

Chapter 1

Introduction

If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream.

(Num. 12:6)

Dreams are a personal process that need to be understood in a personal way. For a long while I felt that Swedenborg's private *Journal of Dreams* was too raw a material for a general audience to use. When I learned that the Swedenborg Foundation intended to reprint this *Journal* I boldly proposed to do a commentary. But when it came right down to the task, I had misgivings that bear directly on the nature of dreams and how they can finally be understood and used.

Once you get used to the peculiar language of dreams they become a personal guidance system with a superior overview of the nature of one's own life. As a clinical psychologist, understanding my own dreams is a prerequisite for working on a client's dreams. Before I started on Swedenborg's dreams I required that I regain facility with my own dreams—I feel I have no right to play the expert with someone else's dreams unless I am able to understand my own. But there is a deeper reason for this self-imposed requirement. As you will see better later, dreams are a valuable guidance system. Should I be in error with Swedenborg's dreams, I would expect my personal guidance system to tell me so. I need my own dreams to monitor my understanding of his. This might surprise you. But when you are working on something, especially when it is close to your life concerns, your dreams will tell you how well you are doing. We will see several instances in which Swedenborg felt that his own dreams were commenting on the writing then concerning him.

C. G. Jung, the noted analytical psychologist, said dreams are objective, that is they come from a level more objective than one's subjective point of view. Here's an example: as I was finishing my Ph. D. dissertation, *Mind in Hyperspace [1]*, I felt I had made an immense contribution to science. After all, I had added the fifth, sixth, and seventh dimensions to real space. I remember quite well that my dreams said in effect, well it's pretty good, but definitely dull! This comment dampened my enthusiasm, but one learns to appreciate the fact that dreams come from a higher, more objective viewpoint. This is why I am watching my own guidance system while commenting on Swedenborg's dreams.

Why comment on Swedenborg's *Journal*? A great deal occurs in this *Journal*. It goes far beyond a dull listing of someone's peculiar fancies. It may be the oldest long series of dreams in existence; it is also the product of a great mind. And, most fortunate of all, it came just at the time that Swedenborg, the renowned scientist, was becoming Swedenborg the spirit seer. We will see the inner struggles and processes of a man coming into accord with the will of God. If I could ask for the dreams of any period in his life, this is precisely the period I would ask for.

But dreams are in a rather arcane language. If you haven't worked with your own dreams they easily seem to be a mishmash of elements into which one could read most anything. Swedenborg's heirs tore a few pages of dreams out of an earlier journal that presumably appeared scandalous to them. I warrant they had no experience with their own dreams. Some translators omitted certain sexual dreams altogether [2] or left them in Latin [3]. Others concluded that Swedenborg must be mad. I am quite sure these pundits weren't looking at the weird mishmash in their own dreams! We will be looking at all of the dreams available. Very simply I feel a commentary is needed to help the reader understand what is going on—this way, the untranslated dreams are turned into something of use to others.

Suppose this personal and private journal had not long ago fallen into public hands. If I were handed the original journal and asked if it should be made public now, for the first time, I'd agonize over the question. After all, if Swedenborg were alive there would be no question in my mind but that he'd have to okay publication, and my guess is he would not okay it, feeling that it was too much of him and too little of the spiritual world. With Swedenborg gone from the world my vote would be to suppress it until a competent commentary could be made. My reason—the *Journal* is too personal, too raw, and open to too many interpretations. I feel we have no right to peek into the corners of someone else's life without their permission. In the case of a person who has left this world, I would feel we have no right to publish *unless* the material is to be treated respectfully and made of some public use. In spite of the current trend of the media to exploit even the most distorted peeks into the private lives of famous people, I don't feel we have the right to peek even if it is printed and put before us. As a psychotherapist I've had to look closely at the personal details of many lives, but only when asked to do so, and for the purpose of helping the person. The therapist's intent is so different from the sensationalist's peek. So this, too avoiding sensationalist exploitation—was behind my offer to do a commentary. We will look at all the dreams and experiences and try to understand them. My intent is neither to build up nor to tear down Swedenborg, but only to learn as much as we can from this material. I cannot be Swedenborg's therapist, but

perhaps we can all learn something—it is this attempt to learn that gives us some right to look at such personal material.

What Is a Dream?

Dreams are a spontaneous and natural process in which the central life concerns of an individual are presented in a dramatic language of correspondences. Let me elaborate on this. *It is a spontaneous and natural process* because it occurs in everyone whether they have any interest in dreams or not. It appears to occur in animals too, though we can't ask them to confirm this. It begins in the womb and occurs throughout life. It must be natural, because it occurs without our bidding. Dreams are of the *central life concerns*. We have to penetrate their language to see that they carry a message of this importance.

