

## Training for Lucid Awareness in Dreams, Fantasy, and Waking Life

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In this paper, I would like to focus on lucidity as a concept, and on lucidity training as a means of fostering psychological growth.

What makes dreams seem so strange? My work with lucidity grew out of my desire to over-come, in myself, first of all, that paradoxical split in consciousness wherein I “know” that my dreaming is uniquely self—expressive and reflects my deepest personal concerns, yet I frequently do not understand my own dreams. Many of us who are mystified and fascinated by dreams like to think of dreams as precious gifts to be opened, sacred texts to be faithfully recorded and analyzed, or secret coded messages, sent from one “part” of the self to another “part” of the self, to be decoded and translated, these metaphors, though enchanting, are misleading, because they make dreams seem like things we receive from elsewhere, rather than creative action<sup>1</sup> that we undertake as unified beings. My approach to lucidity training aims to overcome this kind of alienation from self by fostering awareness of ourselves as active dream creators, of the cognitive and emotional processes by which we create dreams, and of the unique safety of the imagination as space for acquainting ourselves with all of our human psychological potentials. What would it mean to be able to dream consciously? It would mean being at one with oneself, fusing spontaneity with purpose, and acting freely with full awareness. Just as I would rather learn to paint than study “art appreciation,” so would I rather learn to dream than study dream interpretation. Interpretive approaches may

increase the ability to understand dreams, but by requiring that the dreamer take the stance of audience to the dream, they reinforce the dreamer’s sense of alienation from his or her own creation. I found that I would have to go beyond interpretive approaches to my dreams in order to work toward my aim of being able to dream the way I can paint or dance—freely and spontaneously, yet with creative purpose and full awareness that I am the creator of my experience. In lucidity training, I use active fantasy, which requires a participatory stance. By using fantasy as a bridge between the waking and dreaming modes, lucidity training is hands—on practice in conscious “dreaming” during the waking state, and tends to facilitate a direct awareness of one’s own intended meanings.

I find lucidity in dreams so intriguing because it provides a model for expanded awareness. However, minimal lucidity—realizing you are dreaming during a dream—does not yet amount to much. In order to explore the possibilities of lucid dreaming, you still need to clarify what kind of reality the dream is, how dream reality differs from

waking reality, and what unique opportunities it offers. I differentiated three characteristics of dream experience which the dreamer must keep in mind in order to be fully lucid:

First, the creative source. You are the primary creator of your dream world and dream experience.

Second, the connection between self and environment. The apparent separation between yourself and your dream environment is an illusion. In creating your dream images, you are expressing yourself and your unique perceptions of reality.

Third, alternate realities.<sup>2</sup> Your dream experience is but one subjective reality contained within the larger reality of the waking world. As an alternate reality, the dream offers different possibilities and limitations from those of ordinary waking life. Within the dream, you can choose among alternative ways of structuring and responding to your experience.

While lucidity in dreams obviously offers exciting possibilities for experimentation and self—confrontation, what excites me even more is the realization that the concept of lucid awareness can be extended to apply to fantasy and waking reality as well.<sup>3</sup> The essence of lucidity, in any state of consciousness, is awareness of the subjective aspects of a seemingly objective reality. Fantasy, like dreaming, is an internal imaginary form of reality, and therefore full lucidity during fantasy involves awareness of essentially the same three characteristics as those I just stated for dreams. Although waking reality is significantly different from the imaginary realities, in that it involves more objective and concrete elements, lucidity in waking life is analogous to dream lucidity and involves awareness of three parallel characteristics:

First, the creative source. You are continuously contributing to the creation of your waking world and waking experience.

Second, the connection between self and environment. The apparent separation between yourself and your waking environment is an illusion. As an interdependent co—creator of your waking experience, you are continuously expressing yourself and your unique perceptions of reality.

