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Daybreak

A Brief History of Waking Up

(Original German title: In den Tag. Eine kurze Geschichte des Aufwachens)

166 pages, Hardcover

Publication date: 18 February 2026

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pp. 7–19; 69–72

1. PAUL'S DREAM

Dolphins can be awake and asleep at the same time. They turn off one side of their brain, allowing that side to rest while the other side keeps them swimming. Eventually, the two sides switch roles. Human beings can't do this. When they sleep, they sleep. They wake up briefly – and then they go back to sleeping until they are no longer sleeping.

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Paul McCartney, 23 years old in May 1965, woke up one morning with a melody running through his head. He had spent the night at his girlfriend's place, an apartment under the roof on Wimpole Street in London. It seemed to him that he had dreamed the melody, and now that he was awake, it stayed with him. He got out of bed. There was a piano in the apartment. He sat

down at the piano and tried to create music out of the melody in his mind. He thought it was a great tune, but because he had dreamed it, he believed he hadn't invented it. He thought it was probably a song he had heard somewhere that had appeared in his dream.

Over the next few days, Paul tried to clarify things. He asked everyone around him whether they recognized the song. He sang it for them, coming up with a tentative lyric: "Scrambled eggs," he sang, "oh my baby, how I love your legs." Usually, people laughed when he sang those words because the melody didn't match; it's a sad song. Paul lost his mother to cancer early in life. He was fourteen, she was forty-seven, and that loss echoes in the finished song. But he kept asking people because his bandmate Ringo Starr had recently written a song, his best so far. Ringo had worked on it for three hours before realizing it was actually a hit song by Bob Dylan. He didn't want that to happen to him, Paul McCartney. People he asked about the song thought "Scrambled Eggs" was very nice, and they told him they were sure it was his. So, he stuck with it. And the song in his head became a global hit.

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A typical morning person wakes up differently than Paul the Beatle did. They open their eyes, maybe because a smartphone alarm rings, maybe because an old-fashioned alarm clock sounds, or maybe because someone who's already awake makes their presence known. Maybe they only wake up because they usually wake up at the same time or, ideally, because their homeostatic sleep drive–that's the technical term–has decreased enough for their brain to start the waking process on its own.

At some point, the person becomes aware that they are conscious—awake. From then on, unlike when they are sleeping, they can communicate clearly with others. The person gets up or stays in bed for a while before getting up, perhaps thinking that they have dreamed, and that, in

theory, they should be able to remember at least one dream. Often, they realize that they have forgotten everything they dreamed about.

To remember dreams more often, a person could write them in a dream journal right after waking up. Having a pencil and paper next to the bed would help, as would dedicating a few minutes to this task. Studies have shown that simply keeping such a journal increases the number of dreams a person recalls. Even writing down something like “I forgot all of my dreams” can make it more likely that they will remember their dreams. Groundbreaking ideas generated during sleep could be noted in the journal the next morning, like a pop classic, as happened to Paul McCartney. However, most people don’t have time for self-reflection early in the morning.

And it’s not just haste or stress that prevents impressively creative waking. A biological phenomenon called sleep inertia slows us down, although some people are more affected than others. “Waking up” means becoming conscious moment by moment but not being truly awake. The doctor Samuel Hahnemann noted this in 1803: People feel “An unpleasant sensation of inertness and awkwardness in the limbs...in the first moments or quarter-hour of being awake.”

Current research confirms these observations. A person who has just woken up has significantly lower cognitive ability than a person who has been awake longer. The sleepyhead reacts more slowly and seems confused. In sleep, their brain, like their entire body, is cooler than when they are awake; the temperature needed for normal thinking must be reached first. Additionally, the brain needs time to reconnect areas that were decoupled during sleep. Sleep inertia can dissipate quickly, as it apparently did for Paul McCartney, but it can also last a couple of hours. Generally, it lasts fifteen to thirty minutes.

