

Sleep, Death, Anesthesia and Coma

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Sleeping is considered as one of the most important physiological processes in human being and many studies have been conducted on this complicated and vital phenomenon. Any disorder in sleeping including the time of sleeping and its duration causes many physical and psychological problems (1).

Anesthesia is used in surgery. In many sources and old Iranian texts such as Shahnameh and some of the writings of Aviceenna (2, 3), Anesthesia has been referred to. However, during the last 200 years, it has turned into a distinctive field as anesthesiology. The process involved in anesthesia is, in fact, apparently similar to sleep, but it is basically different. In anesthesia, coma is induced medically (*pharmacological coma*), which is totally in conflict with sleep. As a matter of fact, some of the features of sleep such as waking up at a certain time by some people and dreaming, do not really exist in anesthesia. In contrast, some events such as being irresponsive to painful stimulants such as the surgical blade can be seen during anesthesia but not in the state of sleeping.

Can we consider them as the same?

Based on scientific evidence and biological findings, sleeping is different from anesthesia. Electroencephalographic waves or the EEG is different between these two states. In anesthesia, the waves have low frequency but are high in amplitude while in sleeping whether at the REM stage (fast eye movement during sleep) or at the non-REM stage (slow eye movement during sleep), the EEG has a very different pattern. In this regard, verse 42 of Chapter Zomar can be mentioned: “Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those who have not died, in their sleep. Then He retains those for whom He has ordained death and releases the others until a specified time. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect” (4). According to this verse, there is a particular trait associated with sleeping, which is called “Tawaffa”, which makes it different from any other state. Accordingly, based on evidence from the Quran, the results of studies pointing to the difference between sleeping and anesthesia can be confirmed (5).

Can we use some features of sleep in anesthesia instead of the current methods?

In some stories mentioned in the Quran, attention is drawn to very long sleeps. For example, in Chapter Kahf, some points and questions come to mind:

1) How did they sleep for 300 years on: “They remained in the Cave for three hundred years, and added nine more [to that number]” (6);

2) How did God put them to long sleep: “So we put them to sleep in the Cave for several years” (7);

3) How God prevented their cells from aging in this long time? They thought we had been asleep for only one day: “One of them said, ‘How long have you stayed [here]?’ They said, ‘We have stayed a day, or part of a day’” (8).

4) They turned left and right (during sleeping) so that their body would not be harmed: “We turn them to the right and to the left (9)”. What is interesting is that today, one of the important methods of preventing bedsores in ICU centers is to consistently turn the patients’ body to left and right.

As the Quran is beyond the sciences, we can hopefully find better methods for promoting the

current techniques of inducing anesthesia and discover similar methods if we ponder upon its verses. As in instance, preventing bed sore by consistently moving the patient to left and right has been developed and introduced only recently based on blood physiology in pressure points while in the Holy Quran, this issue and even the method of preventing bed sore has been clearly mentioned for more than 14 centuries.

On this basis, it seems that there is a need to carry out wide biological studies to examine and discover the secrets of sleeping in this regard to be scientifically used in inducing anesthesia and in similar cases such as discovering the anti-aging mechanisms during sleep.

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