

The wonder of sleep - Tehran Times

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Most of us learned about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in the 7th or 8th grade. You remember seeing the pyramid that starts with the most basic physical needs and progresses on to love/belonging, esteem and finally self-actualization. When we think of basic physical needs we usually think of breathing, food, water and shelter but we rarely give thought to the requirement of adequate sleep. The concept of sleep has fascinated me for a long time. It is a subject near and dear to my heart and is something I love to do. It is a subject with which we are all intimately acquainted yet, to this day, it is still not completely understood by scientists. Let's review the basics. Webster's Dictionary defines sleep as: "The natural periodic suspension of consciousness during which bodily powers are restored." Wikipedia states sleep is, "The recurring state of relatively suspended sensory and motor activity with total or partial unconsciousness and inactivity of nearly all voluntary muscles." OK, we know what it is but what does it accomplish? Why is it a vital necessity of life, included on Maslow's list of basic physical needs? Sleep is controlled by our internal Circadian "clock" or cycle and is regulated by the neurotransmitter adenosine. This chemical gradually builds up in our brains throughout the day and when the levels are high enough, it induces sleep. The average need for adults is 7 to 8 hours per day and is regulated genetically. Those with a mutation on a particular gene typically sleep 2 hours less than normal. That certainly does not apply to me! But I digress. Sleep aids in wound healing, boosts immune function, helps in cellular regeneration, allows for growth and rejuvenation of the nervous, skeletal and muscular systems. It also consolidates and organizes the brain's neural connections formed during learning and daily experiences. Those deprived of sleep for as little as 24 hours begin to suffer irritability, cognitive impairments, memory lapses, impaired moral judgment and decreased reaction time and accuracy.

Further deprivation can even lead to increased heart rate variability, tremors, aches, impaired immune system, hallucinations and even a higher risk of Type 2 diabetes.

Studies have shown that rats kept awake develop skin lesions, loss of body mass, hypothermia and eventually fatal blood poisoning. Poor things!

However, I'd like to explore the spiritual side of this. It seems to me that, among other things, God made us with the desperate need for sleep to show us how weak we humans really are. After all, on average, people spend approximately 1/3 of their lives in an unconscious state! We run around on this earth thinking our thoughts and plans are so important; that we are in control of our lives and destinies.

Even world leaders, with their pomp and ceremonies strut around in front of their people, meeting in summit talks with other rulers, all vying for domination.

You see, God has no need for sleep. He is in total control of all that is happening on earth, down to knowing each of our thoughts and motivations.

It is so comforting to know the One who created me constantly has His eye on me and never needs to take a break.

I'll never have to leave a message or have Him paged when I need Him. He's always available and I have His full attention when I talk to Him. Nothing slips by Him.

So when you see egomaniacal world leaders and hear their threats of nuclear attack and terrorism; when you worry about the decline of America in the eyes of the world and the moral corruption of society in general remember the real power lies with an Almighty God who needs no rest.

Frail humanity however, no matter how big or small our station in life, must put on our jammies every night and succumb to the overwhelming demand of our weakness. Blessed, humbling sleep.

Experts say the Mighty and Kind God expresses one's sleep as the means of health and internal calmness in the Holy Quran. If one follows His instructions will certainly have a happier and longer life.

(Source: EzineArticles)