

## *Introduction: The Varieties of Religious Dream Experience*

The subtitle of this introduction refers, of course, to William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which was based on the Gifford Lectures he delivered at the University of Edinburgh in the fall of 1901 and winter of 1902. In these lectures James developed a distinctive new method of studying religion. He used new research in the relatively young discipline of psychology to analyze and explain certain phenomena found in virtually all the world's religious traditions—phenomena like mysticism, asceticism, prayer, saintliness, conversion, and sacrifice. James, who was himself one of the preeminent psychologists of his day, approached religion just as he would any other expression of human mental life. He made careful, detailed observations of people's religious experiences in all their colorful diversity, and he gave very sensitive attention to the personal meanings different kinds of experiences had for different kinds of people. James rejected the stubborn skepticism toward religion held by many of his scientific colleagues, and he argued that the ultimate standard to use in making a psychological evaluation of a religious experience was to look at its practical effects on the individual's life—"by their fruits ye shall know them" (James 1958, 34).

However, just as much as James was interested in seeing what psychology could teach us about religion, he also wanted to explore what religion could teach us about psychology. Toward the end of the Gifford Lectures James brought the concept of the subconscious into his analysis, and he concluded that in psychological terms religious experiences are expressions of subconscious feelings, thoughts, energies, and desires. "[I]n religion," James said, "we have a department of human nature with unusually close relations to the transmarginal or

subliminal region [of the mind]. . . . In persons deep in the religious life—and this is my conclusion—the door into this region seems unusually wide open; at any rate, experiences making their entrance through that door have had emphatic influence in shaping religious history” (James 1958, 366). What this means, James suggested, is that the further development of psychological knowledge will require us to explore experiential realms that have traditionally been regarded as religious or spiritual in nature. If we truly want to expand our psychological understanding of the human mind we must continue to examine in a careful and respectful fashion what the world’s religious traditions have taught about those mysteriously nonvolitional, nonconscious powers that have guided, inspired, and sometimes radically transformed people’s lives.

In the twenty lectures he gave at the University of Edinburgh James mentioned the subject of dreams but once, noting only that they are one of the most common expressions of that subconscious realm of the mind where religion and psychology come together (James 1958, 366). I imagine, though, that James might have devoted more attention to dreams if he had given the Gifford Lectures a few years later, after having what he described as “one of the most intensely peculiar experiences of my whole life”:

San Francisco, Feb. 14th 1906. The night before last, in my bed at Stanford University, I woke at 7:30 a.m., from a quiet dream of some sort, and whilst “gathering my waking wits,” seemed suddenly to get mixed up with reminiscences of a dream of an entirely different sort, which seemed to telescope, as it were, into the first one, a dream very elaborate, of lions, and tragic. I concluded this to have been a previous dream of the same sleep; but the apparent mingling of two dreams was something very queer, which I had never before experienced.

On the following night (Feb. 12–13) I awoke suddenly from my first sleep, which appeared to have been very heavy, in the middle of a dream, in thinking of which I became suddenly confused by the contents of two other dreams that shuffled themselves abruptly in between the parts of the first dream, and of which I couldn’t grasp the origin. Whence come *these dreams*? I asked. They were close to *me*, and fresh, as if I had just dreamed them; and yet they were far away *from the first dream*. The contents of the three had absolutely no connection. One had a cockney atmosphere, it happened to someone in London. The other two were American. One involved the trying on of a coat (was this the dream I seemed to wake from?) the other was a sort of nightmare and had to do with soldiers. Each had a wholly distinct emotional atmosphere that made its individuality discontinuous with that of the others. And yet, in a moment, as these three dreams alternately telescoped into and out of

each other, and I seemed to myself to have been their common dreamer, they seemed quite as distinctly *not* to have been dreamed in succession, in that one sleep. *When*, then? Not on a previous night, either. *When*, then, and *which* was the one out of which I had just awakened? *I could no longer tell*: one was as close to me as the others, and yet they entirely repelled each other, and I seemed thus to belong to three different dream-systems at once, no one of which would connect itself either with the others or with my waking life. I began to feel curiously confused and *scared*, and tried to wake myself up wider, but I seemed already wide-awake. Presently cold shivers of dread ran over me: *Am I getting into other people’s dreams*? Is this a “telepathic” experience? Or an invasion of double (or treble) personality? Or is it a thrombus in a cortical artery? and the beginning of a general mental “confusion” and disorientation which is going on to develop who knows how far?

