

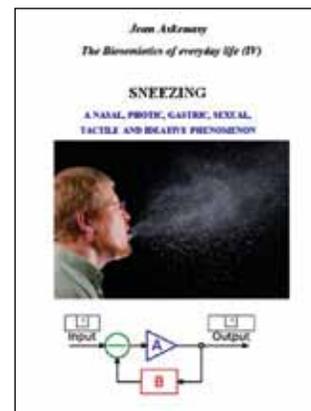
BOOK REVIEW

Sneezing A nasal, photic, gastric, sexual, tactile and ideative phenomenon

by Jean Askenasy

169 pages

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Professor Jean Askenasy's book *"Sneezing: a Nasal, Photic, Gastric, Sexual, Tactile and Ideative Phenomenon"* appeared this year at the "Viata Medicala Romaneasca" Publishing House.

Dr. Jean Askenasy is a professor of neurology at the Sackler Faculty of Medicine of the Tel-Aviv University and associate professor at the University "Pierre et Marie Curie" in Paris.

Since 2003, when he was awarded the diploma "The Academic Merit" by the Romanian Academy, Prof. Dr. Jean Askenasy is also an honorary member of the Romanian Academy of Medical Sciences and, at the same time, an honorary member of the French Society of Neurology, constituent member of the Israeli Society of Forensic Medicine, president of the Society of Sleep Medicine in Israel and vice-president of the Asian Society of Sleep Research.

Prof. Dr. Jean Askenasy has published 15 books and 132 scientific papers in the neurology and sleep domains, in internationally renowned magazines.

The book "Sneezing: a Nasal, Photic, Gastric, Sexual, Tactile and Ideative Phenomenon" is the third volume of the series of biosemiotics of everyday life entitled "Principles of Existential Medicine: the Semiotics of Ordinary Life", a series dedicated to sleep, smile, crying, laughter, yawning, sighing and sneezing.

Throughout the 163 pages, the author provides a detailed description of this phenomenon, starting from the most common definitions used in the literature to pathological sneezing, trying to unravel the mechanisms that determine sneezing, which can be caused by various nasal, tactile or bright stimuli, by a full stomach, sex or sexual ideation.

In the introduction, we find that the word sneezing derives from the Latin "sternutatio" or "the sternutatory reflex", name inspired by the sternum, "a bone whose motion is very visible during the expiratory blast".

Over time, many definitions have been given to "this phenomenon, considered simple and taken for

granted, although the process is very complicated". "The common denominator is represented by the explosive release of air from the lungs".

From the very beginning, faith related to sneezing has been different in different cultures, being often seen as a combination of good and bad, a mixture of superstition and mysticism.

Therefore, "in Genesis, the patriarch Jacob considered sneezing a predictor of misfortune", but "in IV Kings 32-35, Shunamit's son, who gave the impression he had died, starts to sneeze seven times, then opens his eyes and awakes".

Thus, we learn that history is full of examples when sneezing has played an important role, most often being interpreted as a sign of good; hence the verbal reactions to sneezing, which are still preserved nowadays in the popular belief: "Cheers", "Be healthy", "God bless you".

In the chapter "Sneezing in Animals" we learn that sneezing has existed in animals for millions of years, researchers linking its appearance to the age of dinosaurs, while in human beings it existed since homo neandertalis. It seems that almost all animals sneeze, especially the small-sized ones, sneezing being mostly related to the presence of infections, allergy or humidity.

The chapter "Nasal Sneezing" outlines the details of anatomy and physiology of the nose, as well as the pathways of transmission of nerve impulses from the nasal mucosa to the brain. It seems that the sneeze center has been identified with certainty in animals, but in humans there is no histological data about the presence of a sneeze center, although many studies have indicated its existence in the reticular formation, and the discovery of the brain rainbow is going to confirm this hypothesis.

"The brain rainbow" or "the brainbow" is the name given by two researchers at Harvard University who, by means of a fluorescence method, were able to identify every neuron in the brain together with its connections.

The author explains that one can clearly distinguish three periods in the production of sneezing:

1. the inspiratory period, which can be monophasic, biphasic or polyphasic
2. the glottic period, when closing of the glottis occurs by increase in intrathoracic pressure, and is then followed by the opening of the glottis
3. the expiratory blast period, when there is a massive and violent expulsion, through the opened glottis, of the air and the impurities it contains; the particles are projected at a distance of 2-3 m at a speed of about 160 km/h. This period is accompanied by eyes closing, even tighter as sneezing is stronger.

Sneezing appears from the first week of life and persists throughout our existence. In general, sneezing lasts 2-4 seconds and is unique. Sometimes it appears in bursts of variable length. The author presents a very interesting case of a 12-year-old girl from England who presented the longest sneezing fit in history, which lasted 977 days, from January 1981 until September 1983.

The chapters "Olfactory Sneezing" and "Pheromone Story" explain the mechanisms by which people can distinguish a wide range of odours, although smell is in regression in humans compared to the animal world. At the same time, in these chapters, the author introduces us into the fascinating and still little-known world of the way in which are released "external hormones", the pheromones, chemical substances that are "meant to transmit

sexual impulse for the multiplication of species", but also behaviours of "aggression, domination or territory delimitations".

Going through the chapters "Erotic Sneezing" (orgasmic or ideative), "Photic or Visual Sneezing", "Postprandial Sneezing", "Tactile Sneezing", we learn new information about less common causes triggering sneezing, and about the mechanisms that govern its production in such moments.

"Pathological Sneezing" is a process that can be generated by a varied pathology of the nasal cavity, "of chemical, infectious, neoplastic, traumatic, degenerative or hereditary nature". Also, sneezing may be considered as a trigger factor for various diseases; a number of cases have been published, in which sneezing triggered hypoacusis, fracture in patients suffering from osteoporosis, transient exophthalmos, vertigo, presyncope, retinal detachment, disorders in maintaining pregnancy, stroke, epistaxis, Wallenberg syndrome or epileptic seizures.

In conclusion, Professor Askenasy's book teaches us that sneezing is "more than a reflex"; it is "a semi-automatism meant to maintain body homeostasis" and transforms an apparently common and insignificant phenomenon into a complex mechanism which helps maintain the harmony within the human body.

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