A person who is waking up usually finds the first slow phase of the day unpleasant. Nevertheless, they must function: use the bathroom, groom themselves, shower, possibly cover

unpleasant odors with cosmetic products, and they may even come into contact with people who have also just woken up. Sleep inertia can negatively affect communication. Those who communicate with one another in the morning are not always aware of these communication difficulties. A person who is waking up will also try to get dressed and energize themselves in some way to be ready for work, school, or studies, or to be there for others. Or perhaps, from the moment they wake up, this person must organize a routine of grooming, getting dressed, and energizing not only themselves but also children or others who need help. None of this is easy.

People experience sleep inertia especially intensely if they haven't gotten enough sleep or if they wake up from deep sleep with an unusually low body temperature. Sleep inertia causes fewer problems if you've moved around a lot and didn't drink alcohol the day before. Somnolence is a deeper form of sleep inertia and often results from sleep disturbances or illnesses. But even regular sleep inertia, as common as it is, can cause issues. For example, a doctor who is awakened in the hospital and must operate immediately may not be fully alert.

Research indicates that the line between sleep and wakefulness is not as distinct as we often think. Elements of wakefulness seep into sleep, elements of sleep seep into wakefulness, and the very first moments of the morning—when we're getting up, heading to the bathroom, or making breakfast—are still nearly part of sleep. So, we should be glad that we can handle this at all. During this part of the day, you can hardly expect more of yourself.

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Humans, creatures so limited in the morning, nevertheless connect the time right after waking with high hopes. Throughout history and even today, many believe that the start of the day should be an especially productive period. They suggest that others accomplish something

immediately, early in the morning. People shouldn't just empty their bladders, make coffee, and get dressed quickly. They should do more, much more.

In the literary world, many such examples exist. Ernest Hemingway, admired by many young writers, said he preferred to write as early in the morning as possible because no one would bother him then. He could wake up, and his mind would start producing sentences that he needed to unload quickly.

For Hemingway, who was an old-school father, taking care of children was no obstacle to creative work. Toni Morrison, by contrast, had to write for years while her small children were asleep, so she started at five in the morning. But when her children were grown up and no longer needed her, she still wrote in the early hours of the morning. She got up before it was light, made herself coffee while it was still dark (for this was the way things had to be), drank the coffee, wrote, watched as it got light, and kept on writing. It was essential to get up as early as possible so she would be up before the light. It was the only way that Morrison could be creative.

Today, we face more demands early in the morning. Jamie Oliver, the chef and cookbook author, for example, is awakened at a quarter to five by his smartphone. He takes a half-hour bath with Johnson's Baby Bedtime Bath Wash. In the tub, he visualizes the day ahead, then goes for a jog or to the gym before starting his work. If you believe today's self-help books and social media accounts, the influencers and self-care experts, then we all can and should, regardless of whether we actually need to be creative in our work, do as Jamie Oliver does and get up as early as possible – or at least much earlier than most of us currently do.

During the time we gain from waking up early, these experts suggest we could focus on self-improvement activities such as keeping a dream journal, a gratitude journal, practicing yoga, weight training, or experimenting with conscious breathing. The range of morning routines is

broad. Perhaps people should take a walk right after waking up, as new studies show that awe-inspiring experiences, like watching the sunrise, benefit both mental and physical health. You could also use the extra time gained from waking up early to prepare and enjoy a particularly healthy breakfast. There are many opinions on what makes a nutritious breakfast; it's best to research these options beforehand.

All of this suggests that a decision is made shortly after you open your eyes: whether you want to be an inspirational, successful, healthy person—someone who starts the day energized, more creative, and goal-focused than your peers—or whether you'd prefer to stay in bed, doze off again, and have nothing to report about successful self-improvement.

However, this only *seems* like it's a new phenomenon. In the Middle Ages, there were people, ambitious monks, who wanted to be admired for their early waking and rising. With extremely disciplined morning routines, they demonstrated their exemplary lives, just as today's early birds do with their social media presence. But there are also sources from the Middle Ages that emphatically support staying in bed. Starting around the year 1200, poems critical of getting up portray lovers who were torn from their embraces by unbearable mornings and would, without question, have rather stayed in bed.