Dreams are in a dramatic language of correspondences. The idea of correspondences comes from Swedenborg and indeed his dreams may well have been the beginning of his direct experience with this language. Swedenborg says our facial expressions represent our feelings within. When the expression accurately reflects the life within, it *corresponds* to it [5]. The idea of correspondences enabled Swedenborg to deal with different but corresponding levels of reality simultaneously. The dream images correspond to truths and qualities in the inner life. It is as though the source of dreams can only speak a dramatic language of things and events that represent its inner quality and nature. To me this says something very profound about the source of dreams. If I am mistaken in a relationship to another person, why can't dreams just say, "Van, you are wrong about so and so. He is finer than you realize?" Although occasionally there is speech in dreams, dreams are mostly composed of dramatic visual representations. The struggles of a dreamer even to understand these images says immediately that they are not from the dreamer's usual sphere of thought and language. There have been efforts to teach the dream process to speak plain English. They have been only partly successful. Whatever we are dealing with in dreams, its natural mode of thought is this dramatic language of correspondences dramatic because it is inclined to make statements by showing actual incidents involving us. It speaks in terms of dramatic events which correspond to elements in the inner life and the experience of the person.

Let me show you a short dream. I taught dream interpretation to a group of mental health workers. We had a social-scientist intern in the group. He presented a dream in which there was a hut full of food. In the upper story an animal was gnawing at something. I learned from prior work that the dreamer accidentally enacts a dream while telling it. By watching the dreamer's gestures while he is

telling it you can sometimes see some of the meaning. When the social scientist said "hut full of food" he held his hands out to just the width of his body. He was quite stout. So I held my hands out to the same width and said, "I wonder where there is a hut full of food this wide." He smiled and said, "Oh I see that. But what is this gnawing in the upper story?" I paraphrased the dream. Pointing to him I said, "In the upper story a gnawing is going on." It took just a few moments trying to get at the quality of gnawing for him to see that it corresponded to his constant worrying about things. He was reluctant to speak of his worries, but we didn't need that. He now knew the dream was an image of his life. The image was rather unflattering, as is often true of dreams. The dream said, in effect, you are like a primitive dwelling place (hut), you eat too much, and you worry all the time. Because the dream connected "hut full of food" and "gnawing in the upper story," one could suspect that his excess eating was related to his worrying. But this is speculation on our part—he would have to confirm it. At first the dream just seemed peculiar. "Why would I dream of a hut full of food?" he asked. Once he had connected it to his body he had the key to working out the other detail, the gnawing in the upper story.

Why does the Dream Maker speak this odd language of correspondence? We don't really know. My experience strongly suggests that this is the natural language of the Dream Maker. Perhaps one value of it is that it leaves the dreamer free. If this man's dream simply said you eat too much and worry too much, it would be a disturbing insult. Instead it presents a curious incident he can try to figure out or not, as he wishes. It seems to leave his will free. I also think the Dream Maker is in a position to know all the memories, experiences, hopes, and fears of the dreamer. It must be at the very center of the life.

I coined the term Dream Maker just to avoid disputes as to who or what fashions the dream. We know this much: dreaming is a universal process, occurring in all persons. It has its own language, which is highly symbolic or, even better described in Swedenborg's own terms, is a language of correspondences. Dreams are apparently fully aware of the most intimate details and memories of the individual's life. The Dream Maker chooses to comment on the life. The reader may need more experience to see that this commentary is from a more objective viewpoint than the dreamer's own personal view. In the above-mentioned dream incident, the man considered himself of average build. He looked fat to everyone around him and to the Dream Maker. The Dream Maker chooses to comment in its own language on the quality of the life. If I could put in a single phrase what the concern of the Dream Maker is, I would say definitely *the quality of the life*. When life-quality is not so good, it says so. Dreams also note the individual's deepest struggles and can, at times, help the person in the clearest way. But

throughout all this, this peculiar language, which we must struggle to penetrate, consistently set dreams apart from simply an extension of the ordinary conscious life of the person—that, and their loftier, more objective viewpoint. All this is my experience. It is not "science" since no strict measures were made and no manipulation of variables has been attempted. I would also like to say that, in general, those who have worked some while at the analysis of dreams are generally in accord with each other. The great differences between Freudians and other "isms" of dreams have largely disappeared. Small differences remain, but for the most part those with experience in dream interpretation are seeing things largely the same way regardless of their backgrounds! I'll leave the issue of what the Dream Maker is until after we have journeyed through Swedenborg's dreams. I delay addressing this central issue because the answer will begin to be apparent to you as you see Swedenborg struggling with the Dream Maker.

