



Conscious Life presents

Lucid Dreaming for Healing PTSD

Guest: Charlie Morley

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[00:00:10] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone to this interview, where I'm super excited to be talking with my friend Charlie Morley, and we're going to be talking about his work using lucid dreaming for healing PTSD.

What is particularly impressive about Charlie, beyond the work he's doing, is the evidence base, and the published research that he's been doing to really show not just that lucid dreaming can help, but it can help in cases of more severe PTSD, for example, with veterans.

To give a little bit of Charlie's background. Charlie Morley is a Hay House author, Mindvalley coach, and teacher of both lucid dreaming and mindfulness of dream and sleep. He received the traditional authorization to teach within the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism in 2008, and since has run workshops and retreats in over 20 countries.

In 2018, he was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship Grant to research PTSD treatments in military veterans, and continues to teach people with trauma-affected sleep a set of practices called Mindfulness of Dream and Sleep. His 2021 book, *Wake Up to Sleep*, is a practical guide to these practices. Charlie welcome. Thank you so much for joining me again.

Charlie Morley

Thank you for having me.

Alex Howard

Charlie, you've done some really impressive work using lucid dreaming, and working with people that have experienced some of the most intense and significant traumas we can experience. You've been working with veterans for a number of years. Maybe you want to just start by saying a little bit about how you got into that work, and then some of the ways that you've been working with that community.

[00:02:04] Charlie Morley

I got into the veterans work through a guy called Keith Mackenzie, who my latest book is dedicated to. Keith Mackenzie, he's now died, he was a veteran of the Parachute Regiment, and then he was a firefighter for 20 years. He came to one of my Lucid Dreaming retreats that I was running on Holy Isle, about eight or nine years ago now. It wasn't a retreat for veterans, it was a retreat for everybody, he was the only veteran there.

He had this big breakthrough when we were doing the Lucid Dreaming practices. He emailed me afterwards to say, I healed more of my PTSD in that four-day retreat than I did in four years of therapy. It was such a mic drop, I was like, oh, that's so great to hear, and do you mind if I put that on my website? He was on my website for a long time. I didn't really know him after that. A few years went by, and then he came back on the scene, and he said, I trained to be a mindfulness teacher and a Buddhist chaplain within the armed forces.

I was like, that's interesting, and he went, I'd love to be able to share some of the work that you did with me with veterans on this retreat I'm running at Samaling, which is the Buddhist center that I go to, so there was that connection. I said to him, look man, I have no idea whether the stuff that worked for you is going to work with other people, but let's give it a shot. You're the only veteran I know, so if you can bring me into this and it works, let's try it. If not, it's an experiment that didn't go well, that failed.

I was going to with that mindset because when Keith started to brief me about the veteran scene, I was like, dude, this is like heavy stuff. Not only have people been through heavy experiences, but the scene's really closed. He kept saying, "it's a very isolated scene." They had this thing about Civvy Street, and I'm someone from Civvy Street, civilian street, and I can never know their experience, I still stand by that. I can never know the experience of the veterans I've been working with, now for more than seven years, but I can know the experience of trauma.

I don't think we're in the same boat, we're never in the same boat, we're in different boats based on our race, and class, and gender, and all these terrible prejudices that lead to variables in the boat which we are in, in life, but we can be in the same storm. Anyone who's experienced trauma, and PTSD knows what that storm is like. I knew that storm, and they knew that storm, and there was a way in there.

We went and did this retreat, and it was amazing. I remember the first thing that struck me was the level of banter with these veterans. They just started taking the piss out of me, and I thought I might know some of them. They were so bold, I was like, maybe I've met them before because they all knew my name. But of course, he had told them I was coming, so they were, "hey, Charlie, what the fuck are you doing?" And I was like, Whoa, this is really intense. And then you realize you need to up the level. So I'm like, "yeah, I'm here, what the fuck are you doing here?" They're like, "you're here".

Just constant swearing, constant banter, very high-level energy, which I now realize is people trying to integrate this perhaps constantly switched on fight or flight system that's going, and it's manifesting in this constant talking, and constant banter.