Third, alternate realities. Your waking experience is one, relatively subjective reality which offers different possibilities limitations from those of the more encompassing reality you might experience if “awakened” from your ordinary waking life. Within waking reality, you can choose among alternative ways of structuring and responding to your experience.

In 1979, I completed a doctoral dissertation in which I differentiated these three aspects

of lucid awareness, extended the concept of lucidity to apply to the fantasy and waking states, devised continua to define levels of lucidity, and developed procedures for lucidity training. In the principal training procedure, subjects “re—dreamed” their dreams lucidly, during waking fantasy, with the aim of increasing their satisfaction in the dream. I hypothesized that practicing the lucid attitude and consciously striving for satisfaction during these dream—inspired fantasies, or waking dreams, would result in both increased lucidity, and a greater capacity to achieve satisfaction when confronting problems and opportunities not only in waking dreams, but also in sleep-dreams and in waking life.

I explored this hypothesis through an in-depth study of six subjects, using a dialectical rather than classically experimental research design. That is, I used feedback from the subjects to revise and improve the lucidity training methods as the study progressed, giving particular attention to the varied capacities of each subject.

The subjects were sent orientation materials and training instructions for having lucid waking dreams, including a lucidity training manual, an outline of the lucidity continuum, and a lucidity checklist. The lucidity checklist covered five typical dream situations in which a dreamer might benefit from lucidity: “problematic relationships,” “threatening situations,” “frustrating situations,” “improprieties” and “impossibilities.”

The subjects were instructed to mail me at least one dream each week, with lucidity work, for eight to twelve weeks. I responded with detailed feedback letters offering suggestions for heightening awareness of dream feelings, becoming more fully lucid, and working toward more satisfying resolutions of dream situations.

The criteria that I used to assess changes in the subjects were self—report and my own observations of changes on 22 variables, including lucidity, satisfaction, attitudes toward the imagination, and values concerning personal growth. The raw data, which consisted of taped interviews and written correspondence between me and the subjects, is extensively quoted in the dissertation.

The most frequent result was that the subjects became more lucid in their waking fantasies. That is, they became more aware of their imaginative power and creativity, they behaved more freely, fearlessly, and uninhibitedly during their fantasies, and they gained insight into themselves by recognizing the self—reflecting nature of their own imagery. There were less data available to assess whether changes occurred in the subjects’ sleep—dreams, waking lives, and other outcome categories, but there too, the results encouraged me to believe that with further development and refinement of the training methods, lucidity training could be very effective in increasing awareness and satisfaction in living.

My thinking about lucidity has continuously been stimulated by dialogue with subjects and colleagues who often raise questions and objections. Here are some of the concerns

that come up most frequently, and a brief summary of my current views:

Question—Is it not possible that if we give free play to our fantasies, we may be flooded by unacceptable thoughts, wishes and feelings that may lead us to behave immorally or irrationally?

Ordinarily, no. Awareness of a wish does not automatically lead to action; choice and decision intervene. We may be more likely to act inappropriately on our irrational or immoral motives if we are unaware of them. Becoming conscious of our wishes enables us to choose consciously whether and how we will act on them. An exception: people who have difficulty telling the difference between their fantasies and reality probably will not want to attempt lucidity training unless others are available to provide support and help with reality—testing.

Question—One of the most valuable and delightful qualities of dreams is their spontaneity. If we learn to direct our dreams consciously, won't we lose the benefits of that spontaneity?

Unlikely. The development of the capacity for conscious control does not necessitate indiscriminate use of that capacity. Lucid dreamers can allow their dreams to proceed spontaneously, if they prefer.

Question—Isn't there a danger that lucidity training, by teaching us to control the unconscious mind, may stifle its wisdom and impose the one-sided attitudes and values of the conscious mind?

No. In the first place, it is a mistake to equate ordinary dreaming with purely unconscious behavior. Most dreams involve both conscious and unconscious processes. For example, one may be aware of deciding how to respond to a dream situation, without being aware that one is also creating that situation at that very moment.