There has been a fairly recent discovery that has opened dreams to scientific study. It was found that when a person dreams there are rapid eye movements (REMI—when a person dreams, you can see their eyes move around under their eyelids as they look around in their dream. First it was confirmed that REM means dreaming. Sensors were put on the eyelids to detect movement. When wakened during REM the subject would report a dream. When wakened when there was no REM, there was no dream either. Once we had a physical correlate of dreaming then a number of other matters were relatively simple to research. As a result we now know that the average adult has eight dreams a night. Infants dream a great deal and there is a gradual falling off of dream frequency with age. Certain drugs suppress dreaming and others may stimulate it.

A striking discovery was made when persons were deprived of dreaming. They were allowed to sleep a normal amount of time but were awakened at the beginning of every REM. In this way they got a normal amount of sleep, but no dreams. It didn't take long for this practice to produce highly disturbed and even psychotic people, because they began dreaming even when awake. So it appears dreams are not only natural, but somehow necessary. This necessity is unrelated to any interpretation of or even awareness of the dream. The full implication of this is still unclear. It is my guess that dreams are a psychophysical necessity—that is, physically dreams are some sort of balancing or adjustment in the brain/mind itself. On a psychic level there is some sort of necessity to review and assess the life beyond the level of consciousness itself. It is as though it is necessary to come into contact with something higher in ourselves, even if we are not aware of it. Many are inclined to believe that consciousness is everything, but in dream study we come face to face with a process that goes on regardless of conscious cooperation! Those who say dreaming is merely neurons firing have surely not

looked at the intelligence reflected in the process, an intelligence that uses language and concepts which routinely transcend the individual's understanding.

Another key to understanding dreams is that there are dreams of different length or importance. There are little dreams of seeming little consequence. There are dreams of average importance. And there are *big* dreams.

For instance, almost any kind of discomfort, or even outside stimuli can stimulate a dream. A person might fall asleep with their head on one arm and dream that while driving, their car became caught and crushed under a heavy beam. When he awakens and gets his heavy head off his arm the beam is removed. This looks like a small dream. It has no major life elements. But of course there might be something in the kind of car, the beam and how he reacted while caught. Or perhaps there is something in the fact that the dream is backwards (head on arm or beam is represented by beam on the head!).

There are also big dreams. They feel big and important when you have them. Often they reflect major discoveries or even turning points in the life. We will see in Swedenborg's series many big dreams. I'll tell you one of mind.

Background—I was a doctoral student in a Catholic university because they had the quality of training I wanted. Yet I was not Catholic and indeed, though widely read in religion, I had not joined any religion.

The Dream—I was walking up a low hill. It was a time of celebration because there were poles all along the way with gay colored flags. It was bright and sunny. Suddenly I was stunned to see Christ, a jet black figure on a jet black Cross. The Cross was lower to the ground than all the crosses I had seen before and Christ was slumped over much more than any representation I had ever seen before. I knew beyond doubt this was Christ and this was Golgotha, the hill of crucifixion. A voice said, "He is well worth believing in."

Feeling and Associations—I was awakened with an awed, stunned feeling. I knew it meant it was time I commit myself openly to religion. I surprised me how much feeling I had in the dream for Christianity because I felt closer to Hinduism and Buddhism at that time. I felt I had seen the crucifixion. The dream had odd changes from the free gaiety of the sunny day of celebration, to the *black* crucifixion, to the comforting last statement. The black Cross and Christ indicated to me I had looked into something beyond ordinary human experience.

That is a big dream. It occurred 32 years ago and is still clear and powerful. I have met clients with big dreams. They are often carried around for years like a sacred treasure rarely shared. These people are often afraid to tell about them because

they fear others will fail to respect and understand the power they feel. They are easy to understand if you respect the feelings and inner wisdom of the dreamer.

A frequent question that arises when I speak of dreams in a group is, what does it mean when a person has a repetitive dream? The repetitive dream is a vital message repeated over and over. Even a little effort to understand it breaks the repetition. It is the simplest of all emotional problems to solve.

The Process of Finding the Meaning of a Dream

Just for a moment let us pretend that someone has presented me with a dream to work out. The person often tells the dream as though I should be able to whip out a brilliant interpretation in a moment. Actually I can't. I usually have not even a glimmer of what it means. But I know in that person are the experiences, the associations, the life on which their dream is based. My first task is to intensify the dream, to get the person back into it, living it. I have them tell the dream again, slowly. This time I watch them closely for signs that they are enacting the dream. I inquire about their feelings. I get feeling details, that is, I ask "What did it feel like when...?" I am trying to make the dream a living experience again. For a long dream I may simply pause and then say, "Where are you now in the dream?" They are in some part of a long dream. I want to start where they are. Often they will say, "I was doing so and so." It is this element which asks to come clear first. Sometimes I can ask directly, "How is that like your life?" and they relate immediately how they sense that part in their life. These connections are usually surprises to me. I don't have brilliant foresight of what they will find. *I have only a method to help them find what the dreams say to them.*

Oftentimes the dreamer can relate the things *they do* in the dream to what *they do in life*. It's all those other odd objects and people in their dream they don't understand. In these cases I try to get them to pretend they are the other object or person and tell the dream from that standpoint. If they dreamed about an encounter with a robber, I'll say, "Pretend now you are the robber and tell it from this viewpoint." Often they get clues as to what the robber is in them.

