

DREAM CATCHERS

LUCID DREAMING ENABLES YOU TO BE THE DIRECTOR AND STAR OF YOUR OWN DREAMS. THINK OF IT AS A MINDFUL AND LIFE-ENRICHING WAY TO SLEEP

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How often have you woken up, groggy from sleep, unsettled by a dream that is rapidly drifting from your memory? During the night your consciousness has produced images and sensations that may have been pleasurable but could just as easily have been disturbing. Whichever it is, these dreams are mysterious and intriguing but out-of-reach.

What would it be like, then, to be able to control your dreams and instead of passively being caught up in them, to direct them according to your own whims? You could explore new countries, fly over your neighbourhood or into space, defeat enemies, return to a favourite haunt, or even engage in something intimate with a favoured person.

This ability to consciously observe and direct your dreams is called lucid dreaming and is, according to Charlie Morley, co-creator of Mindfulness of Dream and Sleep (a holistic approach to lucid dreaming), a state available to all of us. "It's safe and natural, not spooky or paranormal, and you can wake yourself up any time you want," he says. "Lucid dreaming means that you are consciously aware that you are in the dream as you are dreaming. You may be snoring, fast asleep, but part of your mind has woken up and is thinking: 'I'm dreaming'. Everything you see, hear, taste, smell is as authentic as real life. It's super-cool."

THE STATE OF AWAKENING

Although lucid dreaming has only been verified in the last few decades, it's been with us for thousands of years, practised by religions including Sufism,

Islam and Gnostic Christianity but especially Tibetan Buddhism, which treats it as a path towards enlightenment. Charlie Morley, a practising Buddhist, continues this tradition, seeing lucid dreaming partly as a spiritual practice. "Buddha advised his followers to fall asleep in a state of mindfulness," he says. He points out that the word 'Buddha' means 'enlightened' – the state of awakening from the illusion, or dream, that is life. His aim is to train our minds to engage in meditation while we are asleep.

"Don't sleep like a log," he says, "sleep like a tree! Bring mindful awareness to your sleep."

Dream researcher (or 'oneirologist' to use the correct term) Daniel Love of exploringluciddreams.com, on the other hand, thinks of lucid dreaming as a skill to be learnt that enables its practitioners to enter a natural, virtual reality. He considers it to be more similar to an adventure than a spiritual practice, calling it "one of the final frontiers of the human experience" and "a wonderful natural phenomenon of the human mind".

Many of Daniel's ideas are influenced by the writings of 19th-century Parisian nobleman, Marquis d'Hervey de St Denys, who took a scientific approach to lucid dreaming. By assiduously keeping a dream diary of 1,446 nights of dreams, he discovered that his dreams had recurring patterns and themes, and that all dreams are built from memories of the waking world that already exist in the brain. (A theory counter to Freud and Jung who believed that dreams have underlying symbolic meanings that help explore psychological problems.)

By analysing and guiding his dreams lucidly, and

by triggering them with sensory input such as music and scent, Denys felt he was able to control this elusive and other-wordly dream state.

It also enabled him to flirt with two of his attractive female neighbours in his dreams and generally have a good time.

BENEFITS OF LUCID DREAMING

But this is not *just* about getting frisky with your neighbour, it can also have practical and therapeutic effects. In a TED talk, Charlie Morley explains how, in a lucid dream, he was being chased by a monster. He decided to take control of the dream, turned around to face the monster, then hugged it. This is an example, he says, of how lucid dreaming can overcome the demons in our minds, or at least help us handle nightmares.

"It's important not to sanitise or repress your dreams," he says. "Your nightmares could be your shadow or dark side – in my case the monster – that needs to be integrated (or hugged)." He says that by facing your nightmares in lucid dreaming, they cease to be nightmares and instead offer the possibility of transformation.

As well as improving the quality of our night-time experience, lucid dreams could also improve our waking performance. Competitive swimmers who mentally practise during lucid dreams have been said to improve their times in real-life trials. If you think of it as a form of mind-training, it has no end of possibilities: self-healing and the conquering of all kinds of phobias, for example.

Practitioners say that lucid dreaming helps you to be more aware, more present, and that by controlling your dreams you help your subconscious give you pointers about how to conduct your life. It's worth giving it a go: it couldn't be more accessible. As Charlie Morley says: "If you sleep, you dream and if you dream you can lucid dream." The pointers, right, will help you get going. The most essential thing is to keep a dream journal, an interesting thing to do in itself. And, who knows, lucid dreaming could take you to all kinds of places you hadn't even dreamt of. "It's time to wake up," says Charlie Morley. "Lucid dreaming can lead to lucid living. It's a goldmine of potential wisdom and insight." **S**

*Charlie Morley has written books on lucid dreaming, and runs retreats and online workshops. Visit charliemorley.com. Daniel Love is the author of *Learn to Lucid Dream and Are You Dreaming?* Visit exploringluciddreams.com.*

HOW TO LUCID DREAM

1 Sort out your bedroom

Looking at electronic devices or the TV is not compatible with a good night's sleep. Restrict all of that to the living room, and clear your head instead. Then your bed will become a platform to launch you into a calm, uncluttered dream state.

2 Keep a dream diary

This is easier said than done when the urge to drift back to sleep or propel yourself into the day kicks in, but it is vital to enable lucid dreams. As soon as you wake up, write down everything you remember in as much detail as you can. This alerts you to 'dream signs' – situations which only happen in dreams, patterns and repeated images.

3 Ask yourself, "Am I awake?"

Hold your nose and attempt to breathe. If you can't, you are awake. If you can, you are dreaming. This 'reality check' alerts you to the fact that you are in a lucid dream, and allows you to control it.

4 Incubate a dream

Tell yourself what you'd like to dream and picture it in your imagination before you fall asleep. There's a greater chance then that it will manifest.

5 Disrupt your night's sleep

This is for the hard-core would-be lucid dreamers. Go to bed at 10.30pm, then set the alarm to wake you at 4.30am and 6.30am. Each time, record your dreams before returning to sleep. This will give you more opportunities to lucid dream.