

# DreamSpeak

## An Interview With Ian Koslow

© Ian Koslow  
Questions by Robert Waggoner

*Lucid Dreamer, Ian Koslow, is a student of Journalism at the University of Florida (Go Gators!) with a deep interest in lucid dreaming and consciousness.*

### **How did you become interested in lucid dreaming?**

Well for me, the interest in lucid dreaming really sparked years before I had ever heard of the term. As a child, I had always been fascinated by dreaming. It was this fascination that made me realize the potential in the idea of being able to control a dream. I remember bringing it up to my friends all the time. "Imagine if you could realize when you were dreaming," I would say. I knew if it was attainable, the possibilities would be infinite. For me, the concept was simple, but fulfilling it was another story. I fantasized about creating some sort of machine that would be capable of "waking you up" in a dream, without actually waking you up. I pictured my invention as a sort of virtual reality limited only by the user's imagination; the ultimate experience. I remember thinking that if I could come up with this, I'd be rich.

So I think it was really this desire, coupled with one other thing that was responsible for any success I've had at achieving lucidity. The other thing, was the reality check. For as long as I can remember, any time I've ever been in an awkward situation, or something just didn't seem right, I'd pinch myself. To most people that have never had a lucid dream, this seems silly, but I realized that there was no way of telling the difference between a dream and reality, until I woke up. I knew that I couldn't actually be hurt in a dream, so by pinching myself until I couldn't bear the pain any longer, I could be sure that any dream-like situation was definitely reality. So it was for this reason, that in my freshman year of college, while I was fast asleep in my dorm room, my dream body was at a high school I had never seen before, I decided to pinch myself and it didn't hurt.

### **So tell me about this first lucid dream.**

At this point in my life, I had heard of the term lucid dreaming, but only because I had seen the movie *Waking Life* in a high school English class. I'm also pretty sure that I had had several occasions where I realized I was dreaming, but I woke up very soon after. But in this particular instance, when I realized I was dreaming, I didn't wake up. Instead, I began to explore the high school, and you could imagine what I was thinking. I was ecstatic, but I didn't want to be too excited, in fear that I might wake up.

I remember as I was walking through the school, noticing all of the details, that I was thinking, "This is it. I've finally done it," and it was amazing. The level of consciousness is what was so incredible. I started talking to a girl, and I wanted her to follow me out of the school. She was

worried about getting in trouble, so I had to explain to her that we were in my dream, so this whole world we were in wasn't real and therefore there was no such thing as trouble.

This had always been one of the things I thought would be coolest about being aware in a dream, the idea of no consequences. She seemed to understand, so she came with me. It was at this point that I wondered whether this girl was a real person. Suddenly I had a great idea. I would ask her name and then look her up on Facebook when I woke up. She told me her name, and I knew it was a normal name, but every time it came out, it seemed like the letters would all come together and the name wouldn't make sense. After several more attempts, I figured that maybe this was a real girl, but under some type of lucid dreaming law, you couldn't share your name with other dreamers. It made sense to me, because I could imagine how freaked out this person might be if I found her the next day.

### **That's interesting. Did you notice any other strange things in your first lucid dreams?**

I found that there was almost always one common characteristic; while I was lucid, there would always be someone or something that would try to scare me into thinking I wasn't dreaming and therefore I was going to get into trouble. I call these things "distracters." For example, while this girl and I were leaving the school, my very first distracter appeared. It was my mom, and she seemed very concerned that I was leaving school with a girl she had never seen before. I had to pinch myself several times to remind myself that it was still a dream, and then I took great satisfaction in telling her to leave me alone, because this was my dream.

### **So what was the next step for you?**

After waking up from this dream I was amazed. I think, like most lucid dreamers point out, that the feeling of the dream being more realistic than reality is what got to me. The first thing I did was jump on my computer and research lucid dreaming. I wanted to train myself to become lucid as often as possible from that point on, and I was happy to see so many lucid dreaming web sites with people just as excited as me. I was also interested to see what other people did in their lucid dreams so I could get ideas for my own. I felt extremely satisfied to see that the reality check was a popular technique in the lucid dreaming world. All day I was looking forward to going to sleep that night and becoming lucid again, but I knew that if I woke up without attaining lucidity, I would be miserable. I was extremely nervous that it might be a one-time thing for me, but as I slipped into a deep sleep that night, talking to myself and using the techniques that I had previously read on the web sites, the reality check came.

I was at a house party with all of my friends. Two of my friends began fighting, which caused me to pinch myself. The feeling of knowing that I had achieved lucidity for the second night in a row was awesome. I followed as my friends brought the fight into the backyard. They tackled each other into the pool and they both started drowning. At this point, everyone at the party was outside watching the altercation. They all started to scream and worry about our friends drowning. I got a little bit nervous, but I realized this was a distracter. They were trying to scare me into thinking that my friends were actually going to die, so I gave myself a few extra-hard pinches to make absolutely sure I was dreaming.

