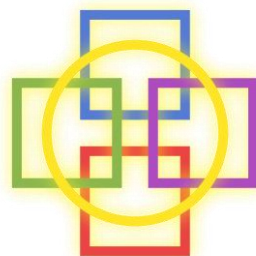




SERMON ARCHIVE 2014

Swedenborgian Community Online



Providence & Prosperity

January 5, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

John 14 & 15

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves....

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

From Swedenborg

TC 8

There is an inflow from God into us. ...This inflow comes into our souls because the soul is the inmost and highest part of us. The inflow from God reaches that part first and then comes down into the things below and enlivens them, depending on our openness to what flows in.

What is meant by spiritual influx cannot be better seen than by means of the natural influxes which take place and appear in this world-as by the influx of heat from the sun into all things of the earth. H.S. 6190

Message **Providence & Prosperity**



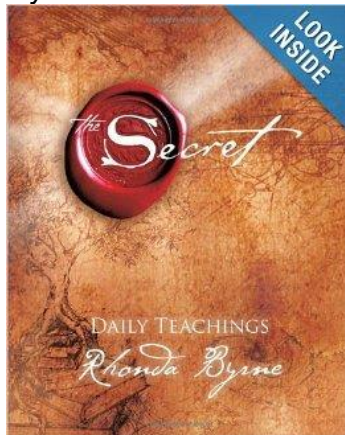
Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

WELCOME TO 2014!



Ten years ago, in 2004, an Australian woman named Rhonda Byrne was in great despair. Her father had just died, her mother was suicidal, and she was broke financially. Rhonda was overwhelmed and didn't know where to turn for help. Then her 24-year-old daughter showed her a copy of a 1910 book, *The Science of Getting Rich* by Wallace Wattles. Rhonda opened the book and read the first paragraph:

Whatever may be said in praise of poverty, the fact remains that it is not possible to live a really complete or successful life unless one is rich. No man can rise to his greatest possible height in talent or soul development unless he has plenty of money; for to unfold the soul and to develop talent he must have many things to use, and he cannot have these things unless he has money to buy them with.... the basis of all advancement for man must be the science of getting rich.



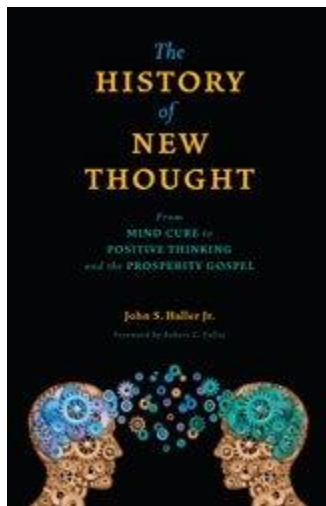
Ms. Byrne immediately put the principles of this book into practice, and her life was transformed. She traveled the road to wealth, success, and happiness.

She thought she had discovered something new, but then learned that the *concepts could be found in almost every religion and field of human endeavor throughout history*. [view [“Making the Secret -- A Brief History,”](#)]

Rhonda felt compelled to put together a video about her discovery. It became immensely popular, and was published as a best-selling book in 2006. [*The Secret*, Atria Books, New York, 2006].

The Swedenborg Foundation recently released a book: *The History of New Thought: from Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel* by John S. Haller.

Haller sees Rhonda Byrne's "The Secret" as coming from a long line of ideas known as "New Thought." Initially, Haller believes, this was a dynamic interfaith theology that was strongly influenced by Swedenborg.



He writes:

As New Thought broke into the twentieth century, it advocated a new religious pluralism that applied not only to the major Protestant denominations but to Catholics, Jews, and other world religions. With minds open to cosmic consciousness, they all searched for truth about life both inside and outside the normative institutions of their day. Drawing upon Emerson's "Over-Soul," Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass (1855), the Hindu sacred texts of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, and Confucius's maxims, among others, they introduced an Oriental flavor to American thought and culture.... Other progenitors of New Thought's second generation of writers were Swedenborg's spiritualistic readings of the Bible; Helena Blavatsky's brotherhood of Mahatmas; the clairvoyant Edgar Cayce (1877–1945), who promoted reincarnation; the mystic visions recounted in William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902); the spiritual works of Indian leader Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) and his American Vedanta Society; and the Self-Realization Fellowship of yoga master Paramhansa Yogananda (1893–1952).

However, by the 1920's, Haller says there was change in approach with New Thought.

What before had been judged a mind-cure movement now conflated those same images of spirit and matter into an unapologetic system of high-powered personal magnetism for exalting material success. With this change, what was left of Emerson's Over-Soul and Swedenborg's law of correspondences disappeared in the rhetorical flourishes of writers whose notions of positive thinking, visualization, and affirmation percolated into the general culture. The mind, once firmly in the domain of divine influx, became a distant echo, drowned out by the kinetic energy of free-market capitalism.