Decidedly I was losing hold of my “self,” and making acquaintance with a quality of mental distress that I had never known before, its nearest analogue being the sinking, giddy anxiety that one may have when, in the woods, one discovers that one is really “lost.” Most human troubles look towards a terminus. Most fears point in a direction and concentrate towards a climax. Most assaults of the evil one may be met by bracing oneself against something, one’s principles, one’s courage, one’s will, one’s pride. But in this experience all was diffusion from a centre, and footholds swept away, the brace itself disintegrating all the faster as one needed its support more direly. Meanwhile vivid perception (or remembrance) of the various dreams kept coming over me in alternation. Whose? *whose? WHOSE? Unless I can attach them*, I am swept out to sea with no horizon and no bond, getting *lost*.

The idea aroused the “creeps” again, and with it the fear of again falling asleep and renewing the process. It had begun the previous night, but then the confusion had only gone one step, and had seemed simply curious. *This* was the second step—where might I be after a third step had been taken? (James 1910, 88–89, italics in original)

What strikes James more than anything else here is the terrifying conceptual dizziness induced by the dream, the effect it has of profoundly shaking his understanding of the ordinary structures of consciousness and personality. James provides few details about the dreams themselves, and no particular associations to the images of the lions, the cockney atmosphere, the coat, or the soldiers. Rather, it is the dizzying *plurality* of the dreams that unsettles him so deeply. Each of the dreams engages him in a vivid and distinct reality of its own, and yet he does not see any means of relating the dream realities to each other or to his daily life. James’s “self,” the customary center of his highly cultured and brilliantly intelligent waking-life identity, is incapable of making sense of these dreaming experiences. The dreams carry him

some place far beyond the boundaries, the “braces,” that have always defined and protected his selfhood.

I find many things to admire and wonder at in James’s narrative. One is his ability simply to describe what has happened to him. Despite the frightening confusion he feels, he still manages to write an evocative portrait of an experience that is utterly alien to ordinary rational thought. I’m particularly taken with his comparison of the dream experiences to the feeling of being “really lost” in the woods, as I too have been drawn to wilderness metaphors when trying to describe the more extraordinary aspects of dreaming. Another remarkable element here is James’s willingness to consider a variety of possible explanations for the dreams. They could be telepathic interactions with other people’s dreams, they could be products of a physiological malfunction in the cerebral cortex, they could be the beginnings of a mental breakdown, they could, perhaps, be an opening toward a kind of mystical insight or revelation. James isn’t sure *what* exactly has happened to him. And although no single explanation seems to fit, James clearly feels a strong impulse to understand the experience, to “attach” the dreams to someone or something.

More than anything, I marvel at James’s ability to live with the exquisitely sharp emotional tension generated by his dreams. He rejects the seductive simplicity of quick, reductionistic answers, and he chooses instead to hold all the different possibilities open, hoping that with time a better understanding will emerge that will do full justice to the mysterious complexity of his experience.

*Visions of the Night* is not intended to be a “Jamesian” analysis of dreaming. For one thing, I am interested not only in further developing the dialogue between religion and psychology but also in expanding that dialogue to include voices from the fields of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, neurophysiology, history, literature, and film criticism. For another thing, I am motivated in my research by somewhat different questions than those guiding James in his investigations. My primary concerns can be briefly stated as follows:

1. What is the role of dreaming in human development, particularly in the development of our capacity for imaginative play? Given that all humans are “hard-wired” with a psychophysiological need to dream, what can or should a society do to educate its members (particularly its children) about the nature and the potentials of dreaming experience?

