

# Dreaming oneself awake: Lucid dreaming and Dream Yoga reconsidered

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*"Tibetan Buddhism considers sleep to be a form of nourishment, like food, that restores and refreshes the body. Another type of nourishment is samadhi, or meditative concentration. If one becomes advanced enough in the practice of meditative concentration, then this itself sustains or nourishes the body."* — His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

**Summary.** In this paper, I examine the relationship between lucid dreaming and Tibetan Buddhist dream yoga, focusing on their significance for understanding consciousness and mental wellbeing. I argue that while lucid dreaming involves becoming aware of the dream state and gaining some control over dream experiences, dream yoga extends this awareness toward a deeper philosophical and contemplative aim. I aim to discuss that dream yoga treats dreams as illusory mental constructions and uses lucidity as a means to cultivate mindfulness and self-awareness across both dreaming and waking life. I further suggest that lucid dreaming functions as an entry point to dream yoga, providing mental benefits such as emotional regulation and nightmare reduction, while dream yoga integrates these benefits into a broader framework of self-transformation.

**Keywords:** Consciousness, Dream Yoga, Lucid dreaming, Mental wellbeing, Tibetan Buddhism

## 1. Introduction

*"May I awaken within this dream,  
And grasp the fact that I am dreaming  
So that all dreamlike beings may likewise awaken  
From the nightmare of illusory suffering and confusion."  
-Surya Das*

*"The Tibetan Buddhists have practiced a form of lucid dreaming known as "the yoga of the dream state" for more than a thousand years. Thus, Western science could clearly benefit from a study of dream yoga."* (LaBerge & Gackenback, 2000, p. 75)

Dreams have long occupied a central place in philosophical reflection on consciousness, selfhood, and reality. From early metaphysical skepticism to contemporary philosophy of mind, dreaming has been used to question the reliability of perception and the boundaries between waking and non-waking states of awareness. In recent decades, this philosophical interest has been revitalized by empirical research on lucid dreaming, a state in which individuals become consciously aware that they are dreaming while remaining asleep (Hearne, 1978; LaBerge et al., 1981; Voss et al., 2009; Srivastava, 2025). Lucid dreaming challenges the assumption that reflective awareness is exclusive to waking consciousness and invites a reconsideration of how

consciousness can manifest across different states (Flanagan, 2000; Voss & Hobson, 2015; Rosen, 2024). At the same time, non-Western contemplative traditions, particularly Tibetan Buddhism, have long developed systematic practices for cultivating awareness within dreams, most notably through the discipline of dream yoga (Padmasambhava, 1998; Norbu, 2002; Wallace, 2012; Holecek, 2016). Lucid dreaming has primarily been studied within cognitive science and psychology as a metacognitive phenomenon involving self-reflection, intention, and partial volitional control during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep (Kahan & LaBerge, 1994; Windt, 2015; Rosen, 2024). Research has demonstrated its potential benefits for emotional regulation, nightmare reduction, creativity, and psychological resilience (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1991; Voss et al., 2009; Stumbrys & Erlacher, 2017). While these findings are significant, they often remain confined to instrumental or therapeutic frameworks that treat lucid dreaming as an unusual but isolated state. Such approaches tend to overlook broader philosophical questions concerning the nature of experience, the continuity of consciousness, and the status of waking reality itself.

*We still do not have a great quantity of contemporary lucid dream accounts, and among what we have, we do not have many dreamers reporting the kinds of phenomena described in the Tibetan texts. Nor do we yet have in English translation much of the vast and complex literature belonging to Tibetan Buddhism. But in what we have, we can see that Tibetan accounts of lucid dreaming are relevant to our understanding of this new area of study, particularly if we are able to distinguish between the phenomena of lucid dreams and their metaphysical and religious interpretation (Gillespie, 1988, p. 34; Sheehy, 2025, p. 3).*

Dream yoga, by contrast, situates lucidity within a comprehensive philosophical and contemplative worldview (LaBerge, 2003; Sheehy, 2025). Rooted in Tibetan Vajrayāna

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and Bön traditions, dream yoga regards both dreams and waking experience as illusory constructions of the mind and treats lucidity as a means of cultivating insight into this illusory nature (Norbu, 2002; Holecek, 2016; Rinpoche, 2016). Rather than emphasizing control over dream content, dream yoga prioritizes the transformation of an individual's relationship to experience, aiming to sustain mindfulness and awareness across waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. In this sense, dream yoga challenges waking-centric models of consciousness by proposing that reflective awareness and spiritual practice need not be limited to the waking state (Young, 1999; LaBerge, 2003; Wallace, 2012; Thompson, 2015a).

