

# SUMMARY

## EXPLORING THE WORLD OF LUCID DREAMING

STEPHEN LABERGE AND HOWARD RHEINGOLD



# **Summary of "Exploring The World Of Lucid Dreaming" by Stephen LaBerge and Howard Rheingold**

Written by Nicolas Stewart

A practical guide to dreaming consciously.

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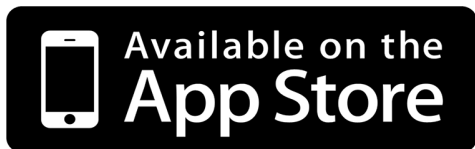


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# Introduction

Lucid dreaming is the experience of having a dream while being consciously aware that you are dreaming. The most fascinating aspect of this phenomenon is that through this awareness you are able to influence what occurs during your dreams. Lucid dreaming has also been shown to make it easier to remember your dreams upon waking.

Through both scientific research and traditional practices like Tibetan dream yoga, Dr. Stephen LaBerge and Howard Rheingold provide a road map and workbook on how to explore your dreams, enhance your creativity, and gain a deeper understanding of yourself.

# Your Dreams Are Built Upon The Sights And Sounds Of Your Waking Hours

Your dreams don't just appear out of thin air. They're based on the sensory data your memory accumulates during the day. Remember, the brain you're experiencing dreams with is still the same brain you're experiencing waking reality with.

What that means, and an important thing to keep in mind if you want to experience lucid dreaming, is that it's your mind that creates your dreams. They come from nowhere else. Which means your dreams are built out of whatever is stored in your memory, so by helping control what enters your mind during the day, you can control what you dream about at night.

The authors propose several exercises with this in mind. The first is to begin making a habit of regularly asking yourself "am I dreaming?" at least five to ten times during the day. The goal here is that by making it a habit you'll start increasing the likelihood that you will reflexively ask yourself that during a dream, which is one of the first steps to induce a lucid dream.

But once you ask that question, how do you answer it? Well there are several ways in which dreams don't correspond with reality. Check a book or newspaper, something with words on it. It's often difficult or impossible to read in a dream, the words will seem jumbled. And if you reopen the book they likely won't be the same as before. This also works for clocks, watches, etc.

Other "reality tests" include things like trying to press the finger of one hand through the palm of another, or trying to walk through a wall. In dreams these will often work.

Another exercise is to start keeping a dream journal. As soon as you wake up in the morning, write down as much of your dream as you can remember. It's a myth that some people don't dream, or that occasionally

don't have dreams. You always dream, you just often don't remember them. Indeed 90% of your dreams are forgotten within the first 15 minutes of waking.

If you can't remember the exact events of the dream, instead write down what thoughts and feelings you remember having, and what you're thinking and feeling at that moment. The goal here is to start recognizing the common themes that appear in your dreams. Once you start noticing recurring elements, they'll become more easily recognizable once you're asleep. You'll have a realization "oh this is what always happens when I'm dreaming", and in doing so you will become aware that you're in a dream.

Dream journaling will also make it easier to remember dreams after you wake up.

A big element of inducing lucid dreaming is to go to sleep with intent. Go to sleep with the intention of lucid dreaming, as you lay in bed tell yourself in your head the common elements of your dreams you've identified, tell yourself in your head you're going to test to see if you're in a dream.

## DILDs and WILDs

The term lucid dreaming typically refers to what the authors call Dream Initiated Lucid Dreams (DILD), which is to say when you realize you're in a dream while it's happening, and the dream becomes a lucid dream.

But the authors also refer to a second type of lucid dreaming, Wake Initiated Lucid Dreams (WILD), these are where you fall asleep whilst maintaining consciousness. That sounds contradictory doesn't it? Sleeping by its very nature involves losing consciousness, doesn't it?

Well yes in that you are no longer awake. But consciousness in this sense means entering a dream state without ever losing awareness that you have fallen asleep and are now dreaming. The technique explained by the authors of how to accomplish this is known as hypnagogic imagery.

