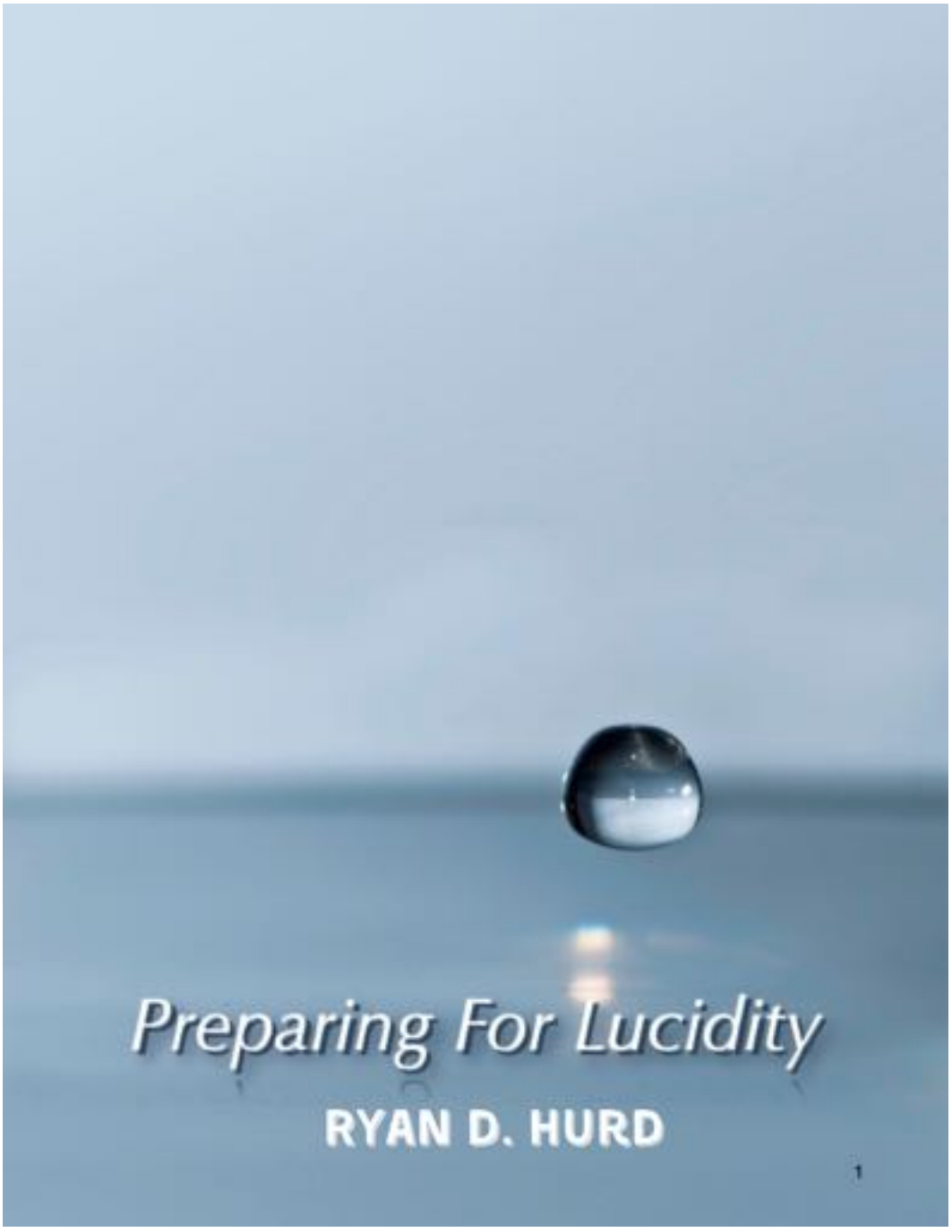
Preparing For Lucidity
RYAN D. HURD
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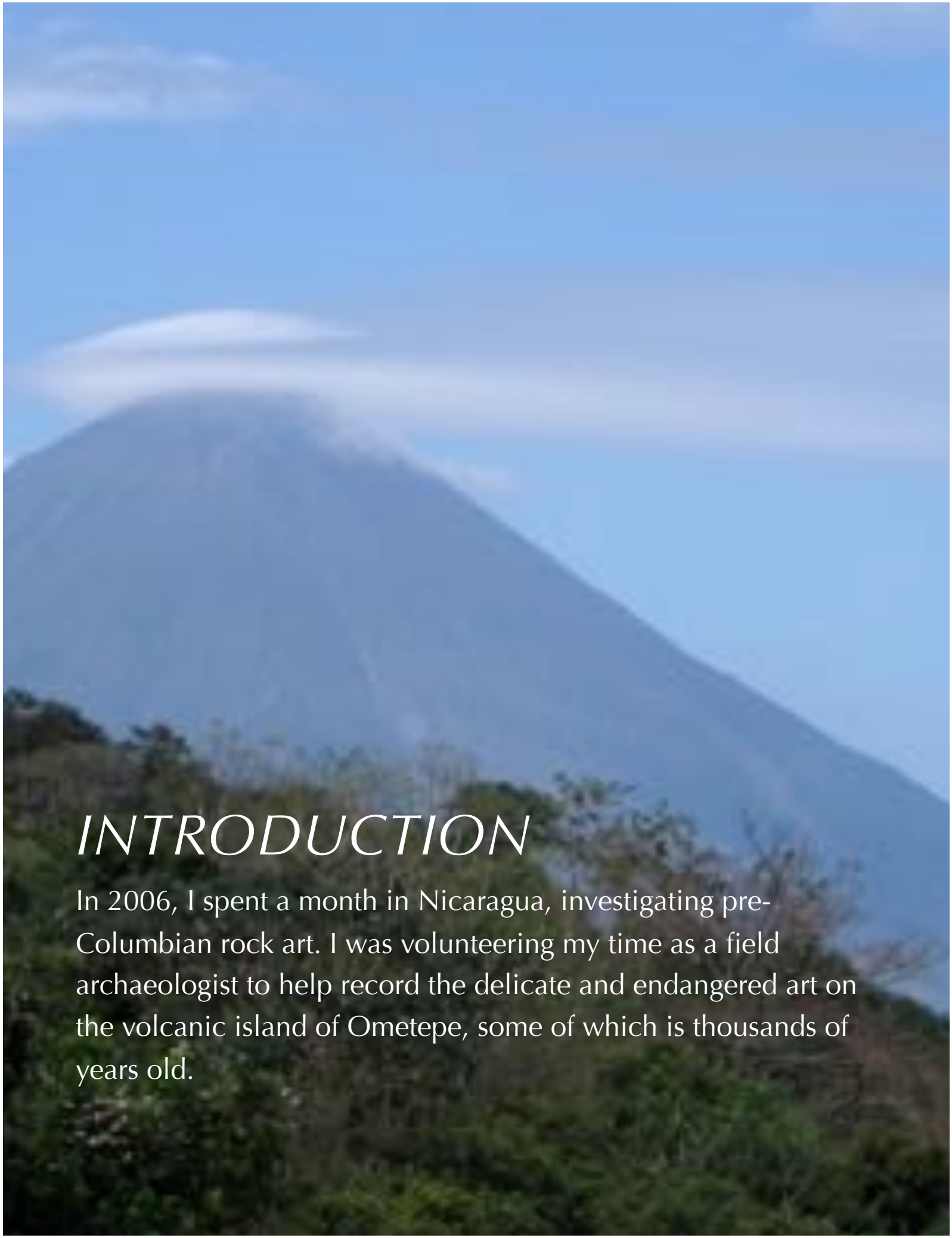

