Dream Lucidity Induction And Control

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Editor's Note: Alan Worsley was the first dreamer to use specific Rapid Eye Movement (REM) signals in a sleep laboratory to indicate that he knew he had started a lucid dream. These excerpts from a somewhat longer essay tell us about his childhood development efforts, specific personal experiments, and some conclusions from his experience as an "oneironaut" in lucid dream research laboratories.

My most important qualification for presenting this paper is an extensive direct experience of lucid dreams. I have had hundreds of lucid dreams in which I have done an experiment or made some observation. In sleep-laboratory work I have had 50 signal-verified lucid dreams. A primary concern of mine is with the philosophy and phenomenology of dreaming and altered states of consciousness and with what they can tell us abut normal consciousness.

Lucid Dreaming Personal History: Development Of Elementary Techniques

As far as I remember, I achieved my first lucid dream by a deliberately developed technique, at about age five. I had discovered I could wake myself from frightening dreams by shouting, "Mother!" Knowing I had this escape route I became more daring; I deliberately allowed a dream of falling to continue, and nothing bad happened. I became even more confident and, having a lucid dream every few months, I gradually learned to recognize that I was dreaming even when the dream was not frightening and I did not have to remember it was only a dream. I also learned that I could wake if I wanted to. I became fascinated by the idea of being free in my own world. As I grew older I began to call these dreams "conscious" dreams.

At about age 12, I planned my first "conscious-dream" experiment. It was to investigate how much detail it is possible to see in a dream. In the first lucid dream I had after planning the experiment I remembered to do it. I was standing in a doorway, the frame of which was made of wood. I decided to look for the grain in the wood. I discovered I could see the fine details of the grain and concluded that visual acuity was good in dreams. I have since realized that detail in dreams is not so much perceived as created. My conclusion should have been that it is possible for fine detail to be created in dreams.

Every few weeks or months I would have one of these exciting adventures. Recently I have performed more sophisticated experiments. One series of exper-iments explored

the properties of television sets in my dreams. I started with simple tasks such as turning a TV set on and off, increasing the sound, changing channels, or adding color. Then I decided it would be interesting if, having selected a partic-ular scene, I could move into it. I managed to do this by expanding the screen until the edges were no longer visible and then walking into the scene. . . .

Suspension Of Disbelief

When one is awake and looking at the physical world, there is no problem in believing it to be real. The problem comes when an apparently physically real world appears in a dream and one wishes to realize that it is not physically real or, having deliberately altered it, knowing it is only a dream, to re-establish the convincing reality of it. In controlling lucid dreams one is trying to do two things at once which seem at odds with each other; to induce imagery and to pretend that one is not re-sponsible for the imagery. The images so created in lucid dreams seem to come with reality built-in. In lucid dreams, I try to balance the degree of awareness (needed for informed control) that it is "only a dream" with the autonomy and spontaneous unpredictable creativity of dreams. These latter characteristics contribute to the feeling that the reality is authentic. This balancing can be difficult to do when I carry out actions within the dream scene with the full knowledge that I am dreaming and have chosen the whole scene deliberately. I have to suspend disbelief, as when watching a play. It is easy to experience a well-produced play or a film as "real" even though, at any time, one may step back to remind oneself that it is "only a play."

What Causes Dreams?

My impression is that nearly all dreams begin with involuntary imagery after which, if the dream is to continue, it requires attention, and better still, active par-ticipation. Dream imagery, unlike a film, cannot continue to run independently of the brain. In nonlucid dreams the attention and the participation are "involuntary" as I am taken in by the imagery and I do what it seems to demand. In lucid dreaming I can choose to attend to the dream or to some other mental activity such as imagin-ing, calculating, or remembering a dream experiment. In my experience, if attention is focussed on these other activities for more than a few seconds the dream may fade. I may be able to recover the dream state by recalling or imagining the last dream scene or starting a new one, but if the process to which I have been attending is more similar to waking thought than to dreaming I may even wake up. If I lose the dream but do not wake, even though I am still lucid, I tend to become disoriented, perhaps because there is no stable focus or content to be lucid about. In order to carry out an experiment requiring waking-type thought in a lucid dream without losing the dream imagery I sometimes switch attention every two or three seconds between attending to the dream imagery

and then to ensuring its maintenance. This seems to allow refreshment of the dream imagery during prolonged non-dream tasks such as communicating with the outside world. . . .

