

Hypnotherapy: A Natural Method of Learning Lucid Dreaming

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I am a hypnotherapist who works with lucid dreams. I would like to function as a connection, a sort of bridge, between these two groups of scientists, the hypnotherapists, and the lucid dream researchers. Hopefully, I can influence your perception of hypnotherapy, so you can understand how dream lucidity can be learned by this means.

If I follow the classification scheme for induction methods by Robert Price, hypnotherapy would fall under "additional techniques." It combines the "lucid-awareness training techniques" with the "intention and suggestion techniques." So you can call hypnotherapy a "combined combination technique."

As Milton Erickson discovered we learn much better in a trance state. Trance and hypnosis, as Ericksonians understand it, do not mean some sort of drowsy or indolent state, but are defined as "active unconscious learning, deliberated from every usual limitation of rational thinking; as a time of exercise with the help of those unconscious creative potentials a human has without knowing or using."² All of you know about trance. You have all experienced it time and time again. Why not learn as comfortably and easily as possible the balance and special concentration found in the trance state?

Some weeks ago I went to a congress in Germany. I had to listen to one speech after another. As most of the presenters were excellent hypnotists - I guess without knowing - it only took me 5 minutes and I fell asleep. I heard the monotonous voice in the distance. I decided then to play a game with myself. My body felt quite comfortable sitting there in a chair with my eyes closed. But I managed to stay awake, enjoying the interesting experience of letting my unconscious pick out some of the words and sentences which were meaningful to me. It's possible to hold yourself in balance, sitting comfortably in a chair, and feel the inner quietness, and at the same time, you can enjoy the exciting experience of being in a state of awareness.

Learning to have lucid dreams is part of dream development, a widening experience which is more or less unknown in our western culture. Yogis always knew about dream development - lucid dreaming being a step on their way to enlightenment. In our society, psychotherapy naturally evokes such experiences. This technique widens your consciousness leading to dream development as is shown in the books of Patricia Garfield.

When our everyday understanding becomes as wide as the general understanding that is sometimes possible in our dreams, then our dreams can be understood as easily as everyday acting, becoming more and more clear until, finally, full lucidity is reached. The growing understanding of our dreams, on the other hand, leads to another understanding - what

growing means in our everyday understanding. And if you were really paying attention and have not excused my words as some foreign English, you

¹This is a paper which was presented at the 1988 annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Dreams. Santa Cruz, California.

² Peter 1983, p. 348.

would be confused. This is what I intended. The hypnotherapeutic technique of confusion provokes you to let go. You adjust and clear your mind in a new way so that you are able to reach a higher level of awareness. Erickson said, "Any trance that is of a sufficient level to let your unconscious mind to take a look at what's going on, is sufficient . . . And you should use your mind at the unconscious level, even while you are using it at the conscious level."

Ernest Rossi specifies in his book, *Dreams and the Growth of Personality*, the important issue we have to look for when dream development is taking place. He states that dreams are a mirror of the development of our consciousness. He then outlines the following items in our dreams as signs of the process of our awareness expanding:

1. The transformation of the dream ego from being a passive victim to an active participant in the dream.
2. The transformation from a uni-level participation (things just happening) to an experience of two or more states of being; so that through self-reflection, dialogue, and evaluating, the integration of several parts becomes possible.
3. The transformation from the state of chaos (expressed through images of danger and feelings of anxiety) to a new state characterized by satisfying circumstances and emotions as the fruit of self-reflection, insights, and the new outlook.

Before we reach lucidity in dreams, these transformations are spontaneous and autonomous. I want to give you a dramatic example from my own dream life, where all these aspects mentioned can be seen. I had this dream about a year before I had my first spontaneous lucid dream.

The Stopping Plane

I stood outside with my youngest son watching a plane. There seemed to be something wrong with the plane, because some smoke came out and it didn't fly straight any longer. It began to teeter. I was shocked and afraid that it might fall down on the city nearby. I expressed my feelings to my son. Then we saw the plane flying away from the city and towards us.

After a while there was no doubt that the plane came closer to us, tottering and turning around. There was no possibility to escape. The plane was too quick. And it became clear, too, that it would crash right on the spot where we were standing. I reflected: well, this is my last second of life. Everything is over now. Then there was some sort of "o.k." feeling. I said to myself, "Yes, it's over now. That's a fact."

