with desire for you, they most likely will (hopefully not literally). When you become lucid, do a dream trick to encourage a willing sexual partner to appear—say, “Behind this door I'll find someone wonderful who is happy to have sex with me.” Then open that door! If you truly *expect* a dream figure to desire you, since dreams are highly responsive to expectation, they very likely will.

**2. Attitude:** If while seeking sexual experiences in lucid dreams your attitude tends along the lines of telling dream figures, “You're just a figment of my imagination and I'll shag you if I want to,” here's an experiment to try. In the next lucid dream, treat potential sexual partners with kindness and respect; openly appreciate them as part of the magic of dreaming. You never know, something amazing might happen. Trying out a new approach could transform your dream life and even have positive effects on your waking sex life.

**3. Stabilisation:** During the lucid dream, stay focused and use elements of the CLEAR stabilisation technique as needed. If you feel lucidity slipping during your erotic encounter, say, “Lucidity now!” and focus your attention on what you can see and touch. If what you can see and touch proves too distracting, turn away from your partner for a moment and touch something else.

**4. Incubation:** Incubating an erotic lucid dream and visualising dream figures willingly agreeing to have sex is helpful, and if once you get lucid they still don't want to have sex, calmly ask them why. The response might astound you—and enlighten you.

**5. Make magic:** Using a firm, steady intention, combined with a power word or gesture, if this helps, turn any part of the lucid dream environment (a door, a tree, a dream figure) into your personal idea of a sex god or goddess.

**6. Discover who you are:** Ask yourself, “Who am I when I dream? Do I act aggressively or with kindness? Am I responsive and ready to listen?” Buddhists say that to find out how the mind will be in death, see how the mind is in dreams. On some level, we are responsible for our actions, reactions, and interactions, whether awake or in our dreams. And crucially, if we can practise kindness in lucid dreams, we will find it easier to be kind in waking life, as we understand that we are all one, not separate.

**7. Let go of preconceived ideas:** Nobody needs a conventional partner to reach orgasm in dreams. In dreams, anything can become sexualised. As Calvin Kai-Ching Yu says: “Genitals [can] be symbolized with inanimate objects, such as making use of a car's exhaust pipe as if it were a vagina. Given the hyperassociative nature of dreaming, anything in dreams can be sex symbols.” <sup>169</sup>

## Recognising Dream Sex Symbols

Sexual energy can flow through many different instruments and take many different forms. In clinical psychologist Patricia Garfield's erotic lucid dreams, movement such as falling or flying can trigger orgasm:

A pink rosebud, a sparkling fountain, a pipe with its bowl warm from being smoked, and many other things have served as sexual implements in lucid dreams ... Sometimes I am my own lover in lucid dreams.

Once, like a hermaphrodite, I found I possessed a penis myself and by bending into a circle could take the silky organ into my own mouth to climax ... Often, I will bring on the orgasm by ascending to great heights and then, turning, plummet back to earth or ocean. On impact with land or water, I explode into orgasm.<sup>170</sup>

Lucid dreamer Beverly D'Urso reports similar experiences:

In my lucid dreams, I have had sex with dream characters who represent men, women, old people, young people, strangers, relatives, as well as people of various races and classes. I have been the woman, the man, half woman/half man, both split from waist, and with both a penis and a vagina ... I have been a man with a man, a woman with a woman, an old man with young girls, with groups and alone. I have made love physically with myself in all combinations. I can barely think of some sexual situation that I have not experienced. These dreams are all very enjoyable and everyone is always totally accepting.<sup>171</sup>

What a range of possibilities! If we open our minds to the potential of lucid dreaming, we'll find that we don't "have to" rape dream figures. Even if dream figures are just "figments of our imagination," as some people assume, they still shape our mind and our energy in the way that thoughts and daydreams do, only more powerfully, as lucid dreams often seem as real as reality. My hope is that if we consciously practise compassion in our dreams, this might help us be more compassionate in our waking lives, and so perhaps little by little we can make the world a kinder place. Surely it's at least worth a try: each of us can tend our own small patch of garden by working consciously, creatively, and respectfully with our dreams.

The more lucid dreamers know about the choices available to them, and the more creatively they experiment within the dream, the more easily they can navigate the dream world in the way they choose. The ethics of lucid dream behaviour are fascinating, and it's useful to discuss them so that people are aware of the issues involved, but as with most things in life, each



person must decide for themselves how to behave. I'm not the thought police; I've no interest in telling people how they should behave in their dreams, in their imagination, or in their waking life. Personally, I'm anti-violence and have learned to treat my dream figures and all other aspects of my dreams with respect and stay open to what they might have to teach me. The consequences of this have been a far deeper conversation with my lucid dreams, a greater sense of compassion and acceptance towards myself and my many failings, and an overall awakening of my dream figures, who often seem highly conscious and happy to help me rather than thwart me.

Imagine if lucid dream ethics were taught in schools along with lucidity tips, nightmare guidance, creative thinking and all the rest! We might end up with a new generation of psychologically aware lucid dreamers who have plenty of fun and recreation in their dreams and also intuitively practise kindness and respect both in and out of the dream state. Is it naïve to hope that this could help to create a better world?

#### **Practice #40: Incubate a Sexual Dream**

The basic technique for dream incubation is presented at the end of chapter 1 (in practice 4) and can be modified to ask for any kind of dream. Use as much ritual as you need around dream incubation: sleep in a different place, slip a photo under your pillow, or simply write down what you want. If you'd like a sexual dream, write, "I would like an erotic lucid dream." Or "I would like a sexual dream that I can turn into art." Try a question: "How is my sexuality related to my creativity?" "How can I improve my sex life?"

Keep the intention to dream about this subject clearly in your mind and repeat it at intervals throughout the day and before you sleep. You can be as experimental as feels right for you when incubating an erotic dream. Maybe you'd like to have dream sex with someone you admire, or practise a new sexual technique. If we can improve sports skills in lucid dreams, why not sexual skills? In our dreams we are

less inhibited, so it can be the ideal place to explore things that we don't yet feel comfortable exploring in waking life.

Try fantasising before bed about the kind of erotic scenario you'd like to experience. Set a strong intention to become lucid and experience this. Combine your incubation with a lucidity induction technique such as Wake Back To Bed (WBTB), and intend to become lucid in the erotic dream of your choice.

### **Practice #41: Erotic Collage**

This is a rapid dreamwork practice that doesn't aim to produce a great work of art (although it might!), but provides a quick way of working with erotic lucid dreams for insights and artistic pleasure. Look through a selection of different magazines; these don't have to be erotic, although they can be. Give yourself just ten minutes to quickly cut words and images from them while focusing on your sexual dream. You may find yourself grabbing images in shades of red, or honing in on mouths and hands. You may choose words and images that seem to have nothing to do with your dream, such as a bulldozer, the word "blindfolded," or a rainbow fish. Surprise yourself and try not to criticise your choices. Now begin to compose your collage on a piece of paper or card. Move the images around and try to sense intuitively where they should go. Then glue them into place and write any words, phrases, or the dream text among and around the pictures.

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156. Schenck, *Sleep*, 130.
  157. LaBerge et al., “Physiological Responses to Dreamed Sexual Activity during Lucid REM Sleep.”
  158. Brogaard, “Lucid Dreaming and Self-Realization.”
  159. Yu, “Lust, Pornography, and Erotic Dreams,” 191.
  160. Garfield, *Pathway to Ecstasy*, 135.
  161. Taylor, “How to Write a Bestseller,” 60.
  162. Stumbrys and Erlacher, “Lucid Dreaming during NREM Sleep.”
  163. Benedict, *The Joy of Writing Sex*, 1.
  164. Garfield, *Pathway to Ecstasy*, 105.
  165. Ibid., 139.
  166. Sparrow, “Early Morning Meditation and Dream Reliving as Catalysts for Lucid Dreams.”
  167. Bulkeley, “Lucid Dreaming and Ethical Reflection.”
  168. Tholey, all quotes from “Overview of the Development of Lucid Dream Research in Germany.”
  169. Yu, “Lust, Pornography, and Erotic Dreams,” 192.
  170. Garfield, *Pathway to Ecstasy*, 135–136.
  171. D’Urso, “DreamSpeak: An Interview with Beverly D’Urso: A Lucid Dreamer,” 6.

# PART THREE: Lucid Dreaming to Assist Sleep Disturbances and Overcome Nightmares

The first thing to know about nightmares is that despite their nasty wrapping paper, they are creative, healing gifts. chapter 13 explores the many ways in which lucid dreaming can help us to face our nightmares and extract meaningful gifts from them, such as insight, inner resources, and wisdom. I'll share my Lucid Imaging Nightmare Solution and practical techniques for lucid nightmares, and discuss post-traumatic stress disorder.

In chapter 14, we'll look at how lucid dreaming can help children who suffer from bad dreams. We'll consider whether it's best to hug the dream monster or attack it, and my L.O.V.E. Nightmare Empowerment Technique emphasises the importance of listening to children and helping them to find their own path to a happier dream life. Children are incredibly fast learners. Through lucid dreaming and Lucid Dreamplay, they quickly pick up the skills of "dream intelligence": empathy, mental flexibility, intuition, self-awareness, and resourcefulness.

This section closes with a look at the positive role that lucid dreaming could play in a variety of sleep disorders. chapter 15 explores REM sleep behaviour disorder, sleep paralysis, night terrors, lucid sleepwalking, narcolepsy, and sleep-related eating disorder. We'll see how lucid dreaming could help sufferers by triggering them to wake up when an episode begins, or by resolving any underlying trauma responsible. I'll explore sleep paralysis as a gateway to lucidity and give practical tips for

releasing fear and moving into the experience with calm  
curiosity.

## CHAPTER 13

# *Nightmares as Creative Gifts: Lucidity and Nightmare Solutions*

Nightmares are dreams that have such upsetting or disturbing content that they usually wake the dreamer. The central emotion is not necessarily fear; nightmares can also be dreams steeped in sadness, anger, disgust, embarrassment, or any strongly negative emotion. Large-scale studies show that 85 percent of the adult population report having at least one nightmare in the past year. Up to 29 percent of adults report at least one nightmare a month, while up to 6 percent have weekly nightmares.<sup>172</sup> Creative, sensitive people tend to have more nightmares than others do,<sup>173</sup> and about 5 percent of the population suffer from severe, persistent nightmares that merit clinical help. Night terrors are different from nightmares and are discussed in chapter 15, along with automatism, sleepwalking, and other irregular sleep behaviors.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung believed in the power of the shadow, the repressed or unaccepted aspect of the self that teems with ugly desires and drives. He believed that although it can be a reservoir for human darkness, the shadow is the seat of creativity. One way the shadow surfaces is through nightmares.

It is well known that lucid dreaming is an excellent way of working with and resolving nightmares. Back in 1974, clinical psychologist Patricia Garfield examined in her classic book *Creative Dreaming* the ways in

which lucid dreamers can engage with the shadow side of their psyche to cope with fearful situations, outgrow old, negative behavioural patterns, release sexual inhibitions, harness creativity, and integrate lost or discarded aspects of themselves. Studies have backed up the usefulness of lucid dreaming for recurrent nightmares,<sup>174</sup> and one study of members of a lucid dreaming forum found that 63.8 percent of them used lucid dreaming to turn their nightmares around.<sup>175</sup> Investigation into lucid dreaming therapy for nightmares and post-traumatic stress disorder is growing.

Lucidity can have a profound and instantaneous effect on dream content. When we know that we are dreaming and will wake up safely from this experience, all fear can drain away in a second. Once we are free from fear, we are able to engage lucidly with the dream figures and dream situation. In his book *Living with Dreams*, Dr. Roderick Peters reports the following dire zombie nightmare. If only the dreamer had realized he was dreaming!

I'm lying on a stone table in a cold room; the zombies are all around in a ring, shuffling closer. I cannot bear for them to get me so I try to kill myself by stabbing my heart. But I hit a bone and fall to the floor. They begin to clutch at me...<sup>176</sup>

This nightmare is like a scene in a zombie movie: visual, with dramatic tension and a strong narrative pull. We wonder what will happen next—will the dreamer escape? More likely, he'll wake up with a pumping heart, scared half to death. We've all been there. The most common nightmares tend to be about being chased, dying, falling, becoming frozen with fright, or being physically attacked. Fearful dreams usually involve imagery, but nightmares can also be imageless spaces that vibrate with terror, horrible sounds, or sensations such as falling.

## The “Thought-Responsive” Rule

There's a simple rule when it comes to nightmares, one we all will have noticed: the more fearful we are, the worse the nightmare tends to become.

This is because dreams are highly thought-responsive environments. The dreaming mind is a marvelous morphing machine; it invents, confabulates, and creates vivid emotional scenes and characters. However, this creation does not take place in a vacuum; it happens in response to the dreamer's current and past preoccupations, fears, desires, and emotions, as can be seen in this lucid dream that Linda Magallón, author of *Mutual Dreaming*, shared with me:

I am joined by a couple, a dark-haired man and a woman. As my fear mounts, I see their eyes change into glowing spots with no dark irises. These specters have the potential to scare me even more. I am very much aware that by continuing my fear, I can turn these people into demons (or at least their appearance into that of demons). And I'm determined I won't do that. So I manage to bring the increase of fear to a standstill ...

I begin to wonder if we will bash into something, like an airliner. An airplane engine noise begins rumbling, getting increasingly louder as if we're coming closer and closer to it ... As the outline of a white cylinder begins to form towards the front of me, I let go of the need to hear or visualise it. The noise and imagery immediately dissipate.

This lucid dream demonstrates thought-responsiveness in action: as soon as Linda imagines bashing into an airliner, she hears the noise of one getting closer. The thought-responsiveness of dreams is one good reason why it's so important as part of lucidity training to watch our thoughts and be aware of what we are putting out there—and not just during a lucid dream, but during waking life as well. Waking physical reality is like a “slow dream,” because although it is thought-responsive, things generally take a lot longer to manifest in waking reality than in the dream world, where a thought can trigger an instantaneous response in the environment. In dreams, thoughts are akin to actions.



The rule of thought-responsiveness says that if we are scared, the dream experience usually responds by becoming scarier. This rule can be visualised as a seesaw: If we get weighed down by fear, the fear factor of the experience rises in response. If we manage to reclaim a calm state of mind, the dream environment responds by growing calmer, and the seesaw regains its balance. When we become lucid in a nightmare, it's important to focus instantly on calming down, as in the CLEAR technique for staying lucidly aware in a dream. Linda's lucidity in this dream allows her to know that she must calm her fear in order to stop the spectral couple from turning into demons. Lucidity gives us the immensely comforting knowledge that we are in the dream state and will wake up safely in bed.

## Nightmares: Gifts in Nasty Wrapping Paper?

What does the nightmare *want*?

It's crucial when working with nightmares to remember that all dreams come to help and heal us. Yes, even our worst nightmares. Keep this in mind every time you have a bad dream or remember an old one. Useful questions to ask yourself are: "What does the dream want? What is it trying to say to me at this moment in my life? What does it want me to learn?" However obscure or twisted a nightmare may seem, remind yourself that ultimately it wants your health, wholeness, and happiness. Unwrapping the nightmare through Lucid Dreamplay techniques or confronting it during lucid dreaming can lead to insights that can change our lives.

Nightmares often end at the moment of greatest fear, with the dreamer waking up in fright, as in the following scenarios: *I am being chased by someone who wants to kill me. ... The street is strewn with sawn off body parts. ... There is a secret room in my house, and it is evil.* Psychologically, it is important to find a resolution to these unfinished horror stories or they will likely return in a different form to scare us some other night. Neuropsychological experiments have shown that the brain barely distinguishes between physical and emotional pain. Nightmares are utterly,

chillingly real while they are happening. We suffer anguish, terror; we get torn apart by sharks or chased by killers. It is only by waking up or becoming lucid that the reality of the nightmare is questioned.

Too often nightmares are dismissed upon waking, and not dealt with. This is a missed opportunity, both for personal growth and for practising lucidity skills. With my Lucid Imaging Nightmare Solution (LINS), described further on in this chapter, a nightmare can be worked on not simply in terms of “escape as fast as you can!” but through learning about the frightening imagery and taking steps to integrate rejected or unheard parts of the psyche. Lucid Imaging is like a waking version of lucid dreaming. When we enter into conscious conversations with dreams and nightmares, either in lucid dreaming or in waking dreamwork, we give ourselves the possibility of growing, changing, and becoming happier in our dream life and in our waking life.

In one nightmare, the dreamer saw her children lying dead in open coffins. It turned out that far from predicting an awful future event, as the dreamer had feared, this was an “empty nest” statement about how bereft the dreamer felt now that her two grown-up daughters had moved out of the family home. The nightmare was a red flag telling the dreamer, “Look out! This is how you really feel about your daughters leaving home!” When we know exactly how terrible we feel about a situation in our life, we are able to take positive steps to improve things and give ourselves—and others—the necessary care and attention.

Nightmares are gifts. They are wrapped in rather nasty wrapping paper, it’s true, but once we unwrap them, we may discover all sorts of unexpected treasures of the soul.

#### **Practice #42: Nightmares as Creative Gifts**

Imagine dreaming about the genesis of a monster patched together from the different body parts of dead humans, as Mary Shelley did before she wrote *Frankenstein*, or suffering repeated dreams of healing people by day and murdering them by night, as did Robert

Louis Stevenson, author of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. These authors tapped into their most terrifying nightmares and successfully turned them into fiction. Such is the power of fearful dream images that when they are turned into art, they can infiltrate the minds of others until what was a personal nightmare image becomes a collective one.

Try writing your nightmare into a story. When a link is forged between the imagination and the nightmare, this dark gift from our shadow self can contribute to the creative process with astonishing speed and ease. It can be disturbing to work closely with a nightmare, but it can also be cathartic. It's vital to retain a sense that you are in control, and stop if the dreamwork becomes upsetting.

## Lucid Dreaming Therapy and Lucid Imaging

In a 2006 pilot study by Dr. Victor Spoormaker and Jan van den Bout on the effects of lucid dreaming therapy on nightmares, something intriguing came up.<sup>177</sup> Participants were helped to create alternate endings to their nightmares and were taught about reality testing and how to set an intention to become lucid in their dreams. Overall, the nightmares of the participants decreased, but in a few cases no lucid dream was reported, so it wasn't clear if the reason for the overall decrease in nightmares was due to lucidity or simply knowing that "bad dreams can be changed." It is so important in every area of life to know that we have options: sometimes just having that knowledge is enough for transformation to take place.

This is encouraging for people who do not yet have a great facility with lucid dreaming. Barry Krakow's studies with chronic nightmare sufferers have shown that rehearsing a happier nightmare outcome decreases nightmare frequency.<sup>178</sup> Nightmares are important, and if we ignore our dreams or intuition, we should be prepared to get the occasional nightmare, because dreams are communicative. They want to be heard; they want to converse with us. Waking dreamwork and dream lucidity enable all

dreamers to be present with powerful dream imagery and react to it free from fear and other negative emotions, knowing that there are options.

When I was eight or nine, I read Edward Packard's Choose Your Own Adventure book series, where the reader can choose different endings to the story. I loved those books because I got to make decisions and star in my own co-created adventure. There were choices at the end of each page: if you were being chased by a monster, you could decide, for example, to (a) hide in a cave, (b) rush forward to fight the monster, or (c) risk the rickety bridge. Looking back, those wonderful books helped me to become an intrepid lucid dreamer, and they prepared me to look for possible solutions in any situation in waking life and in dreams. Imagine life as a kind of Choose Your Own Adventure book. At every moment, we can choose *how to respond to events around us*. People sometimes say, "I have no choice," but even if we feel unable to act in a situation, there is one thing we can always change: our attitude to that situation. In lucid dreams and in nightmare techniques, there are many more choices available. Learning to look for solutions is an important skill to cultivate in any state of consciousness.

I've created a technique called the Lucid Imaging Nightmare Solution (LINS). It combines elements of Jung's active imagination, Krakow's imagery rehearsal therapy, LaBerge's MILD, and my own Lucid Writing technique. In contrast with these other methods, Lucid Imaging is carried out in bed immediately after waking up from a nightmare. Over years, I naturally developed this technique when doing dreamwork in the middle of the night, not wanting to wake my husband by putting on a light to write the dream down. Whenever I wake up from a disturbing dream, I go through it immediately, wondering about its meaning and examining the emotions and imagery. Then I reenter it imaginatively and replay it in different ways until I find a resolution that reestablishes balance and harmony and offers me insight. This is not only a soothing therapeutic practice, but also training for lucid dreaming, as it is like a waking version of lucid dreaming and

rehearses the possibilities open to lucid dreamers. It also primes the dreamer to go straight into a lucid dream on returning to sleep.

Most people will have trouble getting back to sleep after a nightmare anyway, so why not use the time to create a solution to the nightmare so that you can slip back to sleep feeling refreshed and calm, and perhaps even have a lucid dream due to your practice? Lucid Imaging is like lucid dreaming awake. It's like Lucid Writing without the pen, observing and guiding dream imagery in your mind's eye.

### **Practice #43: The Lucid Imaging Nightmare Solution (LINS)**

Please do not use this technique if you are suffering from anxiety, depression, psychosis, or personality disorder, or have recently experienced trauma or bereavement. Some nightmares should not be worked on alone. Instead, find a trained therapist to help you with any underlying issues.

**1. Attend to your body.** As soon as you wake up from a nightmare, do whatever you need to calm yourself and make yourself comfortable. Some nightmares result in hefty physical reactions, like a wildly beating heart or sweat-drenched pyjamas. Drink water if you need to, and take deep, calming breaths. Then lie comfortably, close your eyes, and breathe calmly. Ask yourself if you want to work with this nightmare now or not. If the answer is yes, remind yourself that you are relaxing safely in your bed and can stop the process whenever you want to, simply by opening your eyes and sitting up.

**2. Reenter your nightmare.** Recall the dream imagery as far back as you can. What were you doing before the dream grew unpleasant? Knowing that you are now safe in your bed, allow the imagery to resurface in your mind's eye. If you have difficulty summoning mental imagery, you can use the storyline of your nightmare as a way in. Notice any associations you have with the dream images and events, but don't agonise or obsess about possible meanings. If at any point in this process you feel very frightened, upset, or unsafe, stop

immediately. Some nightmares are simply too strong and disturbing to face alone.

**3. Identify the “tipping point.”** Pinpoint the moment when feelings such as fear, guilt, or anxiety grew strong, or when the monster reared its ugly head. This moment is like the tipping point on a pair of scales. It is the moment that your dream turned into a nightmare. Your task now is to restore the balance. Decide where in the dream action you want to begin to change events or your attitude towards them. Beginning just before the tipping point usually works well.

**4. Imagine this is a lucid dream, and rerun the script to resolve the dream crisis.** Watch the imagery as it unfolds and reacts responsively to your thoughts, questions, needs, and guidance. This is a highly creative state of consciousness because the mind is alert yet your body is relaxed and close to sleep. In lucid imaging, you can be a film director, rewinding the action and replaying different outcomes. Now that you are playing at being “lucid in this nightmare,” you have many options.

You could ask a frightening dream figure why he is following you, or actively change the nightmare story so that something harmonious or amusing takes place; you could introduce help into the dream in the form of a strong friend, a magic tool, or a healing mantra. You could try passively reliving the nightmare free from fear and observe how this affects the imagery and events. The best nightmare solutions are not forced; allow the imagery to develop spontaneously in response to your initial guiding thought or question. You’ll know when you’ve found the right nightmare solution, because your tension around the dream will greatly diminish and you’ll feel safe and calm.

**5. Program yourself to get lucid.** When you are happy with your nightmare solution, you are ready to return to sleep. This is an excellent time to watch as your hypnagogic imagery builds up into a

moving dream, and set a firm intention to fall asleep consciously. As you fall asleep, try repeating, “I am lucid, I am lucid...” or “The next thing I see will be a dream.” The practice you have just done with LINS, observing and changing dream imagery in a relaxed, pre-sleep state, is a form of lucidity rehearsal that will help you to become lucid in your next dream. It is also useful to use this post-nightmare work to program yourself to become lucid the next time you have a nightmare. Simply repeat, “The next time something bad happens, I’ll recognise that I’m dreaming.” When working with a recurrent nightmare, remind yourself that the next time you are confronted with its particular imagery, this will trigger lucidity.

## Lucid Imaging to Resolve a Dream Crisis: The Zombie Nightmare

To show exactly what’s possible with LINS, let’s take the zombie nightmare from the beginning of this chapter as an example to work with. The dreamer is surrounded by zombies and becomes so desperate to avoid whatever grisly fate he imagines they have in store for him that he actually tries to kill himself by stabbing his own heart, but he hits a bone and falls to the floor, and they start to clutch at him ...

Let’s rewind that script.

The dreamer is lying on a stone table in a cold room. The zombies are all around in a ring, shuffling closer.

I would take the dream forward from this point, bypassing the fear-based reaction where the dreamer tries to kill himself and falls to the floor. Succumbing to terror is the worst thing anyone can do in a highly thought-responsive environment like the dream state, because the imagery will tend to respond by getting even more terrifying. Let’s imagine that the dreamer suddenly realises this situation is preposterous and must therefore be a dream. This knowledge frees him of fear. He can still feel the cold stone of

the table beneath his back and see the zombies, but he knows that he will wake up safely in his bed. Because he is lucid, he is aware of the many options he now has.

For the sake of clarification, I'm going to pretend that the zombie nightmare is my dream, to show the possibilities that open up when I engage with it imaginatively. Let's say that in Lucid Imaging, I imagine becoming lucid in the zombie nightmare. Any of these different approaches are possible, and others are sure to exist too:

#### **Practice #44: Lucid Imaging Options**

**1. Call for help:** When I realise I'm dreaming this, I call for help at the top of my voice, confident that it will arrive. A woman made of flowing water materialises beside the stone table. "You are always safe, wherever you are and whatever is happening," she says to me, "because you have this inside you." She taps my heart, and within I see a sphere of golden light. The waterfall woman vanishes, but I know I am completely safe and have the inner power to deal with this situation. Spontaneously, I allow my heart light to grow until it encompasses the zombies, who are transformed into columns of bright, welcoming energy.

**2. The aggressive, fearful response:** As soon as I know this is a dream, I leap off the table and confront the zombies, shouting, "Get away from me!" They shrink back, and with a few well-placed kung-fu kicks, I dispatch a few of them and get out of there fast.

**3. Offer a dream gift:** The moment I become lucid, I remember that if you offer dream aggressors a gift, the whole energy of the nightmare changes. Reaching into my jacket pocket, I pull something out. I have no idea what it is, but I open my hand and the zombies crane their necks to see it. Right there on my palm is a tiny flame-coloured bird. As we watch, it opens its beak and bursts into song.

**4. The annihilation option:** When I wake up in this dream, I am so terrified that I know I need to annihilate the zombies. I jump from the



table and run around stamping on them. It's like a curious party trick: they turn into coils of grey smoke and vanish. (People often choose the annihilation option, the escape artist response, or the aggressive, fearful response when they are first asked to decide how to change the nightmare. It can be psychologically powerful and freeing to defeat a dream enemy, but I always say a live dream friend is worth more than a dead dream enemy, so exploring other options is worthwhile too!)

**5. Fearless surrender:** I stay on the table, fully lucid and free from fear. With an attitude of calm curiosity, I surrender to this dream and wait to see what happens next. To my amazement, instead of ripping me to pieces, the zombies surround me like angels and beam healing light all over my body.

**6. The dream magician:** "Wow, I'm dreaming—time to try out some lucid dream magic!" Soaring up above the stone table, I extend my right arm and zap the zombies with globules of pink light that stream from my fingertips. They turn into fluffy rabbits and hop around on the floor. With one final friendly zap, I magic some lettuce leaves, which they nibble happily.

**7. Hug the monster:** Quashing my revulsion, I open my arms and bear-hug the nearest zombie. It hugs me back warmly, and to my surprise it turns into my old French teacher who so disapproved of me practising ventriloquism in his lessons. I feel a wonderful sense of acceptance.

**8. Ask for a gift:** When I ask the zombies for a gift, one of them shows me a sparkling blue ring he's wearing. It can be used for interstellar travel. He takes it off and gives it to me, promising to teach me how to use it.

**9. The escape artist response:** Even though I'm lucid, all I want to do is get out of there. Rapidly, I fly to the roof, where I pull down a trap door and wriggle through it into the safety of the blue sky. The zombies stare up in disappointment and I blow them a cheeky kiss.

**10. Protective shield:** I am seriously scared when I become lucid, so I use one of my old tricks: I pull a circle of white light around me for protection. This shield is strong enough to keep me safe in any dream situation. With my palms upright, I push forward and then upwards and then down to the sides to increase the white light so that I'm now safely ensconced in a big bubble of light. As soon as I feel safe, I notice that the zombies have lost their demoniacal aspect. In fact, they look small and colourless. It was my fear that was making them so scary. I marvel again at how dreams are co-created experiences. As I watch the dream zombies from a place of fearlessness, they morph into perfectly nice-looking people, all chatting together as if they're at a social event.

**11. The “message” question:** I smile at the zombies with as much love as I can muster and ask, “Do you have a message for me?” The chief zombie looks at me, and I see the kindness in his face as he replies, “We're here to help you master your deepest fears.” (You can ask dream figures or the dream itself any question or for anything: “What do you want?” “Why are you chasing me?” You can ask for information: “Tell me something I need to know.” “Show me something important/beautiful/inspiring.” You can ask philosophical questions about the nature of reality or questions about your own health or that of others. The answers will range from cryptic to nonsensical to incredibly deep and wise, so prepare to be surprised.)

I had fun inventing these possible nightmare solutions for the zombie dream. It's rather like creating my own Choose Your Own Adventure book endings! It's even easier to do this in the highly creative hypnagogic or hypnopompic state, which is why Lucid Imaging works best immediately after having a nightmare. If you can recall two or three of the approaches that appeal to you most, such as the “message” question or fearless surrender, try them out in Lucid Imaging the next time you wake up from a nightmare.

## From Lucid Imaging to Lucid Dreaming

All of the options available in Lucid Imaging are also available to the lucid dreamer while the nightmare is actually happening.

In fact, doing the Lucid Imaging Nightmare Solution is great practice for lucid dreaming, as it helps us to rehearse possible actions and reactions that we can then put into practice in the dream state. If we practise power gestures—such as the protective shield where we push our arms outwards, upwards, and sideways to increase the protective light surrounding our dream body—we give these visualisations an extra kick, as we link them to the body. Of course, we may also earn ourselves an extra kick from our bed partner if we enthusiastically create a shield while lying in bed next to them, so it might be best to practise this mentally or standing up.

A lucid dreamer can “rewind the script” in the same way as in Lucid Imaging, and change his mind about how he wants to resolve his nightmare. A forty-year-old man shared this lucid dream with psychotherapist Scott Sparrow:

I am in a cabin alone, and the door opens. Three figures enter and stand abreast just inside the doorway: Dracula, Werewolf and Frankenstein. I am alarmed, but the strangeness of the event convinces me that I must be dreaming. Realizing that they are only a dream, and that I can make them go away, I say, “You are only a dream. Go away!” They disappear immediately.

Alone again, I think to myself, “Maybe I should have surrounded myself with light instead.” So I call out to them to return. The door opens again, and they come back in. I say to myself, “I surround myself with light.” Instantly, a pinkish white glow envelops me. As for the figures, I can barely see them through the bright haze. Then I think, “Maybe I should invite them into the light.” So I say, “Please come into the light.” As they walk forward, the light fills me, and I experience an overwhelming sense of ecstatic love. Following the dream, I remained in a blissful state for several days.<sup>179</sup>

Becoming lucid in a dream and asking nightmare figures what they want from you, or if they have a message for you, can be revealing. A dream question can also be called out to the dream sky or to any dream object—it doesn't have to be a person or animal. Paul Tholey was a pioneer of lucid dream research. He reports the following dream of a young woman who had recurring nightmares and was fearful in her waking life. When she next became lucid in a nightmare, she remembered Tholey's suggestion to ask threatening dream figures what they want of her, and bravely waited for these figures to show up so that she could do just that:

A giant of a man with a cold blue face and glowing eyes comes towards me. I summon all my courage and my fear and demand as nastily as I can: "What are you doing here? What do you want from me?" The man looks at me and his eyes grow really sad and his gaze becomes helpless, and he says, "Why? You asked us to come. You need us for your fear." And then the man shrinks to a normal size, his face becomes normal, and his eyes don't glow any more.<sup>180</sup>

The young woman's nightmares never returned. She felt freed after this lucid dream, and reported that she was less fearful in her waking life too. Lucid dreamers in need of inspiration of how to react when confronted with frightening dream imagery can draw on the previous LINS zombie examples for ideas.

## Mixing Up Realities

When I give talks, people often ask me about the dangers of lucid dreaming. One worry some people have is that if they take up lucid dreaming, they might mistake dream reality for waking reality and end up doing something stupid. Yet when we are awake, we are so firmly entrenched in waking reality and all the deeply rooted assumptions that go with it, such as "objects are solid," "people can't fly," and "gravity is present," that it is actually very difficult to feel convinced that we are dreaming when we are

awake. This means that for psychologically stable people who are awake and in a “regular” state of consciousness (i.e., they haven’t taken mind-altering drugs), there is no real danger of mistaking waking reality for a nighttime dream.

When you consider the dreams in this chapter, ask yourself how likely it would be that they would occur in waking reality: Dracula shows up on your doorstep; zombies surround you; a blue-faced giant approaches you. If you’re not at a Halloween party, none of this seems likely to happen. If you are ever uncertain about which reality you are in, *do a reality check*. Don’t go jumping off buildings until you are fully convinced that you are lucid in the dream state! Sensible lucid dreamers float experimentally before they jump off anything.

If a person is psychologically fragile due to trauma, bereavement, or abuse, or is lost in substance abuse or suffering from debilitating nightmares or psychotic episodes, they would be advised to get help from a registered counsellor or therapist before actively pursuing any type of deep introspective activity, whether this is meditation, yoga, or lucid dreaming.

Some of the most beautiful moments in my life happen when I “become lucid” in the waking state. However, this doesn’t mean that I think I’m asleep and dreaming; it means that I have the same doubly-awake, super-lucid, moment-by-moment sense of wonder at my surroundings that I do in my most lucid dreams. It is intense. It’s the purest embodiment of presence.

## Lucid Nightmares: When Lucidity Seems to Make No Difference

There can be a tendency for lucid dream explorers to talk only about the bright, happy side of lucid dreaming, and it’s true that its positive aspects are very strong, but as with all states of consciousness and all growth paths, there can be a darker side. In this book, this is mainly explored in chapter 15 on sleep disorders, but I’m also going to talk now about lucid

nightmares. In lucid nightmares, the “powers” of the lucid dreamer appear to fail her; she cannot release herself from a nightmare situation, cannot move, fight, or even wake herself up. Most readers will immediately spot the connection here with the natural sleep paralysis we all experience every night as a biological safeguard against kicking out or leaving our beds and running about while we are dreaming.

Why would anyone be powerless and unable to act in a lucid dream?

**1. Physical factors.** Most of us have had nightmares where we are trying to flee a pursuer and it’s as if we’re running through quicksand. This is because the sensations of the dream body get mixed up with the sensations of our sleeping physical body, which is paralysed. In sleep paralysis and in other very light sleep states (such as waking up slightly from a dream), the dreamer is in a transitional state of consciousness and can feel the physical body and experience with full conscious awareness the sensations of numbness and immobility common to sleep paralysis. These sensations then bleed through into the dream. In this type of lucid experience, you are very likely not far from the waking state despite feeling catatonic, because your brain is so alive and wired, but it may be hard to wake up and regain control of your limbs. What is needed here is conscious relaxation and release—fighting sleep paralysis rarely did anyone much good, as the greater the panic, the worse things get.

**2. Psychological factors.** If the dream is reenacting a trauma, there may be such psychological resistance that the psyche becomes “stuck.” The underlying feeling if one is unable to move is powerlessness. What is needed in this case is empowerment. I’ve created some empowerment techniques for lucid nightmares exacerbated by either physical or psychological factors.

#### **Practice #45: Empowerment Techniques for Lucid Nightmares**

**1. Identify pain and fear.** There may be actual physical pain that is coming through in the lucid nightmare and being expressed in the language of metaphor. Breathe into the pain and send it healing light

and love. Where in your dream body are you feeling pain? See which associations come up around that body part. If you are feeling a strong emotion such as fear, ask, “Where in my body do I feel my fear?” Deep-breathe into that place, and release with an affirmation: “I release all pain and fear. I am safe.”

**2. Connect the feeling to your waking life.** Ask yourself, “Where in my life am I experiencing powerlessness, fear, an inability to change a situation?”

**3. Relax.** You can fight a wave or you can surf it. Do not fight sleep paralysis! You’ll only end up thrashing around in a panicky dream space while your body lies quietly in bed. Relax. You have control over three things when stuck in sleep paralysis: your breathing, your eye movements, and your mental attitude. Slow your breathing down and count the inhalations and exhalations. Move your eyes gently around in tandem with your breathing if this helps. Moving the eyes can also help you to wake up, as can holding your breath.

The key element here is your mental attitude. Focus on accepting whichever strange sensations arise. Be fully present in the moment. Know that sleep paralysis is entirely natural. It happens to all of us every night. We just don’t usually notice it because we have already slipped into dreaming consciousness. You are actually very close to a lucid dream in sleep paralysis! The unpleasant part of the experience will pass, so remind yourself that you will either wake up safely or fall asleep properly and have good (and even lucid) dreams.

**4. Mentally rehearse a different ending** while in the lucid nightmare—try LINS—after all, you are lucid right now. Even if your dream body seems momentarily stuck, remember that this can change in an instant. See how the imagery and atmosphere change when you release your fearful attachment to them and become fully present. British lucid dreamer Natalie O’Neill shared this recurring lucid

experience where she releases her fear and is then able to change the dream:

I am on a bed outside, exposed and vulnerable, surrounded by body parts. I go to sleep on the bed and go into another lucid dream. As soon as I realised I was in control and that even though what I was seeing with my eyes was horrifying, it could not actually hurt me, I would change the scenery by going to sleep on the bed and showing that I could not be hurt by what I see.

**5. Be lucid.** Psychologically speaking, your unconscious wants you to be present to this horrible experience: for whatever reason, it is being raised to consciousness. You can then release it. Stay fully aware in the moment but do not get too attached to events. Ask yourself, “What does this experience want me to know?”

**6. Practise relaxing breathing exercises while awake** and think of a safe memory: a moment in your life that you treasure, perhaps from your childhood. Practise suffusing yourself with this moment of safety or happiness. If you summon this memory during a lucid nightmare and focus on it while you breathe, the dream will transform. Jorge Conesa Sevilla, author of *Wrestling with Ghosts: A Personal and Scientific Account of Sleep Paralysis*, had many disturbing lucid sleep paralysis experiences. He practised zazen meditation by day, and began to use it to calm himself during these experiences. This helped him to transcend his fear and move into a beautiful lucid dream.

**7. Challenge your beliefs.** Which attitudes and assumptions are you taking with you into the dream state? Do you believe yourself to be separate from your dreams? Do you see frightening dream figures as separate from you? If so, you are giving those dream figures power. If you accept them as part of yourself, or part of the collective unconscious, and if you are open to the idea that this experience may be here to teach you something, then you are more likely to draw



something positive from lucid nightmares. What might such experiences teach us? Perhaps they are flagging up repressed trauma, or perhaps they are showing us that we need to learn other ways to react when we are threatened. They might not always reflect our personal psychology, but the state of our community or our planet. They may arise solely from the dream body–physical body overlap that occurs in sleep paralysis.

**8. Work on self-healing.** If your lucid nightmares point to a past trauma, it makes a lot of sense to take steps to heal yourself from the after-effects of that trauma. Otherwise the nightmares will likely just keep coming. Talk to a therapist and explore ways of working with these strong memories and emotions so that you can release them and move forward. Lucid dreaming can help with healing, as seen in part 4 on healing and wellbeing.

**9. Move beyond terror.** Many nightmares end at the point of greatest terror. Moving beyond this point into something happier can be psychologically beneficial. If you manage to achieve the necessary presence of mind and calmness, you can change your lucid nightmare story while you are dreaming it. Otherwise, when you wake up from a lucid nightmare, make a point of completing the story or rewriting it from the beginning for insight and resolution.

**10. Imagine movement.** In any frozen dream, lucid or non-lucid, I would advise doing bodywork to get the energy moving. At the time, if you can't physically move your limbs, simply imagine yourself moving. When awake, work with the experience by walking outside in nature while recalling the dream images, or find a nightmare solution through LINS and then hold this in your mind while you do gentle yoga. These are easy ways of working with the body to get “stuck” energy flowing again.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Can Lucid Dreaming Help?

A major, recognised symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder is recurrent nightmares in which the initial trauma is often relived. PTSD nightmares are characterised by feelings of intense fear, horror, or helplessness.

For years, lucid dreaming has been recognised to be useful in the treatment of nightmares. A study on five chronic nightmare sufferers led by Dr. Antonio Zadra and Dr. Robert Pihl in 1997 showed the effectiveness of lucid dreaming for the reduction of nightmares. Two of the nightmare sufferers were taught progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, and lucid dream induction, while the other three were treated with lucid dream induction alone. All five cases were successful. One year later, four of the subjects no longer had nightmares and the other experienced a decrease in nightmare intensity and frequency.<sup>181</sup>

This research has been expanded upon in subsequent nightmare studies, such as those by Victor Spoormaker and colleagues, but studies specific to how effective lucid dreaming is for post-traumatic stress disorder are few and far between. One 2016 study was the first of its kind to study the nature of lucid dreaming experiences in PTSD sufferers. Researcher Dr. Gerlinde Harb and colleagues worked with thirty-three Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans and found that prior to treatment they had low dream control even when lucid. These people were particularly prone to lucid nightmares in which trauma was reenacted: “The combination of conscious awareness of dreaming and inability to control dream content may contribute to the particularly distressing nature of posttraumatic nightmares ... Patients may feel trapped in reliving a traumatic event in their dreams.”<sup>182</sup>

Imagine for a moment how that must feel—night after night, you lucidly witness the horrors you have endured but are unable to change the unfolding dream scene. It really is a living nightmare. But the veterans who were taught imagery rehearsal therapy as part of their treatment responded well. Although they did not report an increase in lucid dreams, they did

report greater dream content control and reduced nightmare distress. Here's the technique:

### **Practice #46: Imagery Rehearsal Therapy**

PTSD sufferers should not attempt this practice without support in the form of a friend or therapist, as working with PTSD nightmares can cause flashbacks.

Rewriting a terrifying nightmare to give it a happy ending may sound like a childish waste of time, but it is astonishingly effective. Imagery rehearsal therapy is an imagination exercise where the trauma victim writes down an altered, happier version of their nightmare and does a daily imagery exercise with this new version, reliving it intensely in its new, positive form.<sup>183</sup>

If you feel battered by a nightmare, particularly a recurring one, try rewriting it so that it is no longer a nightmare, but a dream of triumph, love, healing, or freedom. You can gift yourself with magical protections. You can fly away from your aggressor, or turn to face him and give him a hug. You can ask your monsters what they want to tell you, and listen to their response. Through this flight into fiction, you can transform yourself on paper from a victim into a happy, confident person who knows how to stand up for herself and come to no harm.

This rewriting is like a waking version of lucid dreaming, because you have the freedom to change your dream narrative if you want to. It's relatively easy to do this on paper, and yet once it exists on the page, somehow the changed narrative gains a certain reality and you may experience anything from light relief to a profound sense of healing and completion. Take time every day to reread your story and meditate on the new, healing imagery.

## **Changing the Nightmare While Lucid**

The effectiveness of changing the dream while awake, by rewriting the ending as in imagery rehearsal therapy, could be enhanced by teaching PTSD sufferers that this content control is also possible while lucid in a dream. For those who do not often have lucid dreams, lucidity could be triggered in the sleep lab using transcranial stimulation so that PTSD sufferers can go ahead and change their recurring nightmares while lucid inside their dream.

More studies involving wide samples of case studies are needed to be able to judge how effective lucid dreaming actually is in the treatment of PTSD. Sometimes lucid dreaming teachers claim that they have “cured” somebody of PTSD nightmares. If this is truly the case, it is wonderful. Yet with such a serious disorder, a total cure can be difficult to achieve, as there is a tendency for the nightmares to return during times of major life stress. Linda Magallón, author of *Mutual Dreaming*, is a PTSD sufferer following a childhood of physical and psychological abuse. For thirty-eight years, Linda recalled nothing but nightmares. She remarked to me:

A veteran that has repeating nightmares of combat may be able to overcome them temporarily. But the nightmares come back when he’s going through a divorce. For me, the real test of a treatment is that it still works during the worst-case scenario. In my experience, utilizing both visualisation and lucidity were required.

Linda worked out ways of combatting her PTSD nightmares. She learned to fly in her lucid dreams but realised that her non-lucid dreaming self felt unable to fly and was still being victimised in nightmares. Linda developed an empowerment method that involved her lucid dreaming self, her waking self, and her imagination. She even learned to pilot a private plane in waking life! Flying was the key to freedom from her traumatic nightmares:

Since most of my non-lucid dreams were light years away from either lucidity or the waking state, I couldn’t use resources from those states to alleviate them. What I needed was something that was available to my

deeply non-lucid dreaming self. Something native to the world of dream: the skill of flying. The dreaming self has the ability to fly no matter what her stage of awareness.

But lucid dreaming was still extremely useful as a practice ground, an arena far closer to the non-lucid dream than waking visualisation or physical flight. And it worked. Even during times of crisis, I have few nightmares. My percentage of titanic nightmares dropped from 100 percent to 1 percent, because I spent so much time using trial and error to make it so.

Linda's three-pronged approach to PTSD nightmares, involving waking actions, imagined actions, and lucid dreaming, seems inspired. I have once in my life had what might possibly be referred to as PTSD. As recounted in chapter 16 on psychological healing, when my newborn baby nearly died it was certainly traumatic, and the impact of this trauma did subsequently manifest in waking symptoms of anxiety and a terrifying recurrent nightmare. Yet the moment I became lucid in that nightmare, it spontaneously transformed into a healing experience. Seven years later, the nightmare has not yet returned, and I can't imagine that it ever will. Although on the personal level my lucid dream was a marvellous result, I don't believe that my trauma can be compared to the repeated trauma of soldiers involved in combat and insurgency, or the victims of torture, childhood abuse, and war. However, every trauma, no matter what the degree, deserves healing pursuits.

As with any psychological event, the individual case is what counts, and we all have different inner resources and self-protective mechanisms. Personally, I have devoted most of my life to exploring dreams and I am deeply familiar with bodywork (yoga) and mind work (consciousness exploration is part of my job as a lucid dream researcher, and imagining is part of my job as a novelist). I have also never suffered from depression or mental illness. Added together, this puts me in a strong position for working easily and effectively with lucid dreaming to overcome trauma. What works

for one person may not work for everyone, and this is why although there may be few people in the world who believe as much as I do in the healing potential of lucid dreaming, I feel wary of prescribing it as a cure-all, particularly for tough cases of PTSD. Rather, it may well be best to use a combination of different therapeutic interventions (including lucid dreaming if the patient feels happy with the idea) in order to provide PTSD sufferers with a stable platform on which to build a lasting recovery.

That said, there are heartening examples of lucid dreams that seem to have been instrumental in keeping PTSD nightmares at bay over long periods of time. Clinical psychiatrist Dr. Timothy Green worked with a Vietnam veteran who had been suffering for three decades from a nightmare in which he was fighting the Viet Cong and one of his friends fell, seriously wounded. When he reached him, the friend was already dead. Green told the veteran about the possibilities of lucid dreaming and suggested he pick a place in the dream to act as a signal to prompt lucidity, and visualise himself becoming lucid so that he could guide the dream. A few weeks later, the nightmare recurred. Green reports:

This time as he reached his friend he was able to realize that this was a dream and he could choose to direct it in any manner he wished. He decided to tell his friend to get up, that the war was over and they were all going home. In the dream, his friend sat up, smiled and they got up and walked off the battlefield. It has now been over two years and he has not had this nightmare since.<sup>184</sup>

When we bring lucid awareness to a fearful experience, we are already more than halfway there. If we are able to add empowering action, we have a solid chance of freeing ourselves from debilitating nightmares, past traumas, and deeply rooted fears.

#### **Practice #47: Become Frankenstein**

If your nightmare is truly terrifying and makes you feel powerless, please first try the imagery rehearsal therapy described earlier in this

chapter (practice 46), preferably with a supportive friend close to hand. If you are curious about the characters or imagery in your nightmare, try “becoming” the nightmare image by writing from the point of view of your personal Frankenstein, beginning with “I feel ...” or “I want to ... .” This can have surprising results—perhaps the terrifying figure is itself terrified ... of what? Write and find out, using my Lucid Writing technique described in chapter 9 if you like.

When reading back over your writing, ask yourself, “What story does this tell? What happens next?” Sometimes the answers you come up with will lend themselves to the construction of a poem, or they’ll contain the kernel of a story or the heart of a piece of artwork. If a sentence intrigues you, write it at the top of a page, relax into the creative trance, and write nonstop for five minutes. If you’re more of a visual person, try drawing the central image in three different ways—first at its most fearsome, then with some gentler or humorous aspects, and finally benign.

[contents]

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  173. Schredl, "Nightmares."
  174. Zadra and Pihl, "Lucid Dreaming as a Treatment for Recurrent Nightmares."
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  176. Peters, *Living with Dreams*, 159–160.
  177. Spoormaker and van den Bout, "Lucid Dreaming Treatment for Nightmares: A Pilot Study," 389–394.
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## CHAPTER 14

### *Kids and Bad Dreams: How Lucid Dreaming Can Help*

It was only a bad dream, not real.” This dismissive statement is kindly meant by parents faced with a child’s nightmare. But dreams can seem more real than reality, and intense emotions such as fear or distress can linger long after waking up. If a child is told his ultra-real experience was not real, he’ll likely feel confused rather than comforted. As English essayist Charles Lamb famously remarked, “Parents do not know what they do when they leave tender babes alone to go to sleep in the dark.”<sup>185</sup>

If a child’s dreams are dismissed as “not real,” the child may not share further distressing dreams and could start to have problems sleeping. Since the line between dreams and reality is blurred in young children, bad dreams may affect the child’s waking behaviour. In her book *Dream Time with Children*, counsellor and dream author Brenda Mallon writes of a six-year-old boy who dreamed there was a monster in his mother’s bag. The next day, “he would not go near it, skirting around his mother when out shopping, just to avoid contact.”<sup>186</sup> It was only when his mother asked why he was behaving so strangely that he told her about his dream. Ten-year-old Emma reacted similarly following a nightmare, and her sister’s teasing made it worse: “Once when I was sick I dreamed that my sister was Dracula and for weeks after that I refused to sleep in the room with her. She teased me by showing her teeth.”<sup>187</sup>

This chapter focuses on bad dreams, as so many children have them and lucidity is a powerful tool for handling them. Bad dreams and nightmares are different from night terrors (also known as sleep terrors), where a child screams and screams in her sleep and cannot be consoled, often staring unseeingly and not acknowledging her parents at all. These and other sleep disturbances are discussed in [chapter 15](#).

Following a bad dream, the emotional residue, or “fear factor,” of vivid dreams can remain for a long time in children, and without help they might be unable to find a way of releasing these difficult feelings. So how might parents best respond to their children’s disturbing dreams?

Easy: with L.O.V.E.

No, I’m not getting soppy on you; this stands for Listen, Options, Verify, Empower (although a generous helping of love never hurts). I developed this method by working with my young daughter’s scary dreams. When she had just turned two years old, she started getting freaked out by dragons she’d seen in a picture book, as well as tigers and lions. She began having nightmares, and I gleaned their content from her jumbled descriptions: in Yasmin’s dreams, these sharp-teethed beasts wanted to eat her up.

