

DreamSpeak

An Interview With Paul Helfrich, PhD

© Paul M. Helfrich
Questions by Robert Waggoner

Lucid Dreamer, Paul M. Helfrich, PhD, has a multidisciplinary background as a former university educator, researcher, composer, and writer. Most recently, Helfrich has presented workshops and lectured nationally on conscious creation, the channeling phenomenon, and integral psychology and spirituality. He's authored a series of online essays on these topics, (viewable at www.newworldview.com) as he prepares for his first book, "Integral Conscious Creation".

When did you first learn about conscious dreaming or lucid dreaming?

I stumbled upon a book on Astral Projection as a teenager. I forget how it came to my bookshelf, and who the author was. But the notion of an astral body and projections sounded like fun, and made intuitive sense to me, though the experiences described didn't match any that I had had up to that time. No silver cords, or scary demons, or the like.

Can you recall your first lucid dream experience? Please, tell us about that.

When I was about eight or nine years old, I had my first recalled lucid dreams, though I didn't know they were called that at the time. I recall two in particular, the first involved me driving my mother's car, and it was so real that upon awakening I wasn't sure that it was a dream, but knew rationally that I couldn't have driven her car "for real." And yet, the experience was so vivid, so real it confused me for years until I stumbled upon a book on Astral Projection.

The second involved a repeating dreamscape in which I could leap down the stairs from my bedroom to the first floor in a single step! It was so cool! I could also float/fly around the living room downstairs. Again, this was all very vivid, and confused me as a child. I don't recall asking my parents about it, because they made no mention of dreams that I recall. I just assumed that everybody did it, and left it at that.

What about those early experiences did you find interesting?

Again, the vividness, the clarity of focus was so real, and that I remained confused for years about how to situate it within my larger worldview. There was simply no room for it, so it was suppressed into the closet of unofficial experiences. I can only wonder how often this occurs in the general population?

At that time, what methods did you use to bring conscious awareness into the dream state? Has that changed over the years?

I read a lot of science fiction (Asimov, Clarke, Herbert, Heinlein, Tolkien, etc.) in High School. I was also experimenting with psychedelics, but as a recreational pursuit with no shamanic guidance whatsoever. This led me to the Castañeda books and his notions of second and third attentions, and many other shamanic concepts that I intuited as valid, though alien to my experience at the time.

Eventually, my older brother introduced me to *Seth Speaks*, the classic by Jane Roberts in 1976, which led to an intensive study of the Seth material through 1980. It was during those four years, while pursuing undergraduate and graduate studies in music, that I began to consciously lucid dream. I worked through *The Seth Material*, *The Nature of Personal Reality*, and *The "Unknown" Reality*. The latter contains 17 "Practice Elements", a rudimentary "yoga" to experience the concepts outlined up to that point. So it's beyond the scope of this interview, but these practices led to a series of short awakenings, only 5-10 dream seconds long, but enough to familiarize me with the focus during 1979.

This study was also coupled with keeping a dream journal, as suggested by Seth as a tool to capture, organize, and interpret dream symbols (really a life-long process, as you know). I recall that working through *The "Unknown" Reality* was grueling, sometimes moving at 1-2 pages per reading, because there were so many new concepts involved. The map of the psyche presented was just beyond anything I was familiar with up to then.

I took a break around November 1979, and read my favorite piece of fiction by Jane Roberts, *The Education of Oversoul Seven*. All of the concepts Seth talked about were playfully fleshed out therein, from multiple focus personalities within "simultaneous time" (from the perspective of the source self), to "reincarnation" (a nonlinear interpretation), and of course, lucid dreaming and projections.

There's a wonderful Zen saying that comes to mind here: "Gaining enlightenment is an accident. Spiritual practice simply makes us accident prone." It seems that during this break, my rational, analytical mind relaxed enough to open for my first satori in the classical sense. It was a lucid dream and projection experience that lasted for over two and half hours that occurred on December 2, 1979. It lasted from 4-6:30 AM, because I was sleeping at my soon to be grandmother-in-law's house, and she had a cuckoo clock that I was able to follow during the experience.

