

while
you
were

SLEEPING

What do your dreams tell you?

Here's how to delve
into your night visions
and figure out
what they really mean.

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Why

a salamander?"

was the question on
Kim Collet's mind when she
talked about a recent dream

to a group of her friends. In her dream, the busy mother had been relegated to the mundane business of taking care of a house by the ocean while everyone else got to go off to the beach. Inside the house, she discovered a salamander—shimmering and colorful in pinks and purples—lying on the kitchen table.

Collet was mystified by the image, but her friends—all of them part of a dream group they'd formed—offered up several clues: Salamanders are amphibians that go between water and land, and in certain mythologies they are symbolic of transformation.

"Right after I had that dream, I decided to create that salamander," Collet says, and she began working on a human-sized cement and mosaic sculpture of a salamander. The piece would take almost five years to complete, and during that time Collet also began building an art studio adjacent to her home.

In creating her artwork, Collet was doing what Stephen Aizenstat, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, chancellor and founding president of Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, Calif., calls "animating the dream image." Like a growing number of psychologists who host dreamwork groups like Collet's, he often recommends using art as a way to "meet the dream more directly" than words allow.

Searching for meaning

Interest in group dreamwork led by a peer or professional has been slowly growing over the past three decades, and with the advent of the Internet, the practice blossomed. Now, online groups—with real-time conversations and postings of dreams and feedback—have made dreamwork accessible to everyone. Yahoo! offers thousands of dream groups, while the Facebook fan page for the International Association for the Study of Dreams, an international organization that fosters multidisciplinary studies of dreams, has more than 1,500 likes. Can these laypeople be sure that they're analyzing their dreams "correctly"? No matter: It's having the conversation that counts, say experts.

"The psychological interpretation is really a less important part of it," says Aizenstat, who has conducted seminars and workshops for 35 years. The benefit of such groups, with or without a professional leader, "is people sharing the power of the dreamtime in intimate ways," he says.

"There are many, many uses for dreams outside of the psychotherapist's office," says Alan Siegel, Ph.D., an associate clinical professor in the psychology department at the University of California at Berkeley and author of *Dream Wisdom: Uncovering Life's Answers in Your Dreams* (Celestial Arts, 2002). While he cautions that dreamwork should not be used as a substitute for professional therapy, Siegel believes that the reward of dream groups is in "the process of exploring, of building the dialogue between the dreamer and the others in the group."

It's a process that can translate into personal and spiritual growth, artistic and creative development, and improved problem-solving skills, say proponents. Noticing, honoring and sharing our dreams connects us to our inner, less rational and more emotional selves, as well as to our outer world and the other beings that inhabit it.

There is significant variation in how dreams are used in nontherapeutic settings. Some groups promote using dreams to solve the problems of daily life, encouraging people to think of questions before going to bed and then interpreting dreams as answers. Others utilize their dreams to pick up on subtle messages from their bodies, and there are reports of people detecting diseases through dreams. Some groups focus on the dream as a pathway to creativity, and members try innovative techniques to combine dreams and art.

One of the hottest debates in dreamwork revolves around those times when we realize that we are dreaming. Enthusiasts of these "lucid dreams" encourage people to not just go along for the ride, but to step into the driver's seat, changing plot, characters and outcomes. Others tend to see dreams as communications from either an inner or outer source of wisdom, and believe we should be engaging in dialogue with these wisdom sources rather than trying to tell them what to say.



What's a dream group?

Sharing dreams and commenting on them with other people gives the dreams an independent life. That's the wonderful gift of dream groups, says Rev. Jeremy Taylor, D. Min., a Unitarian Universalist minister who is an adjunct faculty member at Sofia University in Palo Alto, Calif., and directs the Marin Institute for Projective Dream Work in San Rafael.

Taylor's groups, which take place across the country, all start with a check-in period, during which members update each other on major concerns and briefly describe a recent dream with a summarizing title. A good title is one that vividly recalls the dream experience: *Running After the Ant-Man Through the Cobblestone Streets*, for example, is more evocative than *The Chase* or even an analytic title such as *Feeling Like the Details of Life Are Getting Away From Me*.

The cardinal rule in Taylor's discussion method is understanding that each comment is not about the dream as much as it is about the person making the comment. "It's all projection," he says.

Participants begin with the phrase "If this were my dream..." as a reminder that we bring our own feelings, memories and associations to the images in our dreams and the dreams of others. In a group, once a dream makes its way from the speaker's

imagination to that of the listener, it takes on a life of its own, arousing something different in everyone. And since every dream has multiple meanings, multiple projections from others in the group increase the chances of someone identifying a meaning that rings true to the dreamer.

"We are uniquely blind to our own dreams," says Taylor, which is why describing a dream aloud to attentive listeners who respond back can improve our own interpretation and understanding.

But what if you're so blind to your dreams that you don't even remember them? "That's all the more reason to come to a dream group," says Taylor with a laugh. "You can make good use of other people's dreams while you're waiting for your own to assume a more memorable form."

A safe place for change

Justina Lasley, founder and director of the Institute for Dream Studies in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina and the creator of DreamSynergy, says these dream groups are safe, efficient and effective environments for personal transformation.