In this paper, I argue that lucid dreaming and dream yoga are best understood not as competing practices but as philosophically continuous. Lucid dreaming functions as a threshold that makes explicit the possibility of awareness within sleep, while dream yoga extends this awareness toward deeper ontological and ethical insight. I aim to suggest that dream yoga presents a richer conceptual framework for understanding the significance of lucidity, one that integrates mental wellbeing with questions about selfhood, illusion, and liberation. The paper is structured as follows. In Section II, I clarify the concepts of lucid dreaming and dream yoga, highlighting their phenomenological features and philosophical differences. Section III examines how lucid dreaming serves as a bridge to dream yoga by enabling reflexive awareness within the dream state. Section IV explores the implications of these practices for mental wellbeing, drawing on empirical studies and contemplative theory. Section V situates dream yoga within broader mindfulness and meditative traditions, including recent findings in contemplative neuroscience.

## 2. The Concept of Dream Yoga and Lucid Dreaming

*"Dream Yoga transcends but includes lucid dreaming. It starts when you become lucid in your dreams, but then transcends normal lucid dreaming activity"* (Andrew Holecek, n.d.).

Lucid dreams serve as the bridge between the realms of dreaming and wakefulness. Lucid dreaming is a state in which we are consciously aware that we are dreaming, having both the aspects of dreaming and being awake (Voss et al., 2009; Windt, 2015; Rosen, 2024). It is a state in which an individual can potentially exert control over the content and direction of the dream (Schredl, 2018; Srivastava, 2025). This phenomenon bridges the conscious and subconscious mind, allowing individuals to engage actively with their dream environment (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1991; Green & McCreery, 1994; Voss & Hobson, 2015). With this basic structure of dreaming in our mind, we have to explore how lucidity differs from ordinary dreams and waking experiences. Unlike typical dreams, where the dreamer is a passive observer, lucid dreaming enables a heightened level of awareness and intentionality within the dream state (Windt & Metzinger, 2007; Rosen, 2024). The lucid state is not as stable as the wake or REM phases. Thus, it frequently returns to either waking or non-lucid dreaming (Flanagan, 2000; Voss et al., 2009; Rosen, 2024). Stephen LaBerge (2009) argues that consciousness places us in both the waking and dream worlds during lucid dreaming. Even though

the brain creates the dream in the ordinary dreaming state, it is acknowledged as reality rather than a model (Windt & Metzinger, 2007). Occasionally, the strangeness of a dream raises doubts about reality, but the dreamer may come up with an equally unusual reason to stay in the dream. However, when a dreamer experiences lucidity, they acknowledge the dream for what it is- a dream, 'a representation of reality' (Srivastava, 2025, p. 7). Different levels of lucidity exist, from realizing one is dreaming to taking control of the dream content- from recognizing that one is consciously dreaming and being aware of it (Green & McCreery, 1994; Rosen, 2024; Srivastava, 2025). Lucidity and waking experiences complement each other, but they are different in the sense that focused and goal-oriented behavior is better experienced during waking consciousness (Thompson, 2015a; Windt, 2015; Srivastava, 2025). It differs from the waking experience, as we can experience our unfulfilled desires and the unimagined aspects of our mind in this state. When we are lucid, we can see through the curtain separating our waking and dreaming minds and experience both states of awareness at once (Kahn & Gover, 2010, pp. 190-193; for a review on lucid dreaming, see Srivastava, 2025, pp. 7-10). It has been extensively researched for psychological benefits such as emotional regulation, nightmare resolution, and creativity enhancement, making it a useful practice for personal growth and mental wellbeing (LaBerge & Rheingold, 1991; LaBerge, 2009). Lucid dreaming is an extraordinary state of consciousness that serves as an intriguing pathway for personal growth, self-discovery, creativity, and problem-solving. However, 'how does it relate to dream yoga?'

