

SPIRIT, MIND & BODY

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Illuminating What's Beneath the Surface

I write this on the eve of a full moon. I sit on my balcony and watch the beautiful orange ball rise slowly in the Eastern sky. As the night darkens, the rich orange turns yellow and the moon's elusive presence casts night shadows on what is ordinarily a dense black slate. Its glow makes visible an existence that is easily and readily forgotten. In other words, it illuminates the things that go bump in the night.

Having this temporary gift of night vision makes me question our beliefs about that which we cannot see. If we can't see it, it doesn't really exist. Right? On most nights we close our doors, turn on interior lights and pretend the sun has never left. We often give little thought to the growth and life that goes on beneath the surface or beyond that which requires our immediate attention. But then another month passes and the moon beckons us once again to explore a world beyond our awareness both inside and outside of ourselves.

One example of our lack of understanding about what we cannot see is our perception of sleep. Most of us think sleep is about shutting down or shutting off, like parking the car in the garage and turning off the engine. We have an idea that everything "stops" or slows down to a state of hibernation until the sun comes up in the morning,

triggering a chemical reaction in our brain, signaling our bodies activity to begin. Some cultures even believe that sleep is a "mini-death", or that the soul leaves the body as we sleep and returns to the body when we awake.

These ideas about sleep couldn't be farther from the truth. During our sleep, the brain releases new combinations of hormones -- chemical messengers that stimulate cellular activity throughout the body. This cellular activity restores and repairs the waking day's toil and, at times, the sleeping brain appears to be more active than it is when we're awake. When dreaming, the mind takes on a different consciousness. It inhabits a new world that is as real as the world it experiences during its waking state.

What is most fascinating about sleep is that we never know we're sleeping while we are asleep. We may have a memory of our awakening or perhaps a slice of a dream, but while we are sleeping we are unaware of what's actually taking place.

We spend a third of our life sleeping and have no recollection of actually doing so. We spend much of our sleep dreaming and experiencing another reality -- one that reflects and parallels our waking reality. I sometimes wonder which reality is more connected to the truth.

When I realize how

unaware we are of the activity taking place during our sleeping state, I question how aware we are of the activity taking place during our waking state.

What miracles are taking place in our bodies as we breathe, digest food, or assimilate energy? How do our brains and bodies process the daily onslaught of new information we encounter? What messages does our brain send us? Must we act on these messages? What if we disagree? What is the part of us that is disagreeing? What impulse drives us to the water fountain, Starbucks or Mrs. Fields Cookies? What keeps us from going there if we don't? What drives our decisions about the opposite sex? What makes our favorite restaurants our favorites? What prevents us from

breaking our appointment at the gym?

More than a thousand decisions are made everyday, with little thought as to whose driving the "bus" or to where the bus is actually going. Imagine that process in millions of other human beings and some of the chaos in the world begins to make sense.

What if you could turn on a light and see yourself and the world around you a little more clearly? What if you actually understood where you were going and why? What if you actually had a purpose? What if you took the time to know yourself so well that decision-making became intentional?

A full moon is an auspicious time to probe beneath the surface because it sheds light on an otherwise myste-

rious nightlife, enhances our intuitive powers and makes available our deeper, often hidden, selves. A full moon is not required to begin the process of self-awareness and discovery, though. So you don't have to wait until next month. You could begin now and turn on your own internal light. You could take the time to try to understand and illuminate what is lying beneath the surface, and see if it doesn't make your world more rewarding.

"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious."

---Carl Jung

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