

Chapter 2

Catch the Dream

When I was around thirty-years old, I felt a strong need to develop a new language that could better express my feelings and ideas. I felt frozen and trapped by many expectations. The Swedish poet Stig Dagerman helped me put words to my feelings in his 1953 poem “Ice age”:

*You have no soul when it's cold,
You have an icy little business stamp.
You might almost wish you could melt
and become a river, like the Nile for example.*

*But here no one becomes what he wants to be.
You stand like a statue in the snowy landscape.
Suddenly one day you have frozen solid
and every time you open your mouth you spout ice.*

*And then everything happens as foretold.
In front of some fire your icy profile melts.
The hostess brings nothing but a rag.
You become a puddle, though you wanted to be the Nile.*

The poem was written before the Aswan Dam was built to regulate the Nile River, the world's longest river. Before the dam was built, the Nile River flooded every year, bringing water, nutrients, minerals, and silt to fertilize and build up the delta, making the Nile Valley and Delta ideal for farming. Today, a combination of regional anthropogenic changes, such as the Aswan Dam and climate change induced by increased greenhouse gas levels, is seriously threatening the Egyptian coast. Later in my life, I had the opportunity to work on climate change in the Mediterranean Sea area with Mohamed Shaltout from the University of Alexandria. We demonstrated that even a slight sea-level rise could greatly damage the Nile Delta region (Shaltout and Omstedt 2015). This led to a call to organize, with the involvement of the wider society outside the scientific community, effective integrated coastal zone management to prevent future flooding. Such interaction is often needed in the Earth



sciences, creating a need for new communication skills not touched on in most science curricula but discussed widely in relation to climate change. In my early thirties, I wrote a short article in our union newsletter, accompanied by Stig Dagerman's "Ice Age", expressing my frustration at being trapped in an old mode of work organization. My search for a new language had started.

I had defended my Ph.D. thesis about cooling and ice formation in the ocean while working at the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute, developing forecasting models for the ice-breaking service. The scientific work was a great pleasure: in particular, testing theories about the sea against field observations evoked unfamiliar and exciting feelings. The possibility of integrating mathematical expression into computer codes and of testing theories directly against observations inspired me greatly. However, I did not feel satisfied or free and, needing to redirect my life, attended a summer course to work on dreams, myths, and literature. The first night I dreamt that *I was standing outside a department store and inside I could see lots of interesting boxes. When I went to the main entrance, the door was locked.* The night after this dream, I dreamt that *I was bitten by a scorpion on my Achilles tendon.* My interest in dreams had awakened, and I realized that the key to my dreams was my own vulnerability and feelings. That first summer course was held at Biskops-Arnö Adult Education School, beautifully situated on Lake Mälaren outside Stockholm, by Stina Hammar, who has written several books about literature and dreams. From that beginning, attending summer courses at various places around Sweden and working in dream groups gave me an education in dream appreciation. At the same time, I was exploring my academic field and deepening my understanding of how the seas function.

Reference

Shaltout, M., & Omstedt, A. (2015). Sea-level change and projected future flooding along the Egyptian Mediterranean coast. *Oceanologia*, 57(4), 293–307.

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