Dream yoga comprises a set of cognitive and ritualistic practices originating in Tibetan Buddhism as well as other traditions such as Bön Buddhism (Rinpoche, 2016). It is considered one of the Six Yogas of Naropa, a set of advanced tantric practices in the Vajrayana tradition (Gillespie, 1988; Young, 1999; Sheehy, 2025). In this sense, Evans-Wentz (1958) states:

*The whole purpose of the Doctrine of Dreams is to stimulate the yogin to arise from the Sleep of Delusion, from the Nightmare of Existence, to break the shackles in which maya thus has held him prisoner throughout the eons, and so attain spiritual peace and joy of Freedom, even as did the Fully Awakened One, Gautama the Buddha (p. 167; LaBerge, 2003, p. 234).*

Dream yoga involves specific techniques to induce lucid dreaming and to use the dream state for spiritual growth, self-awareness, and mental wellbeing (Young, 1999; LaBerge, 2003). The fundamental premise of dream yoga is that the dream state presents a unique opportunity to recognize the illusory nature of reality. With such a practice, the practitioners will train their minds to be awake while dreaming and thus explore the unconscious and subconscious levels of the human mind, confront all fears in the subconscious mind, and understand the nature of their thoughts and emotions (Young, 1999; Holecek, 2016; Sheehy, 2025). It is not about dream control but about transforming the dream experience into a tool for enlightenment and mental wellbeing (Wallace, 2012; Thompson, 2015a). Dream yoga can be defined as:

*Then when you go to bed in the evening, cultivate the spirit of enlightenment, thinking, "For the sake of all sentient beings throughout space, I shall practice the illusion-like samadhi, and I shall achieve perfect Buddha-*

*hood. For that purpose, I shall train in dreaming (Padmasambhava, 1998, p. 151; LaBerge, 2003, p. 236).*

Dream yoga surpasses the realm of lucid dreaming, transitioning from psychological exploration to spiritual transcendence (Young, 1999; LaBerge, 2003). While lucid dreaming focuses on self-fulfilment, dream yoga, rooted in traditions like Tibetan Buddhism, prioritizes self-transformation and understanding the nature of mind and reality (Gillespie, 1988; Young, 1999). It disregards dream content in favor of examining how one relates to and transforms that content. Serving as an advanced form of nocturnal meditation, dream yoga is an opportunity to get into the depths of consciousness. Instead of treating lucid dreams as entertainment, they are seen as a laboratory for profound introspection (LaBerge & DeGracia, 2000; Erlacher et.al., 2020). Dream yoga, in essence, transcends while incorporating lucid dreaming, guiding individuals toward a more aware existence beyond the illusion of duality (Wallace, 2012; Morley, 2013; Holecek, 2016; Sheehy, 2025). This advanced practice demonstrates the potential for meditative exploration during one-third of our lives, turning sleep into a profound meditation practice (Young, 1999; Rinpoche, 2016).

Across various wisdom traditions, including Tibetan dream yoga and some native American practices, there are techniques aimed at cultivating lucid awareness within the dream state. Dream yoga, for instance, blends mindful presence with the boundless creativity of the mind, incorporating elements of creative, reflective, and receptive meditation (LaBerge, 2003; Norbu, 2002; Holecek, 2016; Sheehy, 2025). One of the most common methods is to set an intention to become aware and remain awake in dreams before falling asleep. Dreams have an important influence on the construction of our waking experiences and sense of self (Windt, 2015; Rosen, 2024). Often, in our daily lives, we fail to deeply examine our perceptions, biases, and assumptions that shape our reality. Dream yoga philosophy suggests that our waking life mirrors the conditions of our sleeping dreams, viewing ordinary life as a 'waking dream' (Norbu, 2002; Holecek, 2016). We embark on a transformative journey of awakening by learning to awaken within our dreams and perceive them clearly. As Thoreau eloquently stated, 'Our truest life is when we are in our dreams awake.' To support this claim:

*With this refinement, instead of thoughts distracting you from your meditation, they become your meditation. This is a subtle practice, so don't tie yourself into knots trying too hard. It has to be gentle and precise, and it takes practice. You're approaching the thinnest end of the oneironaut's mindfulness pole and cultivating a very refined awareness. But if it can be done, the very thought that would otherwise send you out into the world now leads you directly to your clear-light mind (Holecek, 2016, p. 108).*