First I listened to her dreams and took them seriously. Then I offered her a number of options. I told her that if something she doesn’t like happens in her dream, she can choose to wake up and call for me, or shout at the dream tiger that it’s *her* dream and that it has to go away, or (and this “shadow integration” idea is the one she liked least) make friends with it by giving it a cuddle. She refused to consider the latter option, telling me, as if I’d clearly lost my mind, “No—got *sharp teeth!*” I gave her a mantra to use in her scary dreams: “I am Yasmin. This is MY dream! I am STRONG!” After this, I kept verifying the status quo, asking her about her dreams and reminding her of her options. One day after one of these talks, I came across her jumping up and down on her bed, shouting, “This is MY dream!” Over several days I heard her happily shouting this maxim from time to time. It seemed to empower her, as her nightmares diminished sharply.

The L.O.V.E. technique was born! Here’s how it works.

## Practice #48: The L.O.V.E. Nightmare Empowerment Technique <sup>188</sup>

1. Listen to the dream. Being heard is therapeutic and can be healing, so don't feel pressured to try to interpret the dream; simply offer the child your undivided attention.

2. Present the child with options. Give examples of what lucid dreamers can do during a nightmare, or offer different Lucid Dreamplay options from this chapter. This can be as simple as asking, "Do you want to draw the mean alien?" The drawing can then be ceremoniously destroyed, or help can be drawn into the picture, depending on what the child deems best. Every child needs to know that help will appear in a dream if they ask for it, and that they can always wake themselves up from a nightmare by holding their breath and wriggling their toes. All dreamwork should be child-led, so let the child choose their preferred strategy themselves, as it is far more likely to work.

3. Verify the child's progress. Check in with the child every now and then: "Did that lawnmower nightmare happen again?" Or a more open question: "Do you remember any dreams?" Showing interest will help the child to feel validated in her experiences and she will see that her dream life is important to you, too. You'll be able to monitor the child's progress and help her to change tactics if she needs to.

4. Empower the child. When children are told by a trusted adult that they can transform bad dreams into good ones and make friends with dream monsters, they feel empowered to make this actually happen. It helps to explain to children that the more scared they feel in a dream, the scarier it will get, but if they are calm, the dream will grow nicer again. They may need a mantra to help them calm down: "I am STRONG!" "This is *MY* dream!" A power object such as a magic shell or a shiny conker can work wonders for children. Slip this talisman under the pillow or make a dreamcatcher to catch the bad dreams. "Magical" physical gestures practised by day, such as waving the arms

from belly to spine to create protective white light around the body, can be carried into the dream state and used to keep them safe. Encourage the child to rehearse nightmare strategies such as this one. Every time he does, he is empowering himself to act in the dream world.

## Help the Children in Your Life to Have Happier Dreams

Young children are highly impressionable and believe everything their parents tell them. Sadly for us, this state of affairs won't last, and it landslides when they hit the teenage years, so why not make the most of it for as long as we can to help them build a healthy relationship with their dreams? After all, we spend a third of our lives asleep; why not make our dreaming years happy ones? I tell my daughter, "There will always be help in your dreams when you need it." I explain that if she needs me or her father or anyone else in a dream, she can call us and we will come and help her, and she accepts the truth of this without question. This means she carries this tacit belief with her into her dreams, both believing in her own ability to act and feeling confident that help is at hand if needed. Anyone who has paid attention to the effects of expectation and belief on dream content knows that dreams are highly responsive to the dreamer's tacit understandings and expectations.

Children are powerless: adults make their decisions for them; they can be bossed, bullied, even mentally or physically abused; and they have no voice. This sense of powerlessness carries over into their dreams. Dream therapist Brenda Mallon reports that children aged five to seven rarely have dreams of bravery and adventure. Yet if children's dream lives are nurtured, they can practise acting in their dreams, calling on allies for help or even helping others, as six-year-old Keziah does in this dream: "I can change into anything I want and do anything. I changed into the strongest person in the world and I went to help people in the fires." <sup>189</sup> From the age of two

and a quarter, my daughter began to report experiences of nightmares changing into happy events. Once, a scary lion confronted her on a road and she cried, but then her father came and sang a lullaby and the lion went away.

Clinical psychologist Patricia Garfield notes that “any child who receives recognition and praise for dreaming will certainly learn to recall more dreams as he is rewarded for doing so.”<sup>190</sup> Similarly, the praise children receive when they show that they are managing to improve their dream life will encourage them to continue to do this. As children become more proficient dreamers and understand the way dreams work, they’ll develop a confidence in their abilities that could carry over into their waking lives. Self-belief is a concept that runs deep. If children believe in their ability to act in dreams, their place in the waking world may seem less daunting as they learn to react creatively to difficult situations. When a couple of five-year-olds were picking on her at nursery, my then three-year-old daughter rehearsed her responses in her imagination until she was happy with the visualised outcome, then found the courage to say and do what she needed to say and do when the girls next tried to pick on her. When they saw that she was no longer bursting into tears, they lost interest in being mean to her.

One of the most important things is simply letting kids know that a trusted adult in their lives is on their side and firmly believes in their ability to create a happier dream life for themselves. In the case of abused children, they will be far more likely to share a dream in which the abuse is relived if they have a supportive adult to turn to. Mallon points out that all too often, children are not believed when they try to report abuse:

Since Freud’s rejection of his first findings on the high incidence of sexual abuse, when he chose to view the experiences revealed to him as fantasy rather than fact, a legacy of disbelief has been the lot of too many children.<sup>191</sup>

If you believe that your child's dreams point to abuse, first listen to and reassure the child that you are there to help them, and talk to their doctor as soon as possible. Even if abuse is not part of the picture, it is essential for children to be empowered by adults; otherwise nightmares can just recur over and over. An eleven-year-old boy who was emotionally disturbed and slightly brain-damaged had terrifying nightmares for eighteen months about monsters who chased and hurt him. His therapist, Leonard Handler, used confrontation therapy to help the child. He told the boy they'd fight the monster together, then sat him on his knee so he felt safe, and asked the boy to visualise the monster. Then the therapist pounded on the desk and shouted something like, "Get away from my friend, you lousy monster! If you come back, I'll be with him and we'll fight you." This was repeated until the boy also joined in with yelling at the monster. The next time the monster showed up in his dreams, the boy shouted at it and it disappeared. Six months later, the nightmares still hadn't returned.<sup>192</sup>

If your child suffers frequently from screaming nightmares, has suffered a trauma, or has severe problems sleeping, do see a doctor for professional support. One major factor contributing to children's nightmares is violent television. Children soak up information and images like sponges, and whatever they witness in waking life, including seeing people shot dead in a film or chased over cliffs in cartoons, will infiltrate their dreams and waking fantasies. TV and video game violence can have a negative psychological impact on children and fill their dreams with horrors.<sup>193</sup> Parents need to monitor children's visual intake carefully, and a lot depends on the child's sensibility rather than the age guide listed on the DVD. My own daughter once watched a preschooler's programme all her friends were into, marked as being for "universal" viewing, and even though I watched it with her and reassured her whenever she was uncertain about events, it resulted in a nightmare!

For children, as for adults, the occasional nightmare is perfectly healthy and perhaps even necessary to work out conflicts experienced in waking life. At three and a half, my daughter shouted out in distress while asleep,

and from her words I gathered she was dreaming about fighting over toys. Well, this is natural, reflecting her experiences with other kids, and is of no cause for concern. Something no child deserves, though, is weeks or months of nightmares that make them jumpy and fearful during the day, scared to go to sleep, and beset with a feeling of powerlessness.

## Lucidity Can Empower Children—If They Know It Can!

Almost a hundred years ago, in 1921, Mary Arnold-Forster, author of *Studies in Dreams*, suggested that lucid dreaming could be beneficial for children suffering from nightmares. Children can experience terrifying nightmares, and if the adults in their lives are not interested in dreams, it can take a long time for these children to realise that instead of suffering the nightmare over and over, they can wake themselves up from it or change the dream by interacting with the imagery when they become lucid. It's vital to let children know that they can wake up *inside the dream* and—crucially—guide it if they want to.

Do children have lucid dreams? The answer is yes, even at relatively early ages. A 2006 study by Qinmei, Qinggong, and Jie reports that most four- to six-year-olds believe there may be a way of controlling the action in their dreams, while knowing that this is a dream.<sup>194</sup> A 1998 study by Lapina, Lysenko, and Burikov found 80 to 90 percent rates of lucid dream frequency in fifteen- to eighteen-year-olds. The study also found that when thirteen ten- to twelve-year-olds were taught lucid dream induction techniques such as the Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams (MILD) and reality checks for six weeks, 92 percent of the children had at least one lucid dream.<sup>195</sup> Lucid dreaming is a learnable skill. Children are swift to pick up new concepts, and because their belief system is far less ingrained and inflexible than that of most adults, they don't have the same hang-ups about what may or may not be possible. If you tell them they can guide

their dreams, they believe it—and then they do it! Children often have spontaneous lucid dreams, and I have spoken to many adults who told me they had these special dreams all the time as kids, but never knew there was a name for them.

In the first lucid dream I had, when I was three, I assumed there were just two options: I could continue to drown inside the dream or I could wake myself up. At that stage it clearly hadn't occurred to me yet that there was a third choice: to stay in the dream and *not* drown, but have fun exploring the dream! If kids are told about the options available to them in their lucid dreams, this could spare them a lot of frightening experiences, as lucid dreaming is known to help eliminate nightmares. Why struggle with years of nightmares, fear, and insomnia when we can begin the process of dream exploration and befriending dream figures right from the word go? Line Salvesen from Norway also had her first lucid dream when she was three, and became a highly proficient lucid dreamer over the years. She had lots of nightmares around the ages of three to six, and recalls:

Most of my first lucid dreams were triggered by fear during nightmares, so the first thing I learned was how to wake myself up ... I had several scary characters in my nightmares, but once I gained lucidity, I would offer my friendship, and my nightmares stopped being about getting attacked/chased/hunted by evil beings ... Once I got a little older, I started to figure out dream manipulation, and I got rid of some recurring nightmares by changing the scary parts ... I learned that not only could I fly and move objects by controlling the dream, I could also change my own shape. By the time I was eight, I had at least one lucid dream a night.<sup>196</sup>

The beauty of becoming lucid in a dream is that the child can shape events, because often (although not always) his fear vanishes as soon as he knows he is dreaming and he is comforted by the fact that he can always wake himself up if things don't improve. Usually lucidity makes the child bolder



and more confident, so he decides to stay in the dream and interact with his dream figures. But this is certainly not always the case, and many people admit that when they were children and had no guidance from anyone as to what was possible in their dreams, it took them years to learn to manipulate the dream environment and throw off their fear.

## Children's Lucid Nightmares

Sometimes the feeling of terror in dreams is almost impossible to express. One recurring lucid nightmare I had when I was about seven terrified the living daylights out of me. In the dream I would be lying on top of a sunny hill, perfectly happy as I gazed into the blue sky. Then all these thick, black, buzzing lines like electric power lines began to cross the sky, crisscrossing it over and over until it all went black, and although I screamed, I couldn't make it stop. When my mother rushed into my bedroom in response to my scream, all I could say was, "There were all these lines crossing the sky." How banal that sounds! I mean, my mother could be forgiven for thinking, "So what?" Yet I remember it as the worst nightmare of that time in my life.

In my family, dreams were seen as silly scraps of random imagery to be discarded as quickly as possible. They were not real—waking life was the only thing that was real, so why bother with dreams? One day, making what may have been my first attempt at dream interpretation, I spoke to my mother about this recurring nightmare and suggested, "Maybe it means I'm secretly a really tidy person" (because the chaotic energy of those lines disturbed me so much). Mum joked it off: "*You*, tidy? That'll be the day, Clare." I laughed too, but inwardly I was gutted that she wasn't taking my nightmare seriously. It felt too momentous to be laughed off. In these nightmares I was completely lucid in the sense that I knew I was dreaming, yet apart from trying to wake up as fast as I could, I felt powerless to change events. Knowing what I do now about lucid dreams, I wish someone had told me back then that I could ask the dream if it had a message for me, or direct it to a happier conclusion.

Natalie O'Neill has been a lucid dreamer ever since she can remember. Her early lucid experiences involved "a golden light slightly like fire filling up my bedroom; it used to be scary but at the same time fascinating and exciting." This reflects my own childhood memories of seeing a fiery luminescence expanding to fill my bedroom as I went off to sleep. It seems that Natalie and I both had early experiences of the Lucid Light: the substance or energy from which dreams are created. Sadly, as she grew up, Natalie suffered from horrific nightmares in which she was lucid yet powerless to change the scene simply because she didn't know she *could* change it. Here, she shares one recurring lucid nightmare and what happened when she finally realised she could change it:

In the centre of my grandmother's sitting room was a conveyor belt. As soon as I saw the belt I knew it was not real waking time but that I was aware in a dream and could feel everything. Then the panic would come in. My sister would slowly appear at one end of the conveyor belt, strapped down and screaming. At the other end was a man but I never saw his face. To me he represented pure evil and I knew as a fact he was going to hurt my sister. I would then go into a blind panic, as my only wish was to save her. She would get to him and then I would wake up, and this happened so many times over the years.

When I was a bit older the epiphany occurred. I realised that because I was aware I could actually change this whole experience and instead of being filled with panic and fear I felt anger. I used this as a strength and I created a dagger in my hand. I was elated when it actually appeared and I stabbed the man. As soon as I did this I felt free and happy. I never had this nightmare ever again.

This is just one of a number of shocking nightmares Natalie had as a child and which she generously shared for this book in the hope that her experiences might help other nightmare sufferers. It seems such a shame that nobody was there to give the child Natalie advice on how to deal with

such debilitating nightmares. In the end she found her own solution, and was liberated.

## Hug the Dream Monster ... or Attack It?

Stabbing a dream figure may seem pretty extreme to some, and it is indeed an aggressive act of protection, but it's worth remembering that not only can dreams be frighteningly real and form part of our permanent life memories, but also violence in dreams can in some cases be an act of empowerment. Natalie O'Neill commented to me:

I have had various recurring experiences and nearly all those that were once frightening no longer occur because I destroyed whatever was out to attack me. I realise after hearing talks that apparently the right thing to do is hug your would-be attacker, but I never thought of doing that when I was young. Attack was the best form of defence from my point of view, especially after I realised that it worked and I could end these horrific recurring dreams.

In Natalie's lucid nightmares she was utterly powerless, and so the important thing psychologically was that she recognised her ability to act. Whether she chose to do this by attacking or hugging the nasty dream figure was a spontaneous and intuitive decision. Integration of the negative dream figure through sending it love, hugging it, or befriending it is a wonderful thing, but not everyone will be ready to do this initially. A middle path between hugging the monster and stabbing or fleeing from it is to ask the monster if it has something it wants to teach us.

The whole of life is a learning experience, and dreams are no exception. Stabbing the evil man is a powerful act that takes place in the unconscious and can help the nightmare sufferer break a pattern of being victimised in their dreams.

## Waking Lucidity Practice for Children

Practising waking lucidity helps and supports dream lucidity practice. Just as with nightly dreams, it can help to accord a certain reality to small children's waking fantasies while directing things gently towards a happy outcome. When she'd just turned three, my little girl started seeing witches all over the house. I knew she had recently read a story about witches at nursery and was frightened of them, so rather than saying, "Don't be silly, there's nothing there," I'd smile in the direction of the witch and say, "Ah, she looks friendly, doesn't she?" If my daughter looked unconvinced, I'd say something like, "She's only tiny, and so sweet! Do you think you'd like to play with her?" If the answer was no, I'd escort the witch to the nearest window and we'd wave goodbye as she flew away. But after a while, Yasmin would come up to me cradling another witch in her hands, and I'd encourage her to take care of it. She lost her fear of them; they became her "good witches." And after a time, she didn't mention them anymore.

Aged four, Yasmin watched a *Dora the Explorer* episode that begins with a bad witch disguising herself as a tree and casting a wicked spell on some little cartoon animal. The following night, she was terrified because the bad witch showed up in her bedroom while she was dropping off to sleep, and it was huge and strong. Yasmin called for me. I didn't turn on the light to show her "nothing's there." Instead, we lay together in her darkened room and I told her, "Nothing is stronger than you are in your dreams." I gave her a cuddle and reminded her of her mantra: "I am Yasmin. This is MY dream! I am STRONG!" At first she wouldn't say it because she was concerned that she could still see the witch and it was getting bigger. I told her, "It's only big because you're scared of it. If you feel strong and aren't scared anymore, it'll get smaller." She said her mantra in a tiny, frightened voice, then brightened, as apparently the witch had shrunk a bit. "Oh, yes," I agreed, pretending to see it, "it's only tiny."

I suggested that she say her mantra louder, and she shouted it at full volume while I surreptitiously stuck my fingers in my ears. Then she

laughed—the witch was “just a baby” now. But there were still “strangers” in the room. “If you don’t like them, turn them into something beautiful,” I said. So she turned them into butterflies, and the baby witch became a baby monkey. Then we made up a story of how she and I and all these new friends were in the woods having fun with the butterflies and taking care of the little monkey. Then Yasmin went happily off to sleep. The whole thing only took about seven minutes.

This kind of waking visualisation can help the child to practise what she might need to do in a bad dream where there initially seems to be no control over what is happening. *If the child understands the basic principle that it is her fear that is giving the scary dream figures power, she can learn to overcome that fear by*

1. knowing she is dreaming and *can change the dream*;
2. reciting a power word, mantra, poem, or prayer to empower herself;
3. calling on friends, parents, or allies (in this case my daughter called on me in person, as she was awake, but it is equally possible to get help while in the dream state); and
4. believing and trusting that she can transform bad things into something good and befriend them.

#### **Practice #49: Lucid Dreamplay for Young Dreamers**

In Lucid Dreamplay, we engage with the dream while awake in ways that mirror lucid dreaming, so there is a huge range of options available to help children to heal and find solace or empowerment after nightmares. The options and tools we share with children to help them tackle bad dreams and feel safe falling asleep will obviously change depending on their age group and interests. Older kids might want to try to materialise a magic wand or an invisibility cloak when they next find themselves having a bad dream, while younger ones may want to look to their favourite cartoon character or stuffed animal for help. They could ask scary dream figures what they want,

or make friends with them, perhaps by doing a magic “be my friend” spell (to be practised while awake, as an empowerment technique). Rehearsing how they want to react in their next lucid dream and visualising positive outcomes can be powerfully effective for children of all ages.

Some children may respond to the idea of transforming themselves into a superhero if a dream turns nasty, while others will prefer to encircle themselves with protective white light. There’s quite an obsession with magic in contemporary film culture, such as the sci-fi element of zapping things with beams of light, the “Force” in *Star Wars*, James Bond types of gadgets, or fighting in magical realms. Lucid dreams are themselves magical spaces where we can play at being dream magicians, an idea that attracts many teenagers. In a book on children’s dreams that I co-edited with Jean Campbell, *Sleep Monsters and Superheroes: Empowering Children through Creative Dreamplay*, I explore the four levels of lucid dream magic that correspond to those I discuss in chapters 5 and 6 of this book. Children can watch the dream film or go with the flow, or they can add touches of magic to the dream or move into full-blown dream wizardry. When children learn to be dream magicians, they can guide their dreams in the direction they choose. This can be hugely empowering.

The idea of shouting a power word might appeal to any age group—anything from abracadabra to a Harry Potter spell, an amusing poem, or a prayer. When my daughter was four and a half, this is the kind of lucid dream she reported:

I was a fairy and I turned you and Daddy into fairies too and we had magic crowns and your crown was silver and we said: “Magic crown, magic crown! Fly us to the moon and stars and sun!” And it did.

It might be helpful for children to make a dreamcatcher for their bedroom or choose a talismanic object to put under their pillow to keep nightmares away. Smaller children might respond well to befriending a soft toy that looks like their dream monster. When our daughter was two and a half and scared of dream dragons, we got her a green and pink dragon that became her “sleep dragon” and protected her while she slept. Nightmare plots can also be changed by parents, if the child likes the idea, in the form of a bedtime story that involves the same scary dream figure, only the child makes friends with it, or it turns into something sweet and helpless like a kitten. Children need to be asked first if they want this sort of story; it’s their dream, so they must be allowed to guide any dreamwork. They’ll probably chip in to correct the adult’s version of the story as it’s being told, and that’s good. Older kids can retell their own dream.

There are as many options as there are children in the world, because each child knows instinctively what will or won’t work against their dream foes. Engage your imagination and that of your child with the dream material to discover what works best for them.

## Mum, Dad, What Is Reality and Why Do We Exist?

When she turned five, Yasmin developed a tendency to ask me big questions while we were on train journeys, which meant we had an entourage of passengers with sympathetically pricked ears chuckling behind their newspapers as I tried to answer her in simple language. “Where is the universe?” she asked me. “What is energy?” “What happens when people die?” “What’s the most important thing in life?” and even, “Did somebody decide about all the people, what they look like and how they should be?” After some clarification, this last question turned out to be a five-year-old’s equivalent of, “How did humanity come into existence?” She had already thought about this, she told me, and realised it couldn’t have been a *person* who made up other people, “because people didn’t even exist yet!”

On those train journeys, I tried to offer her possible answers while explaining that some things in life are a mystery. (“What’s ‘mystery,’ Mum?” and so it went on, mile after mile, until I distracted her with some colouring pencils.) Despite the broad smiles and comments that other passengers bestowed on us when we finally left them in peace and got off the train, I wasn’t entirely satisfied with my responses. I remembered a popular quote attributed to Einstein: “If you can’t explain it to a six-year-old, you don’t understand it yourself.”

I realised I could answer these questions through reference to lucid dreaming, which is a state Yasmin experiences and has a good understanding of. I came up with the following simple guide to the universe.

## The Lucid Dreamer’s Guide to the Universe

- The universe is all around us. It might feel a bit like when we float lucid in dream space—it stretches far, far out in every direction and we are part of it.
- Energy is what you feel in your body when you sit and breathe, or run in the fresh air, or fly in your lucid dreams. Energy is in everyone and everything. It flows like water.
- Dying may be like when we fall asleep. If we can be lucid at the moment of falling asleep, we can be lucid at the moment of dying, and then we can find out for ourselves what happens next.
- The most important thing in life is being kind. When there’s a monster in your dream, if you are lucid, calm, and kind, it’s much more likely to become your friend and be kind back to you.
- There are many different stories and beliefs about who or what created people and animals and plants. What do you think creates the people, animals, and plants you see in your lucid dreams? Some people think dreams are nonsense. Others think that the dreamer creates the whole dream



all by herself. And other people, like me, think that the dream is created both by the dreamer and the dream itself. In the same way, we co-create the universe and our own lives.

- We can shape our lives in the same way that we can shape and guide a dream when we become lucid: by thinking and intending things to happen. If we remember to be kind when we do this, our dream life, our waking life, and all the people around us will become kinder, too. This is called “reality creation.”

Attempting to explain the world (or the whole universe!) to a young child is a form of waking lucidity, because it forces us to simplify, clarify, and question. It also made me rush out and buy a child’s encyclopaedia and an illustrated book on world religions.

#### **Practice #50: The Magic Dream Box**

One way of helping a child to know that he is not powerless in his dreams is to help him create a “magic dream box.” This box will gradually be filled with magical weapons, protective white light, and dream “helpers” such as angels, unicorns, parents (if wanted!), superheroes, and anything else the child thinks might be helpful. The child needs to know that he’ll have access to everything in this magic dream box whenever he’s dreaming. Even grown men use these sorts of magical props. In one of my Lucid Writing sessions in Switzerland, one man reimagined the action of a dream in which he was viciously attacked, and this time he materialised a Harry Potter sword with which to protect himself from his opponents. He said that although he knew this scene he’d written “only happened in the imagination,” he now felt free of his bad dream because he realised he had magical resources at hand if he needed them.

This is why after-the-dream work is so important; we can rewrite scenes of danger or stress by visualising them unfolding differently, and since our imagination works with similar imagery to that of

dreams, the “blueprint” of the nightmare can be changed into something that strengthens us. The magic dream box works on exactly the same premise: in creating strong dream allies to counterbalance each nightmare they have, children empower themselves so they are no longer helpless victims in their dreams.

The child can be as detailed as she likes when creating her magic dream box. It doesn’t have to be artistically special and could simply be an old shoe box, but she may want to decorate it. For each nightmare she has, she can consider what would have helped her in that situation. If she’s not sure, ask her, “What would you want to change in that dream? Who or what could have helped you?” In a dream about being attacked by a vicious dog, she might decide a friendly wolf could have protected her, for example, so she draws a wolf, or makes one out of shiny paper, glitter, and beads. For every new nightmare, the child simply paints a picture of whoever or whatever she feels would best protect her, and adds it to the box. Happy, precious dreams can also be drawn or collaged, and older kids may want to try drawing with their non-dominant hand to make the imagery less self-conscious. The child can also add any object she’d especially like in the box, such as an enchanted fir cone to keep mean dream figures at bay, or a wishing ring she can rub if she needs help.

A separate “nightmare box” could also be made (with a lid that closes tightly!) to imprison any frightening imagery. Again, this doesn’t have to be a big artistic deal; the child could just scribble the nasty face from her dream on a scrap of paper and chuck it in, saying, “You’re not welcome in my dreams again!” Parents can help the child dispose of the contents of the box now and then in whatever way the child prefers: rip the pictures to shreds, paint over them, shout at them never to come back, throw them in the bin, decorate them prettily and turn them into friends, or incorporate them into a special nightmare scrapbook. Children should never be forced to do dreamwork, and at all stages of these dreamwork techniques, the child is in control.

## Dream Intelligence

When lucid dreaming is combined with Lucid Dreamplay, it quickly results in what I call “dream intelligence.”<sup>197</sup> Dream intelligence is the development of empathy, mental flexibility, intuition, self-awareness, and resourcefulness. This mixture of skills, developed through lucid dreaming and dreamwork, carries over into situations we face in waking life and is a tool for empowerment. Dream intelligence can even improve our family relationships. Sharing dreams at home among family members can positively affect family dynamics. If dreams are respected and shared in the family, they can be a vehicle for communication with children even when they turn into angst-ridden teenagers, helping to resolve conflicts both within the family and at school.

It can be much easier for a child to talk about a dream with his parents than to tell them outright that he’s being bullied at school. Together, parents and children can make bridges between the dream and the waking life situation, and perhaps involve dreams as part of the process of working out a solution, for example, by suggesting the child incubate a dream about how best to deal with the bullies. In time, dreamwork might become more acceptable in school settings as word of its strong links to creative thinking spreads. Some innovative teachers have already brought dreamwork into the classroom and are discovering its potential as a creativity tool for children. Canadian Alison Camire, who teaches at an international school in Singapore, remarks of dreamwork that it

helps bridge the way between literal and metaphorical thinking, extending children’s metacognition. By reflecting on their dreams, children’s creative thought is developed and their creativity is boosted. Through the practice of remembering and speaking about or artistically representing dreams, children’s memory is improved and they begin to pay attention to small details. These skills are transferred to other areas of their work outside of dream study.<sup>198</sup>

I've focused on nightmares in this chapter because so many children suffer from them, but of course there's much more to children's dreams than terrifying scenarios. Art can be used to transform, honour, or explore a child's dream whether it's a nightmare or not. If children need help with a challenge in waking life, they could incubate a dream to help them solve the problem, by suggesting to themselves before they go to sleep (or a parent can suggest it, if the child is very young), "Tonight I'll have a lovely dream about how to make a new friend at school/how to cheer myself up when I feel sad/how to rollerblade as fast as my sister." In letting dreams into our day and making them a normal part of family life, we are not only connecting in rich and satisfying ways with our children, but are also helping our children connect with their innate dream intelligence. Children's lucid dreams can be transformative and can even help improve sports skills, as demonstrated by this talented lucid dreamer, ten-year-old Claire Shticks:

In gymnastics you have to learn a complicated trick called a "kip." It was taking me months to learn it when Mom suggested I practice my kip in my lucid dreams. In this particular lucid dream, gymnastics equipment is laying around in our living room. I get a dreamy feeling so I check my hands to get confirmation. I have six fingers on one hand. I get happy and I remember to try to get my kip, so I walk over to the bars and execute a perfect kip! I keep repeating the move until I wake up.

The next day I was able to get my kip on the bars!

Claire's dream links to current research into improving motor skills in lucid dreams, and if a child regularly has lucid dreams, he can choose in the dream to work on a particular skill if he wants to. As children engage creatively with their dreams, they could find it easier to engage creatively with their waking lives, too, by recognising that they can be active players

in life, drawing on their own valuable resources to improve their relationships, circumstances, and skills.

When my daughter was four, one of her favourite recurring lucid dreams was about whizzing down the biggest waterslide in the world, and another was of the butterfly with a hundred colours in its wings. At that age, she would often tell me before she went to sleep that she was going to dream of these things, and usually reported doing so the next morning. One day she got so frustrated trying to describe to me in detail the way the biggest waterslide in the world had looked in one dream that she declared she wanted to make a lucid dream book where she could draw and collage her best lucid dreams. This suggestion really did come from her, with no prompting from me, although I expect the fact that she knew I was writing a book on lucid dreaming was also a factor! Yasmin headed straight for her art table and got busy cutting, gluing, and painting. She used watercolours, glitter glue, dried petals, wool, and plenty of glitter sprinkles, and over the course of the next few days she depicted lucid dreams in which she got married to her best friend wearing rainbow shoes, was a ninety-one-year-old surrounded by trees, admired a witch's Christmas tree, and flew to the moon.

If we can give one gift to the next generation, let it be the key to a happy and creative dream life! We all have the healing tool of lucidity within us, and for children it is especially easy to learn lucid dreaming, as they aren't yet stuffed full of limiting beliefs and preconceptions. Sometimes just telling a child he has the option of waking up in a nightmare and changing it will be enough for him to implement this almost immediately. A happy, confident dream life has an effect on the nascent personality of the growing child so that he is more likely to grow into a happy, confident adult.

### **Practice #51: Imaginative Play**

Imaginative play is great for creativity and is a wonderful complementary activity to lucid dreaming. Young kids are happy with a camp made from two chairs pushed together and a sheet thrown

over the top, and encouraging them to invent stories and act out scenarios in which they direct the action is a dreamlike way of expanding their creative imagination. Perceptual games can help children learn about the transformative power of their own imagination: ask them which colours they see in the sky (any painter will confirm there's a lot more than just "blue" or "white"), or practise cloud-gazing, seeing which shapes or faces appear.

Try playing "Consequences," the game where each person draws a head on a piece of paper, then folds the paper over so their drawing is hidden and passes it to the person next to them. Next, each person draws a torso, and so on, until the feet are done and the papers are unrolled to reveal trolls with the bodies of gazelles and elephant feet. A similar game can be played in story form with older kids, so that each person writes the first few lines of a story and passes it on, leaving just the last part of the sentence visible. Then the second line is written, and so on, resulting in strange and funny stories.

My brothers, my sister, and I used to make up bizarre little plays that we then made our long-suffering parents watch. Dream theatre—enacting the dream with or without props and costumes—is a great way of exploring a child's dream if they want to. If parents are happy to join in and play a part (if the child wants them to) or simply provide an appreciative audience, this shows the child that both their dreams and their waking imagination are valued. Directing events in the imagination is a very similar process to directing dream events while asleep, and it can be a lot of fun.

### **Practice #52: Create a Dream Zoo**

Children might want to create a zoo of the monsters, cartoon characters, nasty people, tame dinosaurs, and scary feelings they meet in their dreams. These dream creatures can include "angry Miss Hannaford" or "my brother trying to squash me." They can be made by drawing or collaging the dream figures, or representing them any

way the child wants to: twisting a white pipe cleaner to represent a ghost, or making an alien out of balls of plasticine.

Expression can be found for spooky feelings by asking the child, “If this feeling had a colour/shape/face, what would it look like?” Physical feelings such as falling and emotions such as dread, embarrassment, or fear can be explored in the same way, through simple questioning, so the child can decide how he wants to represent them. Humour can work wonders against really frightening images, so if the child wants to turn them into funny pictures, so much the better.

Any of the following children’s nightmare images, which appear in Brenda Mallon’s *Dream Time with Children*, could be put into a dream zoo: “toilets opening and closing and eating people up,” “a ferocious, giant two-headed caterpillar,” “a man with a chainsaw cut a lump out of my leg,” and “fishes had swords and were killing us.” The child can decide how to organise the zoo, which could be set up in a large cardboard box or simply be a large piece of paper laid on a table. Lego walls can be built around individual cages, or boundaries can be defined with a thick felt-tip pen. Give some of the creatures plenty of space, and put others in high-security enclosures.

The dream zoo is also a place for friendly dream animals: “I dreamt my hamster could talk and fly. She took me up to the clouds and we had a tea party.”<sup>199</sup> The child could use cotton wool for the clouds, cut out photos of her hamster and herself, draw teacups and speech bubbles, and stick in magazine pictures of cakes and sweets. The dream zoo is a place to visit whenever the child wants to. Dream creatures can be played with, and who knows, maybe the meaner ones will transform over time into allies if this feels right. In the meantime, the high-security enclosures can remain securely locked!

[contents]



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185. Lamb, "Witches and Other Night Fears."
  186. Mallon, *Dream Time with Children*, 33.
  187. Mallon, *Dream Time with Children*, 35.
  188. Johnson, "Dream Magicians: Empower Children through Lucid Dreaming," 236.
  189. Mallon, *Dream Time with Children*, 33.
  190. Garfield, *Creative Dreaming*, 92.
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  193. Viemero & Paajanen, "The Role of Fantasies and Dreams in the TV Viewing–Aggression Relationship."
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  195. Lapina et al., "Age-Dependent Dreaming."
  196. Salvesen, "DreamSpeak: An Interview with Line Salvesen."
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  199. Mallon, *Dream Time with Children*, 173.

## CHAPTER 15

# *Could Lucid Dreaming Be a Remedy for Sleep Disorders?*

What would you do if you heard a noise in your kitchen in the middle of the night and went downstairs to find your house guest sitting at the table, slathering butter onto a can of Coca-Cola and trying to eat it? Or if she entered your room in the night and tried to have sex with you against your wishes? Or if she woke up covered in blood, having punched her fist through a window pane, even though she claimed to have no memory of doing so? You'd probably think she was stark raving bonkers and wouldn't be too keen to invite her to stay again, but in fact, any of these activities can happen when some parts of the brain are awake while other parts are asleep.

Around 4 percent of adults sleepwalk, 2 percent have night terrors, and 2 percent engage in sleep violence.<sup>200</sup> These “parasomnias,” more commonly known under the blanket term of “sleep disorders,” affect millions of people, but they are often misdiagnosed and mistreated, and can leave sufferers and their families feeling desperate. Sleep disorders actually encompass a huge fan of conditions, from insomnia and circadian rhythm disorders to breathing disturbances such as sleep apnoea. Parasomnias are a category of sleep disorders, and this chapter explores four types of parasomnia: REM sleep behaviour disorder, sleep paralysis, night terrors, and lucid sleepwalking. I'll also touch on narcolepsy and sleep-related eating disorder.

At a social event in 2005, I mentioned that I'd just flown back from California after giving a talk at an IASD dream conference. The guy across the table from me pricked up his ears. "Dreams? You know about dreams? Well, maybe you can help me—listen to this ..." He went on to tell me the shocking story of how he had started having violent dreams that he acted out. Recently he'd dreamed of fighting off an intruder, but woke up to the sound of his girlfriend's screams to find that he was dragging her around the bedroom by her hair! Now she understandably didn't want to sleep in the same bed as him anymore, and he was worried that their relationship would end if he didn't sort his problem out. He was being tested in a sleep lab, he said, but there didn't seem to be a solution yet.

I talked to him about lucid dreaming and suggested that if he used dream violence as a lucidity trigger, he could choose to either wake himself up, let go of his fear, or change the plot so that he wouldn't act the dream out. He seemed keen to try it, but I never saw him again to follow up on his progress. That conversation had long-lasting effects on me. It left me with an image in my head: a room filled with bluish light, a dreaming man dragging a woman around by her hair. This was the kernel that would become my second novel, *Dreamrunner*.

Parasomnias can make people's lives an absolute misery. Here's a typical remark from a sufferer of REM sleep behaviour disorder (RBD), which is very likely what the guy at that social event was suffering from: "When I woke up in the morning, I saw that I had a very big gash, like pants with a tear, and my nose hurt horribly. I had to go see a plastic surgeon."<sup>201</sup> People get quite creative in their methods for dealing with sleep disturbances. Some sleepwalkers install door alarms so it either wakes up the sleepwalker or else their family knows immediately if they sleepwalk out of their room at night. Others must hide knives and guns so the dreamer can't find them, lock the kitchen to stop them from sleep-eating, or install waterbeds so dreamers can't hurt themselves when they kick and flail. Narcoleptics can have difficulty living a regular life because they never know when they will fall into a deep sleep; they are not allowed to drive, and special

arrangements must be made so their situation doesn't interfere too much with their job. Let's take a look at the most violent of the parasomnias and consider how lucid dreaming could help.

## Violent Moving Nightmares

The violent enactment of dreams happens in REM sleep behaviour disorder (RBD). In sleep expert Carlos Schenck's book *Paradox Lost*, one man reports on his wife's violent sleep behaviour:

Even if she appears to be awake, she imagines she's seeing things, animals or persons, coming through the window, shadows on the shade, that sort of thing. It was frightening to see her out on the floor, or ... crawling over to my side of the bed, or punching me. I recognized that there was some great disturbance, something that had to be taken care of, a medical problem.<sup>202</sup>

Schenck remarks: "RBD is a dream disorder almost as much as it is a behaviour disorder arising from REM sleep."<sup>203</sup> Part of my own interest in RBD stems from the thought that witnessing an RBD attack must be like having a window into someone else's dream life, a window that is only partially opened and gives a rather confused picture.

The good news is that parasomnias can often be treated with medication, and self-hypnosis works for some, so there's no need for sufferers and their families to live in fear of nocturnal attacks. But there still isn't enough information out there about them, and even general physicians can be poorly informed. I was contacted by a young man who sleepwalked and sleep-talked, as did most of his family. But with him it seemed far more extreme, and it scared him. Once, when he was a teenager, he jumped out of his bedroom window while asleep and hurt his foot:

The worst time was when I leapt out of the window and hurt myself. The whole thing was like a dream, and I only woke up when I hit the

floor. I had to walk on crutches for two weeks. The doctor had no answer for what had happened, the entire medical staff were all shocked, and I had to explain myself in front of them all as they asked me if I had thoughts of suicide or was being abused at home.

Worldwide, doctors must be well informed to avoid situations such as the one this teenager had to go through. If doctors cross-examine sufferers in a panicky and ill-informed way instead of calmly sending them off to a sleep lab for a proper diagnosis, the sufferers begin to fear that they're losing their minds. Often people only hear about parasomnias when a horrific case of sleep violence comes to light, such as the British man who strangled his wife while dreaming he was fighting off an intruder. There's a tendency to think such incidents are either linked to repressed murderous fantasies or are a symptom of madness, but in bona fide cases of RBD sufferers attacking their loved ones, neither of these are the case. Sleep researchers are very conscious of the need to raise awareness of parasomnias. It's important to educate doctors as well as the general public so that cases can be diagnosed early on and treated before they erupt into violence.

## Could Lucidity Help to Overcome Parasomnias?

Lucid dreaming is just one state on a whole spectrum of consciousness, and just as we can “wake up in a dream,” so we can “dream while awake.” These wake-dream mixtures are truly fascinating: sleepwalking, waking trance states, lucid dreaming, full-blown waking dreams, sleep paralysis, narcolepsy (when people fall asleep involuntarily several times a day), and many more. These hybrid states are a key to consciousness exploration because they enable us to see how dreams and waking states can mingle to create a unique and convincing reality for the person experiencing them. Carlos Schenck, MD, told me what he believes parasomnias can teach us about the nature of consciousness:

The major finding ... is that we can be both asleep and awake at the same time: mixed states of sleep and wakefulness. Animal studies and also human functional brain scan studies have shown that parts of the brain can be asleep while other parts of the brain are awake. So consciousness can be a mixed bag of wake and sleep mental activities, rendering us prone to bad things happening during the day or at night since we are not “fully with the program.”

If we are not “fully with the programme,” how do we “get with it”? For years, I’ve been pondering the idea that lucidity could help to alleviate or overcome certain parasomnias.<sup>204</sup> Oddly, this idea seems to have received no real attention by scientists or sleep experts yet, and I hope that will soon change in the form of widespread empirical research. There was one 2015 study by Michael Rak and colleagues at the Max Planck Institute for Psychiatry in Germany<sup>205</sup> that showed that lucid dreaming can help people with narcolepsy in the context of the nightmares they often suffer from. Narcoleptics are prone to have frequent lucid dreams since they are so often on the border between sleeping and waking, and the study showed that lucid dreaming did help them greatly with their nightmares. This result is in line with plenty of previous studies into lucid dreaming for nightmare relief. However, to date I am not aware of any studies investigating how lucid dreaming might help sleep-eaters or sufferers of REM sleep behaviour disorder to overcome their actual condition.

How could lucidity help someone who acts out their violent dreams? Well, they could train themselves to become lucid as soon as they experience violence in a dream, and wake themselves up or change the dream, so that they won’t enact it and put themselves and their bed partner at risk. Alternatively, lucidity could help to resolve the central trauma in cases where parasomnias may be associated with a particular recurrent nightmare, such as with sleep-related dissociative disorder. After all, lucidity gives us the unparalleled opportunity to *do dreamwork while in the dream*—and as

we will see in chapter 16 on psychological healing, this type of direct dreamwork can have profound and lasting positive effects.

### What if Sleep Disorder Sufferers Can't Get Lucid?

The problem is perhaps that people who suffer from parasomnias are not always lucid dreamers, and what use is dream lucidity if it never happens? Lucidity induction devices are gradually improving, and since 2014, lucid dreaming can be triggered in the sleep lab via electrical stimulation of the brain.<sup>206</sup> As the technology develops, we're likely to find a reliable way of getting people lucid in the comfort of their own home, but this would need to be combined with a programme of reality checks, guided visualisations, and other natural methods to heighten awareness and prolong lucidity. Even then, would doing a reality check while sleepwalking result in the aha moment: "Wow, I'm dreaming!"? Not necessarily, because during sleepwalking we don't always see dream imagery; we see our physical surroundings.

In my childhood experiences of sleepwalking, although I was aware of "dream-thinking" in the sense that my movements were in accordance with an inner dream plot, I quite clearly recall seeing the inside of my house and noticing the furniture, the staircase, and so on, which all seemed as they were in waking life. So it's possible that a sleepwalker, even if she asks herself if she's dreaming, will note the lack of weird dream imagery and conclude, "Of course I'm awake!" Daily mental training could help her to recognise when she is in fact asleep, and there's a chance that with trial and error, and adjustments of focus in the daytime practice, lucidity will be triggered during the next episode, enabling the sleeper to stop her odd behaviour and return to bed.

My novel *Dreamrunner* explores the devastating effects of a violent parasomnia on family life. Let's imagine a scenario where one of the characters, Marisa, who has sleep-related eating disorder, leaves her bed and walks downstairs in the middle of the night. Part of her brain is asleep, part is awake, and she's hungry. She walks to the fridge and pulls it open.

The creak of the fridge door sends off a trigger she has been planting in her mind for the past week—whenever she hears that sound, she does a reality check. Automatically, she pauses to pull at the fingers of her hand. “Am I dreaming?” she mutters. Her fingers look and feel real, but there’s something niggling at her, something about the fact of standing in front of the open fridge all alone in the night, something she’s trying to stop doing ... Then it hits her. Like an eye opening, she sees the situation for what it is: she’s sleepwalking again and is about to sleep-eat! She realises she must close the fridge and return to bed. Still in a strange sleep-wake mode, but with the balance tipped more towards lucidity now, she does this. In the morning, there’s no chocolate smeared on her bedcovers, no soggy lentils on her face. She remembers becoming lucid in the kitchen and is elated.

Just as lucidity can help some sufferers of post-traumatic nightmares, so lucidity is a potential tool for those suffering from certain sleep disturbances. I look forward to studies in this area, because it does merit proper investigation. After all, since parasomnias are naturally arising hybrid states of consciousness, surely they could be treated (at least to a certain extent) through natural methods such as dream lucidity combined with reality checks, self-hypnosis, meditation, and guided visual imagery. It comes down to waking up: waking up to the state of consciousness we currently find ourselves in and then reacting appropriately. If someone came to me with stories of violent dreams, rather than giving them some pills to suppress the symptoms, I would definitely want to help them get to the bottom of those dreams!

*Does this maniac who wants to kill you remind you of anyone or anything? How do you feel in the dream? Where do you feel this emotion in your body? When did you last feel like this in waking life? What would you change about this dream if you could?* All these and many more dreamwork questions and associations might begin to unlock any deep-down psychological cause of the sleep violence (if there is one—some sleep researchers might say certain parasomnias are purely down to brain chemistry, so it depends on if you take a holistic approach or a conventional



medical one). Imagine the potential for healing if the sufferer becomes lucid in the violent dream and asks these questions directly, or turns to face their would-be aggressor without fear and enquires respectfully, “What do you want?”

## Sleep Paralysis: Gateway to Lucidity

We all experience paralysis every night. As we fall asleep, muscular paralysis sets in to stop us from acting out our dreams. As we’ve seen in the accounts of RBD sufferers, dream enactment can be a very dangerous thing. The only parts of the body that are not paralysed are the eyelids (which is why ocular signalling from lucid dreams is possible) and the respiratory apparatus (for obvious survival reasons). Sleep paralysis often goes hand in glove with odd or unpleasant sensations, such as being sucked into a vortex or crushed by a weight on the chest, or the feeling that one is being closely observed by an uncanny presence. Loud, realistic noises are also sometimes heard.

One night I entered sleep paralysis, and after some time of relaxing lucidly in this state, I distinctly heard a woman shouting at a child. “Fascinating,” I thought to myself. “Sleep paralysis experiences are so real—if I didn’t know better, I’d be certain that woman was right outside my bedroom.” I concentrated my lucid attention on the whirling, swirling sensations I was now experiencing, as if I were being spun around in space. Then I heard a crash, as if my daughter had fallen out of bed. That gave me pause, and I listened closely. “I’m in sleep paralysis,” I reminded myself, “and this is an auditory hallucination.” But then there was more ruckus and I clearly heard my husband saying, “Who *is* that?” This last detail made me wake myself up in case I was wrong about the other details.

Of course, I woke to a peacefully sleeping husband who had not spoken, a daughter who had not fallen out of bed; and a house empty of shouting women and children! The hallucinatory power of dreams and sleep states is remarkable. Time and again, we are fooled by their realism. Episodes like

this one make me seriously wonder about the ultimate nature of reality. The senses are so easily fooled! Even when the critical mind is engaged, we can still reach the wrong conclusion. We may be very wrong about the nature of waking reality, as the senses—our primary way of engaging with the world—are so subjective and unreliable.

## Terrifying Experiences in Sleep Paralysis

For some people, sleep paralysis can be terrifying. They get “stuck” in a state of conscious awareness even though their body has fallen asleep, so they find themselves feeling trapped, unable to move, and in this state they experience all sorts of frightening sensations, such as being attacked by demons or seeing hideous faces. Ryan Hurd, lucid dream researcher and author of *Sleep Paralysis: A Guide to Hypnagogic Visions and Visitors of the Night*, suffered from sleep paralysis as a child. When he was fourteen he experienced “the hyperrealistic vision of being held down in bed by an evil force that tried to crush the air out of my lungs with invisible hands.”<sup>207</sup> As the following account from British lucid dreamer Natalie O’Neill also shows, these experiences can be ultra-real and terrifying:

I could not move at all even though I was aware when I had this experience. I have had sleep paralysis a few times in my life ... This reptilian creature had arms that can only be described as being similar to pinchers and it stuck one in my right side. I actually felt this rip into my flesh and deep into my side and the pain was excruciating. The pain was so overwhelming I felt like passing out within the dream. I was then raped. After this experience I woke up bolt upright with cold sweats. I had tried to wake myself up many times but had been unable to, which is strange as usually I can do that.

What can we do to minimise such traumatic sleep experiences? People commonly report sleep paralysis experiences that include apparitions, suffocation, alien abduction scenarios, and goblin-like figures. As hard as it may sound, the very best thing to do is *relax* as soon as sleep paralysis sets

in. Work with the visualisation in practice 54 at the end of this chapter, or customise it until you hit upon the perfect calming image for you. Allowing fear to build up only makes it a hundred times worse, as these images, just like regular dream images, react to our fears and expectations. If we get scared, they get scarier. If we struggle to escape the paralysis, it only seems greater. If we expect something horrible to happen, it likely will. If you truly want out of sleep paralysis, some people report that holding their breath shocks the body into waking up.

Neurocognitive researcher Jorge Conesa Sevilla writes about his own experiences in his book *Wrestling with Ghosts: A Personal and Scientific Account of Sleep Paralysis*, and attempts to remove some of the supernatural aura of sleep paralysis experiences. He shows how this state can be used as a springboard to lucid dreaming. While doing zazen meditation practice, Sevilla kept finding himself freezing up in sleep paralysis. Eventually he stopped the zazen by day ... and instead used it every time he found himself in sleep paralysis, in order to enter lucid dreaming!

Sevilla refers to sleep paralysis as “bound lucidity,” because the sensation is often that of being fully conscious yet unable to move one’s limbs. This experience is frequently associated with terrifying “presences,” and Sevilla explains that choice comes in the way that such states are approached: “[Sleep paralysis] can potentially convey two disparate signals: ‘anxiety and fear’ or ‘it is now time to float about and enjoy a remarkable otherworldly dreamscape.’ ”<sup>208</sup> There’s a lot of wisdom in this, because in dreams, as in waking life, our attitude to our circumstances is the one thing we can change. Once we grasp the concept that in dream states we have access to a kind of personal magic—the powerful tools of expectation and intent—we can begin to flex these tools and learn to use them for our own good. Evil demonic faces looming out of the darkness while we lie shaking in our bedsocks can be transformed into faces full of love and compassion.

We first need to learn to minimise the fear response, so practising self-hypnosis and some calming techniques (such as deep belly breathing) while

visualising something beautiful (like a flower or golden light) can help us to do the same when we find ourselves in sleep paralysis. Once we are no longer panicking, we can focus on what we want to do: enter a lovely lucid dream. We need to *expect* and *believe* that this is possible, remind ourselves that we can change the fearful visions, and focus our intent on doing exactly that, without getting all stressed about it. The eerie presence by the bedroom door could transform into a wise tree or dissolve into light. A general attitude of “let’s just see what comes,” along with a detached curiosity about the imagery and sensations, can be a healthy way of not getting too scared.

If we can learn to relax during sleep paralysis and view it as a portal to lucid dreaming, then after a while it becomes a highly effective lucidity trigger—that is to say, whenever sleep paralysis occurs, we will automatically relax and navigate through it into a lucid dream.

## Night Terrors

Also known as “sleep terrors” or *pavor nocturnus*, night terrors can be even more traumatic for family members than they are for the sleeping person. While someone undergoing a night terror usually has no recollection of it when they wake up, family members experience the harrowing situation of witnessing their relative screaming and screaming in terror. The night terror sufferer usually seems unable to recognise or hear anybody around them despite having their eyes wide open. Sometimes night terrors, with their alarming array of symptoms, such as shrieking, trembling, sweating, thrashing around, or even running about, can go on for twenty minutes before the sufferer finally lapses back into calm sleep.