[Haller, John S. (2012-12-01). The History of New Thought: From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel (SWEDENBORG STUDIES) (Kindle Locations 305-310). Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. Kindle Edition.]

Haller sees much to admire in "New Thought," but also has deep concerns by what is often called the "Prosperity Gospel" – that God want us to be rich and rewards our faithfulness with wealth.

In a [Washington Post](#) article, Cathleen Falsani [religion editor for *Chicago Sun-Times*] writes:

The gospel of prosperity turns Christianity into a vapid bless-me club, with a doctrine that amounts to little more than spiritual magical thinking: If you pray the right way, God will make you rich.

But if you're not rich, then what? Are the poor cursed by God because of their unfaithfulness? And if God were so concerned about 401(k)s and Mercedes, why would God's son have been born into poverty?

Does God want you to have a lot of money? Are the righteous and faithful more likely to prosper financially? Where do these ideas come from? Where would Swedenborg and modern-day Swedenborgians fit in with debates on this subject?

We're going to explore these question in the coming weeks. We'll look at a variety of perspectives on the topic, and share together our ideas and experiences with Providence and prosperity.

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Providence, please help me understand how You lead me in my life. Show me how to understand Your will and Your guidance. Open my heart to follow where You are leading me. Amen.

Health & Wealth: New Thought and God

January 12, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

John 9

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

From Swedenborg

By the human mind are meant its two faculties, which are called the understanding and the will. The understanding is the receptacle of the light of heaven, which in its essence is wisdom, and the will is the receptacle of the heat of heaven, which in its essence is love, as was shown above. These two, wisdom and love, proceed from the Lord, as a sun, and flow into heaven universally and particularly, whence the angels have wisdom and love; and they also flow into this world universally and particularly, whence men have wisdom and love. [Soul-Body, [Soul-Body, 14, XII]

Message HEALTH & WEALTH: NEW THOUGHT AND GOD

Part I: The Major Players

In 2004, a woman in Australia – Rhonda Byrne – was depressed from a series of traumatizing events in her life. Her daughter encouraged her to read an old book from 1910: *The Science of Getting Rich* by Wallace Wattles. Rhonda read the book eagerly, and then set out to put the principles into her own life. She became healthy and rich. She felt that there was a secret to health and wealth, which had to do with our thoughts. After producing a DVD and book, she became one of the most recent proponents of a way of thinking often called "New Thought."

In the early years of New Thought – primarily the 1800's – the focus was on how we can

use our thoughts to heal disease. By the 1900's, the idea of using our thoughts to become rich -- and that wealth is God's will -- become dominant and is often called "the prosperity Gospel."

We're going to be exploring some of the roots of this movement, which was impacted by Swedenborg and Swedenborgians, and then consider where it fits into Swedenborg's ideas -- and *your* ideas.

You might well ask why any of this matters for your spiritual life. It all ties into this year's theme on how Providence works in our lives. It is key to questions about health and wealth:

What is God's role in sickness and health? Does God make you sick to teach you a lesson? Does God give you health to reward your faith? What is *your* role? When you are sick, how much is your negative thinking the cause? If you are healthy, is it because of your positive thinking?

What is God's role in poverty and prosperity? Is wealth a reward from God or poverty a punishment? What is *your* role? If you are poor, how much of this is due to your own thoughts? Can anyone become rich by the "right" thinking?

If health and wealth are primarily about God's will, then prayer and faith are core. If they are primarily about our thoughts, then learning how to control our thoughts is central. On the other hand, if health is primarily about germs, health care, and medical research -- then social policy is more important than individual thoughts or prayers. If poverty is primarily about discrimination and lack of opportunity, then again social policy becomes key.

It is possible, of course, that we are dealing with complicated topics in which all of these factors interweave in a complicated and crucial way. We'll look at some of the major players in these debates and consider Swedenborg's views. Of most importance, will be for each of us to decide how we want to live our life connected with God, our thoughts, and each other.

Let's look at some of the key players as "New Thought" principles coalesced into a movement in the years following Swedenborg's death.



PHINEAS QUIMBY [1802-1866]

After the death of Emanuel Swedenborg in 1772, many of his followers became involved with the advocates of Mesmerism – also called animal magnetism.

In 1838, a 36 year-old man from Belfast, Maine, went to a lecture on Mesmerism; and he eventually helped launch much of New Thought and modern healing. His name was Phineas Quimby [1802-1866], a clock maker. After the lecture on Mesmerism, he worked with a man named Lucius Burkmar. Quimby put Burkmar into a trance, in which Burkmar could diagnose disease. At first, Quimby thought this was “animal magnetism” and a form of electricity passing into patients.