Dream yoga is imparted within the trance states known as the Bardos of dream and sleep, typically passed down in the tantric tradition by qualified teachers after the student undergoes initiation (Padmasambhava, 1998; Das, 2000; Norbu, 2002). Unlike textual study, it involves the transmission of enlightened experiences and necessitates the development of self-awareness to achieve conscious lucidity during sleep. The primary objective is to harness the potential of the lucid dream state through the 'apprehension of the dream' (Thompson, 2015a). Practitioners are tasked

with completing various exercises to progress, such as practising sadhana, receiving initiations, exploring different realms, communicating with enlightened beings, interacting with other sentient beings, and engaging in activities like flying and shape-shifting (Wallace, 2012; Holecek, 2016; Rinpoche, 2016).

Tibetan dream yoga aims to apprehend and dissolve the dream state, leading to the observation of pure conscious awareness once the mind is devoid of physical and conceptual stimuli from the dream. Tibetan Buddhism stands apart from other Buddhist traditions by offering teachings on awakening within dreams and practising spirituality while asleep. This lies at the heart of Tibetan dream yoga and informs all associated practices. In the ancient Tibetan manual titled 'The Yoga of the Dream State' (Norbu, 2002; Wallace, 2012; Rinpoche, 2016), five profound wisdom lessons are outlined, which can be gleaned through dedicated practice:

1. Dreams can be influenced through will and attention.
2. Dreams are transient and illusory, akin to fantasies, magical illusions, and mirages.
3. Everyday perceptions in waking life are also ephemeral and illusory.
4. Life itself is fleeting, akin to a dream with nothing permanent to grasp onto.
5. Conscious engagement with dreams can lead to the realization of wholeness, balance, and unity (Das, 2000; Rinpoche, 2016).

For centuries, Tibetan masters have instructed their disciples to utilize the realm of dreams to advance spiritually by enhancing awareness during the dream state. Dream yoga advances these techniques to help practitioners grasp the five wisdom lessons and experience the benefits of awakening within dreams (Padmasambhava, 1998; LaBerge, 2003; Morley, 2013; Holecek, 2020).

### 3. Building the Connection

How does dream yoga relate to the notion of lucid dreaming? Thompson explains this state as:

*Before you fall into a deep sleep, there are so-called thoughts between falling asleep and dreaming. Before you actually fall asleep and you are still in the process of falling asleep, thoughts arise and sounds are faintly heard. You have a sense of the body's becoming very torpid and a sense of becoming pressed into darkness. You also have a sense of the experience of deep breathing as you begin to relax. Right after that, there is a sensation of numbness at the point midway between the eyes. At that time, you will begin to feel vague impressions of people, animals, environments, or whatever your recent mental impressions are. These vague mental impressions are the cause for the dream. The dream you will have actually arises as the result of those impressions. If you recognize this, it is your chance to recognize the dream, like threading a needle right through the eye, and you will immediately enter the dream and apprehend it (2015a, p. 151; also see Thompson, 2015b and Alcaraz-Sánchez, 2024).*

In modern lucid dreaming techniques, the initial step is recognizing the dream state, essentially learning to have lucid dreams (Thompson, 2015a, p. 169; also see LaBerge, 2003). Techniques developed by researchers like LaBerge (2003, 2009) are often more accessible to modern Western-



ers compared to traditional Tibetan methods involving complex visualizations and sleeping postures. Once we have confirmed we are dreaming, the key is to maintain lucidity without waking up. Recent research suggests that immersing ourselves in the dreamscape keeps the dream going. Engage deeply with the dream content—fly, whirl around, and avoid meditating or staying still, as these actions can diminish the dream experience (Thompson, 2015a).

