

Interview with *The Sun and the Shadow* Author, Ken Kelzer

Ken Kelzer is a licensed clinical social worker in private practice in Novato, California. He is the author of the recently released autobiographical book *The Sun and the Shadow: My Experiment with Lucid Dreaming* published by A.R.E. Press and available from Lucidity Association. He and his wife, Charlene, have one son

EDITOR: You were trained to be a priest?

KELZER: I was studying to be a Roman Catholic priest.

EDITOR: And you were within a year of finishing. What happened?

KELZER: I experienced a sudden and profound doubt, a career crisis, right around the Christmas vacation of my third year of theology. It really threw me because before that it had been smooth sailing for me all the way through the seminary. I had not had any struggles, doubts, or difficulties of any kind. I was almost a model seminarian. But I began to have these awful doubts and talked with my advisor about it as well as my closest friends, priests, everybody. I went into therapy for the first time and worked with a psychiatrist who was a transactional analyst.

In the midst of all that, around March of 1966, I had this very powerful dream which I kept trying to figure out on my own. But my interpretation of the dream never really satisfied me because my mind was still churning. One day I was walking along the grounds with a good friend of mine who was quite astute, and who knew my personal dilemma. I said to him I had this powerful dream and I told him the dream. He said, "The most important thing about a dream is the way the dreamer feels in the dream." I really tuned in. Then he said, "This dream shows that you feel intense disgust for the official hierarchy of the church." As soon as he said the word "disgust" I felt this really powerful electrical flash go from my head to my feet and then back from my feet. It was like a definite current. I just said to myself, "You're right, that is what I'm feeling."

EDITOR: That's how you got started on dreams and also it is the framework of the Christianity often referenced in your book but what about the other religious and philosophical perspectives, that are also so much in your book.

KELZER: I should say it started in the seminary. I was very interested in Protestantism, and I began reading on different areas. I also was interested in Hinduism. I remember reading extensively and doing a special report and term paper on Hinduism in the seminary, probably about two years before I had this dream.

EDITOR: Where does lucid dreaming sit in the East-West dialogue?

KELZER: It has the potential to be a real common area because it does come from

Buddhism. As far as I know that's the earliest reference to lucid dreaming as a spiritual discipline. The yoga of the dream state. So I think that Christians have the potential, or even non-Christians, any westerner has the potential to work with it as a psycho-spiritual tool if they choose.

EDITOR: How does it fit potentially as a sort of merging point or focal point. I mean it's clear from the Buddhist perspective there's a long history there. What about from the Christian perspective?

KELZER: I think there's a big vacuum. I don't know of any Christian authors, as such, who have addressed the topic.

EDITOR: I don't mean literally, you're quite right about that. When I say East-West dialogue I don't only mean philosophical and religious traditions, I also mean life style, perceptions of reality, personal orientations. Okay?

KELZER: My view on that is from a historical perspective, that western civilization is more structured. The Roman Catholic Church is traditionally, and still today, the most structured religion perhaps in the world. Because of this it is automatically suspect of anything unstructured, such as mysticism. The mystical traditions, lucid dreaming, people who claim to have visions of God, people who claim to have any direct access to spiritual worth.

Whereas in the Buddhist traditions, and especially in the Hindu traditions, they're so unstructured that they're just more open I think to the basic force of life coming through. So it doesn't surprise me that they have a tradition around lucid dreaming and we don't. Or if we have one in the West it's so hidden that most of us haven't found it yet.

EDITOR: As much as the eastern perspectives have things to teach us about lucid dreaming, perhaps the western ones do to. Paul Tholey talks about that in terms of psychotherapy in the lucid dream. You address some of the same kinds of things in your book. I'm interested in the extent to which the active mode, which I think represents the western kinds of traditions, relative to the passive mode, which characteristically represents the eastern perspectives, is the best way to engage the dream. What do you think?

KELZER: I agree with that. I think that we have to be westerners because we are westerners so we have to as Jung would say, honor our own cultural roots at all times and not try to be Buddhists approaching the lucid dream. Rather be ourselves approaching the lucid dream. What kind of more active approaches we're going to take, what kind of research approaches we're going to take, I mean we're already doing this. We're already doing it in our own style.

EDITOR: How, tell me?

KELZER: Well I think Stephen LaBerge's research approach to lucid dreaming is something that only a westerner would think of doing. So I think that's already a unique contribution. Trying to relate lucid dreaming to Jesus or to the Christian myths is something that came up in my book just because of the dreams that I had.

