

# Lucid Dreaming

Dreaming and waking are normally mutually exclusive states of consciousness, but in lucid dreams they overlap, the dreamer becoming aware of being in a dream. Most often this occurs in the middle of a dream, but some people remain conscious while falling into sleep, while others stay alert after awakening while going back into dreaming. The duration of lucid dreams depends on the dreamer's levels of skill and experience.

Lucid dreaming has been described since antiquity but has only recently been the subject of research. It can be acquired as a skill with training, and offers extraordinary potential for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being, with largely untapped relevance for mastering everyday reality.

Many people can recall having had at least one lucid dream. In a survey of seventy Swedish psychology students 80% reported one.<sup>1</sup> A small but significant relationship has been demonstrated between the frequency of lucid dreams and personality factors, such as thin boundaries, absorption, imagination, and fantasy.<sup>2</sup>

## Brief Historical Overview

Lucid dreams (LDs) have been recorded for centuries by religious figures, poets and philosophers. In the ancient tradition of Tibetan Bön Buddhism, LDs are recognized in the context of dream yoga. Aristotle noted that it was a common occurrence to become conscious in a dream. In the twelfth century the Sufi mystic Sufi Ibn Al-Arabi stressed the importance of controlling thoughts in dreams. Among Christians an early report of LDs was given by St Augustine, and later in the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas correctly commented that such dreams were typically experienced towards the end of sleep by especially imaginative people.

The nineteenth century sinologist and sleep researcher Léon d'Hervey Saint Denys, a lucid dreamer from young age, documented his dreams over two decades and demonstrated that one can learn how to 'guide' dreams.<sup>3</sup> In 1913, the Dutch psychiatrist and pioneering researcher Frederick van Eeden was the first to use the term 'lucid' – from the Latin *lux*, light, and *lucere*, to shine, radiate, being clear, bright – for dreams in which the mind is clear, awake and conscious of being in a dream; he recorded 352 of his own lucid dreams between 1898 and 1912.<sup>4</sup> More recently, American researchers Stephen LaBerge and Robert Waggoner refer to several thousands of their personal LDs, while other reports can be found in internet forums.

## Consciousness and Dream States

In 2013, an interdisciplinary study compared the factors of insight, control, thought, realism, memory, dissociation, and negative and positive emotion in LDs and non-LDs. The study showed that realism and negative emotion do not differentiate between lucid and non-lucid dreams, concluding that 'lucid insight is

separable from both bizarreness in dreams and from a change in the subjectively experienced realism of the dream'.[5](#)

## **Physiology and States of Mind**

The most vivid dream periods occur during the sleep periods of rapid eye movement (REM). LDs typically occur during REM sleep, particularly close to the end of the REM phases in the morning. A study at the University of Frankfurt found some evidence that LDs share physiological aspects of both waking and dreaming at the same time.[6](#)

REM phases are characterized mainly by the higher frequency of alpha and beta waves, indicative of the mental arousal that dreaming implies. LDs show also the highest frequency waves, gamma waves, which are typical for meditation. The frontal lobe during these REM phases is even more active than during the waking state. All this suggests an intellectually demanding activity that involves intense concentration.[7](#)

In experiments with a dedicated lucid dreamer, British psychologist Keith Hearne is credited with the discovery that it is possible to signal by the use of eye movements while being in the lucid dream state. Hearne wrote up these ground-breaking results in his 1978 doctoral dissertation, which however was not published.[8](#) American student researcher Stephen LaBerge made the same findings, which he wrote up in a doctoral thesis completed two years after Hearne's and published in his now classic book *Lucid Dreaming* (1985).

The Hearne and LaBerge work led to the commercial development of a sleeping-mask with inbuilt REM sensors that react to eye movements by stimulating the dreamer as a cue to become lucid, usually with light.