After awhile, Quimby came to feel that Burkmar was not picking up an actual disease in a patient, but rather the patient’s belief about his disease. As Quimby explored “The Truth,” he became convinced that disease was not real; it existed only in the mind. He began to sit with patients and talk to them about their belief about their disease. He would point out the error in their thinking, and people would be healed.

It was with this approach that Quimby treated the sick. He claimed that "mind was spiritual matter and could be changed;" that we were made up of "truth and error;" that "disease was an error, or belief, and that the Truth was the cure." He claimed this to be "science of curing the sick."

In 1859 Quimby went to Portland, Maine, where he remained until the summer of 1865, healing the sick. He died at home in Belfast in 1866.

Quimby had an amazing array of patients during his years in Portland. They included Mary M. Patterson, who later founded Christian Science as Mary Baker Eddy. Quimby also healed two young people who met in his office: Julius Dresser and Annetta G. Seabury. They later married and moved to Boston where they started a healing movement known as “New Thought.” Two of their sons would become Swedenborgian ministers in Maine. One of them, Horatio W. Dresser, edited the works of Quimby and wrote about how they compared to Swedenborg.

One of his patients was a Swedenborgian.



WARREN FELT EVANS [1817-1889]

Evans was a Methodist minister from Vermont became a Swedenborgian and a student of Quimby's. He wrote many books comparing Swedenborg's theology with Quimby's healing. Here's a bit of his story:

In 1856, he was a New Hampshire Methodist minister becoming bored with Methodist church literature and prayer. He began reading the mystics. He had numerous health problems, so turned to prayer to address them. He began praying to be led to "*some book or books which would satisfy this inmost need.*" He then felt guided to a bookshop in Portsmouth, N.H., where he saw a book by mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. He began reading Swedenborg with great enthusiasm.

But his health began to worsen. He had to suspend his parish work and by 1859 had not been preaching for 6 months. He turned to the writings of Swedenborg to gain a new perspective on healing; one that looks beyond the body to the soul. He wrote "*But during this complete prostration of my nervous system my soul had tranquility reposed in God. Far down below my trembling nerves there is a region of soul where all is still and silent.*"

In 1863 he decided to visit Phineas Quimby in Portland, Maine. Evans was immediately healed of dyspepsia, which had afflicted him for years. He felt that he had found someone who put into practice Swedenborg's approach to healing. Evans felt that because of his Swedenborgian background, he understood Quimby's healing secrets, and could use them himself. Quimby agreed as Evans began his training with Quimby.

The next year, Evans was re-baptized at the Swedenborgian Church on Beacon Hill. He and his family moved to Boston, where he became a well-known healer. He wrote many books combining the theology of Swedenborg with the healing techniques of Quimby. Many consider Evans to be a key starter of the New Thought movement. It was through the writings of Evans that many came to learn about Quimby's approaches to healing.

Evans was an important link between Quimby and the Swedenborgian community.

Evans came to believe that Quimby's healing methods were Swedenborg's ideas in action. There were other ideas about this, however, as we'll see in Part 2 in two weeks.

Have you used prayer to heal yourself or others? What has that experience been like? Do you think your own thinking has contributed to your health or sickness?

Do you believe that your prayers and/or your thoughts contribute to your financial situation in life?

Let us pray.

“Dear Lord, Help us to understand how You work in our lives and how our prayers and our thoughts contribute to our well-being. Help us also understand how we each contribute to the well-being of others.”

Making a Difference

January 19, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Micah 6

He has showed you, O man, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

From Swedenborg

To will not to do evil to the neighbor is to love him. For he who loves another? does not do evil to him. ...This is evident, that he who loves the neighbor does not? commit these evils.
[Divine Providence 210. (1.)]?

Message Making a Difference

Martin Luther King, Jr. learned about social evil at an early age. He wrote this in his autobiography:

I remember a trip to a downtown shoe store with Father when I was still small. We had sat down in the first empty seats at the front of the store. A young white clerk came up and murmured politely:

"I'll be happy to wait on you if you'll just move to those seats in the rear."

Dad immediately retorted, "There's nothing wrong with these seats. We're quite comfortable here."

King entered Morehouse College in 1944 at the age of 15 and there read Henry David Thoreau's essay "On Civil Disobedience" for the first time.

He wrote:

Here, in this courageous New Englander's refusal to pay his taxes and his choice of jail rather than support a war that would spread slavery's ...I made my first contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times.

Thoreau seems to have read Swedenborg, and may have absorbed some of his concept of “evil” and of “neighbor.”

King graduated from Morehouse College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology in 1948 and entered seminary. He came to believe that religion had as its purpose addressing social evils: He wrote while in seminary:

any religion that professes concern for the souls of men and is not equally concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried. It well has been said: "A religion that ends with the individual, ends."

Seminary was a transformative experience for him.

