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Season of Dreams

I'm amazed by one-way thinking. A holistic article tells us, "Dreaming of seasons symbolizes the division of life in phases." In contrast, a reductive article says, "changes in light-dark cycles affect your body release of melatonin, making you feel tired earlier or later than usual." Why not state the obvious combined truth?

Living systems, like us, engage our environment. We interact, express, modulate, and are modulated by our environment. Dreams don't just symbolize divisions -- divisions create dream symbols. Light-dark cycles don't just affect melatonin -- our control of melatonin affects our relation to light-dark cycles. We are not just "subject to" or "creatively imagining"; we do both. Their combination is how we control our world.

Dream of Seasons

The acronym for Seasonal Affective Disorder, SAD, reinforces two falsehoods: that the symptoms are related to being sad and, by inference, it's a winter phenomena. Latest research [1] indicates SAD should be renamed CID: City

Affective Disorder. The symptoms are mood and season related, predominant in city dwellers, and are year-round. They're also closely associated with sleep cycles.



Chronos is Ancient Greek for what we know as time. Strange to say, the Greeks had a more sophisticated view than we do; more on that later. Chronotype distinguishes people of natural proclivity or propensity -- a distinction we tellingly fail to make -- for early-morning or late-night activity. Teenagers are famous evening chronotypes, but so are city dwellers. About half the population are either early-morning or late-night chronotypes.

You may think your wakefulness cycle is a matter of preference, but preference is affected by and, in turn, affects biology. Problems occur when one chronotype dictates the schedule of another. Adults set the work schedule, forcing teenagers onto an early cycle. The result of this incommensurability is considered an irritation, but is actually a health and education disaster.

Symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder	
	
Winter SAD	Summer SAD
Overeating	Loss of appetite
Unexplained weight gain	Unexplained weight loss
Sleeping more than usual	Insomnia
Depression	Irritability

I am mixing seasonal and daily clock issues because they are related. The evening chronotype is dark-active, and dark predominates in winter. The opposite occurs for morning and summer. Let's carry this forward to dreaming and, for whimsy, let's throw in some conjecture.

Hibernation

Some animals hibernate and some, such as bears, almost hibernate. Hibernation evolved from sleeping. Understanding hibernation shows the metabolic connection between sleep and survival as the whole metabolism slows: digestion, movement, circulation, cellular processes, and thought. If you broaden the notion of hibernating to include the almost-hibernators, then mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects, and even plants do it. But we don't do it.

Or do we? What if humans do have a seasonal torpor, like every other living system, but which our mechanized and electrified industrial world does not reflect, or respect. What conflict would result? Seasonal affective disorder.



Maybe it's not a disorder; maybe it's a natural sensitivity to the unyielding schedule of industry. Like ADHD, which I've written about [in the Journal of Mind and Behavior](#), perhaps SAD makes a pathology out of being human: a condition that arises when our metabolism, productivity, and perspective change, but our business obligations don't. My suggestion that Seasonal Affective Disorder is the result of heightened sensitivity to an assaulting environment is not contradicted by the research which, incidentally, only created this label in the 1980s.

**Maybe SAD sufferers don't need a light box.
Maybe they need a good vacation.**

There is a third element at play here: genetics. Last year's Nobel Prize in physiology went to a few principal investigators in a 50-year, multi-hundred scientist search for the genetic basis of time rhythms in living systems. The prize winners were humble enough to admit they were not the primary movers in this work.

The seminal work for the prize was done by R.J. Konopka, who was largely overlooked, undervalued, twice denied tenure, and who eventually left the field

and died a few years ago. Such stories fuel my ambivalence about the scientific enterprise!



This work ultimately showed diurnal cycles correlate with protein metabolism, the production of which is genetic. But beyond that, the protein cycles also trigger the genetics, so that there is a feedback mechanism that allows for variation and accommodation. The work was done with fruit flies. Similar work has emerged pertaining to mice and, surprisingly, the mechanisms involved are much the same despite the independent genetics of these species.

There are many temporally cycling behaviors, and genetic mechanisms are not straight forward. It is conjectured, but far from demonstrated, that these diurnal genetics relate to, or are relatives of, other temporally cycling behaviors. Who but a geneticist would question whether hibernation is genetic?

Actually, it's not quite so obvious. There is quite a bit of "wobble room" for these behaviors to be environmentally triggered and learning-enhanced. This is important because we have some control over our own cycles. Learning to interact with your dreams is one of these control mechanisms.

Dreams

[Aunty Flo tells us:](#)

"Spring in a dream omens good business, major possibilities, and nostalgia. To dream that it is spring and the trees are blooming means you will be lucky in love and in business."



“Dreaming of summer portends abundance and a future filled with realizations. Seeing white summer clouds foretells advancement at work.

“Autumn in a dream predicts spiritual turmoil. If you dream that trees have colorful dry leaves like in the fall, you will receive an unexpected gift from someone you are not too close to.