"When we try to make changes, the first glimpse of that change often comes in a dream, and the group is a safe place to try out being like that," she explains. Personal change (continued on pg. 93)



UGLY IS Beautiful

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Pickled Eggplant with Olive Oil, Fennel & Chiles

SERVES 4

PREP TIME: 30 MINUTES

When there's an abundance of eggplant growing in my garden or I've bought extra that's going unused, this simple pickling recipe preserves the fruit for future enjoyment.

- 1 medium purple globe or Rosa Bianca eggplant**
- ¼ cup kosher salt**
- 2 cups red wine vinegar**
- 3 cloves garlic, finely minced,**
- 2-3 red jalapeños or similar hot chili peppers, seeded and finely chopped**
- ¼ cup finely chopped fresh fennel**
- ¼ cup finely chopped fresh oregano**
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided**

- 1.** Cut eggplant in half and slice as thinly as possible using a very sharp knife or a mandolin. Toss the eggplant with the salt and place in a colander over a mixing bowl; refrigerate overnight.
 - 2.** Using your hands, squeeze the eggplant to remove any remaining liquid.
 - 3.** Heat the vinegar in a medium saucepan, bringing it to a simmer. In batches, simmer the eggplant in the vinegar for 2 minutes. Remove and cool to room temperature.
 - 4.** Sterilize 4 half-pint wide-mouthed canning jars; allow the jars to cool completely.
 - 5.** In a medium bowl, combine the garlic, chiles, fennel and oregano.
 - 6.** Spoon a few tablespoons of olive oil into the bottom of each jar. Add a few slices of eggplant, and top with 1 tablespoon of the fennel mixture. Drizzle with a few more tablespoons of olive oil. Keep layering the eggplant, fennel mixture and olive oil until each jar is filled to about ½ inch from the top. Add enough olive oil to cover.
 - 7.** Place in a cool location, but do not refrigerate, for 2 weeks. Then enjoy.
- Per serving:** 152 calories, 13.5 g fat (2 g saturated), 2.5 g protein, 4 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 17 mg calcium, 0.5 mg iron, 957 mg sodium. ✕

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often has a ripple effect on the dreamer's friends and family, who then become empowered to make positive changes of their own.

For Taylor, a long-time social activist, the power of dreams to reach out to the community is what makes him so excited about the work. "The language of the dream is universal," he says, referring to the common images and feelings that come up in our dreams. "If you can encourage people to share their dreams with each other, and teach them the simple steps for new ways to explore them, people realize that they are more connected to each other than they thought," Taylor explains. Starting the conversation is the first step toward that connectedness.

HOW TO START A DREAM GROUP

Justina Lasley is the author of *Honoring the Dream: A Handbook for Dream Group Leaders* (dreamsynergy.org) and offers these tips for creating a safe, fun and productive environment for discussing dreams.

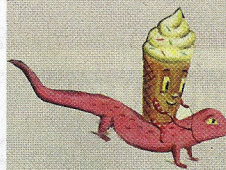
Have confidence Anyone is qualified to lead a dream group, says Lasley. "All you need to do is honor the dreamer, the dream itself, and the group as a whole." (You can find ethical guidelines for running a dream group at iasdreams.org.)

Keep it small Make sure everyone has time to be heard. The ideal group has five to eight members.

Set a clear timetable Agree on a regular meeting time and a specific number of sessions. At the last session, the group may decide to continue, but having a clear beginning and ending gives the group "a regular rhythm of self-reflection and self-examination."

Honor the dream Listeners should respond to each dream as if it were their own. Such a "projective" approach not only honors the multiple meanings that a dream contains, but also acts as a "safety net" against accusatory or defensive comments.

Stay fresh If the group starts to feel stale, bring in new techniques. Read books to learn innovative approaches, attend dream workshops, or hire a professional dream worker as a guest facilitator.



WHAT is a DREAM?

Is it a message of wisdom from the inner self or the unconscious mind? Is it a whole world, as real and valid as the waking world, as some cultures in India and Australia believe? Or is a dream simply the result of random brain neurons firing during sleep?

In ancient and aboriginal cultures, dreams were too important to be entrusted to mere dreamers. A shaman or medicine man interpreted dreams, mostly with an eye toward the future, as dreams were often thought to be predictive. Later, the modern Western version of the shaman, the psychoanalyst, stepped into the role of interpreter, looking mostly into the dreamer's past for clues.

Today, neuroscientists are using advanced brain-imaging technologies as well as first-person reports to explore the science behind dreams. What they are finding is that the dreaming brain is quite different from the awake brain both in its chemistry and functioning.

Harvard researchers have confirmed the obvious: People we know in real life often appear in our dreams behaving like they never would in real life. Yet it's not usually until we wake up that we realize they're acting out of character. There's a reason for such implausibilities and our lack of resistance to them while dreaming, according to a report in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. Imaging studies show that the brain's centers for episodic memory, self-reflection and directed thought close down during dreaming.

In *Dreaming: An Introduction to the Science of Sleep* (Oxford University Press, 2004), J. Allan Hobson, M.D., professor emeritus of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School in Boston, describes how many of the features of dreams (implausible plots, bizarre distortions, powerful emotions) can now be traced to specific biochemical processes of the brain during sleep. These correlations, he believes, "can be used to help individual dream interpretation by relieving it of an impossibly difficult task [determining meaning] and helping us to discover the usually clear emotional salience of our dreams." In other words, it isn't possible to say with any scientific exactitude what a dream means, but we can describe how it makes us feel. In most dream groups the interpretation that feels right to the dreamer may be helpful even if it cannot be verified.