In the spring of 1950 he heard a lecture by Howard University president Mordecai Johnson on Gandhi [who had been killed in 1948; two years previous]. King wrote in his autobiography:

His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half-dozen books on Gandhi's life and works. Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by his Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform.

So King now came to see a method for eradicating social evil: Non-violence.

Ghandi was on the path of “karma yoga” or “yoga of action.” There one seeks unity with God through good actions or Satygraha -- the way out of pain of hurting others. This was particularly important to MLK. For him, the essence of truth was nonviolence.

King said that one can bring about change through the force of one’s moral character; not by violence. He wrote:

While the Montgomery boycott was going on, India's Gandhi was the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change.

King came to understand that non-violence was deeply rooted in the understanding of the nature of God.

In 1959, the Kings embarked for India. King wrote in his autobiography:

I was delighted that the Gandhians accepted us with open arms. I left India more convinced than ever before that nonviolent resistance was the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. . . . The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But the way of nonviolence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community.

He was saying that God’s redemption comes to us through non-violent living in community. Non violence only makes sense in the context of a God of Love.

King also embraced Gandhi's God of Truth. Gandhi was a deeply spiritual Hindu who said "Truth is God, God is Truth." When asked if he believed in God, he said, "God is even in these stones."

Dr. King worked for world peace. He traveled across America to support and speak out about civil rights and the rights of the underprivileged.

In April 1968 King went to Memphis, Tennessee to help the sanitation workers who were on strike. On April 3rd Dr. King would give what would be his last speech:

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I have been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind.

In his 1959 sermon on Gandhi, he wrote:

The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, so that when the battle's over, a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor." In the same sermon, he contrasted violent versus nonviolent resistance to oppression. "The way of acquiescence leads to moral and spiritual suicide. The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But, the way of non-violence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community.

The logic of King's dream was theologically specific: beloved community as the realization of divine love in lived social relation. To be sure, King's concept of love was surely not the platitudinous "all you need is love"; it was rather the passion to make human life and social existence a parable of God's love.

Marsh, Charles (2008-07-31). *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (p. 2). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Each and every person makes a difference in the world.

The Monday after "Beloved Community Sunday" is a time to do something to serve others.

What will you do to make a difference and help us take a step towards a "beloved community"?

Choose any volunteer activity that serves others in love. It doesn't need to be an entire day. If you can spend one hour in loving service, you will help transform our violent society into a caring "beloved community." You can make a difference.

Thinking Healthy

January 26, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Exodus 7

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a miracle,' then say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a snake."

Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt.

But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said. Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.

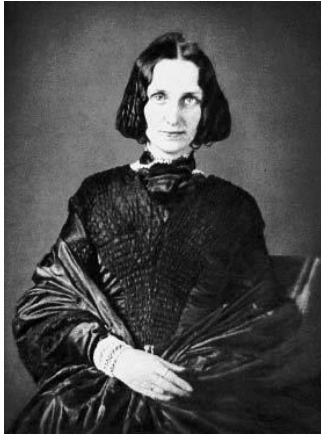
From Swedenborg

As regards miracles, it should be recognized that Divine miracles are as different from miracles involving the use of magic as heaven is from hell. Divine miracles spring from Divine Truth and take place in accordance with true order. Effects on lowest levels are miracles when it pleases the Lord that they should present themselves in that form. Thus it is that all Divine miracles represent states of the Lord's kingdom in heaven, and of the Lord's kingdom on earth, which is the Church. And this is the inward form that Divine miracles take. AC 7337

Message Healthy Thinking

When you are sick or have a medical condition, what do you do? See a Western doctor? See a doctor who practices some form of alternative medicine [such as homeopathy]? Pray? See a faith healer? Change your thoughts about your condition? Some combination of all of these?

The question of how much our thinking impacts our healing has been a central issue throughout the history of "New Thought." Some "New Thought" proponents say that we can cure any illness by changing out thoughts. If you are sick, it is because, in your mind, you think you are sick. If you think you are healthy, you will become healthy. How valid is this? How does it compare to Swedenborg's perspective?



Mary Baker Eddy was certain that our thoughts lead to our illness or our health. She was the founder of Christian Science. Eddy was born on a farm in Bow, NH, in 1821 – the youngest of six children in a devout Congregational family. She lived for a time in Franklin, as well as in the town next door; Tilton. In later years, she had a large home in Concord, N.H.

Mary was sickly throughout her childhood. As an adult, she continued suffering from poor health. In 1862, she decided to visit a healer in Portland, Maine named Phineas Parkhurst Quimby. During treatments, Eddy was completely healed and became an enthusiastic student of Quimby's approach to using thoughts to bring one to health.