I accepted our death and waited actively for the crash. In this moment there was a dramatic change. I heard and saw the plane begin to stop about 10 feet over our heads. A huge parachute came out and stopped the falling plane totally. It just stood in the air now, the parachute over us like a huge protective screen. And then it came down slowly beside us. I felt safe and relieved.

Rosen 1982. p. 64

In the first part I simply watched. I was a passive observer of autonomous forces. What generated change was my becoming an active participant in the dream process.

There are several stages of activity: At first I only talked to my son (another aspect of myself, you might say) and expressed my frightened feelings. When these became stronger and stronger - shown in the image of the plane coming nearer and nearer to destroying me - I had to go to the next level of activity. My consciousness widened to self-reflection, which meant in this situation, that I saw myself experiencing the last second of my life. From this overview a new level of activity aroused. An evaluation of the situation was possible. I accepted. This again expanded my awareness - saying yes to the most horrifying thing - that I am going to be killed. And this saved my life, so to speak. This was the final key for the dramatic change in the dream, as well in my feelings. It's amazing that this change could happen just by reflection and evaluation. There was no other activity performed in the dream, such as fighting or moving, just accepting.

In hypnotherapy we have several ways to train activity and to widen consciousness, so that a transfer can be made to the dreams at night-time. There has been no research done so far in this field, because hypnotherapists didn't know about lucid dreaming, and lucid dreamers don't generally know about hypnotherapy. Ernest Rossi, the hypnotherapist and close colleague of Milton Erickson said that the term "lucid dreaming" was not used in the first edition of his book in 1972. But for the second edition in 1985, he pointed out that his patient, Davina, learned to have lucid dreams during the course of her therapy. He showed that in her dream examples. This is something like a double - blind-experiment because neither the therapist nor the patient were aware of previous work on the concept and phenomenon of lucid dreaming. During hypnotherapy it naturally happened that the patient developed lucid dreams, even when no one was informed of this possibility. (This also shows that Erickson was right with his concept that the work had to be done by the patient,

not by the therapist.) Ross; wrote, "Davina's record, then, provides an unusually clear example of how the development of lucid dreaming can be an entirely spontaneous and optimal process of psychological change, growth, and transformation."³ The same thing happened to me in my teaching therapy, and that's why I began to teach my patients lucid dreaming in hypnotherapy, consciously.

In my personal experience and the experiences with my clients, I found that everything widening the consciousness during the day may lead to lucid dreaming during the night. The mere experience of trance can widen your consciousness. Did you ever experience the language of a finger of your hand saying "yes" or "no" (or "I don't want to answer") by an autonomic movement? You can try it right now by responding to my question, "Are you enjoying a light trance right now?" If your unconscious says "yes," a finger of your left hand can move. If your unconscious says "no," a finger of your right hand can move. That's the way David Cheek came to a basic conversation with the unconscious mind. Even when your conscious mind says "yes," your autonomic system may say "no," with its better knowledge of the whole situation. If there is a missing correspondence this may widen your perspective and show you that there is something in the way which you haven't been aware of before. Since trance work is body work, the language of the body, just as verbal language, can widen your consciousness.

³Rossi 1985, S. 219

Right from the beginning, clients have new bodily and often new emotional experiences. They don't have to wait for the success of the therapy because then consciousness is widened right in the first sessions of trance training. Many clients remember in detail what they experienced in an altered state of consciousness. They also recall events in the therapist's room. A part of them registers everything as if an observer not a participant.

Milton Erickson in his early years often insisted on deep trance phenomena as a resource in therapy. These patients might have forgotten what had been going on. He also developed the creative possibilities of everyday light trances. Many of his disciples prefer to work with these light trance states allowing the consciousness to be present unless it interferes. By working in trance, the patient can experience at least two levels of reality at the same time: on the trance level - acting and communicating with the therapist as you work on a special problem - and on the every day level - you can observe and register the process. With this you train to have more than one ego state in a dream.

In lucid dreams you also have to be able to maintain at least two levels of consciousness. As LaBerge pointed out, it's impossible to become lucid in a dream until there is that balance of being involved in the dream play and being the observer at the same time. Therefore learning to train the ability to stay conscious while working in trance can widen

your consciousness.

I usually try to facilitate this by shifting from one state to the other and aiding the patient to “learn to balance in the states.” For instance, I could ask, “Where are you right now with your concentration?” You are aware of your right foot, feeling more or less warm; you are aware of the brightness of the room compared to other rooms; you are aware of the tone of my voice in addition to what I am telling you; you are aware of the special language of hypnosis, of the rhythms of my repetitions. If you listened carefully, you would have noticed how often I used an embedded command, so that you could also learn on an unconscious level. For example, notice the embedded command in my last sentence: “Learn on an unconscious level,” You can maintain the experiencing level and the analyzing level simultaneously.

