

The Weird Observations and Barriers in Lucid Dreaming

Shôn Ellerton, October 8, 2023

From incomprehensible timepieces to pain barriers, I run through some of my observations within the weird world of lucid dreaming.



It was back in 2017 when I [first wrote about lucid dreaming](#), and now, I would like to elaborate a little further on some of the more peculiar aspects of this strange phenomenon. And most strange it is.

Let me do a quick recap on what lucid dreaming is. But before doing so, my writings on lucid dreaming is what I have personally experienced. Something I've managed to do since an early age. I've done very little research on lucid dreaming and why it happens, so if the reader is wanting to understand more about the scientific *reasons* of why lucid dreaming occurs, there are plenty of resources out there from experts on the subject.

What is lucid dreaming from my viewpoint? It is when you have entered into a dreamlike state but knowing full well that you are in a dream. Furthermore, you have certain 'powers' at your control. Powers not granted in real life, such as being able to throw objects around as if you had some sort of [gravity gun](#), or being able to transition through solid objects, or just simply, floating around. Being immersed in a parallel or completely new world, not of this earth, is quite the sublime experience.

I've had many a discussion with friends about lucid dreaming. Some of them purport that you are really leaving your physical body and entering or astral planning into some kind of meta-universe by transcending across the spiritual world. Being somewhat cautiously sceptical of such concepts, I merely posit that the brain is playing some very cool and interesting tricks.

I can liken the feeling of lucid dreaming as being weightless in a kind of frontier or 'event horizon' between reality on the outside and a full dreamlike state on the black hole side. You feel the dream but also intrinsically aware of reality. For example, in most of my lucid dreams, I know exactly what I need to do for work the next day with the same, or even heightened, awareness when I am fully awake.

There are many observations and questions about lucid dreaming which truly puzzle me.

The Pain Barrier

First off. What I call the 'pain barrier'. This is a barrier which cannot be crossed. At least, not for me.

Last night, I was in a lucid dream and in typical dreamlike fashion, a series of nonsensical events occurred. I was in some hotel foyer which had a very large and nasty prickly cactus. Now let me just re-iterate that I was fully aware that I was in a lucid dream knowing that no physical harm could happen to my resting body in the real world. In the dream, I tested out the theory of whether I could puncture my hands with these extremely long and nasty cactus spikes. My hand was brushing against the surface and I felt real pain when pressing my hand into the cactus. Even though I knew it was a dream, I simply could not do it as hard as I tried.

Now, I am no expert in the world of how the brain works, but this fascinated me to the core. I asked myself the question. What exactly is pain? Moreover, I asked this question *within* the dream. Does this qualify the action of conducting the same experiment in the real world without consequences as to physical harm? Obviously, no. I'd simply have a fistful of half-embedded vicious cactus thorns which I would meticulously have to remove one by one from the palm of my hand. It is common knowledge to many that pain is nature's way of telling us that we are doing something harmful to our body by alerting us to take some form of action to stop the harm. Like removing our hand from a hot stove or, if taken to a more comical and extreme example. Sitting outside on a deckchair enjoying a mojito and reading a book whilst a hungry alligator is gnawing on your leg and you being completely unaware of it. However, knowing that I am not physically harmed in a lucid dream, nature's pain warning still prevented me from undertaking an action which would harm me, like sitting on a barrel cactus.

Which would, undeniably, give me a very sore arse. It is purely coincidental that I am using cacti as examples. I am not really fixated on them. Honest.

The Morality Barrier

Another cracking example of a barrier impossible or difficult to cross in a lucid dream is what I can only coin as the ‘morality barrier’. Although, it might be considerably less difficult for some who, in reality, have swayed outside the circumference defined by a moral compass. For example, those who wouldn’t think twice of assaulting someone in broad daylight, committing some act of sexual violence, or robbing some poor and helpless lady struggling to get to her car from the supermarket. Digressing for a moment, this is one of the reasons I find the video game, [*Grand Theft Auto*](#), so disturbing. It allows the player to commit any of the above acts without fear of consequence.

You see. Most of us are hardwired in our brain not to do certain things which we are taught during our childhood as being wrong. For example, if your boss said something to you which you don’t entirely agree with, it just wouldn’t feel quite right to reach out for a jumbo-sized egg and throw it with full force onto his forehead. Although, it would be funny as hell and one would assume, of course, that you had the power in that dream to invoke a carton of jumbo sized eggs. Free range, preferably.

But that’s not really what I mean. I’m talking about the often shared men’s fantasy of groping an attractive woman in a house party or a public place. Apparently, I heard that they do this sort of thing in Japan as a business. For example, allowing male clientele, to grope women, who are, of course, paid actresses, inside a room designed to look like a Tokyo underground metro train carriage. Anyway, one would think this sort of scenario would be easy within a lucid dream. It is, after all, possible to invoke certain objects at will, but it is often not terribly easy. It is far easier to manipulate or move an object through the power of telekinesis if it is already there to begin with.

