

Lucid Living

“If you want to make your dreams come true, the first thing you have to do is wake up.”

– J.M. Power, award winning American writer/producer

My legs were failing, my breath coming in ragged gasps. The squealers were nearly upon me. It was the name I had given them, this pack of feral hogs. They had killed me before, dozens of times, and were about to kill me again. I braced for the unspeakable, inevitable conclusion.

I shot up in bed drenched in sweat, my mind whirling. It was the dream, the damned “pig” dream again! This recurring nightmare always ended the same with me being overwhelmed, torn apart. As a child, I was beset nightly by violent, horrific dreams. My slumber was filled with terrifying encounters, but the pig dream was the most fearful and unrelenting.

Today, I might well have been diagnosed with night terrors: frightening dreams (typically in young children) in which the person awakens in a state of terror. Often, the dream recedes rapidly leaving the person with little or no recollection of the details. Remembering was not the issue – it was forgetting that seemed impossible. I dreaded going to bed. I forced myself to stay awake and invariably awoke exhausted in the morning. The resulting fatigue began to impact my mental and physical wellbeing – my school work and home life began to suffer.

To survive my night terrors, I developed the ability to lucid dream, also known as cognitive dreaming. Don’t ask me how I did it, it just happened one night. In a lucid dream the dreamer is aware that he or she is asleep. The term was coined by Dutch psychiatrist and writer Frederik Willem van Eeden. Noted van Eeden, “A lucid dream can begin in one of two ways. A dream-initiated lucid dream (DILD) starts as a normal dream, and the dreamer eventually concludes it is a dream, while a wake-initiated lucid dream (WILD) occurs when the dreamer goes from a normal waking state directly into a dream state, with no apparent lapse in consciousness.”

Knowing that I was dreaming allowed me to change the course of the dream and in doing so dramatically alter the outcome. Lucid dreaming eventually put an end to my night terrors.

“Lucid living” is a term used to describe waking up from the dream of our current life experience. Many of us are moving through life with our eyes closed – sound asleep – invested deeply into our beliefs, prejudices and perceptions. We are seldom in the moment and reacting rather

than responding to people and situations. Some of us believe we are the hapless victims of a world beyond our control and helpless to alter the outcome. Living lucidly means waking up to the reality of what is and accepting responsibility for our life. It means shaking off fantasies that filter our experience, seeing through illusions and purposefully changing course to alter the outcome.

Ask yourself these questions. Are you doing things out of a sense of obligation rather than passion or purpose? Are you performing tasks that keep you busy but do nothing to help you to grow or evolve as a human being? Do you perceive the years fluttering by in endless procession? Are you living paycheque to paycheque, drowning in debt with no idea where your money is going? Do you find yourself focusing on the urgent rather than the important? Do you suffer from depression and often feel helpless? Answering yes to all or most of these questions could suggest that you've been dozing – sleeping through life.

Living lucidly does not happen overnight. It takes a commitment to awareness, a desire to live in the moment and a willful effort to grow your self-awareness. Waking up is not something you do once then roll over and pull up the blankets. It's a habit evolved over a lifetime – sustained by practice and effort. On the surface, it seems deceptively simple: be awake, be aware and practise living purposefully every day. Make conscious choices rather than living your life on autopilot. It sounds simple, but it's amazing how few people will actually do it.

Want to wake up? Here are some tips that have worked for me. Regularly reflect on your life. I keep a journal and find it a powerful way to capture thoughts and track my progress.

At least once a year review your life goals. What do you want to accomplish? What is important to you? Where do you want to be in five days, five months or five years? How will you get there? Write down your goals and post them somewhere you can see and study them daily.

Those we love are among the most important people in our lives. Work on building and maintaining relationships with friends, family and spouses. Spend time with them. Show appreciation for them. Give them yourself at your best. Forgive others and make amends. Apologize. Forgive yourself and free yourself from the burden of guilt and failure. Strive to stay in the moment – your only place of power and influence. Build your self-esteem and strive to connect

with your authentic self. Be human. Experience life. Express your emotions. Truth is in behaviour. Let your actions flow freely and purposefully from an honest and loving intention.

Indian philosopher Osho writes, "If you exist accidentally, like driftwood, you live without a soul. [Your life] is pseudo, it is lukewarm, it has no intensity, it has no flame, it has no light [and] you cannot experience the truth. Living accidentally [while] knowing the truth, is impossible."

When we're asleep, it can feel as though we're drifting through life, never certain of where we're going and only glimpsing reality. Wake up. Be present. Stretch and open your eyes.