## **Degrees of Lucidity in Dreams**

The realization that one is dreaming often surprises dreamers so much that it wakes them up. It requires some training to remain lucid and become fully aware of the opportunities. In terms of length, a LD of half an hour is exceptional, but longer periods of dream lucidity have also been reported. German gestalt psychologist Paul Tholey reported having twice experienced 24 hours of lucidity with an approximately five-hour period spent in a total sleeping state,[9](#) although a duration of this length seems to be the limit, at least amongst western dreamers. As dreamers continue to have lucid dreams, some develop great skill in steering the experience. Gaining complete control of the LD may however be as difficult as gaining complete control of our waking thoughts.

Awakening in LDs involves three basic steps:

- 1) Pre-lucid – seeing something unreal in the dream and realizing that it is unreal.
- 2) Lucid – seeing something unreal in the dream and realizing that it therefore must be a dream.

3) Super lucid – becoming aware that one is dreaming and realizing the opportunity to steer the dream in any direction.

Deirdre Barrett in her study ‘Just how lucid are lucid dreams?’ concludes that it is not the ability to control the dream that constitutes the significance or ‘lucidity’ of lucid dreaming but rather the ‘coexistence and interaction of the two modes’, waking – including more complete cognitive abilities – and dreaming.<sup>10</sup>

## Lucid Dreams and Out-of-Body Experiences

LDs and out-of-body experiences (OBEs) have aspects in common, for instance independence from the physical body and bird-like mobility. Certain features appear to be different, although the line between them is blurred. Typical in LDs is the creation of new environments and even new worlds, whereas in OBEs the consciousness stays close to the physical reality, including perception of the individual’s body in the room.<sup>11</sup> The table below offers a comparison of typical features of LDs and OBEs.

Lucid dreams	Out-of-body experiences
A typical survey finding is that about eighty percent of respondents had one LD in life.	OBEs are less common than LDs. Ten to fifteen percent of respondents report having one.
LDs do not start off from the current body position.	OBEs start off from the current body position.
LDs do not include the experience of leaving the physical body.	OBEs include the experience of leaving the physical body.
Lucid dreamers are unaware of their physical bodies.	Out-of-body experiencers are aware of their physical bodies at the onset of the OBE
Lucid dreamers sometimes become aware of their dream bodies, which can feel solid.	Out-of-body experiencers can be aware of their new non-physical bodies, which feel subtle.
Lucid dreaming includes (potentially but not necessarily)	OBEs are always flying experiences, in the sense that the experiencers perceive the physical world

the experience of flying.	from outside their physical bodies, from a bird's eye perspective.
LDs are not typically related to sleep paralysis although they do occur more in nightmares and night terrors.	Sleep paralysis can precede the feeling of leaving the body
Lucid dreamers know that they are in a dream and at the same time feel it to be real.	Out-of-body experiencers are sure that the OBE is a real event, more real than a dream.
LDs are not frightening.	OBEs can be frightening or uplifting.

Levitan and LaBerger comment that 'all dreams could be called OBEs in that in them we experience events and places quite apart from the real location and activity of our bodies'.[12](#)

## Practising Lucid Dreaming

### Recalling Lucid Dreams

In a major investigation of the frequency of LDs, conducted by Adrian Parker at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, about 80% of students reported having experienced at least one LD; 24% reported one or more per month.[13](#)

Lucidity in dreams typically occurs towards end of sleep and can be maintained until full awakening, facilitating easy dream recall. Inexperienced lucid dreamers often awake abruptly when they realize they are dreaming, and this also provides a vivid memory of the dream. LDs of a lower degree of lucidity are naturally harder to recall than highly lucid dreams.

Advice for recalling LDs is the same as that for ordinary dreams, including use of a diary. Recall is also supported by making notes of special conditions relating to dreams, such as LD-inducing technique, thoughts, wishes, intentions, success, uncontrolled events and so on.[14](#)

### Inducing Lucid Dreaming

The most natural and direct way of triggering LDs is a serious attitude and strong motivation to experience them, in order 'to bring your sleeping, dreaming life into focus'.[15](#) In folklore tradition natural stimuli have been used, for instance the phyto-coneirogenica (nutritious plants and spices such as nutmeg, vitamin-B6-rich foods (whole grain, avocado, yeast), herbs for teas (balm, lemon grass, yarrow, etc.),

aromatic plants (lavender, helichrysum italicum, clary sage), and herbs for scenting pillows (lavender, mugwort, chamomile).[16](#)

More than 80% of LDs start in the middle of an ordinary dream. termed 'dream-initiated LDs' by LaBerge.[17](#) The level of displacement from ordinary dream to lucid dream depends on the skill of the dreamer.

