

Female interviewer: What do you think dreaming does?

Dr. Robert Stickgold [over the phone, US accent]:* Well, I think what dreaming is is it's our mind, if you will, watching our brain as it goes through and reviews and tries to recombine memories from both the recent and distant past – in large part, trying to make sense out of the information we've gathered over the past. The... the brain and the mind take in information during the day at a rate much faster than it can really process it. And it needs time to go back and *review* those memories and try to figure out how they all fit together.

Female interviewer: So is dreaming[s] a way of filing information in our brains?

Dr. Robert Stickgold: It's filing it, and cross-referencing it, and probably editing and displacing it at the same time.

Female interviewer: So why does it often seem to us that we have whole stories within dreams?

Dr. Robert Stickgold: Well that's one of the mysteries. One of the mysteries is how... how the brain, as it goes about (mm...) this process actually takes what in large part are static memories and puts them together into stories. And we don't know how the brain does that. It's a complete mystery to us still.

Female interviewer: But do we always dream?

Dr. Robert Stickgold: As best we can tell, the brain and the mind are pretty much active all night long. Hum, when we wake people up at various stages of sleep – whether it's REM*-sleep or light non-REM sleep or deep non-rem sleep – we always have a certain rate at which we get dream reports. And it varies from stage to stage. And it's something of a... of a conundrum whether when we don't get a report, it's because nothing was going on or because something about the waking process causes the dreamer to forget it. It's... it's true that people *do* sometimes wake up and recall nothing. And then they say, "Wait a minute, no, no, now I can remember something." So there's something very fragile about that

transition from sleep to wake that makes hard for us to hold on to our dreams.

Female interviewer: Extraordinary stuff, Dr. Robert Stickgold, thank you very much.

* **REM:** **REM** sleep is a period of sleep that is very deep, during which your eyes and muscles make many small movements. It is the period during which most of your dreams occur. **REM** is an abbreviation for 'rapid eye movement'. (*Collins Cobuild Dictionary*, 2006)

* See Bob Stickgold's presentation [on YouTube](#), for instance.

Stickgold teaches at the Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School. See his Harvard page [here](#).

