Narcolepsy: Sleep, Dreams and Spirituality

Rubin Naiman, PhD
Director, NewMoon Sleep, LLC
Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine
Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine
University of Arizona, Tucson
A Spiritual (non-violent) Approach

How do we view narcolepsy?
- A neurological disease
- Highly pathologized in sleep medicine
- Many have an adversarial relationship with sleep & dreams

Another view:
- Heightened permeability between waking & sleep/dreams
- A personal religion? A kind of reluctant shamanism?
- A special source of creativity?

Our purpose:
- PWN need to become sleep and dream experts
- Cultivating mindfulness or non-judgmental awareness

What to remember when waking
We don't get sleep because
...we don’t ‘get’ sleep*

- defined negatively: not waking, non-REM
- valued in terms of waking world functions
- domestication: seen as servant of waking life
- medicalization: the brain doesn’t sleep; we do.
- pre-copernican-like, wake-centric mindset
- we are addicted to waking consciousness

* R. Naiman, Huffington Post Sleep and Dreams Blog
WASO is normal in narcolepsy

Fragmented sleep is normal in narcolepsy

What wakes us up is not what keeps us up

Daytime sleepiness is sleep

EDS is normal in narcolepsy

We’re only sleepy if we fight it!
The “American Dream”

... dreaming has been devalued, domesticated, and downsized
A silent epidemic of REM sleep suppression

- excessive alcohol & pot
- hypnotics: TCAs, benzos
- most antidepressants
- anticholinergic burden
- LAN suppression of MT
- obstructive sleep apnea
- middle insomnias
- alarm clock awakenings
- dismissive posture

We are at least as dream deprived as we are sleep deprived.

What is sleep?

- a way to get back home
- our default consciousness
- serenity: access to inner peace
- deep sleep is our deep Self
- gender, age, health changes
- can we be aware of sleep?
- sleep is a spiritual art

Sleep is a return to the unmanifested Source. -- Eckhart Tolle
What is dreaming?

1. REM: mediates memory, mood -- an OBE; digests experience
2. The dream: wild consciousness -- liberated from somatic constraints
3. Dreaming: a way of seeing with dream eyes / shamanism

The range of what we think and do...
Hyperarousal: *addictive waking impedes sleep and dreams*

- accelerated heart & ‘head’ rates
- elevated body temp / inflammation
- overexposure to light at night (LAN)
- circadian & melatonin suppression
- nocturnal sympathetic activation
- leaves us *t’wired*: tired & wired

*Hyperarousal is excessive and imbalanced wakefulness; it overrides sleepiness by night and day.*
Healing our sleep

1. sleep tricks and tips do not work

2. sleep hygiene is necessary but insufficient

3. requires transformation -- personalized lifestyle and attitudinal shifts

4. consider CBT-I: cognitive behavioral tx for insomnia;

   Internet programs work!
The art of sleep

I thought the earth
   Remembered me, she
Took me back so tenderly, arranging
   Her dark skirts, her pockets
Full of lichens and seeds. I slept
   As never before, a stone
On the river bed, nothing between me and
   the white fire of the stars
but my thoughts, and they floated
   Light as moths among the branches
Of the perfect trees. All night
I heard the small kingdoms of breathing
   Around me, the insects, and the birds
Who do their work in darkness. All night
I rose and fell. As if in water, grappling
   With a luminous doom. By morning
I had vanished at least a dozen times into
   something better.

- Mary Oliver
Sleeping in the Forest

the body falls and the spirit rises
The body falls in sleep

- let your body fall
- the wisdom of dogs
- humus in garden beds
- submit to gravity
- weighted blankets

Humility is the antidote to hyperarousal.
our spirit rises in dreams

- who sleeps? not “I”
- cranking up sleepiness
- we cannot “go to sleep”
- we can only *let go* of waking
- falling asleep is an accident
- falling asleep is an act of faith
- dying to sleep
Nightmares, hypnagogic dreams and sleep paralysis

Dreaming gives us the fluidity to enter other worlds by destroying our sense of knowing this world.

-- Carlos Castaneda
Approaches to bad dreams and nightmares

1. Pharmacological - symptom suppressive
2. Psychotherapeutic - analytic
3. Social support (dream circles) - containment
4. Imagery rehearsal therapy - revision
5. Dialogical (shadow work) - experiential
Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT)

Overview:
- more a discovery than invention
- can be practiced individually or in group
- positive outcomes in over 90% of users
- generalizes to other nightmares

Technique:
1. Select a disturbing dream / nightmare  
   *(with lesser intensity at first)*
2. Change this “any way you wish”
3. Rehearse this new dream daily
4. Change another dream every 3-4 days

Shadow work - “dialog with the devil”

- All we wish not to be
- Find diamonds in coal
- Opening the heart nightmare
- Sweetness & light vs. Tonglen
- Jesus & the Demons

Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare* 1782
Cataplexy

1. Is Superman’s reaction to kryptonite a form of cataplexy?

2. What if we kept our spirits strong when our muscles got weak?

3. What might we learn about where cataplexy takes us if we were not as concerned about what it removes us from?

4. Can cataplexy take us where shaman’s go?

Suggestions

> Practice mindful cataplexy: intentional induction and reduction

> Be aware of personal triggers: thoughts, feelings, situations…

> Investigate the depths of laughter

Life is lived in the pauses, not the events. -- Hugh Prather
Creative narcolepsy

1) Find a mentor
2) Practice yoga nidra...
3) Write, sketch, paint, dance, sing, sculpt ...
4) Explore the interface of narcolepsy and spirituality
5) Consider healing work...
A BRAID THEORY of consciousness

Could it be that we are sleeping, dreaming, and awake all at once?

How might we experience the united states of consciousness?

Practice mindful awareness of sleep and dreams during waking.

Sleep is the best meditation.-- The Dalai Lama
Sleep and dreams reveal a wild order behind all things... 

... will we trust it?
Rubin Naiman is truly a pioneer in integrative sleep & dream medicine.
-- Andrew Weil, MD

HUSH draws on the latest sleep science to take us deeper, exploring sleep’s spiritual, sacred, transformative dimensions and guiding us toward the deep, restorative sleep our bodies and souls need.
-- Arianna Huffington

The best prescription for our sleepless patients.
-- Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD

www.DrNaiman.com
Rubin Naiman, PhD
Director, NewMoon Sleep, LLC
Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine
Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine
University of Arizona, Tucson

PO Box 269
Tumacacori, AZ 85640
520-975-7785
rrnaiman@gmail.com
rrnaiman@email.arizona.edu

Life is lived in the pauses, not the events.
-- Hugh Prather