With this kind of work we can often find several connections between the dream and the person's life. It is not necessary to find all the connections if there isn't time. I sometimes suggest that if the dreamer will reflect a little on the dream's connections during the day, they will find the rest of the meanings—and they do.

I want to get across the basic nature of the process: the therapist usually has little or no notion what a dream means—instead he has methods for getting the meaning from the dreamer. This is so true that I finally decided that the only valid

interpretation of a dream was that which the dreamer himself or herself gives to it. Sometimes this can be disappointing. A client and I would work together some while and have what looked like several rich clues and understandings. Yet one could see them one by one disappearing from consciousness. If I finally asked, "Now what does the dream mean to you?" I'd get some simple statement that overlooked most of our discoveries. But this is to be expected. The dream language and conception transcend our understanding. People who have little experience working with this rich and transcending language are especially prone to lose it just after seeming to find it. Again, this says we are dealing with processes which transcend the slim little consciousness.

I want to add another caution. When I worked with a group of mental health professionals on dream interpretation, a particular kind of misinterpretation was common. After someone recounted a dream, often someone else would think he knew what it meant and would try to force the dreamer to accept his wonderful insight. It is easy to project our interpretation onto the dreamer. In fact I could present any dream and have everyone in the group interpret it and come out with a different interpretation for each interpreter. This has been done with myths too. Present a myth and have each person find their meaning for it. There would be some similarities in these interpretations but many differences. People who haven't ever worked with their own dreams often feel particularly expert with others' dreams! Just as an example, a woman who was considering suicide had a fantasy in which she climbed inside a snow bank. All of the other "experts" in the room thought this was suicidal. But when we looked at the woman's own feelings, this was a place for recovery away from people. She felt warm and cozy in there, that is, the snow made her feel how warm (alive) she was! For her it was a quiet, cozy retreat that shut everyone else out. Because of this positive value I encouraged her to return in fantasy to this retreat whenever she wanted. We had to find out what her dream meant to her to understand it.

In my experience strangers are particularly prone to tangle themselves in others sexual experiences, to project themselves into sexual dreams. sometimes left details of a sexual history out of medical records because the staff would eagerly read these details and they would not pay attention to any other part of a psychiatric history. So I just say, beware of projecting fantasies into someone else's life. Perhaps it was a good idea to leave out Swedenborg's sexual dreams in earlier generations, but now let us hope we can be a little wiser.

Perhaps now you can understand my major hesitation to comment on Swedenborg's dreams: I don't have Swedenborg to work with. That I would enjoy. I'm quite sure that our work together would discover a great deal more than I will

be able to see here. This situation would be nearly impossible except for several facts that make even the absent Swedenborg's dreams clearer. We have an abundance of his own associations. He often says what a dream reminds him of or means to him.

His associations and meanings are valuable clues I will be somewhat governed by these, for I really feel the dreamer is closer to the source and wisdom in a dream than I am!

There is another saving grace in interpreting this *Journal*: we have a relatively long series of dreams and experiences. We may miss on one, but we will eventually understand themes that recur. We will see patterns *in* a series which we might overlook if we had only one dream.

There is another help in this series. We have not only dreams but also other kinds of experiences reported by Swedenborg. They all issued from the same life and were other aspects of what was happening. Moreover we know a great deal of Swedenborg's history before and after this series. Some purists might think we should deal with dreams alone, but that would be foolish, for it is actually the whole life that concerns us. It is a real boon to see his dream struggles in relation to what he was to become.

Yet with all these saving graces I must respect the fact that I am working within the real limitation that Swedenborg is not here to affirm or deny. I am not permitted the relationship that enables dream elements to show their meaning. So I cannot be complete, or final, or reveal all that is here. Often you will notice that I am unsure, struggling with possible meanings. That is part of the situation. My role then is to try to throw more light on what is here than you might find on your own. But in a real sense, the only final word on the meanings here is Swedenborg's life itself and its effect on history.

Procedure

I will quote the J. J. G. Wilkinson translation as edited by William Woofenden [4]. In every instance I will look at the other two translations (2, 3] also. Where I feel another translation is closer to the feeling of a dream I will bring this out. The thread to understanding dreams is in feelings. People Swedenborg knew appeared in his dreams just as people we know appear in ours. Much of the comment on who so-and-so was will come from the work of these earlier translators. Sexual or not, no scrap of the original will be omitted.