In my opinion, one of the more fun things about becoming lucid is confronting your friends in the dream. I like to let them know that they are just guests in my dream, and they usually think I'm crazy, so it's fun to see their faces when I begin to fly, or do something that defies the laws of physics. Well, in this particular dream I had about 30 of my closest friends looking at me like I was insane and wondering why I wasn't worried about my friends drowning in the pool right next

to me. Their faces were so convincing, that there was a moment where I thought to myself, “Maybe I’ve gone crazy and I’m about to be responsible for two of my best friends dying.” But refusing to give into the distracter, I announced to the group, “To prove that this is all my dream, I am going to walk on the water.” I nervously stepped up to the pool, took a step and balanced myself on the surface of the water. It was a great feeling, and from that moment on there was nothing that could convince me I wasn’t dreaming.

**Since this LDE has “dream characters” as a main topic, let me ask about any interesting interactions with dream characters. (I actually prefer the term ‘dream figure’, since dream characters insinuates that they have no basis except as fictional or imaginary characters). Any interesting conversations?**

I love meeting dream figures and find it very intriguing to talk to them and ask them questions about whether or not they are real people. One of my favorite things to do while exploring a lucid world is find people and make conversation. A lot of times they tell me that they are also lucid dreaming. One guy told me his name was Sam Manson and he was from Westin, Florida. I did a Google search the next day but didn’t find much.

I learned early on that dream figures could help you in your dreams. In one of my very first lucid dreams I was walking down a street and I remembered reading on a lucid dreaming web site (LD4all, thank you, PasQuale) that one dreamer enjoyed turning cars into Ferraris so he could know what it’s like to drive a car he would probably never get a chance to drive. I decided I’d like to drive a Ferrari, and suddenly there was a man walking toward me. He threw something in the air and a car key landed right in my hand. I asked him how he knew I was dreaming and he replied, “Because you looked famous.” I asked him to take me to the car where the key would work and he lead me to a truck. I said, “Do you know the trick to turn cars into Ferraris?” He said he would teach me for a dollar, so I handed him a dollar and he touched the side of the truck as if there were invisible buttons. Suddenly, the truck turned into my very own Ferrari.

**At some point, you began to experiment with lucid dreams. I recall one lucid dream in which you decided to see if you could discover secret information about a friend in the dorm. Tell us about that. What were you after?**

I was after what I suppose most lucid dreamers are after; to discover whether dream figures are real and have lives for themselves, or if they are just products of our imagination. One night a friend and I got into this discussion so we decided to do an experiment. She told me that somewhere on her back was a freckle, and she wanted to see if I could find her in a lucid dream and locate the freckle. For some reason, by the way she was acting, I had a feeling that the freckle was somewhere on the side of her back.

A few nights later I became lucid, and the first thing that came to my mind was finding my friend and looking for the freckle. I left my dorm room and began walking toward hers, but as I got closer, it became harder for me to move. It was as if there was some type of force preventing me from moving any further. Then a different friend of mine who also lived on my floor came out of his room to yell and wake me up from the dream. It’s interesting to point out that the person who yelled for me to wake up is someone who didn’t believe in the concept of lucid dreaming and accused me of making it all up. I was upset about this failed attempt when I had come so close, but a few nights later I became lucid again in my dorm room. I got up to go find my friend, but this time I decided to just have her come through my door. She walked right in and approached me. I told her to turn around and lift up her shirt, and I must say I was pretty excited to see one freckle in the dead center of her back, right above her butt. Although I was happy to find the

freckle, I was at the same time a little disappointed because I thought that this certainly wasn't the real spot of the freckle, which for some reason I felt was on her side.

The second I woke up, I ran all the way to her room with a smile on my face. I opened the door and told her that I found it. She knew what I was talking about, and she turned around as I pointed my finger to the dead center of her back, right above her butt. She lifted up the back of her shirt and my finger was touching the freckle. Of course we were both in shock, but I can't even describe the feeling of amazement I had that it was the right spot. She sort of looked at me in disbelief and I ran out pondering my discovery.

**How do you explain that to yourself? Do you feel that you visited her in the dream state? Or do you feel that you telepathically picked up the information, and then incorporated that into a dream? Or something else?**

To be honest, I really don't know, although I have my own theory which I will get into momentarily. I asked her if she had any dreams the night before, but she had none that she could remember. There are certainly a number of possible explanations for what happened. It is quite possible that the event was a coincidence, but I do not think it was. I think a possible explanation, is that without realizing it, I had seen her back before, and although I had no recollection of a freckle being anywhere on her back, this information was stored somewhere on a subconscious level. If in fact this explanation is correct, it could mean a number of significant implications not just about lucid dreaming, but about our minds as well.