[00:04:34] Charlie Morley

We did this retreat, and it was brilliant, I loved it so much. Of the 20 in the group, maybe 5 of them did have a breakthrough with Lucid Dreaming, similar to Keith. So that was brilliant, but only 5 of them. I realized the rest of them, the 15 other people, they had breakthroughs with the other methods that were being taught on that retreat, which were Breathwork, Deep Relaxation, Yoga Nidra, and Qigong.

I remember at the time thinking, if I could train in those modalities, then I could bring all of that to an offering, I might have something really complete. I then spent the next five years doing those trainings in Breath Body Mind, which is a former medicalized Qigong and Breathwork, and did the Yoga Nidra training at iRest, and Deep Relaxation and PTSD Masterclasses, and then got something complete together, which formed the basis of the latest book *Wake Up to Sleep*.

Keith was the entry in there. Then we did the retreat again, and we did online courses, and then I did the Buddhist chaplaincy training, the same one that Keith did, so I was able to bring that into the mix. Then through Keith's work, he hooked me up, he led to me getting this talk at the Ministry of Defense, where I was able to present on the findings with the veterans courses, and what we were doing.

Once I gave the talk at the Ministry of Defense, all these doors started opening. I mean, there's nothing more hierarchical than the military system, if you can get to the top, and give a talk to all these top, some of them five-star generals who are watching, it trickles down quickly. Again, that was still due to Keith Mackenzie, everything with the veterans work I owe to Keith Mackenzie.

The thing that opened up from that though after a few years of working with veterans, was again this idea that we're in the same storm, trauma is trauma. So in one of the veterans retreats, we opened it up not only to veterans, but veterans' family members, who needed it just as much, who were living in a world affected by trauma.

Then we started opening up, people had friends who weren't veterans, but were also traumatized. In one of the retreats, a woman turned up on the retreat, who was a woman that Keith Mackenzie saved from a fire 11 years earlier, and he didn't know she was coming on the retreat, but she knew about Keith's work, and our work together, and she booked onto the retreat.

There was this amazing moment mid-retreat where she revealed who she was, lovely moment. After that, we realized trauma is trauma, let's open these retreats up to everyone. Then Lockdown came and we moved online, and we were able to open up to everyone. The funding I got, if I needed 20 places for veterans, I'd get funding from certain veterans' charities. One in particular, a brilliant charity called Forward Assist, and we'd get 20 places for veterans.

Then I said, "Look we got 50 places on the course, let's open it up." Then we'd open 30 other places up to non-military people, who are also working with trauma. We found that worked really well, and really helped to break down the barriers of Civvy Street, because veterans and civilians working together in the shared storm of trauma, actually, I think helped with, in some small way, those relationships between veterans and civilians too.

[00:08:33] Charlie Morley

That's how I spent the last seven years, and that's been a big part of my work.

Alex Howard

We're going to come to some of the experiences, and some of what happens with this work. I'd love you to talk before we do that about the research, because as someone who's published some studies over the years, I think most people don't realize how hard research is to do. How long it takes, how many challenges there are, in terms of getting funding for research, or self-funding research. I have enormous respect for the fact that you've been through that process. I'd love you to speak to some of the findings of that research because it's very compelling.

Charlie Morley

I was approached by an organization called IONS, the Institute Of Noetic Sciences, which is very interesting place. It's in San Francisco. Their main thing is they do hard science on what people believe are soft topics. They do hard science on things like distance healing, and Reiki, and Qigong. A lot of times they prove that, no, nothing's going on here, it seems to be the placebo effect, or there's some other things going on, but sometimes they prove very interesting stuff.

They had some really interesting studies, I thought, God, these guys are cool. Really rigorous science, but in topics that are on the fringes of science. They approached, they knew of my work, and they wanted originally to bring me to San Francisco to run this Lucid Dreaming retreat to see if we could use Lucid Dreaming to treat PTSD.

There have been a lot of studies, dozens in fact, that show that Lucid Dreaming is a brilliant treatment for nightmares, because if you can train somebody to be able to become conscious in their nightmare, oh, I'm not really back in this traumatic scenario, I'm simply dreaming I'm back in the traumatic scenario.