A relatively easy method, termed 'critical state testing', developed by Tholey in 1959,[18](#) involves asking oneself repeatedly throughout the day: 'Am I dreaming?' This habit of reality-testing then continues during dreaming and can trigger lucidity.

An auto-suggestive way of becoming lucid is finding your hands. While sitting relaxed in bed, look at the palms of the hands and think for five minutes prior to the onset of sleep: 'Tonight while I am dreaming, I will see my hands and realize that I am dreaming'.[19](#)

Another easy method, CRAM (constant repetition and affirmation method), was invented by Waggoner. He observed that 'falling into sleep while constantly affirming the intention to become lucidly aware may place that intent in your short-term memory'.[20](#)

A variety of cognitive techniques and external stimulation methods for inducing LDs have been evaluated.[21](#) The four most successful[22](#) to have been demonstrated in empirical studies are MILD (mnemonic induction of LDs); reflection/reality testing; intention; and Tholey's combined technique.

LaBerge's well-known MILD technique[23](#) involves 'forming a mental connection between what we want to do and the future circumstances in which we intend to do it. The best time for applying MILD is the early morning after awakening from a dream.'[24](#)

Reflective-intention techniques involve reflecting on the major signs of dreaming as they break into consciousness (if reading a book it can be unstable text, if relaxing then, fantastic imagery) at the point of falling asleep along with the intention to recognize them next time in the dream and become lucid (prospective memory).[25](#)

This approach requires an active use of imagination before sleeping, namely to imagine being in a dream and then recognizing that this must be a dream.[26](#)

Tholey's induction technique involves aspects of reflection, intention and auto-suggestion: developing a reflective frame of mind, imagining being in a dream, recognizing this, and incorporating the suggestion to oneself to get lucid while falling into sleep. Two field studies have demonstrated that this method increases the frequency of LDs, especially for dreamers who have already experienced LDs.[27](#)

Experiments have shown that of the various methods of external stimulation (light stimulation, acoustic stimulation, vibro-tactile stimulation, electro-tactile stimulation, vestibular stimulation, and water stimulus) light stimulus is successful. Some caution is needed with the use of external stimulation devices

where commercial motives are involved (for example DreamLight, DreamLink, Novadreamer light cue devices, or the electrical ‘dream machine’).[28](#)

Success has been reported with a variety of alternative approaches. One is the WBTB (wake back to bed) technique, also called the Nap to Lucidity Technique, which requires the individual to rise two hours before normal waking time, spend fifteen to forty-five minutes reading, thinking about lucid dreaming, or meditating, and then return to bed with the intention to achieve a LD.

Another LD-inducing method that has received positive reviews is dream-re-entry.[29](#) On awaking from a dream, the dreamer remains still with eyes closed, and returns mentally to the end of the dream, as if watching a movie, letting the image become real.[30](#)

An alternative to the MILD technique developed by LaBerge is termed WILD (wake initiated LDs), where the individual, having woken from a dream, goes straight back into it with continuing awareness.[31](#) However, this has proved not quite as successful as MILD.