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, I spent a month in Nicaragua, investigating pre-Columbian rock art. I was volunteering my time as a field archaeologist to help record the delicate and endangered art on the volcanic island of Ometepe, some of which is thousands of years old.

There may be no dreamier place in the world than Ometepe Island, where ancient spirals, swirls and meanders decorate boulders that dot the fields and forested slopes. The mystery and power of the island has been celebrated for eons, as the indigenous peoples made their way across the choppy Lake Nicaragua to make their marks and honor the local spirits with ritual and ceremonies. Today, the cloud forest on the steep upper slopes of the massive volcano hides one of the densest concentrations of undocumented rock art in the world.

During my month in Nicaragua, I recorded over one hundred dreams, and had 12 lucid dreams as well. A lucid dream occurs when you are aware that you're dreaming, while still within the confines of sleep. The conditions of travel bring on lucid dreaming naturally, thanks to disturbances in sleep patterns as well as the heightened mental vigilance that comes with the excitement of adventure. Travel literally shakes us out of our habitual life patterns.

A lucid dream occurs when you are aware that you're dreaming, while still in the confines of sleep.

Photo: Ometepe Island consists of two volcanoes, creating a double spiral image if seen from above.

Luckily, I had anticipated this explosion of my dreamlife and was prepared.

On Ometepe Island, I focused my lucid dreams on the rock art imagery that filled my days. I wanted to see what my dreamlife would tell me about these sacred sites, even if they only exposed my own preconceived notions.