For one, there's a big drop in cortisol levels in the dream, which we know allows trauma to be processed much better when we're in the REM dream state. Also, there's the ability to self-empower and go, oh, wait, I'm not back in that situation. I'm dreaming, so if I'm dreaming I'm back in the car crash again, now I'm going to choose to make the car fly into the sky, or make the car, someone made it drive rather than into the other car, the car became flowers.

It's symbolic, they drove into flowers. Or in even the highest cases, just to allow the car to crash knowing that it's not real, there's nothing that can be harmed, your body's asleep in bed, this is just a trauma replaying itself.

Loads of studies have shown that nightmares can be really well treated through Lucid Dreaming, that's well documented. What no one had done was to see if it could actually impact waking state PTSD symptoms, that's what we were looking for. Essentially what we were doing at the beginning of the study was testing people's levels of PTSD using the DSM5 self-report methodology, just a long series of questions.

[00:11:22] Charlie Morley

We were testing at the beginning of the week, and then at the end of the week, along with the Nightmare Experience Scale. We wanted to see, would there be any reduction in waking state PTSD symptoms by training people to become lucid in their nightmares? And transform their trauma, or face their fear, or call out affirmations of healing, while they're in the nightmare. All these different techniques.

We got 55 people, about a quarter of them were veterans with military backgrounds, and three-quarters were not. Two-thirds were female and they were mainly from the UK, and the US. We had a week online because COVID hit, we couldn't do it in person, it was an online retreat. My job for the week was to teach them how to Lucid Dream.

How do you learn to Lucid Dream? It is a learnable skill, self-hypnosis techniques before sleep, certain meditations you do in the day, waking up at certain times of the night, and then dropping to sleep, doing these affirmations. It's well documented, you can teach someone to become conscious in their dreams. My job was to do that, the scientist's job was to do all the data collection around the PTSD scales and stuff like that.

For them to get onto the study, they had to have chronic PTSD, many of them treatment resistant, but all of them chronic. They had to have a high enough level of PTSD that they weren't just mildly traumatized, they were in the severe traumatization category. So, tough crowd, 55 people, 100% of them have chronic PTSD.

The funder for the study, the day before we began, sent me this message on WhatsApp, he must have been thinking, God, am I about to waste my money? And he said, how many Lucid Dreams you think we're going to have Charlie? And I remember messaging him back going, Maybe none. I've never worked with a group...

Alex Howard

Good ballsy, honest answer.

Charlie Morley

Maybe none, man. I've never worked a group with 100% PTSD. We might end up just trying to get people to sleep, let alone get them into the dream state, and do all this stuff. But what I found again was the truth of this thing, we're not in the same boat but we are in the same storm. Something around day one, even day two, even day one. Some sort of magic starts to emerge within the group, and I could feel it. I was like, oh, we've got something cooking here. We've got something really special that I think is about to happen.

We taught them to Lucid Dream, and their aim, whenever they became lucid in their nightmares, was to face a fear, or transform a trauma. We had things like one woman, she became lucid and she called out, "Anxiety, come to me. Anxiety, come to me. I want to heal my anxiety." She's in her dream, this huge three-dimensional projection of her own mind, and she calls out for anxiety. She had this severe anxiety condition brought on by several traumatic experiences from childhood.

[00:14:00] Charlie Morley

When she called that out, the dream instantly provided her with this symbolic representation of the anxiety. It's quite an interesting one, I didn't get it straight away, it was a huge golden lozenge. I was, "what do you mean, lozenge?" And she says, "like for a throat sweet?" And I said, "oh, like a healing thing?" "Yeah, this huge golden lozenge appeared, and it was radiating golden light." I said, "What did you do?" And she was like, "Nothing, I just saw it, and looked at it, and knew that there was something happening by the action of witnessing it."

She's witnessing golden lozenge, and it's vibrating this golden light onto her. Then she wakes up, nothing amazing seemed to have happened, but when you look at it, that is amazing, a symbolic representation for anxiety appeared. It radiated the golden light, it seemed to be this representation of healing. Then she woke up. She wakes up, they jot down their dream report, they do the Nightmare Experience Scale, they do some well-being scale. Then it's at the end of the week they do the PTSD self-report again.