Shortly after Quimby's death, Eddy fell on the ice, and was found to have severe internal spasms. Taken back to her home in Swampscott, MA, she was confined to her bed. Most of those around her felt that she could not be healed. Then, a few days later, she picked up a Bible, overwhelmed with the conviction that her life was in God and that God was the only Life, the sole reality of existence. She was instantly healed. She got out of bed, dressed, and walked into the next room. Christian Science was born.

New Thought researcher John Haller writes:

Eddy's "Christian Science" represented one of the more nonrational forms of healing in American history, denying the existence of sickness, sin, death, and even matter.

HALLER, JOHN S. (2010-03-11). SWEDENBORG, MESMER, AND THE MIND/BODY CONNECTION: THE ROOTS OF COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE (SWEDENBORG STUDIES) (Kindle Locations 3200-3201). Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. Kindle Edition.



Denying the existence of matter is quite a provocative statement. Yet it is at the root of much of "New Thought," including the ideas of the healer who taught Eddy about thoughts and health: Phineas Quimby. Haller says of him:

Many people have studied his techniques, but he remains unique and mysterious in how he healed. He insisted that he did not work with energy -- like in Mesmerism or hands-on healing. He said he did not go into trances or contact spirits. He said he simply established a rapport with the patient and came to understand how their thinking was causing their illness. Then he helped them change their thinking.

Another person influenced by Quimby's healing approach was Warren Felt Evans.

Evans was a Methodist minister from Vermont. He had serious illnesses that did not respond to medical care. He visited Quimby for healing and, in the process, became a Swedenborgian -- and a student of Quimby's. He wrote many books comparing Swedenborg's theology with Quimby's healing. He felt that Quimby and Swedenborg were saying pretty much the same thing about matter not really existing.

Someone who disagreed with that was Horatio Dresser.



Horatio Dresser was a Swedenborgian minister and editor of Quimby's works. He was the son of Julius Dresser and Anetta Seabury. The two had met in Quimby's waiting room in Portland, ME. Later they married, and devoted their lives to New Thoughts forms of healing. They had two sons who became Swedenborgian ministers in Maine. Horatio served the Portland New Church for awhile. He became an early historian of the New Thought movement, and how it compared with Swedenborg.

Horatio became quite critical of claims that "matter" didn't really exist; that the only reality was in the mind. He pointed out that Swedenborg believed in the reality of both the physical and spiritual planes.

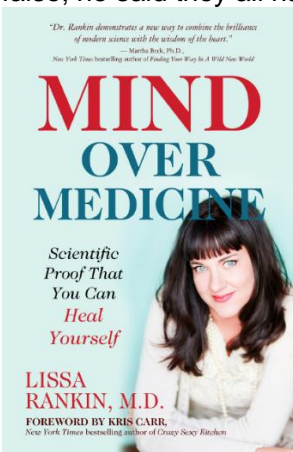
Dresser felt that some of Quimby's ideas were very compatible with Swedenborg, and some were not; and most of New Thought came from parts were not compatible with Swedenborg's writings.

Swedenborg says that both the physical and spiritual exist. Our physical self is in direct relationship with the spiritual. Our focus needs to be on love, and on living with loving actions.

How do we make sense of this in our lives – for our personal healing? How much healing is in our thoughts? Our prayers? Our medications and surgeries?

Swedenborg had a central focus that he returned to many times: *both/and*. He tended to reject rigid *either/or* approaches to life. He didn't say that there is only one true religion and the rest are

false; he said they all have some truth.



There is no question but that positive thinking and prayer can impact healing. Lissa Rankin, M.D., in her book, *Mind Over Medicine: Scientific Proof that you Can Heal Yourself*, points out that there is much evidence of people being healed from a placebo – “the placebo effect.” Subjects are given a pill with no medication in it; but they are told the pill has medication that will heal them. Over and over again, some subjects are healed with a placebo. Why? She explores a number of reasons for the placebo effect, and concludes that it is often – but not always – effective. She writes:

What I found is that nearly every clinical trial demonstrates a placebo effect, but some health conditions appear to be more placebo-responsive than others. Placebos seem to be most effective when given to patients with immune-system conditions.

Rankin M.D., Lissa (2013-05-07). *Mind Over Medicine: Scientific Proof That You Can Heal Yourself* (Kindle Locations 558-560). Hay House, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

She says that the dictionary defines “to heal” means both “to cure” and “to become whole.” We can become whole without necessarily curing a particular illness. She says:

From here on, when I use the word heal I’m referring to the second definition— the return to wholeness. There’s a difference between curing and this kind of healing. You can be cured without being healed, and you can be healed without being cured. In a perfect world, the process you’re about to embark upon will both cure you and return you to wholeness. But I can’t guarantee that you will be cured. What I can guarantee is that, if you embark upon this process with the support of the right people, you will wind up healed and whole, even if you’re not cured.

Rankin M.D., Lissa (2013-05-07). *Mind Over Medicine: Scientific Proof That You Can Heal Yourself* (Kindle Locations 3104-3108). Hay House, Inc., Kindle Edition.