I further incited my dreaming mind by engaging in two crucial practices. First, I spent an hour each day at a specific rock art site, sitting in a quiet meditation that opened me up to non-rational ways of thinking. In the evenings, I sought lucid dreams by preparing for sleep mindfully.

These two practices reinforced each other, and the dreamworld opened up, inviting me in.

The resulting lucid dreams did much more than reveal my biases. Archaeological observations I had made and then disregarded actually surfaced in the dreams. These anomalies directed my focus towards new hypotheses about the significance of the sacred sites. More profoundly, I was invited into the stones to travel in a world between worlds, where mythology and destiny meet.

For example, in one dream I was shown how to "see" correctly. In one dream,

> *I see a [rock art] design [on a boulder] out of the corner of my eyes, but it disappears when I focus on it. Then I think I see another, a small spiral pecked design, but it too disappears when I look directly. I notice then what's happening, that the designs are everywhere, all over the rocks, but only at the periphery of my vision. They blip in and out of existence at the edges of my visual field as I scan the rock faces. An amazing effect.*[1]

Once I came back home to my ordinary life—a world of work, responsibilities and daily habits—my lucid dreams retreated once again to their default levels. For me, this is about one or two spontaneous lucid dreams a month. Some months, there are none.

It occurred to me that traveling around the world is a wonderful way to easily go lucid, but surely there is a more practical way to do it, without having to get a passport and suspend ordinary life for a month at a time.

You have probably read about induction techniques for lucid dreams, such as reality checks, recognizing dream signs, and Stephen LaBerge's MILD practice. These classic induction techniques can make a big difference, but there's still not a magic bullet for lucid dreaming, and many people have trouble breaking through.

This spiral petroglyph was the center of my daily meditations, and quickly became a potent dreamsign at night.

Why Isn't The Success Rate Higher?

I took another look at my condition on Ometepe Island, and realized that during the trip, I was meditating, hiking, journaling, and making strong intentions before going to bed. In my normal life, I'm lucky to do one of these things in a given day.

It came to me in a flash: the secret to lucid dreaming is not about finding the miracle technique, it's about saturation: a short period of time marked by waking practices that together encourage lucidity by addressing the entire mind-body ecology.

This is how ***Lucid Immersion*** was born. Just like the best way to learn a new

language, lucidity comes more quickly when you are immersed in the conditions that push you past your comfort zone and that everyday haze of habit and expectation.

> The secret to lucid dreaming isn't a specific miracle technique, it's about saturation.

Before laying out the holistic blueprint for lucid immersion in everyday life, this book teaches you how to prepare for lucid dreaming, and what to expect from this profound altered state of consciousness. After all, we don't go lucid in a vacuum, but during the weird and wonderful dream state. This review is drawn from ancient lore prized by the world's wisdom traditions as well as the latest dream research: the best of the old ways and the new.

