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Chapter 1

THE SCIENCE AND PARADOX OF LUCID DREAMING

In very simple terms, lucid dreaming means realizing that you are dreaming while in the dream state. The American Psychological Association has a more official definition in its 2007 *Dictionary of Psychology*, defining a lucid dream as “a dream in which the sleeper is aware that he or she is dreaming and may be able to influence the progress of the dream narrative.”

Both of these definitions identify the fundamental paradoxical quality of lucid dreaming: the knowledge and realization that you are consciously aware within the dream state. In fact, when you become lucidly aware within a dream, you may even find yourself announcing: “Wait, this is a dream. I am dreaming!”

My very first lucid dream occurred spontaneously around age 11 or 12 when I found myself in the book stacks of the public library and saw a *Tyrannosaurus rex* walking through the aisles. At first, I felt alarmed, but then I thought: “Wait a second, dinosaurs are extinct.” And at that moment, I realized: “This must be a dream!” I knew I was dreaming, even as I dreamed. Even in this short example, you see the active components of most lucid dreams:

- Observing or experiencing something unusual (e.g., *Tyrannosaurus rex*)
- Critically reflecting on or analyzing the experience (e.g., dinosaurs are extinct)

- Concluding that “dreaming” represents the most likely explanation (e.g., “This must be a dream!”)

Essentially, lucid dreaming shows the triumphant emergence of your reflective awareness; you awaken to an understanding of your actual situation. Now consider how you often act in regular dreams. You accept things. You go along with whatever happens. You make up stories to justify your actions and the events. You lack higher levels of critical awareness and analysis. So when you see *Tyrannosaurus rex*, you normally feel fear and run away. In regular dreams, you accept incredible situations because of your diminished critical awareness.

Tibetan Buddhists have a wonderful metaphor for dreaming. They liken the experience of regular dreaming to that of a blind horse with a lame rider. In this metaphor, the lame rider is the person’s largely unaware mind, which sits on a blind horse that dashes around with little control. If the rider (the person’s mind) overcomes its lameness and becomes lucidly aware, then it can begin to direct the blind horse (the energy of the dream) and use it for personal transformation and spiritual growth.

Much of this book focuses on techniques and practices that you can use to elevate your awareness and critical reflection about your waking experience. By doing the practices given here, you can increase your chances of becoming lucidly aware in the dream state. In fact, many people report that just reading and thinking about becoming aware in the dream state has been enough to prompt them to become lucid in tonight’s dreaming.

When you realize in a dream that you are dreaming, you have become lucidly aware. At that moment, you can do many amazing things:

- You can consciously decide what actions to perform.
- You can become free of waking-state limitations. You can fly like Superman, perform magic like Harry Potter, walk through concrete walls, breathe underwater, seek creative solutions to waking issues, and much more.
- You can interact and converse with dream figures.

- You can conduct personal and scientific experiments.
- You can begin to explore the dream space and the contents of your unconscious.
- You can work on improving waking skills for sports, business, and more.

Although these examples hint at lucid dreaming's possibilities, the greater potential of lucid dreaming for individuals, science, and society seems truly staggering and will be more fully discussed later in this chapter.

Evidence for Lucid Dreaming

The scientific evidence for lucid dreaming reveals an amazing story of insight, talent, and ingenuity. In the mid-1970s, Keith Hearne, a graduate student studying sleep and dreams at the University of Hull in England, met Alan Worsley, who claimed to have frequent lucid dreams. Hearne listened to him and was intrigued. Being a scientist, he spent time pondering how he could create an acceptable experiment to provide scientific evidence for lucid dreaming.

Later, a brilliant solution came to him. During sleep, our bodies become functionally paralyzed. But while dreaming, researchers have shown that we usually have rapid eye movement (REM). Hearne wondered whether a lucid dreamer could use his eyes to signal that he was lucidly aware and conscious while dreaming. If this were possible, it would create a major breakthrough for the sciences of dreaming, consciousness, and psychology.

So Hearne brought Worsley into the sleep lab and put polygraph pads on his eyes to record his rapid eye movements while dreaming. He then instructed Worsley to move his eyes left and right a pre-determined number of times when he became lucidly aware in a dream.