2. Why do certain dreams respond so directly and so creatively to waking-life experiences of crisis, trauma, suffering, and loss? How have different cultural traditions made practical use of these “healing powers” of dreaming?

3. What is the relationship of dreaming to politics, authority, and rebellion? In what ways do dreams both reflect and challenge the structures of power that govern a dreamer’s life (at psychological, political, and cosmic/theological levels)?

4. Is it ever possible to know *with certainty* if our dreams are revealing valuable spiritual truths or are simply deceiving us with alluring but vain fantasies? Can we develop trustworthy hermeneutic principles to guide us through the epistemologically confounding process of dream interpretation?

These four broad questions are woven throughout the thirteen chapters of this book. Although each particular chapter uses a different interdisciplinary framework to study a different set of issues, all of the chapters are efforts to develop new perspectives on these four concerns. Readers who expect a book to have a precise linear argument, marching point by point toward a specific concluding destination, may be disappointed by the kaleidoscopic array of views presented in this work. Again, I can only appeal to the infinitely diverse nature of dreaming itself, and suggest that the best way to increase our understanding of dreaming is to engage in the kind of free-ranging interdisciplinary dialogue offered in the following chapters.

The specific focus of the first three chapters is on different ways of interpreting the religious or spiritual dimensions of dreaming. Most contemporary scholarship on dreams, even if it is friendly to religious issues and concerns, relies on conceptual models of religion that are narrow at best and erroneous at worst. In these three chapters I draw on resources from contemporary theology, the history of religions, depth psychology, and hermeneutic philosophy to promote a more sophisticated understanding of the numinous power and rich spiritual diversity of human dream life. In chapters 4 to 6 I consider the ways in which dreams relate not only to the dreamer’s personal life but to his or her social world as well. These chapters show how dreams reflect significant features of the dreamer’s cultural environment and sometimes even motivate moral and political actions that aim at the resolution of particularly troublesome problems in the dreamer’s community.

In chapters 7 and 8 I respond to the dream theories of Sigmund Freud and J. Allan Hobson, both of whom share a deep but in my view misguided hostility toward religion. I suggest that their theories, despite their triumphant scientific reductionism, provide valuable resources in helping us better understand the profoundly creative nature of dreaming.

In chapters 9 through 12 I turn to the interplay of dreaming and artistic expression, and study different cultural representations of dreaming in myths, plays, and films. All of the dreams analyzed in these chapters

are fictional, that is, they are all experienced by people who are characters in an artistically rendered narrative. My argument is that careful reading and interpretation of these “fictional” dreams can reveal intriguing new aspects of the “real” dreams we experience in our own lives.

I conclude the book with a personal narrative of my experiences at a dream-studies conference I attended in Moscow, a conference that by coincidence began the very day (August 19, 1991) that a group of Red Army generals tried to seize control of the country from then-Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

A postscript offers some thoughts on where *Visions of the Night* fits into the ongoing scholarly discussion about the field of religion and psychological studies, a field that is in the midst of (yet another) period of transition and reorientation. An annotated bibliography on dream research is included at the end of the book to aid readers who want to pursue the study of particular issues and themes.

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### *Dreaming in Russia, August 1991*

One of the primary themes woven throughout the chapters of this book regards a paradoxical quality at the very heart of dreaming. Dreams carry us deep *within* ourselves, into a realm of memory, feeling, and desire, at the same time as they lead us far *outside* ourselves, into realms of human community, the natural environment, and the Divine. It is out of the mysterious interplay between these centripetal and centrifugal forces in dreaming that people experience the various kinds of creative inspiration, psychological transformation, and religious revelation discussed in the preceding chapters. I would like to close the book with a personal story about how I gained a particularly deep insight into this central paradox of human dreaming experience.

Like many people, I don't really like plane flights, especially long ones. So when our Lufthansa DC-10 from Chicago finally landed in Frankfurt some ten hours after we had taken off, I felt just terrible. When I'm feeling that bad I tend to become very antisocial, so the last thing I wanted to do during our four-hour layover in Frankfurt was chit-chat with the group members whose flights had already arrived at the airport from other points of origin. I wandered around the terminal until I found a quiet, unpopulated waiting area where I could lie down and be miserable all by myself.