*Under all conditions during the day hold to the concept that all things are of the substance of dreams and that thou must realize their true nature. Then, at night, when about to sleep, pray to the guru that thou mayest be enabled to comprehend the dream-state; and firmly resolve that thou wilt comprehend it. By meditating thus, one is certain to comprehend it (Evans-Wentz, 1958, p. 216; LaBerge, 2003, p. 237)*

Upon sustaining lucidity, the next step is to transform the dream state. Use imagination to manipulate the dream playfully, changing people into animals, day into night, or even going through walls (Thompson, 2015a, p. 169). This exploration reveals the malleable nature of the dream, which presents deep awareness into its mental construction. In the event of nightmares, view them as opportunities for transformation. Convert threatening elements into peaceful ones or accept the nightmare calmly, understanding that the dream cannot harm us (Schredl et. al., 2016). This perspective helps us in recognizing the illusory nature of the dream and seeing beyond its surface. Once lucidity stabilizes, and dream transformation becomes proficient, the focus shifts to seeing through the dream state. By dissolving the dreamscape entirely, an individual can glimpse the awareness underlying any dream content, akin to lucidly experiencing the state of deep and dreamless sleep (Thompson, 2015b; Alcaraz-Sánchez, 2024). This allows the radiant nature of consciousness to manifest more readily.

Dream yoga engages directly with the creative imagination by honing these capacities. Recognizing the dream state involves acknowledging it as a product of imagination and maintaining stable and vivid awareness of it (Norbu, 2002; Thompson, 2015a). ‘Transforming the dream state’ entails experimenting with altering dream appearances, including the dream ego, through sensory and cognitive imagination (Thompson, 2015a). Lastly, seeing through the dream state involves temporarily setting aside or relinquishing imagination and resting in a state of imageless awareness without disrupting sleep. Dream yoga distinguishes between ordinary non-lucid dreams and lucid ‘dreams of clarity’ (Das, 2000; Wallace, 2012; Alcaraz-Sánchez, 2024). The latter is particularly vivid, stemming from the mental clarity cultivated through meditation and reflecting the fundamental luminosity of awareness. Tibetan teacher Chögyal Namkhai Norbu explains, ‘Just as the sun may be obscured by clouds at times but still shines constantly, moments of individual clarity can spontaneously emerge, resulting in dreams of clarity’ (2002).

In essence, both lucid dreaming and dream yoga perspectives underscore the plasticity and trainability of dreaming in different ways. To support this:

*Lucid dreaming represents in this view what ought to be a normal ability in adults. If this is correct, why are lucid dreams so rare, especially in cases such as nightmares, where lucidity should be extremely helpful and rewarding? I think a partial answer can be seen by comparing lu-*

*cid dreaming with another learnable cognitive skill, namely, language. All normal adults speak and understand at least one language. But how many would do so if they were never taught? Unfortunately, in this culture, with few exceptions, we are not taught to dream (LaBerge, 2007, p. 323; Thompson, 2015a, p. 173).*

Empirical research in cognitive science and sleep studies provides clear evidence that lucid dreaming can be systematically trained (LaBerge, 1980, 2007; Stumbrys & Erlacher, 2017). Laboratory and longitudinal studies have shown that techniques such as reality testing, mnemonic induction of lucid dreams (MILD), and prospective memory training significantly increase lucid dream frequency over time (Kahan & LaBerge, 1994; LaBerge & DeGracia, 2000; LaBerge, 2009; Voss & Hobson, 2015). Neurophysiological studies further demonstrate that trained lucid dreamers exhibit distinct patterns of metacognitive awareness during REM sleep, suggesting learnable cognitive control rather than spontaneous anomaly (LaBerge, 2007; Rosen, 2024). This means that the mind can play a leading role in shaping how the brain and body experience sleep. Reality testing, as postulated by Western tradition, emphasizes differences between waking and dreaming states, whereas dream yoga focuses on their similarities. It prompts us to see waking events as dreamlike expressions of the mind. Our imaginative conceptions constitute our view of the world; experiences are not separable from a view of them, for instance, all these perceptions: thoughts, images, feelings, meanings as they appear (Thompson, 2015a). It then depends on the mind, even if the waking world is modified, affected, or reliant on its existence. Recognizing our role in shaping reality parallels becoming lucid in a dream. Dream yoga encourages us to cultivate this mindful awareness in waking life and carry it into our dreams (Young, 1999; LaBerge, 2003; Thompson, 2015a; Holecek, 2016).

Lucid dreaming and dream yoga share a fundamental connection in their emphasis on awareness and control within the dream state. Both practices involve training the mind to recognize the dream as a dream during the experience, thereby enabling the dreamer to become conscious within the dream environment (Wallace, 2012; Morley, 2013; Holecek, 2016). In most cases, awareness emerges spontaneously or through a number of induction techniques, such as lucid dreaming. Once an individual becomes lucid in a dream, they can explore and manipulate the dream environment, engage in creative activities, or even work through personal issues within the dream context (LaBerge & DeGracia, 2000; Konkoly & Burke, 2019).

