

Perspective

The dead of night. All is calm, nothing stirs, aside from the occasional teaspoon. Peace reigns as blissful serenity descends upon the world. The infinite glow of starlight pierces through the blanket of nocturnal darkness. Only dreams invade the tranquillity.

Not quite.

Bats flutter, swoop and echo, echo. Cats prowl, misguided in their belief that their owners want 'gifts'. A Christmas list very rarely includes the entries, 'entrails of dead mouse,' or 'bird's wing.' But bless 'em for trying. Night-workers earn their corn, battling against their natural instincts to sleep. The moon shimmers in the night sky, overlooking the Earth like a silent sentinel guarding all below. And then there's the silent few...

Tiredness hides like a scurrying mouse escaping from a hunting owl. The avian foe circles above, stalking, hunting, never retreating. It won't rest. Oh, the irony.

The mind won't cease, it just will not flick the off switch. Nothing will stem the tide of thoughts racing through the mind. There are a veritable torrent of feelings, worries, reflections, ideas and even, regrets.

Count sheep? By the time the third sheep is mid-leap over the farmer's gate, the mind has moved on to pastures new. That sheep never quite made the landing, destined to perpetually hover over the gateway. Until the next night. Maybe.

Baa!

It feels like madness. Sleep had been so easily attainable for thousands of nights, with only the odd exception. The circling owl won't win the battle, it can't. Falling into deep slumber had once been a pastime, one of life's joys. And there had never been any difficulty keeping that feathery little blighter at arm's length. Until...

With one swift blow to the head, one burst vessel, one roaming virus, the reliance on sleep takes on a new and altogether far more frustrating form. What was once a way of life, taken for granted in a similar vein to, well, breathing, can now be unattainable. The brain fights the urge to rest, to sleep. And it fights hard, like a punch drunk boxer trying to stay on his feet. Suddenly, from nowhere the need for sleep is overtaken by far more important things in life, such as,

'Did I lock the door?'

'Why are Ant and Dec STILL so bleeding popular?'

'Have I got any clean pants?'

'What is that noise?'

And still, the sheep hovers over the gate, a woolly testament to the inability to sleep like a baby. Small, inconsequential factors become all-encompassing in the mind. Any attempts to succumb to the joys of sleep are resisted. Meanwhile the importance of pondering why you don't seem to be able to recall whether or not you actually went to the toilet when you thought you had wholly takes over the thought processes. It becomes endless, nothing else matters. The need to unravel the seemingly unimportant is overwhelming.

Baa!

The insignificant becomes of such great magnitude that every detail is picked over like a ravenous vulture picking at a fresh corpse. More than once. Or twice. It's endless. However, there's the other side of the thought processing coin. The flip side, the newest additions to life, the superfluties that were never supposed to be a part of life; let alone nailed on, set in stone facts.

'Why is this headache starting to feel like my head is going to explode?'

When am I next seeing a doctor?'

'Have I taken my medication?'

'Why has my circle of friends shrunk by 90%?'

'I want to stay in this bed for a week'.

'When did life become such a bloody chore?'

Is it any wonder that sleep is virtually unachievable? You know it's going to be a long night when the mind is incapable of successfully knowing the difference in importance twixt,

'My head is sore, I can't see' and...

'Will Gary Lineker ever stop flogging Walker's crisps?'

Totally unrelated and yet the mind is consumed by the 'importance' it places upon them.

Baa!

And finally, last but not least, there is the gateway. Aah, the gateway. The sheep still hovers above it, an entire flock of his friends waiting behind in one long woolly queue. There are rams and ewes everywhere. As the mind battles with thoughts of varying degrees of importance and lunacy, sleep still evades. And there are moments, brief fleeting moments, nanoseconds of hopelessness. There is no explanation, no rhyme nor reason for the sporadic flashes of irrationality. Once in the bluest of blue moons, as the moment of unconsciousness approaches, the mind suddenly becomes more aware, more perceptive than it has ever been. Sleep is but a moment away, but this time it is so very different. Tiredness joins forces with the myriad of utterly meaningless drivel that conspires to keep the sheep at bay. Watching on the side-lines are the conditions, the ailments that collude in order to make alertness your worst nightmare. And then, it happens...

At last, the frustration runs off into the distance, focus and attention decide the time is right to take a well-earned break. The mind is empty, ready to switch off and rest in preparation for the same old slog the following night. But watching, waiting, one last surprise. The owl is still circling above, the sheep remains perpetually hovering, destined never to land. Then, nothing short of a lightning bolt...

A blinding flash of light, a moment of perception so clear and so vivid in its reality. After so many hours of wallowing in a gloomy mire of drivel, the clarity is stunning. The only other time or times you have experienced anything similar is in the seconds before epilepsy drags you away to painful unconsciousness. If you drift away to sleep, there is suddenly no doubt at all that if and when that blissful moment arrives, there will be no turning back. It is finality in the most definite way. You are certain, 100% sure that this time, you will not wake. You will cease to function. Death is the ultimate cure, the infinite sleep. And do you know what?

You accept it and you really don't care. The owl will forget about its prey and at long last, that damned sheep will land. What will be will be. Goodnight world. Will it be the same tomorrow night? Will there even be a tomorrow night? It is no longer an issue, the lines are blurred to such an extent that you accept whatever comes next. Who knows what that will be? Not you, but you no longer mind.

Baa!