Night terrors are most common in children aged up to fourteen, and are especially common in children under the age of seven, but 2 percent of adults also suffer from them. If you or someone in your household has persistent night terrors, it’s a good idea to consult a sleep specialist to ensure that no underlying medical condition is present, such as obstructive

sleep apnoea, which is often linked to night terrors. Children tend to grow out of night terrors naturally by the time they become teenagers and no lasting ill effects have been noted. If a child wakes from a night terror, it's important to give them loving reassurance to help them feel safe, and to be there for them during the episode while staying calm yourself. Here are some practical tips for how to reduce night terrors and how to react to them.

### Practice #53: A Lucid Approach to Night Terrors

**1. Scheduled awakenings.** Note the time of the episode. There may be a simple way of reducing night terror occurrences: research has shown that it can be helpful to wake the sufferer ten to fifteen minutes before the time they usually experience a night terror.<sup>209</sup> Keep them awake for five minutes, then allow them to sleep again. This interrupts the sleep cycle and resets it.

**2. Don't try to wake a person during a night terror.** Episodes tend to occur within the first ninety minutes of the sleep cycle, in the slow-wave sleep phase, so the sufferer will typically be hard to awaken and it's best not to try, because if you do manage to wake them, they are likely to feel extreme confusion and disorientation because you are forcing them out of a deep sleep state.

**3. Remind yourself that night terrors are not dangerous.** The sufferer, if left alone, will naturally calm down and fall asleep again. However, do stay with her so that you can make sure she doesn't harm herself by flailing around.

**4. Ask your dreaming mind for information.** If you suffer from night terrors, try finding out more about them the next time you become lucid in a dream. Ask, "Why do I experience night terrors?" Or (if you are sure you want to know this), "What do I see or experience during my night terrors that makes me so frightened?" Ask the dream, "What do I need to do/change/face up to in order to stop having these episodes?"

**5. Rehearse lucid awareness to wake up from your next night terror.** As often as you can, visualise yourself becoming lucid and calmly realising that you are dreaming as soon as you feel intense fear or hear screams. It is possible to stay lucid across the entire spectrum of sleep, as demonstrated in the sleep laboratory,<sup>210</sup> and lucid dreaming has been recorded in non-REM sleep stages,<sup>211</sup> so it should be possible to bring lucid awareness into a night terror. Once lucid, you can calm down and release fear, or wake yourself up, or guide the experience into something infinitely more pleasant, thereby stopping the episode.

**6. Learn calm breathing techniques and meditate before bed.** Adult sufferers should also see a psychotherapist or hypnotherapist to look into any underlying issues, such as repressed trauma. Ask yourself if your night terrors are flagging something up: are you over-stressed, under-loved, under-nourished spiritually, grieving, or suffering in other significant ways? Take steps to heal your life. Lucid dreaming can help with this, as explored in [part four](#) on healing and wellbeing.

**7. Improve your sleep hygiene.** Make sure you get more deep sleep by going to bed earlier and by creating a safe, relaxing environment in your bedroom. Try to view sleep as the wonderful, revitalising retreat it is, and look forward to your well-deserved rest, recuperation, and glorious dreams.

## Lucid Sleepwalking

There's a striking case study reported by sleep disorder specialist Carlos Schenck of a woman with vivid recurrent dreams who is convinced that she's awake when she's sleepwalking. This in itself is not the amazing thing. What is truly remarkable is that everyone else also assumes she's awake—until she actually wakes up! So everyone is astonished when she wakes up, especially herself. How can this be? Again, it's explained by the fact that parts of the brain can be awake while other parts are asleep, and

sleep-related automatism (an unconsciously performed act) can lead to behaviour that seems “normal” even to others.

Cindy experiences her sleepwalking episodes as being like watching a film, with her dream imagery intermingling with her perceptions of the physical world she moves through. One day straight after a nap (that she, in fact, didn't wake up from), she drove to a supermarket, parked her car badly so it blocked incoming traffic, and only woke up with a jerk when she emerged from the shop and saw the strange look on the face of a man who wanted to drive into the car park and couldn't. Cindy realised she had been driving in her sleep. She isn't the first person to drive while asleep. There was a shocking case in Toronto in 1987 when Kenneth Parks drove to his in-laws' house and stabbed his mother-in-law to death and nearly killed his father-in-law too—all while he was asleep.

In legal cases, defendants have been found innocent due to an automatism defence such as homicide while sleepwalking. The law says that if someone is asleep, they are unconscious, so anything violent they do while asleep is not their fault: therefore they are innocent. But there are plenty of what-ifs. What if someone has long hated a particular relative and has always suppressed their terrible thoughts towards them, sincerely believing they would never act them out? And then one night these feelings surface during sleepwalking, in a state of consciousness where we are all less inhibited ... and they murder the relative? And what if, as sleep research is showing, there are many different “mixtures” of consciousness during sleep, so that we can have waking dreams or episodes of lucid sleepwalking where the level of lucid, conscious awareness is much higher than in other episodes?

All in all, it's a tricky field, and nothing about sleep (or consciousness in general!) is black or white—we only have myriad shades of colour, as consciousness occurs on a continuum. How “lucid” do we need to be in order to take responsibility for our actions even when we're partially asleep? Maybe one day there'll be a finer way of measuring such things. In the meantime, it's beneficial to do dreamwork on a regular basis. When we pay attention to our dreams, we become aware of the deep feelings we

harbour, and if these feelings are negative or violent, we can work on changing and integrating them. If we have a lucid dream, we can even do dreamwork while we're still in the dream, which can have remarkably swift healing effects. On the whole, the more light we shed on our dreams, the better we come to know ourselves, and the more easily we can recognise and deal with suppressed urges.

Mindfulness in the waking state carries over to mindfulness in dreams and sleep as we get into the habit of recognising the state of consciousness we're in. Cindy, the lucid sleepwalker, remarks:

I can convince myself while I am dreaming that it is a dream IF I have had the dream more than twice. Then I can keep myself from getting out of bed or reacting to the dream. I don't know if I could change any actions unless I knew I was dreaming.<sup>212</sup>

So danger arises for her only if she's unable to recognise whether she's dreaming or awake. For Cindy, lucidity truly is the key to safety. If she becomes fully lucid and knows she's dreaming, she stays safely in bed. If she misinterprets her state of consciousness and assumes she's awake when she's actually asleep, she might get up and do something dangerous. For lucid sleepwalkers, cultivating the self-reflective awareness we have in lucid dreams and combining this with *waking state mindfulness practice* like meditation and regular reality checks could benefit sufferers by helping them become adept at correctly identifying their current state of consciousness. For these people, the question they need to keep asking and get the hang of answering correctly is:

“Am I dreaming?”

#### **Practice #54: Ball of Light**

This practice is specifically designed to help you in any unpleasant lucid situation, such as being “trapped” in sleep paralysis or faced with a lucid nightmare. The more often you practise creating a ball of light (and this whole visualisation need take no longer than two



minutes), the easier it will be to recreate it in scary liminal spaces in the sleep state. The basic practice of breathing in peace and safety can be done at any moment in your day. Once this practice becomes an automatic response, you will be much better equipped to deal with sleep paralysis experiences and stressful daytime situations too.

Sit or lie in a comfortable position that allows your breath to flow freely. Close your eyes. Inhale deeply while mentally saying, “Peace.” Exhale slowly while affirming, “I am safe.” Be aware of your belly rising and falling in rhythm with your breathing. As you settle into these deep, steady breaths, continue to repeat those same words: “peace” on the inhale, “I am safe” on the exhale (or substitute with your own preferred calming words). Feel yourself growing calm and relaxed.

Now imagine you feel something warm tingling in the palm of your hand. Looking down, you see it is a sphere of light the size of a marble. It radiates warmth, and as you focus on it, it grows larger, filling your palm so that you are holding a ball of this radiant light. As the ball continues to grow, any unpleasant emotions you may be holding, such as fear or anger, dissolve. Hold the ball in your two hands now, and feel it expanding effortlessly.

Nothing can hurt you when you are holding this ball of light.

You understand that anything fearful you see or experience is directly linked to your own thoughts and expectations. You are perfectly safe. Your heart grows calm and you feel a powerful sense of love and safety as the warm energy of this ball of light moves through your body, illuminating you and everything around you.

Everything the light touches, it heals.

Notice how any imagery or sensations transform when touched by the light. Fully expect to see or feel powerful positive changes. There is so much beauty now in this space, such a feeling of wellbeing. Keep your attention on your breath as your environment responds to

your calmness by creating harmonious sensations and colours.  
Remind yourself, “I am lucid and all is well.”

When you are ready, take one last deep breath, and when you finish exhaling, open your eyes and smile.

[contents]

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200. Schenck, *Paradox Lost*, 11.
  201. Schenck, *Paradox Lost*, 101.
  202. Ibid., 101.
  203. Ibid., 30.
  204. Johnson, "Lucid Dreaming, Synaesthesia, and Sleep Disorders."
  205. Rak et al., "Increased Lucid Dreaming Frequency in Narcolepsy."
  206. Voss et al., "Induction of Self Awareness in Dreams through Frontal Low Current Stimulation of Gamma Activity."
  207. Hurd, "Weirdness in the Night: Terrors and Disorders in Children's Sleep," 156.
  208. Sevilla, *Wrestling with Ghosts*, 171.
  209. Frank et al., "The Use of Scheduled Awakenings to Eliminate Childhood Sleepwalking"; Lask, "Novel and Non-Toxic Treatment for Night Terrors."
  210. Tholey, "Overview of the Development of Lucid Dream Research in Germany."
  211. Stumbrys and Erlacher, "Lucid Dreaming during NREM Sleep."
  212. Schenck, *Paradox Lost*, 188.

# **PART FOUR: Lucid Dreaming for Healing and Wellbeing**

All dreams come to help and heal us. Even the tiniest dream snippet or the most mundane-sounding dream can release insights if we take the time to work with it. In lucid dreams, we can work and play with the dream while it is actually happening, and allow it to lead to deeply healing experiences. Chapter 16 explores the power of lucid dream therapy for psychological healing and looks at how fears, anxieties, and phobias can be worked with in lucid dreams in ways similar to virtual reality exposure therapy.

But is lucid dreaming any use if we have a bad back or a headache? Dream actions have a physical effect on the body, and lucid dreamers may be able to influence unconscious body processes, like subjects in hypnosis. Chapter 17 investigates the possibility of healing physical pain and illness and gives tips for optimal lucid dream healing. Chapter 18 steps beyond what science knows and examines examples of lucid dream healings of other people. I'll look at successful and less successful examples of lucid dream healings and ask how it could work on others. There can't be enough authentic attempts to help others, and attempting to heal another person in a lucid dream is a strong way of focusing compassionate intent.

## CHAPTER 16

# *Psychological Healing and Overcoming Phobias*

One of the most powerful healing experiences I've had in a lifetime of lucid dreaming was a "dead baby" dream. It happened following a traumatic incident in 2009 when my husband and I were living in Portugal. When our daughter was just four weeks old, we found her lying stiff and blue in her cot. She had stopped breathing and appeared to be dead. Really luckily, we were just in time and I managed to resuscitate her by breathing air into her mouth. We rushed her to the local hospital, where she stayed for a few nights of observation, wired up to brain, heart, and breathing monitors while we took turns sitting with her. The doctors couldn't find anything wrong but advised us that sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) was more likely to occur after this type of incident.

This was far from reassuring, and we found ourselves in the position of never being able to fully relax when she was sleeping, in case she stopped breathing again. Since newborn babies sleep around sixteen hours a day, this was extremely stressful. I became exhausted and anxious, constantly checking the rise and fall of her belly while she slept. I was happy when she was awake and loved being with her, but my own sleep was suffering at a time when my body needed to recuperate from childbirth. Unsurprisingly, I began to have nightmares. In these nightmares, I would find a dead baby

and would be unable to revive it. I'd scream in the dream, wake up in a panic, and instantly check on my baby's breathing.

Something had to be done, but at first I was simply too exhausted to do anything. Because I was sleep-deprived, post-natal sleep still felt like falling into an abyss. My baby was all that mattered; I pushed myself and my dreams into the background and focused on her. The third time the nightmare happened, I knew it had to be faced. Logically, I knew from my years of dreamwork that all dreams come to help and heal us and that these nightmares were flagging up my intense anxiety to encourage me to recognise and deal with the problem. But emotionally, I felt the nightmares were kicking me when I was down. They were making me even more fearful, seeming to suggest that I might find my baby dead in her cot, and I was resentful of them. More than that, I was angry with them! The anger fuelled my intent: I would become lucid in the next nightmare. I didn't visualise doing anything specific, but if someone had asked me I would probably have said that when I got lucid I'd try to integrate the negative dream imagery—embrace the shadow—that sort of thing. But it didn't happen quite that way:

I find a baby dead in her cot. She has gone; there is no hope of reviving her. I scream in anguish. In the middle of the scream, I realise I am dreaming. Still totally hyped-up with emotion, yet lucidly aware, I look at the dream baby and see that it doesn't look anything like a real baby—it's a rubber doll, totally unrealistic! How could I have been fooled by this? On impulse I snatch it up, angry at this horrible recurring nightmare. I shout: "I refuse to have this sort of imagery in my dreams again! I am lucid, and I *know* my baby is alive!" I throw the rubber doll onto the floor and it dissolves into the floorboards.

My anger dissolves with it ... and as I stand there I am suddenly filled with a sense of deep peace and radiance. I have the strong feeling that I am face to face with my dreaming mind—or heart to heart with it—and the rush of love and beauty is indescribable. My whole body begins to

buzz with yoga energy, as if I'm vibrating with rainbow colours. It's as if I am the dream and the dream is me, and there is total understanding and perfect harmony. I feel completely loved and embraced. Lucid, I experience this moment with full conscious awareness.

Slowly, I wake up and find I am lying in my bed in the same position I was standing in in the dream—the yoga relaxation pose of savasana: on my back, my legs and arms slightly apart, and my palms open. I am still buzzing with the dream energy; it vibrates through my physical body and I know something amazing just happened.

The nightmares never returned. My anxiety levels dropped and I started to sleep better, trusting that my baby would stay alive. Thankfully, she was fine and eventually grew out of the age where SIDS can occur. The danger zone was behind us, and lucid dreaming had helped me to manage a stressful life situation and take a major step towards psychological healing.

Some people are resistant to the idea of working with lucid dreaming for psychological healing because they don't want to change the dream. Yet as we've seen, reacting in a lucid dream, or changing a nightmare, can be immensely powerful and healing. Those who feel we shouldn't change anything in our dreams may well raise an eyebrow at my initial forceful reaction when I became lucid in the dead baby nightmare, but interestingly enough, it turned into a spontaneous integrative healing anyway. Maybe the important thing for me was to express my emotions and affirm on a deep level that my baby was alive and well. If having a brief lucid dream tantrum and chucking a rubber doll around helped me to do this, then it served its purpose!

I'll never forget the speed at which my emotions changed from anguish and anger to deep peace and wellbeing. Nor will I forget the way I woke up buzzing with dream energy. That for me is the ultimate sign of integration: dream body and physical body reverberating with the same healing energy. I believe it's good to react intuitively in a lucid dream. A wide variety of possible reactions to negative dream imagery, such as integration, attack,

escape, getting help, and asking the dream a question, are discussed in the nightmares chapter (chapter 13) along with my Lucid Imaging Nightmare Solution technique. The simple fact of becoming lucid can instantly change the dream imagery as our perception of reality changes—consider the way the chillingly convincing dead baby in my nightmare instantly changed into a fake-looking rubber doll as soon as I looked at it with a conscious, lucid gaze.

## The Healing Potential of Lucid Dreaming

Healing is the ultimate creative expression. When we learn a reliable technique for entering a lucid waking trance, we can benefit from “lucid dreaming while awake.” There’s an experiential and psychological overlap between working with imagery in a trance and being lucid in a dream. Could we potentially heal the same sorts of things in lucid dreams and lucid trances that we can in hypnotherapy, such as psychological blocks and phobias to weight loss or even physical illnesses? Dr. Deirdre Barrett shared her thoughts on this with me. Deirdre is a Harvard psychologist and hypnotherapist and author of *The Committee of Sleep*.

Hypnotic trances and lucid dreams are subjectively much alike. In each, we have both our modes of thought: (1) what Freud called primary process—imagery, intuition, emotion; and (2) our secondary process—logical, linear, verbal, operating at the same time, and they can directly interact. In a lucid dream we have the primary process active and introduce secondary; in hypnosis, we start off in secondary and introduce primary. So I think there’s definitely some overlapping potential.

One day I was talking with Keith Hearne, founder of the European College of Hypnotherapy, about the enormous power of the unconscious and he said, “The unconscious can kill, and it can cure.” It can also stop us from doing things that we sincerely believe we really want to do. Keith gave the



example of one of his hypnotherapy clients who was suffering from infertility. Together they unlocked the memory that had triggered in her a huge unconscious block against the idea of becoming pregnant:

It turned out that when she was about four, her grandmother had a brain tumour. Her parents told her only this: “Grandma’s got something growing in her head.” All the little girl knew was that Grandma then got ill and died. So the message is: if there’s anything growing inside you, it’s going to kill you! So her unconscious had been wrongly programmed.

This kind of internalised unconscious block is often hidden so deep within us that despite soul-searching and hoping, as Keith’s patient likely did as she struggled through her infertility, nothing seems to shift. The soul-searching and the hoping do lay the groundwork for unconscious change, but often the final push that opens the door happens in a state of consciousness in which we drift closer to our unconscious mind, such as a hypnotic trance or a lucid dream.

## Healing after the Dream: Lucid Dreaming While Awake

For those who don’t often have lucid dreams, or those who don’t want to direct their dream towards a healing conclusion (or wake up before they can), working on the dream while awake can help us take the first step on the path to psychological healing. There are many different types of dreamwork, from Dr. Fritz Perls’s Gestalt therapy <sup>213</sup> and Dr. Montague Ullman’s “if this were my dream...” technique<sup>214</sup> to Dr. Carl Jung’s active imagination <sup>215</sup> and my Lucid Writing technique.<sup>216</sup> Simply recording a dream in a journal or thinking about it can be considered a type of dreamwork, as can honouring the dream by drawing it or turning it into a song.

This book is filled with Lucid Dreamplay techniques to help you to engage with your dreams in ways that mirror lucid dreaming, and deepen your relationship with your dreams. Different techniques work for different people, and it's good to experiment and discover what suits you best. All good dreamwork has a healing element, helping the dreamer to connect with the wisdom of his dreams and, as the dreamwork progresses, hopefully restoring power to him in terms of confidence and the belief in his own creative capacity to change. A lot of dreamwork involves an aha moment, where a particular life problem is brought to consciousness, and from there solutions can be unwrapped.

Recognition can be the first step towards healing. One woman who was terrified of heights worked with the following dream. She was in a hotel room at the top of a very tall building. She noticed a cat clinging to the ledge outside her window and knew she'd have to open the window and lean out to save it. She felt equally terrified for herself and the cat. In a Lucid Writing session with me, she understood for the first time that the cat represented her disabled husband. This realisation felt very powerful and shocking to her, so much so that when she told the group about it, she couldn't speak for tears.

Recognising how we really feel about a situation can be a first step towards making healing changes in our lives. We might suddenly see clearly that a particular situation is affecting us far more than we'd thought, that it has become unbearably stressful and that, psychologically speaking, we are in danger. This kind of aha moment is like a red flag being waved in our faces. It shouts, "Stop! Listen! Make some changes for the better!" Although initially we may feel overwhelmed or shocked by this recognition, it can be a valuable indicator because it shows us we need to act now before things spiral out of our control. Further dreamwork helps us to examine the issue so that we can see the way forward.

If, during dreamwork such as Lucid Writing (described in [chapter 9](#)), you experience powerful emotions and find yourself feeling upset, you always have a choice as to whether you continue or halt the process. Intuitively

you'll know what's best for you. If you want to stay with the emotions and be present to them, try to notice where they are inside your body and note any imagery or memories that emerge, as these can sometimes provide rapid answers as to the nature of the underlying issue and even lead to insights into how to resolve them. If you choose to stop the process, try simply getting up, walking around, making yourself a cup of tea, or doing whatever you need to return to a calmer state. Call a friend or family member for support if need be, and if what comes up seems too deep and powerful to handle alone, get in touch with a therapist and work on this with them.

### Some Dreams Should Not Be Faced Alone

Some dreams, especially those where we are vulnerable or outnumbered or there is extreme violence and overwhelming negative emotions such as guilt or rage, should not be faced alone. The risk with doing dreamwork alone is that we may not be able to get past these extreme dreams in a helpful way and so are in danger of making ourselves feel even worse.

Dr. David Jenkins, author of *Dream RePlay: How to Transform Your Dream Life*, notes that extreme dreams can happen to anyone and gives some examples:

In the long run, [extreme dreams] can also be gems because they express some great issue in your life, but that does not mean you should go there alone now ... *"I dream that I am alone in a room and I have filled the room with shit. There's no toilet ..."* *"I dream there's a funeral going by. I look and see that it's my mother. I know I killed her ..."* *"I go to a party and when I get in I realize they are all cannibals and they are going to eat me alive."* ... You must, must, must get a strong ally to help you deal with these kinds of dreams. It is essential.<sup>217</sup>

In these dreams, the dreamer is in a desperate situation or is struggling under a huge burden of guilt, or finds herself in a position of extreme

vulnerability. If you have this type of very strong dream, it would be wise to find a dreamworker or therapist to help you deal with it.

What if you become lucid in this kind of dream? It can be empowering to repeat an affirmation, power word, or mantra, or surround yourself with protective light. When we learn to identify and dissolve fear in the waking state, we can calm and ground ourselves more easily when we encounter disturbing imagery in the dream state. The practice at the end of this chapter gives tips for psychological healing within dreams and in waking life. The important thing is to *release fear*, as feeling fearful in a dream only seems to make the imagery even scarier, since the dream responds to our thoughts and emotions. Of course, in a lucid dream we can also choose to wake ourselves up (try holding your breath or wriggling your physical toes) if the dream imagery seems too extreme and we are not sure we can face it alone. Dreamwork can then continue in the waking state, with help from somebody else or in the safety of a group setting.

A man in one of my workshops said he had once encountered an evil presence in a lucid dream, and so he had stopped lucid dreaming. I explained how we can gently explore disturbing imagery in Lucid Writing and suggested he try this if it felt right for him. Ten minutes later, he told me that he had just worked with the evil presence in his Lucid Writing and that it had unexpectedly turned into a dialogue where the two of them had even found common ground—the evil presence complained that being evil took up a lot of energy, that it was boring in Hell and there was no central heating there! The two of them agreed that God could be stingy. So the dreamer humanised the evil presence and discovered they could communicate and even agree on things; this made him feel better about it. This type of gentle communication in a safe environment can be a first step to understanding and integrating the imagery and energies we encounter in our dreams. Once we find common ground with even the scariest of dream entities, the power they hold over us lessens, and we are one step further along the road to releasing our fear and discovering what they represent or what we can learn from meeting them.

The exact same process can happen “live” in a lucid dream if we are able to manage our fear levels, take a deep calm breath, and open ourselves up to communicating with negative aspects of the dream *with the expectation that this will result in something good*. The more calmly and confidently we are able to react to negative imagery in a lucid dream, the more likely we are to be able to make positive psychological changes. This might not happen all in one dream; it may take two dreams, or ten dreams, to fully integrate highly emotional imagery. Patience is key, and so is trusting our intuition to tell us how far we’re ready to go. The next dream will give feedback as to where we are in this process. At any stage in unwrapping powerful dream imagery, if things feel too intense, stop working on it alone and ask for help from an experienced dreamworker or therapist.

## Lucid Dream Therapy: Healing Psychosomatic Illness in a Lucid Dream

Imagery is incredibly powerful. You can visualise yourself in a different state of mind, or living the life you want to live, and this can change your waking life. In lucid dreaming, hypnotherapy, and some forms of guided imagery, we can participate in our own wellbeing by working with unconscious images. The concept of lucid dreaming as therapy has been around for a while. In her 1974 book, *Creative Dreaming*, clinical psychologist Patricia Garfield writes about what lucid dreamers can do to help themselves to heal: “You can practise overcoming your own fears, inhibitions, and phobias within your dreams. You can carry around within yourself your own self-therapy available to you several times each night.”

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I discovered this for myself when I began to have stress-related dizzy spells. It seems there are different types and causes of dizziness; some are physical while others seem psychological. The cause of my moments of dizziness was psychological and linked to a specific situation looming in

my life. In 2004 I was worried about getting my PhD topic through the end-of-first-year assessment interview. What if the panel wasn't convinced by my research and kicked me off the programme? Just the thought made me dizzy; I loved what I was doing and believed in it. Lucid dreaming was such a wacky, off-beat topic in those days and I knew I had to be ultra-careful to prove to sceptics that my research had solid academic merit. As the assessment approached, I had the following dream:

I enter a big building from the fourth floor. A series of glass staircases with low bannisters descends to solid ground. I edge down, uneasy. Then I remember it's a dream—the bodily sensation of floatiness sparks this. I decide that I've been experiencing dizziness far too much recently and wonder if I can cure it while lucid. I look down at the giddy curve of steps and see tiny people on the ground floor below. *This is a dream and I'm not afraid*, I think, and feel confidence well up in me. I put one foot forward and let my weight sink into it. Then another. Suddenly I know I'm doing it right. This is how it should feel: Steady stomach, solid feet. Head held high. I trust myself and I won't fall.

Right before I went into the interview room for my assessment, I bumped into a lady who'd just come out. She was distraught—she'd been told she was being thrown off the PhD programme! Shocked, I commiserated with her. When she'd gone, I took a moment to ground myself as I had in my lucid dream. Steady stomach, solid feet. Head held high. Instantly I felt a surge of confidence. In the interview I was confident and convincing. I made it through. My spells of dizziness stopped; not only had I passed the test I'd been worried about, but the lucid dream had also given me a simple but effective grounding technique to use in future stress situations.

The dream body has a powerful connection to the physical body. In waking life we can recall the exact physical posture that gave us confidence or a feeling of success in a lucid dream, and we can use this to help us enter

the same mindset. If you find yourself in a lucid dream where you heal a psychological problem, it's worth bringing back something physical from that dream with you—it might be a particular smile, a stance, the movement of your fingers, or simply the feeling of your belly muscles relaxing. Use these things as anchors to get you back into the positive mindset of the lucid dream, and they'll serve you well in your waking life.

## How Lucid Dreaming Could Help with Phobias

Phobias can become bigger and bigger until they affect our waking lives negatively. The more fear and anxiety we attach to them, the greater and more powerful they become, like a snowball getting huger and huger as it rolls down a snowy hillside. When it eventually comes to rest, it's enormous, an obstacle. We forget how it started, how it got there; it simply is. If we leave that snowball in the cold, dark place of fear, it remains rock-solid. But if we allow sunlight to enter, the sun will melt the snowball. As the snow melts, maybe we'll see that the snowball formed around a stone, or a blade of grass: often at the heart of a phobia is an emotional memory. Layers of fear build up around certain incidents, and once we acknowledge the source memory—it *wants* to be seen, heard, and acknowledged—we may find it much easier to release it.

How can lucid dreaming help with this? Theoretically, a lucid dreamer with a phobia could desensitise herself by facing the fear-triggering situation or object in a dream. Lucid dreamers know that they will wake up safely in their beds, and this can be enough to make them fearless (or at least a lot less fearful than they would be while awake!). A therapist might help a phobia sufferer to imagine facing a snake or a bat in their imagination, along with calm breathing techniques to give a feeling of safety. In the same way, a lucid dreamer could approach the object of a phobia with fearlessness and respect to desensitise herself and possibly discover the root cause of her fear.

Yet sometimes the phobia is so great that the idea of encountering it close up, even in a lucid dream, seems horrifying. A lady I know has a phobia of pigeons. “I wouldn’t even *want* to dream of a pigeon,” she admits with a shudder. Dreams can seem as real, or even more real, than waking experience, so for someone terrified of pigeons, the idea of meeting one in any state of consciousness is bound to be daunting. The problem is, if we carry an unconscious expectation that meeting a lucid dream pigeon will be a bad thing, the dream will likely react to our unspoken expectation and create a pigeon that we feel unable to relate to without fear. If this is the case, working with a phobia *before* incubating a lucid dream about it could be beneficial. This can be done through visualisations, hypnotherapy, or exposure therapy in a controlled environment.

### Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy and Lucid Dreaming

It’s fascinating to see that virtual reality—so similar to lucid dreaming!—can be helpful in curing people of phobias. A *Guardian* article reports that in one study that used virtual reality to treat arachnophobia, people were encouraged to gradually approach a virtual spider: “By the end, 83 percent of patients showed a significant improvement in how they dealt with spiders, with some so desensitised to the virtual spider that they could approach a real tarantula with minimal anxiety.”<sup>219</sup>

In virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET), 3-D computer imagery of the object of the phobia—an audience of people for a public-speaking phobia, the inside of a plane for those with a fear of flying, or a snake/spider/mouse for animal phobias—is viewed through a headset. Haptic feedback replicates the person’s body movements, enabling them to feel “embodied” in their virtual avatar. Physiological monitoring and feedback are combined with stress management techniques and relaxation skills, and the idea is to gradually expose the person to the object of her phobia at her own pace, until she learns to calm her fear of it and react to it normally. At every step, the phobia sufferer is exposed to virtual experiences that are more and more difficult to face calmly, but since the therapist is there, and since the client



knows that all she has to do is take off the headset to get out of the virtual world, there is a sense of control over the situation. The client learns to become comfortable with the experience, and this response carries over into her waking life experience too.

Exposure can help overcome fear—but only you can know whether your particular phobia would be better treated in the carefully controlled environment of VRET, along with a qualified therapist, or whether you'd like to face it in a lucid dream. After all, a dream feels *far more real* than a virtual reality headset, and although the knowledge that this is a dream may help enormously in reducing fear, on the other hand it might seem “all too real” for someone to face something they find truly terrifying in waking life, even when they are lucid. Some people are so controlled by their phobias that it affects their waking behaviour to an extreme. One woman went so far out of her way to avoid spiders that she wouldn't walk on grass, taped up any cracks in her paintwork, and cocooned herself in protective clothing when she went to sleep. If a phobia is this extreme, it needs professional help, and VRET helped this woman so much that she was even able to hold spiders in her hand by the end of it—a remarkable improvement.

If exposure therapy gets to be too much, the client removes the headset. Similarly, the lucid dreamer making first contact with the object of her phobia can wake herself up if it gets too much—or change the dream into something else. Psychologically speaking, it's important to remember there is a way out if need be.

In *Lucid Dreaming, Plain and Simple*, Robert Waggoner, a longtime lucid dreamer and a deep explorer of many aspects of lucidity, recounts the case of Norwegian lucid dreamer Line Salvesen. Line had an intense fear of flying. Robert encouraged her to go to an airport in her next lucid dream and practise getting on a plane, safe in the knowledge that this plane was a dream object and that she could stop the experience by waking herself up if she needed to. Over the next several months, Line tried this. At first she found that because the lucid dream airport, plane, and flight attendants

looked so real, she still experienced anxiety. Over time, she grew more comfortable with dream planes and was able to fly on them. She also used affirmations in her lucid dreams: “I love airplanes!” <sup>220</sup>

When someone decides to face their phobia in a lucid dream, it can take courage and perseverance to do so, yet waking life benefits could be felt immediately, like the young man whose fear of the dark had always been very strong. He used to have nightmares about a demonic, possessed cupboard that seemed full of evil intent towards him. Even when he became lucid in his nightmare, he still found the cupboard extremely menacing and hard to face. But in one lucid dream, he made the decision to face this disturbing image. He summoned all his courage and walked determinedly towards the cupboard. As he grew close, the cupboard started to shake, as if something was about to burst out of it, but he kept walking and it dissolved into shreds of shadow around his feet. Beyond it he saw sunlit fields, and he walked into them. From that day on, he was no longer scared of the dark.

The dream is thought-responsive: if we see a dream figure and think he looks menacing and might start chasing us, lo and behold, he does. In a lucid dream, if we can calm our fear, the dream imagery tends to respond by becoming less frightening. If we find ourselves lucid but still very scared, it can be useful to protect and strengthen ourselves, as shown in the following tips for psychological healing in lucid dreams. There are so many different psychologically rooted maladies we could potentially heal in a lucid dream, from psychosomatic illness to behavioural patterns, and from relationship problems to anxiety. These tips cover a range of possibilities, but each will need to be fine-tuned by you, the dreamer. Waking practice is very important in cultivating the right mindset for an effective psychological healing. It’s good to go into a lucid dream healing with respect, curiosity, and hope, and remember that your dreaming mind wants you to heal.

### **Practice #55: Tips for Psychological Healing**

**1. Protect yourself:** Decide on a mantra, power word, affirmation (“I am safe”), song, or white light visualisation that you can spontaneously

use in any dream where you feel threatened. This will help to calm and centre you when you become lucid, and you may find yourself spontaneously using it in non-lucid dreams too!

**2. Visualise a positive outcome:** If your relationship is floundering or you fear your boss is going to fire you, visualise everything working out for the greater good of everyone involved. If you have a phobia you want to heal in a lucid dream, it can be effective to visualise yourself becoming lucid and engaging in nonthreatening ways with the object of your phobia. Examine your expectation of resolving your phobia in a lucid dream, and change it if need be: *expect and trust* that the lucid dream will be a positive experience. Practise exposure therapy in your imagination, and continue it in gentle ways in your lucid dreams. A conversation with the object of your phobia can be a good starting point!

**3. Keep calm, be brave:** Mindset is key. Make sure you know how to calm yourself when you feel upset in waking life (take a deep breath; count to ten; recall a moment of deep peace), and bring this technique into the lucid dream so that instead of reacting from a place of fear, you can react calmly and intuitively.

**4. Send love:** Once lucid, send pure love to highly emotional dream imagery, or direct a stream of healing light towards it—this can be transformative.

**5. Question the dream:** In a lucid dream that involves upsetting imagery or the object of a phobia, try asking, “What do you have to teach me?”

**6. Give the dream a gift:** The giving of a gift is an act of friendship, as long as it’s given with sincerity. If you can’t see a gift to give, close your fist and intend that when you open it, the perfect gift for the threatening dream figure or negative imagery will appear. The gift doesn’t have to be an object—blow the dream image a kiss, pay it an honest compliment, or smile at it with love.

**7. Wake up:** If you become lucid in a disturbing scenario and realise you are unable to handle this dream alone, calmly wake yourself up by breathing deeply (or holding your breath) and focusing on your physical body in bed. Write the dream down, and make a point of getting someone to help you work on it as soon as you can. If you ignore it, it's likely to recur.

**8. Get help:** Try asking, "What do I need to make me feel safe in this situation?" The answer ("a guard dog," "God," "a bulletproof vest") might magically show up in the dream. You could call for a dream guide; some people find it helpful to call on their ancestors or a deity. Others may prefer to call, "Please help me with this dream!" and see who or what shows up to offer support and protection.

**9. Trust the dream:** However terrifying the dream may first appear to be, remember that it has come to help and heal you.

[contents]

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214. Ullman, *Appreciating Dreams*.
215. Jung, *Jung on Active Imagination*.
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217. Jenkins, *Dream RePlay*, 62–63.
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## CHAPTER 17

# *Physical Healing of Pain and Illness*

It might sound fantastical: “I healed my dodgy hip/bronchitis/back pain in a lucid dream.” There are reports of people healing burns and tinnitus in their lucid dreams, curing tonsillitis and ear infections, and speeding up the post-operative healing process. How on earth could this possibly work—after all, we’re asleep, right? And as fun or scary as dreams can be, they’re just dreams ... aren’t they? Yet as we’ve seen, lucid dreams can help heal psychological wounds such as deep-rooted fears and anxiety. Scientific research shows that lucid dreams can help eliminate nightmares and help with traumatic memories. That’s different, you might say; dreams are part of the psyche, so it makes sense that lucid dreams might be used to heal the psyche. But heal *physical* problems?

We have all heard the theory that “illness is all in the mind.” In fact, anyone who has ever woken up from a nightmare with a wildly pounding heart, drenched in sweat, has experienced the mind-body connection. If there is any truth in the maxim “illness is all in the mind,” the next question needs to be: in order to enable healing, where might we encounter the mind in its freest, most receptive, and most creative state?

Answer: in dreams.

Due to the work of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and others who came after them, these days most people accept that our personal dream imagery can reveal our psychological state, our memories, and our emotions, and even alert us to health problems. Some physical health problems are recognised

as being a direct result of stress or psychological issues, so the two areas—physical and psychological—are often connected. Who today hasn't heard of the placebo effect, where patients given a dud prescription pill report an improvement of physical symptoms? Sometimes simply believing that we're going to be healed seems enough to heal us.

Other times, bringing conscious awareness into a dream can enable us to initiate healing, so if we work directly and responsively with our dream imagery while lucid, we may have a good chance of resolving both psychological and physical issues. *Lucid dreaming gives us the unique opportunity of doing dreamwork while we're actually in the dream.*

## How Does Lucid Dream Healing of Physical Pain and Illness Work?

How can what we do in a dream trigger physical healing in the body? Lucid dreamers may be able to influence unconscious body processes, like subjects in hypnosis. Maria Isabel Pita had a strained tendon in her wrist and couldn't move her thumb in any direction without pain shooting through her. She decided to try and direct healing energy to it in her next lucid dream:

I find myself fully conscious of being awake in a dream ... Raising both hands before me, I point the index finger of my left hand at the junction of my right wrist and thumb, willing a healing energy into it. I'm delighted to see a stream of lovely blue and violet sparkles. I ... direct the starry healing energy to just above the tender area ... I can see beneath the skin ... I discern a black line or band of sorts which at first looks like an inverted syringe with something sharp and dark moving up my arm from my wrist. I'm quite fascinated to be seeing the inside of my body as I continue directing healing energy that consists of a shimmering violet light indistinguishable from my intent, which is the real mysterious source of the "corrective" power I'm focusing on my

wrist and thumb. [Upon awakening] I moved my wrist and thumb around in different directions without any pain whatsoever.

When she woke from the dream, Maria was so sure it had had the desired effect that she immediately pulled off her bandage and showed her husband that she could now move her thumb without pain. That day she noted:

If I have to assign a percentage to the improvement in my condition, I would say 75 percent. My wrist also feels so much stronger, nowhere near as weak and vulnerable to being accidentally moved in the wrong direction. It's very interesting how connected I feel to this part of my body after seeing it in the dream, and seeing into it. I look at it now and feel as though I can will it to get better, that my intent is still connected to it in an active way.<sup>221</sup>

Sceptics might claim that lucid dream healings are an absurd idea, mere coincidences, or just plain impossible. Albert Einstein would respond to that, "If at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it." Refusing to entertain absurdity is like slamming a door on possibility—and who in their right mind would want to do that? It's early days, and we do need to gather a much wider database of healing lucid dreams and see if there's any way of verifying such healings in the lab, using brain-body scanning technology such as fMRI. But before we slam that door, let's look at some scientific sleep research data that supports the idea of dream healing, and also investigate physiological changes in hypnosis.

### 1) Dream Actions Have a Physical Effect on the Body

In 1975 when Keith Hearne provided the first scientific proof of lucid dreaming, his experiment simultaneously demonstrated that the direction of a lucid dreamer's gaze affects the movement of his physical eyes: lucid dream eye signals show up on a polygraph machine. In the eighties, psychophysiolgist Stephen LaBerge and lucid dreamer Beverly D'Urso provided the first scientific proof that a female lucid dream orgasm results



in a physically measurable orgasm.<sup>222</sup> This showed that dream events are closely paralleled by physical events. Over the past three decades, further studies by LaBerge and others have shown that lucid dreamers can affect their respiration, muscle tone, and heart rate. Such studies clearly indicate that the lucid dreamer can influence some bodily processes.

Much more recently, neuroscientific research has shown that dreamed physical activity lights up the same part of the brain as when that particular activity is performed while awake. In 2011, neuroscientists in Germany devised an experiment using brain imaging and polysomnography to measure what happened when lucid dreamers clenched their fists. Even though their bodies were lying immobile in sleep, the same part of the brain (the sensorimotor cortex) lit up when they clenched their fists in the dream as when they made the same movement while awake. This groundbreaking study, by Dr. Martin Dresler and colleagues, provided “the first demonstration of imaging of specific dream contents”<sup>223</sup> and showcases the mind-body connection (or the lucid dream-body connection) under controlled conditions.

Ongoing doctoral research, again from Germany, has shown that motor skills of many different types, from yoga and swimming to skateboarding and kickboxing, can be improved by practising them in lucid dreams. One study of 840 athletes showed that some of the lucid dreamers found that in-the-dream practice of sports skills enhanced their waking performance.<sup>224</sup> The theory here is that this happens because dreamed movements trigger and strengthen new neuronal connections in the brain: people work on their motor skills while asleep, and upon awakening their sports performance is noticeably better. It shows that what we dream is not just a “brain event,” but potentially a whole body event, as what our brain learns while we dream is then naturally incorporated into our nerves, muscles, and physical movements.

If we expand this theory to less easily measurable body parts, such as internal organs and cells, it could provide us with an answer as to how physical healing can be prompted by dream healing. As the technology

improves, we can expect to discover more about the effects lucid dream events have on all aspects of the body.

## 2) Sleep Is a Regenerative Process

During sleep, growth hormones are released that stimulate cell repair. Immune system replenishing also takes place, and an immune factor that is a potent killer of cancerous cells rises tenfold during sleep. Healing seems to be one of the major functions of sleep. All the bodily functions that we rarely think about because they're unconsciously regulated, such as our endocrine system, circulation, and respiration, are overseen by the autonomic nervous system, and these too are closely linked to sleep. Neurologist Pietro Cortelli, MD, and colleagues confirm: "There is an intimate relationship between the autonomic nervous system and sleep from an anatomical, physiological, and neurochemical point of view."<sup>225</sup>

Not only do dream actions have a physical effect on the body, but dreams take place during sleep, which is a natural state for regeneration, growth, and healing.

## 3) Hypnosis Can Be Effective for Pain Control and Physical Healing

Hypnosis can be used to control pain in childbirth and dentistry, and in rare instances it is used as the only anaesthesia during major surgery. Skin disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, and a speedier healing of injuries inflicted by car crashes are just some of the physical problems that have been successfully treated with hypnotherapy, where the client relaxes into a trance and responds to the questions, positive suggestions, and healing imagery of the therapist. Some people may wonder what hypnotic trance and lucid dreams have in common. Yet it's easy to see the strong connection between the two when we consider that guiding a client through hypnosis can feel very similar to guiding a lucid dream: the client experiences inner imagery in response to the guided visualisation the hypnotherapist leads her

through. Logical, waking reasoning coexists with vivid imagery to form a kind of waking dream.

I asked Keith Hearne, who founded the European College of Hypnotherapy, “You help people to heal through hypnosis—do you think this same process could work with lucid dreams?” He replied, “Absolutely! I think they’re indistinguishable—it’s the unconscious, a mind-body link ... All of the conditions that I deal with in hypnotherapy can be applied by people who are fortunate enough to lucid dream a lot. It is *exactly* the same process.” Just as in hypnosis, in lucid dreams we can *change the body image*—in illness, the healthy body image has slipped, and by working with healing imagery we can correct this. This means that hypnosis and lucid dreaming could also work for people who want to lose or gain weight. Keith explains:

They’re in an altered state with the full cooperation of the unconscious. It’s an ideal state, the lucid dream, to effect change. And what changes the dream is *thought*, positive thoughts. You could actually tell an obese person to imagine altering the body image in the brain—it can be altered ... But I always prefer to look underneath, at the unconscious, for the real reasons.

The “real reasons” for physical conditions can be uncovered in a lucid dream, in a waking trance state, or in hypnosis. Sometimes all it takes is asking a question: “Why is my hair falling out?” “Why do I have ‘frozen shoulder’?” The gut is the “second brain,” and if we have internalised a trauma, the emotional memory of that will still be inside our bodies. What happens in the mind is converted into bodily effects such as psychosomatic illness, cancer, inflammation, and many others. Some neurogastroenterologists believe that psychiatry will need to expand to treat the second brain as well as the one in our head.

The neuroscience behind how hypnotherapy works is explored by Dr. Ernest Rossi and David Cheek, MD, in their book, *Mind-Body Therapy*.

They theorise that the limbic hypothalamic system mediates the healing effects of hypnosis by converting emotional information into hormonal or immune system information. If we can unlock negative emotional memories behind illness, we can positively influence these and other body systems and heal ourselves. Hypnosis is a direct route to the mind-body connection. It's possible that lucid dream healing works in the same way.

#### 4) The Mind Can Alter Unconscious Body Processes

Some fascinating research has shown that people with multiple personality disorders can experience a certain illness while in one personality, and when they change to another personality, that illness disappears. Biochemist Ed Kellogg reports on this:

Mental changes can apparently lead to substantial physiological changes in a matter of minutes. Although sharing the same body, different personalities often have different allergies, accelerated healing rates, and eyeglass prescriptions. Dr. Bennett Braun reported on the case of one woman who has diabetes in one personality but not in another. Dramatic changes can take place within minutes, and point to the amazing and accelerated healing effects potentially available to all of us, through mental changes-of-state leading to physiological changes-of-state in other modalities.<sup>226</sup>

Such research points to the fact that if we are able to alter unconscious body processes, the physical body sometimes responds with incredible speed.

#### 5) Healing Intent Can Alter the Body

In lucid dreams, intent has a magical effect: as soon as we intend to see our black and white cat, we feel her warm tail curling around our shin. If we have a strong healing intent in a lucid dream, this carries more power than when we are distracted in a fully waking state. Buddhists claim that suggestions made while lucid dreaming are many times more effective than those made while awake. Similarly, a healing meditation in a trance state

could be more powerful than formulating an intention to heal a physical illness while we're wide awake: when we slip into a deeply relaxed state, or when we dream, we're open to all the creative and healing potential of the unconscious. In chapter 18 on healing others in lucid dreams, I look at the power of prayer and healing intent in more detail, but the main thing to note here is that directing healing intent has been shown to produce physiological effects in controlled scientific trials,<sup>227</sup> and while we still have much to learn about the nature of intent, it seems clear that it has an important role to play in lucid dream healings.

## 6) Visualisation Is a Key to Wellness

Visualisation has been shown to be highly effective in healing and is often an integral part of recuperation therapies following a wide range of physical diseases ranging from cancer to severe external injuries. In yoga, it is said that simply visualising a “perfect” yoga pose while attempting it makes it as physically beneficial as actually *doing* it perfectly (something my yoga students are always relieved to hear!). And what is the most powerful form of visual imagery people experience in their lives? Widespread lucid dream reports refer to the striking realism of scenery and dream figures and the luminosity of colours. Stephen LaBerge says:

Lucid dreaming bears a family resemblance to daydreaming, hypnagogic reverie, psychedelic drug states, hypnotic hallucinations, and other types of mental imagery. ... The efficacy of imagery is to a certain extent dependent upon its believability as reality ... Without exaggeration we can say that lucid dreaming is *the most vivid* form of imagery likely to be experienced by normal individuals.<sup>228</sup>

Lucid dream imagery is multisensory, multidimensional, and super-real. This makes lucid dreaming a great platform for attempting physical self-healing. Hypnotherapists agree that healing imagery can influence physical processes, and in the majority of cases imagery is what we work with when we attempt a healing in lucid dreams—we see our body, or we see under

our own skin, as in Maria Pita's wrist dream. And we work intuitively with what we see and feel.

Other healing lucid dreams have a less specific imagery focus and involve a healing environment. William Buhlman reports lucid dreams of "floating in a cube of white light" following his cancer surgery. In a lucid dream, we can recall our desire to heal ourselves of a physical problem and then direct healing intent to our dream body, or we can visualise ourselves whole and healthy. We can also integrate and transform unhealthy imagery when we wake up in a dream; a spread of black fungus might react to healing intent by turning into a carpet of spring flowers, while a nasty-looking creature biting us might transform into a colourful butterfly and twirl off into the sky.

## Dreams Warning of Disease

The idea that dreams can predict illness long before symptoms appear, or tell us more about an existing illness, is far from new. Some 2,300 years ago, Aristotle claimed that dreams could recognise illnesses. In ancient Greece there were four hundred Asklepeian temples where sick people would sleep in a sanctified chamber and wait for a healing dream. Lucid and non-lucid dreams can warn us of physical disease in the body; we might notice ominous imagery, such as a skull and crossbones, or a very sick dream figure. We may see an image and "just know" that it represents our own heart, lungs, or swollen joints. Sometimes we recognise the symbolism only when we work with the dream. Other dreams are so nightmarish that their message is blazoned into us the moment we awaken. Journalist Marc Ian Barasch dreamed: "Torturers had hung an iron pot filled with red-hot coals beneath my chin, and I woke up screaming, the odor of searing flesh in my nostrils."<sup>229</sup> After this nightmare, he insisted on medical tests, and despite their initial scepticism, doctors found that he had thyroid cancer.

Dreams are adept at translating physical sensations into imagery, as can be seen in the dream of five-year-old Fran, reported by Brenda Mallon in

*Dream Time with Children.* Fran had the first in a long series of nightmares when she had her first asthma attack. This dream returns whenever Fran gets asthmatic and symbolises the physical sensation of fighting for air.

These gloves appeared from nowhere and they kept coming in funny magician type moves. At first I thought it was fun watching them but then they would come close and start choking me. Then they would float back in the air again and start choking me again.<sup>230</sup>

How do we know when a dream is forewarning illness? In his book *Love, Medicine and Miracles*, Surgeon Bernie Siegel describes a nurse who'd had a mysterious illness for weeks. She dreamed: "A shellfish opened, a worm stood up inside it, and an old woman pointed at the worm and said, 'That's what's wrong with you.' " <sup>231</sup> The nurse woke up knowing she had hepatitis. Our unconscious mind may perceive what we cannot consciously see, and through dreams it can pass this information to us. Rosalind Cartwright and Lynne Lamberg, authors of *Crisis Dreaming*, observe:

Dreams often metaphorically, even poetically, illuminate the specific illness affecting the dreamer. A woman with multiple sclerosis dreamed of stepping on a big tarantula that did not die. Instead its legs were spread out and paralysed, as were her own. Another woman dreamed of a disease demon who forced her to sit on a hot pipe. She had a bladder inflammation. A man with AIDS dreamed of fish. Every fish he touched died.<sup>232</sup>

When we dream of disease, we might find ourselves fighting a ferocious dragon that guards a healing elixir, or fighting another kind of "battle to the death." Showing our unconscious mind that we're ready to fight to regain our health is in itself an act of empowerment. If we can recognise while lucid that we are dreaming of disease, we can immediately take steps to understand and heal ourselves. We can go ahead and win that battle. We can ask the illness why it has come to us, what we need to learn from it, or how

serious it is. We can also send healing energy to the diseased part of the body in whichever way feels right, for example, by putting our hand right inside our body, or by using any of the methods described in practice 56 later in this chapter. In dreams we are interacting with deep unconscious material, and lucidity gives us the ability to act with clarity and understanding so we have a direct, beneficial effect on this material. We can try to transform negative energies pooling in a particular area of the body into neutral or positive energies, or at least learn more about the nature and message of the illness. Quite often in a lucid dream healing, the ideal way to heal something will spontaneously occur to us, so it's good to be open to our intuition.

## What if We Ignore Warning Dreams?

What happens if we don't react to ominous health warnings either while in the lucid dream or when we wake up from it, using Lucid Writing or other dreamwork techniques? Well, in some cases nothing dramatic may happen at all, but sometimes the unthinkable occurs. William Buhlman, author of *Adventures Beyond the Body*, told me about what happened when he didn't pay attention to health warnings in his lucid dreams:

I had several dreams related to my physical health. In one dream I became lucid and thought for sure I had died and began searching for my physical body. In another lucid dream I experienced a dark parasite attached to my neck that was draining the life force from my body. Unfortunately, I did not stop to examine the purpose for these rather disturbing dreams. At this time I was very busy with a new book and conducting workshops and did not stop to acknowledge the repeated warning until a physical manifestation of the cancer (a tumor) appeared in my neck. I learned a valuable lesson about my dream life and now journal and examine my dreams and their meaning with the respect they deserve.