An opportunity to utilize trance occurs when a patient won’t relinquish or denies an emotion. With every strong emotion we can go into trance, allowing creative change to occur. When I do this task the client to stay with this emotion, focusing on it, taking the opportunity given by this pattern interruption to experience it in a new way- more slowly, for instance, or with another intensity.

After learning the structural patterns of emotions, as taught by David Gordon, experienced emotions in a new way - a widening of my horizon. I had a lucid dream the first night after that! Did you ever ask yourself, “Is this feeling of comfort more active or more passive? Does it have a slow, moderate, or fast speed? Is the rhythm more even or uneven? What time frame is the emotion about - past, present, or future? Or maybe past and future? What about the degree of the emotional strength - low, moderate, or high intensity? Do you feel the comfort has a large or small size? When you look for the visual representation, is it vague or rich?” Asking questions like these may lead to widening your usual patterns of feeling and expanding your awareness.

These, I feel, are aspects of hypnotherapy which seem to have a positive influence on the ability to dream lucidly.

Let me repeat my hypothesis:

- A. It is possible to have a transfer from conscious widening experiences during the day to the conscious widening experience of lucid dreaming during the night.
- B. It is possible to experience trance as a conscious widening experience.
- C. Becoming aware of body language may help to expand the consciousness.
- D. Gaining the ability to stay conscious during trance work may develop the ability to have lucid dreams.

E. Interrupting the usual patterns of emotions and experiencing different ways may expand the awareness.

Case Illustrations

The following are examples showing special techniques in hypnotherapy which have obviously led to lucid dreaming.

My patient, Gaby, was a 21 year old woman displaying manifest anxiety. She lived at home with her parents and was unable to be alone day or night. Gaby felt persecuted by an invisible being at home. I worked with her hypnotherapeutically on this problem in the presence of her parents. I asked her questions about the persecutor to make him concrete. She couldn't see him, only hear him, but was able to answer questions like: "Is it more a man or more a woman? What hair color would fit him? What is his size? How old is he? What might he wear?" After a while, she became more and more involved with guessing and describing the details about him. When in a trance state, I asked her to give a name to her persecutor. She was confused, but then named him "elephant." She did so because she remembered a special picture of an elephant she had been laughing at. This was the first anxiety reducing maneuver Gabs developed.

I then asked her to allow the elephant to come to my room so we could talk with him and find out his wishes. I assured her I would give her any shelter necessary. The "elephant" came in and stood at a distance of 15 feet. I discussed with Gaby the questions we would ask. She then asked him directly. She was able to hear his answers. Through our discussion, I gave her the idea that this person may have other intentions than what she expected - maybe even good intentions. This "reframing" technique changed her frame of reference in which she was perceiving things. By giving only an impulse - not a direct answer - to the patient, the perspective is widened. This allowed the patient to perceive the situation differently.

Gaby followed me. When she asked the elephant why he came to frighten her, she heard him answer. It was not his intention to frighten her, but rather to be near her because she was so lonely. He wanted to give her some entertainment. Gaby began to weep. That's an important indicator of an effective reframing process, the "reconciling physiology." As Thies Stahl calls it, (in Bandler and Grinder) the change from, sympathetically to parasympathetically activated physiology happens just at the moment when the patient can accept the part of themselves which they had rejected before.

After this lesson Gaby had her first recurring dream, in which her ex-partner persecuted her, but with a new outcome - she jumped over a closed door. Some nights later she had her first lucid dream from which she awakened with a good feeling that lasted the whole day. In the dream Gaby went to a restaurant where she saw a sign which read, "Guru Jrgen." She was curious and frightened and wanted to see the Guru. She looked in the

window. The Guru looked young, about 40 years old, but with white hair, He wore jeans. When he saw her, he stood up. She wanted to run away, but was not very quick. The Guru came out and shouted, "She is anxious!" Then a handful of young boys came after her and she fought with them. Three boys grabbed her at the same time, and she struggled desperately. Then she broke free and ran away, but again not very quickly. One of the boys said, "I will give her three minutes head start." She came to a path in a wood and thought, "Now they must be here soon." She wanted to fly and at this moment she became lucid. Flying high she said to herself, "I'm just dreaming." Her anxiety had gone. She wondered why the boys didn't come and decided to fly back. But there was nobody.