The use of ‘dreamsigns’ offers a very individual way of learning lucid dreaming. These are the ‘peculiarities’ in dreams that appear often enough to be a reliable signpost of the dream state.[32](#) When one is recognized it can help to induce lucidity. Waggoner favours the use of his CRAM (constant repetition and affirmation method) as a means to become lucid, observing that, ‘falling into sleep while constantly affirming the intention to become lucidly aware may place that intent in your short-term memory’.[33](#)

## Steering the Lucid Dream

The main challenge for adepts is to stabilize the dream.[34](#) The ultimate degree of lucid dreaming is reached when the dreamer has learned to control the dream and steer it into an intended direction, to shape the dream scenery freely, and to act consciously. Individuals who master this experience achieve a form of ultimate freedom and are termed by LaBerge *oneironauts* – a word with Greek roots that means ‘explorers of the inner world of dreams’.[35](#) A single short LD can leave a lifelong impression, but repeated and advanced experience of steered LDs inspires and challenges the dreamer even more. The potential to steer the dream adventure seems virtually boundless, in the absence of time and spatial limits and of physical matter, including the physical body. The lucid dreamer can explore a new existence in a magical world. Even without absolute control over the course of the dream, lucid dreamers still can influence the dream environment with their thoughts and wishes according to their degree of alertness, concentration and intentions.

Typical LD experiences:

- moving around freely with control over the speed, and flying, by which the dream body is transported in a flash to any other place
- penetrating matter (closed doors and windows, walls, other dream figures)
- meeting people who are complete strangers, or who are known but live far away, or who are deceased, also even people who are complete strangers

- getting in touch with nature
- gaining philosophical and spiritual insights through the new experiences
- revising one's ideas about material life and so-called reality

Ten points characterize the potential of lucid dreaming:

- direct experience of other worlds that feel more real than reality
- experience of a new body and a world without physical limits
- penetrating beyond time and space
- developing personality by overcoming fear; solving problems; making decisions; reducing stress
- training new skills for use in waking life
- learning
- developing creativity
- gaining philosophical insights into life and experiencing spirituality
- creating physical, emotional and mental harmony: healing
- training consciousness for the transition beyond death

## **The Potential: Applying Lucid Dreaming**

### **Overcoming Fear**

Several studies have confirmed that LDs are an effective technique for overcoming nightmares.<sup>36</sup> The realization of being in a dream allows the dreamer to deal with fears and to face her own shadow – to use Carl Gustav Jung's term for disowned personality features. The guarantee that there is nothing to be afraid of enables the lucid dreamer to recognize the fearful situation, monster, beast, oversize black spider, or murderer. By looking at it, questioning it, hugging, accepting and understanding it, the fear diminishes. However, sometimes several LDs are needed, especially where recurring nightmares are concerned.

Identifying, accepting and then symbolically integrating elements of oneself that are split off and rejected has a strongly positive effect on personal growth. In the words of LaBerge and Rheingold, 'The stones once rejected by the builder of the ego can then form the new foundation of the wholeness'.<sup>37</sup> The poet Rainer Maria Rilke recalls ancient myths that tell of dragons that transform into princesses: 'Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us'.<sup>38</sup> The advice in short: Don't run away in the lucid dream – whatever stands in your way, face it!

### **Solving Problems**

A problem or difficult decision that troubles the mind during the day can be addressed in a LD as a means to gain feedback and advice. It can be spoken out loud in the dream environment or directed to a specific dream figure. The answer will not always be straightforward and may be delivered in the way used by the oracle in ancient times, encrypted or with a double meaning.

A four-step way for solving problems in LDs:



- 1) Phrase your problem.
- 2) Incubate a dream about your problem (formulate your intention and focus on it when going to bed).
- 3) Use your LD to generate solutions.
- 4) Remember to awake and recall the dream once you have an answer.[39](#)

## **Improving Skills**

Research has demonstrated that it is possible to improve skills in LDs. Tholey has published singular examples of how training movements in LDs can improve performance in waking life,[40](#) and recently Michael Schredl and Daniel Erlacher have showed more systematically how nightly training of motor skills during REM periods can positively influence performances in sports[41](#) such as skiing, athletics, gymnastics, high diving, wind surfing, and yoga.[42](#)

## **Creativity**

It is now firmly established that ordinary dreams can trigger creative ideas and provide outstanding insights to scientists and artists of all kinds. LDs too have been found to open the door to the inner creator.[43](#)

LaBerge and Rheingold define creativity not as a rare talent but rather as ‘the use of imagination to produce some new thing’ and add that ‘we can’t help being creative’.[44](#) LDs provide the opportunity for anyone to enter the area of choice in which he or she wishes to be creative and inventive.