Fortunately, despite being diagnosed with stage four of a highly aggressive and fast-moving cancer, William had surgery and recovered well. He feels this illness and his enforced convalescence after surgery came to inspire him to write a new book, *Adventures in the Afterlife*. Just as dreams can carry messages, warnings, and lessons to be learned, so can physical illness. Even on a minor level, we all have our personal Achilles' heel—an area of weakness in our bodies—and if we know ourselves well, we can react early to our body's signals. Personally, the moment I start getting an earache or a whistling in my ear, I recognise this as a warning sign: I have to slow down, take a day off, and listen to myself, or the earache will start throwing its weight around and *force* me to relax by turning into an infection. Bigger illnesses may carry bigger messages. Perhaps every physical illness has its root in psychology; our thoughts, fears, repressed memories, and repressed needs might all reveal themselves through the physical manifestation of disease.

We have the ability to engage lucidly with our dreams to attempt self-healing of both psychological and physical illness. Some people might wonder if attempting a self-healing in a lucid dream allows us to “learn the lesson” of the illness, and I would argue that lucidity puts us in a wonderful position to do just this since we wake up in the unconscious and can simply ask the dream, “Why do I have bowel cancer?” or “What do my migraines want to teach me?” Through lucidly engaging with our illness, we have the chance both to integrate any message it has for us and to heal ourselves from it.

If we pay attention to our dreams and heed their messages, we might notice the onset of disease early, when it's often easier to cure. Getting lucid about our health could help us to learn and integrate the lesson of a major illness *before* it kills us! Of course, recognising illness is one thing, but actually *healing* an illness is another. How do we go about healing physical health problems in lucid dreams?

### **Practice #56: Top Tips for Lucid Dream Healing**

Before you attempt a physical healing in a lucid dream, check out some of the possibilities that open up when you get lucid, and see which ones appeal to you:

**1. Obtain information:** If you believe illness can carry a valuable message, you may want to ask the dream why you have this illness or what it wants you to know or learn.

**2. Ask the dream to heal you:** You might want to open up to any spontaneous healing the dream environment provides. Sometimes asking the dream, “Please heal my backache!” will result in the unexpected transformation of the scene; you may find yourself floating in light or pulled upwards by a lucid gravitational force. Go with the flow and don’t be scared: trust the dream.

**3. Create a healing environment:** If you are strongly lucid, you can actively use your intent to create a healing space and then announce: “I’ll dive into this pure pool of water, and when I emerge my eczema/stomach ulcer/tumour will be healed.”

**4. Call on your ancestors or a trusted medical figure:** This can be helpful if you feel uncertain in the dream and need to feel supported and focused, but the most important thing is to have enough determination and charge to carry out the healing. It might be wise not to waste your time and energy trying to materialise helpers—don’t be too literal about needing to see them! Instead, trust that their energy will combine with your own as you direct your healing intent.

**5. Draw on your own inner resources:** As soon as you are lucid and the scene is stable, focus on your wound or physical illness. Point at it or touch it with your hand and inject healing intent into it. If something comes out of your fingers (light, liquid, sparks), don’t let this distract you!

**6. Use a healing chant or power word:** Ed Kellogg, author of numerous papers on lucid dreaming, has experimented many times with lucid dream healing. Ed often uses a healing chant to focus

himself, such as “Now let the healing energy shine/To cure the lungs with power divine.”<sup>233</sup> This was from a 1992 dream of healing someone with emphysema, a healing that seemed effective, as the ill person was subsequently able to drastically reduce his oxygen therapy. If this idea appeals to you, make up your own chant or power word to use in the dream, as this can be a great way of focusing intent.

**7. Experiment creatively and follow your intuition:** Even if you have a pre-sleep plan of what to do when you get lucid, remember to stay flexible and allow the dream to respond. Something you see or experience in the dream might give you an even better idea of how to heal yourself! If we’re too fixated on a particular lucid dream healing scenario, we risk missing what’s right under our noses in terms of imagery and dream figures. This is why *the purity of our intent is the most important thing we can bring to a lucid dream healing*.

## Lucid Dream Healings of Physical Ailments

Let’s have a look at some examples of what can happen during a successful lucid dream healing. Dutch dream author Dr. Susanne van Doorn told me about the following lucid dream with a surprise ending. Susanne wanted to try and heal herself of a severe headache, and her dream shows the importance of the previous points: she manages to avoid getting distracted, experiments creatively, and follows her intuition.

I was able to enter inside what looked like a golden snake ... This must be my brain, I thought, and I tumbled upside down and backwards with joy. I suppressed my urge to do experiments with my consciousness. I was dreaming for a reason: I wanted to get rid of the headache. I concentrated on my heart-energy and managed to produce a golden healing energy into the golden snake. Then I realized this was not a solution. The energy poured outside of my being; I had to go inside the brain.

I tried to manifest a gate, a portal. First I used a mirror but it did not work. Then I manifested a knife in my hand. I was a bit scared. If I carved an opening in my dream brain would that be safe? Following my own gut I decided not to carve. I touched the golden snake to search for obstacles that might produce the headache. My hands transported into this snake with ease, it felt a bit scary though. I felt something crawling. Yuk. I tried to catch it: bang—there it was. I pulled it out: it was a dried up fish ... I had to laugh and I woke myself up.

Dreams can have much more common sense than we give them credit for most of the time. If there's an obvious solution for physical pain, the dream will show us this, often with symbolic imagery. Susanne remarked:

This dream was a magnificent way to tell me something very basic: that I was dehydrated. I did not drink enough during the day. My body is used to big bowls of tea and that day I had not had the opportunity to drink enough tea or water.

It's one thing being shown why we have a headache, and perhaps quite another to have a serious physical illness that we want to heal in a lucid dream. Several healings might have to take place before we are freed from a deeply rooted physical illness, although this is not always the case, and sometimes one powerful, well-aimed lucid dream healing seems enough. All dreams come to heal us and make us whole, and becoming lucid gives us the opportunity to consciously interact with the deepest part of our psyche. In a conversation I had with Ed Kellogg many years ago, he put forward the following valid point:

It seems easy to believe that one creates one's own reality while sitting in a comfortable chair in good health reading a book about metaphysics. But when the shit hits the fan on a physical level, what one really believes comes to the surface. One can look for outside help and do nothing else, and/or "walk one's talk," taking up the challenge by

working to access and manifest inner levels of healing. I see this process as perhaps inevitable at a certain stage—as seen in the universal archetype of the wounded healer, and in the initiation diseases that shamans throughout history have endured as the means to force them to move onward to the next level. In my opinion lucid dream healing belongs solidly to this evolutionary tradition.

Strong motivation is a key to lucid dreaming, and the idea of being able to alleviate personal suffering through attempting a lucid dream healing can be a great lucidity trigger. Caz Coronel is a DJ who was suffering from tinnitus, a continuous, maddening ringing in the ears. Here she shares a dream in which she heals her condition by making a surprising request:

I call out to the dream: “I want to feel my unrepressed pain.” Suddenly my body starts to hurt a lot all over and it is hard to move. Everyone else in the garden becomes frozen and my mouth starts to seal over so I can no longer speak ... I feel completely inhibited to express myself. *I don't need to put up with this!* I think. Suddenly I launch myself at my frozen friends. I give them all a giant hug, sending them all the love I have ... I awake with a thumping heart. I listen and my tinnitus is gone. I spend the whole day checking again and again but it's definitely gone.

Caz explains why she wasn't surprised that tinnitus could be healed through lucid dreaming:

Tinnitus is caused by the brain misinterpreting the signals it receives. Commonly when tinnitus is caused by hearing loss, the brain fills in the missing frequencies it can no longer hear. In most cases there are actually no sounds occurring, it is just the brain's subjective interpretation. In this respect it makes sense that if you can access the subconscious mechanism that controls this, you can also change it.<sup>234</sup>

One research paper by Dr. Mauro Zappaterra and colleagues suggests when lucid dream healing may work best. It examines the case of a man who had

been suffering chronic pain for twenty-two years. He was on a program of biopsychosocial treatments for two years and then had a lucid dream in which he healed himself. He experienced “a complete resolution of pain” following his dream, and the authors of the study suggest that his previous years of treatments had primed him in terms of neural plasticity so that he was ready to benefit from a lucid dream healing. The authors remark that “central nervous system (CNS) reorganization (i.e., neural plasticity) ... may set a neural framework for healing, in this case via a lucid dream.” <sup>235</sup> How fast might we expect healing to take place if we already have a receptive neural framework for healing? Some lucid dream healings are rapid and dramatic. When Beverly D’Urso found out that she had an enlarged uterus, a cyst, and a mass that doctors thought might be a tumour, a week later she had the following healing lucid dream:

Standing outside [with my son], we notice these huge geometric figures in five different colors hovering and circling over us in the sky. They seem as large as ocean liners. A turquoise colored one comes closest to me. It has the shape of two candy dishes pressed together. They all seemed to shoot a kind of energy on me which I experience as a healing. I become very relaxed and open to taking in this invisible energy. I would describe it best as a type of heat. My son seems scared, but I tell him not to worry. I explain, “They came to heal me!” <sup>236</sup>

Later that same day, Beverly returned to the doctors for an ultrasound scan, and there was nothing—no possible tumour, no cyst, and her uterus was completely healthy and back to its normal size.

## What if You Can’t Get Lucid?

Perhaps lucid dream healing sounds like an appealing possibility, but you can’t seem to wake up inside a dream. What then? If you have a look at the first four chapters of this book, on getting and staying lucid, and if you put a lot of energy into wanting to become lucid, it’s likely you will succeed. But

if you need results fast, then working with waking trances, visualisations, meditation, and affirmations can be effective too, as healing intent can be activated in all of these states (see chapter 9). One scientific experiment showed that imagining a physical movement while awake, carrying out the same physical movement in a lucid dream, and actually performing it while awake *all* activated the same area of the brain.<sup>237</sup> This shows that simply imagining something has a noticeable effect on the brain, which in turn affects the physical body. Visualisation techniques are now commonly used in recuperation therapies, so even if lucid dreaming is easy for you, it's a good idea to mix and match by trying a bit of each technique, as they are all wonderful complementary practices.

I did this around 2007 when I was diagnosed as having a uterine fibroid (a benign tumour) that seemed to be getting bigger, and this worried me, as at that time my husband and I were starting to think about having a baby. My mother had to have a hysterectomy due to fibroids, so I knew they could be problematic. It felt important to me that my womb be an entirely healthy space before I conceived, particularly as my doctor had said fibroids tend to grow during pregnancy, as they feed off oestrogen, and if they get too big this can complicate pregnancy. I began to work on healing myself, using a mixture of lucid dreaming, waking meditation, affirmations, and trance visualisations. The following is an example of one in a series of unusual lucid dreams I had quite spontaneously during that time:

I find myself floating in a healing space, just lying down in this orange light which surrounds and supports me. It's incredibly quiet and peaceful ... It seems to last for ages.

In waking visualisations in a light trance, I sent healing golden light to my womb, and felt that a delicate balance was needed between ridding myself of something in my womb and welcoming a future baby. So instead of focusing 100 percent on getting the fibroid to disappear, I said affirmations that simultaneously discouraged the growth of the tumour and welcomed

pregnancy. My favourite of these was: “The only thing that grows in my womb is a baby!” A subsequent scan showed that while the fibroid was still there, it had stopped growing. When I became pregnant, instead of reacting as the doctors had predicted by feeding off all the oestrogen and growing bigger, the fibroid vanished and hasn’t reappeared.

## Sparks, Stars, and Balls of Light: Typical Aspects of a Lucid Dream Healing

In July 2005, lucid dream explorers Ed Kellogg, Beverly D’Urso, and I exchanged a long series of emails about our lucid dream healing experiences, as described in chapter 6 on dream magic. At one point Ed remarked:

I’ve found that the condition targeted can have a huge effect on the kind of phenomena that manifest, these have varied from invisible heat rays, to different-colored liquid sprays, to different-colored laser beams, to blue and gold sparks. Often the healing energy takes a form that surprises me, and for which I had no conscious expectation. Some other part of me, a deeper part, seems to determine what happens ...

The green-colored liquid has showed up pretty consistently in my lucid dream healings and lucid dream healings of others where I have good reason to expect that infection plays a significant part ... This happened for the first time in 1988—I felt quite surprised. I’d had absolutely no expectation that this kind of phenomena would occur.

Could there be a lucid dream “rule” for what manifests in relation to a particular illness? Ed, Beverly, and I were amazed to find that all three of us had similar things manifest at the moment of a lucid dream healing—we’d each had these lucid dreams within days of each other, and while I’d experienced something like fluorescent orange liquid soap coming out of my fingers, Beverly reported a “lemon-yellow, liquid-like substance ... like



a puddle of lava.” In Ed’s lucid dream, “a yellow mustard-colored mist comes out of my extended fingers, spraying the bite and surrounding area with a yellowish liquid.” While what we experienced was very similar, the conditions we were treating were very different: Beverly was healing a burn on her leg, Ed was healing a cat bite on his foot, and I was trying to heal my friend’s mother from cancer. It was interesting, too, that whether we were healing a personal ailment or someone else’s, similar stuff seemed to manifest.

For each of us, surprising spontaneous phenomena occurred, and in our email discussion we tossed questions back and forth, trying to make sense of it. Was there a kind of colour code for lucid dream healing? Did the viscosity of the liquid make any difference? And why did stuff so often seem to come out of hands or fingers in lucid dream healings? My husband pointed out that in sci-fi films we’re used to seeing weird stuff coming out of people’s hands—laser beams, balls of fire, and so on—so it could just be our dreaming mind finding a way to show us that *something* is being transmitted from us to the object of our healing.

Gestures are another variable to consider when attempting healing in lucid dreams. By prior agreement, Ed, Beverly, and I all used the same hand gesture to direct intent in the lucid dreams where the yellow/orange liquid appeared. This is known in qigong as the “sword fingers” gesture, where the middle and index fingers are extended together and pointed. Although this could at first glance seem to suggest a meaningful connection to what appeared at the moment of healing, I’ve used this gesture since and had completely different stuff appear. So far, it seems pretty impossible to find a “rule” for all of this. Maybe the dreaming mind in all its wisdom simply comes up with whatever it feels is right in that particular moment, and what it does in a particular situation could happen in a completely different way from one night to the next.

It’s like in my creative writing classes when I ask students to get in touch with their animal energy and write without stopping for five minutes from the perspective of the animal. From one session to the next, they’ll choose

different animals, or write about the same animal but from a completely different perspective, as they'll *feel* different in that moment, and this is the way the creative brain works: it's a here-and-now kind of space, spontaneous and free, with its own underlying sense of purpose. As is so often the case in the exciting wonderland of lucid dreaming, we need to do a lot more in-the-dream research in order to discover how it all works. Have fun exploring for yourself!

### **Practice #57: Six Steps for Attempting Physical Healing in a Lucid Dream**

Once you've read, thought about, and perhaps daydreamed about the different possibilities for lucid dream healings explored in this chapter, try the following steps:

**1. Incubate and visualise:** Use your favourite dream incubation technique: do a pre-sleep ritual, slip a stone or crystal under your pillow—whatever works for you. Repeat a simple sentence as you fall asleep, such as “Tonight I heal myself in a lucid dream.” Visualise yourself carrying out an effective healing. Believe it!

**2. Stabilise the dream:** Once you become lucid, stabilise the dream. Breathe calmly, look around, engage with the dream environment by touching something, and remind yourself, “I am lucid.” Ask for clarity if you need it: “Clarity now!”

**3. Focus your healing intent:** Think about the condition you want to heal. Recall your chant, power word, or gesture if you have one.

**4. Trust your intuition:** As we've seen, there are many options open to the lucid dream healer. At this point in the dream, you can intuitively decide upon a particular healing technique.

**5. Be open and flexible:** You may need to experiment creatively within the dream to find the most effective way of healing yourself. Be prepared for the unexpected! Body symbolism in dreams can take curious forms: don't expect a perfect anatomical fit—you may “just

know” that a particular dream object or shape symbolises a particular body part.

**6. Finish what you start:** Once you begin a dream healing, stay focused and see it through. Remind yourself throughout, “This is a lucid dream healing.” When you’re done, thank the dream.

[contents]

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221. Pita, "Lucid Therapy: Healing My Tendonitis."
222. LaBerge et al., "Physiological Responses to Dreamed Sexual Activity during Lucid REM Sleep."
223. Dresler et al., "Dreamed Movement Elicits Activation in the Sensorimotor Cortex."
224. Erlacher et al., "Frequency of Lucid Dreams and Lucid Dream Practice in German Athletes."
225. Cortelli et al., "Autonomic Dysfunction in Sleep Disorders."
226. Kellogg, "Lucid Dream Healing Experiences: Firsthand Accounts."
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228. LaBerge, *Lucid Dreaming*, 171–172.
229. Barasch, *Healing Dreams*, 2.
230. Mallon, *Dream Time with Children*, 114.
231. Cartwright and Lamberg, *Crisis Dreaming*, 163.
232. Ibid., 164.
233. Kellogg, "Lucid Dream Healing Experiences."
234. Coronel, "Healing Tinnitus in a Lucid Dream."
235. Zappaterra et al., "Chronic Pain Resolution after a Lucid Dream."
236. D'Urso, "Interactive Dream Healing for Ourselves and Others."
237. Dresler et al., "Dreamed Movement Elicits Activation in the Sensorimotor Cortex."

## CHAPTER 18

### *Healing Others in Lucid Dreams*

This chapter brings us to what may be a hard idea for some people to swallow: that of healing someone other than ourselves in a lucid dream. I've provided arguments as to how *self-healing* of physical ailments could work in lucid dreams, but by and large these don't account for how lucid dream healings of *other people* could work. Unless we agree with the idea that humans are more than just solid, separate physical bodies with a brain, that dreams do not occur exclusively within that person's brain, and that energy is entangled on some level, this concept is bound to be especially difficult to accept. It implies that it is possible for a lucid dreamer to influence the energy and immune system response of another person in such a way that physical healing can result. At first glance the idea could pass for a beautiful and peaceful version of the plot of the movie *Inception*, where lucid dreamers implant ideas in the heads of other people while they sleep. Yet some convincing examples of lucid dream healings of others have been reported.

Viewed from a scientific perspective, the difficulty with lucid dream healings is that we have no way of telling whether or not they are simply the result of "coincidence." Would our elbow have healed anyway that night? Was our friend's tumour about to vanish anyway? How on earth can we know for sure? As is so often the case with "psi" phenomena such as dream telepathy or precognitive dreaming, for the most part we still lack an effective method for verifying these cases. Perhaps brain imaging

technology could be used to view the brain activity of both the healer and the recipient during a lucid dream healing of another person in order to see if there is a correlation between the content of the healer's lucid dream and stimulation in the brain of the recipient. An exciting scientific experiment that came to be known as the "Love Study" investigated the effect of compassionate intention on other people's bodies using skin conductance tests and showed a positive correlation between distant intent and physiological changes:

The Love Study demonstrates that the focusing of one's thoughts and intentions on another does have a measurable effect, and that presumably when the thoughts are of a healing nature, the impact is potentially healing as well. While this one experiment is not definitive, it is consistent with three dozen earlier studies.<sup>238</sup>

But even when significant correlations are found, science still doesn't know why or how this actually works, so supporting data tends to get swept under the rug. As Harvard psychologist Deirdre Barrett remarks, "The common 'scientific' stance of simply ignoring data that can't be explained by any existing theory is actually quite unscientific."<sup>239</sup>

At this point in lucid dreaming, we step beyond what science knows. Just over forty years ago, science didn't "know" lucid dreaming existed, and even after the initial proof was provided by Keith Hearne's experiments in 1975, it took many years for the concept of becoming conscious in a dream to be accepted in the scientific community, with some scientists arguing that lucid dreams were in fact "micro-awakenings."<sup>240</sup> Today, science not only recognises lucid dreaming as a bona fide phenomenon of sleep, but is also extremely interested and excited by its possibilities. The fact that scientists have not yet demonstrated a desire to verify things like lucid dream healings of others shouldn't stop us from keeping an open mind and exploring further in this area—otherwise how will we ever discover more about what we can do with our lucid dreams?

## Successful Lucid Dream Healings of Others

Maria Isabel Pita's husband was diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis, and his right foot and the lower part of his leg were swelling up, perhaps as the result of a blood clot. He was scheduled for an emergency ultrasound the next morning. That night, Maria had the following lucid dream:

I remember my intent and command, "Show me your leg." He raises his jeans and I kneel before his right leg. Where the pocket of swelling was in reality there is a largish flap of skin raised to reveal an opening through which I can see into his leg. There's a distinct welling up of blood in there. It's like looking into a subterranean cave where the water (blood) is getting ready to rise up over the edge. The blood is a very dark red at the center and around the edges it's nearly black, and shining in that blackness are stars. I can't describe the awesome beauty of this blood welling straight out of a fathomless darkness shining with stars. I will never forget the sight.

The clot is definitely there and I'm raising my right hand in front of it intending a blue healing energy toward it. I don't see any blue, but what I do begin to see is a reflection of my mouth taking some of the blood into it, tipping it between my lips as I massage the clot, the bulk of it, with my mouth, somehow dissolving it in this manner ... Crossing my legs, I assume a yoga prayer position directly in front of him. Raising my hands, I instruct him not to touch me as I separate my hands into Reiki position in order to enable healing energy to flow down between my palms into his leg. I sit there performing Reiki on his leg, and in the dream I'm there all night.<sup>241</sup>

The following morning, improvement was 95 percent, and by the time they got to the doctor's office, there was no sign anything had ever been wrong with his leg at all. Maria remarks that her husband, who is a scientist, admitted that, all things considered, it was perfectly reasonable to conclude that she had indeed healed his leg in a lucid dream.

In 2012, Pilar Vallet's son was taken to hospital with epiglottitis, a severe swelling of the throat. He couldn't eat or drink, and the specialist said he'd have to stay at hospital for at least two weeks. In the journal *Lucid Dreaming Experience*, Pilar recounts what happened when she decided to try healing him in a lucid dream:

Lucid, I remembered my intent to heal my son and the practices to do so. I found Eric alone in a room, and lucidly began to repeat my intended sentence, "De mis manos saldrá una luz que te curara," or "From my hands you will get a light that will heal you." In the lucid dream, I felt an energy coming out from my hands and especially my fingers. While I pointed towards Eric's throat, it felt that the energy went to his chest and penetrated into him, which then glowed white and illuminated the upper part of his body. He remained quiet. I felt very focused on my intent. After some time, I thought, "I've done it. I completed my mission." I then woke.<sup>242</sup>

The following day, Pilar's son began to eat, and from then on he made a recovery that the doctors agreed was extraordinary. Pilar explains:

Though we can never know how his healing would have progressed without my lucid dream, we do know that the doctors were amazed by his extremely fast recovery, and he returned home almost ten days sooner than expected.<sup>243</sup>

In the following lucid dream, Maria Isabel Pita attempted to heal someone suffering from depression:

Holding my hands facing each other, and leaving a few inches of space between them, I raise them before me and silently request healing energy flow into them. At once, I feel an answering warmth growing cradled between my palms. ... Almost immediately, tiny squares of jewel-like multicolored lights become visible, generated by my palms. They are so beautiful! They shine, sparkle, glow ... I know what I need



to do with them. I lean toward X and place my hands on either side of his head, just barely touching him. ... I'm using these lights to stimulate the electrical synapses in his brain, because they mysteriously correspond to them. The lights aren't computer chips, they aren't electricity, they're a living energy I caress over X's brain and I can feel them falling into place over his synapses like a map stimulating, while also perhaps "rewiring" or strengthening, even forging "relationships" between some of them.<sup>244</sup>

Maria reports that eighteen months after this dream, X was no longer introverted and depressed, and his mood and lifestyle had noticeably improved—he was taking acting and improvisation classes and learning to read music so he could improvise on the piano.

## Less Successful Lucid Dream Healings of Others

Many things could get in the way of a dream healing, sustained lucidity being the biggest potential difficulty for some. Even if we complete a lucid dream healing, it may appear to have little or no effect on the sick person's health. In order to learn more about this topic, it's helpful to look at lucid dream healings that didn't seem to work.

We should ask a person's permission before attempting a lucid dream healing, for ethical reasons and also because if the ill person is aware that such an attempt will be made, he can consciously—and unconsciously—keep an open mind to the idea. Also, if the lucid dream healer *knows* she has received waking permission, she'll feel much more confident about trying to heal the person when she becomes lucid.

In July 2005 a friend of mine, Lizz Melinek, told me that her mother had been diagnosed with cancer that had already spread to her vital organs, and she was in great pain. Lizz asked me to try something in a lucid dream, and said her mum found it "all very amusing and rather sweet" that Lizz's friends were trying to help by sending her healing energy in so many

different ways. I was happy to help, and since I'd never met her mum, I asked Lizz to email me a photo of her, which she did. In the following lucid dream, you'll see that I went through several moments of insecurity and worry: "What does Lizz's mother look like again? Will I find her? Is it really her? Will this work?"

I am walking along outside in a sort of motorway lay-by when I realise I'm dreaming. "Brilliant. Now I just need to get Lizz's mum to materialise," I think. To my left is a bridge. I tell myself that when I walk under it, she'll be there. As I walk, I try to remember what she looks like from the photograph. I feel uncertain, worrying that since I've never met her, this might not work. But I decide just to be open to the fact that I'll find her. Under the bridge is a café area, empty except for one person sitting there waiting for me. She must be Lizz's mum.

I feel calm and alert, ready to see this through. The scene is solid and Lizz's mum is sitting there in the sunshine. I go up to her and am disconcerted because close up she looks like a man. I ask her if she is Lizz's mum and she says yes. I remind myself that no one looks like themselves when they're ill. I explain to her what I'm about to try. "It's nothing scary or painful," I say. "All I'm going to do is put these two fingers"—and here I hold up the index and middle fingers of my right hand—"very gently on the place where the illness is and send you some healing energy." She seems to be okay with this.

I know the cancer is all over the place, including her liver. I wonder where to lay my fingers. I ask her, and she points to the right side of her neck. I stand beside her and take yoga breaths to quieten my mind. "This is a lucid dream healing," I think. I lay my two fingers against her neck and concentrate on the flow of energy. I remember to observe what happens at the moment of healing, and shift my gaze to my fingertips.

From them comes a bright orange stream, rather like a spurt of fluorescent orange liquid soap. As I watch, it changes, glowing and flickering, and suddenly I see that it has become a fire—tiny leaping

orange flames. I look at Lizz's mum's hair and skin, but they are perfectly unharmed. After just a few seconds, the flames vanish and my hand can "unstick" and move away. Lizz's mum looks and seems fine, and I feel peaceful. I really hope this has helped in some way.

The fewer questions, doubts, and worries we have before attempting a lucid dream healing on ourselves or on another person, the better. Otherwise we risk spending valuable time debating issues in the lucid dream, and we may even wake up or lose lucidity before we get around to doing the healing. So a very useful thing to do is to *visualise the lucid dream healing successfully taking place before we go to sleep*. This not only helps to incubate a lucid dream in the first place, but also irons out any doubts we may have, as we practise the whole thing before we actually do it. We can also decide in advance on a "trick" to ensure the person materialises in the dream, such as opening a door and finding them behind it, or simply turning around and expecting, full force, to find them there. Once we've found the person we want to heal, we have to be careful not to lose focus. When I saw Lizz's mother sitting in that café in my dream, I reacted like this:

I'm so pleased it worked that I leap into the air and do a beautiful floating forward-body flip, which feels fantastic. I really want to do another one but I know I mustn't get distracted. To be sure that I'm concentrated on the task before me, I pause, my feet firmly on the ground again, and raise my hands before my face and focus on them. They are dark grey and fluffy but it doesn't bother me.

I then proceeded with the dream healing. Although Lizz gave me feedback that her mother had felt "wide awake" on the night I tried to heal her (but not because of pain) and then had a "good" day, the cancer continued to run its course and Lizz's mother died nine months later. So this, my first attempt at healing another person in a lucid dream, did not feel much of a success. Still, it's possible that my lucid intention to heal her did have some kind of

effect, perhaps by easing pain and discomfort. Scientific studies have shown that compassionate intent can physically affect other people.<sup>245</sup>

Dutch psychologist, dreamworker, and blogger Susanne van Doorn told me about how she had tried to do a lucid dream healing on her mother when she was old and very ill:

In my dream that night I called upon the help of my female ancestors, my grandmother and my great-grandmother. I saw them and we formed a circle around my mother's body. My mother was lying on a sort of shrine, like she was already dead. I was very, very worried and tried to change the image. My grandmother and great-grandmother held my hand and then my mother's stomach seemed to move, to change into a copper-toned circle. The circle moved upwards into the sky. I only followed that circle so I lost track of my mother's body. Like a UFO this circle was flying away. My heart was broken when I saw it leave.

I never told anyone about this experience. But I went to the hospital next day to visit my mother. She was very weak. When I left, doctors performed a scan that showed she might have a perforated gut and they decided to operate on her even though her life forces had deteriorated. She did not survive the operation. My mother was almost eight-five years old and she had a very good and fulfilling life.

In this lucid dream, Susanne is unable to heal her mother because it seems her mother's time is up; though lucid, Susanne is unable to change the imagery. Death is present in the dream, and there are precognitive elements that correspond with what actually happens to her mother—the circle moves and transforms the mother's stomach, and in waking life she dies during an operation on her gut. Susanne's idea of calling upon her female ancestors for help and support is a wonderful one, but this dream shows that no matter how much we want to keep someone alive, sometimes there's nothing we can do. In other cases the sick person may not actually *want* our help, no matter how pure we feel our intention to be. Even if a person has

given their permission in the waking state, it could be that deep down in their unconscious they want or need to go through their illness alone. Sometimes it is simply time to die.

## Dream Healings Refused: What if Someone Doesn't Want to Be Healed?

Ethically speaking, if you want to attempt a lucid dream healing on someone else, you should for sure ask their permission first. Some people may not want anyone else to get involved with their illness and healing process, which is fair enough. But what if getting consent isn't practical because the person is too ill to communicate? How do you know the person really wants to be healed? We can't assume everyone will welcome our help, no matter how much we love them. In waking life, people don't always want treatment for their illnesses, possibly because they believe that the illness has come to teach them something valuable, or because they don't want to go through unpleasant treatments like chemotherapy. Other times they are simply ready to die.

Luckily, it seems that it is perfectly possible for people to refuse healing in a dream. Imagine being worried sick about a friend who is seriously ill. You decide, as an act of friendship, to try and send him healing energy the next time you become lucid in a dream. But when you do, the friend is either impossible to find in the dream or puts a shield up around himself, as Ed Kellogg told me happened to him in 1994 when he tried to heal a friend with a severe chronic illness: "When I try to heal him (hoping he hasn't already died) I encounter a dome-like force field from his waist to his feet, my energy bounces off ..."

Lucy Gillis, co-editor of *Lucid Dreaming Experience*, told me that the idea of permission and refusal in lucid dream healings really came home to her when her mother was dying and Lucy wanted to heal her:

I became lucid one night and immediately flew to her bedside with the strong intent to send her healing energy. Though I knew in waking life she was dying, I think I was clinging to hope that a miracle could happen. As I flew to her I opened my arms and repeated a few times to her, “Healing! Healing!” with the intent to surround her in a turquoise-coloured energy. I felt that turquoise was the colour for me to use because in waking life the only aura I’d ever seen was my own: turquoise, flame-like energy emanating from my hands. As I got closer to Ma, she threw up her hands to ward me off and turned her head from me as she cried out, “No!”

Shocked, I hovered in mid-air above her bed. In that nanosecond I knew that there would be no miracle—she wanted to go and nothing would stop her. So to help ease her way in any way I could, I suggested, “Love, then. I’ll send you Love,” and I envisioned, and then saw, a light pink mist surrounding us both as I woke.

Notice how despite her initial determination to heal her mother, Lucy, an experienced lucid dreamer, responds with flexibility and respect for her mother’s rejection of that healing. Lucid dreaming is a conversation: even if we go into it with our own agenda, we need to learn to react intuitively and gracefully to the unexpected.

## How Can Lucid Dream Healing Work on Others?

In the Love Study, also known by its less catchy name of “Compassionate Intention as a Therapeutic Intervention by Partners of Cancer Patients,”<sup>246</sup> Dr. Dean Radin and his colleagues did a double-blind experiment under controlled conditions using skin conductance to measure the physiological response of cancer sufferers when their partners (in a different room) focused on them at random intervals with deliberate, compassionate intent. They found that there was a strong correlation between senders and receivers. Radin explains that this showed that the intentions of a person

can affect the other person's body in a potentially healing way. He points out that it is clear that something is happening—some form of distant healing—but that he and his colleagues don't know yet how it happens.

Nobody has the answers yet to how distant healing might work, just as nobody can say how doing something in a dream might have physical effects on another person's body. Robert Waggoner, co-founder of the online publication *The Lucid Dream Experience* and author of *Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self*, shared his view on this with me:

At some point, modern physicists may explain the unseen and underlying mechanisms that connect the energy of consciousness at other levels, and thus explain items as diverse as mutual dreams, physical healings of others, forward-looking dreams, and more. Whether Jung's concept of a collective unconscious, Bohm's idea of an implicate order, or some other model arises, it appears that modern physicists will head towards a paradigm that sees matter, energy, and consciousness as transformational equals. If and when that occurs, a new revolution in science will begin.

The majority of people on the planet admit to praying for the health of those they love, and many believe this really does help. A 2004 survey of adult Americans revealed that the most popular alternative healing practice was “prayer for self,” and the second most popular was “prayer for others.”<sup>247</sup> The idea of trying to improve another person's physical or psychological health through thought, belief, and intent is far from new. In principle, everything in the universe seems connected on the basic energetic level, so it is possible that compassionate thoughts, prayer, and lucid dream healing could somehow transcend time and space to affect another person.

For me, just as interesting as the question of “Is distant healing even possible?” is the question of the state of consciousness in which such attempted healings take place. If we send love and healing thoughts to someone while deep in prayer or meditation, is this so much different from

sending someone love and healing thoughts in a lucid dream? In each of these states we move away from “regular” waking consciousness and find ourselves in touch with our unconscious mind in a state of lucid awareness. As I’ve explored elsewhere in this book, a lucid trance state or *any state of consciousness where we actively mingle waking and dreaming consciousness together has enormous transformative potential*. We’re only just beginning to discover the entire range of possibilities.

At the end of the day, it can’t hurt to send healing energy to another person (as we’ve seen, it seems that they can refuse it if they don’t want or need it), and perhaps a great deal of good will come from it. As with many things in life, it’s worth shrugging off scepticism and giving it a whirl! The more lucid dreamers who try out their healing skills and get subsequent feedback on the state of the ill person, the clearer a picture we’ll be able to build of how it all works.

I’ve heard people scoff at the idea of lucid dream healings of others. Yes, if we subscribe to current scientific parameters of human consciousness, then any practice that hints at the non-separate, porous nature of the mind will sound farfetched. Everyone is entitled to their own view. I wonder, though, if the scoffers would tell a friend not to bother praying for their sick child? It’s also interesting to imagine how we might feel if we were ill and in pain, perhaps even dying—would we prefer others to shrug their shoulders and say, “Oh well, there’s nothing we can do,” or would we feel comforted in knowing that they were sending love and healing thoughts?

In my view, there can’t be enough compassionate thoughts in the world; there can’t be enough authentic attempts to help others. If we send healing energy to someone else in thought, in word, and in deed, whether we’re awake or dreaming at the time, we are doing a good thing. At the very least, the sick person will know that there’s someone out there rooting for her, and we’ll feel less helpless too, as we will have acted. And at best, we might actually make a difference. What makes the world go round? Is it scepticism? Or love? Let’s go back to the Love Study for a final thought: “Directing intention toward a distant person is correlated with activation of



that person's autonomic nervous system. Strong motivation to heal and to be healed, and training on how to cultivate and direct compassionate intention, may further enhance this effect.” <sup>248</sup>

If we can train ourselves to “cultivate and direct compassionate intention” in lucid dreams and waking lucid trances, we could access deeper levels of human possibility by awakening our ability to heal both ourselves and others. The results could be astonishing.

### **Practice #58: How to Carry Out a Lucid Dream Healing of Another Person**

**1. Get consent:** In waking life, ask the sick person for permission to send them healing energy in a lucid dream.

**2. Choose a power word or gesture:** Decide in advance if you'd like to use a power word, rhyme, or simple sentence to help focus your healing intent, for example, “With this light I heal you.” You may want to combine this with a particular healing gesture or the visualisation of healing imagery. Don't stick to this rigidly, though—you may decide to do something completely different once in the dream.

**3. Incubate and visualise:** Incubate your intention to do a dream healing: visualise yourself doing this successfully. Visualise the person in vibrant health, glowing with life and happiness. Believe that this outcome is possible!

**4. Become lucid,** recall your intention, and stabilise the dream if necessary using the CLEAR technique.

**5. Find the sick person:** You don't need to be too literal about “finding the sick person” in your dream. In fact, creating healing light in a lucid dream and mentally “sending” it to the sick person is likely to be just as effective. But having the dream figure to concentrate on may be helpful in focusing your intent. If you feel you want to see the person in your dream, use a simple expectation trick to get them to appear: “I'm going to walk to that rock and my brother will be behind it.”

**6. Align your intention:** Don't worry if your dream version of the sick person looks different or odd; try to follow your gut feeling, and align your healing intention with the sick person as you know them in waking life.

**7. Don't get distracted!** To keep the dream and your intent stable, keep reminding yourself, "I am lucid. This is a lucid dream healing." If the dream scene turns murky or blurry, say, "Lucidity now!" and really mean it. The scene should instantly respond.

**8. Ask for help:** Be open and flexible—you may want to talk to the dream figure who represents your sick friend and ask them for guidance, or you may just want to get on with the healing. At any stage in the lucid dream, if you think you need it, make a verbal request to the dream for help with the healing.

**9. Follow your intuition:** Carry out the healing in any way that seems best. You could chant, zap your friend with healing light, do Reiki, or visualise the person whole and healthy. Be ready to draw on your own inner energy and *ask the dream to fill you with healing energy* if you feel you need it before you direct your healing intent. Be ready for weird things to happen, such as florescent soap-like stuff coming out of your fingers, or the appearance of orbs of light. Relax and go with the flow; remain focused on the healing. When you've finished, thank the dream; gratitude can feel like a real deal-sealer in lucid dreams.

**10. Write down your healing dream:** Note every detail of the lucid dream healing, and if possible, ask the person you tried to heal for a report on how they are feeling.

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238. Radin et al., "Compassionate Intention as a Therapeutic Intervention by Partners of Cancer Patients."
239. Barrett, *The Pregnant Man*, 144.
240. Schwartz and Lefebvre, "'Contacts Veille/P.M.O. II. Les P.M.O. morcelées.'" ("Contacts Between Wakefulness and REM Sleep. II: Fragmented REM Sleep.")
241. Pita, "Healing Someone I Love."
242. Vallet, "Healing My Son in a Lucid Dream," 10.
243. Vallet, "Healing My Son in a Lucid Dream," 11.
244. Pita, "Lucid Dreaming to Heal."
245. Radin et al., "Compassionate Intention as a Therapeutic Intervention by Partners of Cancer Patients."
246. Radin et al., "Compassionate Intention as a Therapeutic Intervention by Partners of Cancer Patients."
247. Barnes et al., "Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use Among Adults: United States, 2002."
248. Radin et al., "Compassionate Intention as a Therapeutic Intervention by Partners of Cancer Patients."

## PART FIVE: Extraordinary Lucid Dreaming for Connection and Oneness

The surface of the ocean sparkles in the sunshine and enchants us, but once we dive beneath it to explore the deeps, the adventure begins in earnest: an entire underwater world is revealed in all its profound mystery. It's the same with lucid dreaming, which dazzles us so much at first that we long to experience more of this cinematic, multisensory dream world rather than diving deeper. Advanced lucid dreamers recognise the spiritual and existential potential of lucid states where there is none of the usual seductive movie-like imagery.

This section explores the depths of lucid dreaming. It kicks off with [chapter 19](#), which investigates telepathy in lucid dreams. I'll raise the Viewing Tube Problem of Consciousness Exploration and look at scientific research into dream telepathy. Then we'll swoop into another fascinating area: out-of-body experiences (OBEs). These can arise from both waking and sleep states, and [chapter 20](#) looks at my Rainbow Theory of Consciousness and examines neuroscientific studies on OBEs. I'll look at the differences between OBEs and lucid dreams and share practical tips on how to release fear and embrace creativity and light.

Staying on the subject of light and bodilessness, [chapter 21](#) will take you on a trip into the sparkling black void and show you how to find the grace and luminosity of the Lucid Light, our baseline state of consciousness and the bedrock of reality. My Lucid Light Theory of Dreams and Reality shows how lucid dream experiences where we enter a bodiless, imageless state provide us with the fastest possible route to the experience

of interconnected oneness. The beauty of meditating in lucid dreams is examined in chapter 22, along with its potential for experiences of oneness, while chapter 23 looks at the ultimate experience: death and its related topics, such as near-death experiences and how lucid dreaming can help the dying and the bereaved.

The section finishes with chapter 24, which looks at living life as a dream with practical help from my ALIVE code for reality creation and a happier, more lucid life. The conclusion reflects on the future of lucid dream research and how lucid dreaming helps us to do something that sounds easy but can seem so elusive: wake up in our lives.

## CHAPTER 19

# *Lucid Dream Telepathy: Coincidence or a Natural Human Potential?*

One of the most hotly disputed areas of human potential is that of psi. “Psi” encompasses all experiences that seem to transcend or disregard the laws of time and space, such as telepathy (communicating without using the five senses) or precognition (presaging future events). In an interesting and not unrelated parallel, one of the most hotly disputed areas of modern physics is quantum entanglement, where two seemingly independent particles appear to be connected to each other in a strange way. Albert Einstein called this “spooky action at a distance.” Scientist Gilles Brassard calls it “pseudo-telepathy,” and parapsychologist Dean Radin believes that “psi is the human experience of the entangled universe.” <sup>249</sup>

Some dreams seem to defy our comfortable concept of linear time, or raise the notion of dreams as a shareable mutual space. We have all heard of “prophetic” dreams, as they have been recorded for centuries. In the Bible, Pharaoh had a dream of seven skinny cows eating up seven fat ones. Joseph interpreted this dream, claiming that it prophesied seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine. There are many documented examples of death dreams that “come true.” Other fascinating dreams are “mutual” dreams, where two people seem to share the same dream. The movie *Inception* plays with the concept of mutual lucid dreaming, and dreamers hook up to a shared dream in which they can communicate with

each other and even plant an idea into the mind of another dreamer. This chapter focuses on telepathic lucid dreaming because of all the forms of psi dreaming, this is the one with the most scientific evidence to back it up.

## Evidence for Dream Telepathy

Sigmund Freud showed an interest in telepathy, believing that it could be the original form of communication between individuals. In his 1922 paper “Dreams and Telepathy,” he comments that “one element of the apparently intimate connection between telepathy and dreams ... [is] the incontestable fact that sleep creates favourable conditions for telepathy.”<sup>250</sup> Yet what evidence is there for the existence of dream telepathy?

From 1964 to 1973, controlled scientific trials into dream telepathy took place at Brooklyn’s Maimonides Medical Center dream laboratory. Dream telepathy was tested along with other types of extrasensory perception (ESP), such as remote viewing and precognitive dreaming. The results of several hundred attempts were statistically significant at a level suggesting the actuality of remote perception. Psychologist Dr. Stanley Krippner and psychiatrist Montague Ullman, MD, concluded that “the psyche of man possesses a latent ESP capacity that is most likely to be deployed during sleep, in the dreaming phase. Psi is no longer the exclusive gift of rare beings known as ‘psychic sensitives,’ but is a normal part of human existence, capable of being experienced by nearly everyone under the right conditions.”<sup>251</sup>

Post-Maimonides research into dream telepathy tended to use different procedures. To avoid expensive, time-consuming EEG monitoring in sleep labs, from the 1970s experimenters turned instead to studies where subjects slept in their own homes, or lay awake in a light trance using the Ganzfeld technique, where mild sensory deprivation is induced by covering the subject’s eyes with halved ping-pong balls and pointing a red floodlight at him while he listens to white or pink noise. A review of ESP studies since Maimonides until 2003 concluded that “judges could correctly identify

target materials more often than would be expected by chance using dream mentation.”<sup>252</sup> It appears that the frequency of accurate ESP is higher when the subject is in an altered state of consciousness such as the hypnagogic or dream state.

In 2013, experiments at Trent University in Canada led by cognitive psychologist and Professor Emeritus Carlyle Smith tested whether young, healthy adults were able to dream details about the personal problems of an individual unknown to them simply by examining a photograph of that person and intending to dream about his or her problems. Smith concluded: “The data from these experiments suggests that normal undergraduates were able to have dreams with content that reflected the real-life problems and concerns of an unknown target individual.”<sup>253</sup>

The target suffered from multiple sclerosis, especially in her hands, and was on medication for the pain. She had also been in a serious car accident, and was taking care of her mother, who was dying of lung cancer. Here’s an example of one of the dreams that seemed to tune into the woman’s MS problems: “Woman has crippled hands and can’t open the pill bottle. The right arm does not work and there is a lot of pain. Her hands are all crippled and rolled almost into fists.”

Is this really a case of dream telepathy, where minds “overlap” with other minds and are able to receive information otherwise unavailable to them? Is telepathy a latent human ability, as Freud thought? Or are such dreams simply coincidences? Neuroscientist Dr. Patrick McNamara remarks of Smith’s results:

Let’s say that some sort of dream telepathy is real—and that dreams are more sensitive signal detection devices than our daytime mental states. What could account for this sensitivity? Smith mentions a few possibilities: He notes that correlated brain signals between two isolated individuals has been documented using functional magnetic imaging. Striking instances of apparent dream telepathy and similar brain activity patterns has been noted between twins in particular.



Whatever the mechanism, tests of the reality of dream telepathy should continue apace.<sup>254</sup>

## Death Dreams

Seemingly telepathic dreams are often reported when a person known to the dreamer is in danger or has just died. Such dreams often seem shockingly real. The dreamer wakes up “knowing” that the dream has shown them something that has actually happened. British lucid dreamer Natalie O’Neill told me the following lucid dream that she had after an evening out with friends:

I had a lucid dream and I saw F in a coffin. She told me she was dead. I told her she couldn’t be, as I had seen her only hours ago. She said she was sorry but that she was dead.

I woke from this in shock and I knew it was real. I ran to my housemate and told him. I found out the next day that F had committed suicide the night I’d had the lucid dream. Her poor mother had found her dead.

In her book *Consciousness: An Introduction*, former parapsychologist Sue Blackmore examines the example of a woman who dreamed that her best friend, Shelley, was in a hospital bed, covered in blood and bandages, dead. Just three hours later, the woman received a call to say that Shelley had been killed instantly in a car crash the night before, at the same time that the woman had her dream. Blackmore argues of this dream: “People ... remember the details that come true and forget the rest,”<sup>255</sup> pointing out that since Shelley died at the scene of the crash, she was probably never bandaged nor in hospital. Blackmore would likely argue the same of Natalie’s lucid dream: since F had only just committed suicide, she would not have been in a coffin.

Yet the information in both of these cases was presented by way of a dream, and dreams habitually translate events into symbolic, pictorial

language that is coloured by the individual consciousness of the dreamer. We associate death with coffins. We associate fatal road accidents with blood, hospital, medical treatment, and morgues. If these dreamers *did* intuit their friends' deaths, and the information was filtered through their own associative mental imagery while they were dreaming, it's unsurprising that some visual elements were distorted. In these dreams, "the details that come true" outweigh the vagaries of the imagery. In each case, the essential truth and timing of the matter remain: the dreamer's friend has just died.

Since dreams are not usually overly concerned with aligning details precisely with what goes on in waking physical reality, their creative interpretation of events can make it difficult to identify a "telepathic" dream. It is also important to consider how often we dream the death of a friend *without* this coming true the next day! Without religiously keeping a dream journal, the probabilities and variables involved are impossible to calculate accurately. Personally, I once had a dream so awfully real that upon waking I feared it might be true. In my early twenties I ended a relationship with a boyfriend, and shortly afterwards I dreamed that I walked into my bathroom and found him swinging dead, with a rope around his neck: he had hanged himself. Fortunately, he was not actually dead—nor was he "dead to me," since we are great friends to this day—but death in dreams can symbolise change, and here was a massive, irreversible change in our relationship. It's wise to investigate possible psychological explanations for disturbing dream imagery before calling someone up and relaying to them a horrifying dream in which they die.

Yet can you imagine how you would feel if you had a dream like this and then woke up to discover that your friend was actually dead? There are many documented examples of death dreams that "come true." Happily, not all apparently telepathic dreams involve death, as demonstrated by Carlyle Smith's study where undergraduates dreamed the problems of a person they had never even met before. The only thing that people may find spooky about Smith's study is its conclusion—doubtless unsettling for some—that

it seems possible for “normal” people to dream about a stranger’s problems simply by viewing their photograph.

## Mistrust of Telepathy

Apart from us shying away from the spookiness of it all, mistrust of telepathy and other psi seems to stem from two main sources, the first of which is a reluctance to change a cherished worldview of separate minds. Author of *Entangled Minds*, Dean Radin is Chief Scientist at the Institute of Noetic Sciences. He told me why he feels that science is reluctant to accept proof of dream telepathy, dream healings, and precognitive dreaming:

Most scientists (except for a small percentage of physicists) assume that common sense is good enough to describe everything in the real world. This leads to a set of “basic limiting principles” that define how scientists think about reality. It includes such ideas as causation, locality, objectivity, absolute space and time, and so on. For most everyday aspects of reality these assumptions are good enough. But physics has revealed over the past century or so that virtually all common sense assumptions about the nature of reality are possibly wrong, and in some cases they are demonstrably wrong.

This means that the average scientist (and most non-scientists) has unknowingly adopted a worldview in which phenomena like telepathy, distant healings, etc., are literally impossible. Given that stance, no amount of evidence presented can be regarded as anything except wrong, coincidental, delusional, etc. There are no alternative options because the impossible is, well, impossible.

As US business magnate and philanthropist Warren Buffett says, “What the human being is best at doing is interpreting all new information so that their prior conclusions remain intact.”<sup>256</sup> This great human skill was demonstrated in 1768 in France, when a hot rock was seen to fall from the sky. The chemist Lavoisier tested the rock and concluded that it had in fact

not fallen from the sky, but had simply been struck by lightning. His reasoning went: “There are no stones in the sky. Therefore stones cannot fall from the sky.” <sup>257</sup> Today, since we know about meteorites, their existence is accepted.

Second, people fear being “mind hacked.” The idea of telepathy makes people uneasy because of notions of invasion of privacy, or just this “spooky” idea that minds are porous and interconnected. Of course none of us would want our boss to use telepathy to discover that our “dental appointment” is in fact a rendezvous with a lover, just as we wouldn’t want our children to tap into our memories of our wild youth whenever they feel like it. Mind reading could get people into sticky situations, but the abilities of most people seem so weak and untrained that we really don’t need to worry about thought transparency or mind hacking.

