



Book Review

Kenneth Kelzer's "Sun and Shadow": A New Classic on Lucid Dreaming

Reviewed by Charles Tart

Many publishers send me galley proofs of books they are about to release in the hope that I will read them and say something about the book that they can use in promotion. This is one of the areas of regret in my life, because so many of these books look like they will be of great interest to me and I want to read the galleys: but I seldom have time. There is still a set of proofs on my desk of a forthcoming book by Robin Robertson, for example, that I know I will be fascinated by, yet I haven't been able to look at them at all. I miss too much.

Recently I received the proofs of *The Sun and the Shadow*, and regretfully thought once again, "This looks really fascinating, but I don't know when I can find time to read it in the next two months." I thought I should at least read a page or two at breakfast, though, before sending a letter of regret to the publisher. The first two pages led to more, and I ended up taking the galleys to work with me and reading them at every opportunity. This book will clearly be one of the classics of the lucid dream literature - I'm glad I looked at it!

Kenneth Kelzer is a psychotherapist who decided to induce and explore lucid dreams as part of a personal and spiritual growth program in 1980. The book is an

account of the dreams that followed and his struggle to integrate their insights into his everyday life. The lessons he learned will be helpful to all of us, even if we don't have lucid dreams.

Because Kelzer writes very clearly, I will mainly quote selected passages, not only to give you the flavor of the book but because they are useful to our growth even in isolation.

Commenting on one of his early and powerful lucid dreams, Kelzer notes that:

There is a kind of magic in many lucid dreams. This one had the potential to become a nightmare, but in the moment that I became lucid I experienced total inner transformation. All my fear vanished in an instant, and inside of myself I felt full of courage. Complete clarity of vision in this dream, yielded instant transformation. This became one of the important principles that I learned from this particular lucid dream. To see fully to have courage. To see fully is to have no fear. But, as is so evident when we examine our world, we human beings seldom see anything fully in our normal state of consciousness. More often than not, as the apostle Paul wrote: "We see now through a glass, darkly, but then we shall see face to face."

Why Do We Have Lucid Dreams?

One of the purposes of lucid dreaming, I am now convinced, is to give people the experience, however fleeting or temporary, of spiritual and psychological mastery. These tastes of mastery and moments of transformation spur us on to continue the inward journey.

As a psychotherapist, Kelzer is very sensitive to underlying psychological dynamics in both lucid dreaming and ordinary life. Commenting on a lucid dream in which he met a primitive man riding on a huge beast like an African wildebeest, he notes that:

Eventually, after some reflection, I realized that this lucid dream taught me a lot about fear. Fear is perhaps the most primitive human emotion of all, and we all have a great deal of it inside ourselves. We all need to learn how to confront the objects and sources of our fear in order to thrive and prosper in this world. I realized, too, that the dream was bearing a personal message, telling me that I still have a lot of powerful fears inside myself, which at times threaten to overwhelm my conscious mind. I did not associate the wildebeest to any particular fear, but more to fear in general. The dream reminded me of Franklin D. Roosevelt's statement, 'The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.' Now I am wondering if this lucid dream was suggesting that I might surrender one step further and give up the fear of fear. To be unafraid of fear itself implies a willingness to face all of my fears, whatever they are, regardless of what plateaus I may already have reached in my personal growth.

I personally find this quite interesting as there was a point in my own growth where I realized that fear of being afraid was indeed a bigger fear of mine than any fear of anything in particular.

The Shadow Side of His Nature.

Kelzer has to struggle with the shadow side of his nature in his quest, a side that seemed to strengthen as his sun side, his spiritual side grew. In such struggles it is all too easy to identify with the good and totally reject the bad, a strategy which is quite costly in terms of psychological growth.

Spiritual work, when it is true and genuine, is expansive of awareness and not displacive of awareness. It leads us to see and appreciate the whole of our humanity, and does not lead us to reflect upon our higher natures only. While we need to dwell upon our higher nature in order to grow in a positive direction, we must not do it by rejecting our dark and primitive side. A whole person, then, is someone who has walked with God and wrestled with the devil.