In another one, a woman became lucid, and her intention was to call out to face her fear. I don't know what the fear was because she became lucid, she was about to call it out, and then a huge lioness appeared in the dream. She said it was oversized, the size of an elephant, but a female lion. She knew that it was some sort of protector for her in the dream, she rode the lion, and the lioness took her around the dream, viewing symbolic representations of the trauma.

I don't know what they were, but like vignettes, let's say it was a car crash. It would be vignettes of the car, or vignettes of the car crash, or the aftermath. She was riding around on this huge symbol of protection, power, and that was her Lucid Dream. She woke up and she writes it down. This is the kind of stuff that they were doing in the Lucid Dream.

Those were the sorts of things that they were doing in the Lucid dream, and there's loads of other, dozens of dream reports. Anyway, long story short, or long story long, at the end of the week, we give them the same PTSD tests again, and across the board of the 55 people in the group, the average PTSD score dropped so low it was beneath the PTSD threshold.

When I asked a scientist about that, I went, "What do you mean?" And he went, "There are several people who are not showing up with PTSD anymore, so we think there's a problem with data collection." They literally couldn't believe it, they were incredible results.

Alex Howard

That's what you want to hear, isn't it? It can't be the intervention it must be the data.

Charlie Morley

"Check them again," so they double-check them, still get the same thing, they triple-check. After the triple-check, they were still unsure of the results, so they said, "Look we're going to need to do a follow-up, a four-week follow-up to check was this just a weird flash in the pan." I thought maybe it was because I could feel this energy, we had a really strong energy in the group, really deep bonding, and empathetic energy. I thought maybe it was a flash in the pan.

[00:16:50] Charlie Morley

Four weeks later, follow-up PTSD scores again, they'd dropped one point below. By the end of the study, and still one month after the study, 85% of the 55 people in the study were beneath the PTSD threshold. They were now free of PTSD based on the DSM5 self-report.

If 10% of them had been free of PTSD by the study, I'd be raving about it, but 85%, it was shocking, and amazing, and brilliant, and no one will publish it. We went for several places, which shall remain nameless, who said, "This data looks strong, data collection is fine, but yet it's not for us. We're not going to be publishing." And they wouldn't say why.

Alex Howard

It's so interesting just to pause there for a minute, because as I mentioned at the start, have had about half a dozen publications over the years, although not necessarily as complex and as well-designed as you're talking about. I think what people fail to realize, is how much bias there is in academia. And in lots and lots of industries how there is, this is the stuff that we're interested in, and if you're not within the category we're looking at, we're not going to support it.

What that means is, you get more data on the same things. What it means that doesn't happen, is new ideas get to come in. One can get into lots of discussion about that, maybe there is professional competition and bias, and maybe there are vested interests, and so on. I also see this happen in lots of other places in the world where there aren't necessarily those issues. There's just people they want the world to stay ordered the way that they understand the world.

It's almost like a psychological defense mechanism that comes in, but it makes it very difficult for new ideas and new potentials, beyond even getting funding in the first place, is incredibly difficult. But you've done all the great work, and then it struggles to get the airtime that it deserves.

Charlie Morley

Yeah, we met that barrier, however, the results did start to get out, even though they weren't published, because the people who were peer-reviewing before we sent for publication started talking, it's a reasonably small scene, the sleep, and dream scene. The findings were so impressive that we managed to get funding for 100-person randomized control.

Because the first one was a 55-person pilot study, it was no randomized control, but because they were so impressive, we got funding for the second one. Once we had completed the second one, and had tentatively seemed to get similar results, amazingly the doors opened to several of those publications. Anyway, it ended up getting published in the Journal of Traumatology, which is like the top, top one, we were so, so happy it got in there.

Alex Howard

Because I'm interested. For some folks this may be a level of detail they don't want, they can just jump five minutes in the interview. I'm interested in terms of what the control option was. And also what those intervention groups were? I'm just interested in some of the study design.