We are all connected. Walk down the street behind a stranger who is smoking a cigarette and you’ll breathe in the smoke he just blew out of his lungs. Cigarette smoke makes shared breathing tangible: if you can smell it, you’re breathing it, and we all breathe the same air. Every one of us grew in a woman’s body: one person becomes two people. We bury our dead in the earth. We eat root vegetables that feed on that same earth. As Dean Radin points out, “All energy and all matter emerged out of a single, primordial Big Bang. And thus everything came out of the chute already entangled.” <sup>258</sup> We’re interconnected on a physical level; why not on a mental one too? What’s scary about that—why are we so keen on being separate from others? I’ve spoken to some lovely scientists and philosophers who snap closed like clams when topics like mind-to-mind communication are raised, but telepathy, both in and out of dreams, has been reported since time immemorial: surely it’s worth investigating?

A fundamental difficulty with the investigation not only of dream psi but of consciousness itself is what I call the “Viewing Tube Problem of Consciousness Exploration.” <sup>259</sup> The waking ego is but a tiny part of conscious and unconscious awareness. In clinging to the waking ego and shutting ourselves off from the possibility of interconnected minds, we may

be shrinking our own possibilities. Who are we to think we already know all there is to know about the nature of consciousness? When we recognise the Viewing Tube Problem, we take the first essential step to bypassing it so that we can get a clearer idea of the nature of conscious experience.

## **The Viewing Tube Problem of Consciousness Exploration**

Imagine for a moment that you're standing in the centre of a room. Imagine that this room is the whole of consciousness. A religious woman takes a viewing tube made from her beliefs and holds it to her eye to examine the room. She sees the ceiling lighting through her tube and exclaims, "Consciousness is divine light!" A scientist, whose tube is known as the scientific lens of enquiry, spots a plastic chair through her tube and announces, "Consciousness is hard, white, and rigid." A psychedelic explorer's trammelled gaze alights upon his own shoelaces and he declares, "Consciousness is Day-Glo green and wiggly, like a radioactive worm!"

Each explorer has had their own epiphany, but they're forgetting the distortion of the viewing tubes through which they're perceiving consciousness. They return from their exploration with conflicting impressions, and with each further investigation by people with different viewing tubes, the waters grow muddier.

How do we get the big picture? We need to let go of our viewing tubes and gaze around us with full lucidity. Whether our personal viewing tube has been shaped by religious views, science, psychedelics, or our own accumulated assumptions, we can be pretty sure that if we can't bring ourselves to relinquish it at least now and then, it could be an exceedingly long time before humans stumble across a cohesive understanding of consciousness.

If some philosophers and scientists were able to step away from their "viewing tube" assumption of a subjective/objective dichotomy as a starting

point for their investigations, and instead examined consciousness and the universe from the starting point of a more porous, flexible, inter-subjective reality, I think we would make much faster headway on discovering the ultimate nature of reality. Instead of posing questions loaded with assumptions, such as “Why is consciousness subjective?” it could be useful to dismantle those assumptions.

In a lucid dream it is much easier to drop your viewing tube than it is while awake. Lucid dreaming gives us the opportunity to examine the fabric of consciousness while in the dream state. This is why lucid dreaming is a valid tool for consciousness exploration, and we each have the opportunity to use this tool every night. We need more lucid-dreaming, void-floating philosophers and scientists: it could really speed things up in consciousness studies and extend science in creative new directions. Today, a few philosophers, such as Dr. Jennifer Windt and Professor Thomas Metzinger, are alert to the importance of dreaming and lucid dreaming as a platform for consciousness exploration, so perhaps basic premises, assumptions, and restrictive ideas about consciousness will start to change accordingly.

## Lucid Dream Telepathy

Lucid dreamers interested in the potential of telepathic dreaming may first need to make a conscious effort to recognise the nature of their own viewing tube in order to then release any preconceptions and open up to experiencing the porous nature of the mind. Keeping an open mind to the possibility of experiencing telepathy in a lucid dream is probably the biggest step on the road to success. Expectation—both our own and that of others—and a desire to please or impress can also be powerful incentives for producing a telepathic dream. Montague Ullman and Stanley Krippner note of the analyst-patient dynamic: “If the analyst is a Freudian, the patient tends to dream in Freudian symbols; if the analyst is a Jungian, the patient dreams in Jungian archetypal symbols; and ... if the analyst is interested in telepathy, the patient may comply with telepathic dreams.” <sup>260</sup>

Might it be possible in dreams to bypass fixed and inhibiting beliefs, such as “my mind is separate from other people’s,” to arrive at a place of overlap where information can be picked up from other minds? Biologist Dr. Rupert Sheldrake remarks, “Many spontaneous psychic phenomena take place during dreams.”<sup>261</sup> The telepathic death dreams from earlier in this chapter arose spontaneously: there’s no mention of any intentional effort on the part of the dreamers to tune in to what was happening to their friends that night. What happens when we play the lucid telepathy game and *deliberately* try to tune in to a preset target as soon as we become lucid? Rupert Sheldrake, author of *The Sense of Being Stared At*, shared his views with me on the importance of intention:

I think intention is very important in the way that extended minds connect with each other. This is why dogs know when their owners are coming home: they pick up their intention to do so. And I think it’s why people often feel when someone is about to call them on the telephone just before they do so. Again, I think they pick up their intention. In fact, I think intention is fundamental to most telepathic processes.

If intention is fundamental to the telepathic process, then surely when two people both intend to communicate with each other telepathically, the odds of success will increase? And if dream lucidity is involved, wouldn’t that also increase those odds? As lucid dreamers, we don’t have to wait for spontaneous psi to occur: we can actively seek telepathic information as soon as we realise we are dreaming.

In the book that charts his personal journey into lucidity, *Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self*, Robert Waggoner recounts the experience of a lucid dreamer, Ian Koslow. Ian decided to test for himself whether it is possible to seek unknown information in a lucid dream. Ian reports:

I was talking to a girl in my dorm about lucid dreaming, and we were discussing whether or not the people you see in the dream are actually

real, or just imaginations. To test this out, we decided to do a little experiment.

She told me that somewhere on her back she had an awkward looking freckle and she wanted me to find her in my lucid dream, and see if I could locate her freckle.

Well, it took me about a week, but I finally found her in my lucid dream and searched her back until I saw a dark freckle on her lower back, dead center, right above her ass. ...

When I woke up I went to her room and told her that I was ready to guess where her freckle was. I went up to her back and pointed my finger at the spot that I saw it in the dream, and to both of our surprise, she lifted up her shirt and my finger was directly covering her freckle. Now, I have no idea what this means, but I don't think it's just a coincidence that I happened to guess exactly where the lone freckle on her back was. All I could think is that the power of lucid dreaming might be more than I imagined.<sup>262</sup>

It's great fun to play around with our own made-up dream telepathy experiments, and this is a wonderful result. Of course, from a scientific point of view, unless dreamers are involved in an experiment that has been rigorously devised and externally verified by impartial judges, scientists will remain sceptical of dream psi. It was good to see Carlyle Smith's carefully devised experiment with students dreaming the problems of total strangers in 2013. One non-scientific but nonetheless externally verified dream telepathy experiment that happens on an annual basis is the Dream Telepathy Contest of the International Association for the Study of Dreams.

## The IASD Dream Telepathy Contest

When something smashes your viewing tube, it can be alarming, because it blows your mind wide open. When he found that elementary particles seemed to be communicating in "psychic" ways, physicist Guy Vandegrift



was shocked: “I do not believe in mental telepathy, miracles or any other occult phenomenon. This affair with Bell’s theorem has shaken me to the bone.”<sup>263</sup> He had to rethink his worldview.

My own experience is of course far less important than Vandegrift’s, as it is purely personal, but I’ll never forget having my viewing tube pulled away from my eyes at the 2004 IASD conference in Copenhagen. It was my first time at the dream conference and I was having a wonderful time meeting thoughtful dream researchers and making new friends. When someone mentioned a “dream telepathy contest,” I was sceptical. My critical mind was shining like a light bulb through force of habit. Yet these intelligent, reasonable people all said to me, unperturbed, “Oh yes, we do this every year. We’ve had some good hits in the past.”

*How?* I thought. How can that possibly work? And that did it: I was curious. Curiosity is often an unacknowledged power, but it’s the catalyst for most scientific and creative discoveries. I asked how this contest was set up.

IASD’s juried dream telepathy contest is loosely based on the Maimonides experiments. A telepathic sender publicly chooses one of four sealed envelopes, each of which contains a different picture that neither the sender nor the participants have seen before. The sender opens it in privacy and then spends the night trying to transmit the image. Contestants try to dream about the image and write down their dreams. The four target images are displayed the next morning, and contestants post their dream report into a box under the picture they think it most relates to. These dream reports are read through by a jury and the winner is chosen.

I pushed aside my qualms and opened my mind to the possibility that these people I liked and respected knew what they were talking about. That night, I was determined to dream about the target image. Here’s the account I wrote up after the event.

In a Copenhagen youth hostel at around midnight, I conjure up a strong visual memory of Beverly Kedzierski D’Urso [the sender] standing in

the auditorium a few hours earlier, clutching the envelope with the image in it and inviting us to dream of her. “Okay, Beverly,” I think. “I’m listening.” Then I drop straight into an exhausted sleep. Several hours later I wake up feeling thirsty and drink some water. I think briefly of the telepathy contest and scan my dreams, but they are just a tangled bulge of impressions from the conference. “I’ll be looking out for you, Beverly,” I think. I wonder what the image might be, and go straight back to sleep again. This time the sleep is a lighter one.

Green begins to seep into my dreams. It hangs in translucent blocks of colour as a backdrop to the dream action. It reflects off people’s faces. Soon I am surrounded by it and the scene morphs into a spacious park full of big old trees. The air is fresh and I feel happy. I am wandering around with IASD members, commenting on the greenness. In the distance, a woman’s voice is shouting, “Tree! Tree!” as if she has just discovered the answer to some fundamental question. I glance in the direction of the shouts but see no one. I hesitate, looking into the woods, but I’m not lucid at this point and I’m caught up in the pleasant social interaction with the other dream characters. I feel it would be rude to leave them.

Later, we are all at the conference site in a high-ceilinged room, discussing the dream telepathy contest. I see Beverly across the room and know that I’m dreaming this. Beverly looks cheerful but I think she’s got to be tired since she must be having a sleepless night trying to transmit the image. I ask her how she is feeling. She flings her arms out, grinning, and says, “I’ve just been shouting the word inside my head!” “That’s interesting,” I say, “because in my last dream, people were shouting about trees.” I want to ask her outright if tree is the image she is projecting, but think this might be cheating. A woman across the room says excitedly, “I’ve been getting that, too. Tree shouting.” We get into a discussion about the nature of greenness. Is green a positive or negative colour? We agree that it is both dark and light. Deep and beautiful.

Then the scene changes and I am alone before an image of a big leafy tree. Even the background is green. I remember that the IASD people said we should try to draw the images we see tonight in our dreams. Dutifully, I take a pen and paper, but I am no good at copying things ... I glance between my spindly, inaccurate drawing and the serene tree before me. It finally dawns on me that trying to draw the dream image is a waste of time, since I'm dreaming and nothing more than the memory of this whole scene will remain with me when I wake up. I toss the pen and paper aside in relief and look again at the tree image. Then, very slowly, I wake up. I am smiling in the dark. "The telepathy picture really might be a tree," I think.

In the cold light of day I was convinced I hadn't accurately dreamed the image. I pushed the telepathy contest to the back of my mind, but Beverly and I ended up in the same workshop that morning. I told her I'd dreamed of her and of a tree, and she asked me if I'd entered the contest. I said no. She asked me if I'd seen the four images, and I said no. Then she told me I should hurry over to registration and enter my dream before the competition closed. Feeling reluctant, as I didn't want to miss any of the workshop, I went to post my dream and saw the four revealed contest images. Three of them meant nothing to me, but the fourth was a photo of "my" tree exactly as seen in my lucid dream, green background and everything. It was as if someone had walked into my dream and taken a photograph from my viewpoint.

Recognising the image caused one of the oddest sensations I've had: a pounding heart and strong feeling of *déjà vu* mixed with a curious aliveness of vision that made me feel as if I'd just become lucid unexpectedly in a dream—only I was lucid-awake, not lucid-asleep. This was the moment that I experienced my viewing tube being flung away from my habitual view of the world. It was mind-blowing. How could this happen? I posted my dream into the "tree" box in a complete daze.

I had to fly home that day so I missed the awards ceremony, but later the judges informed me that the tree photo had in fact been the target image: I had won first prize in the contest with the most direct hit they'd ever had. They also said that my dream description accurately reflected the ways in which the sender had tried to transmit the image from the privacy of her hotel room: she had focused on the colour green, flung out her arms to represent boughs, pictured parks in her mind, ... and shouted the word "tree" inside her head.

Following this externally verified telepathic lucid dream, I considered the possibility that dreams are not purely subjective phenomena but experiences in which minds can connect with each other and exchange information. After all, what are the odds of such a direct hit on both the target image *and* the ways it was transmitted? How had I somehow heard the sender shouting the word "tree" in her head? How had I seen, in a lucid dream, the big leafy tree from the target photograph that the sender was focusing on that night?

## Coincidence or a Natural Ability?

When we read of other people's experiences, it can be easy to dismiss them as flukes, exaggerations, coincidences, or set-ups. Yet somehow when we experience it ourselves, we find ourselves asking fundamental questions about the nature of reality and the interconnectedness of minds. The basic Western assumption that individual minds are separate from one another suddenly seems less relevant, and the black-white terminology of "subjective" and "objective" appears restrictive. What about those all-important shades of grey, where subjective and objective realities might converge to become porous, flexible, and inter-subjective?

Consciousness researcher Sue Blackmore remarks on the problem of not being able to fit consciousness neatly into brain science: "Somewhere along the line we are making a fundamental mistake or relying on some false assumptions."<sup>264</sup> Although an obvious false assumption might go, "the brain encapsulates the whole of consciousness," another equally false

assumption may be, “minds are separate.” Dean Radin remarks: “Experiments have demonstrated that the worldview implied by classical physics is wrong. Not just slightly incorrect in minor ways, but fundamentally wrong in just the right way to support the reality of psi.” <sup>265</sup>

Might telepathy be an innate skill? And if so, how might its development impact society? There’s a story about a colony of Japanese macaque monkeys whose sweet potatoes were covered in sand. One day a young female monkey realised that if she washed them, they tasted better. Over a period of years, other monkeys in that colony slowly learned to wash them too. In Dr. Lyall Watson’s book *Lifetide*, he writes that “the addition of the 100th monkey apparently carried the number across some sort of threshold, pushing it through a kind of critical mass, because by that evening almost everyone in the colony was doing it. Not only that, but the habit seems to have jumped natural barriers to have appeared spontaneously ... in colonies in other islands and on the mainland.” <sup>266</sup>

In physics this is known as “the law of critical mass.” Could this spontaneous jump across the sea into other colonies be due to a sort of collective telepathy? Could some evolutionary leaps be a mixture of collective telepathy and critical mass? If enough of us hone our telepathic skills, how might the world change? While writing this chapter, I dreamed of two “mind” experimenters, each sitting dreaming in chairs. Behind one person was a note that said she was trying to melt a particular snowman faster than other, identical snowmen. The man in the seat next to her was trying to get a particular plant to grow faster and need less water than the control plants. People filed past the experimenters in respectful silence as they worked. In this dream world, mind-matter interaction, or telekinesis, was considered a skill, and after people had got through the training tasks, they did it as a regular job!

Imagine a world where telepathy is the norm: How would it change our personal and intercultural relationships? Would lying still be possible? How about infidelity—would the number of “crimes of passion” go up, with people getting furious about other people’s unvoiced *intentions* towards

their spouse or child? How would arranged marriages fare? Come to that, how would *any* marriage fare? Would transparency of intention improve our lives or make them worse?

### Dream Telepathy: A Natural Ability?

One year after my tree dream, at the 2005 IASD conference in Berkeley, California, I was curious to see if I could repeat the experience, and entered the dream telepathy contest again. This time I won second place with a hypnagogic image of a tiger that turned his head and looked right at me (the target image was a cat, looking right at the camera). Pure chance again? Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proofs, and I look forward to more dream telepathy studies, carried out with scientific curiosity and a stringent methodology.

How does dream telepathy work? All I know from my own experience is that I opened my lucid dreaming mind to an image that Beverly D'Urso was simultaneously trying to broadcast and that there appears to have been an exchange of information. More than a decade after that night, I still have no real answers for how my dreams seemed to so accurately pick up on what Beverly was doing, seeing, and internally shouting about! I can only say that it seemed quite natural to meet her while I was dreaming. It was only when I woke up and won the contest that I found the whole incident hard to digest. After all, it was an event that bulldozed my viewing tube and, like most people, I was pretty attached to my viewing tube.

If you look at the scientific and anecdotal evidence for telepathy, the twin studies, and the great number of individual accounts that make their way into various books, it does seem that the barriers between individual minds can—particularly in certain situations and in certain states of consciousness—be porous. When two people are attempting to connect telepathically, as in the IASD telepathy contest, and when lucid dreaming is involved, there seems a greater likelihood that information can be accurately exchanged. Perhaps telepathy is not the alarmingly mysterious event it is usually seen

to be, but a latent ability that can sometimes be tapped into purposefully in dreams and lucid dreams.

### **Practice #59: Question Your Beliefs**

Try asking yourself some questions, such as those listed in the introduction to this book, to test what your own personal viewing tube is made from.

1. How separate am I from other people?
2. Is my brain the creator of my conscious experience, or does it mediate consciousness, a bit like a radio receiver that receives waves and decodes them into sounds? Which beliefs do I hold about consciousness?
3. Does time move only in one direction: forward, in linear style? Or might it move seamlessly between past, present, and future?
4. Are dreams “all in my head,” or might there be a vaster dream matrix where it is possible to connect with other minds?
5. Do I really *want* to experience lucid dream telepathy?

### **Practice #60: Mind Reading with a Friend**

Playing telepathy games can help us reconnect with our intuition and extend our mind-body experience. The simple telepathy game presented here may not fast-track a career change to circus-tent clairvoyant or get us accepted into a classified US government psi research programme like Stargate, but playing with psi can help us move more deeply into what creativity researchers call “think-feel,” and open our minds to the creative possibilities of reality.

Cut out five cards and draw a different symbol on each: a star, triangle, circle, square, and wiggly lines. Phone a friend who knows which images appear on the cards but not the order in which you’ll be sending them. Shuffle the cards, then pick one and try to mentally send the image on it, by staring hard at it for up to one minute (or until your friend guesses aloud what it is), while your friend tries to

“see” it. Keep a tally of right and wrong responses, and count them up at the end to see if the correct ones are above the chance level of 20 percent if five cards are used.

This can also be done as a dream telepathy experiment, with the sender focusing on just one shape throughout the night and checking the receiver’s dream reports the next day. If the receiver gets lucid, he can ask the dream to show him the target shape and intend to see the correct one. Pay attention to elements that seem to be forced into the dream or impose themselves in some way, like the way I heard a woman’s voice shouting, “Tree! Tree!” and noticed blocks of green seeping into my dream. Also pay attention to dream telephones, which often show up in telepathic dream reports. Dreams use symbolic imagery, so in the case of a circle being “sent,” it’s unlikely the dreamer will dream of a neatly drawn circle on a piece of paper! A circle might appear in the dream as the full moon, or someone ice skating in circles, or a dream figure windmilling one arm.

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249. Radin, *Entangled Minds*, 235.
250. Freud, "Dreams and Telepathy."
251. Ullman et al., *Dream Telepathy*, 227.
252. Sherwood and Roe, "A Review of Dream ESP Studies Conducted Since the Maimonides Dream ESP Programme."
253. Smith, "Can Healthy, Young Adults Uncover Personal Details of Unknown Target Individuals in Their Dreams?"
254. McNamara, "Can Our Dreams Solve Problems While We Sleep?"
255. Blackmore, *Consciousness*, 358.
256. Buffett, quoted in "News Is Bad for You—and Giving Up Reading It Will Make You Happier."
257. Sheldrake, *The Sense of Being Stared At*, 4.
258. Radin, *Entangled Minds*, 17.
259. Johnson, "Celebrating 40 Years of Lucid Dream Exploration."
260. Ullman et al., *Dream Telepathy*, 37.
261. Sheldrake, *The Sense of Being Stared At*, 49.
262. Waggoner, *Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self*, 177.
263. Vandegrift, "Bell's Theorem and Psychic Phenomena," 476.
264. Blackmore, *Consciousness*, 2.
265. Radin, *Entangled Minds*, 239.
266. Watson, *Lifetide*, 147–148.

## CHAPTER 20

# *Out-of-Body Experiences and the Rainbow of Conscious Experience*

Imagine you're off to meet some of the world's foremost explorers of out-of-body experiences. How do you expect them to be in person? A bit "woo-woo" maybe, or floaty and vague. Perhaps when you meet them you find yourself glancing down at their feet to check they're not levitating. After all, if they "leave their bodies" all the time, surely they won't have much of a connection to the physical? Yet most experts in the field agree that the popular term "out-of-body experience" (OBE) is a misnomer, as we don't actually "leave" our bodies, or at least, no more so than we do each time we go to sleep.

In fact, you could say that we all leave our bodies every night when we fall asleep and take on a dream body. If someone yells in our ear while we sleep or gives us a kick, we'll be aware of it, even in the deepest stage of sleep. But for the most part we are disconnected from our physical bodies, which remain in natural paralysis while we float off into our dream world. So despite the sometimes dramatic accounts of OBEs, there's really no need to view so-called "out-of-body" experiences as any more esoteric than ordinary sleep.

Yet despite scientific monitoring and recent advances in neuroscience, out-of-body experiences are still viewed by many as weird, esoteric experiences to be treated with suspicion and scepticism. In this sense, such

experiences are in a similar position to that of lucid dreaming in 1975, when it was scientifically verified for the first time by British psychologist Keith Hearne. Yet 15 to 20 percent of people have at least one OBE in their lifetime,<sup>267</sup> and as Lynne Levitan and Stephen LaBerge point out, they are “a natural phenomenon arising out of normal brain processes ... The OBE is a mental event that happens to healthy people.”<sup>268</sup>

## What Is an Out-of-Body Experience?

What exactly is an out-of-body experience? Here’s my definition: The OBE is a state in which self-perception (perceived sensory input, self-location, and self-identification) seems external to and independent from the physical body; a state that may be entered spontaneously, involuntarily, and abruptly from diverse waking and sleeping states of consciousness. In terms of onset, the OBE differs from lucid dreams in that an OBE might arise from the waking state, trauma, meditation, fainting, or in the midst of great physical danger. But an OBE can also arise from sleep states such as hypnagogia, sleep paralysis, non-lucid dreaming, and lucid dreaming. The numerous entries into the OBE state seem non-exclusive in terms of reported onset phenomena: a lucid dreamer may experience either earthquake-like shaking at the onset of a lucid dream–induced OBE, or a gentle transition. A meditator may suddenly find herself floating above her body, or she may experience diverse kinaesthetic and auditory sensations (such as vibrations and buzzing) before the experience of being “out of body” seems complete.<sup>269</sup>

Luigi Sciambarella of the Monroe Institute shared his first OBE with me, and it captures the violent sensations of some OBEs:

It felt as though a train was running through me followed by what sounded like a thunderstorm taking place near my head. The sensation was incredibly physical and the shaking was violent and uncontrollable ... I found myself gradually getting closer to [the ceiling] even though I

was still shaking ferociously in a horizontal position with my eyes closed! When I'd reached the ceiling ... I turned around and saw my form in the dim moonlight. I was lying in bed facing the ceiling with my eyes closed.

If we can stay consciously aware while we fall asleep, we experience the transition from the physical body into a dream body or energy body. We may experience a rush of sensations, like falling or floating or shooting “out” of our physical body. When we lose sensory contact with our physical body—and this is a natural process that happens every single time we fall asleep—and we remain aware of the process while it's happening, we can expect a crazy mixture of visual imagery, sounds, vibrations, and sensations of paralysis and movement. The best thing to do amongst all this chaos is relax and enjoy the weirdness! It's a creative experience and it's fun to see what emerges, as it can be different every time. Here's an excerpt from an OBE I had:

Everything is black and buzzing. I relax into the vibrations, which are unusually smooth and harmonious. As I do, I'm looking into the void—a very alive darkness. Bits of light in it, even some colours. I decide to try and get out of my body now, and raise my right side out, it feels lovely and light. I see a face made of electric blue light, just deft lines like an artist's sketch. For a moment it looks devilish, then not. I roll over and am fully out of body ... The room has strange light in it as if the moon is full and shining in.

The colourful void, the smooth vibrations, the electric-blue face ... none of these are typical for me. Each new sleep experience brings us something novel, just as every new day of waking life does. If we can manage to live all of our experiences without fear, we open ourselves to the creativity and beauty of the whole spectrum of conscious experience. An artist might decide to sketch the deft lines of that blue face, while a musician might want to reproduce the energetic vibrations in riffs and trills. Hovering

between waking and sleep, and conscious of tipping from one state into another, we're situated not only at the threshold to our own creativity, but at the threshold of an out-of-body experience.

States of consciousness naturally segue in and out of one another, often with experiential overlaps, and I have tried to capture this in my Rainbow Theory of Consciousness. Along with other elements of this chapter, parts of this theory first appeared in a chapter I wrote for the book *Consciousness Beyond the Body* and are reproduced here with permission.

## The Rainbow Theory of Consciousness

Imagine consciousness as a rainbow-coloured expanse of silk. Why take up scissors and slice the different colours into separate ribbons? "This deep red is a dream. Snip, snip. This orange is a waking vision. Snip. This sunny yellow is an out-of-body experience (OBE)." The stuff of consciousness is woven together from the same fabric: if we get too fixated on separating it, we risk no longer seeing the big picture.

States of consciousness bleed into each other like coloured dye: a non-lucid dream becomes a lucid dream, which can transmute into an OBE, which in turn might transition into a state of sleep paralysis and then waking consciousness. Within a single lucid dream (in which we are aware that we are dreaming), lucidity fluctuates from effortless clarity to confusion as we get sucked into the dream scene and begin to forget we're dreaming. Similarly, in the waking state we drift from daydreaming to sharp mental alertness and back again. We drive to our child's school rather than to the doctor because we go into the curious state of alert non-attention known as "automatic pilot mode"; we have a beer in the evening and get a buzz off that; later in bed we lapse into sleepiness and might spontaneously find ourselves having an OBE.

Consciousness occurs on a continuum, with experiential overlap between different states. Every state of consciousness that has ever been experienced

emerges from the same baseline state. Nothing is ever completely separate from anything else.

When we turn our attention to conscious experience, we are able to recognise moments of transition as they arise. Of course, definitions of different states are extremely useful for clarity, and I'm as keen as the next researcher to tease the strands apart and name them so that we can discover more about consciousness. But it's important to remember that at the end of the day we're all talking about the same intrinsically connected phenomenon: the rainbow of conscious experience.

In some OBEs, we no longer identify with a body; instead, we seem to exist as a dot of awareness in space, or as fully unified with vast expanses of Lucid Light. Whether these experiences started off as OBEs or as lucid dreams, I term them bodiless lucid experiences (BLEs). In a BLE, we have no sense of location. There may be a sensation of movement. There may be a sense of wonder, oneness, or belonging, maybe a sense of understanding the nature of the universe. Perhaps at first we continue to identify with ourselves as "I," but after a time in the white (or grey, or black, or luminous) space, there's not much for the ego to bounce off. When everything dissolves, what remains?

When we spin a rainbow spinning-top, the colours merge into whiteness. When the rainbow of conscious experience merges into white light, self-perception and ego dissolve. So does the illusion of separateness between different states of consciousness. What we experience is the baseline state of consciousness, the Lucid Light that is the underlying creative substance from which all forms, matter, and states of consciousness arise. All that remains then is lucid awareness: a full experience of the Lucid Light.

## Are Lucid Dreams and Out-of-Body Experiences the Same Thing?

This question has been asked a lot over the years, but recent neuroscientific research studies and other sleep lab monitoring have cleared up some of the uncertainty by highlighting the differences in brain state and onset of both types of experience. There are new names for OBEs being bandied about as researchers try to hit on something that more accurately reflects the experience, such as Graham Nicholls's "independent consciousness experience" or my "consciousness relocation" (this one popped into my head in a state of lucid hypnagogia); but for sure "out-of-body experience" is catchier and it does capture the essence of the classic "lift off" experience, so it may well stick around. Just as it's tricky to hit on an apt name for this type of experience, there is still no widespread agreement on whether lucid dreams and OBEs are fundamentally distinct experiences.

Where does a lucid dream stop and an OBE begin? What if a child finds herself flying outside her home at night in a highly accurate representation of waking reality—the Tonka toys lying in the sandpit, the gravel driveway, silhouettes of trees moving in the breeze? What if she hangs out with magical beings in the hedge at the bottom of the driveway, all the while consciously aware that her "real" body is asleep in bed and this is not a normal waking life experience? Are we talking a lucid dream here, or an out-of-body experience? When I was around seven, I experienced this lovely scenario many times.

Levitan and LaBerge remark that "all dreams could be called OBEs in that in them we experience events and places quite apart from the real location and activity of our bodies. ... OBEs may be a kind of dream."<sup>270</sup> But English consciousness researcher Sue Blackmore argues of OBEs, "Although often dismissed as dreams, they are not. They feel somewhat like lucid dreams in that one feels fully conscious and able to fly around and control things in another world."<sup>271</sup> Unlike lucid dreams, OBEs can occur in a deeply relaxed waking state.

Scientists have identified OBEs as being connected with a range of different brain states. As far back as the 1930s, an OBE was accidentally induced when neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield electrically stimulated the

temporal lobe in an epileptic patient.<sup>272</sup> Keith Hearne told me three female subjects he tested in the lab in the seventies were found to be in Stage One slow wave sleep with hypnagogic imagery during their OBEs. Scott Rogo's 1985 article "OBEs as Lucid Dreams: A Critique" points out the wide variety of brain states that can lead to OBEs and argues that OBEs cannot be explained away as lucid dreams. Leaping forward a few decades, Sue Blackmore explains that "many OBEs take place when the person is wide awake, and physiological studies using EEG, heart rate and other measures show that experimental OBEs occur in a relaxed waking state similar to drowsiness, but not deep sleep and certainly not REM sleep."<sup>273</sup> A 2014 Canadian study by Dr. Andra Smith and Dr. Claude Messier reported in the journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* used fMRI scanning technology to test the brain state of a healthy female subject who could induce OBEs at will, simply by lying down at rest. The twenty-four-year-old subject had taught herself the technique in childhood to distract herself during naptime. The OBEs that occur under more "normal" circumstances at home can emerge from various sleep states that include lucid dreams.

Neuroscientific studies claim to identify the area of the brain activated during OBEs (the temporoparietal junction) and propose that OBEs can occur when sensory input and the body image are disrupted. In a 2005 study by Dr. Olaf Blanke and colleagues, when healthy subjects were asked to imagine themselves in the visual perspective of an OBE, this resulted in the activation of the same part of the brain as when a person is actually having an OBE. In an exciting 2007 experiment, Dr. Bigna Lenggenhager and colleagues used virtual technology to induce "full body illusions" in the lab by showing subjects a film of themselves viewed from behind, then stroking their backs to trigger a perceptual leap into the virtual body they could see being stroked before them. Such experiments raise important questions: How is our sense of self linked to visuospatial perspective, body image, and agency? What light does this shed on the nature of consciousness? OBEs could be useful in the future in helping scientists and philosophers not only to raise these questions but to answer them.



As far as personal experiences of OBEs and lucid dreams go, whatever the label we slap on, what counts is the experience itself, and what it can bring us in terms of consciousness exploration, life perspective, creativity, and human understanding. The argument of whether or not OBEs could be lucid dreams is rapidly diminishing as more scientific research comes to light demonstrating the differences. However, on the experiential level, there can be plenty of overlap between these states.

## Transitioning into an Out-of-Body Experience

Let's consider again the Rainbow Theory of Consciousness: In my view, consciousness occurs on a continuum; that is to say, all states of consciousness (dreaming sleep, trance states, full waking alertness, drowsiness, lucid dreaming, and all the rest) are intrinsically linked, with variations in awareness, perception, meta-cognition, and self-identification.

While I recognise that OBEs differ from lucid dreams in many respects, I've also had experiences where right in the midst of things I've wondered, "Hey, is this an OBE I'm having, or is it a lucid dream of an OBE, or is it a lucid dream that has somehow turned into an OBE?" because the overlap can be confusing. After all, in OBEs, lucid dreams, and states of lucid suspension such as the void we are consciously aware yet we perceive with our inner eyes rather than our physical eyes. Additionally, we are in a thought-responsive environment and our sense of self is often identified with a light, mobile "body" that can float and fly, or perhaps we are bodiless and perceive ourselves as a point of conscious awareness.

When we look at *transitions* between different states of consciousness, we get more clarity on what is happening. It's useful to ask ourselves: "How did the experience arise? Which state of consciousness was I in when it began? How did it develop?" I find it useful to consider the respective characteristics of OBEs under the following key categories: wake-induced; hypnagogia-induced; sleep paralysis-induced; dream-induced; lucid dream-induced; faint-induced; trauma-induced; and also the "void OBE," where

one hangs bodiless in a formless environment. It's important not to assume that these experiences are all one and the same thing, and as we uncover any distinct characteristics, we'll learn more about consciousness. Here are some examples of transitions into the OBE state:

1. Wake-induced: My personal account: "As I walk across the university library, a buzzing grows in my head and I feel myself involuntarily beginning to rise up out of my body."

2. Hypnagogia-induced: When we stay alert while our body falls asleep, we'll see random visual imagery and experience some of the strange sensations linked to falling asleep: buzzing, wild swinging movements, the sensation of shooting through space. If we then purposefully roll sideways to get "out of body," we can trigger an OBE, as in my example earlier in this chapter. Graham Nicholls, author of *Navigating the Out-Of-Body Experience*, reports the following experience while he was lying in bed in a sleepy trance: "A jolt of energy shot through my body, something akin to a large electrical shock. It wasn't painful, but it was very close to that level of intensity. As I regained awareness of my surroundings, I realised I was hovering or floating around a meter above my physical body." <sup>274</sup>

3. Sleep paralysis-induced: My personal account: "It's as if I'm stuck in concrete and as I fight to free myself I realise I'm in sleep paralysis. I stop fighting and relax, and then suddenly I'm being spun around in a black vortex, faster and faster, until I pop free of it and emerge up on my bedroom ceiling. The whole room is grainy black and I feel very light."

4. Dream-induced: My personal account: "Suddenly, with no observable transition, I'm floating cross-legged about a foot above the ground, next to my bed."

5. Lucid dream-induced: William Buhlman shares an experience in his book *Adventures Beyond the Body*: "Again the crab jumped and I realized that I had to be dreaming. At that moment I said aloud, 'I must be dreaming.' Immediately I felt a strange tingling sensation in my body and realised that I'd entered the vibrational state while dreaming ... I focused

my complete attention on the idea of floating up and out of my physical body. Within seconds I could feel myself lift from my physical body and move toward the living room.” <sup>275</sup>

6. Faint-induced: My personal account: “As the nurse injects me I see black spots in my vision and there’s a roaring in my ears. I know I’m about to faint. For a moment it feels horrible, then I’m drawn up into the corner of the room where I float calmly and observe the scene. From what seems a great distance I hear the nurse shouting my name.”

7. Trauma-induced: When we are in extreme personal danger, we might experience shooting up out of our body and observing the scene as it unfolds below us. One woman told me that when two men locked her in an apartment and forced her to perform sexual acts on them, she floated above her body into a very safe cocoon and stayed there for the entire experience. This is a safety mechanism to protect us from psychological trauma. Others report spontaneous OBEs during a car accident or when suffering extreme physical pain.

8. Void OBEs: These are out-of-body experiences that occur in the lucid void and can be triggered in various ways while lucid dreaming, for example, by diving through portals (such as doors or mirrors or into lakes) or by meditating in a lucid dream until all the imagery falls away. A void OBE can also be reached from other states of consciousness, such as the hypnagogic state. Chapter 21 explores the marvellous potential of the void. In a void OBE, we float, fly, or are suspended bodiless in black light or other coloured light.

I suspect there is a wide range of OBE states and experiences, some of which may be categorised as dream-influenced OBEs, while others—such as those where the person having the OBE travels to a location and witnesses an actual physical reality event take place, with the details confirmed after the experience—are quite different from the dream state.

## Thought-Responsiveness in OBEs

Different types of OBEs can also reflect different intensities of thought-responsiveness (where our thoughts mould the environment). In form-based OBEs, we find ourselves in a replica of our bedroom or flying through an energetic replica of the waking world. Reports suggest that these seem to be the least thought-responsive type of OBE. In psychological projection OBEs, psychological elements and projections are strongly present, and thought-responsiveness seems higher than in form-based OBEs. In bodiless lucid experiences (BLEs), we go *beyond* form and experience ourselves in white light or another formless environment, and these seem highly thought-responsive. Most beginning OBErs will tend to experience the form-based OBE or the psychological projection OBE.

It's quite hard to agree on a set of definitions for states of consciousness because of the variations of individual experience. How can we even be sure we see the exact same colour as someone else does when we identify an object as "red" or "yellow"? Keith Hearne once said to me: "Individual difference is the biggest thing I've learned in psychology: we're all totally different. You can't give 'one unit of pain' to a person because some people will say, 'Can you give me another, please?' And others will be, like, almost dead!"

## Too Many OBEs?

If you look at online forums and Facebook groups, most people seem very keen to trigger OBEs; they avidly exchange techniques and post in triumph and delight when they manage to leave their bodies. But what about the opposite extreme?

At university, I was wide open to exploring my dreams and all the other strange and marvellous experiences that seemed connected to them. In a way, maybe I was too open. Lucid dreams are one thing—they happen during sleep, so generally you're lying down safely in bed. But I quickly found that OBEs didn't seem to have the same natural boundaries, at least not for me. One evening I was in the library, where no food was allowed,

and although I was hungry I was deeply engrossed in my work and didn't want to break my creative flow. When I got up to get another book, I felt lightheaded but was determined to finish my essay. As I crossed the busy library, the vibrations typical of the onset of an OBE started to run up and down my body with great insistence and then I actually felt myself leaving my body, stepping out of it.

This wouldn't do! I was in the middle of a public space, about to float off and abandon my physical body, which I suppose would have fallen to the floor with a crash and alarmed everyone. With a tremendous effort of will, I forced myself back in by breathing deeply, biting down hard on my lip, and wriggling my toes and fingers. I caught the experience in time, but it was a struggle. There were other times that I nearly OBE'd in the waking state without wanting to, almost always when I was overtired or my blood sugar was low, as this sends me into a light trance and my connection to my body is weakened.

These inconvenient daytime OBEs soon became annoying. It seemed anything that possibly *could* trigger them *would* trigger them. A vaccination before a trip to India made me float off to the ceiling (I disliked needles and used to faint, so I'd taken the precaution of lying down before the nurse did the injection). I watched with detached curiosity from the air as the nurse inexplicably raced from the room. Then about four doctors rushed in. When they started calling my name, I sheepishly came back down from the ceiling; I hadn't meant to scare anyone. Apparently my face and lips had turned grey, so the nurse feared I'd had a dangerous medical reaction to the vaccination.

Discovering a grounding technique is essential for consciousness explorers, especially those who are prone to slipping into OBE or deep trance states. Yoga was what helped me. Walking along in nature and feeling your feet on the ground, practising slow deep breathing, and eating regularly to keep the blood sugar up are all good techniques for bringing the attention back to the physical body. Visualising yourself as a firmly rooted tree might help. It's wise to work out what does the trick for you personally

so you can bring yourself back to the body in an instant whenever you need to.

## Are OBEs Dangerous?

OBEs are a natural phenomenon present in healthy people. They are not dangerous for anyone who is reasonably psychologically stable. But understandably, an OBE can be shocking if the person does not grasp what is going on. Some people think they must be dying, or feel terrified that they will never get back into their body again. This can be made even worse when they see their physical body from another perspective and assume they must have died. One lady, Brittany Nicholas, told me she had spontaneous OBEs from childhood that terrified her: “Honestly, I thought I was dying and ascending into heaven for many years, but always tried to fight going up.” When we know what to expect, the fear goes away.

When fear is removed from an experience, we are free to explore with playful curiosity and learn all we can. What if we encounter a terrifying vision in the OBE state? Here, the same advice applies as with any nightmare image: Don’t run away. Send love to the vision, integrate it. Every issue you avoid will come back again another time. Confronting the fearful vision in whatever way feels right may be the fastest way to progress spiritually.

When we feel fear during an OBE, whether it is form-based or involves psychological projections, there are basic steps we can take to calm down and focus, such as taking a deep breath and relaxing. It may sound strange to suggest something as physical as taking a deep breath when we are “out of our body,” but the connection between calm breathing and mental calm is so strong that the act of intending to breathe deeply and relax will normally trigger greater calmness in any state of consciousness. We can also remind ourselves that we will return safely from this experience, and summon feelings of love and acceptance while keeping our thoughts positive. If we

know about these simple techniques, we can begin to work with the OBE rather than fighting it.

A typical train of panicky thought and its impact upon the thought-responsive OBE environment runs as follows: Weird vibrations are experienced and the person is projected out of body for the first time. He feels terrified and out of control. “Oh no,” he thinks, “there’s a shape in the corner. What if it’s something scary?” In response, the shape becomes noticeably scarier. “What if it comes up to me?” The shape responsively moves towards the OBEr. “Whoa, it’s going to attack me!” The shape approaches faster and at the moment it’s about to touch the OBEr, he wakes up bathed in sweat, convinced he has escaped something evil in the nick of time.

Let’s rewind that script. In this version the OBEr experiences a spontaneous OBE, but because he’s read this chapter he knows he should relax and breathe. It works a bit, but he’s still uneasy because this is the first time and it’s all rather strange. He notices a shape in the corner and feels a little nervous but remembers that this is a thought-responsive environment and consciously guides his thoughts towards a positive outcome: “Okay, a shape in the corner. That’s fine, there’s plenty of room for shapes. I’m safe here and later I will return safely to my body.” He breathes, relaxes. “Uh-oh, the shape’s moving towards me ... Think positive.” He does his best to muster a feeling of love and acceptance. “Maybe it wants to help me?” The shape grows bright and he sees it is a beautiful ball of light. He’s so astonished that before he can communicate with it the experience ends.

This is a simplification of the thought-responsive process, but it shows how attitude and expectations can impact the OBE environment. The greater the fear and resistance we feel, the more likely it is that the experience will only become more terrifying.

Some people prefer to stay close to their physical bodies when they have OBEs, as it makes them feel safer, so many people have never tried to leave their homes. Brittany Nicholas told me: “I had never left my home until about six weeks ago—I’d just float to the ceiling and maybe around a

corner to the bathroom until I ‘fought’ to get back into my body.” When she did finally let go of her fear about OBEs, she flew into space and woke up feeling as refreshed as if she’d had eight hours of sleep, even though she had been exhausted beforehand. In one OBE back in 1994 when such experiences were new for me, I too experienced fear when I floated out and saw my body on the bed. I recalled that it was supposedly dangerous to see your double—clearly I’d been reading too much Castaneda at the time!—and I felt worried that I might die. I had the desire to be back in my body and suddenly I was.

There’s truly nothing funny about the fear and caution some people feel when they have OBEs, but I had to chuckle when I heard what William Buhlman had to say about people who asked him what they should do when they found themselves out of body. “Most people hang around at home!” he exclaimed. “And when their home dissolves, they freak out! What do people expect me to say? ‘Oh—stay in your home! Explore your kitchen!’ ”

<sup>276</sup> For William, it is clear that nothing in an OBE can hurt us. He advises sending love to fearful visions if we encounter any in the OBE state, and suggests people stretch themselves and go into extreme situations, as this is the fastest way to make spiritual progress. So what does he think might be a good thing to try while out of body?

“Fly into the sun—it burns all the crap off you!”

### **Practice #61: How to Release Fear during an OBE**

**1. Relax:** Panicking is possibly the worst thing a person can do during an OBE. I cannot overstress the importance of relaxing and breathing calmly when the freight train version of an OBE entry runs you over. It’s remarkable how simply accepting the experience can transform it fairly quickly into a calm, beautiful event. Practising yoga and meditation is an excellent way of learning to connect with the peaceful centre we all have somewhere inside us. Once the “Breathe—Grow calm—Relax” structure has been strengthened (and it takes only minutes of regular practice), it becomes second nature to turn to the



breath *in any state of consciousness* as a way to calm emotions and release fear. Yes, in bodiless lucid experiences we have no sense of inhabiting a body, but even in this state the decision to calm down and relax will trigger an automatic response. Combine it with an affirmation, such as “I am safe,” and it will be even more effective.

**2. Visualise:** Another useful practice is that of visualisation. If we visualise ourselves moving easily away from our physical body towards a beautiful landscape or safe place, the thought-responsive environment generally tends to react by materialising that place. Feeling and projecting love is also a very good way of dissolving fear and fearful visions or sensations: when we explore lucid states with love in our hearts, the lucid environment responds warmly. Summoning a feeling of love can be done by imagining warmth or colour emanating from the chest, breathing freely, and smiling.

**3. Be curious:** Adopting an attitude of curiosity when observing strange visions or scenes that arise during an OBE is an effective way of gaining perspective and clarity. If you’re in search of creative inspiration for a painting or a story, these visions are imbued with creative potential, so try to notice everything about them: watch them like a film. Remind yourself that after all this, you will find yourself safely in your bed. Don’t forget your ability to fly in the OBE state; kick out a little or wriggle upwards like a mermaid. If you are truly desperate to escape the OBE experience and return to your body, try wiggling your toes, which brings your attention to your physical body, or hold your breath for as long as you can. This second technique can shock the body into returning to regular waking consciousness.

**4. Daydream:** If you have had a previous scary OBE, instead of wishing it would never happen to you again, it’s far less psychologically stressful to think of something fun to try out in case it *does* happen again. Relax and have a little daydream about how your ideal OBE might go—would you fly over mountains, experiment with

putting your hand through a wall, or enjoy the sensory explosion of doing floating somersaults? Once we open ourselves to the creative possibilities of OBEs, we soon find ourselves hankering after more experiences and working on inducing them. Personally I've found that curiosity burns stronger than fear. If we get curious about OBEs, any fear rapidly diminishes. Reading widely on the subject and talking to experienced practitioners is also helpful, as the experience will seem less foreign.

**5. Balance the seesaw:** The golden rule of fearlessness in OBEs can be visualised as a seesaw, because it's all about balance and reciprocity: If you tip too far down into fear, the fear factor of the experience rises in response. If you are relaxed and calm out of body, and feel balanced within yourself, your OBE is far more likely to be a relaxed and calm one.

## Can OBEs Change Our Lives?

The out-of-body experience can do something quite amazing if we allow it to: it can transform our instinctive fear of death. Feeling ourselves apparently "leave" the physical body and yet continue to exist as a fully conscious self can be liberating. It can help us to leave behind our assumptions and beliefs about the nature of reality, life, and death. Often such experiences take place within a Lucid Light environment, with no other imagery. A friend of mine, Anja, told me, "I've had white light out-of-body experiences where just for a moment I understand the nature of reality, the universe, everything."

Such profound insights are also common in the related state of near-death experiences (NDEs), where people report leaving their bodies when they are close to death or have been pronounced clinically dead. Some OBEs occur spontaneously during moments of extreme physical danger. In one incident in Greece, Natalie O'Neill was involved in a motorbike crash. As the motorbike skidded and crashed, Natalie found herself floating above

and behind the bike, watching as everything happened in slow motion. She told me of the incredible feeling of peace that came over her; there was no sense of concern about the riders, no pain:

I remember the bike going from side to side in slow motion and then I was outside of myself. I couldn't have been any calmer. Totally at peace, content, just watching it like you'd watch a movie. I remember thinking, *This is probably what happens to everyone when they die*. It made me feel much better about everything; it made me think that whatever happens when we die, it's going to be fantastic! I totally believe something continues after death. It's just one little journey, this one on Earth. I know 100 percent that your energy continues after your physical body dies.

We don't need to crash a motorbike to have such realisations; it can be enough to share experiences with others. William Buhlman's OBEs have taught him that there is no death as we understand it: "No one has ever died. We just transfer our energy from one body to the next."<sup>277</sup> It's an immensely comforting vision—and after all, why live life in fear of death? Death is inevitable, and besides, fearless people have a lot more fun. After speaking at the Gateways event and discussing lucid dreaming, OBEs, and shamanism all weekend, I flew home. At one point the flight got turbulent. I looked out of the plane window and saw a circular rainbow lying on the clouds to my left. Floating in the centre of the rainbow circle was the tiny shadow of the plane. I realised it honestly didn't matter to me if the plane crashed; I could have died quite happily, and not because I felt sick of life but because I felt total love and interconnectedness. Everything was one, and death was just a transition. It was a deeply peaceful feeling and so much better than sitting sweaty-palmed wishing we were safely on the ground!

## Opening Up to Transformation

The more we test our own experience of the whole spectrum of consciousness, from daydreaming to OBEs, the less tied we become to a rigid view of reality. And there is great freedom in this loosening of our ingrained assumptions. London DJ Caz Coronel had the following OBE in which she had a transformative experience within the Lucid Light:

I lose all bodily form. I am propelled into a mix of different shades of vivid turquoise, blue, and purple light. This light is no ordinary light; it shines with a translucence and aliveness that is not from this earth, its quality is certainly extra ordinary. My being is washed in these lights and I feel incredible, charged and vibrant. It feels as if my very DNA is being altered and invigorated and that I am becoming something new. I am returned to my body as light.

In an OBE, just as in a lucid dream, we can experience the Lucid Light and undergo profound changes in our understanding of life. We can ask all the big questions of existence: What am I? What is my life's purpose? What happens after death? We can ask to be shown our soul. Sometimes the "answers" will be cryptic, sometimes mind-blowing. Asking questions in altered states of consciousness can accelerate our personal evolution and lead us to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of life. If consciousness is all that remains when we die, then it makes sense to explore it. OBEs can help us connect with our spiritual essence and allow us to live our waking lives with a greater sense of understanding where we may fit in the grand scheme of things.

Like lucid dreams, OBEs can also be wonderfully liberating experiences for those with physical disabilities. One man had been paralysed from the waist down for twenty years. Sitting in his wheelchair one day, he had an OBE in which he first floated above his chair, then glided around for a bit before plucking up the courage to fly over the rooftops like a bird. He wrote: "For the first time in my life I know what true freedom really is. ...

The exhilaration of this experience is beyond words. I only wish I had learned about this twenty years earlier.”<sup>278</sup>

Lucid dreams and OBEs enable us to experience huge creative power. Exploring these states shows us that thought is a form of energy and that directing our thought-energy has an instant effect. We intend to see a deceased loved one, and they appear. We decide to be in a meadow of flowers, and boom—there we are. Our thoughts and intentions are continually creating our environment with incredible speed and flair. We can even decide to heal ourselves and connect with a state of pure, unconditional love.

The more we experiment within thought-responsive environments such as OBEs and lucid dreams, the easier it becomes to understand that directing thoughts in waking life can have a similar effect: when we aim for a particular outcome with focused intent and visualisation, we can shape and create our reality. Of course, waking reality is not nearly as thought-responsive as dream reality, and our intent can take much longer to manifest, but practising reality creation in altered states of consciousness such as lucid dreams, OBEs, or trances helps us understand that we are powerful creative beings and we can change our lives and those of others for the better.

### **Practice #62: Climb a Rope to the Ceiling**

This practice shows you a relaxing way of entering the OBE state. Lie down somewhere comfortable but not too comfortable, like on a yoga mat. Close your eyes and allow yourself to relax. Feel your mind slow down. Feel your breathing, slow and deep. Let it get to the point where you can barely feel your body, as you are so relaxed. Now form the solid intention to have an out-of-body experience. Believe it will happen. Visualise a rope dangling from the ceiling: a strong, sturdy rope. Picture yourself grasping the rope and pulling yourself up on it, hand over hand, with the greatest of ease. As you climb this rope, you are leaving your physical body behind.