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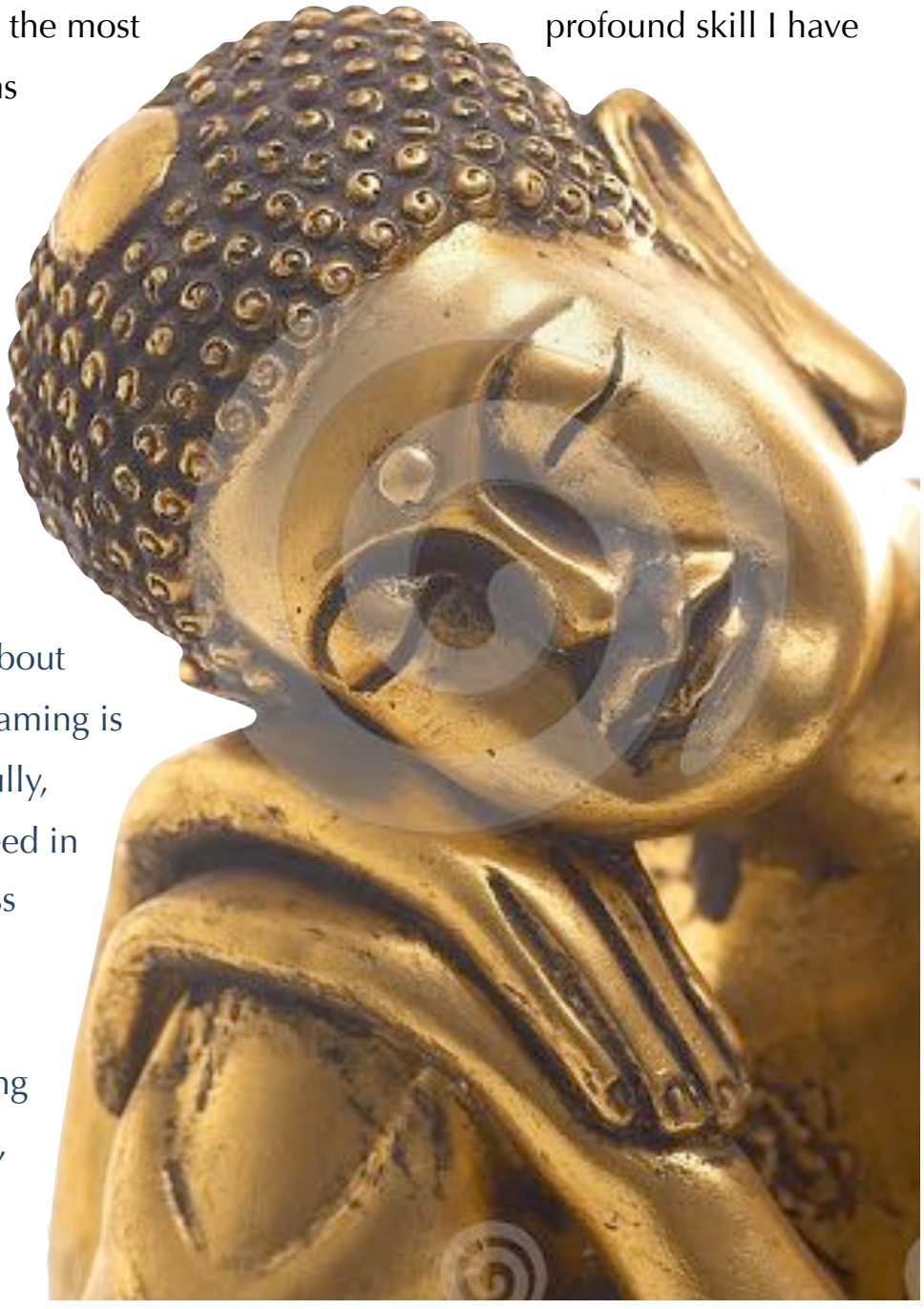
[1] *Hurd 2011a*

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

"And perhaps many a one, like myself, recollect having sometimes called out cheeringly and not without success amid the dangers and terrors of dream life, "It is a dream! I will dream on!"

–Friedrich Nietzsche

Lucid dreaming may be the most profound skill I have ever learned. My dreams have helped forge my identity, and tempered my soul. With practice, I think the same electrifying possibilities await you.



Let's be honest though. Much has been made about the claim that lucid dreaming is a learnable skill. Truthfully, not everyone will succeed in achieving self-awareness during the dream state. Like all worthy goals, mastering lucid dreaming takes practice, patience, and persistence.

Still, the odds are pretty good.

In a 2009 study of demographically diverse American adults, dream researcher Kelly Bulkeley found that 62% report having had at least one dream in which they were aware [1]. In a 2008 review of five studies of Japanese college students, 17-36% say they have a lucid dream once a month [2]. Demographically, women seem to have more lucid dreams then men, and young people may be easier to teach than older individuals.

The central goal of this book is to identify the practices that will dramatically increase your lucid odds.

But demographics are not destiny. The central goal of this book is to identify the practices that will dramatically increase your lucid odds. Secondly, the book provides a structure for developing a personal life practice that encourages lucid dreams naturally.

Add patience and persistence to this valuable skill set, and you will succeed, likely within just a few weeks.

The Importance Of Grounding

Many masters of lucid dreaming do not teach their methods publicly because popular culture does not take lucid dreaming seriously. Let's be clear: although I am a dreaming expert, I do not consider myself a master. My lucid story is still unfolding and I have much to learn.

However, I have been lucky enough to learn from several true lucid masters in the last decade[3]. These teachers have shown me how lucid dreaming is more than a virtual reality or a mental playground for our entertainment.

Rather, lucidity is a powerful ability that taps into the ancient and profound realm of the dreaming mind, where logic is not king, and where you are constantly mingling with forces outside of the realm of awareness. Lucid dreaming can lead to ecstatic experiences, new information, and heightened awareness in waking life. It also can be a gateway to realms beyond the dualism of the mind, towards ecstatic knowledge.

On the flip side, lucid dreaming can also lead to disquieting realizations about the past, the world we live in, and our most intense fears about the future. Without proper grounding, lucid dreaming can, in some cases, open the floodgates to jarring altered states that resemble bad acid trips. Although terrifying, these visions are not to be feared. It is just part of the package, for some more than others.