In April 1975, it happened. Sleeping in the lab, Worsley realized he was dreaming and became lucidly aware. Then he recalled the experimental design and moved his eyes left and right a pre-determined number of times to show that he was consciously aware and lucidly dreaming.² Other measurements in the sleep lab confirmed that his body remained asleep, although his mind was consciously aware and signaling with the prearranged eye movements. When Hearne saw

the hard evidence of the pre-arranged REM eye movements, he later remarked: “It was like getting signals from another world. Philosophically, scientifically, it was simply mind blowing.”³

Separately, in the United States almost three years later, Stephen LaBerge, a Stanford University doctoral student and lucid dreamer, wondered how a scientist could provide evidence for lucid dreaming. Like Hearne, he realized that a lucid dreamer could signal by moving his eyes in a pre-arranged pattern. Placing himself in the sleep lab in 1978, LaBerge became lucidly aware in a dream and signaled his awareness by moving his eyes left to right a few times, which was recorded by the laboratory equipment. He replicated this eye-signal verification technique in twenty subsequent nights in the sleep lab.⁴

After the scientific paper he wrote describing his research was rejected by the prestigious journal *Science*—one reviewer adamantly refused to believe it possible to become lucidly aware in the dream state—and then by *Nature*—which did not review the study, but judged the topic “not of sufficient general interest”—LaBerge succeeded in getting his research published in an acceptable, peer-reviewed journal.⁵ He then became closely connected to this fascinating new area of scientific exploration and headed much of the subsequent research into it.

How to Identify Lucid Dreams

Now that you understand the definition of lucid dreaming, have you had a lucid dream? If so, take a moment to write out your first lucid dream or a lucid dream that you remember. Now, write down a typical dream. Compare the lucid dream to the typical dream. How do the dreams differ after you become lucid?

The Neurology of Lucid Dreaming

What does the brain look like when someone is lucid dreaming? And what may that tell us about the nature of awareness—both dream awareness and waking awareness?

In the past ten years, subjects have been studied while lucid dreaming in fMRI machines (wearing special headphones to mute the machine's noise so they can remain asleep) and separately while wearing 19-channel electroencephalogram (EEG) receptors on their scalps. Both studies provided similar evidence about brain function during lucid dreaming.

In very general terms, the researchers discovered that, when you lucid dream, the parts of your brain associated with dreaming show their usual activity; but certain parts of your brain normally associated with waking consciousness also show activity (e.g., frontal and fronto-lateral portions of the brain). Essentially, your brain activity confirms what lucid dreamers experience—you engage a dream scene knowing it as a dream and can consciously direct and manipulate your thought process. In essence, you have conscious awareness within a dream that you are dreaming.

The research team led by Ursula Voss that performed the 19-channel EEG recording of the lucid dream state concluded “. . . [L]ucid dreaming constitutes a hybrid state of consciousness with definable and measurable differences from waking and from REM sleep, particularly in frontal areas.”⁶ It also commented: “Because lucidity can be self-induced, it constitutes not only an opportunity to study the brain basis of conscious states but also demonstrates how a voluntary intervention can change those states.” In the team's view, lucid dreaming shows us a special neurological state between the waking and dreaming states, but with features of both states existing simultaneously.

A member of the other research team that performed the combined EEG/fMRI study, Michael Czisch at the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry, commented to *Science Daily* about that team's research results:

The general basic activity of the brain is similar in a normal dream and in a lucid dream. . . . In a lucid state, however, the activity in certain areas of the cerebral cortex increases markedly within seconds. The involved areas of the cerebral

cortex are the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex to which, commonly, the function of self-assessment is attributed, and the frontopolar regions, which are responsible for evaluating our own thoughts and feelings. The precuneus is also especially active, a part of the brain that has long been linked with self-perception.⁷

Using the fMRI data, this research team could focus on the specific areas within the brain that showed activity. The results clearly showed that lucid dreaming activated parts of the cerebral cortex connected with self-assessment, self-perception, and examination of thoughts and feelings.⁸

This neurological research basically confirmed the thousand-plus-year contention of lucid dreamers: 1) Through voluntary actions, you can achieve lucid awareness in the dream state, 2) When lucid, you have the capacity for metacognition or awareness about your own thought process, 3) When lucid, you can direct your actions within that unique state of dreaming, and 4) When lucid, you can assess your actions and learn from the response.