Feel it happening. Feel the excitement and delight as you float weightlessly in the air, still holding the rope. Touch the ceiling and feel its texture. Then imagine yourself flying smoothly out of the room, into the fresh air, and look around you from this new height. What can you see? Examine flowers, stone walls, stains on the pavement, the tops of people's heads as they walk along oblivious to your presence. Do whatever you want to do in this joyful flying experience. Repeat to yourself, "I am having an OBE!" Make it all as real as possible.

After some time, whenever you feel ready, visualise yourself transitioning gently back into your physical body. Feel the ground beneath your spine. Feel gratitude for this experience, and affirm your intention to experience this for real in just a moment.

Now relax completely so that you enter a half-sleep state, keeping your intention on one thought only: "I am moving out of body." Keep repeating this thought, and if you feel vibrations or strange sensations beginning, embrace them and allow them to intensify. Soon you will feel yourself floating. If it seems hard to leave your body completely, grab the rope (it is always there, whenever you need it) and use it to haul yourself out of your body and upwards, light and free ... You've done it!

### **Practice #63: From Lucid Dream to OBE**

If you are already lucid in a dream, it is possible to turn the experience into an OBE. Try a simple request, such as "I would like to have an out-of-body experience!" or "OBE now!" You may find that the dream dissolves into vibrations and you are swept along through turbulent winds, or you might be deposited in an unfamiliar landscape. You may experience a false awakening, or find yourself floating around in a space that looks exactly like your bedroom. Stay alert to your dream body when formulating your request. When moving from a lucid dream into an OBE, I tend to feel vibrations

throughout my dream body, and if I let these intensify, the dream scene falls away to be replaced by a realistic physical environment such as the walkway outside my house. Sometimes nothing dramatic will happen when you request to move into the OBE state: there may be no surprises, no vibrations, no startling sensations, but only a visual change as a new environment gently forms around you like mist.

[contents]

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267. Blackmore, *Consciousness*, 402.
268. Levitan and LaBerge, "Other Worlds: Out-Of-Body Experiences and Lucid Dreams."
269. Johnson, "Surfing the Rainbow: Fearless and Creative Out-of-Body Experiences," 130–131.
270. Levitan and LaBerge, "Other Worlds: Out-Of-Body Experiences and Lucid Dreams."
271. Blackmore, *Consciousness*, 406.
272. Penfield, "The Role of the Temporal Cortex in Certain Psychical Phenomena."
273. Blackmore, *Consciousness*, 406.
274. Nicholls, *Navigating the Out-of-Body Experience*, 14.
275. Buhlman, *Adventures Beyond the Body*, 183.
276. Buhlman, "How Out-Of-Body Experiences Can Improve Your Life."
277. Buhlman, "How Out-Of-Body Experiences Can Improve Your Life."
278. Buhlman, *Adventures Beyond the Body*, 139.



## CHAPTER 21

# *The Void and the Lucid Light: When Imagery and the Dream Body Disappear*

People pay good money to spend an hour relaxing in the dark, womblike environment of floatation tanks. Sure, there are hazards. If you accidentally get a drop of the dense, salty water in your eye it burns hellishly, and when you emerge from the tank your feet are so slippery with salt that you skid dangerously around the shower room. It also takes forever to rinse the salt out of your hair. It's all worth it though, because it's so dreamlike and afterwards you feel deeply relaxed: you walk out of the wellness centre bouncing as if you're wearing brand-new trainers. After she had experienced her first float, Angela Wix, my editor at Llewellyn, told me:

The minute I started, I felt like I was lucid dreaming, that this was my sleeping body, but I was still conscious. The edges of my physical body seemed to dissolve and my mind calmed to whatever state it goes to while dreaming. The image I kept going back to was of me resting in large open space, and the sensation was exactly like when I'm flying in a dream. I was astonished to experience this sensation while in the "real world" and fully conscious. Maybe you get this experience for free every night when you lucid dream!

Angela's right that there's a salt-free floatation experience that doesn't cost a penny, one that we can have every night from the comfort of our own beds. You've guessed it: it's the state of consciousness generally known as "the void." This state has been reported in all cultures around the globe and seems to be a universal experience. The void is not always "black space." It may be a different colour (people also report grey, white, or even multi-coloured light), and there may be flashes of light, wavy lines, or shapes. It may not be a still, calm space—the void can act as a vortex, sucking you along and spitting you out somewhere else. So there's a lot to explore here, and the term "void" doesn't really encapsulate it all. I think of this space as a state of "lucid suspension," <sup>279</sup> because we find ourselves suspended in what feels like infinite space, yet in a state of effortless lucidity. We are often bodiless in the void, and in this chapter I explore the potential of bodiless lucid experiences (BLEs) <sup>280</sup> and the pure experience of Lucid Light that they can lead to.

## From the Playground to the Profound

Lucid dreaming often starts as a kind of amazing dream playground that people tend to leave after a while—although not permanently, since the playground is there whenever we want to swing by for a visit. As lucid dreamers advance further, they recognise the spiritual and existential value of lucid states where there is none of the usual cinematic imagery. When we move from form-based imagery such as people, cars, houses, and mountains—"dream furniture" that we often experience in a dream body—to the formless, bodiless, yet lucid experiences of floating in the void, we open ourselves up to a different type of lucid event. It makes me think of the experience astronauts have when they leave the chaotic tangle of people, words, and metropolises to explore space.

On his first spacewalk, Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield found himself floating all alone in space holding on to the flimsy edge of the space station. He reflects: "It had little fabric rails. I'm holding on, thinking, it's like a

cheap suitcase handle and that is my link to everybody and everything. ... [After a bit, he simply let go of it!] I just sat there floating, trying to soak up the experience. Alone in the universe ... You feel hugely honoured and privileged; this is a glimpse into an understanding of ourselves.”<sup>281</sup>

In outer space, as anywhere else, the experience is what we make it. If we allow ourselves to feel fear, it will be a fearful experience. If we cultivate curiosity or calm awareness, we open ourselves up to an intense and transformative experience. Of course, astronauts undergo years of training to help them remain sanguine in the kind of situation Chris Hadfield describes, but then that’s because travel in outer space can be mortally dangerous. Thankfully, lucid dreamers exploring *inner* space don’t need to worry about dying on the job. What they do need is a relaxed approach and the curiosity of any good explorer.

One day, at the Science Museum in London, Keith Hearne and I checked out the space rocket from the first lunar landing. It looked like a shiny gold-wrapped Christmas present you could just rip open. I asked the pioneer of lucid dream research, “If you had a chance to go on a tourist trip into space, would you go?” Keith didn’t hesitate for a second. “Oh yes, I’d go,” he said. “For sure.” And this shows the optimal attitude of lucid dreamers everywhere—a spirit of adventure, a desire for discovery and new experiences. The beauty of lucid dream exploration is that we don’t have to undergo decades of expensive training before we begin—all we need to do is cultivate the right mindset to enjoy the experience ... and then fall asleep.

I believe that we probably all experience the void every night, and likely at several different stages of the sleep cycle; I see it as a natural “gap between dreams.”<sup>282</sup> Most of the time, though, we forget all about it—after all, what could be easier to forget than being largely unconscious and with no physical sensations, suspended in blackness or formless light? Generally there’s nothing to bring back in terms of the startling streams of imagery usually associated with dreams. Sometimes even regular visual dreams are hard to remember. So we forget the many hours we clock up in the void, just as most of us also forget the exciting transition between waking and

sleeping and back to waking again, because we are not conscious of it. If we *do* become lucid, the void can be a fascinating and perplexing experience, and one that we can actively seek out, as in this experience that experienced lucid dreamer Peter Maich shared with me:

[In a lucid dream] I jumped out the window into the night sky and was in the 3-D blackness, or the Void. It was awesome, pitch black with even blacker energy swirls that I could feel or sense but not see. I had the tiniest awareness of my body and extended my arms out a long way and was getting touched by these gentle swirls of energy from time to time. I stayed here for a while just relaxing and it was wonderful.

Imagine how much richer life could be if we made a greater effort to grasp these experiences and live them in full lucid awareness! I'm convinced they could lead us to a greater understanding of the nature of reality as well as higher levels of creative thinking and artistic freedom. Ryan Hurd, co-editor of *Lucid Dreaming: New Perspectives of Consciousness in Sleep*, told me that in the void he feels like a witness to creativity itself:

I have had some incredible music played while I listen, feeling the music in ways I don't have the words to describe. Some of the mandalas and incredible geometric patterns I have seen in this realm beyond representational imagery have also compelled me to take up a brush and try to depict what I saw ... My fascination with this class of imagery also led me to study ancient rock art around the world, much of which has similar abstract forms, leading me to believe that lucid dreaming is one of the portals into the same creative mind that Paleolithic people were depicting.

Artist and scholar Fariba Bogzaran, PhD, calls the void "hyperspace lucidity," and her gorgeous, otherworldly paintings represent its light forms and spatial vastness. Fariba says, "Attempting to express [the] sheer luminosity and multidimensionality has tested and expanded my creative

abilities.”<sup>283</sup> Sounds heavenly, doesn’t it? But how do we get there—where is the void and how can we enter it?

## Finding the Void: Portals and Lucid Backflips

Finding the void is easy when you know how. One of my favourite ways is simply to do a back-flip when I realise I’m dreaming, with the intention of entering the void. Lucid dream meditation can take you there, as can closing your eyes in a dream and saying, “When I open my eyes, I’ll be in the void.” Many people look out for “portals” such as doors or windows in the dream and go through these to enter void space. The very first time lucid dream researcher Ryan Hurd encountered the void, he actually had to dig through the lucid dream imagery to reach it! When he dug into some dream concrete, he found it was only a few inches thick, and underneath it he could see a glinting electrical space. He widened the hole, jumped in ... and found the void. I loved hearing this dream, as it shows in a very literal way that if we dig a little deeper, we will discover for ourselves the ever-present underlying reality of the dream; the formless, infinite light-energy of the void.

We don’t have to work up a sweat digging our way into the lucid void. We can enter it through dream imagery such as doors, pools of water, holes in the ground, windows, and more. Mirrors seem to be especially efficient portals. I think my strangest portal into the void was when I saw myself in a mirror in a lucid dream and noticed a big brown mole on my face that I don’t normally have. I then used the mole (as I saw it reflected in the mirror) as a portal by diving through it into another dream. Peter Maich told me how he uses the mirror-as-portal technique to change dreams or enter the void:

I am in a dream, fully lucid with the intention of finding another dream, so I create a mirror and start to enter it. It gets to the point where my feet are on the floor in one place, my body halfway through the mirror,

and the top part of me in this blackness in a state of nothingness. I am slowly dissolving into the void ...

Often the void doesn't wait to be found: it finds you. Sometimes asking a profound, nature-of-the-universe type question in a lucid dream will cause you to be flung into the void, as if this is a space for quiet reflection. Don't worry if the dream dissolves like this. It's fine—just relax and enjoy being weightless for once. It can be quite a shock to enter the void for the first time. Once in the void, much of what we experience depends on the way the void presents itself: very often it's a huge, still darkness, but people also report sensations of rushing or falling, as well as visuals in the form of geometric shapes, disks of light, or oscillating lines. In general, the void is empty of representational imagery such as objects or people. So what do we do in this minimal perceptual space?

## The Boring Void: What Is There to Do?

This was what I found myself wondering as I hung in the void more than twenty years ago. It was one of the first times I'd found myself in this space, and the experience seemed very stable this time—almost boringly so. What was I supposed to *do* here? I'd already run through the list of what state of consciousness this might be and had reached the conclusion that it could be a type of OBE or a very boring lucid dream. All I could see or sense around me was deep blackness. I was suspended in this space, my thoughts and reasoning highly lucid. “Well,” I thought, “if there's nothing going on, I'll experiment to see what I can do.” Would it be possible to hear in this black space?

I wished for the sound of a violin, and magically the sound of one soared towards me, perfectly clear. Amazing! How about an oboe next, then? In it came, harmonising with the violin. A cello, saxophone, drums, cymbals ... soon I was building an orchestra out of thin air, the melodies rising and falling exquisitely. It was exhilarating to feel the music vibrate through me

and listen as my creation created itself and ran way beyond anything I could imagine. This was better than a philharmonic orchestra! The bass drum crescendo was so thunderous that I woke up ... to dead silence in an empty bedroom.

I was stunned. I'd transformed myself into a conductor, a musical creator. If only I could write down what I'd heard! Since the zenith of my musical skills had been playing "Three Blind Mice" on a recorder when I was seven, getting it down seemed unlikely. Such a waste, in a way. But now at least I knew there'd never be any reason to be bored again in the void—this was a space of infinite creativity. What a discovery: if in the void the simple wish to hear a violin could transform me into an astronaut-musician-composer, then surely I could also build my own dream from scratch, ask questions and receive answers, dissolve into nothingness? It seemed anything was possible. From then on, I got hooked on the void and it seemed to get hooked on me, too. I started having spontaneous lucid void experiences several times a night, usually around sleep-entry moments, but I'd also end up there from lucid dreams that happened at any time in my sleep cycle.

In the void, we have the dreaming equivalent of a blank page to play with. We can create anything we want, from music to imagery to dance to sensations. We can even watch the birth of dreams, as in this wonderful account reported by Stephen LaBerge and Dr. Donald DeGracia:

I seemed to now be floating in the void. However, there were what seemed to be colored triangles moving around, crossing and spinning over one another making distinctly geometric patterns in front of me. The colors were mainly a yellowish green with red, orange and pink hues and they had the texture of clear and smoky, but smooth glass. ... I began to focus harder and harder on these patterns, trying to discern some detail in them. Then, as I was focusing, the most incredible thing happened. I watched these patterns "solidify" and transform into the scene on the dance floor of the club I had just faded from. The spinning

triangles were actually the dancing people in the club! I was amazed. I relaxed my focus and the scene faded back to the spinning triangles. I was thinking, “Wow! This is amazing!” I tightened my focus again and the triangles again transformed into the dancers on the dance floor. This time I tightened my focus so much that the entire bar scene faded in around me! I was back in the bar again! <sup>284</sup>

The void is thought-responsive. This means it responds not only to thoughts and emotions, but also to focused intent. Look at the way this dreamer was able to observe and guide the switch from spinning triangles to dancers simply by adjusting focus. If ever you want to leave the void, focus on the alive blackness (or grey, or whatever colour it appears in) around you, and intend to see some light, a colour, a shape. When this appears, focusing on it may allow it to transform into a dream. This process could be different for every dreamer, and even different each time you try it, but as with any dream state, relaxing in a fear-free state of mind and setting a gentle intention is the purest form of dream magic there is. Whatever happens, you can be sure *something* will!

In my early days of lucid void exploration, when I was around twenty years old, every night brought me new experiences, and not all of them were fun. Often I found myself being buffeted by strong black winds, and I learned that to resist only made it worse. Sometimes I was shot through space like a message in one of those pneumatic tube systems! Left, right, diagonal, up, down; you name it, the void did it. Struggling only prolonged this disorienting experience or led to sleep paralysis. The void was teaching me to surrender to whatever was there and, through conscious relaxation, move into “the eye of the storm,” the still centre. Gradually I was learning the lesson that the void wasn’t only about “doing” stuff.

## Chilling Out in the Void: Doing Nothing at All



Why do we always have to *do* something? Why not just be? When it's stable and still, the void is the perfect place for some downtime. It must be one of the states of consciousness most closely linked to the elusive feeling of oneness that mystics have chased after for millennia. After all, we are bodiless and there is little or no sensory data, yet often we are highly, effortlessly lucid. Ryan Hurd told me what he generally "does" in the void: "These days I don't really do anything. I practise a form of meditation that is simply about attending to my perceptions and noticing my reactions and thoughts without following the thoughts beyond their initial emergence ... I am then invited into portals (which I may or may not go into), or the dream recrystallizes around me again, offering up a spontaneous lucid dream."

Lucid dreaming appears to take place for the most part in a self-constructed psychological theatre of imagery. While this is endlessly fascinating terrain to explore, moving beyond form-based dreams opens us up to new modes of existence. We can float in infinite space with little or no sensory input; we can be bodiless; we can experience oneness. The void opens doors into spiritual experiences and seems to allow us to glimpse an underlying reality, an awareness beyond form.

Over the twenty-plus years that I've regularly experienced the void, my practice has changed. These days I'm much more likely to float, accept, and meditate in the void than to try to change anything. I don't bother hankering after "form"—the familiar shapes of objects and people—but rather I just chill out and see what happens, like an astronaut enjoying space. The word "void" makes it sound empty, but this space is in fact more of a fullness. There is energy there, and depth, and often luminosity and a kind of rippling, expansive awareness. Relaxing in a state of lucid suspension can be very restful and rejuvenating. There is no contact with the dream body and no physical sensory input apart from a feeling of weightlessness and freedom from pain. The void can be healing in this sense—it gives us precious respite from our bodies. Floating around in the void can lead to an imagery-full lucid dream, or it can lead to an experience of total

interconnected oneness where there is no sense of separation between the self and the environment.

Luigi Sciambarella, a trainer at the Monroe Institute, talked to me about his view of “being” in the void.

Once you drop the idea of form, you can easily drop the idea of distance, because you can comfortably become the environment and everything contained within it. The “you” then becomes blurred because you’re more than “you” in the physical form. If you look for a “you,” you’ll find one and the separation between you and the environment is reestablished. Remember, the environment is thought-responsive! However, continue to expand your consciousness and something interesting happens: you stop expanding. There’s nothing to expand into because it all *is*. This is the void.

## The Whirling Void

As I’ve said, the void isn’t always a space of still contemplation—we may find ourselves being spun around, projected extremely fast through blackness, or sucked into spiralling tunnels of light and spat out at the bottom of them, perhaps into a dream, into awakening, or into infinite space. These experiences are likely related to the vestibular sensations (of sinking, dropping, or being pulled around) that are often reported in hypnagogic states when we transition from the physical body into a dream body when our sensory system is in transition. This suggests that when we’re being pulled willy-nilly through the void, we’re “between” different sleep stages, possibly following one of the many brief awakenings we all have during a night of sleep.

The absolute best advice I can give to anyone who finds themselves in this situation is to *relax*. Don’t be scared—this experience will not hurt you. Don’t struggle to wake up; just go with it. Surrender to it with a spirit of curiosity. Imagine it’s like watching an action film, but instead of seeing it

with our eyes, we are feeling it with our bodies, our sense of balance and movement. Adopt an attitude of relaxed detachment and enjoy the weirdness. In my experience the sooner we let go of fear and relax, the sooner the situation stabilises, and if we don't wake up at this point, it can lead to the strange and beautiful experience of floating in dream space, as shown in one of my earliest reports of the lucid void, back in 1995:

*I'm dreaming*, I realise, and immediately the dreamscape bucks and swirls, tipping me over into a shooting flight, down and down at an incredible speed into a rainbow-colored vortex which seems to be made up of an infinite number of dots. I'm not frightened but it's all I can do to hold on to my lucidity as I am sucked along into spirals of this colour and light ... I am propelled out of the bottom of it into a motionless space. I am suspended in space—*dream space*, I think. There is nothing here, just millions of greyish dots and I am one of the dots ... A feeling of great peace comes over me and a sense of gentle, infinite expansion ... As the sense of expansion increases I am no longer a single dot of consciousness ... There's just a blissful sense of timelessness and oneness and a merging with the light.

## The Meditative Void

The void has strong links with meditative or nondual states. Tibetan Buddhists claim that the highest aim of dream yoga is to cease dreaming. For dedicated consciousness explorers, perhaps the state we need to focus on more than regular lucid dreaming is the void. We are lucid in the void, we are often bodiless, and there is usually no imagery. So what *is* this state? I think of the void as the gap between imagery-rich dreams, a place pregnant with possibilities. In his book *Buddha Standard Time*, Lama Surya Das explains that in advanced Tibetan meditations, “the student seeks to enter that gap between thoughts, to experience that pregnant stillness ... Buddhism calls this gap the “radiant womb of emptiness,” a vital space in

which dwell an infinite number of choices and possibilities.”<sup>285</sup> In the void, our minds grow still easily, as we have no physical distractions, so we are better able to experience “that gap between thoughts” while lucidly suspended in the gap between dreams.

Lucid dream experiences where we enter a bodiless, imageless state provide us with *the fastest possible route to the experience of interconnected oneness*. In a lucid dream you can not only ask, “Am I conscious now?” but in bodiless lucid states such as the void you can also experience the dissolution of the self-construct; the dream-you becomes a dot of light, and then “you” disappear and experience oneness. I suggested to British consciousness explorer Sue Blackmore, an experienced meditator, that if she was interested in experiencing the dissolution of the self in a dream, she could try meditating the next time she became lucid, or she could remain conscious while falling asleep and enter the lucid void directly. She tried it out that same night and reported “a night of focussed mind” and found herself intensely practising staying aware when she awoke. I’m always saying we need more lucid-dreaming, void-floating philosophers, because any theory of consciousness that ignores or skims over the sleep state, with its huge variation in levels of awareness and the sense of self, must be incomplete.

Luckily, more philosophers are getting interested in this state. Mystics always have been. Advanced brain imaging techniques will soon be able to show us a lot more about what happens to the brain and the body when such states are experienced, and this in turn may open more doors. In the meantime, I have developed my own theory about the nature of reality: the Lucid Light Theory of Dreams and Reality.

## The Lucid Light

Light, luminosity, white spaces, or dark spaces that seem alive with potential are commonly mentioned not only in lucid dream reports but also in hypnagogia, the void, out-of-body experiences, and near-death

experiences (NDEs). Here are some examples of Lucid Light experiences, the first of which is my own:

I hover up, vibrating, and fly again. I'm in whitish space, endless neutral light. I try flying as fast as I can and it's so quick it's impossible to describe—I could go around the circumference of the world in a second at this speed.

There's enough room in this white space for absolutely anything and I'm alight with exhilaration. It strikes me that in experiences like this there can be no doubt that we are more than just a physical body. We are physics itself; gravitational pull and light particles and the energy-force that pulls everything together ... There's something so harmonious and natural about flying so fast, as if I become the energy of the air itself. There's no resistance and with wonder I think to myself: "This is soul-flying."<sup>286</sup>

In an anthology chapter called "A Pilgrimage into Dreamless Sleep," George Gillespie reports one of his early experiences with light in lucid dreams at a time when he was attempting a "dreamless sleep" experiment. In this lucid dream, he closes his dream eyes to eliminate all the visuals:

Although I had closed my eyes, I saw an intense white light on the periphery of my vision to my left and remembered that an appearance of light did not necessarily mean that a light in my bedroom was waking me up ... Then the light increased. Intense light surrounded me and I floated in light. I began to contemplate prayerfully what I was doing.<sup>287</sup>

In her book *The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences*, Dr. Penny Sartori reports the case of Julie, who had a near-death experience (NDE) when she haemorrhaged after a tonsillectomy.

Blood was gushing from my mouth like a waterfall ... They put me on a heart monitor. Then I got weaker and I heard the nurses and doctors say,

“Quick, we’re losing her.” ... I just saw like orbs of light—purple and silver orbs of light floating in front of me. Then a bright light appeared, it was a very bright light that got brighter and brighter. Then it started to dim as if it was like a dimmer switch ... It was as if I was just suspended there in this dim light and then I started to hear the nurses calling my name and I woke up in the recovery room. The funny thing is that I wasn’t scared; in fact it was a fabulous experience. I was really comfortable and I was enjoying it.<sup>288</sup>

Penny Sartori’s book is the result of her PhD study and her decades of nursing experience. It is full of firsthand NDE reports, a great many of which make reference to encountering light and either floating in it or moving towards it. In the cases where medical notes and testimonials of members of hospital staff enabled NDEs to be thoroughly documented, she notes: “Such people were reporting clear, lucid, conscious experiences at a time when their brains had ceased to function or were not functioning optimally.”<sup>289</sup> Other NDE researchers, such as Peter Fenwick, MD, report the same phenomenon.

### What Is the Lucid Light?

The Lucid Light can be any colour. It is discernible in lucid states such as floating in the black light of the void, or while experiencing the blank screen of awareness just before the onset of hypnagogic imagery. We can experience the Lucid Light in what I refer to as “white light lucid dreams,” and also in the void, in meditation, in dreams where we experience luminescence, in relaxation, and in ultra-lucid waking life moments. This same Lucid Light often seems present in the accounts of near-death experiences. In fact, the more we look, the more we will begin to see that the Lucid Light is around us all the time, more easily accessible in dreams or altered states than while wide awake, but nonetheless a constant presence.

People speak of the paradox of lucid dreaming because one seems both awake and asleep at the same time. Ultimately *there is no paradox in any state of consciousness because everything is one*: the Lucid Light is always there. The Lucid Light is pure conscious awareness, and as such it seems to be the energy of the universe and beyond, the underlying oneness that binds everyone and everything together. The sun is always shining but we can't see it at night, and by day it may be hidden behind clouds, so it cannot always be glimpsed. Nevertheless, it is always there, emanating light. It is the same with the Lucid Light, but on a far vaster cosmic scale.

My lifelong personal exploration of dream and sleep states, combined with academic research and two decades of reading and collecting primary and secondary data into lucid dreaming, OBEs, and (more recently) NDEs, leads me to the conclusion that permeating every state of consciousness and all matter is one constant: the Lucid Light.

### The Lucid Light Theory of Dreams and Reality

My theory is that our “baseline state of consciousness” is not that of the waking state, as most people presume. Lucid Light is our baseline state of consciousness: this is the state from which all forms and matter emerge. It is the original, alive, aware light from which everything—all states of consciousness (from hypnagogia to alert daytime awareness) and all energy, matter, and physical forms—emerges. It is always there as a baseline state of consciousness, and as such it makes up the “gap between dreams,” just as it makes up the spaces in our regular daytime awareness. The Lucid Light seems to be reflected in the experiences of light that occur during near-death experiences. This is the light we emerge from as conscious beings, and it is the light we return to at the moment of dying.

This leads me to the second part of my theory, that the Lucid Light we encounter in dream states, OBEs, and NDEs may be the light of creation. Perhaps just as dreams can emerge from formless luminosity, so the multisensory onslaught we refer to as “waking reality” emerges from an identical luminosity. In the void, we have seen how it is possible to watch

the creation of a dream. Step by step, colours and lines emerge and begin to flow together to form shapes on the dark (or luminous) canvas. They grow in aliveness and emotiveness and become three-dimensional. These newly created dream fragments spring up all around, and all of a sudden we find ourselves in a fully fledged, brand-new dream. This dream-creating process, which we have seen both in the hypnagogic dream-building process and in the void, may be a useful parallel with the way the universe itself began: from formless light, forms emerge that are imbued with their own inner light and life.

The Lucid Light is always there, rich with possibilities. It underlies and permeates all states of consciousness. It inspires positive feelings that range from wellbeing, bliss, safety, exhilaration, oneness, and peace to pure, unconditional love. This blissful, loving, aware light is the bedrock of all creation. When we encounter it, we encounter the core fabric of the universe.

Astrophysicist Dr. Bernard Haisch writes in his book *The God Theory*, “The key to creation does seem to lead back to light, in the context of both ancient traditions and modern physics. ... Light propagation may actually *create* space and time. The zero-point field inertia hypothesis implies that the most fundamental property of matter, namely mass, is also created by light.”<sup>290</sup> The Lucid Light corresponds to the “clear light” of Tibetan Buddhism. It corresponds to the pure light of consciousness. It corresponds to the divine light of creation referred to in Genesis 1:3: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” It corresponds to the light mystics have referred to throughout history. The Lucid Light is not an idea I have come up with on my own. It is a phenomenon that has been around for centuries.

What *I* am saying is that this light is far closer and more accessible than we are inclined to believe. It is not reserved for mystics, meditators, and the devout. The Lucid Light is ever present and can be accessed in many different states of consciousness, one of which is lucid dreaming. In 2014, I had the following dream:



I become lucid in a room, floating around. I observe the way my dream body feels and how the room has a shifting quality. I stand upright, still floating, and shout a question:

“What are dreams made of?”

Instantly, there is a powerful vibration and roaring and the scene is charged up with huge moving energy. I feel my dream body start to dissolve in the earthquake-like upheaval. I am so familiar with this response that I laugh and call out, “I get it—energy!”

Then I shout, “So what is energy made of?”

In response to this, the powerful energy subsides a little in terms of vibrations but everything becomes infused with white light which seems held together like molecules holding hands; infinite chains of light. It’s wonderful; everywhere.

I think in awe: “Energy is made of light!”

This dream and many other white light lucid experiences made me seriously question the ultimate nature of reality. What is underneath all this daytime imagery, and all this dream imagery? When we strip away the sensory, when we lose the physical body and even the dream body, what remains? I had to know, and so I deepened my dream experiments and developed the Lucid Light Theory of Dreams and Reality.

## Discover the Lucid Light

I invite you to test the Lucid Light theory by moving towards the light in lucid dreams, in meditation, in the void, and in other states, and by asking the dream the “big” questions of life (if you feel ready to know the answers), such as “What is the universe made of?” and “What happens when we die?” I would love to hear how you get on. Bodiless, imageless lucid states give us the fastest possible route to the experience of interconnected oneness. They can lead us directly to the Lucid Light. Each person will instinctively know what they want to do with their lucidity, and I’m not saying we should all try to spend most of every night in the void.

Personally I have no intention of leaving behind all my form-based lucid dreams, as I'm too much of a hedonist and my creative impulses often feed off the dazzling imagery, luminous colours, and sensations of these "regular" lucid dreams (themselves creative expressions of the Lucid Light).

Yet when we move "beyond" lucid dreaming into lucid states such as the void or OBEs, we can experience the bliss of not having a physical body or even a dream body. We can taste the freedom of existing as pure conscious awareness and sample the marvellous, uplifting sensation of dissolving into oneness in the Lucid Light.

And that is quite something.

#### **Practice #64: Void Immersion**

Before falling asleep, lie in bed knowing that you are safe, then purposefully imagine a vast darkness building around you. Sense its infinite reach. What do you feel in this space? What can you see? Observe your reactions calmly, without getting sucked into your thoughts. Move fully into this blackness, knowing you are safe. Imagine that you are now immersed in the lucid void. The blackness might move and transform into something else, and you can let this happen. If you feel frightened for whatever reason, create a shield of light around your body, or imagine yourself dressed in a spacesuit, perfectly protected all over. Repeat to yourself, "This is a normal sleep experience and I am safe." All this is to prepare you to experience the actual void, and rehearsing protective and positive reactions is useful.

Now affirm your intention to experience the lucid void for real tonight. Stay in that deeply relaxed, dark space, and bring your attention to your breath. Do you fall asleep on an in-breath or an out-breath? Observe the breath as your pre-sleep imagery comes to you ... in ... out ... in ... out ... and watch yourself fall asleep. You may

soon experience yourself floating effortlessly—and lucidly—in the void.

### Practice #65: Paint a Door

Doors, windows, mirrors, swimming pools, rabbit holes ... all of these can be portals in lucid dreams. Use them to enter the void, or if there is no obvious portal in the dream, create your own by saying, “A portal to the void appears before me!” or by turning around with the intention of spotting one behind you. You could also try doing what German lucid dream author Simon Rausch does: paint a door onto the dreamscape using your finger as a brush and your saliva as paint.

In 2016 I was invited to the premiere of a lucid dreaming documentary that Simon, Melanie Schädlich, and I feature in, called *Painting Doors: The Art of Lucid Dreaming*.<sup>291</sup> Special effects were used to portray our lucid dreams. In the final scene, a guy is running through the woods from something unseen but terrifying. He comes up against a huge, impenetrable wall. Realising that he is dreaming, he paints a door onto the wall with his finger. There is light brimming around the doorframe, and the lucid dreamer slowly pushes the door open and steps into the light ...

Watching this gave me goose bumps all over my body because this is exactly what it is like to be fully aware in a dream, creating options and daring to explore the pure magic of this state, never quite knowing what might happen next.

Try this in your next lucid dream and intend to walk right into the Lucid Light.

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279. Johnson, "Magic, Meditation, and the Void: Creative Dimensions of Lucid Dreaming," 46.
280. Johnson, "Surfing the Rainbow: Fearless and Creative Out-of-Body Experiences," 140.
281. Brockes, "Chris Hadfield."
282. Johnson, "Magic, Meditation, and the Void: Creative Dimensions of Lucid Dreaming," 60.
283. Bogzaran, "Lucid Art and Hyperspace Lucidity," 29.
284. LaBerge and DeGracia, "Varieties of Lucid Dreaming Experience," 269–307.
285. Das, *Buddha Standard Time*, 194.
286. Johnson, "Surfing the Rainbow: Fearless and Creative Out-of-Body Experiences," 130.
287. Gillespie, "A Pilgrimage into Dreamless Sleep," 293.
288. Sartori, *The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences*, 41–42.
289. Ibid., 177.
290. Haisch, *The God Theory*, 118–119.
291. Kuhn and Kurrle, *Painting Doors*.

## CHAPTER 22

# *Using Meditation and Mantras in Lucid Dreaming as a Fast Track to Oneness*

What can meditation do for our lucid dreams? And, perhaps just as interestingly, what can lucid dream meditation do for our waking meditation practice? People understand different things by “meditation.” The generally accepted definition seems to be that meditation is a case of closing the eyes and observing our passing thoughts until we reach a state of deep peacefulness or oneness—without falling asleep. But what happens when we begin meditation while asleep, upon becoming lucid in a dream?

At an IASD dream conference I spoke at in Switzerland in 2012, I met a whole new group of dream friends and realised it was time to throw myself into full-time dream research again. I listened with fascination to German philosopher Thomas Metzinger, author of *The Ego Tunnel*, as he asked the audience: “What is the minimum we need to feel we exist? Is it a body? No, because in dreams we don’t always have a body and yet there is still a sense of ‘me/I’ existing. Do we need a location in time and space?” Two of the points Thomas made didn’t fit with my own experience. First, he remarked that the sense of self disappears during general anaesthetic. Second, he said that the minimal form of consciousness requires a spatial sense—the feeling of “being somewhere.” At the end of his talk I told him about how I once

remained conscious throughout a general anaesthetic, and about how lucid dream meditation had led me to states where I became a dot of consciousness and then dissolved into light and existed without a spatial sense.

“It’s like I’m a dot, among millions of other dots,” I explained, “and after a while there’s no sense of me being a separate dot—I merge with all the other dots and dissolve into oneness; there’s no sense of ‘me’ being anywhere.” Talking to Thomas and his colleague Dr. Jennifer Windt, author of *Dreaming: A Conceptual Framework for Philosophy of Mind and Empirical Research*, during the Bern conference, I saw why lucid dreaming seems so full of potential for philosophers. In the past, many researchers and philosophers thought that dream control and rational thought in lucid dreams was a conceptual contradiction and therefore impossible, but as Jenny remarked to me, “We cannot hope to understand conscious experience unless we understand how it changes across the sleep-wake cycle.”

I came home from Switzerland with the idea that lucid dream meditation could provide a key to philosophical questions. Consciousness explorers from varying disciplines are getting excited by the possibilities of lucid dreaming. Neuroscientists are also interested in the ability of meditators to lose their sense of self. In a chapter entitled “Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness,” Antoine Lutz and colleagues comment: “The possibility that some meditators may be able to induce a state approaching some form of bare consciousness ... raises the tantalizing (if contentious) hypothesis that the neural correlates of such a state would bring us closer to understanding what we mean by ‘consciousness’ from a neuroscientific perspective.”<sup>292</sup>

Lucid dream meditation could be a way to discover more about fundamental questions such as “What is consciousness?” “What is the minimum we need to retain a sense of self?” Thomas Metzinger said to me, “The *contents* of consciousness are so deep, rich, and unfathomable that most people don’t even understand how great their inner space of

possibilities is.” Meditating in a lucid dream might be a step towards achieving this understanding.

## The Rapid Art of Stillness: Going Deep Fast

Lucid dreaming can resemble a spontaneous meditative state, as it is linked with experiences of pure consciousness where we enter a state of interconnected oneness and our ego dissolves. When we become lucid, we can give the dream an initial nudge by recalling our intention to meditate. Closing the eyes in the dream helps so we aren’t distracted by imagery, and although it’s sometimes necessary to focus on stilling the mind, lucid dream meditation seems effortless mostly. Although waking meditation gets easier the more you practise it and I’m well used to hovering on the edge of sleep in the calm, alert state of yoga nidra, I have never reached a state of absolute stillness and bliss as quickly as I have in a lucid dream.

Others report similar results. The deeply spiritual, rejuvenating experience of total interconnected oneness is an elusive state that people have been chasing for millennia. Drug-induced mystical experiences, complex religious rituals, or years of constant meditation practice are just some of the many ways people have tried to experience a sense of transcendence.

Could it be that *the fastest way of experiencing nonduality, or interconnected oneness, is through meditating in a lucid dream?*

If so, this is huge: we all dream every night, so theoretically anyone can become lucid and intend to meditate. I say “intend to” rather than “actually sit down, take deep breaths, and meditate as we would in the waking state” because *intention* seems to be the main factor here. As my lucid dream meditation has progressed over the past decade, my practice has changed. I no longer need to go through the motions of sitting down in a dream body, straightening my spine, and focusing on my breath when I become lucid. Simply closing my eyes and *intending* to meditate in a lucid dream will spontaneously transform me into a focused point of consciousness, like a dot of light. From that stage, the experience of seemingly dissolving into

oneness is usually not far away. In the following example of a lucid dream in 2003, my decision to meditate leads to a nondual experience of merging with the Lucid Light.

I'm on the top of a hill with strange granite rock formations. There's a liquid quality to the air and I notice everything as if in slow motion: the pink wild flowers, the prickly grass. I realise this is a dream, and smile. I feel strong and fit, and climb easily up to the top of the nearest rock and sit down. The dreamscape shimmers with energy and I feel very happy. I'm sitting cross-legged and decide it would be a great place to meditate, so I close my eyes.

All imagery vanishes and it goes black. Instantly I am deeply relaxed, it's so much faster than meditation in the waking state and I marvel at how deep I go within seconds, with no back discomfort or sensory distractions. In fact, I realise I can't feel my dream body at all, I seem to be floating, and I relax and let it happen because I am now in a deep, trancelike state, my thoughts slowing, and it feels right to let go, bit by bit, of "Clare." The darkness is turning to light and as I watch, I become surrounded by and suspended in golden light. It feels so wonderful, like being transformed into radiance, and I want to exclaim in delight but I don't want to lose it, so I just experience this radiance. It no longer seems separate from me; I am the light and it is me, in perfect harmony. The light expands infinitely and I eventually wake up feeling as if I am still bathed in it, refreshed and quiet and peaceful.<sup>293</sup>

In nondual lucid dream experiences, we may have an extremely minimal body sense, maybe experiencing ourselves as a dot of conscious awareness. As far as sensory perceptions go, we may only have an impression of light or darkness, and our spatial sense may involve an impression of existing in infinite space, or merging with infinite light. Thought processes are so reduced that once we wake up, we can only describe ourselves as having existed as "pure awareness." In terms of ego, body, and "monkey mind," we



seem to disappear, existing instead as what might be the fundamental substance from which the dream is made.

Quite apart from the exciting philosophical implications of “disappearing” in lucid dream meditations, there are other wonderful benefits. The waking residue of lucid meditation dreams often involves a visceral sense of peace, happiness, and freedom. In this kind of expanded consciousness experience, we can be left with a strong feeling of optimism and a sense that there are boundless possibilities open to us. It also seems to give rise to what I call “artistic courage,” that is, the bravery necessary to be creative in a way we haven’t tried before. We can release our inner critic, and when this happens there’s often a surge of creative energy that manifests in the form of new connections and original ideas. If we can tap into a source of deep peace and creativity through meditating in a lucid dream, this can increase our waking life happiness. Last but not least, meditating in lucid dreams can lead us directly to a transcendent experience of the Lucid Light.

## Lucid Light Encounters and Lucid Meditation Dreams

Reports of lucid dream meditation often involve encounters with the Lucid Light. When highly experienced lucid dreamers notice this light, they tend to wonder about it and pursue it. George Gillespie has been exploring light in his lucid dreams for decades. In a chapter called “A Pilgrimage into Dreamless Sleep,” he recounts how his quest for dreamless sleep resulted in experiences that he calls “the fullness of light.”

I saw that a light was shining high in front of me like a brilliant sun. I recognized this kind of light from previous dreams. Then, while the sun remained in view, intense light spread throughout the entire visual field erasing all other imagery. I was aware of the presence of God and began shouting, “God is love.”

George, an American Baptist minister, explains that “after 10 experiences of the fullness, I did accept the fullness to be what it seemed to be—an experience of the presence of God, as described by those whom we call ‘mystics.’ ” <sup>294</sup>

Reminiscing about his experience of meditating in a lucid dream, Robert Waggoner remarks in *The Lucid Dream Exchange*:

“Suddenly in the sky, I notice brilliant streaks of white light all over—almost like intense white shooting stars in the daylight and lingering streaks of brilliant white.” Visually, it seems like my meditating (or stilling the mind) causes the dream scene fabric to tear, and brilliant white begins seeping through the rips. When lucid dreamers withdraw their energy from the mental projection of the dream by meditating, does the projection begin to shred and let the formless emptiness of light emerge from the dream matrix? <sup>295</sup>

Having practised lucid dream meditation for over twenty years, in the lucid void, in sleep paralysis, and in regular lucid dream scenarios, I can respond that usually any “dream furniture” disappears in response to meditation, and an experience of the Lucid Light often occurs. This may be an all-encompassing light, or the appearance of light in some form, such as a glowing orb or twinkling, luminescent particles. Caroline McCready, co-author of *Lucid Dreaming, Plain and Simple*, shared this lucid dream with me:

I found myself consciously aware within the dream. With my eyes open, I sat cross-legged, became still, and began to focus on the intention to meditate. As soon as I did this I felt a powerful rush of bliss, which I became completely immersed in. I saw effervescent white light in geometric patterns emerge overlaying the dream scene. Circles upon circles, overlapping in a pattern I recognised as the “flower of life,” connected absolutely everything ... It was a beautiful experience that

had a lasting effect on me upon waking, helping me to feel the connectedness of all things on an experiential level.

It's interesting to note that the Lucid Light does not always occur only with the dissolution of dream imagery, nor does it only emerge from "behind" the dream scene, but can also be superimposed onto it, as has happened in many of my own lucid dreams. In an unforgettable early encounter I had with the Lucid Light, it materialised in front of my wardrobe as a giant ball of orange light. In other dreams, it is simply part of the scene. In non-lucid dreams, the Lucid Light often manifests to raise our awareness. In one recent dream, I was alone in nature just as dawn was breaking, and suddenly I saw a magnificent, luminous bush right before me! It sparkled and glowed as if it had been sprinkled with fairy dust, and I felt an enormous sense of timeless wisdom and love emanating from it. Instantly I became much more conscious.

Whether we think of the origin of this light as the presence of God or as emerging from the dream matrix depends on our personal beliefs, but the transcendent nature of this light, its apparent ubiquity across different states of consciousness, and the positive feelings it inspires seem consistent among dream reports. In my view, the Lucid Light is the baseline state of consciousness, the state of potentiality from which all of reality arises. I consider the Lucid Light to be accessible via all levels of consciousness (since it is always there), but most easily via lucid dreams and the lucid void. One excellent way of accessing the Lucid Light from a lucid dream is through meditating in the dream.

## Is Waking Meditation an Effective Lucidity Technique?

Meditating before bed can improve the chances of having lucid dreams, as it clears out the mental trash we all carry around with us after a busy day so that we don't need to dream about it. When we manage to go to sleep with a

clear, peaceful mind, we're more likely to be able to carry this relaxed mental alertness into sleep and have the presence of mind to realise that we are dreaming. If we can force ourselves out of bed to meditate in the early morning when we've already had all the deep sleep we need, we can return to bed mentally alert and enjoy a final period of REM sleep in which we're likely to become lucid.

In psychotherapist Scott Sparrow's first lucid dream, he found himself "infused with a great light and an immense sense of spiritual purpose and belonging."<sup>296</sup> Determined to have more of these experiences, he tried waking up at 5:00 a.m. to do some early morning meditation for fifteen to thirty minutes before returning to sleep again. He reports:

The consequences of this early morning discipline were astounding. Not only did the light experience recur, but lucid dreams began to occur on a regular basis, along with nighttime kundalini awakenings, persistent high-frequency tones, and gentle, pulsating waves of energy in between waking and sleep. Indeed, there were nights when I could not easily go to sleep because of the energetic phenomena that literally overtook me at that formative time. I would begin to leave my body, and just to go to sleep, I would have to sit up and shake it off. It was, as they say, an embarrassment of riches.<sup>297</sup>

Meditation is an excellent way of getting lucid. It can also be effective if you wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep; this seems the perfect opportunity to either get up and meditate or just stay in bed and attempt to clear your mind through focusing on the breath, mentally repeating a mantra, or observing your thoughts. As so often is the case with lucid dream induction, a combination of techniques is best. If meditation is combined with a gentle intention to notice the swirling lights and bodily sensations of the hypnagogic or pre-sleep state, it can lead you straight into a lucid dream ... and from there into the Lucid Light.

## Mindfulness and the Art of Waking Up

Mindfulness in wakefulness has been compared to lucidity in dreams. Psychologist Charles Tart says of his years of mindfulness practice: “I have noticed an enduring aftereffect of those years of practice. One way of saying it is that I wouldn’t say I’m ‘awake,’ but I would say that I’m a lot less ‘asleep.’ ” <sup>298</sup>

This “aftereffect” is interesting. I’m a lifelong lucid dreamer, but there have been periods, during my early teenage years, for example, where I can’t recall having lucid dreams. For the past twenty-plus years though, I’ve had a huge number of lucid dreams. It seems that the more lucid dreams I have in my lifetime, the more conscious my non-lucid dreams become—my dreams across the full spectrum of non-lucid to lucid seem a lot less “asleep” in terms of awareness, clarity, and mental reasoning. I’ve also done yoga and meditation for over two decades. Practising dream lucidity as well as mindfulness while awake seems to work in tandem to gradually build up our basic level of awareness.

Since meditation is an ideal mindfulness tool that helps us to wake up in our lives, it follows that it can also help us to wake up in our dreams. There’s a problem, though. Although meditation is great for reducing stress and increasing emotional equilibrium, it can be unbelievably hard not to get sucked into the scenarios, to-do lists, thoughts, and worries we constantly create in our minds, as well as ignore the insistent demands of the body. A curl of hair tickles our cheek. Our spine cries out to slump instead of sitting upright. Our ankles are uncomfortable, and the cushion is lumpy, and ... now we need to pee! Accepting the body’s complaints without getting drawn into its dramas can be an almighty task, and this is the beauty of meditating in a lucid dream—we have no physical body! There are no nagging aches, no constraints, no muscle tension. It’s as if we are made out of light.

## Can Lucid Dream Meditation Help Waking Life Meditation?

The more we meditate in lucid dreams, the easier it may become to meditate in the waking state. Researchers estimate that the reason practising sports in lucid dreams has been shown to improve waking life sport performance is because neural connections in the brain are strengthened. Elsewhere I've suggested that creative thinking can be developed and fortified in lucid dreams in the same way.<sup>299</sup> It's possible that virtually *anything* we practise in a lucid dream can enhance our waking life performance and even alter our "brain baseline" due to neuroplasticity, or the flexibility of the ever-growing brain. This idea can easily be extended to meditation. Writing on the subject of meditation and the neuroscience of consciousness, Antoine Lutz and colleagues remark that "many of our core mental processes such as awareness and attention and emotion regulation, including our very capacity for happiness and compassion, should best be conceptualized as trainable skills."<sup>300</sup>

This is a vital and valid point. Lucid dreaming is a training ground for all manner of skills. Awareness can be trained in a lucid dream as we learn to keep the delicate balance between engagement and detachment. Our capacity for happiness can be trained simply by experiencing time and again the joy of waking up inside a dream so that joy becomes a more habitual emotion for us that can surface with greater ease during our waking hours. Affirmations in the lucid dream state can reprogramme our minds in ways similar to hypnotherapy techniques, so that our self-worth is boosted. Meditation skills can be trained in a lucid dream as we become familiar with the remarkable experience of going deep fast.

Personally, I've found that my waking life meditation has benefited from lucid dream meditation. Although in lucid dreams such a transition is bound to be faster since we don't have a physical body, on various occasions without trying in the least I have gone into a deep meditative state while awake, as soon as I closed my eyes and relaxed. One time it was a sunny

day and I went to join my husband on the balcony. I sank into the sofa and closed my eyes with the sun shining on my face. Instantly I was perfectly relaxed and was aware of my bodily perceptions disappearing. My husband was saying something and all I could say was “hmm.” Luckily, he’s used to me and quickly gave up trying to make conversation. I was in a state of complete relaxation and it felt amazing, the kind of state it can take a good twenty minutes or more to enter in sitting meditation. For me this state is strongly linked to the regular practice of yoga nidra, where you lie on your back in the corpse pose and progressively relax and leave your senses behind to float on the cusp of sleep—delicious for fans of lucid hypnagogia.

Research shows that the brain of an expert such as a musician or a chess player is functionally and structurally different from the brain of a non-expert, and a study by Irish neuroscientist Dr. Eleanor Maguire and colleagues in 2000 shows that the amount of time London taxi drivers have spent in their profession can actually be seen by looking at their brains!<sup>301</sup> What might the brain of an experienced meditator or a prolific lucid dreamer look like? And could developing greater compassion and lucidity change the structure of the brain? Referring to the taxi driver examples, Antoine Lutz and colleagues say: “These findings raise the possibility that training and practices that are specifically designed to cultivate positive qualities such as equanimity and loving kindness will produce beneficial alterations in brain function and structure.”<sup>302</sup>

So perhaps practising meditation in our lucid dreams could even help us to become nicer people while awake. It certainly couldn’t hurt to try it and see if we find ourselves fuming, complaining, or getting aggressive less often in waking life. Meditation may even help with physical healing. Mental intent has been shown to have an effect on the body. One 1982 study by Benson and colleagues reported on three Tibetan Tummo practitioners who were able to voluntarily increase the temperature of their fingers and toes by as much as 8 degrees C.<sup>303</sup> A study in 2003 on mindfulness-based stress reduction compared trained meditators with novices and found that the meditators had a much greater antibody response to an influenza vaccine.<sup>304</sup>

It seems that physical illness may be modulated by the endocrine or immune pathways in the brain.

## Wake Up in Life

Mindfulness and meditation while awake, and lucidity (and meditation) while asleep, can have long-lasting effects on our basic level of conscious awareness. This is what it means to “wake up in your life and in your dreams”: we can create more moments of focused awareness on the present moment, whether we’re awake or asleep. Just as in hypnotherapy the subject gets to live ideal moments such as experiencing a day as a happy nonsmoker, so the lucid dreamer can experience moments of deep and transcendental bliss through meditating in the dream state. The more this bliss is experienced by night, the easier it becomes to slip into it by day. Experienced lucid dreamers report being swept up by waking moments of beauty, happiness, and elation identical to those we experience in lucid dreams. The mind is a creature of habit, and just as we can get into the groove of being lucid, so we can get into the groove of being happy—or at least experiencing more and more *moments* of joy. Life is made up of moments. We must not lose the present one.

Lucidity in waking and in sleep can help us to capture the moments of our life in all their magical intensity, to live them fully and engrave them on our hearts. Surely this is more rewarding than slumbering our life away and regretting it when it’s too late? I often project myself into the future, imagining myself as an eighty-five-year-old woman looking back on this life of mine. This gives me perspective and reminds me that I have the power to change my mindset, my expectations and intentions, and so change my life whenever I need to.