## **Healing**

Experienced oneironauts say the ability to influence a dream is exciting and uplifting. This powerful feeling is an excellent basis for increasing life energy and well-being, and supporting health and healing processes on all levels. Remarkably, it is now established that congenitally paraplegic or deaf-mute people are freed from their disability while dreaming lucidly, finding themselves able to move, run, swim, hear, or speak.[45](#)

Waggoner describes twelve examples of healing LDs,[46](#) amongst them an ankle fracture, out-of-control menstrual bleeding, and painful plantar warts. A recent finding shows that depression is positively correlated with the frequency of LDs, that is, depressed persons achieve lucidity in their dreams more often than the average.[47](#) This may seem to conflict with positive findings, but is possibly an effect of the relation between depression and sleep disturbance, where worrying thoughts at night promote lucid dreaming. Stress is also a major factor in disorders caused by an imbalance of mental, emotional and physical life processes: stress reduction is an important function of dream lucidity, which offers the opportunity to overcome personal problems by appealing for help to the image or gestalt of a wise person or healer.

## **Extrasensory Perception in Lucid Dreams**



Pioneer research concerning ESP (extrasensory perception, a global term for telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition) in ordinary dreams was published in the form of the book *Phantasms of the Living* by Gurney, Myers & Podmore in 1886. Further investigation was carried out by Eleanor Sidgwick, JW Dunne and Louisa Rhine,<sup>48</sup> culminating with the highly successful studies at the Maimonides Medical Centre in Brooklyn, New York, carried out by Ullman, Krippner and Vaughan during the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>49</sup> The Maimonides studies broke new ground in demonstrating evidence for ESP in dreams, specifically dream-telepathy and dream-precognition, and the findings remain robust despite decades of scrutiny.<sup>50</sup>

No experimental research to date has been reported on ESP occurring during LDs, but single dream case reports can be found in literature such as Waggoner's instructive book *Lucid Dreaming*.<sup>51</sup>

## **Dream Characters**

The figures that appear in LDs can be as complex as those encountered in ordinary dreams. They may or may not be personally known to the dreamer, or may be deceased persons, or may appear humanoid but different from humans. They can change appearance and personality or give the impression of being composed of several characters. Also, LD figures tend to behave in a realistic fashion, apart from flying and going through walls!

Much debate occurs amongst lucid dreamers concerning the degree of 'reality' of these images. Two types of LD provide evidence for their being real: those in which they give information that is not known by the dreamer but later found to be true, and shared dreams (see below).

### **Deceased Persons**

The realization during dreaming that a person in the dream is a deceased can lead to lucidity, in the same way as any oddity occurring in dreams can do in principle. Sometimes the person being dreamed of informs the dreamer about him or herself, as in this example in a study by American researcher Deirdre Barrett:

Then I saw my brother sitting – the same who died in 1906 – and I went up to him saying: “Now we are dreaming, both of us.” He answered: “No, I am not!” And then I remembered that he was dead. ... There was a large stone statue of a head ... it turned slightly and winked at me. ... I looked back at the head and said “This is not a dream!” It winked again and said “Oh yes it is!”<sup>52</sup>

The occurrence of images of deceased persons in lucid dreams has been investigated by German psychical researcher Annetrin Puhle. Her eighteen-month study, carried out in 2014-15, sought information from such figures, ideally that the dreamers could not have known themselves. Ninety lucid dreamers initially took part; with one exception all had previous experience with the three levels of LDs described earlier, and all were given Robert Waggoner's guidelines for interacting with dream figures.<sup>53</sup> Eighty LDs were reported and analysed around ten thematic aspects of communication.<sup>54</sup>