Science has barely investigated the extraordinary potential of this state to develop skills, seek creativity, effect physical changes, and obtain psychological insights. In fairness though, the research funds devoted to lucid dreaming seem extremely small, relative to the potential for scientific contributions. Nevertheless, as the number of lucid dreamers continues to increase and experienced lucid dreamers gain even more insights, the depth of these personal experiments and conceptual explorations will likely grow, as will the reports of fascinating achievements.

How Common Is Lucid Dreaming?

The *International Journal of Dream Research* has published studies on lucid dreaming surveys of students in numerous countries. When college psychology students were asked whether they had ever become aware that they were dreaming while in a dream (i.e., lucid dreaming), the researchers⁹ reported these results for positive responses:

- 71 percent in the United States
- 82 percent in Germany
- 73 percent in the Netherlands
- 47 percent in Japan

The research surveys shows that about 20 percent of college-age lucid dreamers claim to have frequent lucid dreams (that is, at least one each month). Our impression is that, if you ask deeply interested lucid dreamers who routinely visit lucid dream forums about the frequency of their lucid dreaming, a majority average about one to eight lucid dreams per month, with occasional periods of inactivity. Considering that we have five or more dreams a night, or about 150 dreams each month, the percentage of dreams that are lucid seems relatively small.

Research has also shown the prevalence of lucid dreaming among younger students. One study by Michael Schredl and others, *Lucid Dreaming in Children: The UK Library Study*, described how researchers placed surveys on dreaming in libraries in the United Kingdom and received 3,579 responses from children ages six to eighteen years. When asked whether they had experienced a lucid dream at least once, 43.5 percent responded affirmatively.¹⁰

A more in-depth 2012 study published in the *Journal of Sleep Research* dealt with 694 German students in primary and secondary schools between the ages of six and nineteen. Led by researcher Ursula Voss, this study investigated the hypothesis “that lucid dreaming occurs primarily in childhood and puberty.” It found that “lucid dreaming is quite pronounced in young children . . .” Indeed, around 51 percent of these young people reported a lucid dream.¹¹

Using a questionnaire and one-on-one interviews, Voss’s research team asked the children to provide examples of dreams in which they became aware of dreaming. They received examples like the following:

- **Narrative 1** (boy, age 7): I dreamt I was playing soccer with my friends, and when I looked at my legs I saw that they were distorted. Then I realized it must be a dream because they did not at all look like my own legs. Then I looked up

and saw that I was in a giant soccer stadium and I was able to play with my favorite soccer team (the adult team). I could run real fast, faster than in waking.

- **Narrative 3** (girl, age 10): Someone was haunting me. And I was with my girlfriend. The chaser stood before me and wanted to kill me. And then I realized it was only a dream. So I made the person disappear and then suddenly it wasn't dark anymore.

The researchers note that many of these students exhibited an ability to influence the course of the dream, even though “these students had no training and lucid dreaming occurred spontaneously.” Often, when they became lucid, they reported using the experience to go flying or to deal with threatening situations.

If you have children, grandchildren, nieces, or nephews, ask them whether they have ever become aware of dreaming while in a dream state. You may be surprised by how many have had a lucid dream.

When research studies by Jayne Gackenbach investigated personality and gender differences in lucid dreaming, at first it appeared that women had a distinct advantage over men. When the data was examined more deeply, however, it showed that women reported more dreams overall than men—hence more lucid dreams as well. When an adjustment was made for this quantitative distinction, the gender difference largely disappeared. Nonetheless, lucid dream reports seem positively associated with strong dream recall.¹²

Additional research by Gackenbach indicates that people with good spatial skills and field independence have some advantage in becoming lucid.¹³ The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* defines field independence as “a cognitive style in which the individual consistently relies more on internal referents (body sensation cues) than on external referents (environmental cues).” In lucid dreams, we often deal with unusual situations and changing space perspectives, so a reliance on our inner felt sense of direction supports us as we maneuver within dreaming.