REM Control by Avoiding Eye Movement

As I have grown increasingly sophisticated in managing dream imagery, I have developed the ability to choose whether to regard the imagery as moving in relation to me or myself as moving in relation to it. In the sleep laboratory, not only can I move my eyes at will, as when signalling, but I can keep them still when otherwise they might be moving, as between signals. That I am able to keep them still when required helps to make the signals clear. By this means it may be possible to reduce markedly the very characteristic which gives REM sleep its name, thereby making "phasic" REM less distinguishable from "tonic" REM.

Some eye movements associated with scanning a dream scene can be avoided by very simple techniques. In order to look at a different part of a dream scene, I may be able to move it into view instead of moving the direction of my gaze. For instance, if I wish to look at my hand in a dream and my hand is not already in view, I can fix my gaze on the part of the dream scene at which I am already looking and bring my dream hand into line with it. This is an easy alternative. If the whole scene is a large picture which I am holding in my hand, to look at a different part of the scene I can move the picture instead of moving my eyes, though to forestall the pos-sibility of my eyes making a reflex tracking movement I have to move the picture very quickly. Another way to not move my eyes while dreaming is to stare at a sta-tionary object. If I moved my eyes I would see a different part of the dream scene.

I can scan a dream scene while keeping my eyes still by using a dream mirror. Though a dreamed mirror appears in the dream to be a real object, it is only a virtual or dreamed device. If I look straight into the mirror, not changing the direction of my gaze, I can look at different parts of the dream scene by moving only the mirror. By using these techniques I alter my expectations. I still expect to see different parts of the dream scene, but I do not expect to have to move my eyes to do so. It would be interesting to discover just how much the REMs of phasic REM can be reduced by these techniques.

Delay In Dream Imagery Generation

In some of my experiments I have investigated the delay which occurs between the moment of willing or expecting a change to occur in dream imagery and the mo-ment of its actually beginning to change. The so-called "light-switch-phenomenon" is

perhaps the most familiar illustration of this delay. I have observed many times, as others have, that when it is dark in dreams and I try to switch on a light, the light will not come on, or at least not come on immediately or brightly. The same applies to attempts I have made to lengthen my arm, sink into the ground or to make things appear out of nothing.

In waking life making your arm longer is impossible. Therefore, when I tried it in a lucid dream I had no experience of how it should be done. I tried to stretch it further than I knew it would stretch when awake. After a delay of one or two seconds, my arm started to grow longer and my right hand soon disappeared into the distance. Then I realized I had not been as successful as I had first thought; I could feel another arm at my side. In order to achieve correspondence of visual with tactile and kinesthetic imagery I repeated the arm lengthening procedure while sliding my hand along a rough wall and watching it closely. In this way I generated tactile sensations in my hand while it moved away from me, and thereby I successfully integrated all relevant imagery modes. I am now able to retrieve distant objects using this arm lengthening technique. . . .

Implications of Transferring Lucidity Techniques To Nonlucid Dreams

I have noticed a tendency for techniques first developed in my lucid dreams to become incorporated into my repertoire of dream experiences generally. For instance I first used the arm-lengthening technique in a lucid dream. Later, in what appeared to be a nonlucid dream, I used the arm-lengthening technique as if I knew it would work, even though the presumption in nonlucid dreams is that one is in the real world where miracles are impossible. Does this mean that though I was not "aware" that I was dreaming, I somehow nevertheless knew that contrary to waking experience I would be able to lengthen my arm?

It appears that my nonlucid dreaming self has the ability to exploit techniques that my lucid dreaming self has developed. If "I" have a wonderful time in nonlucid dreams by using techniques developed in lucid dreams, but the lucid "I," the lucid person who would clearly recognize the experience as a dream, am not there, from the point of view of the waking self whose wonderful time was it?

I have come to realize through consideration of my own dream observations that, like other skills—such as driving a car or playing the piano—which are prac-tised diligently with great effort and concentration, "dreaming" is a learnable skill. |Having learned by many hours of practice to operate reasonably well in a lucid dream I have found that techniques which once required deliberation have become second nature. This includes to some extent the need to remind myself that I am dreaming.

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.

In a sense the lucidity, once it has started, has become, paradoxically, more automatic. In lucid dreams I now engage in "dangerous" activities such as flying, hitting walls and passing through them without stopping, knowing I am perfectly safe. I know very well what I am doing without having to think about it.

If one learns to dream so well, so fluently, that one becomes as a fish in water, in control but not having to think about it, is that still lucid dreaming?

In fact, I have begun to think that many people who would not call themselves lucid dreamers have in fact learned to "dream well." They may fly or perform other miraculous feats in their dreams, somehow recognizing that it is safe to do so, though they may never have articulated this recognition. They may in effect be lead-ing secret lives, of which their waking selves are hardly aware if, like most people, they forget their dreams.