[00:20:16] Charlie Morley

Because I'm not a scientist, I'm a Lucid Dreaming teacher who works with scientists, I was shocked when I found out the control group would simply be spending the week that the study group was receiving all these amazing tools to heal their PTSD, just living with PTSD.

I was like, what? They just sit at home having PTSD? Yeah, and they do the same checks and the pain PTSD scales. I was like, that's so unfair. They've signed up for this study in good faith, and we're going to sell 50% of them, now you just live with your PTSD.

I said I would only do it if we found money in the budget to support a second full-week workshop retreat for the control study after we had collected all the data. We weren't collecting data on them, but just so they would get that, which I thought was fair. I think maybe all studies should do that.

Alex Howard

That's also an ethics discussion, and I agree with you. I think ultimately people should get the intervention, that's a whole other rabbit hole, I'll avoid us going down together.

Charlie Morley

Yeah, in my naivety, I'm like, Why does everyone do that? I'm sure there are great reasons why they don't and stuff. Anyway, we managed to do that. Just after we completed that study, it got published before, you think, how are these mechanisms working? It's very easy to get conspiratorial about it, and I'm sure it's not. There's a series of coincidences, and co-incidences, and all these things.

Anyway, we, two weeks ago, crunched the data on the 100-person randomized control, and we have replicated the findings. I don't know the exact percentages, but we've replicated the findings. So that's really cool because, like I said, the energy that we got in the pilot group, that magic of the first time you do a study, we didn't quite get in the randomized control study, it was a brilliant study, but there are a lot more variables going on. So I was slightly less confident, but now I'm not.

I'm confident in the techniques, it's not about the magic of the group, it's about these techniques work. If you follow them step by step, and you manage to become lucid in a nightmare, or a trauma dream and you apply these techniques, they work very, very effectively for most people.

In fact, one thing that we found in the first study, I don't know whether we've got this in the second study, about 75% of people during the week managed to have a Lucid Dream, and of those a high percentage had what's called a Healing Lucid Dream. So becoming lucid and intentionally facing a fear, transforming a trauma, calling out an affirmation of healing intent.

Of the 25% who did not get Lucid, a great number of them still had this massive drop in their PTSD score, which the scientists aren't so keen on because that skews the results of it. I loved it, I was saying, what's that about? And they went, well, it seems that just learning how to Lucid Dream in a group can have a lowering on PTSD symptoms. I was like, that's fricking brilliant. Just trying, just learning to Lucid Dream is so empowering, it can help relieve PTSD symptoms.

[00:23:17] Alex Howard

I'd love to come onto, in a minute, a bit more on some of the methodology and techniques. But the techniques that you're teaching people for Lucid Dreaming, also have their own direct impacts, in terms of someone's nervous system regulation, and so on. Things like visualization, self-hypnosis, affirmation. It makes sense, even if they're not facilitating a Healing Lucid Dream, they're still having an impact on that person.

Charlie Morley

Exactly, there's a big module, we spend a full day on transforming nightmares, not only how to literally transform them from within, but transforming our perception of nightmares. I give this whole presentation on how in almost all cases, nightmares are trying to help us.

They are an internal therapy session where the mind is working through traumatic past experiences as a way to integrate them. A nightmare is like a scab. What's a scab? You cut your arm and a scab forms, the scab is a manifestation of healing, it's a healing barrier that appears covering over the wound to allow healing to occur beneath the surface. That's a nightmare, it's a scab, it's itchy, it may be unsightly, you may be ashamed of it and want to hide it from others, but you need a scab for healing to occur.

Just these reframes on nightmares were as beneficial for people to hear as a psychoeducation intervention, as the actual intrapsychic Lucid Dreaming techniques.

Alex Howard

What's also really powerful in that frame is the relationship that someone has to what's happening, as opposed to, I am broken and I'm broken and it's not going to fix. As opposed to, there's all of these protective mechanisms and intelligence in my system that's activating and kicking in, and I need to find ways to facilitate it to complete that work that it's doing.

Charlie Morley

A lot of people were asking why their nightmares came so long after their traumatic experience. And even hearing research on that, a lot of people it's when they retire, or when they take time off work. That's why COVID led to so many more nightmares when everyone was in lockdown. It's that the brain knows when there's time, and it will go, oh, now you've got time. You're retired now, okay, here come the dreams from childhood, or here come these things.