It is an incredibly odd sensation of wandering around a cocktail party looking for a prime target, but it is dastardly difficult. Reason being is this. Other humans within a lucid dream frequently morph into other humans completely at random. So, one could be groping an attractive mate only to find, within a few moments, that the subject has turned into someone else with a decidedly unattractive nature. Maybe not quite as bad as that woman in the bath in Room 237 in that movie, [*The*](#)

[Shining](#)! But on those occasions, where the attractive subject does not change into someone or something else, the ‘morality barrier’ kicks in.

It is not uncommon for men and women to have, or want to have, dreams involving something a little on the frisky side. But in a lucid dream, something strange happens. The subject of interest will often reject and protest strongly to having been made the target of such a forward advance. Not always, but usually. It’s quite unethical to grope strangers, is it not? It’s as if your brain has been hardwired with some sort of morality restraint. You know what you’re doing is wrong. And this is despite the knowledge that one is in control of their dreams. The ‘morality barrier’ is a good moniker for this phenomenon because, within a lucid dream, you have total control of warding off harmful or noxious creatures. So, in essence, you have near-total control of your dream unless it transgresses a moral directive.

Warped Time and Distorted Text

Moving on to one of the most arresting peculiarities of lucid dreaming is time and the written word. Those who are familiar with lucid dreaming will know that any clock, whether it is digital or analogue, is incomprehensible. Digital clocks turn into cryptic Klingon symbols or hands on an analogue clockface move each time you look at them. It’s incredibly bizarre, but funny enough, it’s often the way I fully know that I am *in* a lucid dream or not. Reading text on a sign is also nonsensical. Letters move about or change shape forming utterly incoherent sentences.

The concept of time is totally warped within a lucid dream. That night I was dreaming, I found myself in an old English house adjacent to a wide and sluggish river staring through a diamond-paned glass window. I knew it was night in the real world but had this strangely odd feeling that it was also daylight. I was having elevenses or some sort of refreshment with some of the people in the house. It was a comfortable place but I knew I had to get to work the next day and I better start making a move. I was getting nervous and uncomfortable all of a sudden. There are moments within a lucid dream in which one dwells deeper into sleep forgetting more elements of the real world. In this case, I had not forgotten about work, but I forgot that I was actually physically asleep at home and would be awaked, if necessary, by my alarm clock. It was, as if, I needed to catch a very fast plane to get to work from this cosy cottage to get to work on time.

The Ability to be a Ghost

A somewhat spooky nature of lucid dreaming is the ability to haunt like some sort of a ghost. The creepy 2001 film starring Nicole Kidman, [*The Others*](#), springs to mind in which Kidman and her two children are haunted by ghosts in a mansion during the time after WWII. Turns out that *they* were the ghosts and what they thought were the ghosts were actual people. In a lucid dream, it is not uncommon to move around like Casper the Friendly Ghost trying to communicate with other people within the lucid dream's real world. Not the actual real world, but the actual world *in the dream*. Yes, I grant you, it's very confusing.

'Haunting' others with a lucid dream can be a lot of fun, but there can be some interesting moments when trying to communicate with those you know that had passed away. Such as a late family relative, to take an example. Such occasions can feel deeply real indeed. I thought I was having a real conversation with my late grandfather. He was talking and making absolute sense, much of it I remember after waking up. I could even feel and smell him. It felt incredibly real, but I knew it was not because I was aware that I was lucid dreaming. It was the nearest experience to having a séance on a wet and dreary afternoon. On the subject of hauntings and spookiness, I don't remember if I ever came across a mirror or reflective surface in a lucid dream into which I could look into. Would I be able to see myself, and if so, would it be as I am now?

Flying About and the Altitude Barrier

The most well-known aspect of lucid dreaming is, of course, the ability to fly. Some may argue that this when your soul or being is flying out from your physical body. This is what is known as [*astral projection*](#), of which there are many writings available, one of the most interesting being the Chinese Taoist book, [*The Secret of the Golden Flower*](#) in which the practice of meditation to lift one from the physical body is discussed. In lucid dreaming, it is through sleep rather than through meditation.

But this is where it gets interesting. In lucid dreaming, one is in a very light sleep, almost in a meditative state. It often requires a little work to get into the state and this only occurs after the body is completely and utterly relaxed. You don't have to sit cross-legged, put your hands together, wear a robe, and chant in low monotones. You can do this in the comfort of your own bed. Remaining in a lucid dreaming is a balancing act. It's a bit like scuba diving under ten metres deep

where it is difficult to maintain horizontal buoyancy. Inexperienced scuba divers often find themselves back at the surface of the water, which is akin to being cast out of the lucid dream to reality. However, going deeper than, say, thirty-five metres, is like going into a deeper sleep. Literally, this is almost true because when you hit such depths, the state of narcosis kicks in. All scuba divers are taught about this dangerous physical phenomenon.

