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Amazing Dreamer: Ryan Hurd

Dr. Clare Johnson

Have you ever dreamed of sacred sites, such as Stonehenge or Machu Picchu? Or has a dream waterfall, volcano, or rainforest ever brought you clarity and guidance on a life issue? Sometimes we are so busy racing through life that we forget to connect with Earth's ancient power and consciousness. When we pay attention to the landscapes and geography of our dreams, we can reconnect with a deeper knowing.

One lucid dream researcher I know is very much in touch with the power of rocks. Here, he shares a big dream of a very big rock (a mountain, no less) and the wisdom it brought him.

I first had the pleasure of meeting Ryan Hurd at the 2006 IASD conference near Boston. He was about to give his first ever IASD presentation, on how lucid dreaming enhanced his perceptions as an archaeologist studying rock art in Nicaragua. As we chatted about lucid dreaming, I was struck by his enthusiasm and bright mind, his openness and curiosity. Since that early meeting, the mark Ryan has made on the study of lucid dreaming has expanded in beautiful and fascinating ways.

Ryan's book *Sleep Paralysis* has improved the quality of life of hundreds of readers, and he has researched topics ranging from the healing potential of galantamine to lucid nightmares. He co-edited *Lucid Dreaming: New Perspectives on Consciousness in Sleep* (to which I contributed a chapter on magic, meditation and the lucid void), and his latest book is a how-to guide for using dream amulets, *Lucid Talisman: Forgotten Lore*. His dream amulets – metal necklaces, coins and keyrings – are inspiring thousands to bring more lucidity into their life and dreams.

CJ: What impact has lucid dreaming had on your life?

RH: Lucid dreaming has transformed my life. It's difficult to imagine who I would be today without those experiences that allowed me to meet myself and my habitual patterns, as well as sources of wisdom much older than my waking personality. My earliest lucid dreams helped me face and dissolve nightmares, and find my voice in those turbulent adolescent days. Later, my lucid dreams were philosophical tests of reality, and still later, portals to ancestral knowledge, spiritual downloads, and psychological healing. I'm still learning every time I find myself lucid in a dream. I love that.

CJ: I agree that the wonder never ends – there's always more to discover. From one night to the next, a whole new dimension of lucid dreaming can open up to astonish us afresh. Could you share a "big" dream with us?

RH: I've been thinking recently about a big dream I had over a decade ago. I feel like I'm still under its spell. My fiancée and I had made a botched attempt to live close to family in the Southeastern US. We moved back to California, licking our wounds. We felt pretty isolated. I was not certain we had made a good choice coming back to California, and was often demoralized. Two months after moving back, I had the following dream:

I walk out into a wooded yard and onto a pile of rocks. I look up and can see beyond the horizon of trees to hills beyond. I see Panola Mountain in the distance, as from the vantage of Mount Arabia – two prominent granite outcroppings in Georgia, where I grew up.

Delighted, I say hello to them and then the horizon spins and a new mountain is there – it is Mount Diablo [near where I currently lived in California].

"Diablo!" I say. It is huge, majestic, and lit golden.

It spins again and it looks like a wooded hill, green, East Coast.

Then again: Diablo.

Then another California hill, and then another.

CJ: What did this rotating mountain dream teach you?

RH: Upon awakening from this dream, I knew immediately what to do: visit Mount Diablo, the towering mountain that was only a 20-minute drive away. I drove halfway up the mountain, then got on a hiking trail. At one point, I felt a sudden—and unmistakable—tugging in my chest to leave the trail.

I felt like I was in last night's dream. I climbed up over the rocks, long out of view of the trail below, and emerged onto a large, flat rock. Instantly I knew this was the place to make an offering to Mount Diablo, to honor my dream by saying a prayer.

As soon as I had that thought, I noticed the prehistoric bedrock mortar on the stone. A bedrock mortar is a depression in stone that is made by native people to grind plant materials—such as acorns—into meal. A flood of joy washed over me. I intuitively felt that the mountain had called me with last night's dream, and now trusted me enough to reveal this artifact on Diablo.

This bedrock mortar was the first artifact I had ever seen on Mount Diablo. Afterwards, I saw many more, as if now the ability to find connection with the past on Diablo had been earned.

The stone pile in the dream reveals the power of stones as liminal objects. Rock piles are sacred sites, places where humans and the elements come together and allow us to move beyond our usual waking life consciousness.

The effect of the dream and its waking life echo was a deep feeling in my bones that gave me the courage to commit to living in California again. The "revolving horizon" dream—moving from ecology to ecology—allowed me to relax into not knowing how long this place would be my home, and that other landscapes will soon come into focus.

I got the download: I had not finished my training. We stayed in California three more years, a fruitful time in which I reinvented my career, wrote my first book, made deeper alliances with colleagues, and got married.

CJ: I love that you instantly took action from this dream, and hiked up the mountain. When we honor our dreams in this way, we often find the gold they point to. What would you say is the most valuable thing you have learned from your years of lucid dreaming?

RH: Moral philosophy. I learned quickly that to stay in a lucid dream, I need to take a perspective that altruism and love are the most important cognitive gifts we have. Why? Because everything I see is a part of me, and I am a part of it. Everything I think affects the world and vice versa. This is called "magical thinking" in waking life, yet in the dream it is essential. I had to unlearn a lot of the Western egotistic way of being. I had to learn to surrender, to truly trust in the unknown. Navigating the lucid dream is to think and act and feel as if we are all connected. Turns out this is not a cognitive trick, but a cornerstone of my worldview.

CJ: Right, that simple yet profound realization that "I am the dream, and the dream is me" leads us to an experience of oneness that relates to all of life, whether we are awake or dreaming. The lucid dream is a highly thought-responsive environment and this understanding of the power of our thoughts and the depth of our connection with others is so valuable in all areas of life. Another thing I truly love about lucid dreaming is that it never ceases to amaze me – so many spontaneous and utterly captivating experiences emerge from conscious dreaming. What is the weirdest or most astonishing thing that ever happened to you in a lucid dream?

RH: Once I flew through a portal and spontaneously emerged looking at a gigantic arm. I felt the need to move and I wiggled down and apparently out of someone's giant lap. I then realized I was in the body of a toddler. I looked across from me and sitting on a couch, towering over me, was my grandmother, and several of my aunts and great aunts. They all looked young and healthy as they did decades ago. They were all beaming at me with pure love and acceptance. It was a divine gift.

CJ: Wow, what a wonderful gift of a dream! Thank you so much, Ryan, for sharing your inspiring dreams with us, and for all the lucidity-raising work you do in the world.

Dr. Clare Johnson was the first person in the world to earn a PhD in lucid dreaming as a creative tool. Author of seven dream books, including *The Art of Lucid Dreaming* and *The Art of Transforming Nightmares*, Clare creates Deep Lucid Dreaming video courses with guided dream meditations. www.DeepLucidDreaming.com