Lucid Dreamers Are Revolutionaries By Nature.

But for all, lucid dreaming is an ego-stretching activity. It stirs up our lives and reveals innermost strengths and passions as we come face to face with the self-imposed roadblocks that we all have, unknowingly, built around us. Lucidity is a wake up call!

Where I'm Coming From

I personally consider lucid dreaming to be a psychospiritual practice; it has changed my life and continues to be an avenue for growth, knowledge, and self-development. Lucid dreaming has connected me to parts of myself that I had disowned, as well as to ancestral ways of knowing much deeper than my family-of-

origin, although I have learned a lot about that too.

I have found courage, creativity and wisdom. I have found a sense of purpose as well as a gateway to the other worlds. I have made peace with the past and been shown possible futures. I have been shown my addictions, been scrubbed of old guilts and shames, and bathed in clear light. I have found teachers in the dream who have shown me how to delve deeper.

Most importantly, I have discovered that reality is permeable, and we have opportunities to shift not only our personal constructs of the world but also the constructs of our communities and our planet.

In this way, lucid dreamers are revolutionaries by nature.

The Big Three

Developing lucidity gracefully requires three foundational elements that together create a safe container. These prerequisites are good sleep patterns, good dream recall, and right timing. When these bare requirements are met, the door to lucidity opens naturally and with ease.

Good Sleep Habits

Encouraging lucidity by sleeping well

Understanding the basics of sleep and dreams is critical to learning how to lucid dream. Everyone has a unique sleep style. Although the sleep authorities suggest we get 7-8 hours of sleep every night, this is actually just an average.

Moreover, the very notion that all our sleep occurs in one big lay-down is also an assumption worth investigating.

Most of our remembered dreams come in the early morning.

Figure 4: A night of my own sleep, showing waking, REM, and the non-REM sleep known as light and deep sleep.

As a culture, we sleep in a monophasic style: one sleep phase per 24 hours. When it comes to lucidity, an unwavering pattern of solid sleep can present a roadblock. If you always sleep throughout the night without awakening, you may be missing some lucid dreaming opportunities. You may find you have more dreams if you adopt a biphasic sleeping style instead, which basically means two lay-downs: one large chunk of sleep at night, and then a shorter nap in the afternoon.

However you sleep, if you do not get enough, you will have a problem with lucid dreaming, as constant sleep deprivation is a mind-body drain.

So let's look at the basic rhythms of sleep.

Researchers break sleep down into stages based on the intensity of brain activity. The resting brain moves through the stages several times throughout the night. While the physiological need for sleep is universal, everyone has a unique baseline for long each cycle lasts. Finding out how long your sleep cycle lasts is an important step in sleeping and dreaming well.

The two major divisions are REM sleep, and non-REM sleep. Non-REM sleep is further broken down into light sleep and deep sleep stages. While dream researchers have shown that we dream and scheme in all stages of sleep, dreams occurring in REM sleep are when we are most likely to become aware we are dreaming [4].

We cycle through the sleep stages in a strange order: usually from light to deep, back to light and then REM. This basic progression repeats five times in the usual 7 to 8 hours of sleep, with decreasing levels of deep sleep and increasing levels of REM as the night goes on.

Forms of Lucid Hypnagogia

Technically, imagery seen while falling asleep is called hypnagogic hallucinations, and imagery seen while waking up is known as hypnopompic hallucinations. Both occur in Stage N1 sleep. Hypnagogia is the umbrella term for both of these forms, and can be thought of as the visionary bookends to sleep.

Most remembered dreams occur in REM sleep. However, lucid hypnagogia is a special case of dreaming that defies neat staging. These are hallucinations that occur at sleep onset, when waking up and drifting down into light sleep. Covert REM sleep intruding into light sleep may cause the visionary aspects of hypnagogia[5]. Lucid hypnagogia sometimes comes with sleep paralysis, a strange experience in which you become aware of the body's normal muscle paralysis during REM. More than just a misfiring of the awakening process, however, lucidity during sleep paralysis brings distinct and powerful visitations[6]. In both these cases, lucidity occurs as we are literally between waking and sleeping.

REM Is Fickle

In general, each progression through a sleep cycle results in a longer REM cycle than the time before. That's why most of our remembered dreams come in the early

morning, when the REM stage can last up to an hour in duration, as opposed to the five and ten minute durations of REM in the first half of the night.

When you are sleep deprived, REM dreaming takes the hit. If you only get five or six hours of sleep, you can really miss out on some great chances for lucidity. Also, some researchers link the arousal of the brain in early morning with release of the hormone cortisol [7]. It's possible that self-awareness is easier to achieve in the early morning due to this hormonal change.