## Mantras and the Transformative Energy of Sound



Chanting a mantra in a lucid dream can be immensely powerful. It's the same as saying a prayer. These words, loaded as they are with presence, power, and notions of psychic protection, roll out into the dream like balls of golden light and perform a double action of purifying negative imagery and imbuing the dreamer with energy and confidence. The dream is a thought-responsive environment that reacts according to our expectation and intent, and sound is just one more way of directing our intent. Sound can be a very healing and powerful medium—just look at how music moves us. Singing in a lucid dream, whether we choose a pop song we love or a religious mantra, can transform the dream and is a good way of dealing with fearful visions. Charlie Morley, author of *Dreams of Awakening*, told me about a time when he experienced the power of reciting a mantra in a lucid dream:

The lucidity was crystal clear. As I was flying high up above the world, I was reciting the Om Mani Peme Hung mantra and consciously dedicating it to the well-being of all the people below. It felt very powerful ... I flew back up into the sky again still reciting Om Mani Peme Hung but this time incredibly quickly, far quicker than I could ever recite the mantra in real life, quicker and quicker and quicker ...

When I was living in Portugal, we moved from Lisbon to a little old house by the sea. On one of our first nights there, I dreamed I was in the house and there was a creepy, ominous presence. “I don’t believe in ghosts,” I thought to myself, “but this is pretty eerie.” My uneasiness triggered lucidity and I remembered my yoga teacher jokingly saying that one particular ancient Sanskrit mantra was a fabulous ghost-busting chant. I’d never tried ghost busting in a lucid dream before—here was my chance! Enthusiastically I began: “Om Tryambakam Yajamahe...” As I sang, I drew my arms slowly above my head, placed my palms together, and then snapped them down to my sides when the mantra reached its peak. I experienced a sensation of incredible power. The vibrations of the words

went through my whole body and expanded into the dream like water ripples on a pond. The ominous presence vanished. It was very cool.

Tibetan Buddhists say that reciting a mantra in a lucid dream is many times more beneficial than doing it while awake. They're saying this from a spiritual perspective, but from a psychological perspective it makes sense too. Doing affirmations in a lucid dream can also have a stronger effect than in daytime practice. In a lucid dream we are awake in our unconscious mind, ready and able to engage with it instantly and exchange messages with it in a profound way. Suggestions and affirmations we make in lucid dreams can have effects similar to suggestions made in deep hypnosis and help to free us from phobias, anxieties, and negative behaviour patterns, allowing us to become happier, as can be seen in chapter 16 on psychological healing. Mantras can also be a way of connecting with our personal idea of the divine. This lucid dream Charlie Morley shared with me illustrates this connection.

Once I was lucid I decided to meditate, which is good progress because I didn't have to instantly fight the urge to want to have sex as per usual! I was in a meditation room and I sat on a rock (like in a Zen garden) and began to meditate. Then I began to recite the long invocation mantra of Guru Rinpoche ... I gradually began to transform into Guru Rinpoche, not in physical form but in essence, like it was more subtle than a physical transformation. It was just like the teachers say about taking on the form of the Buddha, but it became so intense that I woke up.

Waking up from a lucid dream meditation is always a risk. When there's a conflict of interest, whether of dream body versus physical body, or being torn about what to do in the dream, staying lucid can be hard, as can be seen in this dream of mine:

There's a basket of sweetmeats or bread on the table. I notice they're in the form of children, tiny, as long as my finger. As I wonder about the symbolism of this imagery, I realise this is a dream. I immediately recall

my intention to meditate in my next dream but I'm so fascinated still by the symbolism and the objects on the table, one of which is an elongated spoon with a face at the dish end. Very strange and incredibly real—I want to stay with these things but it's hard to retain lucidity and I blink rapidly several times, thinking too about the lucidity signal dreamers give in the sleep lab and deciding it must be hard to do if you aren't fully, strongly lucid.

Blinking helps and the scene is stable, so I decide to go ahead and meditate. I close my eyes and instantly I am deeply relaxed, it happens so fast. I see nothing—all dream imagery has vanished. I am however still aware of my dream body. I sit and focus on my breath, which feels constricted in my chest and I realise it's because I'm lying down on my stomach in bed. This thought distracts me and as I work on freeing the air flow by deep breathing, I decide to chant Ommm.... But the Om is so powerful it feels it is actually passing through my waking-life lips, and this dual body awareness—sitting dream-body and prone waking-life body—is incredibly distracting. As I register this, I am brought so strongly into my waking physical reality body that I wake up!

The repetition of a mantra can stabilise a lucid dream and sometimes leads to the spontaneous loss of the dream body, as in this dream that Melinda Ziemer of the Dream Research Institute in London shared with me:

I am once again moved both inwards and outwards at a tremendous speed through a black tunnel. I repeat a mantra of a holy name to keep my equilibrium. The movement opens into what seems like an infinite luminous space. My dream body no longer exists and my awareness is a still point in this light.

Mantras don't have to be linked to any kind of religion to work for us in lucid dreams. We can make up our own mantras or power words for different purposes; we may choose one that keeps the lucid dream stable, and another that imbues us with strength when we are facing up to our

fearful dream images. Helping children to create and use their own mantras in their dreams can be a brilliant way of empowering them to deal with nightmares. It can be as simple as the one my daughter found effective when she was between the ages of two and a half and five: “This is MY dream! I am STRONG!” For very small children it takes a while to grasp the concept that the more scared we get in a dream, the scarier the dream will become, because it reflects our mental state like a mirror. As adults, this seems clear, and if we have a power word or rhyme to hand, we can use this as a kind of psychological backup to help us stay lucid in the dream and remind us that we are strong.

## Lucid All Night Long

Once I went on a one-month yoga teacher training course in the middle of some fields in France. The course was full-on: I had to get up at 5:00 a.m., and my karma yoga assignment was to walk around the dorms and out to the tents ringing a hand bell to wake everyone else up at 5:15 a.m. Every time I trudged across the grass ringing my bell in the darkness and chanting “Om Namah Shivaya,” it felt so surreal that I’d stop, shine my torch onto my feet, and carry out a reality check: *Am I dreaming now?* We began each day with meditation, then sang kirtans and did two hours of yoga before we were finally allowed to eat a vegan breakfast. Then we did our lessons, plus two more hours of yoga, ate more vegan food, and had another meditation session and satsanga before bed.

All this meditation, mindfulness, healthy food, and yoga affected me fast. On the third night there was some amazing drumming at satsanga and I had one of my rare nights of what seemed like continuous lucidity. All night long I heard the drums and the chanting in my dreams; it felt like I was swooping through an infinite tunnel of sound vibrations. There was little imagery but there were plenty of luminous colours, and I was conscious that I was dreaming deep into yoga.

Retaining consciousness across the entire sleep cycle is a goal of Tibetan Buddhists, who believe that maintaining mindful awareness not only in the waking state but also in sleep is a way of preparing ourselves to remain conscious at the moment of death. The after-death “bardo” state is an intermediary one where we are brought face to face with our own karma and experience apparitions, hallucinogenic visions, and dreamlike imagery. This is the part where lucid dream training comes in handy. Namkhai Norbu explains in his book *Dream Yoga and the Practice of Natural Light* that we have the opportunity to recognise the true, illusory nature of these images and understand that they are nothing but the manifestation of our own mind. If we can become lucid in the bardo, we can avoid being reborn and instead dissolve into the clear light.

If we want to know the state of our mind in death, we only have to look at the way it is in our dreams: Are we fearful, chased by threatening figures, or in conflict, arguing with others? Is our dream life mostly happy?

Are we lucid?

#### **Practice #66: Create a Mantra**

Create your own lucid dream chant, spell, song, rhyme, mantra, or power word. It needs to be something easy to recall that resonates deeply with you. You’ll need to ask yourself what its purpose will be when you say it in the dream. Will it help you stay lucid, focus your intent, deepen your meditation, manifest a particular dream figure, or trigger a spiritual experience? It’s your call. When you have your mantra, write it down. Does it have a tune? A rhythm? Practise it until it feels just right. Meditate on it before you fall asleep, and believe in the power you have bestowed on it.

#### **Practice #67: Lucid Meditation**

All meditation should be lucid: the ideal is to reach a state of lucid observation and enter the deep, peaceful awareness we all have at our centre. Meditation is a state that at times is very close to lucid

dreaming and at other times resembles the lucid void. It can be a portal for different metachoric experiences (inner, vivid sensory experiences), including OBEs.

**Breathing exercises** can boost a meditative state on two counts: first because breathwork is the fastest and most direct way to connect with the self—take a deep, mindful breath now and you’ll see what I mean—and second because if we include a short breathing ritual before we meditate, very quickly this becomes habit—body and mind automatically quieten themselves into a light trance as soon as we do the breathing. Alternate nostril breathing is a wonderful way of centring ourselves, as is breathing in synchrony with left-right head movements. The heart rate slows, the breath grows deeper and more relaxed, and the eyes are closed to reduce sensory information from the waking world. From time to time, you’ll notice that your thoughts quieten and you sink into a sort of beautiful, floaty, thought-free state. This is the gap between thoughts that mirrors the gap between dreams. These are the moments of pure awareness that make meditation so amazing. As you become more experienced, these magical moments will expand to become longer and longer.

**Remember that you are meditating:** When meditating, as with any trance state, if you get visuals, keep in mind that this is internal imagery that you are watching like a movie. This constant “background” knowledge is like knowing that we’re dreaming—it can seem so self-evident that we forget to remind ourselves and then we risk finding ourselves sucked into the dream and forgetting to stay lucidly aware. In meditation, the equivalent would be being swept up by our thoughts so that, far from meditating, we are in fact just sitting there fully awake, thinking and fantasising like crazy!

**Visualise:** From time to time, take a few moments to visualise yourself becoming lucid in a beautiful dream and recalling your intention to meditate. Experience yourself meditating in the lucid dream and, if it feels right, disappearing into a point of light and into

oneness. Try this visualisation while practising deep relaxation in yoga nidra, or during sitting meditation, or whenever you wake up in the night.

**Get the balance right:** Meditation and lucid dreaming require balance. It's a bit like snorkelling: the trick is to drop into the unconscious mind just the right amount. Don't lower yourself in too deep or your snorkel tube will fill with water; you'll turn into a deep-sea diver and fall asleep. And don't just dip a toe into the shallows or you'll soon find yourself beached—in a fully waking state. The magic happens when we snorkel: submerged but still breathing fresh air, we are in perfect unison with the ocean, able to see and experience its underwater fabulousness but still connected to the landlubber's vital source: air.

[contents]

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292. Lutz et al., "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness," 106.
293. Johnson, "Creative Lucid Dreaming."
294. Gillespie, "A Pilgrimage into Dreamless Sleep," 295–297.
295. Waggoner, "Following the Light," 20.
296. Sparrow, "Early Morning Meditation and Dream Reliving as Catalysts for Lucid Dreams."
297. Ibid.
298. Tart, "Mindfully Awakening."
299. Johnson, "Magic, Meditation, and the Void: Creative Dimensions of Lucid Dreaming."
300. Lutz et al., "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness."
301. Maguire et al., "London Taxi Drivers and Bus Drivers: A Structural MRI and Neuropsychological Analysis."
302. Ibid., 57.
303. Benson et al., "Body Temperature Changes during the Practice of g Tum-mo Yoga."
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## CHAPTER 23

### *Death and the Divine: Lucid Dreaming out of This World*

Dreams are a mirror. They reflect everything about us, including our religious training and beliefs, our existential doubt, and our conflicting feelings about death, the afterlife, and the divine. Lucidity can bring us closer to our idea of the divine and even change and form our ideas about death. In lucid dreams everyone can discover their own version of spirituality if they feel so inclined. Just hanging out in the lucid void, which feels a little how I imagine outer space must feel to an astronaut, can be mind-blowing. If we then experience a feeling of complete oneness and connection, whatever our religious affiliation, we will typically return from the experience refreshed and awed, and perhaps with a mind full of existential questions about the nature of the self, consciousness, life, death, and reality. We can try asking these questions the next time we become lucid—if we feel truly ready to hear the answers, that is! “What happens at the moment of death?” “Does consciousness continue?” “How do dreams of oneness teach us to die?”

As we start to have lucid dreams of death and the divine, the questions multiply. “Can consciousness exist outside the body?” Anyone who has experienced the void or OBEs is likely to reply, “Of course it can.” “Can dreams prepare us for death?” A woman I knew who died in 2013 reported pre-death dreams of being “surrounded by thousands of winged beings.”

The dreams of people with a terminal illness often connect them to a spiritual world. In hospices, people often report out-of-body experiences as they start to “practise” separating from the physical body. Similarly, lucid dreams can help us to deal with the grief of losing someone we love, by changing our perception of death and allowing us to experience precious dream moments with our deceased loved ones.

## Lucid Dreams of Deceased Friends and Relatives

Years ago I attended a workshop on bereavement dreams. One woman in our group was extremely upset because she kept dreaming about her dead mother and these dreams brought her no comfort. In them, her mother was terribly unhappy, shouting and crying and “raising hell,” and the dreamer feared this meant her mother had found no peace in death. With the help of the group as we gently worked on these dreams together, she realised that they were not a reflection on her mother’s post-death state, but stemmed from her own unresolved emotions and unspoken grudges related to her mother.

So often when someone we love dies we feel an enormous range of emotions, including shock, betrayal, anger, regret at things left unsaid, abandonment, and bitterness—and that’s before we even get started with the deep grief! If we become lucid in dreams of deceased loved ones, we have a golden opportunity to start the healing process of acceptance of their death. The Jungian psychoanalyst Dr. Marie-Louise von Franz did extensive work on dreams and bereavement, and believed that dreaming is of great value in the grieving process, as it allows the past and present to be integrated—the deceased person is momentarily resurrected and interacting with him or her can help the dreamer to reconcile, accept, and heal.

We can do this in any number of creative ways, and as the chapters on healing in part 4 show, it’s often best to act intuitively in the dream with the intent to heal rifts and transform negative emotions. We can ask the dream figure that represents the dead person: “What message do you have for

me?” “How can we make this situation better?” We can send the dream figure healing light or give them a hug. If the dream figure is unresponsive, we can ask the dream itself for help: “How can I better accept my sister’s death?” Each dreamer will instinctively know the question he or she needs to ask, and the lucid dream will provide an answer—maybe not immediately, and probably not in the way we expect. We might see an image, hear a voice booming advice, be transported to a memory or a different dream, or be given a gift. Anything could happen, so it’s good to stay open and lucid and see what comes. After the dream, doing some Lucid Writing or other dreamwork can lead to further insights and understanding.

Some people wake up from dreams of deceased loved ones feeling absolutely certain that this was no ordinary dream, but an actual visitation from the dead person. The feeling of having connected with their loved one is so strong and the meeting so real that they feel this was not a dream in the usual sense of the word. The thought-provoking phenomenon of people receiving accurate information (for example, about an illness, or news that a particular person is going to die soon) from deceased relatives in dreams or during near-death experiences has been explored in various books. The question of whether “visits” are possible and how this might work remains open. Whether a dream of a dead loved one is understood to be a psychological representation or “the real thing,” the level of connection and healing experienced is what counts.

In dreams of the dead, we often remember that the person has died, and this makes for a highly effective lucidity trigger. Some months after my grandmother died, I had a dream that really helped me deal with my sadness and accept that everything was as it should be:

In the house I see Grandma and realise this must be a dream. I say, “We’re in a lucid dream together, Grandma!” She seems pleased. We hug, and I think briefly of my other grandparents but decide not to try and find them. Instead I ask her, “So, how are you—what’s it like there (meaning being dead)?” She points to the wall and I fly involuntarily

towards it, entering it at a point to the right of a Virgin Mary shrine set into the wall. I go through the wall and drift in space: all is grey but light, with dots. I think of Grandma and wonder if this is what she means to show me. I fly around, turning my body and hovering ... I wake up feeling reassured that all is well, and that I need to tell my father about this.

This dream may have been showing me that death (or at least my idea of it at that point in my life) is something like the lucid void. Imagine if this really was the case, and all we had was our own consciousness to keep us company in the afterlife! Wouldn't that inspire us to put an enormous emphasis on raising our level of consciousness while alive, since this is all we can take with us into death? Everyone would be scrambling over themselves to spend time hanging out in the lucid void while they slept, to train for death. Just think of all the funding that would be made available for lucid dream research! Well, it might not be such a crazy idea—after all, the ancient Tibetan Buddhist tradition of dream yoga is based on this principle: *In lucid sleep states, we can train for death.*

## Encounters with the Divine: Spiritual Lucid Dreams

Lucid dreams can be a gateway to the divine—or at least our perception of it. The form the divine takes on as it manifests in our dreams will be as varied as it is in religions all over the world. Muslims might naturally tend to dream of the prophet Muhammad, while Christians might dream of angels and heavenly visions, and Hindus may dream of Shiva, Kali, Vishnu, or whichever deity they feel closest to. Whether they're religious or not, people may dream of mystical light or a sense of being borne aloft by an invisible force. Experiences of the divine in lucid dreams enable us to feel ecstatic union with what seems to us to be a spiritual force, and through experiencing this we become aware of our own spiritual essence. If we are religious, such dreams can deepen our connection to the god we believe in.

If we aren't religious, they can still bring us an overwhelming sense of connection and bliss. George Gillespie is a Baptist minister and a highly experienced lucid dreamer who has done valuable in-the-dream research into light in lucid dreams:

This light has appeared only while I dreamed lucidly ... while engaged in religious activity. It usually appears like the sun moving down from above my head until all I see is brilliant light. I become aware of the presence of God and feel spontaneous great joy. As long as I direct my attention to the light, I gradually lose awareness of my dreamed body.<sup>305</sup>

Lucid dreaming can offer us spiritual experiences, and in doing so it lays the groundwork for waking mystical experience. Just after my twenty-first birthday I went to India for six weeks and stayed a few nights in an ashram in Rishikesh. Every morning I watched as people stretched their limbs into graceful poses while the sun rose over the Ganges, and my body wanted to do the same. Later, in a secondhand bookshop in Tamil Nadu, I discovered the writings of La Mère: *Le Yoga Intégral*. This tatty and wonderful book started me on my journey into yoga. Today, spiritual practice for me is dreaming, yoga, writing, meditation, visualisation, gratitude, love, empathy, creativity, and the appreciation of beauty.

Over the past two decades, I've had a great number of spiritual lucid dreams in which I float among the stars, dissolve into the Lucid Light, and feel total love. I have met dream figures who have inspired me to meditate or fly into deepest space, and doing these things has triggered that marvelous state of oneness. Doing yoga or any other energy work in my lucid dreams often transports me to a state of supreme happiness and a sense of union with everything. Other times I feel so joyful that I just laugh and laugh until I no longer feel my dream body and I reside in a place of pure blissfulness. All of these lucid dreams have felt extraordinary and have left me feeling buoyant and full of love for days afterwards.

I had the following dream when I was doing an intensive yoga teacher training course. It's one of the rare spiritual lucid dreams I've had that involve specific religious figures, in this case the deceased yoga guru Sri Swami Sivananda.

It's dusk and I'm sitting in the meditation pose in the temple with all the others. I know this is a dream. We are chanting *Om Namō Bhagavate Sivanandaya* and I look towards the large triangular temple windows because something is coming; a sweep of powerful energy. Like a wind, it enters the temple space and is all around us. I instantly recognise it as guru Sivananda and I know he has been around the world twice before arriving here. I'm delighted to meet him in spirit because it's clear this isn't some holier-than-thou being but a dynamic, loving, mischievous presence.

For a moment I see his face, then it dissolves again into pure light energy. My consciousness raises with this vibration and I feel supremely awake and lucid. It's like floating on air, swept up by this awesome energy. He flies away again and all of us in the temple are filled with joy. It feels like the last note of a piece of soul-rocking music has been struck and is resonating deep within us.

This dream certainly didn't mean I started to see myself as a disciple of Sivananda. It's important to me personally to question everything, not blindly follow, and I rely strongly on my own experiences and gut feelings to chart my way through life. Very often when I'm in the right place at the right time in my life, my dreams give me the thumbs-up, and this was clearly one of those dreams. Afterwards I felt even more connected to the group and this yoga teacher training path we were all on. It felt like one big beautiful serendipitous moment.

## A Field of Buddhas

Anja is a German novelist, and she and I met because of a dream. At a time of creative crisis when she feared she would never write again, she dreamed

that her spiritual teacher told her, “You’ll meet someone who will become your writing teacher and you’ll work with her on dreams, too.” Then he showed her a photo of me lying on a Goa-like beach, dressed in yoga clothes. Anja and I had never met and she didn’t know my name or how to find me. Somehow she wound up in one of my yoga and writing workshops, where she immediately recognised me from her dream. The dream highlighted three threads of my professional life—writing, dreams, and yoga—as well as giving Anja an accurate physical picture of me. Even the India connection was present; I’ve spent months travelling around India and my first novel is based there. It seemed Anja’s dream had somehow hit the nail right on the head.

Anja has had many spiritual encounters in her lucid dreams because she is an intrepid lucid dreamer who finds that these dreams give her profound insight into reality. However, in one lucid dream that she shared with me, she encountered a spiritual archetype so powerful that it left her speechless.

I’m lucid and I go through a window and suddenly I’m in a place where many huge sitting Buddhas are towering over me. They are all in the lotus position, meditating. The first is in front and the others are each slightly behind each other in a sort of square, row after row, and each so enormous. It’s like a field of Buddhas! They’re all wearing red robes and have white or orange dots on the centre of their foreheads. At first I think they are made of stone.

But then I look closely ... and I see that they are breathing.

I’m scared because they are massive, as tall as skyscrapers. Their eyes are closed. They are meditating and breathing gently and I just want to get out of there as fast as possible. But then one of the Buddhas opens his eyes and turns towards me!

I’m terrified, but then I see that his eyes are full of love, full of peace. I’m not afraid anymore. His eyes are filled with light. Even though they have pupils, these eyes are no ordinary eyes; they are made of light and don’t look human. They are supernatural, but loving. Even though the

Buddhas are so big, so powerful, I stay where I am. I don't want to disturb them, as they look so mystical. They are like protectors.

The Buddha who is watching me smiles. I find myself flying away even though as I do I'm thinking, "How silly of me, I should have asked him something!"

Such a dream is a gift. It seems to speak of a silent, loving spiritual presence safeguarding the very essence of life. The Lucid Light shines from the eyes of the awakened Buddha as he smiles at Anja, awake in her dream.

When she woke up, Anja was frustrated with herself for not being able to think of a question to ask the kindly Buddha, but it's understandable to be overwhelmed when we come face to face with incredibly powerful archetypes in dreams. Lucid Dreamplay can help with spiritual dream encounters that we feel are somehow unfinished: when we imaginatively reenter the dream, we can engage fearlessly with the archetype and ask the question we wished we'd had the presence of mind to ask in the dream, or simply spend time communicating silently with the divine and experiencing our personal connection with it.

Anja's dream may be showing her a place of great spiritual power within her, a power she is awakening to. It can be daunting to face our inner power. Religious icons such as Buddha statues or crucifixes hold vast unconscious power, as they have saturated the consciousness of so many people throughout history. When we come face to face with them in a dream, they often serve a universal archetypal function, inviting us to contemplate the divine within us.

## Merging with the Divine

Music, song, light, and movement are often present in spiritual lucid dreams. Yoga, tai chi, qigong, and other movement-based energy practices have a powerful effect on our ability to lucid dream, because the dream body and the waking body become more integrated, as explained in [chapter 7](#) on the lucid dream body. When we practise bodywork in a lucid dream, it



takes us deep, fast. Martial arts expert Rory Mac Sweeney has developed a practice that combines tai chi with lucid dreaming. In this lucid dream, he experiences a sense of complete oneness with his environment:

In the lounge, I commence the form and with the upward sweep of my hands the room immediately starts to change into a forest, it is lush and bright with a traditional Chinese violin being played in the air. It is that familiar lucid dream-type music that saturates the air, I am intrigued by how pervasive it is as I venture deeper into the form. The wind is blowing and the trees are swaying and as I become immersed in this thought I notice that I am no longer the man doing tai chi to the sound of music but instead the leaf of the tree blowing effortlessly in the breeze to the sound of birds singing. As this feeling takes root, I am simultaneously the man doing tai chi again; a beautiful symphony of events is taking place and I know I am witnessing real magic. The dream dissolves and I wake up feeling enlightened and inspired.

In lucid dreams, all that we experience seems so real that interactions with the divine can be indescribably powerful and leave us with an enduring sense of happiness, trust in some greater plan, or a sense that despite our individual limitations, we fit perfectly into the big picture of life and death. They can also leave us feeling hopeful that life does continue in some form or other after death, and that all beings are *not* separate, but part of a cohesive whole, so that death seems less like the ultimate separation and more like a water droplet returning to an infinite ocean. Such strong feelings are not to be underestimated—lucid dream experiences can provoke deep transformation in our waking lives as we integrate these precious memories of merging with the divine into our waking selves.

One of lucid dreaming's wonderful plus points is that it allows us to fully experience things that can be very hard to experience while awake. And in the thought-responsive, immersive environment of a lucid dream, we can get there really quickly. All we need to do is employ the golden tool of

intention, either before we sleep, in order to incubate a dream of the divine, or as soon as we become lucid. A combination of both techniques is best, as that way our intention is clear both in waking and in dreaming, which enhances its power.

Lucid dream scholar and co-author of *Integral Dreaming*, Dr. Fariba Bogzaran, wrote her 1989 master's thesis on experiencing the divine in lucid dreams, and found that if we set the pure intention to experience the divine in a lucid dream, we will eventually do so.<sup>306</sup> Dream incubation can be a powerful tool. In 2013, doctoral research by Dr. Ted Esser examined experiences of spiritual energy and non-duality in lucid dreams, and he too found that specific attempts to incubate such dreams were highly successful in provoking these experiences.<sup>307</sup> Fariba Bogzaran finds that it is helpful to mindfully witness whatever arises in spiritual dreams, rather than trying to force or control events, while other people find that reciting a mantra or a prayer helps them to stay focused during intensely spiritual lucid dream experiences. Melinda Ziemer reports hearing prayers: "I 'see' bright, vibrating five-pointed stars that resonate like struck cymbals surrounding me. The stars have come very close and I experience them as celestial beings represented as stars. The singing comes from their forms. Their beauty astounds me." Affirmations can help to solidify our intention to experience the divine. Try repeating your own version of this before you sleep: "Tonight in my dreams I am lucid and I encounter the divine."

## The Dark Side of the Divine: Demons and Visions of Hell in Lucid Dreams

All this talk about hearing beautiful music and merging with the Lucid Light before waking up feeling fabulous sounds great, doesn't it? But what happens when the divine takes on a less friendly aspect? Just as we have a particular view of the positive aspects of the divine, such as a compassionate Buddha or a forgiving Jesus, so we have our own ingrained

beliefs about the negative aspects, whether we are conscious of this or not. Religions reflect the light and dark sides of the divine. Take, for example, the Christian belief of divine retribution in the form of Hell and eternal damnation. Even if we've mostly avoided being caught up in a religious belief system, archetypal ideas such as good and evil are so firmly rooted in the world psyche that these can turn up in terrifying Technicolor in our dreams, even if we're lucid. Chapter 13 gives tips on how to deal with lucid nightmares, and ways of reacting to scarily autonomous dream beings are discussed in chapter 15 on sleep disorders and chapter 8 on lucid dream figures, but it's worth briefly mentioning lucid dreams where hideous visions or demonic presences are encountered.

When I was deeply into lucid dreaming at twenty years old, I had a bewildering array of experiences with what I called "lucid dream entities." These entities were mostly invisible, but I could often hear them; they seemed to be energy forms that mocked and jeered at me and pulled me around as I tried to ground myself within the dream and raise enough energy to escape from them. Over time, I learned to employ strong willpower and intent to free myself from them, using a self-created breathing technique to calm me down. These sleep paralysis experiences were the closest I've been to encountering what lucid dreamer Frederik van Eeden would have described as "dream demons,"<sup>308</sup> but they had no religious aspect for me, so they were more of an irritation than anything else. Terrifying visions that are bound up with our religious beliefs are even harder to free ourselves from than regular nightmare images, because they are so deeply ingrained in our psyche. Such lucid dreams definitely happen, and probably to many people, but there seems to be a stigma involved with talking about them. Scott Sparrow remarked in 1988:

In my own life, I found that at the height of my lucid dreaming I ran into a brick wall of sorts. Lucid dreaming had become evidence of my evolution, a merit badge of sorts. Of course, I thought I was handling it okay; but I had no idea what I was repressing. Who does? Well, all

kinds of very angry people began showing up in my dreams, and turning rather demonic to boot. A black panther walked in the front door and would not go away no matter how much I told him he was only a dream.<sup>309</sup>

Let's have a look at some tips on how best to respond when faced with dark or demonic dream figures.

#### **Practice #68: How to React to the Dark Side of the Divine**

- Resist telling the demonic figure, "You're just a dream." Treat these visions as you would any other aspect of your dream: with respect, kindness, and curiosity.
- Remind yourself that you will wake safely from this experience. Decide that you will flee or wake up only if you absolutely can't bear to do otherwise, as doing so is like making a date to meet these visions again in the near future.
- Ask the demonic figure questions: "Do you have a message for me?" "What do you represent?"
- Send love and acceptance to the dream being. Really feel this in your heart. Visualise it as a ball of warm golden light. This is usually enough to transform the negative image and dissolve your fear.
- Do dreamwork after such dreams: change the outcome in Lucid Writing or choose one of the other practical or artistic techniques from chapter 13 on nightmares to get a sense of the issues and conflicts surrounding the dream. Talk to someone you trust.
- By day, practise a fear-releasing technique, for example, one that combines calm breathing with an affirmation that you are safe. (Breathe in thinking "I am" and breathe out thinking "safe.") Practise this in the dream the moment you encounter what seems to be a negative divine aspect.

## Overcoming Fear of Death Through Lucid Dreaming

So many people are terrified of death, even if not their *own* death. Before becoming a mother, I always blithely reasoned: *Death is the only sure thing in life, so why fear it? Death is simply a return to the oneness from which we all came.* I still do reason this way, but less blithely, because do you know what? When my daughter stopped breathing and briefly seemed to be dead when she was a tiny baby, I didn't shrug my shoulders philosophically and think, "Oh well, she's just transitioned into a different state of consciousness. Big deal." No—I was frantic and I fought for her. I resuscitated her with my breath, my voice, and my willpower. When she had an operation under general anaesthetic at age three, I was in a state of focused suspense until she came around afterwards. When she caught pneumonia at age four and the coughing seemed too deep and strong for her body, I slept in her bed with her for a week to keep her safe.

Whenever death seems close to our child, our spouse, or anyone we deeply love, we have a fear response that is beyond rational thought and philosophical theories. It's a visceral, physical reaction—our stomach turns to jelly, we tremble. Even if we truly believe in eternal life, we can't let go. We kick and scream and bargain and implore. We pray to all the gods to keep our loved one alive and with us.

And this is natural! Of course we want those we love most in the world to be safe, well, and part of our lives. If we got so detached that we couldn't give a damn either way, we wouldn't be truly alive. Living consciously means participating *in* life, not disengaging from it. Life's biggest tests often come through our relationships with other people, because other people can be infuriating or heartbreakingly vulnerable, they suffer, they test our limits and expand our hearts, and the ones we love unconditionally can get ill and die on us. Maintaining a flow of compassion, acceptance, and kindness throughout the crazy flow of life is a huge challenge, but a good one, since it teaches us all kinds of lessons of the soul.

Lucid dreaming can help us with the ultimate challenge that everyone alive faces: death. The death of others; our own death. Thomas Hasenberger of the Monroe Institute teaches lucid dreaming to psychotherapists in Germany. He works with states such as lucid dreaming and OBEs to try to learn more about what happens when we die. He told me how he has learned to die in lucid dreams.

When I started to work with psychotherapists and teach them lucid dreaming, the head of the institute in Germany told me to die as often as I can in a dream to dissolve my fear during the death process. In my first dream I was on a veranda in front of a house and I saw a tyrannosaurus running towards me. Of course, I was lucid immediately because they don't exist in waking reality so my dream consciousness was very supportive. I felt the impulse that I wanted to run away but I thought:

“This is the dream where I will die.”

So I remained there and a second later it was over me and everything happened in slow motion. I felt the jaws closing on me and that my fear of pain wanted to arise and my will to fight. Then I thought, “Why fight?” and relaxed deeply. I slipped out of my body and saw how my body was smashed.

I went through a white light which I already knew. I had an immense feeling of freedom and wanted to run through the universe like a puppy playing. But then I thought: “This time I won't play. This time I will go into total unity.” And I let myself drift towards it.

Because of my theory that Lucid Light may be the baseline state of consciousness and the stuff from which all thoughts, matter, and creation arise, I had to ask Thomas more about his experiences of white light, and these seem to support my theory. He explains:

When I do an OBE I always go through a white light. I just leave the body, which is part of dying, but the interesting period during the dying

process is before that. We have fear of pain and losing control. Going out of the body is easy, but working with the fears is the interesting part. When we die we go from waking consciousness to an OBE and then into the white light, as far as I experience it. Our consciousness does what it always does. It interprets the data stream which it receives into a reality. This works with this reality, dreams, dying/bardo ... The only exception is the clear light and total unity. There it doesn't interpret because it is just absolute unbounded oneness.

Consciousness returns to its most restful state in the Lucid Light, like a raindrop merging with the ocean. Might this sense of unbounded oneness be what happens when we die? Lucid dreaming is a state of consciousness with which we can experiment with anything and everything, including dying, death, and the Lucid Light.

### How Do You Feel About Death?

At times it's useful to ask ourselves, "How do I *really* feel about death?" Although a certain fear of losing loved ones is natural, sometimes our fear of death is extreme and needs to be calmed down. Fear of death is basically fear of separation, but in fearing death we are only widening our sense of separateness. Often, our dreams will show us what we need to see. For sure, death in the dreams of healthy people doesn't necessarily refer to mortal death, but can be a metaphor for change—releasing the old and making space for the new. But sometimes the dream makes it pretty clear what's what. In an interview in the journal *Lucid Dreaming Experience*, Caroline McCready, co-author of *Lucid Dreaming, Plain and Simple*, recounts that she wasn't aware that she was scared of death until she had the following lucid dream:

I simply said to the dream, "Show me something important." I found myself at the mouth of a dark tunnel, feeling terrified, I could sense that there was something gruesomely menacing in this tunnel, but I was being drawn forcibly into the tunnel ... I was confronted by an

enormous and grotesque shadowy figure, like something from a horror film. I was told by the dream that this shadow figure was my fear of death. It was so horrifying that I woke myself up, but ended up in a false awakening with this shadow figure lying completely realistically beside me. I was unable to move, paralyzed by fear, with this figure breathing heavily down my neck with terrible breath and a husky gurgling rasp in his throat.<sup>310</sup>

Fortunately, being an experienced lucid dreamer, Caroline knew that what she needed to do was face and embrace her fear. The dream was over, but of course we can always do dreamwork *after* the dream, whether in the waking state or a lucid trance, or by incubating another lucid dream and then actively facing the same issue, which is what Caroline did:

The next morning I went straight from a waking meditation into a lucid dream and asked to be taken to my fear. I felt myself being pulled down and although I was initially frightened by the prospect of facing this figure once more I was able to transform my fear into resignation and acceptance. I felt myself open my arms and feel ready to face anything ... The moment I did that the direction I was being pulled changed. I was no longer being dragged down, but instead lifted into a glorious sky with white clouds on one side and dark clouds on the other. They were all lined and bathed in gold light and I began to feel every cell in my body vibrate with indescribable, pure, ecstatic bliss. It was so beautiful I cried when I woke up.<sup>311</sup>

The simple fact of releasing her fear and feeling acceptance in her dream changes everything completely—the dreamer's direction changes, the scenery changes, and by the end, the overwhelming sensation is one of bliss. How many seconds or minutes did that lucid dream last? Isn't it astonishing how quickly we can change our inner landscape and emotions when we set our minds to it? There's a magic to lucid dreaming, just as there's a magic to dream-based waking visualisation, and the magic works



because we are *consciously engaging* with the imagery of our unconscious minds. Just a few short moments of lucidity can have lasting positive effects on our lives. Caroline remarks: “That dream helped me to become more fearless in every aspect of life and truly grab my life by the horns.” <sup>312</sup>

Yes, let’s grab life by the horns! Why not live life to our fullest potential, since at the end of the day none of us can really know for sure what comes *after* life. Lucid dreaming helps us to release fears that are stopping us from advancing freely, and to savour the everyday magic of the present moment.

## Practising Conscious Dying

We’ve all heard about experiences where people are pronounced clinically dead but then come back to life and report the most incredible experiences, often involving tunnels and white light and a religious representative such as an angel or a god. Such experiences can be so compelling that they even result in religious conversion. Scientific research shows that the brain becomes very active after clinical death. These neurophysiological changes might account for the super-vivid imagery and sensations of near-death experiences. Dr. Jimo Borjigin, of the University of Michigan, explains: “A lot of people thought that the brain after clinical death was inactive or hypoactive, with less activity than the waking state, and we show that is definitely not the case. If anything, it is much more active during the dying process than even the waking state.” <sup>313</sup>

So do we “wake up” at the moment of death? If so, and if we have practised maintaining focused awareness in our lucid dreams, *might it be possible to lucid dream our way into death?* An early mention of lucid dreaming in the West appeared in 415 CE in a letter from Saint Augustine. He describes the lucid dream of a young man, Gennadius, whose dream figure tells him this about the afterlife:

As while you are asleep and lying on your bed these eyes of your body are now unemployed and doing nothing, and yet you have eyes with

which you behold me, and enjoy this vision, so, after your death, while your bodily eyes shall be wholly inactive, there shall be in you a life by which you shall live, and a faculty of perception by which you shall still perceive.<sup>314</sup>

According to this lucid dream figure, the afterlife may be a little like a dream. Is there any way to train for lucid awareness when we die? Some people might ask, “Why would I *want* to realise that I’m dead? With all the dread and fear that surrounds death in our culture, wouldn’t it be nicer simply *not to know* when it happens?” Neuroscientific studies show that the brain wakes up at the moment of death, so it’s quite possible that we have no choice about realising we’re dead. In which case, why do we need any training? Dzogchen teacher Namkhai Norbu explains in his book *Dream Yoga* that the after-death state known as the “chonyid bardo” entails vivid, dreamlike hallucinations, and if we are familiar with lucid dreaming, we have the opportunity to recognise the true, illusory nature of these hallucinations and thereby transcend death:

These hallucinations are of a similar nature to dream images. That is why the ability to lucid dream can be useful for recognising them as illusory. According to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, an awakening is possible if we are able to keep in mind that these terrifying experiences are no more than the manifestations of our own mind.<sup>315</sup>

So Tibetan Buddhists feel it’s not enough to wake up at the actual moment of death; we then need to hold on tightly to our awareness as we are faced with all sorts of crazy karma-related hallucinations. Just as in dreams, we risk being sucked into the highly vivid, emotive, multisensory imagery that surrounds us. Every time we’ve ever lost lucidity in a dream because of getting too caught up in the dream narrative is an example of how easy it is to lose awareness in the face of so much intense imagery. If the Tibetan Buddhists are right about what happens after death, we’ll need to be supersonic-lucid to stand a chance of sailing right through all that stuff with

full conscious awareness. But if you've never had a lucid dream, or have only had a handful, this doesn't mean you can't aspire to waking up in death. Cultivating mindfulness in life, every moment of every day, and living lucidly will raise our overall level of awareness, and it's important not to neglect daytime lucidity practice. As my dream with my deceased grandmother suggested, consciousness may be the only thing that really matters, since it's all we take with us when we leave.

How can we practise conscious dying? My own theory is that we can do this not only through the practice of what Tibetans refer to as "dream yoga." There are other states apart from lucid dreaming where we can usefully practise raising and strengthening our conscious awareness. Here's my theory: We get to practise conscious dying when we stay awake while falling asleep, when we lucidly surf hypnagogia, when we are lucid in dreams, when we hang out in the lucid void, when we have an OBE, when we merge with the Lucid Light, when we meditate in waking life so deeply that we no longer feel the body, when we experience startling moments of waking lucidity, and when we maintain consciousness while under general anaesthetic or during fainting.

This means that there are plenty of opportunities for the dedicated consciousness explorer! I'm not suggesting we should all shoot off to the hospital and ask to be pumped full of anaesthesia to see if we can remain conscious when it knocks us out, but I'd like to share the story of what happened to me when I was twenty-one and travelling around India.

## Staying Conscious Through a General Anaesthetic

I used to get ear infections and had a particularly nasty one while I was in India, so I saw a specialist and he suggested an operation to drain the fluid. It was to be done under general anaesthetic, and it struck me that it might be fun to try and stay conscious throughout the operation. I reasoned that since I was conscious so much of the time in my dreams while my body was unconscious, then it must be possible to do the same thing while my body was under anaesthetic. I was curious and felt very determined. On the

operating table, as the nurse slipped the needle into my arm, I braced myself not to be swept away by what was coming and reminded myself fiercely, “Stay conscious! Stay conscious!”

As soon as the drug entered my bloodstream, there was this tremendously loud buzzing and shaking similar to the sensations sometimes experienced before out-of-body experiences. “Stay conscious!” I thought again, and felt myself shooting backwards until I was suspended above and behind my body. Although I couldn’t see or feel my body anymore, I knew that somewhere down there, Clare was having an operation.

It was as if I were an orange cell with loads of other orange cells, and we were all on an absolute dizzy high, probably due to whatever chemicals the anaesthetic was made up of. If we’d had mouths, we would have been laughing our heads off! I was delighted that I’d managed to stay conscious, and I so enjoyed myself chilling out with those other orange cells, drifting and sliding and feeling ever so happy. When the nurses wheeled me out of the operating theatre, they were horrified because instead of being knocked out for another two hours as expected, I started moving and trying to sit up and speak because I was so excited that I’d stayed conscious and wanted to tell them all about it. Needless to say, I couldn’t speak properly because my tongue felt as dry as a desert, and they pushed me back down in a no-nonsense way and told me to go to sleep, so I did. The whole experience got my twenty-one-year-old self thinking, though. If we can remain aware when our disconnection from our body is so strong that we can’t even feel the pain of an operation—in other words, when the disconnect is *much, much* stronger than the physical disconnect we experience while sleeping and dreaming—surely it must be possible to stay conscious at the moment of death and discover what, if anything, lies beyond that moment.

In his book *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle says: “Death is a stripping away of all that is not you. The secret of life is to ‘die before you die’—and find that there is no death.”<sup>316</sup> What does that mean? To me, it means we need to recognise ourselves as being more than this body, this gender, this mortal and apparently “separate” being. Many of us have false assumptions

about consciousness—and I’m not claiming to have all the answers—but it’s a good idea to question our deepest assumptions and belief systems, and lucid dreaming is often a trigger for this. If we can raise our consciousness so that we experience more and more moments of clarity and lucid awareness in the waking and sleep states, we’re likely to begin to perceive ourselves as part of a much greater awareness, so death will only be a transition, not the end of everything. We can also “die before we die” in lucid dreams, and in doing so we will perhaps get much closer to discovering the ultimate nature of reality.

When we’re forced out of our physical body, we’re obliged to perceive differently not only our environment but also our sense of self. Fainting feels like a small death: have you ever felt how hard it is to return to your body from a dead faint, and how unmotivated you can feel to return because it’s so light and free being out of body, away from the sick chills, the pain? And of course *la petite mort* (“the small death”) of sleep is a transition all of us make several times every night, since all of us wake up at various points in the sleep cycle. There is huge potential for exploration—we have so many opportunities, so many portals that could lead us to all sorts of mysteries if only we let them. Ultimately death, too, is just a transition, if perhaps a rather psychedelic, windy one according to the Tibetan Buddhist belief system. Lucid dreaming and other lucidity practices could teach us how to become the eye of lucid awareness at the centre of the storm when the time comes, and become one with the light.

## Wake Up in Life + Wake Up in Dreams = Wake Up in Death?

It’s an attractive equation, isn’t it? Tibetan dream yoga, which as we’ve seen is about lucid dreaming and retaining consciousness throughout the sleep cycle in order to stay conscious after death, is considered one of the paths to enlightenment. Could we really become more enlightened beings if

we make lucid living and lucid dreaming an integral part of our lives? I'm not sure it matters, as long as we become kinder. Lucidity at any time of the day or night can help us in all areas of our life because it wakes us up to what really matters: shared human experience, love, and making the world a better, kinder place. Based on my own experiences, my research into the subject, and my optimistic nature, I think waking up in death must be possible, and I certainly intend to try it when the time comes, but there are no guarantees. At the very least, a combination of awareness practices, such as meditation and lucid dreaming, and experiences such as dissolving into oneness in the lucid void can be a source of spiritual comfort for those who are suffering a slow and painful dying process, and can help them to face death with equanimity.

I'd like to end this chapter with the story of an extraordinary woman who, through intensive meditation and lucid dream practice, may well have succeeded in seizing the ultimate possibility of lucid dreaming: that of sailing consciously into death. Aiha Zemp was a highly accomplished meditator and learnt lucid dreaming in just one week. She reported 160 lucid dreams in the year of her death, and her Zen meditation teacher, Dr. Peter Widmer, told me that thirty-two of these were what he would call "spiritual" because they were experiences of oneness and light: "In many of Aiha Zemp's lucid dreams, she found herself in oneness in nothing but just light, mostly white light, but also light of other colours. When I asked her about the meaning or significance of these dreams, she said, 'These dreams teach me to die.'" Aiha Zemp was born without forearms and legs, suffered from an incurable disease, and was in pain, so she chose to die in her native Switzerland when she was fifty-eight. One week before her chosen time, she had the following lucid dream.

I'm lying dead in this room with the view of the Rhine. Just after I die, you five carers go out onto the balcony and are holding sparklers ... You light the sparklers. Part of me leaves my body and this part is completely porous, it looks like a breath, slightly bluish, like

evaporating steam rising from a humidifier, except in a different form, a sort of body form but not really; and it's much bigger than you all are on the balcony. I float through the window without opening it and begin to pluck the stars from the sparklers out of the air as if I had hands, and start to play and dance with them. It's wonderful. Then I go away, up into the air, and dissolve. I wake up feeling happy.

Now, this is the part that always brings tears to my eyes: a week later, at the time of her death, Aiha's carers honoured her lucid dream. Peter told me:

We did exactly what the dream described. We went out onto the balcony and lit the waiting sparklers.

It's not just the beauty of the dream that moves me, or its stunning depiction of what the moment of death might be like. It's not even the awesome idea that perhaps Aiha succeeded in dying consciously. No, it's the loving, respectful way that those who cared for Aiha helped her lucid dream to become reality at the ultimate moment of life: death.

#### **Practice #69: Lucidly Connect with the Dead and the Divine**

Many people long to dream of their deceased loved ones just to be gifted with one more moment of connection with them, or to be able to say what they always meant to say to them. In a lucid dream, you can ask to see your deceased loved one as soon as you realise that you're dreaming. If the person appears, keep calm! Too many people have told me they woke up too soon from this kind of healing bereavement dream. Remember to breathe and stay present.

If the person you want to see doesn't appear immediately, try the usual tricks: declare that when you pull back the curtain/open the door/turn around, you will see them. If all else fails and the person does not appear to you, accept this. Don't get too attached to physically seeing them. Close your eyes or sit calmly and focus instead on experiencing a moment of lucid connection with your

memories of them. This too can be a very powerful and healing thing to do in a lucid dream.

To connect with the divine in a lucid dream, voice a request as soon as you get lucid, such as “Let me experience the divine!” or “Take me to the light!” If nothing much happens, you need to adjust your mental state. Try meditating or repeating a mantra or a prayer. Try flying upwards as far and as fast as you can, until the dream dissolves. Or try filling your dream body with golden light that cascades down over your head. Keep your focus on the divine as the highest source of love and light, and be open to what happens next.

### **Practice #70: Lucid Dreaming into Dying**

- Discover how you really feel about death. Work with your fears and be lucid about them. Go into your lucid dreams with a sense of hope and fearlessness and set about helping yourself to face your ideas, judgments, and hang-ups about death. Call out to the dream, “Show me my fear of death!” and be prepared to face the shadow with love and compassion.

- If you are psychologically stable and not suffering from anxiety or mental health disorders, you might be interested in practising dying in your lucid dreams, with full conscious awareness that you will wake safely from this experience. Try this kind of extreme lucid dreaming practice only if you feel ready for it, and remember the “game over” button of waking yourself up if things become too intense.

- Ask the lucid dream a question about death and the dying process: “What happens when we die?” “Is there life after death?” or “What is the nature of death?” Then wait and see what happens.

- Spend more time in the Lucid Light that we readily encounter in the void, the gap between dreams, and the gap between thoughts. Increase the time you spend meditating, and when you become lucid in a dream, try calming your thoughts and allowing yourself to float peacefully above the dream scene. In one lucid dream of mine,



I am floating down a street wondering what it will be like to die.  
“I’ll be ready for it,” I think. I know instinctively that it will be wonderful: as light and free as floating in this dream body.

The feelings of floatiness in your dream body will help you to disengage from the dream content, and if you then decide to meditate, you may quite naturally drift into an experience of oneness and light.

These lucid dreams teach us to die.

[contents]

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## CHAPTER 24

# *Living a Lucid Life: Reality Creation and the Art of Happiness*

What if life were a dream? What would happen if we were to wake up in our life and live it lucidly? We could shrug off our fear of failure and unlock our deepest potential. We could cultivate healthier relationships. We could navigate life's ups and downs like skilled sailors. In short, we could become wide-awake dream magicians, working magic through our lives and the lives of others.

Lucid dreams can give us glimpses of radiance and enlightenment. They can show us deep truths. Finding ways of bringing these newfound insights and wisdom into waking life is one aspect of what is popularly known as "lucid living." A further aspect is that of viewing life as a waking dream, and in my view yet another aspect is honouring dreams with waking lucidity through dreamwork, as shown in the practices throughout this book. The concept of lucid living has become popular as people wake up to the idea of waking up in their lives.

What does it mean to wake up in our lives? It means bringing awareness and love into every aspect of our life. When we do this, our life will change for the better ... and when our own lives improve, we become naturally more able to help others. When we feel separate from life and from other people, as if we're completely on our own and nobody can help us, we risk

deep dissatisfaction and depression. Plenty of people have told me they feel this sense of separation, and they long for wholeness.

How do we stop feeling “separate”? Lucid dream figures and dream furniture are simply the external manifestation of the dream, and when we look at a dream figure, we know there is an underlying awareness there—the underlying awareness of the dream. Similarly, when we look at a person in waking life, there is more to them than their external appearance; they have a deeper awareness. If we address ourselves to this deeper awareness, we will grow a more profound connection with others and feel less separate ourselves. If we look deeply into the eyes of others, it’s easier to engage with them authentically, from the heart, because we see beyond the façade of body, ego, and external appearance to the timeless, eternal awareness we all share. This is soul.

Deep lucid dreaming experiences of light, oneness, or soulful encounters can help us to feel connected to all of life and understand our purpose.

## Discovering Our Role in the Universe

Through lucid dreaming we can experience a profound connection with our planet, the universe, and the underlying energy of life itself. Such experiences may help us to understand what our own role in the unfolding of the universe might be. One lucid dreamer, Kimberley Jones, had the following transformative lucid dream:

I am walking into the most beautiful garden. It feels like heaven on earth. There is light, energy, and love glowing from every flower, every blade of grass, and even the stone sculptures and garden furniture. The other people in the garden are filled with love, they have open hearts; they are awakened and radiant. I feel so safe in this place. Children are skipping around laughing in the sunshine and as I look around I see his holiness the Dalai Lama playing on a tree swing, he smiles at me ...