Even that shows the intelligence of the inherent healing mechanism within the psychic apparatus, which is so genius. It's so genius. And the nightmares are such a brilliant way of healing.

But we're in this society where we use nightmare as a pejorative term. If you've had a bad journey, oh, that was a fricking nightmare of a journey. Or how's that person at work? Oh, they're a nightmare to work with. You know, it's just a word, but words are powerful, and so reframing that idea that a nightmare is not a negative thing.

[00:26:11] Alex Howard

Charlie, maybe you can say a bit about what happens within that program. You mentioned a little bit earlier some of the pieces around the use of self-hypnosis, of waking oneself up and using affirmations. What are some of those key pieces? Perhaps also for those who are watching or listening, what are some bits they can just start to play with?

Charlie Morley

Sure, to put it into context all of the practices that we do are... I teach within the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, so I learned these ancient dream yoga and Lucid Dreaming practices. What I found when I started exploring all the Western practices was that they're very similar. All of the Western scientifically verified techniques are so similar to the Buddhist ones anyway.

Like you say, a series of meditations to do before bed, waking up at certain times in the sleep cycle, falling asleep, doing certain affirmations, and self-hypnosis techniques. The main one, and the one that's my small contribution to the scene, is something called Dream Planning. Which is essentially working out what you want to do in your Lucid Dream before you have it. It's a really powerful intention.

There are three stages to it, you get a piece of paper, an A4 piece of paper, and you go through these three steps; planning, picture, and what's called Sankalpa, which is a Sanskrit word that means will or intent. It's like your call to action.

The first one, the plan, write out, "In my next Lucid Dream I..." Oh, let's use the inner child one, a lot of the people in the workshop had CPTSD, complex PTSD, mainly from childhood experiences, many of them childhood sexual experiences. For them to become lucid and call out for childhood sexual trauma come to me, no way, that's going to be way too triggering.

The dream probably won't respond anyway, because there seems to be the inbuilt safety mechanism, which is very interesting, when people have tried that in the past, similar things, literally in the lucid dream, signs have appeared saying, Access Denied. Access Denied. It's like the intelligence of the brain, insane.

So we thought, okay, how can these people reach that without needing to go straight to the trauma? We use this idea of the inner child, this archetype connected to our childhood. So they were making dream plans, "In my next lucid dream, I call out to meet my inner child. The part of my childhood that has been wounded by the experiences that occurred to me, not because of me." You write in this script. "The inner child appears in a friendly form, I'm then able to embrace them, dialog with them, and show them my love. Through showing them my love, they are healed of any and all trauma."

You write out the ideal Lucid Dream, the perfect Lucid Dream. Sometimes it doesn't go that way, but at least you write out the perfect script, then you draw a picture of it happening. The aim here is not to do a great piece of artwork, especially if you're doing inner child work, do something quite childlike. You might just do stick men pictures of you, and then calling out, "Inner child, come to me."

[00:29:18] Charlie Morley

Then another box of you hugging the inner child, quite beautiful depictions of the healing they want to hear, want to have. Then the Sankalpa would be, what's the call to action once you become lucid? You're asleep and then you're like, hang on I'm dreaming away. Then you see your dead grandma, or whatever it is, something unreal, hang on, dead grandma's not alive. Bam, I must be dreaming.

What do you do then? Well, you don't want to have to remember your whole script of the dream plan, oh, I'm going to call out to the inner child and have this healing. You want to remember a call to action, and the call to action is "inner child, come to me." Or "inner child, healing now," or whatever it is. Something that you call out in a lucid dream.

They would do this dream planning, and once you've got the dream plan, some of them became lucid that night just from using the dream plan, because that's the first technique we teach, they hadn't even got to the self-hypnosis techniques, the meditations, the hacking the sleep cycle, that kind of stuff.

If you were going to sleep with a dream plan that made you salivate, made you think, wow, imagine if I can pull this off. Imagine if I can meet a representation of that wounded child, and send them love after all these decades, imagine. People were going to bed like that, and they became lucid. And some of them, even before they called out for the inner child, they'd just appear.