When Robert interviews talented lucid dreamers for the quarterly magazine *Lucid Dreaming Experience*, he occasionally asks about their first experience with lucid dreaming. He has discovered that a small number began lucid dreaming around age five. (Most report their first

lucid dream occurring in their pre-teen to teenage years.) Normally, they recall this early date because they used lucid dreaming to handle recurring childhood nightmares.

For example, a Norwegian lucid dreamer, Line Salvesen, reported feeling amazed when reading about lucid dreaming for the first time in a Norwegian magazine; she assumed that was how everyone dreamed! In her case, she recalls becoming lucidly aware as a small child in order to deal with recurring nightmares. After that, she found it easy to become lucidly aware each night in almost every dream. Now, she uses her skill to help researchers investigate lucid dreaming in the sleep lab.¹⁴

Cases also exist of people learning to lucid dream at a more mature age. In another issue of *Lucid Dreaming Experience*, Robert interviewed a man named Tad Messenger, who experienced his first lucid dream at age fifty-two. He reports having relatively frequent lucid dreams thereafter. His skill at lucid dreaming developed after persevering through a lengthy psycho-spiritual practice. Then, he claims, “it was like a door opened,” and he could often become lucid when he had the intent to do so.¹⁵

German researchers Melanie Schädlich and Daniel Erlacher investigated how lucid dreamers applied their lucid dreaming skills practically. They found that the broad category of having fun drew the most attention from lucid dreamers, with 81.4 percent reporting how they flew around, danced, played games, and so on. The next most common application, at 63.8 percent, involved changing nightmares. Lucid dreamers, especially women, realized that they could use their awareness when lucid to alter a nightmare scenario in some fashion. Schädlich’s research showed that problem-solving (29.9 percent), creativity (27.6 percent), and practicing skills (21.3 percent) rounded out the top five applications. Lucid dreamers have thus discovered that all points on the spectrum between outrageous fun and serious work can occur in lucid dreams.¹⁶

Unfortunately, much of society neglects or devalues dreaming and remains ignorant of lucid dreaming’s existence and the scientific evidence for it. Even though a high percentage of the college-age population reports having had a lucid dream experience, few understand the fascinating potential of this unique state. As individuals, science, and society come to understand the potential of lucid dreaming, we feel the number of frequent lucid dreamers will rise even higher.

The Profound Potential of Lucid Dreaming

When people ask us why anyone would want to lucid dream, we immediately suspect they have never had a lucid dream.

For many people, lucid dreaming represents one of the most extraordinary adventures and powerful moments of freedom that they have ever experienced. Often when people become lucid, they report a kind of spontaneous euphoria in which they feel a strong sense of energy and mastery coupled with a profound sense of awareness and clarity. Similar to the self-actualization research done by psychologist Abraham Maslow, many lucid dreamers can point to specific lucid dreams as peak experiences, complete with feelings of wonder, awe, well-being, and expansive awareness.

Yet lucid dreaming has many practical, creative, and profound purposes as well. Following are six reasons to explore lucid dreaming more deeply, with a corresponding lucid dream to illustrate each point.

Freedom and Joy

Many lucid dreamers have reported experiencing a feeling of liberation and joyful freedom while in the lucid dream state. Free of normal physical constraints, you have a broader range of incredible possibilities. Here is how one dreamer described his experience:

The dream begins at a party in someone's home with lots of people. After a moment, I realize that I do not know these people. This realization prompts me to become lucid. Once lucid, I immediately begin flying through the rooms and laugh as I have fun moving the furniture around with my mind.

Since my flying ability seems excellent, I decide to fly out to the stars. I begin flying very fast upward into the night sky. I find myself flying past planets! Finally, I stop in the weightlessness of space. It's utterly silent. Looking around, I see a planet with a band of rings around it. Then I notice that two of the planet's four moons also have orangeish, gold rings! Joyful, I fly toward the planet's main ring. As I come near the ring, I see it as bits of tiny reflective particles or shiny dust. I move closer and feel touched by tiny bits of

energy on my body, like sparks of energy. I wake from this lucid dream with a feeling of amazement!

In lucid dreaming, the feeling of freedom, wonder and joy seems quite thrilling and spectacular. Initially, you may think: “Oh, it’s just a mind game, a playful fantasy.” But read on and see how people use lucid dreaming for quite practical purposes and how science can use it to explore the nature of the psyche experimentally.