Secondly, as a dreamer, one acts as a unity and dreams what one predominately wants to dream, whether consciously or not, within the limits of what one believes is possible, given one's perception of reality. Conscious intentions will not prevent the expression, in some form, of stronger, opposing unconscious wishes.

Finally, I think it is a mistake to assume that ordinary, non-lucid dreams necessarily offer a wiser or deeper picture of personal reality than do lucid, consciously created dreams or one's conscious waking thoughts. While the spontaneity of ordinary dreaming may break through the inhibitions and self-censorship of waking life, it frequently does not. Why? Because the non-lucid dreamer falsely assumes she or he is awake, and therefore subject to all the limitations and moral taboos of waking life. On the other hand, when we dream with maximum lucidity, we are aware that we do not have to be bound

by such limitations, and we therefore have the maximum opportunity to give free play to our imaginations for self—discovery without inhibition or self—deception. As an example, consider the non—lucid dreamer who shies away from acting on, or even admitting, sexual feelings during a dream because the situation would seem improper—  
—for waking life. The same dreamer, if lucid, would feel free to explore and enjoy his or her own sensual feelings during the dream, without fear of waking—life consequences.

Question—Is it not unrealistic to believe that one can ever have total conscious control in dreams?

Yes. Since the development of awareness is a gradual process with no end—point, and since dreaming, like any other activity, is mediated by many situational factors, the concept of total lucidity is offered here as a theoretical ideal.

Question—Is one really totally safe in dreams?

Dream imagery often expresses fears that are valid responses to real threats. However, threatening dream images are not the real dangers they represent. This lucid perspective enables one to ‘take the threatening life situation as seriously as is warranted, while using one’s dream imagery about the situation to experiment fearlessly with creative responses.

Question—Doesn’t the practice of lucid fantasy, like ordinary daydreaming, encourage retreat into a world of imaginary gratifications?

On the contrary, lucid fantasy, unlike ordinary day—dreaming, inherently leads to facing oneself more realistically as one consciously confronts one’s own projections in one’s imagery. Like ordinary daydreaming, lucid imagining can be used to rehearse positive behaviors and to develop life—shaping aspirations.

### Applications for Lucidity Training

The ultimate value of lucidity is its potential to increase satisfaction in living. Because lucidity and the pursuit of satisfaction enhance each other synergistically, lucidity training incorporates satisfaction as a goal and as a continuously monitored felt sense.<sup>5</sup> Some of my subjects could not at first, achieve clarity about their actual feelings, values and desires because they were irrationally afraid of having any thoughts or feelings which they considered “bad,” and were too busy censoring their spontaneous reactions. Maximal lucidity which involves the thoroughgoing knowledge that imagining and acting—in—the world are not the same, leads to the realization that it is both useful and safe to use dreams and fantasies to strip away conventional restraints and to use one’s spontaneous reactions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction as a source of inner guidance. Because lucidity involves recognition of one’s creative powers, of alternative

possibilities, and previously unrecognized inner potentials, also increases the likelihood of obtaining satisfaction. Conversely, a satisfaction seeking orientation, by continually posing the question, “how can I make the best of this situation?” acts as a stimulus to creativity and provides motivation to apply lucid awareness.

Lucidity training could be integrated in psychotherapy, where specific applications might include the treatment of nightmares and phobias. I have been particularly interested in developing group exercises to foster sharing, mutual helpfulness and intimacy among friends, couples, family members, and workshop participants. I would predict that many students of lucidity training will find once they have consolidated all the basic principles and techniques, that they can continue to use the method on their own. Lucidity training can also be used as a path for spiritual growth. The clearing away, through lucidity, of cobwebs of projection, can lead to a newly vivid and profound perception of oneself and others, while the lucid awareness of the interconnectedness of self and others, whether in dreams, fantasies, or waking life, may ultimately foster a cherishing of the precious qualities of each individual being.

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