*The power of recognition we develop in lucidity training changes our experience of all aspects of life and helps us cut through neurotic confusion to access our inherent potential for insight and wisdom. These qualities are the basis of a happy, free mind that can embark upon the journey to psychological and spiritual growth (Morley, 2013, p. 11).*

In dream yoga, the goal is to become aware of the dream and utilize that awareness for spiritual growth and awakening. Practitioners aim to recognize the dream as a projection of the mind, akin to the illusory nature of waking reality in Buddhist philosophy (Wallace, 2012; Thompson, 2015a; Holecek, 2016). Ultimately, I will focus on the question, how dream yoga and lucid dreaming may help us in achieving mental wellbeing?

#### 4. Mental Wellbeing through Dream Yoga and Lucid Dreaming

Lucid dreaming has garnered considerable attention within both psychological and neuroscientific fields due to its potential to enhance mental health significantly (Konkoly & Burke, 2019; Erlacher et.al., 2020). The practice of lucid dreaming, where individuals become aware that they are dreaming and can potentially exert control over the dream narrative, has been linked to various psychological benefits. Among these are improved emotional regulation, the reduction of nightmares, and a boost in creativity (LaBerge, 2007; LaBerge, 2009; Rinpoche, 2016). This unique state of consciousness allows individuals to confront and process emotional issues in a safe, controlled environment. Lucid dreamers often experience increased emotional resilience and overall psychological well-being by facing fears, resolving conflicts, or rehearsing positive outcomes in their dreams (Waggoner, 2009; Stumbrys & Erlacher, 2017; Holecek, 2020).

Dream yoga builds upon the psychological benefits of lucid dreaming by integrating it into a broader spiritual framework (LaBerge, 2003). Unlike the more clinical approach of Western psychology, which often focuses on lucid dreaming as a tool for achieving specific therapeutic outcomes—such as reducing anxiety, alleviating depression, or mitigating the effects of ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (PTSD)—dream yoga emphasizes the cultivation of mindfulness and awareness throughout all states of consciousness, including dreams (Schredl et.al., 2016; Erlacher et.al., 2020). This integration aligns closely with contemporary mindfulness-based therapies, which have been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression by fostering a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Integrating mindfulness into dream yoga extends the benefits of lucid dreaming beyond mere therapeutic interventions. In this context, lucid dreaming becomes a practice for mental healing and spiritual growth (Young, 1999; LaBerge, 2003; Waggoner, 2009; Konkoly & Burke, 2019). Maintaining awareness in the dream state allows practitioners of dream yoga to explore the deeper layers of consciousness, confront subconscious fears, and gain insights into the nature of the self and reality. This mindful approach to lucid dreaming resonates with the principles of mindfulness-based therapies, which encourage a holistic view of mental health, integrating body, mind, and spirit (Stumbrys & Erlacher, 2017; Konkoly & Burke, 2019). As such, dream yoga provides a unique and profound pathway for those seeking to enhance their mental wellbeing and spiritual understanding through lucid dreaming (Wallace, 2012; Holecek, 2016, 2020).

Dream yoga is a systematic way of cultivating awareness of dreams. The technique is divided into ‘daytime’ and ‘nighttime’ techniques and plays different roles in preparing the practitioner for the lucid dream state. Practitioners use ‘daytime’ techniques such as reality testing and mindfulness exercises to heighten their overall awareness (Das, 2000; Norbu, 2002; LaBerge, 2003; Holecek, 2020).