Our group was gathering here to take a chartered flight into the Soviet Union for the first conference on dream studies ever convened between Euro-American and Soviet researchers. "Dreaming in Russia," as the conference was titled, was organized by Robert Bosnak, a Jungian analyst from the Netherlands who now practices in the Boston area. Presentations were scheduled to be made by psychologist Robert van de Castle and anthropologists Barbara and Dennis Tedlock on the Euro-American side and by psychologist Alexander Asmolov, anthropologist

Levon Abrahamian, and literary scholar Yuri Karyakin on the Soviet side. I already knew several of the conference attendees, and I was eagerly looking forward to meeting the others. The week-long gathering promised to be a uniquely interesting and educational event, opening up all sorts of new perspectives on the study of dreams. And beyond the scholarly appeal of the conference, I was very curious to visit the Soviet Union itself—America's great enemy and antagonist, the other superpower competing with us for dominance on the world's stage. What, I wondered, are the people really like who live in the "Evil Empire"?

But for this moment, after many, many hours on a plane and with many more still to go, I didn't want to think or talk about any of that. We'll have a whole week, I reassured myself, to do nothing but relax and peaceably converse with each other.

Because I was lying semiconscious in a secluded little waiting area, I missed hearing the first rumors. "Something's wrong with Gorbachev; he's sick, he's been taken somewhere, the vice president is supposedly in control, it sounds really serious." This was the disturbing fragment of news that suddenly swept through the Frankfurt airport during our layover. When I finally returned to our gate a few minutes before our flight's scheduled departure, I found our group anxiously discussing whether or not we should continue on our journey. The consensus feeling was that we had all traveled awfully far to be turning around and going back home now; and really, there weren't any hard facts about what might be going on in the Soviet government, just a lot of guesses and speculations. When the Lufthansa customer-service agents announced that our flight was ready to board, we decided we might as well just go ahead, and see what happened.

Our flight from Frankfurt was uneventful, and we landed in Moscow on the afternoon of Monday, August 19, 1991. As we got off the plane, retrieved our luggage, and wearily made our way through customs, we began hearing more rumors. Ours was evidently one of the last flights allowed to land. Less than an hour ago the army had appeared at the airport and was in the process of closing it to all incoming and outgoing flights. Nobody knew what had happened to Mikhail Gorbachev, but dark suspicions were growing.

Outside the airport we boarded the two large buses that had been arranged for us and began the last leg of our trip, a forty-five-minute drive through the city to the town of Golitsyno, on the western outskirts of Moscow. It was raining heavily as we drove, and everything we saw—buildings, fields, cars, people—was wet and gray. A large number of military vehicles, including several monstrous tanks, rumbled heavily down the road opposite us, heading into the center of Moscow. It was

hard to judge whether or not this was unusual, since few of us had ever been in the Soviet Union before, but we were already starting to imagine the worst.

We reached Golitsyno around 5:30 p.m., and were surprised and relieved by the clean, comfortable, well-tended accommodations. Our home for the next week was a small conference center for trade unions and academic organizations, with dorm-style rooms and numerous meeting halls and amphitheatres. The complex was surrounded by a dozen thickly wooded acres, criss-crossed by small walking paths. Far out among the tall, dark fir trees was a recreation cabin, with a dance floor and small bar, which the center's staff had christened "the Magic House."

We all took our bags to our rooms, ate supper, and then nervously gathered around a TV set in one of the lounges. The government had announced that an official statement on the unfolding political situation would be made this evening. When it began our chief translator for the conference repeated in English the news as it was broadcast, and our shock and amazement grew with every word. The newscaster began by saying Gorbachev was ill, and was being cared for at his dacha along the Crimean shore. We heard no more about him after that. A group of military officials was now in charge of the country, the newscaster continued, and the army had been mobilized to maintain public order. A "Committee on Martial Law" had been formed to take responsibility for insuring order and stability and for putting an end to the dangerous "weakness" and "decline" the nation had been suffering in recent times. Tanks were stationing themselves in Moscow to protect the people from any civil unrest. The TV then showed a brief film clip of Boris Yeltsin complaining about the martial law (our translator commented that this was done to prove that Yeltsin was still alive, and hadn't been physically removed as had the "ill" Gorbachev). The Committee on Martial Law concluded its statement by warning the rest of the world not to interfere in these "internal" Soviet developments.