Should Lucid Dreams Be Analyzed?

Why do we have lucid dreams? Shouldn't they be analyzed like other dreams for hidden messages? As a psychotherapist Kelzer was expert at such analyses and knew their value, yet:

I had no desire to analyze this lucid dream or do therapeutic work with it in any way. It had a sense of completion that is common to many lucid dreams, almost as if the dream were a work of art in itself. This sense of completeness and wholeness is one of the features that clearly distinguishes many lucid dreams from ordinary dreams. Most schools of psychotherapy generally follow or build upon Freud's basic idea that the dream expresses the content of the unconscious mind and usually presents the dreamer with some kind of problem to be solved.

Many lucid dreams, however, are simply nonproblematic; they seem to emerge from a different category or realm of the mind. As such, they serve many important purposes other than assisting the dreamer toward the confrontation of personality problems, although such confrontations can certainly be one of their function...speaking as a psychotherapist, I do not see any inherent contradictions between the works of Freud, Jung, Perls and other psychotherapists and the ramifications of lucid dreaming.

I do believe, however, that one of the biggest challenges that psychotherapists may have in approaching the lucid dream will be to step aside from their traditional problem-oriented point of view in order to appreciate that the lucid dream is more likely to serve the dreamer on another level. A lucid dream is more likely to be instructional about the nature of consciousness per se than to reveal the dreamer's particular disturbances of consciousness. It is more likely to depict something about the general evolution of consciousness than reveal something about the individual dreamer's particular 'arrestment of development.' As its first function, the lucid dream is more likely to reveal the dreamer's inner joy and creativity, while addressing his or her emotional problems as a secondary function. In short, the lucid dream is more likely to be the bearer of good news than the bearer of bad news.

Simply to appreciate and enjoy the lucid dream and to bask in its light, its vivid images and colors may well be the primary creative response that we can make to most lucid dreams. Not that lucid dreams do not offer us messages or insight. They often do, though these messages are often of a much higher or much more subtle nature than the meanings of ordinary dreams. The lucid dream is a subtle teacher. As my experiment progressed I began to grasp this concept in many ways.

Dream Control?

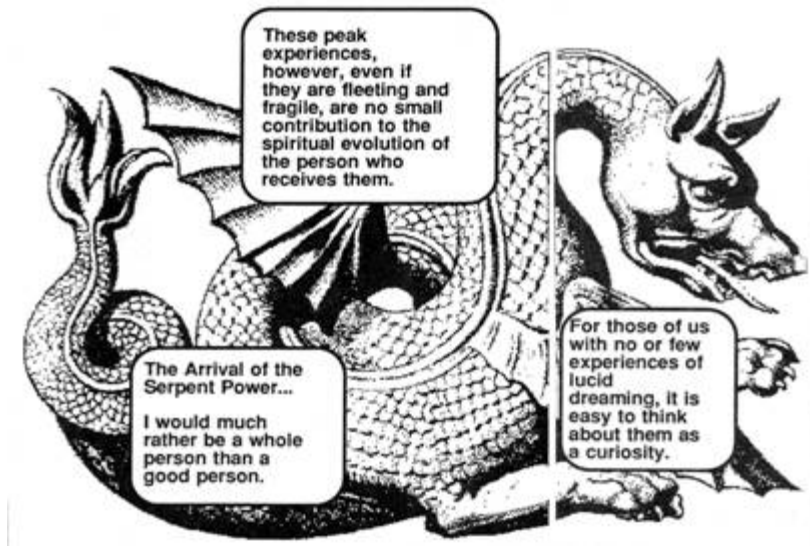
As a well-socialized male, Kelzer brought very masculine attitudes of control to his study of his lucid dreams, but the dreams had something to teach him about this.

My own self-analysis was that for the present my approach to lucid dreaming still contained too much of my willing it to happen and not yet enough of my allowing it to happen. The 'masculine' attitudes of willpower, order, goal setting, intentionality and control are very strong in my personality and always have been since childhood. Correspondingly, the 'feminine' attitudes of trust, patience, relaxation about goals and allowing it all to happen have been my less-developed traits. These feminine mental qualities, I realized, would need to be increased within myself if the fullest psychic cross-fertilization was to take place.

