

DreamSpeak

An Interview With Joy Fatooh

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Questions by Robert Waggoner

When she is not bending the laws of physics in her lucid dreams, Joy Fatooh engages the waking world with an equally keen eye as an illustrator and wildlife biologist. Please welcome, Joy.

How did you become interested in lucid dreaming?

I'd always enjoyed occasional spontaneous lucid dreams but never did anything to cultivate them. About seven years ago I met someone who thought I ought to take them more seriously and insisted I read Carlos Castaneda's book *The Art of Dreaming*. I started reading it just before going to sleep, chuckled at poor Carlos' strenuous efforts to achieve lucidity and thought, "I bet I could do it tonight." And I did.

What do you recall of your first intentional lucid dream? Anything odd, unusual, or unexpected?

Yes! First I have to tell you that I had a houseguest that night, an old friend who'd stopped by while he was in the area, and over dinner he'd told me a very funny story about a co-worker who believed in angels and went on to launch into a long rant: "I don't believe in any of that crap! Don't talk to me about angels, don't talk to me about crystals, don't talk to me about ESP, don't talk to me about UFOs, don't tell me you used to be a pharaoh in ancient Egypt..." Well, I just listened and smiled, because I'd had several experiences with telepathy and precognition and mutual dreaming – but they'd all been years ago. It seemed that when I got educated as a biologist, the intuitive part of my mind got swamped by the analytical side.

The dream itself was pretty simple. I don't remember now the moment of becoming lucid, but it was quite clear and I was delighted to have achieved it by my own intent. I was in my bedroom, and I went out into the hall and saw my calico cat sitting in the doorway to the living room. I paused and marveled at how incredibly vivid she appeared, every long hair visible in detail, her golden eyes scintillating. "It seems even more real than ordinary reality," I thought. I walked on into the living room, fascinated by the feeling of moving about within a dream, and found to my surprise that the room was full of people milling around, all dressed up as if it were some kind of fancy party – maybe a wedding reception. In reality I'd never hosted any such event; I live way out in the desert where people are scarce and dressing up means putting on a pair of jeans without too many holes. I wanted to enjoy the feeling of lucidity undistracted, so I went out the door into the front yard and spent a few moments enjoying the vividness of the natural world, and then I woke.

I was about to leave for work when my friend came out to meet me in the front yard, looking a little dazed. "I had the strangest dream," he said. "It was so vivid. I dreamt that your house was full of people."

"I dreamed that too," I said. "They were all dressed up."

"Yeah, they were all wearing their best clothes! Like for a party or something," he said. "Like maybe a wedding," I said.

Yeah, yeah, it could have been a wedding.” His face clouded over and he shook his head as if to clear it. “Huh! Strange.”

“I used to have the same dream at the same time as other people sometimes,” I told him, “but it’s been a long time. Cool! Well, I’d better go. It was great seeing you! Keep in touch, okay?”

And I haven’t seen him since!

What did you make of that? What about lucid dreams caught your interest and attention? What made you want to have another lucid dream and pursue it further?

It was a delight to have my first intentional lucid dream be a mutual dream as well, to discover I still had that capacity, and it opened the floodgates for other psi experiences. Castaneda’s fear-filled world didn’t appeal to me but I went on to read about Tibetan dream yoga, and that captivated me.

Which came first: your interest in lucid dreaming, or the interest in Tibetan Buddhism?

It was in reading about dream yoga that I first learned about Tibetan Buddhism as a science of consciousness. They have a centuries-old tradition of empirical study of the mind’s potential, with each generation of teachers passing on what they’ve learned in order to convey what’s possible and what’s worth pursuing, but always insisting that the student only believe his or her own experiences.

What are some of the ideas from dream yoga that you find appealing or which you have had an opportunity to use in your own lucid dreaming?

At my paltry level of progress, the main one is simply the wonderful malleability of the dream world. They say you can do anything in a dream, and my experience bears this out. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche’s book *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep* has a list of suggestions including making yourself or anything else bigger or smaller, creating things out of nothing, multiplying objects or making them vanish, traveling across distances, transforming the nature of experience from frightening to loving.... They advocate playing with these ideas until it’s perfectly clear that sensory experience in dreams is illusory, and then carrying that knowledge into waking life as well. For me, it inspires calm and confidence. Playing with the fluidity of every situation in dreams seems to be good practice for feeling unstuck in waking life.