It was replete with false awakenings, visits to other dimensions, other "essences", the whole nine yards. Luckily, as this was unfolding, because of my training, I was not afraid, and did my best to just "go with the flow." But it went on and on, and was a wild ride! I wasn't as trained at that time to take notes or use Seth's "dream camera" technique to capture as much as I could today. I sure could have used Monroe's rote to capture that whole experience, but again, I was just a newbie to consciously manipulating the dream state at that time.

Later, in the 1990s, I would explore Stephen LaBerge, William Buhlman, Namkai Norbu, and Tenzin Wangyal's dream and dream yoga practices. In 1998, I was able to induce my first projection from the vibrational state directly in bed. I awoke in the vibrational state, and my spine felt like it was plugged into a high powered electrical socket.

Finally, I simply willed myself out, and sat up into the peace and quiet of what Seth calls the first astral form, the one most closely connected to the physical body. I also experimented with LaBerge's state checking techniques, but those never produced any great results, mostly due to my inability to concentrate, as they are excellent techniques.

Also, the technique of "clarity now" and spinning to maintain focus and prolong the dreams came in handy. But like anything, it's a "use it or lose it" kind of enterprise, and unless I work at it, I sometimes forget to invoke those mental processes. All of this led to connecting with a "guide" or archetype as I conceptualize it in the late 1990s.

Another teacher recently gave me a name for this Aspect, and I am currently exploring mantra meditation to further connect and explore contact. But this is an important Aspect that is also a deeper part of Me that I seem to have "forgotten" during my physical life, but always is so familiar when I connect with that energetic signature.

Interesting! What did you take from this lucid dream experience/s? What did it come to mean to you?

The most profound outcome of that first satori in 1979 was simply a validation of the Seth material and its potential, its baraka, to induce altered states to validate the map of the psyche and Kosmos presented therein.

That is, all good dream-art scientists, another Sethian concept, have a deeply skeptical side about all inner experience. And Jane Roberts shows this characteristic over and over in her three Aspect Psychology books, *Adventures in Consciousness*, *Psychic Politics*, and *The God of Jane*.

Anyway, any doubt about the unofficial experiences I was exploring evaporated. It completely blew my mind and led to a stretch of ego inflation, as though I now understood the mysteries of the universe for a while. But that was back in the 1980s and I still had a lot of growing to do. I came to realize that Consciousness is indeed an ever-opening flower, and there appear to be infinite layers to peel away, the deeper inward we manage to project or shift our focus of attention to.

These experiences fueled my desire to further explore my own consciousness, and probe its boundaries, this time without psychedelics as a mainstay, instead focusing on mental practices. It has led me to try and understand just what it might take for our civilization to achieve proficiency with what Seth outlined as dream-art sciences, and kind of high intellect that combines reason and intuition, outer and inner senses. It also relates to what sociologist Jean Gebser called integral aperspectival consciousness, and psychologist Ken Wilber the centaur or integral consciousness.

Have you had any interesting lucid dream encounters with dream characters, who perhaps provided advice or gave you insights?

Sure. One example was during a very painful divorce in 1985, I contacted my soon to be ex-wife's parents, both of which were diseased. I asked her father if my wife "would come back to me," and he simply said, "No." But it was a very clear and deep interaction, and though it was difficult, it was the final straw that allowed me to move on from a very difficult separation and give her the freedom she needed to grow without me. So in hindsight, it was a very therapeutic experience.

Have you ever had a lucid dream encounter where the dream character seemed to have his or her own agenda, and own volition? Did it feel as if you were dealing with an independent agent?

Yes, again this relates to what I simply call my "guide," a teacher Aspect that I've only encountered four times to date. And the first time, I was very, very excited, and s/he gave me some simple advice to simplify my explorations.