*During the daytime, one must sustain mindfulness without distraction. This mindfulness is to constantly remind oneself that all daytime appearances are nothing other than a dream. Throughout the different experiences during the daytime reality, you just keep on mindfully sustaining the awareness, “This is a dream, this is a dream,*

*I’m asleep and I’m dreaming,” and this will create a habit (LaBerge, 2003, p. 237).*

Similarly,

*The daytime practice of lucid dreaming is therefore a practice of recognition (as is the practice of lucid dreaming proper—recognizing the dream to be a dream). We shift our identity with the practice of illusory form (as we do with the practice of dream yoga), transitioning from an exclusive identification with form (the psyche) to an identity that transcends (form) but includes (the formless clear-light mind). The destination is false because we only have to open and relax into who we truly are, the clear-light mind, and we’re there. Or more accurately, we’re nowhere. We only have to recognize our more complete identity to arrive at what we truly seek (Holecek, 2020, pp. 97-98; for more examples on daytime practices, see Padmasambhava, 1998 and Wallace, 2012).*

Reality checking is regularly questioning the nature of an individual’s reality throughout the day. As a result of habitually asking whether an individual is dreaming, practitioners condition their minds to pose the same question within the dream state. The greater propensity to realize the nature of the dream makes such dreaming lucid, resulting from habitual questioning (Norbu, 2002). Mindful awareness that results in consistency in practice will tend to flow into the dreams seamlessly, thus leaving the practitioner in possession of consciousness during the dreaming stage. The greater propensity to realize the nature of the dream makes such dreaming lucid, resulting from habitual questioning (Norbu, 2002; Wallace, 2012). Also of equal importance to reality, checking is a mindfulness practice that ensures consciousness and presence in day-to-day life. Mindful awareness that results in consistency in practice will tend to flow into the dreams seamlessly, thus leaving the practitioner in possession of consciousness during the dreaming stage.

‘Nighttime’ practices, by contrast, prepare the body and mind of the individual for lucid dreams through particular rituals and a few meditative techniques (Young, 1999; Das, 2000; Wallace, 2012, pp. 95-100). During nighttime, proper intentions need to be made well before falling asleep, for the sleeper has to become keenly aware during sleep through mental focus. Visualization methods also guide the person in creating vivid images about themselves when they understand that they dream (Padmasambhava, 1998). This mental rehearsal conditions the mind to respond similarly when the actual dream occurs (Wallace, 2012; Morley, 2013). Another technique is ‘mantra recitation,’ which may be used to anchor the mind in awareness. It is the repetition of a specific word or sound, often one associated with awareness or lucidity, helping to keep a thread of consciousness that can carry over into the dream state. These practices essentially focus on creating an unbroken chain of awareness that remains through to the dream state. Through this awareness, a practitioner would then be able to recognize that the dream is simply a projection of the mind. This does not merely entail mastering the content of the dream narrative but an understanding of how both dream and waking are illusory. Through constant practice of these techniques, the practitioners of dream yoga can develop their self-awareness and spiritual understanding of the dream state as a basis for mental wellbeing and spiritual growth (Young, 1999; Wallace, 2012; Rinpoche, 2016; Holecek, 2020).

## 5. Dream Yoga in the Context of Mindfulness and Meditation

Dream yoga represents a sophisticated extension of mindfulness and meditation practices (Young, 1999; LaBerge, 2003; Holecek, 2020). At the heart of the success of dream yoga is the mindfulness created during waking hours, which is essential for achieving and maintaining lucidity within dreams. Mindfulness is a practice in which an individual maintains a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment, thereby creating metacognitive awareness that can lead to lucid dreaming (Stumbrys & Erlacher, 2017; Konkoly & Burke, 2019; Erlacher et al., 2020). This connection between mindfulness and lucid dreaming has been substantiated by contemporary research, indicating that individuals who regularly engage in mindfulness meditation are more likely to experience lucid dreams with greater frequency (Stumbrys & Erlacher, 2017; Baird et al., 2019; Gerhardt & Baird, 2024). The synergy between dream yoga and mindfulness-based therapies, such as 'Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction' (MBSR) and 'Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy' (MBCT), is particularly noteworthy. These therapies have gained recognition for their effectiveness in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress by cultivating a heightened state of awareness and emotional regulation. Dream yoga complements these approaches by extending the benefits of mindfulness into the dream state, thereby presenting a continuous practice of awareness that bridges both waking and dreaming life (Young, 1999; LaBerge, 2003; Konkoly & Burke, 2019).