But even within a dream, I can’t always just think a thought and make it be so. I sometimes have to trick myself past the apparent solidity of the illusion. For instance, once I saw a purple flower in a vase and decided to multiply it. It was stubborn, but I started jumping up and down on the couch like a little kid and seeing another flower appear each time I jumped!

Another dream yoga idea I like to pass on to new lucid dreamers is that of taking a moment on waking to reflect joyfully on whatever your dreaming experience has been – be it full or rudimentary lucidity, just remembering a dream, or simply getting a good night’s sleep! Congratulate yourself, and promise yourself encouragingly that tonight you’ll continue toward your goal.

When you become lucid, is it the result of a particular induction or incubation technique? Or have you simply trained yourself to notice the unusual when dreaming? What techniques have helped you achieve lucid awareness?

Just noticing strangeness. Last night it was raw hamburger in bed. But strong motivation seems to be my key for frequency. After that first intentional lucid dream I started contributing to a Lucidity Institute research project; they said “The more lucid dreams the better,” so I had one a night on average. External motivations

are especially strong for me: generating data for research, trying an experiment someone's proposed, participating in IASD telepathy games, dreaming for someone's healing, or just inspiring other dreamers. If I were more dedicated to dream yoga I'd be constantly seeking lucidity for my own progress and "for the benefit of all sentient beings," as they say, but so far I do best with an assignment. Without one, I tend to get lucid only about once a week.

I think in part it's just because, when I'm dreaming for someone else, I'll take more time to wake and write down dreams. If I'm wide awake in the night for any reason, interleaving waking and sleeping states, I'm more likely to notice when I'm dreaming.

Here's a fun example of a motivating assignment: a profoundly insightful dreamworker expressed regret in an IASD Psiberdreaming Conference discussion that she never had any sense of being in a dream body; she saw scenes as if from above, with colors muted and other senses absent. She asked if anyone would "dream with her" to try to change that. I volunteered, improvised, and spent my next lucid dream rapidly, impulsively reveling in whatever sensory experience presented itself to me, one after another – bright colors, vivid flavors, sensual textures – while intending that she experience these too. She did eventually begin to have dream-body senses and there's no telling if I helped that along, but most delightful to me is that the things I was sampling, which seemed like an odd and random set to me, turned out to be some of her favorites!

I recall at the Sonoma IASD conference, you mentioned some dreams that involved a personal health issue. Would you mind sharing that story?

Happily, and with an update. It's a very common health issue – they say half the women my age have uterine fibroids, nonmalignant tumors that only cause trouble if they grow too big. I first discovered I had them when the source of some pelvic pain was tentatively diagnosed as an infection and, going to sleep that night mistrusting the diagnosis, I dreamed I had a giant pear and a giant grapefruit growing on the same tree. Two women with knives came and cut them and whisked them into their car. I didn't care about the grapefruit but I wanted to keep my pear! – so I demanded it back, and got it, with just a couple bites taken out.

The symbolism was obvious as soon as I woke. Everyone calls the uterus a "pear-shaped organ" and everyone talks about tumors "the size of a grapefruit" or whatever citrus fruit is appropriate, unless they use the sports equipment analogy and say "the size of a softball" instead. So I went right back to the clinic and asked for an ultrasound.

At that point they were only limes (or golf balls) and online research told me most fibroids never get large, so although the first gynecologist I saw – woman with knife – recommended a hysterectomy, I chose to keep my pear.

I wrote to several friends about all this and one wrote back, "The night before getting your email I dreamed you and I were playing catch with a grapefruit. Just as I was wondering 'Why a grapefruit and not some piece of sports equipment?' you said, 'Don't worry, it's not a very good analogy anyway!'" As it turned out, within a year she moved to my town and then developed a life-threatening kind of tumor. I was her main support person through all that, so we really were in this grapefruit game together.