In other words, I was making things too complicated and it was actually preventing my progress. This first occurred around 1999, and there have only been three other encounters I've recalled in the seven years since. So this is a metric of my current inner development. I also image these Aspects in the context of Jane Roberts Oversoul Seven books, so I can trace where the belief system that I use to translate the interaction derives from.

In those books, the Oversoul is depicted in various guises, gender neutral, really trans-gendered, including rapidly changing faces of various physical incarnations, points of light, and even formlessness. So it's natural that given my bonding with these books, that I'd translate my inner experiences into physical, or outer symbols accordingly.

All the wisdom traditions do the exact same thing. For instance, one of my favorite depictions of the source self is the Buddhist Avalokiteshvara with all its many heads and arms. Literally One-Made-of-Many, or what Jane Roberts called a source self. So in my encounters with these kinds of subtle energies, I learned to adjust my focus of attention to where they would appear as gently changing faces more in line with the Oversoul books. Only one set of arms and legs, LOL, but the focal point seems to be the face that changes gender and ethnicity. So my guide appears in various genders and ethnicities, one common one being an African male (who plays a mean cello!).

The appearance of dream character knowledge and volition or seeming independent agency in the lucid state surprises many of us. What possible issues does this raise in your mind?

Simply, that within this subtle field of consciousness, the Self-sense is much, much looser, and the outer egoic Self-sense expands to realize that it is only one Aspect of Many within a much larger gestalt Consciousness.

Also, many of us lucid dreamers report similar or common experiences; things like "false awakenings" when we assume that the lucid dream state ends, but we realize that we have incorrectly believed that we have awakened. Some have suggested that this means we have "world models" in our brain, while others have wondered about the possibility of alternate or parallel realities. Any thoughts about lucid dreams and false awakenings?

I maintain that it stems from confusing forms of the subtle bodies, as there are at least four that I've experienced, the latter leading into formlessness, the Void or Shunyata. Each body seems to be made from its own "matter" along a vast spectrum of which the physical body is only the thin outer "crust" to use Buhlman's excellent analogy.

So as our dream states ebb and flow, the physical brain is busy translating as best it can within the limits of the physical spectrum. As we "return" toward our physical form, we shift gears and focus into the third, second, or first astral form. And it's so real, and the constructions of the conscious mind are so convincing that we temporarily believe (yes, belief systems are active to some degree in the first, second, and third forms) that we're awake in the physical field. These

false awakening have greatly lessened in recent years, as my focus has shifted to include simple Witnessing meditation practices, which I've only recently begun to bring into the lucid state. Rather than actively constructing and participating, I simply try to push inward toward the Witness and rest as that in dream and waking state. It's been very interesting and I look forward to going deeper with those vipassana practices.

Many of us notice in the lucid dream state that "expectations" are frequently made manifest. If lucid, and we expect something, then that something appears shortly thereafter. Have you noticed this in your lucid dreams? What does this suggest?

Yes, it's like the speed of thought is instantly actualized. If I mentally shout strongly enough, "more light please" or "go away" or "move over there" the results are instant, reminding me of a line from an old Moody Blues song - "thinking is the best way to travel."

I believe, again a belief construct, that the subtle bodies simply react to a different, yet related physics, sort of like multiplexed harmonics or musical overtones that are nested within a larger Multidimensional Whole. Physicists like Ervin Lazslo, David Bohm, William Tiller, and Fred Alan Wolf use metaphors like Akashic field, implicate order, or nonlocal fields to try and describe them. And I feel that they are just scratching the first layers of the inner, or subtle field, and will actually keep discovering more and more the further they probe.

But they will have to learn to condition and utilize their conscious minds to go any deeper, and that is currently not the modern paradigm, though we see glimpses in the postmoderns I mentioned above.

You have written and presented at various conferences, interviewed Ken Wilber, and thought deeply about the nature of consciousness. Where does lucid dreaming intersect with the broad issues of consciousness?

