

ON — — ING



On Dreaming

*The Separation of Mind and Body
During a Moment of Rest*

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*To the dreamers. The innovators. The designers. The
people like Kekulé, Ramanujan, and Mary Shelley. The
people that kept the world moving forward.*

When's the last time you got a decent night's sleep?

Good question, right? If you laughed when I asked, I brought you joy — mission accomplished. The things I'm about to say might keep you up at night, so it's best to skip this one if you toss and turn over the thought of existence.¹

For me? These days, I'm lucky to get four hours at most. Don't ask me why, or how — I'll tell you anyway: because I didn't move around a lot that day.

Catch me on a day where I walked around at any local attraction with my family, and you'll catch me in full REM sleep, body and mind, for hours. I'll also wake up hungry.

But that's just me. I'm neither here nor there, and to you, I'm a nobody, so what does it matter?

What *does* it matter, actually.

¹ *Hamlet reaches for sleep at exactly this threshold — to sleep, perchance to dream — and recoils at what may come once the body is set down. The fear of rest and the fear of existence have always been the same fear wearing two coats.*

II

This reminds me of a joke from a recent episode of the new season of *Rick and Morty*. With the utmost respect to the show's creators and writers, this is my accurate depiction of a special moment in my life that occurred while I was watching the show. S9E4, at the 24-minute mark, Morty tells Reese "I love you." But Reese wasn't at the controls of his own body — he was under the control of a "Time Cop" (which is, under my framework of perception, oddly enough... exactly how I'd perceive an alien, angel, or superior being would act and react in our three-dimensional environment).

The Time Cop responded by saying "I love how much matter you're made of," and I laughed loud enough to startle my wife, who didn't see the joke the same way I did.

But I turned to her and said "I love how much you matter," we both laughed, and the Jay traveled its course for the evening.

I hope someday the incredibly witty writers read my writing, and see how much that moment meant to me — silly as it sounds, me being nothing. I still hope the Jay returns to them.

III

Dream with me for a moment.

My friend Elliot used to tell me about a group of "balanced individuals." I can't remember where he said they were, but these individuals had achieved a state of balance so pure, they could operate on an hour of sleep. Later in life, I found the correlations waiting on both sides of the aisle I tend to walk. On one side, the science: a handful of people carry mutations that let them wake fully restored on four to six hours — natural short sleepers, who lose nothing for the hours they skip. On the other side, the contemplatives: traditions that train the practitioner to keep the mind awake while the body sleeps, a deliberate and cultivated separation of the two.²

What must this feel like?

In *On Seeing*, I talked about an individual who knows exactly how much food they need to move through the day. I would imagine for someone who doesn't have to go to work, and take their family to local attractions, they probably wouldn't need much food *or* sleep.

Life would just flow.

What would sleep be like for them? I imagine it would be a separation of mind and body, as stated before. NREM for the body, to recharge the

2. Two literatures meet here. In genetics, a small number of natural short sleepers carry mutations — DEC2 (BHLHE41), later ADRB1 — and wake fully restored on four to six hours, mapped in the work of Ying-Hui Fu and colleagues. In the contemplative traditions, Yoga Nidra and Tibetan dream yoga train the practitioner to hold the mind awake while the body sleeps: a cultivated separation rather than an inherited one.

energy not gained through food; Lucid sleep for the mind, to recharge the balance by planning the next day in advance.³ If the body needs longer, more gets planned. Weeks, months. Not to the detail — but I can only imagine the intent of creation becomes clear to an individual in this state of mind.

So the creativity flows, simply from the mind collapsing all available information it has onto a falsified account of reality.⁴

Or maybe other things, like major developments in math, science, and medicine.

Or maybe major astronomical discoveries.⁵

Or maybe major internal discoveries.

Not biological, but metaphysical.

The discovery of the unified one, the removal of ego, and the dream of humanity as a whole coming together.⁶

Wake me up — I almost forgot we were dreaming.

3. *I use these as registers, not as a clinical chart. NREM names the body's restoration — the slow, dreamless depth. Lucid names the mind's — the layer where awareness persists into sleep. One is physical, one is metaphysical; the night runs both.*

4. *Chuang Tzu woke from dreaming he was a butterfly and could not say whether he was a man who had dreamt the butterfly, or a butterfly now dreaming the man. The Quantum Lens in its oldest robe: reality held in superposition until the waking observer collapses it.*

5. *Coleridge claimed to have composed Kubla Khan whole in an opium sleep, and lost the remainder to a knock at the door — the person from Porlock. The sleeping mind handing up finished work is not a metaphor I invented; it is on the record.*

6. *Jung called this the work of individuation — the long movement toward the Self, in which the ego is decentered rather than destroyed. It is the same vocabulary I reach for when I name the shadow work; the dream is where the unconscious does its first drafting.*

IV

That sounds pretty good, doesn't it?

I think so, and to be honest, there's nothing wrong with dreaming.

But there's a lot to be said about sleep in general.

When you're tired, rest. Don't justify it to the people around you if you can avoid it (don't fall asleep at work, for instance — but some shadow work needs to be done in your off time to resolve that concern).

Rest because you need to rest. Until a human is able to efficiently separate mind and body during their sleep cycle, it's going to be hard to distinguish between the two.

But the signal is clear: you're tired, recharge.

Dream.

Dream a little dream, that is one step away from reality, a constant collapse of realities inside your head.

Take note.

This is your brain telling you what you need to do in a language it doesn't understand.

It might be a past trauma you need to release.

It might be an anxiety about something coming up in your future — also something worthy of dismissal.

But pay attention to the funny dreams.

The ones where your cat is a Nihilist with an internal dialogue about scratching at the bounds of its own existence (your back door) — angry

that its ancestors were worshipped by the gods, while it is forced to pee in a box in the laundry room.

I told you once my cat was one of my biggest muses. This fiction book is in the oven, and soon to come.

Pay attention to those dreams when you rest.

In the words of Tolkien, again: we create because we were created.⁷

Let your brain do its magic.

⁷ Tolkien's line is from *Mythopoeia*: we make still by the law in which we're made. We sub-create, he argued, because we are ourselves sub-created — the creative act is inheritance, not invention from nothing.

V

For me, tonight, I've a lot to do the next few days. This might inhibit my ability to write — we'll see.

Tonight, I need rest.

Both kinds.

Never doubt yourself when you're tired.

It's only your brain and body getting you ready for what's next.

*Dream a little dream — one step away from reality.*⁸

⁸. Keats ends the *Ode to a Nightingale* on the same uncertainty — Was it a vision, or a waking dream? The boundary I keep pointing at is the one his last lines refuse to settle.

✦ ON — — ING ✦

On Dreaming is an ongoing entry in the *On — — ing* series.

Set in Fraunces, EB Garamond, and Cinzel. Nightfall palette over warm bone.

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