

BY KATHLEEN F. MILLER



## TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM

Tonight I will watch my 1-year-old daughter sleep soundly, perhaps dreaming of Elmo, our cat Cleo or the Teletubbies. I marvel that she still likes to sleep with her arms thrown back, straight above her head, as her ultrasound photo revealed she liked to sleep in my womb.

Sleep and dreams are among the few truly universal human experiences. All of us have awakened from a strange dream and thought, "What was that all about?" And in today's fast-paced world, many of us are sleep deprived. For those with severe sleep disorders, help is available locally at Providence, Swedish Ballard, Virginia Mason and at the University of Washington Sleep Disorders Center at Harborview.

Doctor Vishesh Kapur, assistant professor of medicine at the University of Washington, is medical director of the UW Sleep Disorders Center. He describes the most common sleep disorders he treats:

**Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)** is caused by narrowing or closure of the upper airway that

occurs during sleep. This causes disrupted sleep as the affected person struggles to breathe. Signs and symptoms are snoring, breathing pauses during sleep and daytime sleepiness. The most frequent therapy is wearing a mask over the nose with a machine that applies positive air pressure to the upper airway to keep it open during sleep.

**Insomnia** involves difficulties with sleep onset, sleep maintenance and/or early-morning awakening. There are many causes of insomnia, including medications, poor sleep habits, depression, restless legs and sleep apnea. Therapy usually involves treating the cause. For example, insomnia brought on by depression would be treated with psychotherapy and/or antidepressants.

**Restless legs syndrome (RLS)** is a creepy-crawly feeling that occurs in the evening when at rest and is relieved by motion of the legs. It can cause difficulty in falling asleep. RLS is also associated with periodic leg movements during sleep, called periodic limb

movement disorder (PLMD). The limb movements can cause awakenings at night and unrefreshing sleep. Iron deficiency is a common cause; severe cases are treated with medications.

**Narcolepsy** is a disorder that involves severe sleepiness during the day. It can also be accompanied by something called cataplexy—transient muscle weakness associated with strong emotion (laughing, anger). Individuals with narcolepsy can also suffer from sleep paralysis and hypnagogic hallucinations (hallucinations at sleep onset). Treatment involves medications to improve alertness and prevent cataplexy. Narcoleptics can also learn to nap strategically and optimize nocturnal sleep.

Even without sleep disorders, many of us are not getting sufficient sleep. Dr. Kapur comments, "Sleep deprivation is endemic in our culture. Many people are not aware of being sleep deprived because they use stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine that mask it. There is a price paid in terms of decreased alertness and sense of well-being."

If physical well-being depends in part on getting adequate sleep, does emotional well-being depend in part on dreams? Some of the world's most famous scientists, artists and musicians claim their most inspired ideas came to them in their dreams. What are dreams, and what do they mean?

Dreams are such an intimate, internal experience that studying their purpose is a challenge. University of Washington professor Mark Calogero uses a case-study approach to explore the link between who people are, what they do and how they dream.

He applies cognitive psychology to dreaming to uncover a language of meaning, a way of making sense of the day's events. Exploring the possibility of a systematic rule structure beneath the construction of dreams evokes Freud's groundbreaking work more than 100 years ago. While Calogero doesn't agree with many of Freud's conclusions, two important themes from his work seem to ring true, even after a century.

"Freud had a complex understanding about the 'grammatical' rules dreams use to construct themselves. Also he found that rather specific events from the day before do seem to be employed by our unconscious as a form of 'fleeting or transient vocabulary,' in that the words dreams use to express their 'meanings' disappear with each new day," Calogero says.

Calogero studies individuals who appear to be more perceptive than average about their dreaming processes. Through his work he has discovered that

## SLEEPY TIME

Dr. Kapur's tips for catching some good Zs

- Maintain constant sleep time, especially the time you wake up in the morning.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol within four hours of bedtime.
- Keep a comfortable, quiet environment for sleeping.
- Don't work lying in bed and don't use the bedroom for anything besides sleep and sex.
- Exercise regularly, but not close to bedtime.
- Leave the bedroom if you are unable to sleep, until you feel sleepy and ready to sleep.
- Get some outdoor light exposure during the day.
- Avoid heavy meals close to bedtime.
- Have a routine designed to relax you before bedtime, such as listening to music or reading.

who we are and what we do in our work and play influence how we organize our dreams. He speaks of his interviews with an artist whose "dream dialect" consists of colors and landscapes.

"I view dreams as a convoluted language of analogies," Calogero explains. "An analogy is an attempt to make sense of something by drawing on our past knowledge. We use analogy continuously in our lives as a way to help us think about the world and solve its problems. Children use analogy

naturally to learn about the world around them, artists use analogy to spark creativity and scientists use it to make new discoveries."

Calogero's interest in dreams dates back to childhood. "My tendency to believe dreams hold meanings stems from two rituals I grew up with in my childhood home: my father's daily ritual of finding meaning in personally historic events to use as a basis for playing lottery numbers and my mother's ease at solving crossword puzzles. Thus, the title of the book I am writing—*Carefully Chosen Words: How Rituals of Daily Living Lend Meaning to Dreams*," he says.

Psychologists are not the only ones who search for meaning in dreams. Many of the world's great spiritual traditions advocate examining dreams for divine information on how best to handle life's many challenges. The Old Testament hero Joseph climbed the ancient Egyptian corporate ladder from Pharaoh's dungeon to governor of all Egypt by using his talents as a dream interpreter. In the New Testament gospel of Matthew, an angel appears in a dream to reassure an angry Joseph, who was about to quietly leave Mary after learning she was pregnant.

Other ancient spiritual traditions also place significance in dreams. Michal Mugrage, a native of Bainbridge Island, is a teacher and shamanic practitioner now residing in Eureka, Calif.

During her 15 years living in Asia she experienced training and initiation in Nepalese, Japanese and Okinawan shamanic traditions. She explains the significance of dreams from a spiritual perspective.

"The ancient spiritual practice of shamanism views dreams as a way of receiving communication and staying connected to one's spiritual source of guidance," she says. "During sleep, communication between a person's soul and their spirit-allies, ancestors and the spirits of the land they live on is the clearest and most direct.

"From a shamanic perspective there are ordinary dreams and big dreams. Big dreams are the ones that are especially vivid, that are repeated several nights in a row or that re-occur over an extended time. These dreams are considered either a communication or a visitation from the spirits, and it is considered important to pay attention to and honor the message received in such dreams.

"Also, during dreaming the soul can travel to other realms to receive healing and knowledge that will affect daily life. For this reason, in many elder cultures it is considered best to wake people gently—their soul may not be back yet."

Perhaps such advice inspired the great wisdom of another ancient saying: "Don't wake a sleeping baby." Considering the effort it takes some nights to get my daughter to sleep, I consider that good advice indeed.



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