Once the news broadcast ended and the enormity of what was happening sank in, we quietly discussed the practical question of what these stunning political events would mean for our conference. Karen Melik-Simonian, a Moscow psychologist who was the main conference organizer on the Soviet side, stood up and told us not to worry. He said that what we had just seen on TV was, in a way, "very beautiful" (a mysterious comment that I still don't quite understand). He emphasized that we were completely safe in Golitsyno and that these events would undoubtedly work themselves out. He added, however, that it was unlikely we would be able to communicate with our families outside the U.S.S.R. anytime soon.

With that, we returned to our rooms, and for the first time in many, many hours, we slept.



Tuesday was scheduled to be a rest day, with the conference program beginning Wednesday. So on Tuesday morning we ate a late breakfast, climbed aboard our buses, and drove through the cold, steady rain for a sight-seeing trip to the famous Russian Orthodox monastery at Zwinihorod. During the bus ride one of our translators filled us in on the latest news about the coup (which she and her friends had gleaned by listening to BBC radio broadcasts). She said hundreds of tanks and several battalions of armed troops had taken up positions on the streets of Moscow. The members of the Committee on Martial Law were, in most people's view, the worst, most brutal officials of the whole Soviet government. Gorbachev was certainly not ill but had simply been imprisoned, and perhaps murdered, by the military. Yeltsin was already the leading voice of resistance to the coup, and he had called a meeting of the Supreme Soviet of Russia for Wednesday to formulate a response to the situation.

The Zwinihorod monastery was beautiful, despite the dark clouds and the chilling rains beating down upon us. The copper-plated towers with their distinctive bulb shapes glowed luminously against the gray, gloomy skies. Inside the small, thickly walled chambers was displayed the monastery's supreme treasure: a collection of lovingly painted icons, many portraying the great saints of the Church's history, and others showing figures and scenes from the Bible. Gazing at a radiant image of Mary with the infant Jesus, I couldn't help but admire the tremendously deep roots of Russia's religious faith. The monastery was almost five hundred years old, and there was an atmosphere of stubborn determination to it, a proud defiance toward the Soviet government, toward the outside world, toward time itself.

Back at the conference center on Tuesday evening we watched the TV newsbroadcast again, and learned that an 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew had been imposed on Moscow. A series of gray-clad military officials appeared on the screen, each of them instructing the people to be calm, to obey the martial law decrees, and to ignore the treacherous complaints of violence-minded resisters.

After the news was over, the conference organizers informed us that the U.S. Embassy had issued a travel advisory suggesting that visitors within the Soviet Union "consider changing their plans" for departure. Unfortunately, it appeared the earliest possible time we could get

on a flight out of the country would be Friday, three days from now. And there was still no way to call our families, whom we could only imagine were terribly concerned about our safety. After some discussion we decided to go on with the conference and do as much work as we could before leaving on Friday. Karen Melik-Simonian concluded our meeting by saying that we should all stay put at the conference center in Golitsyno, and under no circumstances go into Moscow. The situation was quite unpredictable, he said, as the tensions between the military and the resistance were intensifying by the minute.

A common trait I've noticed among people who study dreams is a visceral discomfort with conventional authority. For many of us, being told *not* to do something often becomes an immediate and irresistible motivation to go ahead and *do* it. At breakfast Wednesday morning a group of us discovered that we all shared an overwhelming urge to go to Moscow—none of us could bear the idea of sitting passively in a conference center while something truly amazing was unfolding only a few miles away. So we quietly went back to our rooms, grabbed our raincoats and umbrellas, counted our rubles, checked our maps and passports, and hurried out to the Golitsyno train station, making sure to leave without letting any of the conference organizers see us.