After this breakthrough Gaby's development went well. She began to sleep in her own room, went out again to see friends, and step-by-step she developed a new independence.

Another example is of a young man of 21 years, Gerd, who had failed his qualifying exam for university entrance. He began training as an information-electrical engineer. At this time he asked for therapy. Some days before he had to do an intermediate test, of which he was sure he would again fail. He had the following dream:

I'm traveling in the first railroad cars of a train. On a railway embankment there is a switch to a side-track. The train drives on this side track at a very high speed and can't be stopped. It knocks down the buffer-stop and finally some of the railroad ears are hanging down the embankment. I manage to get out of the first car uninjured, which is hanging only some feet off the ground.

This was an opportunity to do dream work in trance. Telling the dream and describing the environment in detail facilitated getting into the trance state. Now flexibility had to be taught to find better solutions. We worked on the dream as if Gerd had been lucid during the dream. Before getting out of the train I asked Gerd to look to the other side of the car. He saw the emergency brake and had the idea to pull it. Then he went to the locomotive engine and convinced the engineer to drive the train back to the other track. He threw the switch, and the train went on in another direction.

Gerd passed the test with the highest grade, but he didn't tell me for weeks. He had two lucid dreams which mirrored his trance teachings: "I'm driving with my VW on a steep road. I am hindered by some thoughtless road users, for example by a truck, which overtakes me on the right just at the moment when I overtake a slow-moving car. Suddenly the front windshield is as small as the rear windshield. After I check this by turning around, the front windshield again has another form. Logically I can only be in a dream. I'm very thankful for this realization and enjoy the state. Unfortunately it doesn't stay very long, as I'm thinking too much instead of paying attention to my environment." Here the lucidity came up in the moment when he was flexible enough to look around, as he had learned to do in trance.

The patient's next lucid dream went like this: "Together with another person I am fleeing an unknown danger in a strange building. I climb up higher and higher. When I finally find a way out, I find myself on the top of a hall. There is the danger that I may fall down, because my only hold is some piled stones. Fortunately I notice at this moment that I'm dreaming. Instead of falling I decide to float down. The realization that I'm dreaming is not so important to me. I don't want to risk the dream. Therefore, I let myself fall or float without wishing anything"

Half a year later he decided to study engineering in a technical college, which was more consistent with his abilities.

It's important for me as a therapist not to stand in the way when a patient is working. I don't direct the content of the dream story, and I don't give interpretations. To do dream work in trance you can use Gestalt techniques or the Jungian-Senoï method, of Strophon Kaplan-Williams. Applying these techniques in trance makes them more effective.

In my next example I worked with submodalities. Our ability to reflect our experiences is due to the representations of our senses such as visual pictures, auditory tones or sounds and kinesthetic sensations. The most important representational systems are the visual, the auditory, and the kinesthetic. Submodalities are the small elements within these modalities, such as brightness or color for the visual system, loudness or rhythm for the auditory, and intensity or temperature for the kinesthetic. We all develop individual styles in reacting to inner and outer stimuli. When someone brings to our attention that we exclusively experience the world and invites us to interrupt these automatic ways of responding by changing a submodality, the whole state changes, and in this way, new learning and growth processes are evoked.

I worked with a young colleague, Karin, on the submodality "distance," when she confronted a terrifying figure. In a visual hallucination, a fantasy woman came from behind and frightened her while she was in the bathroom. Karin decided to confront her while in trance. Prior to this we discussed changing the picture before the woman appears. With her eyes open Karin decided to let her come very near to my door, so that she could be certain she could send her away whenever she wanted to. I suggested she play a little with the distance of the picture - to let the person come nearer and to zoom her away again - being aware of her feelings each time. After experimenting, Karin decided that 10 feet was the distance where she didn't feel any anxiety. She named the person "Nirak," which is the spelling of "Karin read from behind. As my colleague she understood she would have a conversation with her "shadow."

This is how it was structured

1. Saying hello in some way and expressing the wish to communicate.
2. Asking, respectfully, if Nirak is willing to communicate.

3. Making clear what “yes” and “no” meant as a minimum communication form and demonstrating this.
4. Asking questions such as, ”What did you do before to get my attention that some changes are necessary? Is it possible to tell some aspects of your positive intentions? What do you want me to change so that you can feel better? Are you ready to give a part of your energy for other projects one day?”
5. Saying thank you and asking for more meetings in dreams in order to go on learning and getting more advice. The conversation ended.