Of course, they'd appear because you'd written your letter to the unconscious already, you'd said, this is what I'd like to happen, you posted it through your intention. They're amazing things. Several women had similar ones where they became lucid and the inner child was already there.

In some cases, it was like a little girl with their back to them who was crying, of course so symbolic of a traumatized childhood. They would then approach the little girl, and in some cases, it was obvious that she wanted to be hugged. They would hug, literally embracing this symbolic representation of their childhood trauma in the dream. Then when they hugged the little girl, she went from her back to them, to facing them and smiling. Just so obvious what's happening here, almost unsymbolic, a very literal representation.

In another case, the woman, when she called out for the inner child, it didn't look like her, it was just this little girl who looked very different, but she was smiling. And she realized, oh, maybe that's the little girl I could have been, it's this representation of her in happiness. In that case, she took her by the hand and was doing ring-o-ring of roses.

All different but when they woke up, they all had the same experience, they said it was like a weight had been lifted. It was this sense of freedom, it happened quickly. It wasn't like they woke up and then there was a massive delay and the integration happened. It's that, I think, because the integration is happening literally at an intrapsychic level. You are in the unconscious mind, a huge projection of your unconscious mind, but you're conscious within it.

It's like you're planting the seed in the deepest depths of the unconscious, in the most fertile ground of the unconscious. So it can work very, very powerfully, and quite quickly.

[00:32:19] Charlie Morley

Now, however, having said that Lucid Dreaming is nowhere near as accessible as many other healing modalities such as hypnotherapy, talk therapies and somatic work. In many cases, Lucid Dreaming takes way longer than a week to learn. I think in this study because it was so intense, we realized if you're working on it every day with a professional one-on-one, making these dream plans together, then yes in a week you can reach lucidity, and have a healing dream.

But in many other cases, it might take people many weeks, even months, to have their first healing Lucid Dream. So I do want to put it in context for people who might want to teach themselves by buying a book. It might take a few weeks, whereas we had a very intensive period.

Or I'd invite those people to come and retreat with me, the retreats that are open to everyone that will be running next year, and then you can have a similar experience.

Alex Howard

It's really interesting Charlie, as you were talking, I was thinking about a lot of the healing work that we do in a therapeutic context, that's not a Lucid Dreaming context, which is about meeting those traumatized places with the adult resources that we have now. So learning how to be present in our body with our resources now, and meet those places. What I'm hearing in what you're describing is, in a way, the same principle, but working with those deeper unconscious places.

Charlie Morley

Yes, you are meeting them. I remember a psychotherapist who was on a course I did about 6 or 7 years ago, she said, "Wait, so you're telling me you're in the Lucid Dream, and you can meet the inner child in a personified form?" And I was like, "yeah." And she goes, "What? And then you can touch them, your hand doesn't go through them, they're solid." "Yeah, you can hug them, you can ask them what you need from me?"

I did this once with my inner child and it said, "to play more." And I was like, wow, that's so cool, I took up surfing again, I was like, play, I need to surf like I did as a child. You can dialog with them.

I was giving her these examples, and I remember she sat back and went, "This can change everything." And then she was wistful, looking into mid-distance, then she said, "It can take me months to get my male clients to admit they have an inner child. You're saying in a dream you could meet the inner child?" And I was like, "yeah." And then again she said, "Yeah, this could change everything."

Now, 6 or 7 years later, I think it can change not everything, but it can change some things. Without doubt what this study has proved, and the 100-person randomized control follow-up, that Lucid Dreaming needs to be seen now as one of the most powerful interventions for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. It's non-medical, it's non-addictive, it's non-invasive, and it's free.

[00:35:00] Charlie Morley

I'm not saying everyone can be healed through this, but we're showing that a lot of people can. Yet it's not viewed as that, it's still viewed as something fringe, or Lucid Dreaming is that like Astral Projection, or is that this Buddhist thing? Yeah, it is linked to Astral Projection, and can be linked to Buddhism, but it can also be a rigorous, scientifically verified healing technique.