Inner Creativity

Whatever area of interest you focus on in life, you can use the magic of lucid dreaming to access inner creativity for that specific interest when you are consciously aware. Consider the creativity of regular dreamers reported by Deirdre Barrett in her book *The Committee of Sleep*.¹⁷

- Paul McCartney: In a dream, he received the tune for the hit “Yesterday.”
- Richard Wagner: In a dream, he received the opera *Tristan and Isolde*.
- August Kekule: While dozing off, he dreamed the structure of the benzene molecule, which opened up the field of organic chemistry.
- Otto Loewi: He awakened with an experimental design to explain the chemical transmission of nerve impulses and won the Nobel Prize.
- Dmitri Mendeleev: In a dream, he saw the periodic table of elements.
- Elias Howe: After months of trying to invent a sewing machine, he felt perplexed by how the needle would function, but then had a dream in which he realized a new design for the needle with the eye at the tip. He went on to create the first functional sewing machine.

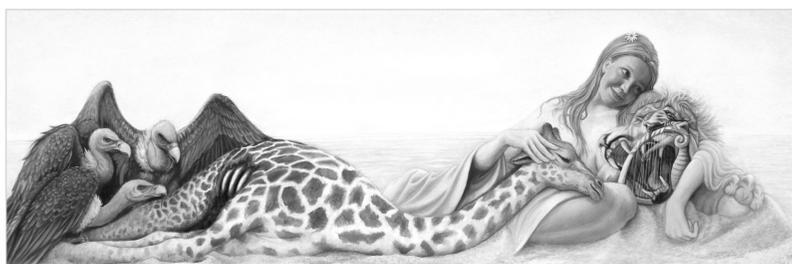
- William Watt: In recurring dreams in 1782, he saw liquid lead falling from above and landing in water, whereupon it became nice spheres. He experimented with this while awake and created a new way to make gunshot simply and inexpensively.

Google cofounder Larry Page mentions the importance of dreaming in his 2009 commencement address at the University of Michigan. As a twenty-three-year-old doctoral student there, he had a dream. “When I suddenly woke up,” he reports, “I was thinking. ‘What if we could download the whole web and just keep the links . . . ?’ I grabbed a pen and started writing!”¹⁸ He could scarcely imagine how a giant search-engine company would later develop, due in part to this nighttime creativity.

In all these instances, artists, scientists, and inventors used the creativity available to them in dreaming to create beautiful music, solve complex scientific puzzles, invent machinery, and develop amazing new ventures. Now imagine this: What if, in a lucid dream, you could purposefully seek out creativity, answers, and inventions while consciously aware?

Montreal artist Dustyn Lucas reports using lucid dreams to access his inner creativity. Sometimes when lucid dreaming, he asks to see a painting when he steps into a dream gallery or opens a book. In one particular instance, he recalls finding himself in a desert. That struck him as strange, and he realized he must be dreaming. Lucid, he noticed that he had a sketchbook in his hand. Suddenly, he saw an extraordinary image in the sand in front of him and began to make a sketch of it. He writes:

As I sketched, a person approached from behind and spoke the most perfectly beautiful sentence in the universe; it explained all of existence and, in a dreamlike way, looped back in on itself. I was so excited to have these words that I began to praise the genius of the one that spoke them, when he turned to me and said, “Stop trying to inflate me, just take me full in.” Then I awoke; the perfect sentence was gone, but the image in the sand was etched into my memory.¹⁹



The Mirage of Duality in the Sands of Time, an extraordinary image revealed to Dustyn Lucas while lucid dreaming.

When I saw Lucas' painting and heard of his accompanying lucid dream at an International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD) conference, I asked him: "What was it like to paint this?" He told me that it was as if he had painted it before. The process of painting went considerably faster and easier than a normal painting, since he had already seen it in his lucid dream. He titled his painting *The Mirage of Duality in the Sands of Time*.

On Iowa Public Radio, Robert had a show every other month for about a year and a half. One of these focused on the topic "Dreams, Lucid Dreams, and Creativity." The switchboard lit up with calls from people who had experienced dreams that had solved problems for them or brought them creative gifts.

