

Swedenborg's Awakening - The Journal of Dreams

On 21st of July, 1743, he began another such journey, ostensibly to publish. He has a number of works either completed for publication or still in process of writing:

The Brain [1743, 1744; published 1882]

Part I & II of "The Animal Kingdom" [1744]

Part III of "The Animal Kingdom" [1745]

According, to custom, he begins a new diary:

[HANDOUT] "[1] 1743, the 21st of July, I traveled from Stockholm, arrived on the 27th at Ystad, after passing through Tévelje, Nyköping, Norrköping, Linköping, Grenna, and Jonköping. In Ystad I met the Countess de la Gardie, with her two daughters, and the two counts, Count Fersen, Major Landtishusen and Magister Klingenberg. On the 31st General Stenflycht arrived with his son, and Capt. Schachta."

This continues until the 20th August ...

[HANDOUT] "[10] From Groningen there is a choice of two routes, namely, to Harlingen, and to Lemmer; to the former, the mode of conveyance is by Treckscheut [canal boat]; to the latter, by coach. I chose the way to Harlingen through Lewarden. From Harlingen, which is a large town . . ."

... and the account stops abruptly. Then there are a few blank pages, and it appears that others have been torn out of the notebook.

Then begins the record of a series of dreams (they are very brief and undated, at first) ...

[HANDOUT] [11] 1. Dreamed of my youth and the Gustavian family 2. In Venice, of the beautiful palace. 3. In Sweden, of the white expanse of heaven. 4. In Leipsic, of one that lay in boiling water. 5. Of one that tumbled with a chain down into the deep. 6. Of the king that gave away so precious a thing in a peasant's cabin. 7 . Of the man servant that wished me to go away on my travels.

And then to attempt some form of interpretation ...

[HANDOUT] [16] It seemed I lay on a mountain with a gulf under it: there were knolls upon it; I lay there and tried to help myself up, holding by a knoll, without foothold; a gulf was below. It signifies that I myself wish to help myself from the abyss of hell, which is not possible to be done.

It's interesting to note the abrupt change of focus (or so it appears to the reader). Prior to the 20th August 1743, we see an entry every few days recording the external circumstances of travel and visits with significant people. After the break, travel clearly presents no interest, at least nothing worth recording. The only indication that he has travelled at all are occasional references to being in a new city. The outer world seems to hold little fascination now. It seems curious to us, but then if you think about it, perhaps it isn't. He's been writing about human anatomy and the physical structure of the brain. Now his interest turns to the inner workings of the mind.

The first dated dream occurs on 24-25 March 1744. It seems he has decided to explore his dreams in earnest because he records five different dreams that night alone, along with

some interpretation. Thereafter he is fairly consistent, with a few days break here or there until the beginning of May, after which time the record becomes less consistent, apart from a flurry of activity in October and the one final record in May the following year, 1745.

The part of the journal that we're interested in is the first week of April 1744. Swedenborg seems to experience a wide range of emotions, from deepest despair to elation. We see a man in crisis, of a kind, a fork in the road - should pursue his scientific work or a "higher calling"? Images of riding horse, and of rooms in different states of repair become common in these dreams.

[HANDOUT] April 1-2. [30] Rode in the air on horseback. Went into all the rooms, kitchen, and the rest, and sought after a particular person; but found nothing. The rooms were badly swept and cared for. At last, I was carried in the air into a hall; there I got two pieces of beautiful bread, and so I again got him [whom I sought]. Here there were a number of people, and a well-swept room. Signifies the Lord's Supper.

[the same night]

[HANDOUT] [31] King Charles sat in a dark room, and spoke something, but very indistinctly; afterwards asked a person at the table if he had not heard what he had asked. He said, "Yes." Afterwards he shut the window, and I helped him with the curtains. After this I got up on a horse, but by no means took the way I thought, but rode over hills and mountains; rode fast; a heavy load followed on to me; I could not succeed in riding away, the horse got tired with the load, and I would have him put in to someone. He came in, and the horse became like a slaughtered and blood-red beast, and lay there. Betokens that I have got all that I had thought for my instruction; and that I am taking a way which is perhaps not the right one. The load was my remaining works that followed me, that on the way became of that kind, weary and dead.