EDITOR: Could you give me an example.

KELZER: Well the dream of the "Gift of the Magi", in which the Christ child is seen as the symbol of the light in the lucid dream is the central story of western civilization in which we think that Jesus is the enlightened one. So in a way, as I look at that lucid dream I say that that dream summarized for me what the Christ story summarized for western civilization. It says we have a vehicle for the light. We have a person who conveyed it to us. And we have a light tradition. Unfortunately, many Christian teachers, ministers and priests, don't focus on that to any great extent. They might focus on Jesus as a moral teacher, or in other ways, but he is a bearer of the light. He says, "I am the light of the world." That's a direct quote from the scripture.

There are mystical teachings all throughout western civilization that say the same thing. We actually do have quite a few mystics in the Christian tradition. I think one of the contributions of my book is I'm trying to say that mysticism is readily available to the average person. That the average person can understand what it is, that it's really not that hard to understand.

EDITOR: It's accessible on a daily basis.

KELZER: It could be accessible, definitely, through the lucid dream state. As well as through other channels. The more we understand this we will look for ways to have our own direct relationship with God. Which is what Scott Sparrow talks about in the introduction to my book.

Jesus' message really was that I and the Father are one, meaning I have my own direct connection with the Father. You're all invited to have your direct connection with the source. You're all invited to understand that you could bypass the middle man in the religious quest, or that you could use the middle man, meaning the priest, the minister, the theologian, the mystic, the writer, you could use him as a stepping stone in your own growth, but not as an authoritarian, an expert.

EDITOR: What have people said that they liked about your book?

KELZER: They liked the personal candor, they liked the personal autobiography. They liked the blending of theory and practice, and they liked the blending of the dreams with the waking life story. They liked seeing how that is woven together. How a person's dreams are reflecting things that go on concurrently in the waking experience, and vice versa. They are like two rivers that flow back and forth and intersect.

EDITOR: What do you think the role of science will be in all of this?

KELZER: I have a lot of respect for the scientific method, and for western science and its roots in Plato and Aristotle. I have no desire whatsoever to throw that out. I think that logic and deductive and inductive reasoning are very important. I'm not interested in the flaky approach to intuition which says now it's time to ignore the left brain and lets focus on the right brain. There's a lot of simplistic swinging of the pendulum from one side to the other right now, in which people in the field of psychology and spirituality are cutting out and throwing away an important aspect of western civilization. I'm very interested in blending reason and logic with intuition, blending patriarchy with matriarchy, or the feminine principle and the masculine principle.

EDITOR: That's a core conflict with me now with the book I'm writing on lucid dreaming. I want it to have as much scientific integrity as it can, but if it doesn't have the excitement and the human element that's so powerful in your book.

KELZER: Well, I think it's important to have a distinction between objective research and subjective research. I am a subjective researcher. I'm interested in looking very deeply into my own self. Or looking very deeply into the client that I'm working with at the moment. So I do see it as a form of research that cannot be done in the laboratory. It has to be done either in meditation or in psychotherapy or in individual dream work. I'm interested in people in the objective scientific research camp developing more respect for the subjective research as being important, not necessarily always being accurate or true, but that profound experiences of an internal nature can to some extent be communicated.

EDITOR: We're running out of time but there's one more thing I want to ask your opinion about. Last night I was talking to a colleague and she said that sometimes she gets afraid of the potential misuse of lucid dreaming. I share her concern. It's so potentially powerful, therefore also potentially powerfully misused. What do you think about that?

KELZER: I agree. I talk about that briefly in my book. Any new form of power that emerges in a culture, or in the life of the individual, has to be assessed for its potential for good or for evil. For creation or for destruction.

EDITOR: Develop that. How can we assess this?

KELZER: I think that people could use lucid dreaming as a status symbol.

EDITOR: It's already happening.

KELZER: People are already saying, "Well I have that." So that's one way in which it

could become corrupted. People could use it to deepen their sense of I'm better than you.

EDITOR: I was thinking of personal abuse.

KELZER: I think you could burn out on lucid dreaming. I think there's a danger of too much too fast, as with any spiritual discipline. I think that Scott Sparrow is right when he talks about approaching it with nonacquisitive desire. Acquisitive desire is a clutching, grabbing, desperation type of quality, and so we need to approach it with a sense of letting go as we visualize the goal and work toward the discipline.