

Healing
NIGHT



the SCIENCE *and* SPIRIT
of Sleeping, Dreaming, and Awakening

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of Sleeping, Dreaming, and Awakening

RUBIN R. NAIMAN, Ph.D.

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To my mother and father ~

MOLLIE AND CHARLES NAIMAN

You, darkness, of whom I am born—

*I love you more than the flame
that limits the world
to the circle it illumines
and excludes all the rest.*

*But the dark embraces everything:
shapes and shadows, creatures and me,
people, nations—just as they are.*

*It lets me imagine
a great presence stirring beside me.*

I believe in the night.

—RAINER MARIA RILKE



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Foreword

Hugh Prather

THROUGHOUT MANY YEARS OF COUNSELING OTHERS, I have been struck by how consistently we humans discount our darkness. In contrast, Dr. Rubin Naiman fully acknowledges the importance of darkness and loves the sacredness of night. He sees with uncanny clarity the function that falling asleep, deep sleep, dreaming, and awakening play in our relationships, our careers, the daily grind, and, above all, our spiritual growth.

My own appreciation of sleep began many years ago when I tried maintaining conscious awareness throughout the hypnagogic state, that period of mind-altering drowsiness preceding sleep. I eventually noted that there is a natural and rejuvenating relinquishment of the ego as we descend into deep sleep.

A few years later, I tried to more carefully observe the hypnopompic state—that half-conscious state that precedes complete awakening. These observations confirmed that the sleep-relinquished ego is then downloaded anew each morning. We are presented with a choice at this time either to continue operating on automatic pilot or to break with our past and plug into our deeper core. If we open to it, we are faced with the important question of what identity we will assume when we awaken.

Rubin Naiman and I have had many lunchtime discussions about phenomena such as these, and always I have come away from these conversations realizing that I have received more insight than I have given. His capacity to empathize and connect within his own

personal life adds a new dimension to his inspired theories. In contrast to traditional approaches to sleep, Naiman's work is based not only on clinical experience and scientific research but also on his personal explorations. As you wade into the mystical pool of sleep investigation, you will sense that this subject has been Naiman's passion for decades. This book is unquestionably a labor of love, and like love, it expands the mind as well as the heart.

Unlike the authors of most of the books and papers I have read about dreaming, Naiman does not traditionally analyze dream symbols. Rather, he uses the reader's personal narrative as a tool to unlock the mysteries of dreams and dreaming. Instead of asking what does the dream tell us about our life, he poses this startling question: "If our life were already a dream, what does dreaming tell us about who we are?"

Perhaps the greatest benefit this book bestows is a fuller understanding of the sacredness of the dark side of day and the importance of the shadow side of human nature. Naiman brilliantly uses circadian rhythms—the play of darkness and light—as symbol and even synonym for our higher and lower selves. *Healing Night* is a book of enlightenment that not only inspires and informs but also provides effective means for our own transformations. The reader feels respected and cared for within the covers of this book. I give you this promise. After reading this book, you will not be the same person you were.



Preface

IN RECENT DECADES, sleep disorders have emerged as the most prevalent health concern in the industrialized world, affecting not only our health, welfare, and safety but also our very consciousness. Although important strides are being made in understanding sleep from a scientific and medical standpoint, we have failed to acknowledge the broader environmental and psychospiritual context of our sleep. We have failed to acknowledge night.

Our approach to sleep medicine, which is born of modern culture, is severely constrained by its mechanical presumptions. We see ourselves as machines. Consequently, the solutions we seek for our damaged sleep are naïve and overly mechanistic, primarily involving chemical switching mechanisms. Getting to sleep is about switching off, and waking up is about switching back on. As a result, we have come to depend excessively on sleep medications, alcohol, and substances to buffer our encounter with night—and on caffeine, sugar, adrenaline, and “waking pills” to maintain a steady charge throughout the day.

Healing Night is about restoring a sense of sacredness to our nights and night consciousness. To do so, we must reconsider our contemporary, limited conception of sleep, which has been stripped of its natural and spiritual context. When we speak of sleep, we must recognize that we cannot reasonably segregate it from dreaming and awakening. The rhythmic flow of sleep, dreams, and awakening must, furthermore, be considered in its natural context of night—of dusk, darkness, and dawn. Only such an inclusive

perspective of night consciousness will allow us to transcend the constraints of our overly mechanistic view and open the way to a more meaningful, effective, and personally enriching approach to night.

The official emblem of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, the foremost professional sleep organization in the United States, is a modified Taoist yin-yang symbol. It serves as an apt representation of the central role of rhythms—of the pulse of night and day, of darkness and light—in understanding sleep. Reminding us also of the essential unity behind duality, above all, the yin-yang serves as a universal symbol of spirituality. Ironically, sleep medicine makes absolutely no allowance for the spiritual dimensions of night, sleep, or dreams.

Night is home to a delicate spirituality. Its sleep and dreams cannot be reduced to squiggly EEG tracings and the complex cascade of bodily humors. As we will see, there is a lovely, sacred, and mythic dimension to our night consciousness. Our challenge is to appreciate the mechanisms of sleep, dreams, and awakening without sacrificing their essential spiritual qualities. Reconsidering night in this way calls upon us to reevaluate and redefine what we deem “normal” in sleep, dreams, and waking.

Healing Night offers a new way of looking at sleeping, dreaming, and awakening that tempers scientific knowledge with spiritual sensitivity. Although the book draws heavily on empirical knowledge and clinical experience, it does not sacrifice what is deeply subjective and mystical. In contrast to the sterile, overly clinical approach of contemporary sleep medicine, *Healing Night* provides a much-needed alternative that is both integrative and personal. It is written for anyone interested in night consciousness, including people concerned with sleep problems. Toward this end, most chapters finish with suggestions for practices to help heal sleep disturbances.

But *Healing Night* does not offer yet another shortsighted, quick mechanical fix. Simplistic laundry lists of suggestions for improving one’s sleep abound. At best, these offer stopgap measures. At worst, they can damage our sleep and dreams by misleading us into relat-

ing to night in the same way we manage day, distracting us from the deeper, nonordinary world of night consciousness.

By reconsidering sleeping, dreaming, and awakening in their natural home of night, *Healing Night* explores darkness itself as a potent sleep medicine. And it encourages us to reexamine and heal our deeply denied yet very palpable fear of the dark.

Healing Night, as we shall see, is also about healing our days. If we allow ourselves an honest and sober encounter with darkness, we will begin to see sleeping, dreaming, and waking in a whole new way. In fact, we could begin to see in whole a new way.

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