Lucid Dreams as Peak Experience

We all experience occasional (perhaps too occasional) "peak experiences," moments of joy and clarity when we transcend our ordinary false personality and experience the higher aspects of our Self. Some of Kelzer's lucid dreams were peak experiences. Because they are rare and fade, though, what good are they?

These peak experiences, however, even if they are fleeting and fragile, are no small contribution to the spiritual evolution of the person who receives them. Without them life could easily become drab and dull. In reflecting on my experiment, I have come to see that the ultimate purpose of the peak experience is to provide us with a taste of ecstasy now, because a taste is better than nothing at all and because a taste is all the most of us can bear now. In addition, we need to understand that if we were to receive the full impact of ecstasy without adequate preparation, most of us would probably die, because we are simply not yet strong enough internally to bear the fullness of Light.



Spectrum of Consciousness

For those of us with no or few experiences of lucid dreaming, it is easy to think about them as a curiosity, a funny variation on ordinary dreaming, but yet:

It seems mandatory to me now to rethink and expand upon our present paradigm for dream studies in which we customarily distinguish ordinary dreams from pre-lucid dreams and lucid dreams. I firmly believe that these three categories of distinction are incomplete and insufficient, since in this dream I experienced a lucidity that was so vastly different and beyond the range of anything I had previously encountered. At this point I prefer to apply the concept of the spectrum of consciousness to the lucid dream and assert that within the lucid state a person may have access to a spectrum or range of psychic energy that is so vast, so broad and so unique as to defy classification and to transcend what we ordinarily speak of as "consciousness" from the perspective of the waking state.

The Whole of Reality, Not Just the Good

I am particularly impressed with Kelzer's clear intent to deal with the whole of reality, not just the parts of it that we label "good." Pursuing the good is fine, but very

tricky. We easily distort our perception in the pursuit of security and pleasure and thus sow the seeds of useless suffering.

Following an especially powerful lucid dream that he titled "The Arrival of the Serpent Power," Kelzer noted that:

The Arrival of the Serpent Power and the life context out of which it came has often led me to reflect upon one of Carl Jung's statements: 'I would much rather be a whole person than a good person.' His message was a criticism of the commonly misunderstood and truncated version of moral goodness that is so often held up for emulation in civilized society. Goodness has often been equated with qualities such as niceness, patience, kindness and tolerance, with the expectation that these qualities should be displayed at all times and in all circumstances. Such 'goodness' unfortunately often makes people into victims because it may unconsciously invite more aggressive individuals to abuse, attack or exploit. In this setting, I was relearning once again that a whole person is someone who feels his own anger and aggression on those appropriate occasions when someone else is exploiting him and can speak out or take effective action to prevent the attack from proceeding any further. In essence, it is not always appropriate nor spiritual to turn the other cheek. For me, Jung's basic idea is so vital because it implies that there is a dark side to love which actually turns out to be a positive human force in the long run. It throws out absolute behavioral guidelines for people to follow and encourages us to commit to the wholeness of the psyche as our overall guiding principle.

Specialness, of Me! As Superior to the Common Hoards

There is a danger in any spiritual path, the danger of identifying with a specialness, of Me! as superior to the common hoards. Kelzer notes that:

Ego inflation was the major two-edged sword that came out of my experiment with lucid dreaming. It was capable of cutting both ways: positively or negatively, creatively or destructively... To inflate or not to inflate, that is not the question. How to respond to one's inflation, if it occurs, is the question. For as Rilke wrote to the young poet, we must give birth to our images, and we must give birth no matter what happens as a by-product in our psychological development. To be human is to love, create and give birth in the real and to wrestle courageously, if need be, with any negative by-products that may emerge from one's choice to be fully alive.

I think you can see why I find this book excellent and fascinating.

Reprinted with permission from The Open Mind, 4(4), pp. 7-10.