Personally, I think this ties into the whole Mind at Large theory, which is discussed in Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, and briefly talked about in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, my favorite book. The theory, which I have taken a strong interest in, suggests that the function of the brain, nervous system and sense organs is actually eliminative, rather than the common perception, that it is productive. At any given time in any given moment, each person is capable of remembering everything that has ever happened to him, and able to perceive anything that has ever happened anywhere in the entire universe. The purpose of the brain and nervous system is to shelter us from all of the irrelevant knowledge, and let us focus on only what is important for our survival. Basically, we are all potentially Mind at Large, but since we are animals, it is our business to stay alive, and to make survival possible, the true nature of the universe must be funneled through what is called a "reduction valve," which is the function of the brain and nervous system. The only data that makes it through this reduction valve is the information we need to survive. That is why we only use a small part of our brain. This tiny piece of consciousness that we are aware of is miniscule compared to what we'd be capable of if we could use more of our brain, the result of our reducing valve being more open. Here's where it gets interesting, because some peoples' valves are more open.

Basically, it all comes down to awareness, and I think most lucid dreamers would agree, that there is a direct correlation between awareness and lucid dreaming. Essentially, that's what lucid dreaming is. The theory says that there are means to opening the valve, and that is through spiritual exercises, hypnosis and mind altering substances to name a few. It is my belief that lucid dreaming is the result of an open valve. And that is why I was able to find her freckle. Because, like I said before, we are all capable of perceiving anything in the universe, we just need to find the capability to tap into it, and that is why I think lucid dreaming is so important. And there's one more thing I'd like to point out. In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Ken Kesey and his gang tap into this awareness through the use of drugs, mainly LSD, which is one of the ways Huxley said you can tap into it.

Now, I think that any oneironaut will tell you that lucid dreaming is the ultimate high. Millions of people are taking these drugs to open their valve, but they don't know that they can achieve this naturally through their own mind. With drugs, you can certainly get to altered states of consciousness, but you cannot control it. In lucid dreaming, you enter a world where the only laws are governed by your own imagination. Like I said before, it is the ultimate high, the ultimate trip, the ultimate experience. That is why I believe it is so important for the mainstream to understand the art of lucid dreaming. I believe that if everybody could lucid dream, there would be no more reason to do drugs. I guess I didn't realize as a kid when I came up with a hypothetical machine to "wake you up" in a dream that I'd be coming up with a way to potentially end the use of drugs in the world.

**I found it interesting that in the middle of this lucid dream, you felt surprised and perhaps a bit disconcerted, since the odd freckle appeared in the center of the lower back, and not on the side as you supposed. Often in lucid dreams, we get what we "expect". In this case, the answer was not what you expected. Did that worry you in the morning when you woke up?**

Of course I was worried. I was extremely excited just by the fact that I had another lucid dream, but being able to control it, and then finding in it what I was looking for made it even more satisfying, however, I didn't want to be wrong about the location of the freckle, which I certainly thought I was. I feared that being wrong would sort of shoot down all of our ideas and insights from the conversation which prompted the experiment. You know the feeling; you always want to believe in something that you feel very passionate about. The fact that I knew exactly where the freckle was doesn't necessarily prove anything, but if I had been wrong about the location of the freckle, it would have proven at least to me, that dream figures are just a figment of our own imagination... Clearly something I did not want to acknowledge, based on the fact that I believe lucid dreaming serves as something far more significant than just our imagination.

**As you've gone deeper into lucid dreaming, what have you found?**

As I explored further into lucid dreaming, I quickly began to see the significance of it and began to wonder about the potential of it. Since I noticed the whole awareness aspect of it, I began to look at people in history who I felt were more aware, and wondered whether they were lucid dreamers.

What I began to find matched up with my theory. I started to notice that things associated with dreaming were all around me. In books, in writing, in songs, in art, it was everywhere, and although I was looking at the same things as before, it didn't jump out at me until now. I wondered if perhaps, the great artists and writers and philosophers, who could see things and understand things that others could not were using their dreams as a way to tap into other levels of consciousness. What if, perhaps the great thinkers of our society could meet in their lucid dreams and share a sort of marketplace of ideas? You see paintings all the time where you wonder, "How could he or she possibly come up with this picture?" What if perhaps the artist saw this vision in a lucid dream, or the same for a writer or musician? (I noticed in a previous DreamSpeak interview that PasQuale gets inspirations for her paintings from her lucid dreams)

The possibilities are endless. And there is plenty of reason to believe that the great minds of human existence were lucid dreamers just by looking at their quotes and their work. This is what I mean when I said I started to notice dream related things all around me. Quotes like "Our truest life is when we are in dreams awake," by Henry David Thoreau suddenly made perfect sense to me! I believe that these thinkers and innovators knew perfectly well the significance of the dream

world, and that is why they were and still are able to come up with things that people could never comprehend in this reduced form of reality.