There were eight of us making the journey into the city: four Americans, three Lithuanians, and a Dutch woman. We got to the train station in Moscow with no problems, and we then took a series of subways to Red Square. At many of the subway stations small crowds of people clustered around handbills posted on the walls. The Lithuanians (who, fortunately for the rest of us, were fluent in Russian) told us that these were notices put up by the resistance movement to provide people with information on the coup. Since the TV and newspapers had been seized by the military, the people had no other source of reliable information. I was startled when, in the process of taking a picture of a crowd reading these handbills, my camera's flash sent everyone suddenly hustling away. I belatedly realized that no one wanted to be photographed reading "unpatriotic" material.

The city's streets seemed fairly empty, although because of the cold, never-ending rain or the heavily armed troops we couldn't tell. Only a few businesses and shops were open, but there weren't many customers. Several major avenues were blocked off by troops and defensively positioned lines of tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs). Now we began to see some large crowds of people, quietly milling about the military vehicles, talking with the troops. I was struck by the intimacy of the interactions between the soldiers and the people. The people were sharing food and cigarettes with the troops, putting flowers on

the tanks, and calmly discussing with the soldiers their feelings about the national crisis.

We kept walking, and at one point we met a tight line of APCs that was blocking off a large intersection near Red Square (this evidently would have been a likely spot for antimilitary demonstrations). At first we thought we would have to turn back and walk around the block, but one of our Lithuanian friends somehow convinced the leader of the troops to let us through the APC barrier and over to the other side. As a group of soldiers, Kalashnikov rifles in hand, escorted us in single file across the big, empty intersection, the bizarre feeling came over me that this was a kind of hallowed realm, with the eerie electrical charge of a ritual circle. The ring of dark green army vehicles surrounding us all had their gun barrels pointed outward; there was no sound within except for the soft splashing of our shoes walking across the wet pavement. For a few strange moments we were inside whatever space it was they were guarding the people *against*. I felt intensely uncomfortable there, although I'm still not sure exactly why. When we finally reached the other side of the intersection, squeezed between the APCs, walked through the line of troops, and reentered the "normal" space of the city's streets, I was deeply relieved to be back among the warm crowd of soggy Muscovites.

We walked as close to Red Square as we could, marvelling at the dramatic scene before us: the stunningly beautiful towers of St. Basil's in the background, the ominous blockade of tanks and APCs in the foreground. By this time it was after 2 p.m., and we were all quite hungry, so we found a little canteen and bought ourselves some lunch. As we ate we decided to try to reach the U.S. Embassy so the Euro-Americans among us could try to send messages to our families, and perhaps get some new information on the crisis. The Lithuanians knew it was useless to seek any reliable news about what was happening in their homeland, which had been a reluctant member of the Soviet Union since its violent annexation at the end of World War II. They were extremely worried, though, because just a few years earlier a group of Lithuanian political leaders had organized a move toward greater independence, and the Red Army had come to swiftly and brutally reimpose Soviet control over their resistant subjects.

We rode the subway again, and when we left the station and started walking toward the American Embassy we saw a big commotion ahead of us. A huge crowd of people had gathered around a cluster of mangled, burned-out city buses. From what our Lithuanian friends could gather, the resistance forces had been using the buses as a barricade against the military; but that night tanks had come and smashed

through the buses, killing a number of people in the process. We could see the crowd circling around a couple of particular spots on the street. I went toward one of these spots, and found it to be a spontaneously created shrine, with icons, prayer candles, and a growing pile of fresh flowers. This, evidently, was the place where one of the people had been killed by the tanks. As we moved along, a Lithuanian friend pointed to other places along the street where the pavement was all chewed and broken up. You can see that the tanks have been here, she said.

We continued on toward the Embassy, very alarmed by what we had just seen. This was no longer just a rocky transfer of political power; the military had actually killed protestors, and now a strong resistance movement was clearly building up. More violence seemed inevitable. We reached the Embassy (itself protected by hastily erected walls of cement blocks), where the staff members informed us that the travel advisory had been upgraded: we were now urged to "seriously consider leaving the country" as soon as we could. The staff members took our messages for our families, gave us what information they had (most of it garnered from watching CNN broadcasts), and let us use the bathroom. Our business finished, we left, more worried than ever.