Karin and Nirak had reached an agreement that Nirak should always hold the distance of 10 feet and come from the front. In her first lucid dream Karin realized she was dreaming at the moment she looked into the eyes of a frightening dog. When she said to the animal, “You must not be afraid of me,” she lost her anxiety and was reminded of the term “underdog” and “don’t run away!” and knew she was dreaming. Karin laughed and was very happy. She went on talking to the other people in the dream, who had climbed a staircase. She said, “You can all come back, it’s only a dream!” Slowly they came down the staircase. They formed a semi-circle as they came nearer. When they were quite near, she again was frightened and said with a trembling voice, “Don’t look at me like this! It’s only a dream. I become anxious when you come too close to me. I want to know about the meaning of every one of you, but please one at a time.” They stopped. She then had several conversations with them. After that she wanted to fly and did so with the persons in her dream.

At this point the dream became a high lucid dream. Karin flew through a tree without getting hurt and then to a mountain with a crater. She felt a wonderful completeness.

One of my basic instruments included in each of the examples I have given you has been from Paul Carter, and to some extent, Wolfgang Lenk, the procedure of parts work utilized. To paraphrase: If you take a symptom or a frightening dream figure, it’s a part of your system you must respect. Every symptom is a miscarried self-healing process, and therefore a friend who in some way pulls the emergency brake. It’s worth it to lend him our ear.

In hypnotherapeutic parts work this can be done by:

1. Developing the part in its sensory representations. (You remember Gaby’s symptom of feeling persecuted and hearing noises in the house? We developed it as a person with a name “Elephant.”)
2. Opening up communications with the part.
3. Discovering the goals of the part, especially the positive intent, for reconciliation. (This being change by reframing.)
4. Learning from the part how to make new choices.
5. Arranging future contacts for ongoing learning and integration within

satisfying circumstances. This is where we can place anchors and give suggestions for lucid dreaming.

The wholistic concept of parts work corresponds to the research of Paul Tholey. We must treat dream figures as if they are real beings. He has found through lucid dreaming that dream figures can have an independent awareness, memory, and motivation. This method, however, does not correspond with Tholey's Gestalt world view to separate from top-dog hostile dream figures. Neither does it correspond to the Jungian-Senoi technique where killing a dream figure is allowed.

As all results in experiments depend on the underlying model of reality, the question of how to deal with symptoms or frightening dream figures can't be decided by experiments. In hypnotherapy it's believed that a symptom has all the information necessary to change life and to recover.

In a final example, I use a personal experience to describe the meaningful understanding of a symptom by parts work. In winter I joined a seminar in cancer therapy. We worked in small groups with our own symptoms to gain self-experience. I chose a pain in my left arm represented by a picture of an arm and a hand with a finger pointing out. I thought one of those terrible top dogs wanted to control me! But I began a conversation, first just by yes-and-no-signals, then by thoughts. I asked for the positive intentions of that part and understood it wanted to show me something. Suddenly the picture changed, and the finger pointed to the west. To me, this meant go to the conference in California and tell about your experiences with lucid dreams. Don't care about the authority that wants to stop you. Go your own way! The supposed top dog had changed into a self-supporting aspect and now became much more sympathetic to me. The next day we continued asking for help and advice, and I received more answers in thoughts and pictures I wouldn't have expected. This convinced me it was really the part answering. My inner therapist, as I named this part later, was so content with my understanding, he gave me a great deal of his energy when I came home. Instead of being tired from a strenuous seminar. I began to write down ideas for this meeting. This really felt like a reunion of a beloved personality part that had been split off.

I have given many examples of hypnotherapy utilizing dream work. I have not discussed story-telling using metaphors, but I will conclude with a special anchor.

I give you one of my anchors - "Turn on the light of lucidity" whenever a switch appears in your dream. Don't become side-tracked. Always go back to the switch to find the right way for lucid dreaming. How real do you feel right now? Do you agree with Kay Thompson, when she says, "The true dreamer is the only true realist, because the dreamer can accept the unreality of his dreams without being shattered by the illusion of the real reality." (Thompson. K. in: Klippstein)

Summary: Clients in hypnotherapy are being taught lucid dreaming. Those aspects of the methods which may be of influence have been discussed. Lucid dreamers may profit from hypnotherapeutical approaches in handling problems in their lucid dreams.

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