First let me say that the work of Ken Wilber is immensely important. He doesn't pretend to have it all figured out by any stretch, but has presented the first comprehensive, balanced, and inclusive theory of consciousness. So much so that I consider him to be the father of the dream-art sciences that lie down the road. Therefore, lucid dreaming and projections of consciousness are two very important states of consciousness that provide direct experience that we are much more than our physical bodies.

As such, there is indeed a larger purpose, intention, and meaning to life, the universe, and everything! If nothing more, they provide a means to break out of the modern fragmented shell of materialism, scientism, and reductionism. I can say these things because I am no longer beholden to any institutions or funding sources that would still consider my experiences and theories heretical or "junk science."

I worked in a prestigious science museum in Philadelphia for nine and half years. I was in charge of raising and spending millions of dollars from corporate sponsors (mostly tech companies) and government sources, like the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, and so on. The sad fact is that the funding priorities are nonexistent for lucid dreaming and projections because the modern paradigm of cause and effect still dominates our cultural values. This is not a bad thing per se, just very limited. There are emerging postmodern worldviews springing up from the grass roots every day.

Wilber's work in particular has captured this spirit and provides a foundation for moving forward with a viable theory of consciousness and praxis within a community of adequately trained dream-art scientists down the road. Though this is a promissory science, I believe it to be crucial to help move the species from its adolescence into the early stages of adulthood, one that finally eliminates the scourges of poverty, ecological depletion, mass warfare, lack of education, freedom of expression, and so on.

What kind of lucid dream experiments could crack open the debate on the nature of consciousness? What would you like to see?

Well, I've mentioned Seth's dream-art sciences as a kind of promissory science of the future, one based upon a viable theory of consciousness, and in my view Ken Wilber's is the first robust one comprehensive enough to lay the foundation (he calls it AQAL or all quadrants, levels, lines, states, and types). Science is done within a community adequately trained. So that's the current Catch-22. There simply aren't enough Tibetan dream yogis schooled in narrow and broad sciences, nor are there enough oneironauts (Lagerberg's term). What this means is that the current cultural center of gravity is still stuck in the modern paradigm, though the postmodern, as I define it, has been experiencing its birth pangs globally since the 1960s.

We need more highly developed people to move beyond conventional thinking into postconventional thinking. Lucid dreaming is part of this, but it's important to note that even though I lucid dreamed as a nine-year-old, I had to interpret the experience and was limited by my preconventional thinking of the time. I was simply quite confused by it all. So as adults develop into postconventional thinking and postmodern worldviews en masse, only then will there be enough momentum to develop adequate dream-art sciences.

But this potential is very exciting, and may happen sooner than we expect, say within 4-5 generations given the accelerated pace of evolutionary momentum. And again, Wilber's theory of consciousness allows, for the first time, to combine the best practices of modern science, with the premodern shamans, dream yogis, saints, sages, and seers to create a new hybrid, a postmodern hybrid that I believe will neither be a religion in the premodern sense, nor a science in the modern, Newtonian sense, but something only in the realm currently of science fiction, like Oversoul Seven (which often precedes science fact, thinking of Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells).

When you think of the cutting-edge issues in lucid dreaming, what do you think of? Any personal lucid dreams that bear on these issues?

The cutting edge issues involve making continued research a higher priority. We spend trillions on defense budgets, and only a few millions for what is still considered avant garde, and seen mostly for its potential to be used by the military industrial complex. So there has to be a way to compromise without taking an anti-military stance, and yet proceed so as to unlock deeper potentials of human development. Seen in this light, then, lucid dreaming is just one modality in a larger more comprehensive integral practice that includes physical, mental, and spiritual aspects nested within us as individuals, our world, and how we can all get along. It is a very important modality, one that may lead to new discoveries, technologies, and solutions to the complex problems of a rapidly changing world.

Thanks, for your observations into lucid dreaming. Any parting thoughts?

Thanks for the opportunity to reminisce and see where I've been and where I'm going. "What a long strange trip it's been...."