Falling asleep isn't like flipping a switch, it's actually a complex series of biological processes. As we enter sleep most of our body's systems become anabolic, the brain begins using less energy, our core temperature falls, and we pass from a transitional period into deep sleep or slow-wave sleep. After this our body paralyzes itself (so you don't end up acting out your dreams) and you enter Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep, which is characterized by heightened levels of brain activity. This is when dreaming occurs.

Hypnagogia, also known as presomnal or wakefulness-sleep transition, is the term for the experience of transitioning from being drowsy to falling asleep. As you undergo hypnagogia you typically begin seeing images in your mind's eye. These are known as hypnagogic images or hypnagogic hallucinations that often take the shape of lights and geometric patterns. Other times this imagery corresponds to a repetitive task you did throughout the day.



These images, as you fall asleep, eventually form themselves into the subject of your dream. The authors therefore suggest that as you're falling asleep, pay attention to these hypnagogic images. Don't try to control them, just notice them passively. Keep your attention on them and notice an awareness of the physical sensations of your body falling asleep. By not losing attention, but also not resisting or trying to control the imagery, you'll fall asleep but your brain will remain active as you enter REM sleep. In which case you'll enter your dream aware of the fact that you're dreaming, you will "wake up" into a dream.

# Controlling Your Lucid Dream

One of the drawbacks of trying to lucid dream is that it often results in waking yourself up prematurely by accident. This obviously ends the lucid dream, and also can cause issues for your sleep schedule.

A common cause of waking from a lucid dream is inactivity. If you're just hanging out, watching your dream and not actively participating it can result in you slowly waking up. So the authors suggest remaining active throughout your dream. Also occasionally remind yourself that you are in fact in a dream. It's easy to forget and for it to go from a lucid dream to a normal passive dream. The authors suggest saying "this is a dream" out loud periodically. However this can actually also result in you saying it in real life, accidentally waking yourself up.

If you want to wake up try saying that as well. Or simply do the inverse of these instructions, remain passive, stop focusing on the fact that you're in a dream, etc.

# Health Benefits

So far it might sound like lucid dreaming is just a fun experience, but there are actually benefits to your mental health as well.

Jungian psychology proposes the concept of archetypes, which are a set of metaphors that seem to help explain different elements of the human psyche. Dreams are deeply symbolic and can help us understand aspects of our psychology we might not realize, or might not want to face, in our waking life.

One of these Jungian archetypes is that of the shadow. The dark aspects of our personality that we all possess, those aspects that lead us to self-sabotage, or to behave self-destructively, or that causes us to hurt others inadvertently.

Lucid dreaming can help us face these symbolic figures within ourselves, to accept that rather than fight them and to help realize that they're part of us, and in doing so be liberated from them.

Lucid dreaming can also help improve our creativity. It may sound fantastical, but practicing some skill you're working on, like playing an instrument or painting, within your dreams has been shown by research to improve your real world abilities.

# Dealing With Nightmares

Nightmares can be created by a lot of things, stress in your waking life, being too cold while you're asleep, fevers when you're sick. Lucid dreaming can't help with all of them, but they can help deal with recurrent nightmares caused by fears or anxieties.

A common nightmare we all experience is dreaming that you're late for school or work. Or dreaming you're unprepared for a test or job interview you've worked hard to get ready for. Maybe you were robbed on the street, or assaulted, and you keep having nightmares about it due to the trauma.

One of the most distressing elements of those nightmares is the feeling of helplessness. You can't control what happens in the dream, but with lucid dreaming you can. When a nightmare is happening, use the exercises previously taught to induce a lucid dream, and then choose to continue the dream rather than forcing yourself to wake up.

The knowledge that you're dreaming will help remind you that you can't be harmed, since it's just a dream, and you can face your attacker or tormentor and force them out of your dream. It will only take a few times before you feel completely safe in the dream, at which point that particular nightmare will cease to keep happening.

# Final Summary

Exploring The World of Lucid Dreaming opens a door to an entire new world for you to explore. It empowers you to alter and create the reality of your dreaming life. It's not just abstract academia, it offers real advice and exercises to master the skill of lucid dreaming. It can help you dive into your own psyche and understand yourself better.



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