Among the lucid dreamers who called in to share their stories, one, a professional rock musician and lyricist, stated that he used lucid dreaming to seek out and discover new lyrics for songs. Another said he wrote novels and graduated from the prestigious Iowa Writer's Workshop. He claimed that, when he felt stuck while writing novels, he tried to have a lucid dream. Once lucid, he called the novel characters to him and asked: "What is wrong with this novel?" He said they sometimes gave him amazing insights into how to move the novel forward to completion. You can imagine a novel character telling him in the lucid dream: "You never should have killed Aunt Sally in chapter 3. We need her at the end of the book to reveal grandfather's amazing secret!"

An even more practical use for lucid dream creativity comes from the book *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming* by Stephen LaBerge and Howard Rheingold. They give the example of a software programmer who used lucid dreaming to work out difficult software code. In

this case, once the programmer became lucid, he called for Albert Einstein to join him and work out the code. After they plotted it out in the lucid dream, he sent the dream Einstein away and spent time memorizing the work. Upon waking, he wrote the code out as fast as he could recall it. The lucid dreamer commented: “I take this to work and usually it is 99-percent accurate.”²⁰

The depth of the unconscious mind in dreams has delighted artists and inventors for millennia and literally changed the world. The advantage of lucid dreaming? You can consciously access your inner muse and deliberately seek assistance from its unfathomable abundance. If you became lucid tonight, what creative issue would you like to experience, resolve, or investigate?

Emotional and Psychological Healing

For twelve years, Robert has co-edited the magazine *Lucid Dreaming Experience* with friend and lucid dreaming colleague, Lucy Gillis. Fans call it the *LDE*. Each issue showcases an interview with an experienced lucid dreamer to see how that person uses lucid dreaming in his or her life.

One interview remains unforgettable. Hope, an airline mechanic, was working on a Boeing 767 when it came loose from its moorings and rolled over her legs, crushing them. The doctors amputated one leg and, for more than six months, she lay in the hospital recovering from her injuries.

Night after night, Hope had a recurring nightmare of being chased. These became “unbearable,” and she dreaded falling asleep. Then one day, she discovered a book on lucid dreaming at a bookshop. She remembered having had lucid dreams as a child and the joyful experience of flying consciously. Reading the book, she realized that she could use lucid dreaming to end her nightmares.

Here she tells of the pivotal lucid dream that ended those horrible nightmares:

The big moment for me was this dream; I was running for my life scared as usual. I knew something was chasing me but I wasn't sure who or what. As I ran and ran, I think that perhaps it occurred to me: “*Hey, I am running but I only*

have one leg.” At that moment, I knew I was dreaming, and I got a bit excited.

I realized I was being chased, but suddenly, I was no longer afraid. I stopped running, turned around, and saw the approaching monster. It looked ugly and scary, and he slowed down and realized I had stopped running. As it approached me, I waved at it and smiled a huge smile and then jumped up and flew away. It was so amazing, and I can never forget it. The monster even got a confused look on its face the moment I waved and smiled. As I flew away, I just had fun with flying around. I only had to evade whatever was chasing me and fly away a few more times, and then it was like they realized it was useless to continue to chase me.²¹

Psychologists find these recurring nightmares a common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Some therapists have now begun teaching their clients to use lucid dreaming to overcome their recurring nightmares.²² As in Hope’s case, therapists often discover that becoming lucid in one nightmare will severely reduce the frequency of future nightmares or stop them altogether.

Since the publication of Robert’s first book, he has received more reports from lucid dreamers who have realized that lucid dreaming may assist them with other issues like overcoming phobias, anxiety, and emotional problems. Others have written to tell how they used lucid dreaming to deal with inner issues like understanding failed relationships so they could move forward in their lives with more energy and joy. Even therapists have told Robert how they used the ideas in his first book to help clients achieve breakthroughs. When you are aware at the level of dreaming, you have a dynamic environment in which to gain insight, practice constructive behaviors, and work through difficult issues.