The Russian Parliament building, commonly known as the White House, was just down the hill from the embassy. We had heard that the resistance forces were gathering there to protect Boris Yeltsin and the other Russian national leaders inside the building. As we walked toward the White House we heard a rumor sweep through the crowds and up the hill toward and then past us—"Yanayev has been arrested!" people cried out happily. The arrest of Yanayev, the Soviet vice president whom the Committee on Martial Law had placed in Gorbachev's office, was apparently good news to the resistance. But we were baffled. *Who* had arrested him? How could he be "arrested?" What did it mean that he had been arrested? This strange rumor only made it more obvious to us how completely everything was in flux, how all ordinary authority structures had vanished.

The White House was surrounded by huge piles of steel pipes and wood planks, strategically placed clusters of overturned trucks, and more people than I've ever seen in one place in my life. The Russian national flag was everywhere, flying from flagpoles, pinned to lapels, and draping the podium where resistance leaders had come outside to give fiery, defiant speeches to the ever-growing crowd.

Suddenly, for the first time all day, our little group felt threatened. Throughout the day the eight of us had maintained a strong sense of group unity; each of us had continuously stayed aware of where the other seven were. But now, with torrents of people rushing in to help defend



the White House barricades, we were having trouble staying together as a group. We also sensed that if there was going to be further violence, it would likely happen here—the resistance forces were making their stand at this place, and we had just seen evidence that the military was willing to kill to enforce its authority. We decided it was time for us to leave.

And then, in the brief time it took our train to carry us from Moscow back to Golitsyno, it was all over.

We reached the conference center and found everyone around the TV again. This time they were listening to reports of how the tanks and troops were *leaving* the city, and how people were literally dancing in the streets, celebrating the shocking victory of the resistance. It turned out that the Red Army soldiers had refused their orders to storm the White House, and some military units had actually turned around and defended the building against attack. The members of the Committee on Martial Law were reportedly fleeing to Siberia, pursued by anticoup air force jets. The same reporters who the previous two nights had spoken of Boris Yeltsin's "inflammatory" words against the Committee on Martial Law were now praising his heroism in defeating the attempted coup.

Despite the tremendously positive turn of events and the relieved jubilation of everyone at the conference, I somehow felt more disoriented than ever. We left Moscow at the darkest moment of the crisis, having seen the intimidating display of military force, the places where people had been killed, and the courageous but desperate people at the White House barricades; then, we arrived at Golitsyno and discovered that the crisis was over, the darkness had passed, and everything was back to normal. It had all happened *so fast* . . .

Not knowing what sense to make of these strange feelings, I tried to put them out of my mind, and I joined with our group in celebrating the resistance' victory. The conference program had begun at last, meaning that the coming days would be filled with fascinating lectures, workshops, and discussion groups. I turned my energies toward the exciting conversations about current dream research that, I reminded myself, were my primary business in Russia.

That night I had the following dream:

I'm back at Stanford. . . . Dad drives me and some others. . . . He drives kind of spastically, over easy roads; he almost hits curbs. . . . I get out of the car, and look around to find a catalog, and time schedule. . . . I'm very excited to be back in school.

What first struck me about the dream when I woke up was my dad's almost hitting the curbs. It immediately reminded me of the tanks in Moscow having broken up the street curbs in the process of killing the protesters. The feeling of elation at being back at school reminded me

of the excitement I felt as the conference started, and the excitement all the local people felt as the coup was defeated. The dream was clearly relating the current political transformations with elements of my personal life, although in a way I didn't immediately understand.