“Winter in one's dream predicts happiness and joy. If you dream that snow covers the ground, this portends prosperity. However, a winter landscape is a negative sign. A winter with heavy snow means good fruits, or financial and material success. A winter rich in snow in your dream foretells a rich and fertile year.”

Before you dismiss Aunty Flo for her “tea leaf reading, magick, face reading, astrology, and psychic information,” recognize these ideas in literature, religion, culture, and commerce. Resonant ideas resound, and to resound is to confirm, perhaps not scientifically, but often sufficiently for their survival as thought forms.

If you could communicate with your dreams, which is to say communicate with your subconscious through dreams -- which you can do, by the way -- then you might find seasonal changes in your perspectives on living, and on life reflected in the content of your dreams.

I must step back for a moment to the issue of awareness. We are not necessarily aware of the underlying currents of feeling, emotion, and inclination that support our thoughts. Our lack of awareness of what motivates us, what determines our choices, is referred to as “free will.” Once you know these reasons, and your feelings about consequences, your will is not so free.

Just because we are generally unaware of how our dreams express and shape our feelings, does not mean our feelings are not being shaped by our dreams. We spend 20% of our night



dreaming active, visual, emotionally meaningful dreams, but consciously recall almost none of it. It seems fair to say that dreams sharpen our focus and impact the emotional landscape for the day ahead.

In my experience, dreams are remembered when there is an important connection to be made between subconscious and conscious life. Such an important decision happened to me a few days ago. In my dream I encountered characters offering me costume jewelry. The message was two fold: beware of presentations, and it is up to me to judge value. This message was twice removed from language. It was just feeling, without dialog or story.

The Environment

Don't overlook the physics. Action and imagination create a feedback system, but so does our perception and environment. Let's consider some of the basic environmental influences on mood, health, and sleep.

Winter or summer, you spend little time outdoors, though some people are exceptions. Great apes live outdoors as humans did historically, but modern humans are a cave-dwelling species. You will find you sleep much better breathing dust-free, moving, fresh air.

Weather has many faces, from temperature to time of day. Changes in weather are disruptive, so change your exposure to it. People say, "There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes," yet the dictates of fashion often overrule. If you dress more for appearance than comfort, ask yourself which has a greater effect? Sadly, self-image is the usual answer. "Where's the man who can ease a heart like a satin gown?" Dorothy Parker once asked. He's the guy holding the winter coat.

All of our pituitary hormones are modulated by the diurnal cycle. Sunlight is our main source of vitamin D, involved in bone, muscle, neurotransmitter production. Rosie Osmun, [blogging for the mattress company Amerisleep](#),

encourages you to expose a fraction of your skin to 15 minutes of sunlight a day:

“People with fair skin need nine minutes, medium skin 16 minutes, and dark skin 38 minutes to absorb 2000 IU of vitamin D with 25 percent of skin exposed. If you can’t get outside regularly, than work near a window. In one study, office workers who sat near windows ... slept better than those who didn’t have windows nearby.”

Stimulants in analgesic, allergy, and cold medicines, as well as other chemicals in other medicines, disrupt your diurnal cycle and, consequently, your sleep. Be selective about the chemicals in your foods and medicines.

Kairos

Kairos is Ancient Greek for the right and critical moment. This complements chronos, the measure of moments passing. Is it our obsession with metric over merit, measure over rightness, that leads us to see the world in terms of chronotypes instead of kairotypes?

Why do we assume that being depressed is your fault, rather than being due to your situation? Why do we assume a childhood lack of attention to the boring, generally diagnosed as ADHD, is a defect of children? That fallacy, at least, is being exposed.



The methods of science are misunderstood. Many people justify their failure to act righteously as a laudable deference to reason. This same lack of humanity appears in science, as an expedient for data collection, but this is not intrinsic to endeavor.

Weak science values quantity over quality, whereas the underlying purpose of science is to quantify quality, that is, to measure what matters. I made this point

in a presentation at MIT some years ago titled "Sorcery for Scientists," which [you can read here](#).

A scientist without a moral compass is a psychopath, a condition whose defining signature is hyper-rationality without empathy. Psychopaths are most efficient engineers, and they're four times more common among executives than the general population. The tyranny of reason generates psychopathology. Resist it.

Have I gotten off track? No. I'm tracking toward emotion, and I'm arguing connection with our subconscious is essential. I'm arguing that disconnection with our subconscious underlies antisocial behavior, psychopathology, and depression.

Getting in touch with your dreams is essential, though consciously it may be unnecessary. It's nice to know why you're feeling well-adjusted -- it helps you help others -- but it's not necessary. Connection with your subconscious may be subliminal, an influence you can't put into words.

What is necessary is that you respect yourself, your inclinations, and your intuition as the graces that guide you. Perhaps you'll be rewarded with insight, and from this an epiphany. Or maybe you'll just do right by you, because in your dreams, which you don't remember, memories have been consolidated in a fashion consonant with your personal, biological, and social needs.



[1] Sandman, Merikanto, Määttänen, et al. (2016). "[Winter is coming: nightmares and sleep problems during seasonal affective disorder](#)." *Journal of Sleep Research*, v25 (5), 612-619.

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