Deep despair

[HANDOUT] "N.B. April 3-4, 1744, which was the day before Easter.

"[36] Found nothing during the whole night, though I often wakened. Believed all was away, and settled, and that I was left, or driven off About the morning it seemed that I rode, and it was shown me where to go; but when I looked, it was dark. Found that in the darkness I had gone astray; but then the light came, and I saw that I was astray. Saw the way, and the forests and groves to which I ought to do, and behind them the sky. Wakened. Then came the thought of itself about the first life and, in consequence, about the other life; and it seemed to me that all is full of grace. Began weeping because I had not loved at all but instead had continually angered him that had led me and had shown me the way that leads at last to the kingdom of grace; and because I had grown unworthy to be taken to grace."

And breakthrough. Three days later, he is in Delft (paragraph 50), the Netherlands.

[HANDOUT] "April 6-7. N.B. N.B. N.B.

"[49] In the evening I came into another sort of temptation, namely, between eight and nine o'clock in the evening when I read God's miracles performed through Moses, it seemed to me that somewhat of my understanding mixed itself therein; so that I could never have the strong faith that I ought to have. I believed and did not believe; thought that therefore the angels and God showed themselves to shepherds, but never to the philosopher that lets his understanding take part in the matter. ...

[51] At ten o'clock I went to bed and was somewhat better. Half an hour after I heard a noise under my head. I thought that the tempter was then going away. Straightway there came over me a shuddering, so strong from the head downwards and over the whole body, with a noise of thunder, and this happened several times. I found that something holy was upon me;

[52] I then fell into a sleep, and at about 12:00, 1:00 or 2:00 in the night, there came over me a strong shuddering from head to foot, with a thundering noise as if many winds beat together; which shook me; it was indescribable and prostrated me on my face. Then, at the time I was prostrated, at that very moment I was wide awake, and saw that I was cast down.

[53] Wondered what it meant. And I spoke as if I were awake; but found nevertheless that the words were put into my mouth. "And oh! Almighty Jesus Christ, that thou, of thy so great mercy, deignest to come to so great a sinner. Make me worthy of thy grace." I held together my hands, and prayed, and then came forth a hand, which squeezed my hands hard.

[54] Straightway thereupon I continued my prayer, and said, "Thou hast promised to take to grace all sinners; thou canst nothing else than keep thy word." At that same moment, I sat in his bosom, and saw him face to face; it was a face of holy mien, and in all it was indescribable, and he smiled so that I believe that his face had indeed been like this when he lived on earth. He spoke to me and asked if I had a clear bill of health. I answered, "Lord, thou knowest better than I." "Well, do so," said he; that is, as I found it in my mind to signify; love me in reality; or do what thou hast promised. God give me grace thereto; I found that it was not in my power. Wakened, with shudderings.

Swedenborg makes the break: he abandons Parts IV & V of "The Animal Kingdom" and his work "The Brain" remains unpublished until after his death. Instead, he publishes, "The Worship and Love of God" [1745], drafts "The Word Explained" [1746-1747; published 1928-1948], and in 1749 he begins publishing his largest work, "Heavenly Secrets" ["Arcana Caelestia", 1749-1756]

In Heavenly Secrets [AC], Swedenborg describes an inner meaning in the Bible, quite different from the literal story, one he relates strongly to his own inner journey. We see this in his commentary upon the Biblical account of creation:

Verse 2 And the earth was a void and an emptiness, and there was thick darkness over the face* of the deep; and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face* of the waters.

AC 17. The person who has yet to be regenerated is called 'a void and an empty earth', and also 'ground', in which no good or truth at all has been sown ... Consequently there is 'thick darkness', or stupidity and lack of knowledge about anything that has to do with faith in the Lord and so anything that has to do with spiritual ... life.