Physical Healing

Stephen LaBerge conducted a series of experiments that looked at lucidly dreamed actions and their effect on the physical body. He noted that lucid dreaming events—eye movements, changing breathing

patterns, tensing muscles—resulted in some degree of a parallel physical event in the body.²³

Working with the basic concept of using the lucid dream state to affect the physical body and the additional physical healing research using deep hypnosis and visualization, some lucid dreamers have taken the idea further and explored the idea of physical healing in lucid dreams. In this case, provided by Ed Kellogg, you can read a simple, self-reported example of lucid dream healing.²⁴

Annie had painful plantar warts on each foot. Every step she took hurt. Nothing seemed to make the plantar warts go away. One day, the teacher of her lucid dreaming group told her of his own successes with healing the physical body while lucid dreaming. He suggested she give it a try in her next lucid dream.

Annie recalls her healing lucid dream: “Something about the light seems strange. I think of my feet because they are hurting me as I walk. So I sit down on a cube, like a wooden cube. Then I remember that I can heal my feet [in a lucid dream]. At that moment, all of the surrounding room drops away to a black void where I sit. I recall using a ball of white light as I had been visualizing [before going to sleep].

Sure enough, the white light appears around my hands. I put my hands on my feet—first, the right one. The light enters the foot and glows golden from within. I hold it there for several seconds and then move to the left foot. Same process. I put both feet down and realize I had done what I had incubated. It seems amazing and terrifying. That feeling is so intense I woke up.

Before this night, Annie could not walk without feeling pain from six plantar warts. In the morning, after the lucid dream, she examined her feet. All the warts had turned black during the night. Within ten days, they all fell off and did not return. She could now walk healed and free of pain.

When you think about this, you realize that the medical establishment could conduct research on lucid dreaming as an alternative

healing practice. Imagine research on a group of people with simple, persistent ailments—skin diseases or warts, for example—who are taught to lucid dream, and a control group with the same ailments who are not taught lucid dream healing skills. After a year, which group shows the most improvement? A simple study like this could begin to confirm that healing potential exists in the lucid dream state, and that lucid dreamers can learn successful approaches to accomplish this for themselves.

Lucid dreamer Ed Kellogg has explored the idea of physical healing quite deeply and reports numerous instances of three types of healing assistance appearing in lucid dreams: curative, diagnostic, and prescriptive.²⁵ In Annie's case, you see a dramatic example of a curative lucid dream, in which the ailment shows significant healing improvement after the dream. In diagnostic lucid dreams, dreamers gather information about the nature of an ailment or impending ailment, because sometimes they or the medical establishment feels uncertain about the actual source of their symptoms. Finally, in prescriptive lucid dreams, dreamers learn about specific items that may encourage healing—a specific medicine, diet, practice, or other prescriptive aid literally or symbolically shown in the dream.

Lucid dreamers have considered the concept of physical healing for a few decades. In 1987, researchers Stephen LaBerge and Jayne Gackenbach created a survey of lucid dreamers for *OMNI* magazine that asked whether the subjects had used lucid dreaming for physical healing. They received a number of apparently valid self-reports of physical healing in lucid dreams.²⁶ In her article "The Potential of Lucid Dreaming for Bodily Healing," Gackenbach notes:

Ailments represented included a recurring headache, menstrual cramps and hives, sprained ankle, pulled muscle, torn ligament and skin cancer. It is important to keep in mind that none of the cures reported by the *OMNI* readers can be called miraculous, but they may demonstrate that during the enhanced state of mental imagery called dreams one can intuit and perhaps affect the health of one's body. At the least, certain commonalities can be found among these examples that hint at a pattern of apparent dream healing.²⁷

LaBerge's work on the psychophysical relations of lucid dreaming actions to body processes and Kellogg's exploration of numerous cases of physical healing after lucid dreams show both the conceptual and practical potential of this approach. Although individuals continue to report new successes, the world of medicine has basically ignored this exciting area of treatment, touched on by LaBerge and Gackenbach almost three decades ago.

Psychological Insight

In *Nightlight: The Lucidity Institute Newsletter*, a lucid dreamer identified as A. T. reported on a life-changing lucid dream epiphany about the importance of belief. In her dream, she rented a pair of wings for twenty-five cents and used them to fly around the dream easily.²⁸ Then she thought: "It was ridiculous that a pair of cheap rented wings could sustain me." With that thought, she began plummeting to the earth!