From this perspective, our thoughts can help to bring us into harmony and wholeness; even if they don’t make a particular medical condition go away.

There are many cases of people being healing by their thoughts – also by their prayers, by Western medicine, by homeopathy, by hands-on-healing. There are also many situations in which none of these have been able to cure a condition.

How do we find a way to use *both/and* approaches to health in our lives?

What has worked or not worked for you in your own times of healing? How powerful are our thoughts? How has *your* thinking impacted your life and your health?

Happy Birthday, Emanuel!

February 2, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 77

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A psalm.

*1 I cried out to God for help;
I cried out to God to hear me.*

*2 When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;
at night I stretched out untiring hands
and my soul refused to be comforted.*

*3 I remembered you, O God, and I groaned;
I mused, and my spirit grew faint.
Selah*

*4 You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.*

*5 I thought about the former days,
the years of long ago;*

*6 I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart mused and my spirit inquired:*

*7 "Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?"*

*8 Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?"*

*9 Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"
Selah*

*10 Then I thought, "To this I will appeal:
the years of the right hand of the Most High."*

*11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.*

*12 I will meditate on all your works
and consider all your mighty deeds.*



13 Your ways, O God, are holy.
What god is so great as our God?

14 You are the God who performs miracles;
you display your power among the peoples.

15 With your mighty arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.
Selah

16 The waters saw you, O God,
the waters saw you and writhed;
the very depths were convulsed.

17 The clouds poured down water,
the skies resounded with thunder;
your arrows flashed back and forth.

18 Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind,
your lightning lit up the world;
the earth trembled and quaked.

19 Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.

20 You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

From Swedenborg

I have stated on occasion that love is what constitutes our life, but this does not mean love separated from wisdom, or what is good separated from what is true in the cause. This is because love by itself, or what is good by itself, is nothing. Consequently, the love that constitutes our deepest life, the life that comes from the Lord, is love and wisdom together. So too, the love that constitutes our life to the extent that we are open to it is not love by itself in the cause, though it is by itself in the result. Love is incomprehensible apart from its quality, and its quality is wisdom. That quality or wisdom can come only from its underlying reality, which is love. This is why they are a single whole; and the same holds true for what is good and what is true. Divine Providence #13 NCE

Message
Happy Birthday, Emanuel!



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

The late [Donella Meadows](#) was a pioneer in looking at system's theory. To explain how a system is about wholeness, she cited this Sufi teaching story:

You think that because you understand “one” that you must therefore understand “two” because one and one make two. But you forget that you must also understand “and.”

In many ways, this quotation expresses the essence of Swedenborgian theology. We are all about the “ands.” Swedenborg wrote about Love AND Wisdom, Good AND Truth, Human AND Divine. Neither of these can exist without the other.

Swedenborg did not focus on separating them; of choosing between one and the other. His emphasis was that the essence of existence was putting both together. They meld together into a “distinguishable oneness,” in which each retains some of its uniqueness, but together they create something that neither could do alone.

Wednesday was Swedenborg's birthday. He would have been 326 years old! He would probably feel today that his theology was well expressed in the Sufi teaching: *You think that because you understand “one” that you must therefore understand “two” because one and one make two. But you forget that you must also understand “and.”*

He would also probably find modern physics compatible with his theology.

Modern physics has established that reality involves both “particle” and “wave.” The “waves” are in constant motion drawing the particles into creative relationship. Physicist [Fritz Capra](#) wrote this:

Modern physics has shown us that movement and rhythm are essential properties of matter ... that all matter is involved in a creative cosmic dance. [Fritz Capra]

I love seeing the universe as involved in a creative cosmic dance! All of life, all of creation, is about dancing together! Swedenborg wrote about dance as an ancient form of prayer from The Word:

The meaning of 'dance' as that which has regard to an affection for spiritual truth, and means the delightful feeling or gladness belonging to it, dealt with below. In ancient times not only musical instruments and singing served to bear witness to gladness of heart but also dancing. Joyful feelings in the heart or interior things erupted into various activities in the body, such as singing and also dancing. Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to dance as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy. This explains why 'dancing' is mentioned in the Word, meaning the glad feelings that belong to affections for truth, or to faith grounded in good or charity, as in Jeremiah, Again you will adorn your timbrels, and will go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. Their life** will become like a watered*

garden, and they will not sorrow any more. Then will the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together. Jer. 31:4, 12, 13. [SH 8339]

One of my favorite Biblical passages is in Exodus. God parts the Red Sea so that that Israelites can cross it on dry land. When they safely reach the other side:

"Then Miriam the prophetess ... took a tambourine in her hand, and all the other women followed her with tambourines and dancing." Ex. 15:20 [SH 8336]

Swedenborg says this passage shows us that "dance" means spiritual truth and gladness of heart, and that in ancient time:

Joyful feelings in the heart or interior things erupted into various activities in the body, such as singing and also dancing. Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to dance as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy. [AC 420 and 8339].