Meanwhile I developed multiple fibroids, some of which did achieve grapefruit dimensions and added up to a truly giant pear. A couple months ago my current gynecologist – second woman-with-knife – finally said it had to go. Or I could try uterine artery embolization, which sounded awful. But I'd read of a new noninvasive treatment offered at a few places, including the Mayo Clinic, called MR-guided focused ultrasound ablation. What to do?

I dreamed I walked into a rural clinic where two smiling medical women offered to examine me. I said, “Sure, I could use a second opinion,” but as soon as I was on the table one of them wrote a prescription – in all-caps, bold italics, twice:

**GO TO THE MAYO
GO TO THE MAYO**

Then, having handed this to me, she gave the table a shove and next thing I knew it had become a raft drifting on water. Three or four men and boys onboard were playing a silly game of causing fish they’d just caught to squirt water at each other, but I lay placidly with my own bigger fish lying contentedly in a shallow pool of water beside me.

On waking, the water bit was a mystery to me, although my bigger fish seemed like my uterus in contrast with the Freudian aspects of the guys’ fish. Then I learned that you get the treatment while lying mildly sedated on a table with your belly in a depression containing a shallow pool of water to help focus the ultrasound beams.

So last week I went to the Mayo. The doctor and nurse looked like the women in the dream and it went very well. The only negative was a preliminary exam with one male doctor who made a lot of jokes and then attempted an unnecessary biopsy and didn’t even tell me he failed to get a sample – maybe that accounts for the goofy fish guys.

How do you feel your lucid dream activities affected the health issue? Do lucid dreamers alter the physical body, or do they alter their ‘mind’ or ‘awareness’ which in turn alters their physical body?

Those were prodromal, precognitive, but non-lucid dreams. I also tried some direct lucid healing, inspired by Ed Kellogg’s workshop at the IASD conference. I transformed a sick, scary little creature into a healthy glowing being which I applied to the region of my uterus. Whether that helped, I don’t know – beyond the confidence-building experience of transforming the negative to the positive. In another lucid dream a woman showed me a flower and said I should make tea from it for fibroids. I eventually recognized it as red clover and found out it is recommended for fibroids. So; I drink it; can’t hurt.

I like the idea that the body is actually generated by the mind, in a continuous process; and if that’s so, then it’s very responsive to changes of mind. And I think lucid dreaming can change the mind profoundly, via physical-seeming and emotional experiences that would be hard to find in waking life. The potential for lucid self-healing seems huge.

In my case, the initial non-lucid dream gave me an accurate diagnosis and prognosis and a general course of action – lose the grapefruit, keep the pear. The most recent dream gave me a specific prescription when I needed one, and seems to have been excellent advice. And it foretold enough of the treatment so that when they shoved the table into the MRI machine, my fish-belly in its shallow pool, it was so like the dream that I laughed to myself and went into it very relaxed and happy and confident, which helped me through the painful parts.

In your dream series, the ‘fruit’ symbolism made it all very memorable. Sometimes, though, I wonder if lucid dreamers don’t bother much to look at their lucid dreams in symbolic terms. How do you feel about that?

It’s interesting to analyze dreams for symbols but I often catch only the most glaringly obvious, or ponder the weirdest ones. Dreams seem to be no more and no less symbolic than waking life. I tend to think both are

potentially symbolic as well as illusory. The dream yoga teachers say not to waste your time searching for meaning in illusions.

I like dream symbolism, though. I like the double meanings. The dreaming mind is so clever – but not always terribly profound. A few nights ago I dreamed a science teacher told his class, “I’m thinking of a metallic element that starts with B. And while you’re trying to think of it, here’s another question: What do you do with an old dog that you really love?” Eventually a student came up with the element – barium – and it wasn’t until I woke that I realized that’s what you eventually do with your old dog too. Now “why” did I dream that? Just so my dreaming mind could make a real groaner of a pun?

As you have looked deeper into lucid dreaming, what information or experiences do you find yourself most curious about?

I’m fascinated by the intersection of lucidity and psi. I would like to know if telepathic and precognitive experiences are more common in a lucid state than non-lucid, or if psi information intentionally sought within a lucid dream is more reliable than, for instance, intending it before going to sleep. It’s not clear from my own experiences. I’d love to be in on designing or implementing some experiments.