Alex Howard

I really love this frame around what you're doing is you're facilitating the wisdom and the intelligence of the mind, the emotions, and the unconscious, to resolve and complete cycles that have got stuck. It's not that we're broken and we need to be fixed. It's that there are these tools that allow a natural process to work.

Charlie Morley

Yes, and it's so self-empowering. There's no guru to worship, there's no religion to be part of, there's no therapist apart from you. Especially people who feel that they have been failed by medication, or by the medical industry, or by therapists themselves. The technique says, no, you go in by yourself. These are the techniques you choose. You write your own dream plan. What could be more empowering than that? You're writing your own dream plan, then you're going and doing it yourself.

I think part of the healing comes from just the fact that you have a Lucid Dream. People who feel that their mind has failed them by giving them these nightmares, by giving this trauma go, wow, my mind's genius, I can learn these techniques, I can do it myself, I can have this experience. And it changes my daytime symptoms. It's so self-empowering. I think loads of the healing comes from that, too.

Alex Howard

Well it also, just as we touched on earlier, that fundamental reframe of sleep. Sleep goes from being a place to be afraid of, because all that stuff that comes up, to being the place that we can heal.

Charlie Morley

Yeah, I know from my own PTSD nightmares, I was afraid to go to bed. I remember eating coffee out of a Nescafe thing because I was not so young, I was in my late teens, I didn't have a flavor for coffee yet, I couldn't drink coffee, so I'd be spooning in Nescafe from the thing to try and stay awake.

Of course, it worked for a night, but then the nightmares would just come double the next night. I know that feeling of being scared to go to sleep, of looking at the bed and being like, that's a torture chamber. Like f going to bed because that's the place the torture nightmares happen. So you don't want to go to bed. Now Lucid Dreaming flips that, it goes, wow, your bed is a magic carpet. Suddenly your bed is where it all happens, this is where we can really embrace our true selves.

[00:37:47] Charlie Morley

Also, something I should say, Lucid Dreaming is really fun, it's so much fun. The fact you fall asleep doing these affirmations, doing this visualization, setting your alarm clock, keeping your dream diary in the morning. There's something childlike about it. You know how kids are so connected to their imagination and dreams?

Of course, this is why two Harvard studies have shown children are natural Lucid Dreamers, not every night, every child, but the majority of children display frequent Lucid Dreams as part of their natural childhood development. This reconnects us to our childhood, makes the bed a safe place, makes going to sleep fun, rather than torturous. That's a reframe of a third of our lives, that's a big reframe.

Alex Howard

That's awesome. Charlie, I'm mindful we're out of time, but I'd love you to say a bit about where people can find you online, obviously, we'll have website and bio below the video. Also say a bit about books, programs, and ways that people can access your work.

Charlie Morley

Sure, charliemorley.com is my website.

There's also for people who are more interested in the work with veterans, mindfulesleep.org is more of this stuff just for veterans, and it's a slightly different layout of the website.

I'm on Instagram, on Facebook, and then online courses, I've got several pre-recorded online courses that you can do anytime. Then I've got nothing left for the rest of this year, I'm in book writing mode for the 10-year anniversary, second edition of my first book, which seems crazy, it was like 10 years ago.

Alex Howard

Just to contextualize, this is going to be coming out in late January, early February, in its original iteration, 2024. So into 2024, you've got programs, I think that retreats are available?

Charlie Morley

Yes, so in 2024 there will be live online retreats and workshops, including the 6-week one on stress and trauma-affected sleep. There'll be in-person 4-day Lucid Dreaming retreats, like the ones that we used in this study. Again, in-person, weekend workshops, online workshops.

I am doing slightly less next year, in 2023 I did 13 retreats in a year, I was tired by the end. So in 2024, I'm not doing 13. I hope to be on 13 retreats as a participant on various meditation retreats, but I will only be leading maybe 5 or 6, so I'll be less retreats, but I'll be turning up hopefully even more fully, because I'll be giving myself a little bit more rest next year.

[00:40:15] Alex Howard

That's awesome. Charlie, thank you so much. I really appreciate you and this wonderful work that you're doing.

Charlie Morley

Oh, thank you so much. Been a pleasure.