The controversies about the right time to start the day have grown more intense since then, especially in Western societies where self-discipline and enthusiasm for one's work count for a lot, as do freedom and self-determination. The crucial question is always how–and how fast–should a resting, passive, dreaming individual become a person who takes on social tasks? If people are generally undecided when they wake up about whether to give in to the pressure to accomplish something in the morning or resist it, then it's worthwhile to study the history of

waking up. Throughout history, people who start the day slowly, who don't wake up quickly, have been constantly challenged, examined, advised, and disciplined.

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Paul McCartney's special waking in May 1965 left behind "Scrambled eggs," and for a few weeks, it was no more than a strange idea. He took it on vacation in Portugal with Jane Asher, on the airplane to Lisbon. From the airport, they drove to Albufeira. Because the Beatles were already successful, neither he nor Jane had to drive to the Algarve. Someone else did that for them. Both of them could sleep. Jane did that, but Paul stayed awake. He kept thinking about the song from his dream. "Scrambled eggs." *Da-da da.*

Later, Ringo would say that he couldn't really play percussion for this song. George and John also said they couldn't contribute much to it. The song was more a Paul number than a Beatles number. *Da-da da*. Paul didn't take a guitar on vacation, but when they arrived in Albufeira, he borrowed one and kept working on the song. Later, someone suggested recording it with a string quartet, which Paul initially thought inappropriate. Then he realized that the strings could play slightly off-key "blue notes." That would work. *Da-da da*. "Suddenly." It would become a song about someone struggling to cope with today. Maybe it's also about sleep inertia, about experiences in the first minutes of waking when you're not yet half the person that you once were, and a shadow hangs over you. You don't believe in the day that has just begun, but you believe in "Yesterday."

2. ROOSTER AND ALARM CLOCK

People are sleeping on grass mats that are 12 inches thick, which makes them pretty comfortable. After waking up, these people refresh the mats. They burn them and build new beds, with a fresh mixture of grass, ashes, and parts of the camphor tree. They use ash and camphor because these substances repel insects. On days when the mats are not refreshed, some people remain seated on them and craft stone tools. Under these, the first documented beds, in a cave in the Lebombo Mountains in southern Africa, lie stone particles that other people, no longer from the Stone Age, will examine very closely two hundred thousand years later.

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In the Bronze Age, chickens were domesticated, and so were roosters, who crow at daybreak and wake people up. The practice of keeping these birds spread from Southeast Asia westward. In 3000 B.C.E, people kept hens and roosters in India; another fifteen hundred years later, an artistically talented person near the Tigris carved an ivory container that depicts a rooster, hens, and the radiant sun. The picture imbues the birds with a metaphysical significance associated with daybreak.

It's otherwise unclear what the rooster's crow is good for. It doesn't mark territory, and it has no function in the sexual relations of the rooster to the hens. When hens live without a rooster, the most dominant hen develops an especially colorful comb, and in some cases, she begins to crow. For some reason, people must have always preferred roosters that crowed all the time to their quieter cousins.

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Now, a time lapse: on to the philosopher Plato. In 400 B.C.E., Plato liked to get up early and wanted others to do the same. He said that sleeping people were not of any use. Resting too long was harmful. He didn't rely on roosters.

He ran an academy not far from the center of Athens, near the potters' quarter, Kerameikos. About twenty of his students lived on the academy grounds. The library had about forty workspaces. Tables were mounted on bases, and papyrus could be rolled out on them, so this was where people read.

To communicate as much knowledge as he could every day, Plato was motivated to build an alarm clock. It was a water clock like the ones developed by the Egyptians, but Plato's innovation was to add a whistle to this device. When a sufficient quantity of water dripped into a container filled with air, the air whistled through the pipes on which the device was mounted.

It must have been an impressively large water clock. The academy's students lived in different houses scattered around the grounds, and the whistling was supposed to wake all of them so that the academy's day could begin on time. It was essential to get up on time: the complicated lectures were held in the mornings, the less demanding ones in the evenings.

