

Using Dreamwork to Solve Problems and Relieve Sleep Apnea

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With age, the rate of change in the dynamics of the mind-body axis can often challenge the pursuit of longevity through quality sleep. Self-programmed dreaming can create better sleep and help overcome sleep apnea while simultaneously finding solutions not achieved during waking hours. How can this happen?

Humans can “train” their dreaming by intentionally trying to dream about a particular problem. Surprised? This is called dream incubation and can increase the chance that a solution to a current problem will occur. Dreams are simply thought occurring in a different biochemical state while one sleeps. They occur during the REM cycles of sleep. The enhanced brain exercise, due to self-programmed dreaming and longer REM or Rapid Eye Movement cycles, disinhibits the brain areas which restrict our thinking to the logical and familiar while focusing on all the same issues that concern us while we are awake. The final phase of the complete sleep cycle, REM or Rapid Eye Movement, typically occurs about 90 minutes after falling asleep. With the several complete sleep cycles each night, an average adult has 5 - 6 REM phases or experiences each night. Often the first REM cycle lasts about ten minutes with each later REM cycle lasting longer. The final REM cycle of the night can last for as long as an hour.

During REM sleep the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, associated with perceptions of volition, is less active than parts of the brain associated with perceptions of visual images, movement and emotions. When we go to sleep the brain activity greatly increases and becomes very neuron-active. One third of each lifetime is spent sleeping with one third of the time doing dreamwork. While one sleeps, dreamwork allows the language of the night to be decoded and reveals the information to the individual upon waking in a conscious and fresh mind state. It is a well-known and amazing experience.

Dream incubation was actually an ancient Greek practice at the temples of Asclepius by individuals attempting dreams that would tell them how to cure their malady. Here in Western psychology, these are the steps to harness our dreams and establish the incubation routine:

1. During the day write down your problem as a brief phrase or sentence and place the note on your bed stand. Also keep and pen and paper available.
2. Review the problem before going to bed.
3. While in bed visualize the problem as a solid image if possible.
4. While drifting off to sleep, tell yourself you want to dream about the problem.
5. Envision yourself dreaming about the problem.
6. When awakening, quietly lie in bed before getting out of bed.
7. Note whether you can recall any part of the dream and invite more of the dream to return. Write it down the results.

In many situations, as reported in the *Journal of Sleep Research*, eight out of ten people have had what is known as a “lucid dream”. These individuals were conscious while sleeping of their dreaming in at least one situation and “view” their participation in the dream. Some individuals who practice selected techniques are able to have one or two lucid dreams a week. During lucid dreams, parts of the brain tend to work together more intensely than in other dream phases. Researchers who have measured the brain waves of lucid dreamers have gained a better understanding of the neural processes underlying this state of consciousness that exists between sleep and waking. This is the lucid dream “zone”.

Lucid dreams cannot be induced at will but the frequency can be increased. Individuals who use regularly the practice techniques described below are able to have one or two lucid dreams a week.

1. During the daytime hours, ask yourself repeatedly if you are awake. Repetition of this habit, when asking this question in a dream, increases the chances of dreaming.
2. Make a regular “reality check” by looking in a mirror or rereading important text often while awake during the day. In dreams our appearance is often altered and the written word is hard to discover. Carrying these dream signs into sleep may alert you to the fact you are actually dreaming while you are “asleep”.
3. Always write down the dreams you remember immediately upon awaking. This “dream journal” keeps one more aware of dreams in general and improves chances to have a lucid dream.
4. Focus very intently on the fantasy you wish to experience in the lucid dream prior to falling asleep. This incubation is known to dramatically increase the chances you will dream about it... and suddenly realize that you are in the dream!

These dream incubation techniques are being investigated worldwide by researchers to confirm it can also lead to enhanced cognitive functioning and reduction of sleep apnea. For example a recent study by the Australian company, SomneMed (located in Sydney), has found that 71.4% of people without sleep apnea remember their dreams. In contrast, 43.2% of sleep apnea patients remember their dreams. Using a dream incubation technique and the resulting improved dream recollection is seen as a marker for the improvement of sleep apnea reduction.

Successful use of these techniques is strongly influenced as a result of life cycle nutrition and perpetuation of fertile brain creativity through brain exercise.

Spoken in lay terms: Eat correctly and constantly exercise the brain with new thoughts!

For those interested in dreamwork and its impact on unleashing the creative mind, please investigate various of the references listed below [1-10].

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