This battle between first believing in the power of the wings and then not believing eventually made her become lucid. She realized she was dreaming, and that "it was my belief that I could fly that enabled me to fly—not any artificial devices or other means of external support." After this lesson in lucidity, she realized the importance of belief in her lucid dreams.

The next week, in waking life, A. T. interviewed for a job. During the interview, she felt about ready to give up, but then recalled the lucid dream and the importance of having self-confident beliefs. With that realization, she says: "I found myself saying positive things about my resourcefulness and commitment to hard work." Guess what? She got the job.

Some lucid dreamers call transferring lessons from the lucid dream realm to waking reality an example of living lucidly. Many of us have powerful stories of becoming more lucid about our current thinking and expectations, which suddenly worked to change our waking life situations for the better. Lucid dreaming may show you exactly how you can work with the unconscious to improve your life situation. Often, lucid dreams show you areas of self-limiting beliefs and doubts, which you may need to resolve to move forward with your personal development.

German psychologist Paul Tholey deeply explored lucid dreaming after teaching himself how to become lucid in 1959 as a college student. Later, he did some of the first work on using lucid dreams as an inner platform to improve athletes' skill levels.²⁹ He taught skiers and snowboarders to lucid dream and then encouraged them to practice their sports in the lucid dream state. In fact, he suggested that they try to push their skills to the limit and attain new sensory-motor abilities in the dream, knowing it as a lucid dream where they could not be physically hurt. The waking-world result? Tholey felt most showed considerable improvement in their athletic ability and competitiveness.

Researchers Daniel Erlacher and Michael Schredl have sought to replicate Tholey's findings on sports practice by having lucid dreamers perform a simple game in which they toss a coin into a cup two meters away while lucid, and then again when awake. After completing this task in a lucid dream, their waking performance improved. The researchers note: "[T]he results of this study showed that rehearsing in a lucid dream enhances subsequent performance in wakefulness."³⁰

Spirituality and Wisdom

In many wisdom traditions, the practice of lucid dreaming can be used for spiritual insight and growth. For example, 11th-century Buddhist yogi Naropa called dream yoga (which relies on lucid dreaming as a main technique) one of the six paths to enlightenment. According to many teachers of Tibetan Buddhist traditions, lucid dreaming can educate you in the true nature of the mind and help bring greater awareness to your experience so that you can see through your habitual reactions and your connection to mental phenomena. With practice, lucid dreaming can possibly serve to lead you to an experience of non-duality, a special state of awareness in which no subject/object duality exists.

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, a lama in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, explains: "If one fully accomplishes dream yoga, one is prepared to enter the intermediate state after death with the correct view and the stability in non-dual presence needed to attain liberation."³¹ In essence, lucid dreaming serves as a supportive practice in clarifying the mind, breaking reactive mental connections, and helping the student move beyond *samsara*, the cyclic existence of rebirth.

You can also encounter lucid dreaming's spiritual potential in the works of other wisdom traditions—notably Sufism, Taoism, Hinduism, and many native shamanic traditions. In each case, lucid dreaming receives serious consideration as a powerful path for spiritual insight, understanding, and personal growth.

Of course, a person does not need to align with any tradition to experiment with spiritual practices in the lucid dream state. Here's my personal example of using the practice of meditation to empty the mind into a lucid dream:

Walking along a trail, it suddenly strikes me as being too strange, and I realize I am dreaming. I think about what to do and remember a friend asked me if I had ever tried meditating in a lucid dream. Thinking about this, I stop on the trail and sit down in a half lotus position. With my eyes open, I begin meditating.

I begin to quiet my mind. Suddenly, the dream scene in front of me begins to be ripped open in places, and brilliant white light shoots through the holes! After more and more of the dream scene disappears, I stop for a moment in the light. Then I decide: "Perhaps, I should close my eyes." Now with eyes closed, I begin meditating again and within seconds, I experience an extraordinary clarity of awareness, profound sense of ego-less enlargement, and feeling of transcendental Oneness.

So when someone asks you why you bother to lucid dream, you can describe the incredibly profound possibilities accessible when dreaming lucidly: joyful freedom, creativity, emotional healing, physical healing, psychological insights, and spiritual growth.