One day, while I was listening to a song which I have heard a million times, a line stood out that I had never really heard before. The song was "Strawberry Fields," written by John Lennon, possibly my favorite person of all time. I was driving in my car when suddenly I heard John sing, "but you know I know when it's a dream," and my heart stopped. Well by definition, knowing when it's a dream is a lucid dream. And suddenly it hit me. What if Strawberry Fields was a place that John went in his lucid dreams? At a closer glance of the lyrics, I got that numb feeling throughout my body when you think you're on to discovering something amazing. "Let me take you down cause I'm going to Strawberry Fields. Nothing is real, and nothing to get hung about." Sounds like the characteristics of a lucid dream to me.

Then another thought hit me. I remembered a lucid dream in which I was at a park and I met a girl who was using a sort of pile driver to dig up the ground. I asked her what she was doing, and she told me in a British accent that she was just doing her job. I noticed that she was collecting frozen strawberries from the fields, which was filled with loads of giant frozen strawberries below the ground. Her job was to send the strawberries back to England she told me. This memory hit me like lightning. What if I had been down to Strawberry Fields and not even realized it?

### **What else interests you about lucid dreaming and what do you hope to find?**

With the knowledge that anything is possible in a lucid dream, I realized I could talk to loved ones who had passed away. This is something I am fascinated with, because just like with the other dream figures, I wonder whether they are real or not. In lucid dreams I have tried to find my grandpa after he died, but have only been successful a couple of times.

The more memorable time, I became lucid when my family was in a restaurant with my grandpa. I knew I was dreaming when I remembered that he was not alive so he could not be there in reality. I took him outside and was happy to see that he could walk perfectly fine, something he had not been able to do before his death. (I noticed in Keelin's interview that her experiences with her father in lucid dreams were similar.) I asked him if it hurt to die and he said no. I asked him what it was like and he said that "Every body was there." He told me that he didn't understand why my grandma didn't come with him when he died. He was disappointed because he was expecting her to follow him. It was a pretty moving dream as you could imagine. I would love to know whether I was actually talking to him, and that is why I am so fascinated by talking to people in dreams, especially people who have passed away.

There is a rather interesting theory talked about in the movie *Waking Life*. If I remember correctly, it says that dream time and reality time are not proportionate. The example they use is by posing the question, "Have you ever woken up at 7 a.m., fallen back asleep and had a dream that seems like it lasted hours or even days, but when you wake back up it's only 7:02?" The idea is that when you die, the neurotransmitters in your brain are still active for a short period of time in which you are in an unconscious state similar to that of REM sleep, which is when most dreams occur. Although it may be a very short interval of time in reality, in dream time it could be an infinite amount of dreams.

So, they propose that when we die we go into this dream state for the rest of eternity. Perhaps the dead become dream figures for other people's dreams. I've met plenty of people that put off sleep and dream time with the justification that "sleep is just preparation for death." Well, if that's the

case, I think I'd like to be well prepared. And if you can control your dreams, I don't know how much more prepared you can be. So, my question is, assuming that it is true that when we die, our minds go into a dream state for the rest of eternity, what if we could become lucid? Sounds like heaven to me.

**When you talk to college friends and acquaintances about lucid dreams, do they seem familiar with the subject? Sometimes, I have a feeling that some people view 'lucid' dreams, as dreams which seem extra vivid – they don't seem to understand that it involves a shift in awareness. Any advice or parting words?**

People don't seem to know anything about it. A lot of my friends think I am crazy, and others think that they've had lucid dreams when their dreams have been very vivid and memorable, but you're right, they don't understand it involves a shift in awareness. I'll be the first to admit that it's very difficult, perhaps impossible to understand what a lucid dream is unless you've had one. And if you have had one, you'd know.

I can only hope that people continue to research the mysteries behind lucid dreaming and are able to discover the relevance of it. Hopefully, when the potential of its power is realized and recognized by scientists all over the world, it will be taught in schools. I think the world would be a better place if everyone could lucid dream, and the thing about it is that everyone has the potential. Just knowing it exists increases your chances of doing it greatly. For now, the only thing I can do is share my experiences, ideas and impact it's had on me. You know it's funny, because I am very reluctant to bring it up when I meet new people in fear that they will think I'm crazy, but I always have a certain feeling of when I should introduce someone to lucid dreaming, and so far, the people that I have shared it with have told me firsthand that I have changed their life.

I want to thank you Robert, for giving me the opportunity to share some of my experiences, ideas and insights. You are doing your part by creating a place to exchange ideas on lucid dreaming and that is fantastic. It is an honor for me just to be on the same list as some of these names below me. I guess my parting advice for those that have read this is to open your valve, one way or another. Oh, and pinch yourself. Because it is quite possible that this entire interview was just a figment of your imagination.