## Creating Friends

The use of lucid dreaming to create a friend or protective spirit guide goes back thousands of years to the dream yoga of the Buddhist Bön tradition. Many children up to the age of six create fantasy friends in their imagination. Lucid dreamers seem to concur that they can create a variety of beings – from friends to godlike figures – and experience them as real or more than real, equipped with the qualities attributes to them by the dreamer. LD figures feel as real as the dreamer's own body, but it remains uncertain whether they truly represent real people or are mere thoughtforms created by the dreaming mind. Some dream figures do indeed seem to be thoughtforms, while others, according to Waggoner, 'argue logically and convincingly for their autonomous existence in an environment they perceive as real and ... vocally express resentment the lucid dreamer's comments about "creating" them'.<sup>55</sup> Transpersonal psychologists David Fontana and Charles Tart have independently revisited an old idea, that it is possible, and sometimes beneficial, to create a wise dream figure that can provide help when needed, answer questions, and promote personal growth.<sup>56</sup>

## Shared Lucid Dreaming

A fragment found in the work of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus states that the dreamer enters his own cosmos, *idios kosmos*. The term relates to the modern word 'idiot', the individual who is locked in his own realm. But many dreams stretch beyond the limits of a personal 'cosmos' and transcend even the human senses through ESP. Another complex area, one that shows the interconnectedness of the dreamer with a cosmos beyond physical conditions, is that of shared or mutual dreams. This term can mean different things:

- two dreamers dream spontaneously about the same or similar content, without meeting each other in their dreams
- the dreamer meets another person in a dream while this other person is dreaming about a similar content, but cannot remember having met the first dreamer in the dream
- two dreamers meet in a dream with similar content and both remember it afterwards
- one dreamer meets another person in the dream and later finds out that this person did not dream the same or similar thing but instead carried out in waking state what the first person had dreamed
- the dreams of one or both dreamers coincide with their intention

In a survey of seventy Swedish students carried out by Adrian Parker, 13% of respondents reported having mutual or shared LDs at the rate of one or more per month.<sup>57</sup>

All three types of ESP experience seem to be a natural part of shared LDs. Waggoner published a couple of these rare reports of shared LDs<sup>58</sup> commenting that 'mutual dreaming ... serves to provide evidence that space, like time, is fundamentally not as we perceive it'. Referring to the Sanskrit word *maya* he sees the lucid dreamer as co-creator – together with the larger Self – of the dream world that he/she then

experiences. The separation of the selves might be due to ‘the belief in our selves as being separated and apart instead of part of a larger whole’.[59](#)

Shared dreams and lucidity do not necessarily occur in combination, but lucidity makes a dream more likely to be shared. Lucidity can function as a ‘tool for developing consciousness’ and support mutual dreaming, in the same way as dream incubation or focusing on the intention of a dream while awake.[60](#)

## **Philosophical and Spiritual Aspects**

### **The Lucid Dream Body**

The notion of a dream body may have originated in Plato’s concept of a ‘vehicle of the soul’,[61](#) taken up by Porphyrius and Iamblichus, and described by the Neo-Platonist Proclus as ‘star-like’ (*astroeides*). The idea gained a further popularity with Paracelsus’s use of the term ‘sidereal body’ (*Sternenleib*) and gave rise to the later term ‘astral body’. Paracelsus ascribed to this star-like body the ability to pass through walls, an experience which thrills lucid dreamers. Attitudes held by lucid dreamers towards the body vary from paying no attention to it to feeling a sense of being in a real, solid body. This contrasts with the OBE experient, who sometimes perceives her or his body as a transparent subtle body.

The LD body rarely changes form during dreaming.[62](#) Wherever the body – as the shell of the I-experience – might be during LDs, OBEs, and the waking state, the usual ‘in-the-body experience’ raises a philosophical key question: Where is this ‘I’, the self located, if it is to be located at all? There is no evidence that the self is defined or limited by physical boundaries. It rather seems that ‘the self is where it feels itself to be. It would seem that its location is purely subjective and derived from input from the sensory organs’.[63](#)

### **Exploring Inner Space**

In asserting that the dreamer gains entrance to his private world, Heraclitus gave importance to the exploration of the dreamer’s inner realm. Nevertheless, like all dreams LDs are not disconnected from a common reality. For example, symbols in dreams can be loaded with individual meaning, but more typically they express a general meaning known in the dreamer’s culture or beyond it in a universal, archaic sense.