When we cut back on REM sleep, the brain finds a way to get it back. Usually, this means longer REM sessions the next time we fall asleep. This effect is called REM rebound. REM rebound dreams are likely to have more vividness and bizarreness [8], which can work as a lucidity trigger or a dreamsign. However, I can't recommend using constant sleep deprivation for REM rebound: one study found that dream recall dropped nearly to nil after one night of recovery sleep [9].

Still, you can use REM rebound in the short term to bootstrap lucid dreaming. In fact, the popular supplement method of lucid dreaming derives from this biological shortcut: not by depriving sleep, but by temporarily repressing REM in the first half of the night. By tweaking the neurotransmitters behind dreaming sleep, you can increase the odds of a dreaming surge in the second half.

> Tweak your biological clock; do not bludgeon it.

Regularity: When To Break Free

The great majority of us are wired to sleep at roughly the same time in the 24-hour day. Our circadian rhythms dip in the evening when melatonin is released by the pineal gland, and cortisol gets us out of bed when the sun comes up.

Hiding within this regularity are some often-missed opportunities. If you're hoping to break through to your first lucid dream, you may want to disrupt your sleep

patterns, and utilize the flow of awareness as dictated by circadian rhythms.

For example, we have a smaller dip in wakefulness in the mid-afternoon, which is why siesta cultures are so prevalent in the non-industrialized world. Taking naps in the afternoon are fantastic opportunities for lucid dreams. Many of my own out-of-body experiences have taken place during afternoon naps on the couch.

The Wild Sleepers

Roughly 1 out of a 100 people have a sleep cycle that is largely untethered from the daylight cycles. Often pejoratively called "circadian phase shift disorder," this is not actually a problem if you can honor your unique sleep needs through lifestyle design. Many of the world's most creative people have slept at odd hours, including Thomas Edison, the surrealist painter Salvador Dali, and the 18th century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg.

By the way, waking up in the middle of the night can be natural and healthy. This pattern is not necessarily insomnia, according to holistic sleep psychologist Ruben Naiman [10]. Let's do a quick historical reframe. In western culture, the prevailing myth is that an unbroken sleep for 7-8 hours is the norm. However, before the advent of electrical light (and the constant daytime productivity schedules mandated by industrial-age factory life), sleep was broken up into two sessions in the night, called first sleep and second sleep. In between, people milled around their house, engaging in relaxing social time or solitary studies.

Tibetan Buddhists also use a period of alertness in the early morning for meditation

practices. By reclaiming this natural arousal time in the middle of the night, and engaging in a couple easy practices, you can greatly increase your chance to go lucid. Personally, this has been very effective for me, spurring on dozens of lucid dreams on demand.

Sleep disruption is part of the commitment to lucid dreaming, especially if you are a beginner looking for a breakthrough.

To review, some methods include:

- Encouraging short-term REM rebound,
- Experimenting with afternoon napping, and/or
- Utilizing the secret arousal period in the middle of the night.

We'll go in more detail in Chapter 7 Getting Physical.

Because sleep disruption can affect your life in unexpected ways, it should not be attempted for long periods of time but rather in short bursts. The goal is here is to avoid the morass of sleep deprivation. Tweak your biological clock; do not bludgeon it.

Polyphasic Versus Biphasic Sleeping

Case in-point for bludgeoning: the trend in polyphasic sleeping. Although there are several ways to go about it—some more extreme than others—polyphasic sleeping is about sleeping multiple times in a 24-hour cycle. Usually the goal is to cut down on total sleep hours. I don't know how many enthusiastic bloggers I've seen who have adopted polyphasic sleep schedules to become more "productive." By and large, these experiments rarely past longer than a few months, and the bloggers admit that they spent the bulk of their "extra" time not in productivity but in a sleepy haze of zoning out. They were probably getting their REM as they watched TV, or worse, while they were driving [11].

No matter when you bed down, or how many times a day you do it, below are some tips for getting quality sleep. These tips encourage good dreaming, and are foundational for the lucid dreaming immersion method.

How not to fall asleep

Treat Your Bedroom Like A Sanctuary

Restful sleep is more than the time you spend off your feet. Relaxation plays a major role in the ease of falling sleep. Conversely, your general anxiety levels affect the integrity of your sleep architecture. Where you sleep is the inner sanctum; it's a sanctuary from the troubles of the outside world. Treat it that way by setting up your bedroom in a way that encourages relaxation. This is reflected not only in the physical set up of the room but also how you approach going to bed.