Swedenborg also talked about the movement or flow towards wholeness:

346. When many are speaking at the same time, there is a certain most beautiful harmony, a very lovely kind of wave-like movement toward oneness, because of the agreement. At such times they also possess much more force of action and speech, as I have, by the Divine mercy of God the Messiah, experienced on several occasions, together with a deep happiness. The beauty itself of the melodic progression, ending up in unity, was also shown to me in an amazing way, and it was stunning, beyond all description. [Spiritual Experiences-Word Explained (Odhner) n. 34.]

The Sacred Dance Guild believes that sacred dance is a catalyst for spiritual growth and change through the integration of mind, body, and spirit. ... as an agent of change; and as a message of peace.

Some Sufi traditions celebrate dances of peace, and the Whirling Dervishes are Sufi's who use movement as prayer. **Kathryn Mihelick**, Development Director and Director of the Leaven Dance Company says:

Movement is the universal language which integrates us, speaks across cultures, and transcends the spoken word to manifest the spirit. "To move is human....to dance is divine."

Connie Tyler, Resource Director of The Dance Company, says:

We have Jewish dancers, participants in Dances of Universal Peace, people who do Yoga dance, Buddhist dance, the traditional temple dances of both Northern and Southern India ...What is important is what is in the heart and the soul of the dancer, the connection to the divine.

All of this says a lot about community.

Community is about the “and .” A congregation is a community with a spirituality focus. You think because you understand yourself and you understand another person, you will understand what their relationship will be like. But a relationship involves the “and” in a constant interactive dance! When we strive to create a better world – Swedenborg’s *New Jerusalem* or Martin Luther King’s *Beloved Community* – we are in a continuous dance together towards wholeness.

I think if Swedenborg wanted us to remember one thing about him in this birthday week, it would be for us to live in the “ands” where we are constantly growing and changing – and integrating pieces into a wholeness.

To honor Swedenborg’s birthday, take some time today to enjoy the dance of the universe that is at the essence of our world!



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

The Science of Getting Rich

February 9, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

6 "Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
7 let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 2515

2515. *And said to him. That this signifies thought therefrom, namely, from the perception, is evident from the signification of "saying," as being to perceive, and also to think (as shown in n. 2506). As it is here said that there was thought from the perception, it may be well to state in a few words how the case is with thought. There are thoughts from perception; thoughts from conscience; and thoughts from no conscience. Thoughts from perception exist only with the celestial, that is, with those who are in love to the Lord; such thought is the most internal that exists with man; and it exists with the celestial angels in heaven, for it is perception from the Lord by which and from which their thought exists; and to think contrary to perception is impossible. Thoughts from conscience are lower, and exist with the spiritual, that is, with those who are in the good of charity and faith as to life and as to doctrine. Moreover with these persons to think contrary to conscience is impossible; for this would be to think against the good and truth which are dictated to them from the Lord through conscience.*

[2] But thoughts from no conscience exist with those who do not suffer themselves to be inwardly directed by what is good and true, but only by what is evil and false; that is, not by the Lord, but by themselves. Such persons believe that they inwardly think just as do those who think from conscience and perception, for the reason that they do not know what conscience is, still less perception; but the difference is as great as is that between hell and heaven. They who think without conscience think from any cupidities and phantasies whatever; thus from hell; and when it seems otherwise, it is from external decorum for the sake of reputation. But they who think from conscience think from the affections of good and truth; thus from heaven. But as regards the Lord's thought, it transcended all human understanding, for it was immediately from the Divine.

Message THE SCIENCE OF GETTING RICH



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Close your eyes, and think about some material object you want in your life. Picture yourself actually having this object. Now open your eyes. How powerful were those thoughts in actually bringing that object into your life?

Close your eyes again, and think about yourself being whole and healthy; surrounded by God's love. Open your eyes. Did those thoughts have an impact on your health?

There are no easy answers to any of those questions, are there? In fact, there have been many complicated debates about those questions for a long time, and this message will not resolve the many issues; but it will give us some things to talk about as we continue our series on the "The Prosperity Gospel." Today, let's look at an important voice from the early 20th Century on the power of thoughts: Wallace Wattles.

WALLACE WATTLES

Wattles lived from 1860 to 1911. His book, *The Science of Getting Rich*, published in 1910, was the inspiration for Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret*.

Very little is known of his life, and what we do know comes from a letter his daughter, Florence, wrote -- after his death -- to New Thought editor Elizabeth Towne. Florence said that her father had been born in 1860 in Illinois. He grew up working hard on the family farm. At 20, he was listed in the census as a laborer on the farm. He experienced a great deal of failure and discouragement in his early life, and began to read great authors, including Descartes, Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Swedenborg, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Notice that he read Swedenborg!