The LD offers the opportunity to find answers to personal questions and solutions to problems according to the current situation and the dreamer’s acute needs. It can facilitate a journey through favourite topics of the person’s life, reveal the potential of personal qualities, and discover new, undeveloped sides, and tell the dreamer how to bring them into life. The message is that there *is* space in reality for things the dreamer dreams of.

### **Meditation and Yoga**

Parallels exist between dream lucidity and meditation. Harry T Hunt supports the idea that lucid dreaming is ‘a form of spontaneously emerging meditation’ based on

similarities between the two experiences. Jayne Gackenbach considers that lucidity is the natural expression of our feminine sides, referring to studies that reveal 'important psychological and physiologic parallels between lucidity and meditation'.[64](#) Meditators not only remember their dreams better, they also experience lucid dreaming more often than non-meditators, while the content is more likely to be transpersonal. Reports of breath suspension and strong experiences of clarity during meditation are related to claims of being hyper-aware during periods of non-REM sleep.[65](#)

Meditating in a LD as a combination of two powerful activities helps the practitioner to live at a highly lucid, conscious or 'superconscious'[66](#) level of mind. This combined exercise requires even more self-discipline but can reward the practitioner – independent of method or path in life – with intense experiences that include:[67](#)

- a state of bliss or ecstasy
- a feeling of transcendence
- increased energy
- heightened perception
- insights into concepts or issues
- altered perception of time or space
- a deep sense of universal oneness

## **Philosophical Aspects**

A major philosophical question arises with the intense experiences in dreams, and one that applies especially with lucid dreaming: What is real?

In modern societies, dream experiences are regarded as unreal, as opposed to experiences in waking life. But in some traditions dreams are understood as an equally real part of life. In the Tibetan yogic Bön Buddhist traditions, the skills of lucid dreaming have been used for personal growth, spiritual enlightenment, and especially for preparing the transition via death into another reality of life.[68](#) These traditions 'use dreams to attain liberation from the dreaminess of ordinary life and use sleep for awake from ignorance'.[69](#) It is emphasised that 'the teachings are not ideas to be collected, but a path to be followed'.[70](#)

In European philosophy Plato relativized reality with his allegory of the cave, in which we perceive only the shadows of the real world above and behind us outside the entrance.[71](#) Plato gave new life to the older idea expressed by Heraclitus about 500 BC, that everything in life moves in a continual flow. Every moment in waking life passes as quickly as in dreams, demonstrating that daily-life is as unreal as dreams – or as real, depending on one's standpoint. LDs convey a strong sense of reality that for some dreamers is as real as normal everyday reality, and for others even more real. The latter experience can have an especially strong impact, altering the dreamer's worldview and triggering a life-transforming process.

All this goes to show that the feeling that an event is real does not mean that it is happening in the physical world that we all share when we are awake. This is

not to deny that that inner experiences are real, in that they have deeply profound effects on our lives.[72](#)

If 'life is a dream', as LaBerge and Rheingold title the last chapter in their book *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*, then the insights of dream yoga go one step further and reveal that dreams are also dreams, in other words, illusions.[73](#)

The philosophical and spiritual insights offered by lucid dreaming can be of great benefit, intensifying and enriching a person's life, helping to overcome the fear of death, and supporting the process of transition at death.

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1](#). Parker (2012).
- [2](#). Schredl & Erlacher (2004), 1469.
- [3](#). Saint-Denys, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1867, English 1982; LaBerge (1980).
- [4](#). Eeden (1913).
- [5](#). Voss et al. (2013), 19.
- [6](#). Voss et al. (2009), 1196-97.
- [7](#). See Puhle (in press).