AC 18. 'The face of the deep' is that person's desires and resulting falsities, of which he consists and in which he is completely absorbed; and because he has no light at all he is like the deep, or something thoroughly obscure. ...

Furthermore, when looked at from heaven, this kind of person resembles a darkened mass with no life to it. ... For before a person can know what truth is, or be moved by good, the

things that hinder and offer resistance must be removed. Thus the old man must die before the new one can be conceived.

AC 19. 'The Spirit of God' is used to mean the Lord's mercy, which is said 'to hover', like a hen over eggs, over what the Lord stores away in man ...

Verse 3 And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.

AC 20. This is at the outset when a person starts to realize that good and truth are something superior. Thoroughly external people do not even know what good is and what truth is, for they imagine that everything which comprises self-love and love of the world is good, and that everything that panders to those loves is truth. Thus they do not know that the things which they imagine to be good are in fact evil, and that those which they imagine to be true are in fact false. But when a person is conceived anew, first he starts to recognize that the good in him is not really good, and then, when he enters more into light, to recognize the existence of the Lord and that the Lord is good and truth themselves. ...

Verses 4, 5 And God saw that the light was good; and God made a distinction between the light and the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.

AC 21. The light is called good, because it comes from the Lord, who is good itself. 'The darkness' is those things which were there prior to the person's new conception and birth. They were seen as light, because evil was seen as good, and falsity as truth. But in reality they are darkness and things proper to that person which are lingering on. All things that are the Lord's, being things of light, are compared to the day, and all that are man's own, being those of thick darkness, are compared to the night, as is done many times in the Word.

Verse 5 And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day.

AC 22. What 'evening' means, and what 'morning', is recognized from what is said above. 'Evening' means every prior state, because it is a state of shade, that is, of falsity and of absence of faith, while 'morning' is every subsequent state, because it is one of light, that is, of truth ...

AC 8 ... Nowadays this state rarely occurs without temptation, misfortune, and sorrow, which lead to the inactivity and so to speak the death of bodily and worldly concerns — the things which are man's own. In this way what belongs to the external man is segregated from what belongs to the internal. ...

There are a couple of things to note here:

There is a deep resonance here between Swedenborg's spiritual awakening and what he reads in the Biblical account of creation, and it is far more real to him than the idea that the world came about in six days.

The processes Swedenborg has observed taking place in his own mind - his inner world - he suggests might take place in us all. It is relevant for every one of us, and not only in this one story, but it continues throughout the Bible (I've omitted the many quotations from the other parts of the Bible he includes in these paragraphs).

If Swedenborg seems judgmental, talking about the stupidity and ignorance of thick darkness, we have to remember he's talking about something he acknowledged within himself first.

He has abandoned his former work, his former life, in favour of a new one. It's not without its risks - as he freely acknowledges later, not everyone will believe him or credit him with the best of motives - but that is a burden he seems willing to bear.

The first life compared with the second one [JD 36, 3-4 April], MIGHT mean physical life compared with life after the death of the spiritual body, but it also might mean the response to a higher calling here and now, taking place before physical death. Indeed, that is what he sees here, and it is a theme that recurs elsewhere in his writing: first and foremost, heaven is a state of mind, and those who enter heaven after death already have something of heaven resident within them before death.

Its also important to recognise that the he also senses a connection also with our progress as a race: he sees the individual as a microcosm of humanity as a whole.

AC 9336 - Divine Truth which emanates from the Lord's Divine Good arranges all things into order in heaven; ... Therefore to enable heaven to come into being in a person, it is necessary for him to receive Divine Truth in the good he has from the Lord. This can be brought into effect only gradually, according to the order similar to that which governs the way the Lord arranges heaven; for if the essential nature of the thing is the same, then the situation on the smaller scale is the same as on the larger scale. This arranging step-by-step is what should be understood here by order brought into effect gradually. From all this it is also evident that the new creation of a person, which is his regeneration, resembles the creation of heaven and earth.