

Amazing Dreamers: Interview with Keith Hearne

Clare Johnson, PhD



It's a rainy day in London and the Science Museum is packed solid, but I barely notice the crowds because I'm sitting across the table from an extraordinary man. We're discussing our common fascination with lucid dreaming and the healing power of unconscious imagery. 'The unconscious can kill,' says my companion—who aside from being a pioneer and an inventor is a hypnotherapist—'and it can cure.' We talk, we share dreams. On the table between us lie polygraph signals he recorded of a sleeping subject four decades ago. The remarkable thing about this particular polygraph are the sudden sweeping lines which leap up in the middle—these mark the first eye signals deliberately made by a lucid dreamer to signal his conscious awareness within the dream. These spindly zig-zags provided the world's first scientific proof of lucid dreaming. There are other items on the table: a CD of a ballet this scientist composed himself; a dream book he wrote—unexpected gifts he has brought for me.

British psychologist Keith Hearne, PhD, is the pioneer of scientific lucid dream research. I first had the pleasure of meeting him when I presented my lucid dream research at a *Gateways of the Mind* conference, and he was kind enough to agree to an exclusive interview for my forthcoming book on lucid dreaming. In the forty years which have passed since his 1975 breakthrough, Keith has lost none of his trail-blazing spirit: when we wander through the Science Museum on our way to see his Dream Machine—the first lucidity induction device to be invented—we stop to admire a space station. I ask him, 'If you had the chance to go on a tourist trip into space, would you go?' His eyes shine. 'Oh, yes,' he answers in a flash. 'I'd go!'

Here, he describes the excitement of his early discovery and shares his first lucid dream and how it changed his life.

CJ: Keith, in 1975 you devised an experiment which recorded the first ocular signals from a lucid dreamer, Alan Worsley, thereby scientifically proving that it is possible to 'wake up' inside a dream. How did it feel to succeed?

KH: The huge technical problem was that it was necessary to have some method for the subject to signal information from within the dream, but the body is profoundly paralysed during REM sleep. I had the thought that since the eyes move in REM sleep, the subject should be able to make deliberate ocular movements that could be recorded on the chart. The evening before the big discovery I wired up a male frequent

lucid dreamer and instructed him to make eight left-right eye-movements immediately on becoming lucid in a dream. The long wait started. At each REM period I stood over the chart-recorder intently watching the output channels of physiological activity. There was a chance, I considered, that it would work.

Imagine now my anticipation and excitement. No ocular signals appear in the first REM periods. I feel frustration and impatience. Then, at about 8am, after a burst of random ocular activity (which I later find is consistent and term the 'pre-lucid REM burst') an exquisitely beautiful, regular sequence of large zig-zag ocular signals appears in the two eye-movement channels. Consciousness waves a greeting from the chaos! Despite feeling tired I am suddenly exultant and smiling. It has to be a 'Zen' discovery, though—I am alone, so there can



be no sound of two hands slapping in a 'high five.' I contain my huge joy in a buzzing quietness, not wanting to awaken the nearby sleeping subject!

I know at this moment that the technique opens a doorway into a vast new area of dream investigation. The dream can now be studied, consciously, from within. It is the morning of the 12th April 1975. Coincidentally, this first recorded inner-space journey happens on the same date that the first person went into outer-space orbit in 1961.

After obtaining more examples of signalling over a few months, I sent details of my findings to Professor Allan Rechtschaffen at Chicago University and Professor William Dement at Stanford University. Several academic colleagues did not believe such dreams could possibly exist. Most had never heard of them. Rechtschaffen replied with a very encouraging letter recognising the discovery.

CJ: What a breakthrough! It must have felt like a dream coming true. Have you ever had a life-changing dream?

KH: My first lucid dream: I am wandering along a Mediterranean beach. The imagery is bright and vivid. I notice some metal pieces and start digging in the sand. Feeling into the sand I discover some coins. Suddenly it occurs to me: "This is a lucid dream!" I stand and look around. It is an overwhelming event—a great dawning of consciousness. The scenery is lovely, and incredibly detailed. The colours are deeper than normal. I remember that lucid dreams can be controlled, and decide to perform an experiment.

For 'purely scientific reasons' I decide to make a young woman appear, indirectly, by walking to a stack of deck-chairs, hoping to see her there. When I arrive there is no sign of her, but then a young woman approaches me from somewhere. She is shortish, with dark hair and very green eyes. I am wondering what to say to her when she introduces herself, smiling, and says 'Hello'. She says her name is Jane. We have a powerful amorous encounter . . .

Later in the dream we are suddenly looking for the home where she was born. Someone points the way. There are bombs exploding in the distance. It seems to be World War II. Jane is sitting on a flight of stairs in a factory. I hold both her hands and promise I will return to see her again.

CJ: How did this wonderful lucid dream change your life?

KH: About two weeks later, in reality, I met that same woman, also named Jane, and we dated for some 18 months. It was a very strange feeling, transferring our extraordinarily strong physical and mental relationship within the dream to waking existence. I told Jane about the dream, but I think she thought it was a chat-up ruse. She didn't report a corresponding dream to me. Over the years several people have told me of their own similar dream-meeting of someone they would encounter later. There could be psychological factors involved, perhaps unconsciously seeking someone to fit the dream character; or it might be a purely precognitive experience; or the World War II reference may indicate some strange regression to a past life.

In my scientific education I was fully brain-washed into the paradigm of Materialism, but that creaking belief system now has so many limitations and exceptions that to be truly scientific we really must look at all possible viewpoints, without bias. This dream showed me the sheer potential of lucid dreaming. Lucid dreamers are more used than others to journeying through realms of reality. What if that is actually how it is?

CJ: So this lucid dream literally 'came true' for you. There's a huge potential in lucid dreaming to discover more about the nature of time, space and reality. What would you say is the most valuable thing you've learned about lucid dreaming?

KH: I think that remarkable and useful features of our unconscious mind are displayed strongly in lucid dreaming. In my work using hypnotherapy, too, communication with the unconscious, using ideomotor responses, is capable of revealing the deep causes of many mind/body problems. I believe that lucid dreams can be particularly helpful in new interactive healing procedures, and in providing much hidden information regarding decision-making on significant topics. The unconscious is a truly valuable resource within all of us!

Lucid dreams can also greatly enhance creativity. I have gone into art galleries and seen beautiful paintings—which, frustratingly, I cannot reproduce on waking because I'm not an artist. However, I have obtained several musical themes from dreams for my compositions.

CJ: With you, Keith, creativity and science seem to walk hand in hand. Congratulations on the 40-year

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