Furthermore, the practice of dream yoga unites with emerging research fields such as contemplative neuroscience, which studies the effect of meditation on brain function and mental health. Studies done in this regard have shown that habitual meditation causes structural and functional changes in certain parts of the brain, especially emotional regulation, attentional control, and self-awareness. For instance, studies have shown increased 'gray matter density' in areas of the brain linked to emotional regulation in long-term meditators (Tang et al., 2015). In this sense, integrating mindfulness into the dream state, dream yoga not only reinforces these neurological benefits but also provides an additional dimension for cultivating self-awareness and emotional resilience, enhancing overall mental wellbeing (LaBerge, 2003; Wallace, 2012; Holecek, 2016, 2020). This synthesis of ancient spiritual practice and modern scientific understanding emphasises the potential of dream yoga as a holistic approach to mental health, advancing unique benefits that extend beyond traditional mindfulness and meditation practices.

Despite the conceptual promise of integrating lucid dreaming and dream yoga, several important limitations must be acknowledged. First, a significant portion of the philosophical argument in this paper relies on phenomenological reports and contemplative texts. While these sources provide rich first-person insights into dream experience, they raise concerns regarding intersubjective verifiability and methodological rigor when evaluated by empirical standards (Windt, 2015; Rosen, 2024). Although research on lucid dreaming is relatively well established within cognitive science, systematic clinical and neuroscientific studies specifically addressing dream yoga remain scarce, which limits the strength of claims about its therapeutic efficacy for mental wellbeing (LaBerge, 2003; Sheehy, 2025). Second,

dream yoga is deeply embedded within a particular cultural, ethical, and soteriological framework rooted in Tibetan Buddhism. As such, its concepts and aims may not translate seamlessly into secular or clinical contexts without risking conceptual dilution or misinterpretation (Norbu, 2002; Wallace, 2012). Adaptations across cultural or psychological frameworks may alter the practice in ways that weaken its intended transformative depth (Das, 2000; Holecek, 2016, 2020). Finally, the practice itself presents practical and ethical challenges. Achieving and maintaining lucidity requires sustained discipline, attentional stability, and consistent practice, which may be difficult for individuals with demanding lifestyles or existing mental health vulnerabilities. Moreover, an excessive focus on dream control risks fostering escapism rather than genuine mental or spiritual growth, underscoring the importance of intention and ethical orientation in practice (Rinpoche, 2016; Holecek, 2016). These limitations highlight the need for cautious application and further interdisciplinary research.

## 6. Conclusion

*"Let us learn to dream, and then we may perhaps find the truth."*  
-Friedrich Kekulé

In this paper, I have discussed lucid dreaming and Tibetan Buddhist dream yoga to clarify their conceptual relationship and assess their relevance for mental wellbeing. I have argued that lucid dreaming and dream yoga should not be understood as isolated or competing practices, but as points along a continuum of cultivated awareness within sleep. Lucid dreaming demonstrates that reflective consciousness can arise during dreaming, thereby challenging the assumption that metacognitive awareness is exclusive to waking life (LaBerge et al., 1981; Voss et al., 2009; Rosen, 2024). Dream yoga builds upon this insight by situating lucidity within a broader contemplative and philosophical framework that treats both dreaming and waking experience as mind-dependent and illusory (Norbu, 2002; Wallace, 2012; Sheehy, 2025). Dream yoga reframes lucidity as an opportunity for deeper self-understanding by shifting attention away from dream manipulation toward the examination of one's relationship to experience itself (Das, 2000; Holecek, 2016). In doing so, it presents a philosophical challenge to waking-centric models of mind that dominate both common sense and much of contemporary cognitive science (Thompson, 2015a).

At the same time, this paper has acknowledged important limitations and challenges. Dream yoga demands sustained discipline, ethical grounding, and proper contextual understanding, and it may not be suitable for all individuals or clinical contexts. Moreover, the cultural and soteriological aims of Tibetan Buddhist practice cannot be straightforwardly reduced to therapeutic outcomes without risk of distortion (Norbu, 2002; Wallace, 2012; Holecek, 2020). My intention has not been to present definitive conclusions or clinical prescriptions, but rather to explore, in an academically responsible manner, the philosophical possibilities opened by bringing lucid dreaming and dream yoga into dialogue. To conclude, this paper represents an honest attempt to articulate the philosophical and practical significance of cultivating awareness within the dream state. Lucid dreaming and dream yoga together invite a rethinking of consciousness,



selfhood, and mental wellbeing that transcends the boundaries of waking life.

## Declarations

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