Flying around in a lucid dream is such a fascinating and odd thing. I don't subscribe to the idea of actual out-of-body experiences. If that was the case, I could fly over to the neighbours and see what they're up to. But that doesn't happen. What I believe happens is that your mind is conjuring up an imaginary world created by a combination of memories, anxieties, and current thoughts before dozing off to sleep.

There seems to be two types of flying around in a lucid dream. At least in my experience. The first one is of thinking of floating and moving ghostlike from place to place. It's the slow way of getting around but the most interactive. It's also the first way I experienced the notion of flying in a dream and the most obvious. You just think about floating and moving, and then you do just that. The second one is more advanced in nature and requires focussing on a point and getting there real fast. Almost like reaching out to some point and pulling it to yourself. You don't necessarily have to see the point or destination you're going to but simply know that it is there. An example would be to think about the top of some skyscraper or peak of a mountain far away. Zone in to it as if you're on a piece of string tied to it and very rapidly get to it.

There is another barrier difficult to penetrate with the act of flying in a lucid dream. Maybe not so much a barrier but of becoming increasingly difficult the higher one goes in terms of altitude. On some occasions, I can visualise myself being so high in altitude that I can see the planet Earth beneath me. It tends to take a considerable amount of concentration to do so for some reason. Perhaps, the brain is interpreting the act as being difficult to achieve in reality. It is seldom or never that we, as humans, venture to such places in real life.

Transitioning Through Solid Objects

We must, of course, discuss the act of transitioning through solid objects in a lucid dream. I can't remember if I, at first, had difficulties in achieving this. For example, floating straight through a door, which is easy as pie to me. Or going

through a window and out the other side suspended hundreds of feet above the ground. If you have doubts about being able to successfully transit through the object, you won't make it, because you'll hesitate and be reluctant to commit.

Martial arts experts who smash through multiple timber planks with their bare hands often attribute their success to thinking about the committal and outcome rather than the act of breaking the boards. This, of course, makes sense, because transitioning through something as thick as the Great Wall of China is quite a bit harder than going through a household door. Although, the great illusionist, [David Copperfield](#), went through the Great Wall as well as making the Statue of Liberty disappear!

The Texture and Physics of Water

Finally, we come to my most recent discovery in lucid dreams. Not recent in terms of experiencing it, but recent in terms of noting and addressing it.

It is the way fluids look like and behave. Air is a fluid as well as water and in a lucid dream, they act quite differently than real life. They are not bound by the Newtonian principles of fluid dynamics within a lucid dream.

First off, there seems to be no problem in breathing through any fluid. Whether it is being high in the ionosphere, an environment one would die in a few seconds in the real world, or immersed in a vat of viscous oil or slime. In fact, I don't remember encountering any issue or even having a thought about the physical act of breathing in a lucid dream *except* on those occasions in which you are perceiving to do some crazy bout of high intensity exercise like running like that liquid metal *T1000* robot in the blockbuster movie, [Terminator 2](#). Again, the mind presents itself another barrier to suggest that you going too far and simply cannot do this in real life.

And secondly, a quality which is common to regular and lucid dreams and really blows my mind.

The texture of water and vivacity of colours.

It's difficult to explain this, but there is a sort of 'shimmer' across surfaces of water. There's no hard reflection, which explains again, the strange absence of mirrors and reflective surfaces. When I look into a clear, deep, and rocky river, I can almost see through it. Not clear as if looking through air, but through layers and layers of transitions of slightly different shading. Colours are not solid and

primary but translucent and pastel looking. Like some sort of three-dimensional water-colour painting. It's incredibly beautiful and refreshing all at the same time. You enjoy being immersed in the water and exploring. The closest thing I can equate this to is being in one of those FPS (first player shooter) games like the old classics from the late 90s and early 2000s, [*Unreal*](#) and [*Half Life 2*](#), in which you can dive into all these interesting bodies of water. But it's not nearly the same. It would be impossible to recreate these textures and colours in the real world.

As for the physical behaviour of water, it can do quite unusual things, such as being a wall, much like when Noah parted the Red Sea. I recount a dream in which I was staying at this hotel along the esplanade with the road outside being on top of a stone embankment. The tide was high and the water level was near to the top. Deep in the basement was a sort of gym spa facility. At the far end was a corridor leading to the Sea, which was odd considering I was beneath the surface of it. I walked down the corridor and encountered a vertical wall of water streaked attractively with vertical greyish and white stripes. It was, again, shimmering, as if in a blurry sort of motion. I stepped into it and was suddenly deep under water and as I swam upwards, emerged out of the surface of the sea. And I was thinking, what a bizarre holiday hotel concept!

To End

In all, I've begun to realise that lucid dreaming really *is* a form of meditation. Which is not a bad thing for me, because I don't do any other forms of meditation.

So there you have it. Some of my observations in the wonderful world of lucid dreaming!