Have you had any lucid dreams that made you wonder about that point?

Lots. I’ve had several lucid dreams that happened to be psi, and a few in which I lucidly sought psi information, like the IASD telepathy games – least useful but most interesting are the elements of non-target pictures and other people’s dreams that come in along with the target information!

It seems as if the ability to lucidly seek specific information within a dream ought to be a good way to take advantage of the psi tendencies of the dream state. I’ve heard of some promising controlled experiments with lucid remote viewing. But some of the most impressive psi dreaming I know of is Dale Graff’s experiment in which he simply intended before going to sleep that his last dream image before waking each morning match the front page photo of that day’s newspaper.

We once had a little group called the Psi Angels, coordinated by Harry Bosma; we’d go on dream missions for people in exchange for a little donation to IASD. Our first mission was to find Jean Campbell’s lost ring. I had a really striking lucid dream in which I asked for and got some very specific information which to my disappointment didn’t help find Jean’s ring, but three years later I discovered it perfectly matched a part about a magic soul-stone ring in a novel about lucid dreaming that Ken Shapley was beginning to write at the time, *When We All Dream Together*. I knew nothing of Ken or his book until he joined Jean’s online World Dreams Peace Bridge group. It seems we all do dream together, and it complicates the psi! But I love it. The glory of psi dreaming is the direct experience of our ultimate connectedness.

As someone with artistic abilities, what intrigues you most about lucid dreaming in an artistic sense? (Any lucid examples?)

The level of realistic detail in dream images astonishes me. I don’t summon that level via mental imagery when I’m awake; I know this because I need to be looking at a specimen or photograph to produce a good scientific illustration. But somehow my dreaming mind

is fully able to come up with a realistic image in all its perfection. When I’m lucid I can examine all aspects of an image critically and I’m often very impressed.

I often experiment with the other senses as well. Once when I'd been wondering if dream smells were just as realistic and vivid as sights, sounds, textures and flavors, I found myself flying over an open dumpster bin. I swooped down to have a whiff. Phew! Ripe!

And what about kinesthetic and proprioceptive senses? How do we know what it feels like to fly?

Do you ever wonder that if our senses can be so heightened in a lucid dream, is it inherently possible to achieve that same sensory experience upon waking? Sometimes I think we have 'dumbed-down' our sensory abilities in physical reality, and lucid dreaming shows the discrepancy between the possible and the normally experienced.

I really enjoy going about waking life pretending it's a lucid dream and revelling in the amazing vividness of all the sights and sounds and textures and flavors and smells! When I attend to physical reality with the same appreciation as I apply to a lucid dream, I find that it is just as real as a dream!

I recall reading recently that the Sanskrit word, maya, which we normally translate as 'illusion,' has a deeper meaning perhaps. The root meaning of 'ma' suggests the ability 'to form' or 'to create.' So maya, or illusion, also intimates that the perceiver assists in the creation or forming of the perception.

My limited studies suggest that here we have the intersection of all the world's great mystical traditions with modern physics.

As you make shadows in your scientific illustrations and bend shadows in the lucid dreaming realm, do you ever feel that lucid dreamers are discovering the hidden illusion of both waking and dreaming?

This is what those Tibetan dream yogis have been saying for a few hundred years. I think they're onto something.

Any thoughts on how lucid dreamers can get beyond the illusion of the lucid dream? Or is being aware of the illusion the endpoint?

Am I supposed to be wise enough to answer that? The yogis say that beyond the illusion is the clear light experience: nothing but pure awareness. I'm not there yet.

Any final comments, challenges, lucid dreams to ponder?

When people wonder if it's okay to do anything we want when we know it's just a dream, I find myself among those who think we're all connected; the connectivity seems

especially accessible in the dream state; and so it behooves us to behave. I try to be the kind of person I want to be in dreams – and I find out what kind of person I am. Last night I gave my blanket to a shivering man, and then I was really disappointed that he didn't compliment my aerobatics as I flew away!

Thanks so much for your time and interest.

You're welcome. It's so flattering to my ego to be interviewed, it's probably very bad for me.