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3. TORN FROM SLEEP

At night, in a London hospital, young men jolt awake. During the day, they stutter, stammer, or remain silent. Some have twisted faces, some are blind, and some shake all over. Others cannot walk anymore, or can walk only on cramped, stiff legs. When nightmares wake them, they actually wake up; supposedly, they aren't dreaming anymore, but they can't escape the horror of their dreams. They continue to hallucinate even when they are awake.

These young men have returned from fighting in World War I. The doctors at the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic trace what they see in these patients to the fact to the fact that, as soldiers, they experienced explosions close-up: “shell shock.” However, the more these patients are examined, the clearer it becomes that the problem does not have organic causes. It doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with the detonations. For the first time, it became clear to doctors that war can make people mentally ill. The history of post-traumatic stress disorders begins with these examinations.

During World War I, the topic of “shell shock” became a typically modern debate. A medical phenomenon was discovered, discussed back and forth in politics and the media, and simplified further. There is suspicion that many soldiers were seeking a quick way out of returning to the war. Offhandedly, they would say to the doctors, “suffering from shell shock, sir,” when they were actually just afraid. That’s what we read nowadays. But there were also serious investigations, like those in the pages of the London *Times*. The newspaper described a soldier who is cut off from his “normal I,” who can hardly sleep and who, when he sleeps, has only nightmarish visions. A patient like this, writes the *Times*, moves through his life like a coach that has no driver.

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Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is about a constant inability to sleep, about finally maybe being able to sleep, about waking up. A kind of sleep, writes Proust, the most intensive, deepest of all, is "leaden sleep," and in it, he says, we human beings ourselves become lead figures. Our identity is lost. Only when you move for the first time in the morning, when you press the electric bell with which you call the servants (assuming one has servants), only then does your own reality come into focus again. You tell yourself that it must be ten o'clock and you ask Françoise to bring the coffee.

The narrator of this epic novel, also a Marcel, asks himself why, when we are awake, we always gravitate to our own selves again. When we open our eyes as if we had been torn from the deepest depths of the ocean, couldn't we then choose some reality from among various realities, just as we draw a card from the deck? We could, he says, take on any identity among the millions of others. Why are we drawn to the being that we were the day before? Marcel also explains that he has observed people waking up, noting their hair, throats, and cheeks; whether the individual was a woman or a man was unclear in the moment and not vital to him, because, for him, every fixed form of identity is insignificant in the first phase of the day. He praises the beauty of this indecision.

And experiencing his girlfriend, Albertine, as she wakes up: he really loves that. Imagining how she rises out of the depths of sleep, almost as if on the rungs of a ladder, how she becomes conscious, returns to life, to the day, how she orients herself in his bedroom, notices him, and then speaks her first words. Perhaps "my dear" or "my Marcel" or "my dear Marcel." How she, just waking up, puckers her lips. How she then kisses him.

However, Marcel is pathologically jealous. In particular, he wants to prevent Albertine from meeting women. He's sure that she is betraying him with women. In her kimono, thrown

over the chair, there could be letters that prove her betrayal, and while she is still sleeping, he goes to the chair, to the kimono, but keeps turning around to see whether she has woken up yet. Yes, he wants to search the kimono, but he doesn't. Yes, he loves looking at her when she's sleeping. Other people, he says, pay a lot of money for a hotel room to breathe sea air: he spends a lot of money on Albertine because he wants to feel her breath. Because, while she's sleeping, he holds his mouth to hers.

But things don't stop there. In somewhat vague language, Proust recounts how his protagonist climbs into bed with the sleeping Albertine and seems to gratify himself with her body without waking her; he comes to his "climax," as he writes, while she's asleep. As a result, he describes nothing less than a rape, and that fits in an unsavory way with Marcel's enthusiasm about the fact that through Albertine's waking up in his presence, he was able to take possession of her even more forcefully than he already had.