- [8.](#) Hearne (1978).
- [9.](#) Tholey (1989), Part 2.
- [10.](#) Barrett (1992), 221.
- [11.](#) Fontana (1997), 65.
- [12.](#) Levitan & LaBerge (1991).
- [13.](#) Parker (2012).
- [14.](#) See Puhle (in press).
- [15.](#) Devereux & Devereux (2011), 95.
- [16.](#) Devereux & Devereux (2011), 97-98; Puhle (2016).
- [17.](#) LaBerge, Nagel, Taylor, Dement & Zarcone (1981).
- [18.](#) Tholey (1983); also Zarda et al. (1992).
- [19.](#) cf. Waggoner's modified version of Castaneda, in Waggoner & Maccready (2015), 34-35.
- [20.](#) Waggoner & McCready (2015).
- [21.](#) Strumbys et al. (2012).
- [22.](#) Strumbys et al. (2012), 1471.
- [23.](#) LaBerge (1985), 155-58.
- [24.](#) LaBerge (1985), 156.
- [25.](#) LaBerge & Rheingold (1991).
- [26.](#) Tholey (1983).
- [27.](#) Paulsson & Parker (2006); Zadra et al. (1992).
- [28.](#) Strumbys et al. (2012), 1470.
- [29.](#) Strumbys et al. (2012), 1468.
- [30.](#) Waggoner & McCready (2015), 51.
- [31.](#) Levitan & LaBerge (1991).
- [32.](#) LaBerge & Rheingold (1991), 17.
- [33.](#) Waggoner & McCready (2015).
- [34.](#) Waggoner & McCready (2015), 53-63.
- [35.](#) LaBerge (1985), 71.
- [36.](#) An overview of five relevant studies is given by Schädlich & Erlacher (2012, 134).
- [37.](#) LaBerge & Rheingold (1991), 255.
- [38.](#) Rilke (1984). 91-92, quoted by LaBerge & Rheingold (1991, 255), inspired by Gayle Delaney.
- [39.](#) LaBerge & Rheingold (1991), 215-16.
- [40.](#) Tholey (1981).
- [41.](#) Erlacher (2005), 7.
- [42.](#) Erlacher (2005).
- [43.](#) Barrett (2001).
- [44.](#) LaBerge & Rheingold (1991), 205.
- [45.](#) Voss et al. (2011), 677, 682.
- [46.](#) Waggoner (2009), 157-72.
- [47.](#) Taitz (2011), 122.
- [48.](#) See Saunders (2015).
- [49.](#) Ullman & Krippner, with Vaughan (1973 / 2003).
- [50.](#) Sjöden (2003), 100.
- [51.](#) Waggoner (2009), 139-154, 173-205.
- [52.](#) Barrett (1992), 227.

- [53.](#) The advice followed Robert Waggoner's guidelines, sent personally to Annekatrin Puhle.
- [54.](#) Puhle & Parker, submitted 2016.
- [55.](#) Waggoner (2009), 125.
- [56.](#) Fontana (1997), 64-65.
- [57.](#) Parker (2012).
- [58.](#) See the chapter 'Mutual lucid dreaming' in Waggoner (2009), 207-26.
- [59.](#) Waggoner (2009), 226.
- [60.](#) Campbell (2006), 207.
- [61.](#) Plato, *Phaedrus*.
- [62.](#) Garfield (1974), 128.
- [63.](#) Levitan & LaBerge (1991).
- [64.](#) Gackenbach (1990), 244.
- [65.](#) Gackenbach (1990), 245.
- [66.](#) Yogananda (1946).
- [67.](#) Waggoner & McCready (2015), 172.
- [68.](#) Wangyal (1998).
- [69.](#) Wangyal (1998), 17.
- [70.](#) Wangyal (1998), 19.
- [71.](#) Plato, *Republic*, Book X, 514a-520a.
- [72.](#) Levitan & LaBerge (1991).
- [73.](#) LaBerge & Rheingold (1991).