The next afternoon I had a long talk with Armenian anthropologist and political activist Levon Abrahamian, who had presented a paper at the conference interpreting Soviet history as a symbolic interplay of father-son conflicts (i.e., Stalin acting as a brutal father figure, Krushchev a buffoonish son, Brezhnev a "false" father, and Gorbachev a mischievous trickster). Our conversation led me to think about my dream as a kind of cultural commentary. In the dream my father drives me around, in control but not in control—endangering me and others with his spastic driving, just as the Soviet military was endangering the people with its spastic grab for power, its tanks clumsily hitting and breaking up the curbs. When I get out of Dad's car, suddenly I'm elated, with the world opened up before me; I can take any class I want, the future is full of possibilities. Likewise, the Russian people had suddenly liberated themselves from the domineering control of the Soviet military, and they could now create their own future, their own world. While I, and they, need some *new* structures to replace the old ones (e.g., the catalog and time schedule), the primary feeling is one of joy and exhilaration.

When I reflected on the dream in this way, I came to believe that at one level the dream was helping me understand that strange, isolating sense of disorientation I felt upon returning from Moscow. The dream seemed to bridge the fear to the elation, helping me integrate the intense yet radically disjointed emotions I had experienced in the past seventy-two hours. If I followed Levon's image of a son's struggle to develop a mature relationship with his father, I could use my own personal experiences with my father to gain at least some insight into the incredible political events swirling about me.

Dreams always bear many gifts, however. As I pursued these reflections I realized that the dream was doing more than interpreting current political events for me. I began to sense that the dream was also suggesting hidden potentials in my future, and perhaps in Russia's future as well. The key fact here is that my father went to college at Stanford, too, and like me he found his time there to be a wondrous, magical period of new possibilities. Despite our many differences and conflicts, he and I nevertheless share a treasured experience of seemingly infinite freedom (what historian of religions Mircea Eliade would call an experience "*in illo tempore*," "in the time of origins"). I thought of how my father and I could perhaps develop a better relationship if we drew more directly on that shared experience, if we talked about the dreams and ideals we formed for ourselves during those enchanting college years.

I also thought of Levon's comments about the patricidal character of the victory celebrations in Moscow following the coup's defeat. Statues of Soviet leaders were being violently torn down, and streets and squares were being hastily renamed, their old Soviet names erased. The Communist Party had already been officially banned. Certainly, when fathers are tyrants, sons must overthrow them. But if the sons forget that even tyrannical fathers once had dreams for the future, and if the sons cast aside those dreams as forcefully as they break free from their shackles, might not the newly liberated sons become tyrannical fathers themselves?

As the end of the conference approached, I started thinking about going back into Moscow one last time. Ever since Wednesday I had been haunted by the image of that broken pavement where the tanks had killed the protesters. I realized that I very much wanted to go there, to *be* at that place now that the crisis had ended. So on Monday, August 26 I left Golitsyno as early as I could and took the long train ride into Moscow. Using the large white balloon flying high above the Russian Parliament building as my beacon, I found my way back to the U.S. Embassy. Then I walked a few blocks down the street, and I was there again.

The spontaneous shrines to the victims of the tanks had grown tremendously in the past few days. Piles of beautiful fresh flowers lay everywhere. At the end of the street, near where the buses had been crushed, a few small fires burned, evidently as part of a continual vigil of mourning. The Russian Orthodox imagery was powerful—crucifixes, images of Jesus and Mary, candles, prayer beads, all emphasizing the martyrdom of the three men who had died there. I saw many adults who had brought their children to the shrines, to see and remember what had happened. I moved slowly through the quiet, reflective crowd, and came to that one place with the broken pavement.

Suddenly, something very unexpected happened. I began to cry. I sat down on the curb, ran my hand over the mangled concrete, and cried.

After a time I stood up and walked slowly over to the main shrine, above which rose a large wooden cross carefully inscribed with the date "8-21-91." People were coming up to the cross and laying down various gifts and offerings—more flowers, icons, food, even money. I wanted to leave an offering, too, but as I patted my pockets I discovered I didn't have anything special with me. Then I realized no, I do have something to offer. I took my green pen from my shirt pocket and laid it down in front of the cross. I said a silent prayer, vowing that my response, my way of honoring the people who had died at this place, would be to write.