- **Turn off the TV.** Limit your exposure to television, computer monitors and mobile media devices at least an hour before bed. The content is emotionally stimulating, and rapid fire light in the blue spectrum may prevent the release of melatonin in the evening.
- **Dress for comfort.** Sleep in clean, loose clothing, or nothing at all. Putting on your sleep clothes an hour before bed is another way of reinforcing your downward shift. It sends a message to others in the household too.
- **Keep it clean.** Fresh sheets, clean pillowcases, and a neat room create a relaxing space. Reducing clutter is crucial for creating mental space. On a related note, I recommend not keeping a computer or mobile phones in the room to clear the electro-magnetic field too.[15]
- **Move the bed.** Make sure the bed is not against a wall so electrical outlets will not be near your head. Metal water pipes in the wall can

also cause noises and may create subtle effects on consciousness too. Sleeping below a window can also create background anxiety.

- **Clear the air.** If you can't get fresh air, have some fresh flowers in a vase, aromatherapy candles, or small dream pillows stuffed with lavender or mugwort. Bad smells can actually increase the likelihood of negative emotions in dreams.[16]

- **Shield the sounds.** Erratic sounds are the worst. If you live in a busy house or neighborhood, turn on a small fan or invest in a white noise machine. Traffic sounds are particularly disturbing.

- **Darkness rules.** I just read an article about how Moby used to have a bedroom composed of walls of glass with fantastic views of Los Angeles. He ended up sleeping in the closet [17]. The bedroom should be dark, with good light-blocking curtains for your afternoon naps. A door that latches also helps create feelings of safety in the evening hours.

- **Wind down for an hour.** In general, create a ritual of winding down that incorporates relaxation, the dimming of household lighting, and the shutting out of information input (TV, computing, texting, etc). Read if you wish or listen to some relaxing music while you settle down with your dream journal.

- **Stay cool.** The lowering of the body temperature is a further cue for the brain to release sleep-inducing hormones, so sleep comes more easily when the room temperature is slightly on the cool side. Taking a cool bath in the summer months is another refreshing way to get ready for bed.

Good Dream Recall

Remembering dreams is part of our evolutionary inheritance. Dreaming has been woven into the fabric of myth making and creation tales since we, as Homo sapiens sapiens, developed the capacity to articulate private experiences to others. As cognitive archaeologist David-Lewis Williams puts it, humans cannot refrain from dreaming [18].

Still, for many of us, it can be a struggle to remember anything at all. How did we

get here? Historical forces, mostly. We do not live in a dream-friendly society. Unfortunately, the fact that many of us do not remember our dreams has colored scientific theories which assume that dreams are meant to be forgotten. This is not the case in traditional societies. Western children have to be taught that these powerful experiences are "just a dream."

But we do remember. Perhaps it is just vague feelings when waking up, or a song that plays repeatedly during the morning shower. Sometimes, the only dreams that we remember are the nightmares that cause us to wake up in terror, heart pounding and in a cold sweat.

In spite of the ludicrous claims that dreams are meant to be forgotten [19], something interesting happens when you decide to pay attention to your nightly journeys. The dreams respond, becoming more prominent and easier to grasp. It happens quite quickly. As the waking mind learns to value our memories of dreams, the dreams themselves turn towards us [20]. The content changes, becoming more intelligible and more focused.

Meanwhile, in waking life we begin to see dream imagery showing up in our daily rounds. Synchronities multiply, intuitive "gut" feelings strengthen, and we become energized, more creative, and more in touch with our emotions. This is what it means to become a good dreamer.

Remembering dreams is part of our evolutionary inheritance.

Cognitive psychologists today suggest that good dream recall is not a birthright, but a capability that can be developed like any other aptitude. Dream recall is a learnable skill, and dreaming itself is a proficiency that almost anyone can develop if desired.[21] This is the foundation for learning how to dream lucidly, for without dream recall, there are no lucid dreams to work with.

Dreaming well is a feedback system: the more you put in, the more you get back.

With that in mind, here are some tips for starting a dream journal, undoubtedly the most important ally in the quest for greater dream recall.

How To Keep A Dream Journal

You want to remember more dreams, but all you have when you wake up in the morning is the vague recollection of the color blue, or the lingering feeling of being frustrated. It doesn't seem worth writing down, but we all have to start somewhere, and those small clues are the gateway to the dreamworld. So an attitude of readiness to work with what shows up is key.

Be patient. You cannot put too much pressure on yourself, especially if it has been months or even years since your last memorable dream. I have found that when I put high expectations on myself to dream, I end up with disappointment. Dreams are, by definition, mercurial. They will come around, in their own sweet time.