Other radiant and divine beings appear, just walking in this beautiful garden and relaxing.

*I become fully lucid in this space and acknowledge that this is how the world could feel if we live with open hearts and create from that place.*

I make a determined effort to commit the feeling of this place to memory and set an intention that when I wake up, all my work, whether it is mentoring, art, writing, or film-making, needs to feel like this. If I can embed this frequency of energy into all I do then perhaps I stand a chance of creating some version of this beautiful place for myself and others.

This lucid dream has informed how I work ever since.

Kimberley's lucid dream—along with the action that follows on from it—embodies the concept of living a lucid life. Such lucid dreams often become unforgettable life experiences that the dreamer can draw on for inspiration or succour. There are many other lucid dreaming “lessons” or skills that could help us to live our best life. A lucid dream I once had featuring a wild alter ego brought home to me the importance of bringing lucid skills into waking life:

I know I'm dreaming, in an action scene looking through the windscreen of a car as it's being driven along very fast. The driver is an amazing woman with wild red hair who puts her fist through the windscreen while declaring with rock-solid intent: “The hand is fine! The hand is fine!”

I watch in fascination as the skin on her hand, which begins to rip open as it passes through the glass, heals and reforms through her pure intent. Wow, she is an incredible lucid dreamer, I think, and if she can bring that skill, that single-minded intent, into her waking life, that will be pure practical magic!

I'm not suggesting we all go and start punching out windows to see how strong our waking intent is, but this dream raises a big question: How do we

bring the knowledge we gain through lucid dreaming into the waking world? Everyone is different and will learn slightly different lessons from lucid dreaming, but how do we bring in, say, the understanding that dream figures are part of us, or that nothing and nobody in dreams or in waking life is truly separate ... or that thoughts and intentions can shape reality?

## Living Life as a Dream

Lucid dreaming teaches us about the aliveness of the present moment: it feels so wonderful to wake up inside a dream that all our senses seem heightened. This helps us to be absolutely aware in the here and now—something that is much harder (but still possible) to achieve in the mêlée of waking life. Lucid states of consciousness can trigger an understanding that just as we can manifest events in a lucid dream when we grasp the nature of thought-responsive environments, so we can shape our waking reality with focused intent.

When we become lucid in a dream, we can witness the way the dream unfolds and wonder about the symbolism of the imagery. When we learn to adopt this mindful, witnessing stance in our waking life, we get perspective on the situation we're in and we become aware of the patterns we are co-creating or the "message" that waking life events have for us. This is living life as a dream: understanding the patterns, synchronicities, and recurring themes of our life and appreciating their deeper purpose while knowing that we are aware enough to change our life in positive ways.

When I was eight years old, I was very upset one afternoon and went outside to cry alone. In the midst of my tears, I saw a vision of my future self, a kind-eyed grown-up who told me with great warmth and love, "If you don't love yourself, then nobody else will love you." She said other things, too, like "If you don't like things, you can change them." In the space of less than a minute, she taught me the power of action. She taught me the value of self-worth. She taught me that I could change my life. It was a strange, unforgettable moment that woke me up to the possibility of

living a lucid life. As I gradually grasped the rules of reality creation, got deeply into lucid dreaming, and taught myself how to live a lucid life, I developed what I call the ALIVE code.

Cultivating the five elements of the ALIVE code—awareness, love, insight, visualisation, and expectation—leads to a natural attunement to synchronicities and flow. When we have cultivated these elements to the extent that they become second nature, it is possible to navigate waking life creatively. In doing so, we become happier, more fulfilled ... and more alive.

## The ALIVE Code for Reality Creation and a Lucid Life

**Awareness:** Act on lucidity cues as you go about your day. Anything unexpected will work, as will beauty, strangeness, and synchronicities. It might be the unexpected wail of an ambulance, the synchronicity of thinking about an old friend for the first time in months only to find an email from him in your inbox, the surreal beauty of a blue flower growing out of spongy moss, the smell of burnt toast, or the shock of seeing the opal ring you dreamed about last night turn up on the finger of a supermarket cashier. Treat these little jolts as lucidity cues. Ask yourself, “Am I dreaming right now?” Do a reality check, and imagine what you would do if this moment was in fact a dream. Work on waking up to the here and now of your life: the eternal present moment. Live in the moment! This moment is really all there is. Be aware of the Lucid Light; the conscious awareness that underlies every thought, word, and action, and underpins all energy and matter. Are you dreaming?

**Love:** Imagine how the world would change if we went about our daily lives with the understanding that we are all deeply interconnected. If we accept even partially the psychological idea that dream figures represent different parts of ourselves, this makes us more open to any message they

might have for us, and to resolving conflicts with them. Many readers of this book will have had the astonishing experience of watching the lucid dream transform when they open their hearts and send love to an aggressive dream figure or a fearful situation. In difficult waking life situations, if instead of reacting with fury or tears, we manage to summon love, we can witness similar transformations as other people unconsciously pick up on our change of heart. It's worth cultivating empathy and extending it to people, animals, and nature every day: nothing and nobody is completely separate. Cultivating love is the one major way to transform our own life and that of others.

Insight: View life situations as dream situations. Try asking yourself, "Why am I having this particular life experience? What would it mean if it were a dream?" When we navigate life as if it were a richly symbolic dream, we quickly see the deeper meaning of our experiences. A lady I know was nominated for a directorial position in a nonprofit organisation. In the election, which had a slate of candidates, she altruistically did not vote for herself, and in the end she lost to another candidate by just one vote. If she had voted for herself, it would have been a tie and she would still have had the chance to become a director! Examining the symbolism of this situation as if it were a dream showed her that she needed to cultivate her self-belief. Just as we can do Lucid Dreamplay and work with a dream while awake to bring greater lucidity to it, as shown in the practical methods in this book, so we can do "Lucid Lifeplay" with waking experiences for insight and guidance.

Visualisation: This element is bound up with reality creation. Use visualisation as a major tool not only to induce lucid dreams and practise what you want to do in them, but also to imagine situations for your own best life. A wonderful yoga teacher I worked with in Lisbon knew that my husband and I were trying for a baby. She told me that when she really wanted something to manifest in waking life, she would tell herself, "It has already happened," and strongly visualise herself in the desired situation, feeling happy and grateful. Gratitude is an extremely powerful emotion for



reality creation. I took her advice, and began dreaming of a little girl beyond a bridge, who I knew was my little girl. In one dream, she and I were playing at the seashore, chasing the waves and laughing. I meditated with this imagery and visualised it happening in waking life. Shortly afterwards, I became pregnant with my daughter.

The more we focus our imagination on a particular goal, the more likely that goal is to materialise in waking life, because we are imbuing it with energy, belief, and expectation. Similarly, the more we learn to bind dream images into our vision of a better life for ourselves and others, the more likely we are to manifest exactly what we and others need. When we tie our best dreams to our vision of our best life, everything we desire will manifest more easily. Should you have an inspiring, positive dream, it is helpful to meditate regularly on the imagery and feelings in order to create them in your waking life.

Expectation: Our thoughts, intentions, and expectations affect our waking reality. In lucid dreams, the speed with which we can manipulate the dream reality is impressive, and we can make things happen that never would in waking life. In a lucid dream, if we fully expect our right arm to grow longer, it probably will. Yet even in the apparently solid physical world we spend time in when we're awake, every thought we think is shaping our future. In this sense, the waking world is like a slow dream. Many lucid dreamers experiment with their ability to change things in the dream with focused intent and the expectation of success. When this lesson in reality creation is drummed home to us often enough in lucid dreams, we find ourselves noticing that the thoughts we think and the expectations we have also impact our waking reality. When we start to guide our thoughts to become more positive, compassionate, and happy when we're awake, our lives respond to this by becoming more harmonious and joyful.

Reality creation means creating your own best life, and cultivating the five elements of the ALIVE code gives us a good basis for doing this. Why not practise love and empathy, and why not expect life to work out for the best? I find it odd that some people seem to go out of their way to see the difficult

side of every past, present, and future situation. What kind of world do they create for themselves and others to live in? One day, my six-year-old daughter and her friend were walking to school and the friend said she didn't want to go, as she knew it wouldn't be any fun. My daughter said kindly, "If you say you think you'll have a fun day, and imagine it being fun, then you'll have a fun day!"

It's an easy enough concept to grasp; the difficulty can be in throwing off old patterns of thinking and training the mind to catch negative thoughts and expectations. This is lucidity practice. In time, it becomes second nature to transform unhelpful thoughts into happier, more constructive ones, and in doing so, we become fully lucid in our lives.

### Practice #71: Stay ALIVE

These practices will help you to follow the ALIVE code for a lucid life by integrating awareness, love, insight, visualisation, and expectation into your actions and reactions.

- **Awareness: develop a physical lucidity anchor.** It can be helpful to create a physical gesture or movement to link with the jolts of lucidity or heightened awareness you experience as you go about your day. Synchronicities or surprising, beautiful, dreamlike events usually trigger waking lucidity. Let's say you open your car door and a butterfly flies out. Startled, you do a reality check and at the same time you might curl your fingertips into your palm, or gently bite the tip of your tongue. This creates a physical anchor to the feeling of lucid awareness, and not only will this remind you to be more aware, but you may also find yourself doing the anchor in a dream and realising you are actually dreaming.

- **Love: create a circle of love.** Love is an incredibly transformative power, and it is at the very heart of reality creation. When we expand our capacity to love, and extend this love generously outwards to other people and the universe in general, we create a beneficial ripple effect and our lives begin to change for the better. Think of someone you love

unconditionally—this might be a child or even a pet. Sit calmly with closed eyes and quietly focus on this pure, warm love. Allow the love to grow in your heart. You might imagine it as a radiant light or a pink orb.

When the love feels very strong, imagine you are sitting in a circle of people; these may be family, friends, work colleagues, or total strangers from around the world. Include at least one person who has upset or hurt you. Now send your love around the circle and watch it expand and grow as it travels through these people and they add their own love to it. By the time it comes back to you, it is amplified. Feel this wonderful shared love fill and nourish you. There is more than enough love in the world for everyone, and you have plenty to give. Savour this feeling and carry it with you into your life and your dealings with others. Any resentment, hatred, or grudges you carry will gradually dissolve, leaving you with more energy with which to create your own best life. Practise feeling love in your heart every day, and your life will transform.

• **Insight: ask the dream of life for guidance.** If life were a dream, what would it mean? When we view life situations as dreams, we can gain insight into why they're happening and what they're trying to teach us. For decades, I have checked in with myself about my life, even when things are going well, to make sure I don't slide into living life as a habit rather than as an alive, conscious event. I ask myself, "Am I making the best of my life and helping others enough? Am I doing what I'm supposed to do? If this life I'm leading now were a lucid dream, what would I want to change about it?" Whenever I do this soul searching, something happens in my life to answer my questions. I'll get an email from someone I've helped in some way, or an offer to work on an exciting new project, or a new friend will enter my life and inspire me.

It's good to look at life as if it's a big dream, and react responsively. Just as we can incubate a dream to gain insight into a situation, or do Lucid Dreamplay to tease out a dream's meaning, so we can do Lucid Lifeplay and ask the dream of life a question: "Is this the life I want to lead?" "Am I doing my best in life?" "Can I be kinder, more compassionate?" "How can I help others most?" "Who do I need to forgive?" "Am I spending my time with the people I need to spend time with?" "Why am I experiencing this situation?" "What do I need to change in my life?" Once you have clearly formulated your question, send it up into the sky in an imaginary balloon and wait for life to come back to you with an answer.

- **Visualisation: the lucid dream theatre stage.** This is a simple, effective, and delightfully therapeutic exercise for creating your own best life. Lie down and totally relax. Close your eyes and think of your deepest desire. Clarify it and focus on it. Then imagine yourself on a beautiful stage, lit up by a warm spotlight. Watch as you receive your deepest desire. Look at your face light up as you realise that your greatest dream has come true! Feel the wonder and gratitude of knowing that you have received exactly what you wished for. This amazing event has already happened, and you feel fulfilled, grateful, and truly alive. Allow this feeling—this knowledge—to settle deep within you. As you come out of the experience by gently opening your eyes, know that you have created your own future reality. Treasure this knowledge and relive that amazing feeling of gratitude as often as you can.

- **Expectation: cultivate optimism.** Every thought we think and every expectation we have affects our reality. Thoughts are a light, mobile form of energy, and they have a strong creative power. If we think many negative, defeatist thoughts, we are soon likely to feel negative and defeated, and life will reflect our attitude by presenting us with negative events. You see this chain reaction when someone who

always stresses about not having enough money loses their wallet. The unconscious *expectation* that they will never have enough money manifests in an event where they lose money. The good news is, we can change our thoughts and expectations. And when we do, our lives improve.

Get intimate with your thoughts. Start watching them; notice the way they escalate around certain situations, or pop up out of the blue when you're doing something completely unrelated. What are your thoughts like? Set aside five minutes and go for a walk, outside or in your home. Notice every single thought you think. This is a little like meditation, except the goal here is to practise changing every negative, sad, uncharitable, unproductive, envious, or hopeless thought into something more optimistic. "I could never do that!" becomes "I can do anything I set my mind to." It's devastatingly simple, but the more we practise this thought-changing technique and modify our unconscious expectations, the sooner we'll find ourselves living a happier, more lucid life.

Cultivate optimism, keep noticing beauty, keep loving life and caring for others and our planet. Stay lucid!

[contents]

# *Conclusion*

**T**he more we explore lucid dreaming, the more its benefits and gifts will quite naturally expand into our waking life. Taking lucid dreaming as a template for waking life can turn the philosophy of lucid living into a way of life as we realise that we can guide and shape our lives in ways similar to how we guide and shape our dreams. When lucid dreaming is explored with respect, humour, gratitude, and kindness, it can teach us a lot about interacting with people in kind and respectful ways in waking life.

One lucid dream that stands out in the process of writing this book happened in 2014, when I was still clarifying my vision for the book. Day and night since I was seventeen years old, I have always worn a small amethyst necklace. That night I fell asleep holding the crystal in my fist, hoping this would remind me to stay aware while I fell asleep. I didn't manage it that time, but became lucid later in the night while flying through white corridors, and discovered that I was still holding the necklace! This intrigued me, especially as the crystal felt different in the dream—as if it were growing bigger as I flew.

The corridors led to a room where there was a full-length mirror. I hovered in front of it and looked at my reflected dream self. At first I only registered my eyes, then my gaze dropped a little and I saw that I was wearing a huge, multifaceted amethyst crystal necklace. It had immense power and presence and bristled with crystals. As I gazed at it, I was filled with gratitude. “This is a gift—a lucid dream gift!” I exclaimed. I felt so outlandishly happy and grateful that tears came to my eyes and I woke up.

This lucid dream felt like a confirmation from my dreams that I was on the right path with the book, and that lucid dreams are full of rich treasures. When I woke up, I drew the “magic crystal” and actually found it a few months later in waking life, in a shop in my hometown. It was already crafted as a pendant, and I couldn’t stop looking at it. Normally I would not have bought such a huge amethyst, but it felt right to honour the dream and accept this gift. Yes, this, too, is part of living a lucid life—buying yourself expensive items that you saw in a lucid dream! The lucidity around the magic crystal continues, because every time I wear it, I feel that my lucid dream gift is with me, helping me to become my best self.

In this book, we have looked at many ways of bringing into our lives the gifts of lucid dreaming, such as creativity, appreciation of beauty, healing, and happiness. We can draw the dream, work through nightmarish scenarios, heal trauma, consolidate skills, lighten our spirits, bring healing dream imagery into our body, and become more attuned to the present moment. As a lucid dreamer, you have the tools at your disposal to help yourself and others through life in many ways. Hopefully this book will remain useful to you as an ongoing resource and you’ll feel inspired to try out many of the different practical exercises and techniques as your path into lucidity deepens.

There are so many riches for each of us to discover, and as the technology improves, even people who have never had a lucid dream before may soon be able to lucid dream on demand! Have you ever wondered what the future of lucid dreaming might bring us all?

## The Future of Lucid Dreaming

We are heading into an incredible future. Already we have lucid dream masks to remind us to wake up in a dream, and it is even possible now to communicate with the mask while lucid dreaming, through eye movements. We can use magnetic imaging to observe the lucid dreaming brain, and Japanese scientists in Kyoto have developed a promising technology for

visually recording dreams, using an MRI machine to track neurological data and transform this into imagery with the help of a database of thousands of images.<sup>1</sup> Other technologies can record dream body movements and potentially even dream speech, by taping electronic sensors to the voice box during sleep.<sup>2</sup> One day it may be possible to watch an accurate movie of a person's dream while they are actually dreaming it!

We can already trigger lucid dreaming by direct electrical stimulation of the brain in the sleep lab. Over time, this technology will likely be miniaturised and made available to the public so that anyone can lucid dream on demand. As brain wave sensors improve, lucid dreamers may be able to communicate with computers from within their dreams by creating particular brain waves. Soon we may have the possibility of interacting with other lucid dreamers while asleep via mobile phone apps that we can "talk to" from a lucid dream using eye movements. Imagine getting a text message from a friend who is lucid in a dream when she sends it. Or imagine being asleep and dreaming, and then your friend, herself lucid in a dream, sends a signal via her phone app that triggers *your* phone app to remind you to get lucid too! The lucid dream world might one day become as intra-communicative as the internet, with mutual lucid dreaming an every-night occurrence. The possibilities seem endless.

Yet no matter how dazzling the technology is or how mind-blowing the science, only one element is crucial in the future of lucid dreaming: children. Children are the future. As adults, we can help the children in our lives to discover the amazing potential of lucid dreaming. It is only when we help children to see this potential that our world will truly transform. In a book I co-edited with Jean Campbell, *Sleep Monsters and Superheroes: Empowering Children through Creative Dreamplay*, I ask who is more likely to develop good self-esteem, creative thinking, and resourcefulness: the child being beaten down every night by nightmares she has no idea she can change, or the child who knows she can tame dragons in her lucid dreams, befriend scary witches, and swim like a dolphin?



Lucid dreaming can empower children to understand that they can change their lives for the better. When they stand up and face their dream monsters, they learn the courage and self-worth they'll need to stand up to playground bullies. When lucid dreaming is combined with Lucid Dreamplay, children and adults alike learn "dream intelligence"; that is, they learn resourcefulness, flexibility, empathy, and the value of intuition. These are important life skills.

As the potential of lucid dreaming for skill consolidation, trauma resolution, and consciousness exploration becomes better known, we will create a generation of children for whom lucid dreaming is something recognised and accepted. They will grow up with online courses on how to have lucid dreams, and will hopefully be educated about them at school too. Lucid dream masks, apps, and other lucidity induction devices will far outstrip anything there is currently on the market, making regular, frequent lucid dreams easily available to even the deepest sleeper. We'll learn ways of exploring the deeper spaces of lucid dreaming and of communicating with each other while in these spaces.

Dreaming consciousness operates continually at some level of awareness, whether we are awake or asleep. We are already living in a kind of dream, because the boundaries between sleeping and waking are way more permeable and intermingled than we tend to assume. We are already living the results of our combined, collective imagination, so in that sense, life is like an eternal lucid dream.

It will be exciting to see what the next generation of lucid dreamers discover about lucid dreaming, and how these discoveries change our world. In the meantime, every single night we have the opportunity to discover more about our own inner world.

## Lucid Dreaming a Better World into Being

Working with dreams could help the state of the world. We need to nurture our communities and take care of everyone on an equal level. Why not

draw on the huge connective power of dreaming to heal our fractured world? We all dream, and so we all speak the language of dreams. When we are familiar with this universal language, we can reach out across cultures, religions, and other self-created divides to connect at a deep level.

When we dream, we are all equal. When we listen to the dreams of others, we are respectfully enabling them to show us a piece of their soul. When we share dreams, we see each other on a level deeper than cultural and linguistic differences, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation. We see each other on the soul level.

We each have individual dreams every night, but there is also a bigger dream—the dream of life that we all co-create through our collective unconscious, our shared universal images and deep-rooted associations. We can see life as a collective lucid dream: a dream that needs healing. Look at what is happening in our world, which we all co-create together on a daily (and nightly) basis. If life on our planet were a dream, what might it mean?

In one version of the “life on our planet” dream, there are people on a beach, having fun with their families. But over there, in a darker corner of the dream, people are fighting, killing each other. Children are going hungry. And right in the middle of that happy beach scene, there’s an explosion as all that negative energy from the other part of the dream manifests. Now everyone is in turmoil, fearful, bleeding, shouting blame, pointing fingers, suffering.

How can we heal this nightmare?

Let’s lucidly reenter it and change the story. Let’s imagine that instead of the explosion, the people on the beach and the fighting men and the hungry children sit in a circle together and share first food and then dreams. Let’s imagine them filling their bellies and their hearts, and beginning to smile at each other as they understand that we are all one and the same: we are all human beings, alive on this blue and green planet. And we can live together in peace.

Does this sound too easy, like wishful thinking? Having read this book, you’ll have noticed how quickly nightmares can be transformed through

Lucid Dreamplay or dream lucidity. You'll be familiar with the power of thoughts, visualisations, and imaginings to change our dreams and our waking lives.

Changing the world is only one step further.

I think of reality as being like a “slow lucid dream”; we can't always change it as quickly as the mobile, responsive imagery of lucid dreams, but every thought we put out there, every prejudice, judgment, and flicker of hatred we feel, ripples outward and affects the whole world—slowly. If we have the presence of mind to change those thoughts instantly into happier, peaceful ones, and take a moment each day to firmly envision peaceful humanity and well-nourished children from every corner of the world playing together, we are doing our bit to help co-create our best world. We are all interconnected, so why not help each other?

## Deep Lucid Dreaming

Deep lucid dreaming allows us to experience the overwhelming understanding that we are all interconnected, and that we are part of something far bigger than ourselves. This “something bigger” seems intrinsically linked to the Lucid Light. This light is clearly discernible in white light lucid dreams, deep meditation, and lucid states such as floating in the black void. The Lucid Light can be any colour. It can be emerald green. It can be purple. It is the original, alive, aware light from which everything—all other states of consciousness, from hypnagogia to alert daytime awareness, and all energy, matter, and physical forms—seems to emerge. It is always there as a baseline state of consciousness, and as such it makes up the “gap between dreams” just as it makes up the spaces in our regular daytime awareness.

In *The Art of Happiness*, the Dalai Lama says of meditation: “When you are able to stop your mind from chasing sensory objects ... you will begin to see underneath this turbulence of the thought process. There is an underlying stillness, an underlying clarity of the mind. You should try to

observe or experience this ...”<sup>3</sup> This clarity of mind is an experience of the Lucid Light, and the more we can tap into this underlying awareness, the more lucid we become, in dreams and in waking life.

We can bring the Lucid Light into our lives in many ways because it’s always there: all we have to do is notice it. We can reach it through meditation, noticing synchronicities, being aware of the creative energy of our thoughts, cultivating intuition, pausing to marvel at beauty or strangeness, taking time to daydream, observing nature and plant life, noticing the flow of breath in and out of our body, observing hypnagogic imagery, and feeling thankful for all that we have. And, of course, we bring the Lucid Light into our lives through lucid dreaming.

### When the Paradox of Identity Vanishes

In bodiless lucid experiences where we directly experience or even seem to become pure, formless awareness or Lucid Light, the paradox of identity vanishes: we no longer identify with a dreaming “I.” We no longer feel separate. We experience unity, oneness, and interconnection. In *The Paradox of Lucid Dreaming*, Rory Mac Sweeney recounts a life-changing lucid dream where he asks the question that Einstein considered to be the most important to ask the cosmos, and receives an answer in the form of an experience of the Lucid Light.

I stared into a vast naked sky, filled my lungs with intention and shouted, “Is the universe a friendly place?” ... As I looked on in wonder the sky and stars began to swirl. Soon the rest of the dream did too, including me. I was whisked up into this perfect storm of cosmic colours and spread like butter across the whirling sky. Everything became intensely bright and warm and began to glow like some brilliant luminous vibrating energy. I had lost any sense of my own body and could no longer perceive of here or there. I had completely dissolved into the dream and I was vibrating with the most intense, orgasmic sensation I had ever felt. <sup>4</sup>

Upon waking, Rory comments: “It was terrifying to have lost myself and yet it felt safe and familiar, like one had returned to the womb of creation itself ... I felt the deep connection between all things and a boundlessness of time. Everything seemed eternal. For me the world would never be the same. I was certain of something so much bigger than me, something so much more powerful that I could only describe as magic.”<sup>5</sup> In lucid dreams like this one, we are made aware through direct experience that ultimately there is no paradox of identity, because everything is one.

Lucid dreaming has taught me how important it is to live life *now*, with love and lucidity. In my four decades of lucid dream exploration, blissful interludes of floating in formless light are the experiences that have moved me most profoundly, more so than the many psychologically revealing lucid dreams I’ve had, or even those beautiful lucid dreams of flying across surreal landscapes, my skin tingling all over. This is because a direct experience of the Lucid Light seems all one could ever want or need. Lucidity is effortless. There is an overwhelming understanding that everything is infinitely interconnected. It’s a loving cosmic embrace and simultaneously a universal knowing that everything is as it should be: in this moment, right now, everything is perfect.

This is the deepest form of lucidity.

## Wake Up!

Great spiritual teachers refer to waking up. Buddha is known as “the awakened one”; Jesus rose from the dead; Sufis speak of “awakening.” Enlightenment is waking up to oneness: experiencing oneness *with lucid awareness*.

Waking up is a spiritual act that is repeated throughout our lives. Something jolts us in our daily or nightly sleep, and we wake up from our habitual unconsciousness. Can you pinpoint some of the bigger awakenings in your life? My first lucid dream at age three was one of my earliest awakenings. It not only awakened me physically from my nightmare of

drowning, but also awakened me spiritually to the power and mystery of the world of dreams. In retrospect, that dream held within it a metaphor for my whole life. In my dream, I recognised that I had a choice: I could stay asleep and continue to struggle and drown, or I could wake up. I decided to wake up. We will all awaken many times in our lives through moments of insight or discovery; moments where we fully register the here and now; moments of danger, change, and extreme emotion, where our vision of our world shifts.

Imagine for a moment a vast black sky. Imagine that each time we wake up in our lives, a new star appears in the sky. Sometimes this star will be a tiny pinprick of vital light, but some life events wake us so thoroughly that a burst of light materialises in the blackness. Now imagine each lucid dream we have as another awakening that also sends a star into the black sky. As we wake up more in life and in dreams, what will eventually happen? More and more light will come through and the sky will grow lighter and lighter.

We will be able to see more clearly.

And finally, after countless mini-awakenings, we will be immersed in the Lucid Light. This is when the great awakening comes, in the form of a state of grace, a deep understanding of life and its mysteries, and a sense of complete connection and oneness.

When we go with open hearts into bodiless lucid experiences and practise “soul flying” in the Lucid Light, we get an immersive glimpse of this greater awakening, its profound bliss and safety. We get other glimpses of grace when we notice the here and now with lucid awareness and open our hearts to life.

When we cultivate waking lucidity and dream lucidity, we take steps towards enlightenment.

Where will your lucid dreams lead you?

I wish you luck exploring all that emerges from the Lucid Light.

1. Horikawa et al., “Neural Decoding of Visual Imagery During Sleep.”
2. Oldis, “Can We Turn Our Dreams into Watchable Movies?”
3. Dalai Lama and Cutler, *The Art of Happiness*, 264.
4. Mac Sweeney, *The Paradox of Lucid Dreaming*, 166–167.
5. Ibid.

# APPENDIX I

## *A Brief History of Lucid Dreaming*

**H**umans have probably been lucid dreaming for millennia. Lucid dreaming has long been a deep spiritual practice in traditions such as sufism and shamanism, and in *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*, author Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche notes that the Tibetan shamanic Bön tradition claims an unbroken lineage that is seventeen thousand years old.<sup>1</sup> Of course, it's impossible to trace the beginnings of such things because of a lack of written sources, and in fact the earliest written mention of lucid dreaming didn't appear until the fourth century BCE, when the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote: "For often, when one is asleep, there is something in consciousness which declares that what then presents itself is but a dream."<sup>2</sup> Despite Aristotle's lucid musings, the first surviving written account of a lucid dream did not appear for another eight hundred years: in 415 CE, Saint Augustine wrote a letter relating the lucid dream of a physician named Gennadius, as described in chapter 23 on death and the divine.

The dream yoga of Tibetan Buddhists around the eighth century CE focused on learning to maintain full awareness throughout sleep and dreaming. Lucid dreaming is an integral part of this tradition, which is viewed as one of the paths to enlightenment. Anyone who looks into the ancient Tibetan texts can see how far ahead of Westerners dream yogis were in terms of the value they placed on lucidity and waking up in life in order to see through the illusory nature of reality. In the West at that point in



history, we find only smatterings of vague references to lucid dreaming. For example, the Spanish Sufi Ibn al-Arabi is on record as saying that “a person must control his thoughts in a dream. The training of this alertness ... will produce great benefits for the individual.”<sup>3</sup>

Eventually, in the nineteenth century, with the advent of more scientific thinking, people seemed ready to move away from previous views of dreams as being sent by gods or demons, and a few pioneers began to investigate their own lucid dreams in a methodical manner. In 1867, the Marquis d’Hervey de Saint-Denys, a self-taught and intrepid lucid dreamer, wrote a fascinating and in-depth book about his experiences.<sup>4</sup> This was likely the first time the phrase “lucid dreams” (*rêves lucides*) was coined in the West. In those days, book distribution was not what it is nowadays, and Saint-Denys’s book failed to reach a wide audience. Unfortunately, despite his best efforts, Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalytic theory, was unable to get hold of a copy. Perhaps because of this, the first edition of his seminal work in 1899, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, made absolutely no mention of lucid dreaming.

Then along came Dutch psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden, who in 1913 presented a paper called “A Study of Dreams” to a meeting of the Society for Psychical Research.<sup>5</sup> He reported 352 of his own lucid dreams and the experiments he had done while lucid. At around the same time, French biologist Yves Delage was also writing down and examining his own lucid dreams, as was Englishwoman Mary Arnold-Forster, who trained herself to become lucid in nightmares and wrote a book, *Studies in Dreams*.

Gradually, the subject of lucid dreaming began to spread in the West. The Russian philosopher Piotr Ouspensky wrote about his own conscious dreams in 1931, and in the mid- to late thirties, two men got their work on lucid dreaming into mainstream psychological journals. Alward Embury Brown reported nearly a hundred of his own lucid dreams in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, with the aim of showing his sceptical colleagues that lucid dreaming was substantially different from daydreaming, and Harold von Moers-Messmer presented twenty-two of his lucid dreams in *Archiv für*

*Psychologie*. Englishman Hugh Callaway became a proficient lucid dreamer, and in 1939 he published his experiences in a book called *Astral Projection* under his pen name of Oliver Fox.

Sleep and dream studies began to kick off in earnest when in 1903, Eugene Aserinsky and Nathaniel Kleitman from the University of Chicago discovered rapid eye movement sleep (REM). The stages of sleep were later classified by William Dement and Kleitman, and a surge of studies into the psychophysiology of sleep ensued. Alongside this surge of scientific interest in dreaming, some key books were emerging. In 1971, English parapsychologist Dr. Celia Green wrote *Lucid Dreams*, based on case studies from the Institute of Psychophysical Research. Green's book had a certain impact, as it was scholarly and pulled together the writings of previous lucid dream explorers such as Mary Arnold-Forster and Oliver Fox. Meanwhile, American parapsychologist Charles Tart reprinted thirty-five scientific papers on a range of consciousness-related topics, including van Eeden's "A Study of Dreams," in his book *Altered States of Consciousness*. In the early seventies, Carlos Castaneda's novels introduced many readers to the idea of finding their hands in a lucid dream, both to trigger lucidity and to stabilise the dream.

Another lucid dreaming author who had an impact was British-born psychotherapist Ann Faraday. She wrote two popular books in the early to mid-seventies, *Dream Power* and *The Dream Game*, which did much to promote a wider familiarity with lucid dreaming. Then clinical psychologist Patricia Garfield's classic book *Creative Dreaming* was published in 1974 and became a bestseller, which did a great deal to popularise lucid dreaming. Along with Strephon Kaplan-Williams, Rev. Jeremy Taylor, and Dr. Gayle Delaney, Dr. Patricia Garfield is one of the four original co-founders of the International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD). The IASD has done a vast amount to promote and support the study of dreams on an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and personal level around the globe, as well as creating a vibrant, growing community of people who love dreams. For the past thirty-four years, this widely respected organisation

has united artists, scientists, therapists, and regular dreamers during its annual and regional conferences, which offer an exciting range of talks and workshops on all aspects of dreams, dreamwork, and lucid dreaming.

At the time that *Creative Dreaming* came out, the IASD was still just a twinkle in the eyes of a few dreamers, and lucid dream science was on the cusp of a breakthrough. A young PhD researcher, English psychologist Keith Hearne, was figuring out a way to scientifically verify the existence of lucid dreaming. As described in chapter 1, Hearne had the ingenious idea of hooking up his subject, prolific lucid dreamer Alan Worsley, to an electroencephalogram (EEG) and asking him to make sweeping left-right eye movements as soon as he became lucid in a dream. On April 12, 1975, Worsley became the first person to send a deliberate message from the dream world. Hearne's experiment had been successful and lucid dreaming history was made. As Hearne's doctoral work progressed, he noticed a consistent pre-lucid REM burst, indicating that cortical stimulation was triggering lucidity.

On the other side of the globe, a handful of other people were carrying out academic research into lucid dreaming. Scott Sparrow did his master's thesis on lucid dreaming as an evolutionary process, and in 1976 he wrote the first book on lucid dreaming to come out in North America, *Lucid Dreaming: Dawning of the Clear Light*. Dr. Jayne Gackenbach completed her doctoral dissertation on a personality and cognitive style analysis of lucid dreaming in 1978, and founded *Lucidity Letter*, a publication that enabled a lively exchange of ideas, theories, and opinions among lucid dream researchers. Both sides of the Atlantic were waking up to the potential of lucid dreaming.

In 1981, six years after Dr. Keith Hearne's scientific breakthrough, Stanford psychophysiolgogist Dr. Stephen LaBerge presented his own similar, independently evolved doctoral research findings at an annual meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies (APSS). He then went on to write two wonderful books, *Lucid Dreaming* and *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*, which greatly helped to popularise the subject.

Academic research branched out into diverse and fascinating areas of lucid dreaming: for example, Dr. Fariba Bogzaran's 1989 master's thesis examined experiences of the divine in lucid dream states. Since those days, hundreds of other studies on the nature and potential of lucid dreaming have been carried out by lucid dream researchers from around the globe. Many of these excellent research studies in areas ranging from neuroscience to psychology appear in the pages of this book, as do the works of popular authors on the subject.

The most recent major scientific breakthrough in the field of lucid dreaming when this book went to press was the 2014 study led by German psychologist and lucid dream researcher Ursula Voss and colleagues, who found that a 40 hertz electrical stimulation of the scalp during REM sleep triggered lucidity in 77 percent of subjects, even though none of them had experienced lucid dreaming before and were not used to recalling their dreams.

With the expansion of the internet over the past decades, new opportunities for lucid dreamers to connect with each other, share experiences, and learn from each other have multiplied, and we can expect new, exciting additions to the historical story of lucid dream research. You are a part of this! Every lucid dreamer can do their own in-the-dream experiments to further knowledge of this extraordinarily beautiful state of consciousness.

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1. Wangyal, *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep*, 213.
  2. Aristotle, *On Dreams*, 702–706.
  3. Shah, *The Sufis*, 141.
  4. Saint-Denys, *Les Rêves et les Moyens de les Diriger*.
  5. Eeden, "A Study of Dreams," 431–461.

## APPENDIX II

### *An Invitation to Dream Lucidly*

#### The Dangers of Lucid Dreaming

Watch out! You're about to wake up in your dreams.

Wrap the duvet tightly around you,  
flip a light switch to be sure you're not awake  
and beware—this is the moment of no return.

Lucid dreaming can seriously damage your sadness.  
It can blow your world view out of the water,  
force you to question the laws of physics,  
the workings of the universe.

Once you get lucid, you won't be able to stop  
seeing beauty everywhere.  
You are in serious danger of  
starring in your own movie,  
coming face to face with wisdom,  
discovering you're alive.

You are in serious danger of losing  
your cherished separateness,  
your worst nightmares.  
You might even learn to fly.  
You risk waking up laughing:  
in extreme cases, joyfulness can persist for days.

You are in serious danger of discovering

you're more than you thought you could be:  
artist, magician, hedonist, wise soul.  
Think how much will change if you fall in love  
with your dream life, your waking life;  
life itself!

If lucid dreaming gets in your mind,  
blaze new trails.  
If it gets in your heart,  
ask to know your heart's desire.  
If it gets in your soul,  
wake up for real,  
see that all of life is one  
big magical dream.

—Clare R. Johnson, PhD

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# *Glossary of Terms*

**aha moment:** The moment of deep insight that can come when a dream is worked with to unwrap its meaning.

**ALIVE code for reality creation and a lucid life:** Cultivating the five elements of awareness, love, insight, visualisation, and expectation leads to a natural attunement to synchronicities and flow, and is a keystone of living lucidly.

**Archetypal Lucid Idea Images (ALI-Images):** The multisensory, kinaesthetic, numinous, emotive images that emerge in lucid dreaming.

**archetypes:** Universal, archaic images, patterns, and energies that have existed throughout all cultures for all time.

**automatism:** An unconsciously performed act.

**bardo:** The after-death state in the Tibetan Buddhist belief system.

**bodiless lucid experiences (BLEs):** When the dream body disappears and we often no longer identify with a dreaming “I,” but experience unity, oneness, and interconnection.

**circadian rhythm disorders:** Disruptions to the internal body clock that regulates the twenty-four-hour cycle of biological processes.

**CLEAR stabilisation technique:** A technique used to prolong and stabilise lucid dreams: calm down, look around, engage with the dream, announce that this is a dream, recall what you’d like to do.

**collective unconscious:** The universal part of the unconscious mind that is derived from ancestral memory and experience common to all humankind.

**conscious:** Awake; aware; alive to our own existence, thoughts, sensations, and surroundings.

**Continuous Control Technique:** Continually attempting to direct and control a dream.

**deep lucid dreaming:** Profound lucid dream experiences, such as floating lucidly in deep dream space. See [www.DeepLucidDreaming.com](http://www.DeepLucidDreaming.com).

**dream body:** In a dream, we generally have a dream body that can run, fly, have sex, shrink, or expand, and can take on the form of animals, birds, or other people.

**dream control:** A lucid dreamer can guide the dream events and environment by utilising intent or consciously interacting with dream figures.

**dream figures:** The characters who show up in our dreams. People, animals, trees, mythical beings, or objects imbued with consciousness can all be described as dream figures.

**dream furniture:** Imagery in dreams that represents what we know from waking reality, such as the sky, houses, trees, people, roads, rivers, and vehicles. The dream seems to automatically create these habitual scenes without the lucid dreamer needing to intend anything.

**dream intelligence:** Development of empathy, mental flexibility, intuition, self-awareness, and resourcefulness through lucid dreaming and Lucid Dreamplay.

**dream signs:** Anything that causes us to question our reality and gives us a clue that we are dreaming. Recognising common personal dream imagery can trigger lucidity, as can bizarre events or imagery.

**dream telepathy:** The communication of thoughts, ideas, or information by means other than the known senses, while asleep and dreaming.

**dreamwork:** Engaging with a dream while awake to gain insight and understanding.

**ego:** The self-aware part of ourselves; the “I.” This includes traits and qualities we believe ourselves to have; our sense of self-identity, including name, age, and gender.

**Elevator Hypothesis for Hypnagogic States:** Hypnagogic and hypnopompic states are hybrid states of consciousness that allow us to access almost any state of consciousness. They can be compared with an elevator that can let you out on any “floor” of consciousness.



**Finger-Induced Lucid Dream (FILD) technique:** A technique of moving the fingers very slightly while falling asleep as a way of entering a lucid dream.

**hypnagogia:** Pre-sleep imagery and pre-sleep audio or somatic sensations such as buzzing or falling.

**hypnopompia:** Post-sleep sensory experiences and sensations that occur as we are waking up from sleep.

**hypnotherapy:** A therapeutic technique that uses guided relaxation and hypnosis.

**IASD:** The International Association for the Study of Dreams,  
[www.asdreams.org](http://www.asdreams.org).

**imagery:** The vivid moving pictures that appear in dreams and the imagination, or the surreal photographic-like snippets, lights, or shapes that appear in the pre-sleep state.

**imagery rehearsal therapy (IRT):** An altered, happier version of a nightmare is written down and a daily imagery exercise is done with this new, positive version.

**insomnia:** An inability to sleep well. This might mean trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, or a tendency to wake up too early.

**intent, clarity, and expectation (ICE):** Core lucidity practices for creating a lucid mindset, raising the chances of becoming lucid in a dream.

**ISA Problem-Solving Technique:** Asking the lucid dream for help: incubate a dream, stabilise it, and ask for help with a particular problem.

**L.O.V.E. Nightmare Empowerment Technique:** A way of working with children's nightmares: listen to their dream, offer options, verify their progress, and empower them.

**lucidity cue:** Something odd or surprising that prompts a dreamer to realise he is dreaming.

**lucid dream:** A dream where the dreamer is aware that she is dreaming *while she is dreaming*.

**lucid dream mask:** An electronic lucidity-triggering device worn by the sleeper, preprogrammed to deliver cues (e.g., in the form of flashing

lights) to remind the person to get lucid.

**lucid dream mentors:** Dream figures who seem to have a teaching purpose. They give the dreamer advice or solace, or show him something important.

**lucid dream physics:** In dreams, the laws of physics are not what they are in the waking state. Gravity can be weak or non-existent, and we can dive through a mirror into a new dream.

**lucid dream therapy:** Working with lucid dreams in therapeutic ways, e.g., for psychological healing or to resolve recurring nightmares.

**Lucid Dreamplay:** Working and playing with a dream while awake in ways that mirror the possibilities of lucid dreaming.

**lucid gaze:** The alert, highly conscious gaze of the lucid dreamer. The lucid gaze focuses awareness within the dream and helps to stabilise it.

**lucid hypnagogia:** Staying lucidly aware during pre-sleep imagery and sensations.

**Lucid Hypnagogia Technique:** Observing pre-sleep imagery to enter a lucid dream.

**Lucid Imaging Nightmare Solution (LINS):** A nightmare is worked with immediately upon awakening from it. The dreamer imagines she is lucid and recreates possible solutions to the nightmare.

**Lucid Lifeplay:** The waking equivalent of Lucid Dreamplay; working with waking life experiences for insight and guidance.

**Lucid Light:** The baseline state of consciousness; the underlying creative substance from which all forms, matter, and states of consciousness arise.

**Lucid Light Theory of Dreams and Reality:** Our baseline state of consciousness is not the waking state, but the Lucid Light: a luminosity alive with potential. This is the light we emerge from as conscious beings, and it is the light we return to at the moment of dying.

**lucid mindset:** An alert, aware state of mind in which noticing and questioning the nature of conscious experience becomes an ingrained habit. This sets up lucid dreaming.

**lucid nightmares:** Scary dreams where we are lucid but nonetheless feel that we are not able to change the content of the dream.

**lucid suspension:** When we find ourselves suspended in what feels like infinite space, in a state of effortless lucidity.

**lucid trance:** A light trance entered into from the waking state. Lucid dream imagery is relived and played with in a highly creative, intuitive way.

**Lucid Writing:** A technique where a dream is reentered in the waking state in a light trance and the imagery transforms and develops while the person writes without stopping. Variations include Lucid Sound, Lucid Doodling, Lucid Talking, and Lucid Sculpture.

**Lucid Writing Archetypes (LWAs):** Archetypal fictional characters that arise from the combined use of lucid dreaming and the writer's trance.

**mantra:** A repeated word or phrase used to focus the attention of the mind.

**meditation:** Observing passing thoughts with detachment and calming the mind until a deep inner stillness is reached.

**metachoric experiences:** Inner, vivid sensory experiences.

**mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR):** Mindful meditation and yoga to bring a person into the present moment.

**misplaced lucidity:** When we have a convincing experience in one state of consciousness while believing ourselves to be in another state of consciousness.

**Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams (MILD):** A prospective memory technique for triggering lucid dreams.

**mutual dreams:** When two or more people share the same dream.

**narcolepsy:** When people fall asleep involuntarily several times a day.

**near-death experiences (NDEs):** Super-vivid imagery and sensations reported in those who have been close to death or have been declared clinically dead but are then revived.

**nightmare:** A dream so disturbing that it usually wakes the dreamer up.

**night terrors/sleep terrors:** When someone wakes from a deep sleep screaming unstopably for some time before returning to sleep and not

recalling the experience the next day.

**nondual experience:** An experience of total interconnected oneness where there is no sense of “I.”

**obstructive sleep apnoea:** When a person’s breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep due to the throat muscles intermittently relaxing and blocking the airway.

**out-of-body experience (OBE):** A state in which self-perception (perceived sensory input, self-location, and self-identification) seems external to and independent from the physical body. OBEs are different from lucid dreams because they do not occur only in sleep states but can be induced from the waking state or from trauma or fainting.

**parasomnias:** A category of sleep disorders including sleep paralysis and night terrors.

**Passive Observation Technique:** Becoming “just a pair of eyes” in a dream and watching lucidly as the dream scene unfolds around you.

**Passive Participation Technique:** Going with the flow of the dream while lucid and not deliberately changing any elements of it.

**post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** A range of symptoms of psychological stress following a traumatic event, often involving terrible recurring nightmares.

**Prana Dream Body Hypothesis:** The dream body is an innate body image animated by *prana*, or life force.

**precognitive dreams:** Dreams about an unknowable future event that then comes to pass.

**psyche:** The soul, mind, or spirit.

**psychological projections:** In dreams, the figures we meet are often parts of our own psyche and so represent our emotions, the denied parts of ourselves, or our desires.

**Rainbow Theory of Consciousness:** Consciousness occurs on a continuum, with experiential overlap between different states.

**rapid eye movement (REM) sleep:** Most dreams are said to occur in this highly active, light stage of sleep, so named due to the flickering eyelids

associated with it.

**reality checks:** Testing whether one is in the dream state or awake by performing various tests, such as pinching the nose closed and then trying to breathe through it.

**reality creation:** Living life as if it were a lucid dream by understanding the impact of thought, intention, visualisation, and expectation on our life and those around us.

**REM sleep behaviour disorder (RBD):** The violent enactment of dreams.

**shadow:** An archetypal energy that represents the denied or repressed parts of ourselves. Our shadow side often emerges in nightmares.

**sleep disorders:** This blanket term encompasses a huge fan of disturbed sleep behaviours, from insomnia to breathing disturbances.

**sleep paralysis:** As we fall asleep, muscular paralysis sets in to stop us from acting out our dreams. When we remain consciously aware during this process, we can feel trapped and experience a range of unpleasant sensations.

**sleep-related dissociative disorder (SRDD):** Dissociative episodes around sleep-wake transitions that can be associated with a recurrent nightmare or past trauma.

**sleep-related eating disorder (SRED):** Sleepwalking combined with sleep-eating.

**Sporadic Control Technique:** Giving the dream an occasional nudge to direct it towards a particular experience, before returning to a more passive attitude and seeing what happens.

**unconscious:** The unilluminated or poorly illuminated parts of the psyche: the part of the mind that is not particularly conscious or self-aware (until we switch on the light by getting lucid in a dream!).

**Viewing Tube Problem of Consciousness Exploration:** We each perceive consciousness through our own distorting “viewing tube,” made up of ingrained beliefs and assumptions. In a lucid dream it is easier to drop our viewing tube and release limiting beliefs to have an unfettered experience of consciousness.

**virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET):** The sufferer of a phobia is gradually exposed to the phobia trigger using 3-D computer imagery and a headset.

**void OBE:** An OBE in which a person hangs bodiless in dream space.

**Wake Back To Bed (WBTB) technique:** Getting up after four to five hours of sleep, focusing the intent to have a lucid dream, and returning to sleep while visualising becoming lucid.

**wake-induced lucid dreams (WILDs):** Lucid dreams that are entered directly from the waking state.

**waking lucidity:** The sensation, while awake, of being fully aware, alive, and present to the moment, as in a lucid dream.

**yoga nidra:** When you lie on your back in the corpse pose and progressively relax, leaving your senses behind to float consciously on the cusp of sleep.

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# Resources

## The International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD)

For readers who would like extra care and help with their dreams or who want to deepen their exploration of dreamwork, I highly recommend becoming a member of IASD. This vibrant and friendly organisation brings dreamers together from all walks of life, creates fabulous dream conferences (easy-access online ones and others in global locations), and provides a wealth of expert dream advice, insight, and information through its member-exclusive *DreamTime* magazine and its academic journal, *Dreaming*. IASD is community-based, supportive, and fascinated by all aspects of dreaming. For me, it's like a second family. Find out more at [www.asdreams.org](http://www.asdreams.org).

## Deep Lucid Dreaming

If you want to keep exploring lucid dreaming and go deeper, my YouTube channel, "Deep Lucid Dreaming Dr Clare Johnson," has plenty of short videos where I talk about different aspects of lucid dreaming: [www.youtube.com/channel/UC3P-H6MiXL4oRQjocOrcxlw](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3P-H6MiXL4oRQjocOrcxlw).

You can also contact me on Twitter @LucidClare, or come over to my Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/DeepLucidDreaming?fref=ts](http://www.facebook.com/DeepLucidDreaming?fref=ts).

On my website you can browse articles on everything from lucid dream healing to nightmare solutions, pick up a free e-book on how to get and stay lucid, and contact me for advice or to share your most transformative experiences with Lucid Dreamplay. I look forward to connecting with you! Visit [www.DeepLucidDreaming.com](http://www.DeepLucidDreaming.com).



Body, Mind & Spirit / Dreams

**"Dr. Clare Johnson has energetically led the way in revealing the limitless practical and spiritual potential of lucid dreaming."**

—Dr. Keith Hearne, pioneering scientist who provided the first proof of lucid dreaming

## Wake Up in Your Dreams and Live a Happier, More Meaningful Life

A lucid dream is a dream in which you become aware that you're dreaming. It's a powerful opportunity to solve problems, create new possibilities, take charge of your own healing, and explore the depths of reality. This book provides a range of practical techniques and activities to help you bring the creativity and super-conscious awareness of lucid dreaming into your life.

Join international expert Clare R. Johnson as she shares the most up-to-date lucid dreaming techniques on how to get and stay lucid, guide dreams, resolve nightmares, deepen creativity, and integrate dream wisdom into everyday life. Drawing on cutting-edge science and psychology, this book is packed with inspiring stories of life-changing lucid dreams and fascinating insights into topics such as the ethics of dream sex, how to interact with lucid dream figures, and the nature of consciousness.

Whether you're a person who barely remembers your dreams or a lifelong lucid dreamer, this in-depth guide is the perfect next step as you cultivate the power of lucid dreaming.

**"A powerful how-to resource book that is also inspirational. Highly recommended!"**

—Patricia Garfield, PhD, author of *Creative Dreaming*

**"What particularly caught my eye as a sleep medicine doctor is how lucid dreaming can benefit nightmares and various other sleep disturbances . . .**

**This is a magnificent book!"**

—Carlos H. Schenck, MD, author of *Sleep: The Mysteries, the Problems, and the Solutions*

Clare R. Johnson, PhD, has researched lucid dreaming for two decades and is a lifelong lucid dreamer. Board Director and Vice President of the International Association for the Study of Dreams, she's a regular speaker in the United States and Europe, where she shares her transformative lucid dreaming techniques. Her books include *Dream Therapy* and *Dreamrunner*. Visit her online at [www.DeepLucidDreaming.com](http://www.DeepLucidDreaming.com).

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