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LUCID DREAMING

by David Town

Most people don't realize they've been dreaming until after they've awakened and the dream has come to an end. Some people, however, are conscious that they're dreaming. These lucid dreamers, scientists have discovered, can literally direct their actions and change the content of a dream, deciding perhaps to talk physics with Einstein, woo and marry a movie star, or assume the powers of Superman.

After nearly a decade of piloting these daring nocturnal flights, two psychologists - Stephen LaBerge of Stanford University, author of LUCID DREAMING (Ballantine), and Jayne Gackenbach of the University of Northern Iowa - have begun to develop a series of techniques aimed at helping ordinary dreamers "turn" lucid, and lucid dreamers gain greater control over the woolly behemoth of the night. These special techniques, still under development, have never before been presented in a public forum.

For those who have acquired the knack of lucidity, the benefits can be enormous. Lucid dreaming gives one the chance to experience adventures rarely surpassed elsewhere in life. These experiences can enhance self-confidence and promote personal growth and self-development. By facing fears and learning to make the best of the worst situation imaginable, lucid dreamers can overcome nightmares. Because recent scientific studies have demonstrated a strong connection between dreams and the biological functioning of the body, lucid dreams might facilitate physical as well as mental health. And finally, because lucid dreaming allows us to tap the power of the unconscious, it may also be useful for creative problem solving.

To direct your own nightly dream-time show, attempt exercises one, two, three and four as outlined below. LaBerge and Gackenbach suggest that you do the tasks as often as possible. Some people may succeed in having a lucid dream the very first night they use the techniques; others, the researchers note may need to practice for several weeks before getting results.

EXERCISE ONE

A number of techniques facilitate lucid dreaming. One of the simplest is asking yourself many times during the day whether you are dreaming. Each time you ask the question, you should look for evidence proving you are not dreaming. The most reliable test: Read something, look away for a moment, and then read it again. If it reads the same way twice, it is unlikely that you are dreaming. After you have proved to yourself that you are not presently dreaming, visualize yourself doing whatever it is you'd like. Also, tell yourself that you want to recognize a nighttime dream the



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next time it occurs. The mechanism at work here is simple; it's much the same as picking up milk at the grocery store after reminding yourself to do so an hour before.

At night people usually realize they are dreaming when they experience unusual or bizarre occurrences. For instance, if you find yourself flying with no visible means of support, you should realize that this only happens in dreams and that you must therefore be dreaming. If you awaken from a dream in the middle of the night, it is very helpful to return to the dream immediately, in your imagination. Now envision yourself recognizing the dream as such. Tell yourself, "The next time I am dreaming, I want to remember to recognize that I am dreaming." If your intention is strong and clear enough, you may find yourself in a lucid dream when you return to sleep.

EXERCISE TWO

Many lucid dreamers report dreams in which they fly unaided, much like Superman. Some lucid dreamers say that flying is a thrilling means of travel; others, that it has helped them return from one of the more harrowing dream experiences --- the endless fall. Why is dream flying so important? It's a form of dream control that's fairly easy to master. It gives the dreamer an exhilarating sense of freedom. And it's a basic means of travel in the dream world. How do you make a dream flight happen at all? We suggest that before you retire for bed, you simply repeat these words: "Tonight I fly!" Then while still awake, imagine that journey.

If you find yourself flying, it will be a clear sign that you are in a dream. In any case, when you realize you're dreaming, remember that you want to fly. When you actually feel yourself flying, say, "This is a dream." Make sure that you start modestly, by simply floating above the surface of your dream ground. As you gain confidence, both in the notion that you are dreaming and in your ability to control that experience, you might experiment with flying a bit more.

Run, taking big leaps, and then stay aloft for a few seconds so that you resemble an astronaut walking on the moon. Try sustained floating, and then flying at low altitudes. As your confidence increases, so will your flying skills. While asleep, work on increasing your altitude, maneuverability, and speed. As with speed sports, you should perfect height and maneuverability before speed. Of course, you couldn't really hurt yourself --- it's only a dream. But you could get scared. After you get proficient in dream flying, remember to ask yourself these questions: "How high can I fly? Can I view the earth from outer space? Can I travel so fast that I lose awareness of my surroundings and experience the sensation of pure speed?"

Throughout your efforts in dream flight, please remember that you're in a dream. With this in mind, your fears will be held at bay, and your control over your dream will be greatly enhanced.



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EXERCISE THREE

Even if you're a frequent lucid dreamer, you may not be able to stop yourself from waking up in mid-dream. And even if your dreams do reach a satisfying end, you may not be able to focus them exactly as you please. During our years of research, however, we have found that spinning your dream body can sustain the period of sleep and give you greater dream control. In fact, many subjects at Stanford University have used the spinning technique as an effective means of staying in a lucid dream. The task outlines below will help you use spinning as a means of staying asleep and, more exciting, as a means of traveling to whatever dream world you desire.

As with dream flying, the dream spinning task starts before you go to bed. Before retiring, decide on a person, time, and place you would like to visit in your lucid dream. The target person and place can be either real or imaginary, past, present or future. For instance, Sigmund Freud, Vienna, 1900; Stephen LaBerge, Stanford, the present; or the president of the solar system, Galaxy Base, 2900. Write down and memorize your target person and place, then visualize yourself visiting your target and firmly resolve to do so in a dream that night.

When following this procedure, it is possible that you might find yourself visiting your target in a non-lucid dream; you will be aware that this happened only after you awaken. Nevertheless, you should strive for lucidity by following the techniques in exercise one. Then proceed to your goal. To do so, repeat the phrase describing your target in your dream, and spin your whole dream body in a standing position with your arms outstretched.

You can pirouette or spin like a top, as long as you vividly feel your body in motion. The same spinning technique will help when, in the middle of a lucid dream, you feel the dream imagery beginning to fade. To avoid waking up, spin as you repeat your target phrase again and again. With practice, you'll return to your target person, time, and place.

EXERCISE FOUR

Up until now we have had little control over the occurrence of creative dreams. But with lucid dreaming it may be possible to intentionally access the creativity of the dream state. You can help determine the feasibility of this idea by attempting to solve a problem in a lucid dream. Before bed, decide on a problem you would like to solve. Frame your problem in the form of a question. For example : "What is the topic of my next book ?" "How can I become less shy ?" If you have an illness, you might consider the problem "How can I regain my health ?"

Once you have selected a problem question, write it down and memorize it. When doing the lucid-dream-induction exercises, remember your question and see yourself looking for the answer in your next lucid dream. Then, when in a lucid dream, ask the question, and seek the solution.



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You might be most successful at problem solving if you take the direct approach. For instance if your problem is shyness, be less shy in your dream. If your problem is health, try to heal yourself in the dream. Then reflect on how your dream solution relates to the waking problem. It may help to question other dream characters, especially if they represent people who you think might know the answer. For example, if you were trying to solve a physics problem, Albert Einstein might be a good dream character to query. You can even combine this task with the dream spinning and flying tasks, visiting an expert on your problem. You can also just explore your dream world with your question in mind, looking for any clues that might suggest an answer.