Making The Habit Stick

Like almost anything that is good for you, dream journaling will be easier to stick with if you make a daily habit of it. That means setting time aside to record your dreams,

Dreams and Synchronicity

Synchronicity is a term Carl Jung coined for the experience of meaningful chance: when two events (or more) that are not causally linked create the feeling of significance. When a dream is followed by a waking life echo, pay attention. For me, the content of the synchronicity is not as important as its expression, as it tells me I'm on the right track and honoring my intuition.

as well as having a notebook and pen by the bed that is specifically for dreams, and nothing else.

Personally, I've noticed that my dream journaling comes in waves: I'll record six dreams in a row, and then the book will be blank for a while. What happened? More often than not, the wave of recording started at the beginning of the week when I reset my daily habits. If I don't set the intention on Monday, I've got no dreams by Friday. Sometimes, I don't have any memorable dreams for weeks simply because I'm focusing on other concerns in life… this is also quite normal. They come and go with the seasons.

> Dreaming well is a feedback system: the more you put in, the more you get back.

No Judgments

Be honest with yourself. It's important when journaling to suspend all moral judgments about what occurred in the dream. Dreams have a habit of being socially unacceptable. Dreams often fulfill a desire or express something that would be inappropriate in everyday life. In my opinion, dreams are not the work of a corrupt or primitive sense of self, but a natural clue to unmet needs. And, besides, sometimes stuff is metaphoric. Emotions and images link to one another through a network of long-term memories, as I'll describe in greater detail in the next chapter.

Bottom line: don't take your dreams too seriously. Like all thought forms, hold them lightly as playful possibilities. Therapist and dreamworker Strephon Kaplan Williams once said, "A dream is a question, not an answer."

Techniques For Dream Journaling

Over the years, my dream journals have ranged from composition notebooks to spiral notebooks to books made with hand-made paper. I like the smaller ones best because they are easily portable.

I have been writing down my dreams now for more than twenty years. Most of this time I have had a separate dream journal, so I have a lot of data on my dream life. This also serves as a record for what works and what doesn't when it comes to journaling techniques.

These are my tips for anyone who is new to dream journaling:

- **Pick your journal carefully, and make sure it speaks to you.** It doesn't matter if it is a fancy leather-bound book with acid-free paper or a spiral notebook you picked up at the dollar store. What matters is that it feels good, approachable, and most importantly, that you use the journal for nothing else but writing down those dreams. Admittedly, I have experimented with mix-use journals over the years, mostly because I was interested to see how my dreams and waking life intertwined. That's a story for another time, but the

I recommend unlined notebooks so you can add sketches of prominent imagery

practical result of this mixed-journal approach is that I wrote down less dreams. So if you are just getting started, I recommend a dedicated book. No recipes, phone numbers, or to-do lists.

- **Keep the journal and your dedicated pen by the bed.** If you are really serious about recalling more dreams, you want the journal to be the last thing you see before you go to bed, and the first thing you see in the morning. Also a good idea to have a book light or a pen with a light attached if you want to record a dream in the middle of the night, upon awakening. Don't trust that you will remember it in the morning — I can't tell you how many amazing dreams and brilliant ideas I have lost with that assumption. Choose a good pen too: a friend of mine has said he has lost many dreams from just giving up when his pen starts running out of ink.

- **Record your dreams upon waking.** This is hard at first. But the truth is that the dream is easier to recall right afterwards; the details quickly vanish. Also, our memory of the dream is less polluted by the unconscious revisions that we will later apply. If you absolutely can't make time to record your dreams after waking up, jot down the most powerful emotions and images from the dream right after you wake up. Later, such as over lunch, record the dream more fully. The danger here is, as we keep recalling the dream throughout the day, we tend to "tidy up" the dream into a clean little story with a beginning, middle, and end. Beware of that urge—dream researchers call it the "narrative effect" when we alter the dream's memory by adding a connecting element like "I must have gone into the house next because then I was in the living room." Instead, record what you actually remember. More dangerous still is the urge to drop a bizarre element that doesn't seem to fit in the story. If I catch myself trying to drop a detail that my waking brain says is unimportant, I make a special note of it. Why? Because that incongruous detail sometimes turns out to be the most revealing part of the dream later on, once I get some distance. It can also prove to be a reliable dreamsign that alerts you the next time you are dreaming.

- **Alternatively, record your dreams digitally.** Transcribe them later, or use a digital voice app like Dragonspeak. Speaking dreams out loud is the more ancient method of dream honoring, and it may bring up a more natural "speech-ripe" rendering of the dream. This may reveal word play and puns when you review the dream later.