In 1896 he attended a convention of social reformers, where he met George Davis Herron, a Congregational minister who taught Christian Socialism at Grinnell College. Wallace's daughter, Florence, wrote:

I shall never forget the morning he came home. It was Christmas. Mother had put her last dollar into a cuff box and we had placed it beneath an evergreen branch which served for our Christmas tree and which we had illuminated with tallow candles and strung with popcorn. Finally Father came. With that beautiful smile he praised the tree, said the cuff box was just what he had been wanting - and took us all in his arms to tell us of the wonderful social message of Jesus, the message which he later embodied in "A New Christ."

After that, he began to preach on "the wonderful, social message of Jesus."

She says her father lost an important position in the Methodist Church because of his heresy. Presumably, that involved Christian Socialism. It could also have involved his use of Swedenborgian doctrine.

Wallace seems to have been poor and struggling financially throughout his life, although always holding financial success in his mind. It seems that only in the last few years of his life did he become successful financially.

In the 1908 election, he ran as a Socialist Party of America candidate in his district. In 1910 he again ran as a Socialist candidate, for the office of Prosecuting Attorney for the Madison County, Indiana, district. He did not win either election.

His daughter Florence remained a Socialist after his death, and was a delegate to the Socialist Party National Committee in 1912 and 1915.

His most famous book, *The Science of Getting Rich*, was written in 1910, the year before his death.

Wattles starts this book with:

WHATEVER may be said in praise of poverty, the fact remains that it is not possible to live a really complete or successful life unless one is rich. No man can rise to his greatest possible height in talent or soul development unless he has plenty of money; for to unfold the soul and to develop talent he must have many things to use, and he cannot have these things unless he has money to buy them with.

One great aid—perhaps the greatest aid—in applying your faith you will find in the exercise of gratitude.

Whenever you think of yourself, or of your advancing condition, give thanks to the Great Intelligent Substance for the perfect health you are enjoying.

Remember that, as Swedenborg taught, there is a continual inflow of life from the Supreme, which is received by all created things according to their forms; and by man according to his faith. Health from God is continually being urged upon you; and when you think of this, lift up your mind reverently to Him, and give thanks that you have been led to the Truth and into perfect health of mind and body. Be, all the time, in a grateful frame of mind, and let gratitude be evident in your speech. Science of Being Well, p. 53

Wattles is seen as an early proponent of the ideas of the “Prosperity Gospel” – that God wants us to be rich, and that anyone can become rich through the right thoughts.

On the other hand, he was also strongly influenced by Swedenborg and by a “social gospel” approach to helping the poor.

In his life, he seems to have been actively involved in helping others, and he also practiced the principles of creative visualization to bring wealth into his life. He was not highly successful at this, at least in terms of finances, and was poor until a few years prior to his death when his book *The Science of Getting Rich* became popular.

The front of a recent publication of his book says:

Those who feel the book is centered on the individual rather than on God in creating wealth (Paper published by Ankerberg Theological Institute, 2008) have criticized The Science of Getting Rich. Fans of the book on the other hand have claimed that the very theme of the book was widely misunderstood and has no basis for wide contention; the book seeks the individual to acquire inner, full personal development not just on wealth alone and also promotes a better understanding of God’s plan for us in terms of inner, spiritual wealth (Wikipedia, 2012).

[Wattles, Wallace (2012-01-24). *The Science of Getting Rich (Deluxe Version)*. Quincentennial Publishing Company. Kindle Edition.]

In his preface he writes: *Every man or woman who does this will certainly get rich; for the science herein applied is an exact science, and failure is impossible.*

[Wattles, Wallace (2012-01-24). *The Science of Getting Rich (Deluxe Version)* (p. 1). Quincentennial Publishing Company. Kindle Edition.]

He sees thoughts themselves as having power:

THOUGHT is the only power which can produce tangible riches from the Formless Substance. The stuff from which all things are made is a substance which thinks, and a thought of form in this substance produces the form.

Every thought of form, held in thinking Substance, causes the creation of the form, but always, or at least generally, along lines of growth and action already established. The thought of a house of a certain construction, if it were impressed upon Formless Substance, might not cause the instant formation, of the house; but it would cause the turning of creative energies already working in trade and commerce into such channels as to result in the speedy building of the house. And if there were no existing channels through which the creative energy could work, then the house would be formed directly from primal substance, without waiting for the slow processes of the organic and inorganic world. No thought of form can be impressed upon Original Substance without causing the creation of the form.

[Wattles, Wallace (2012-01-24). *The Science of Getting Rich (Deluxe Version)* (p. 15-16). Quincentennial Publishing Company. Kindle Edition.]

So, how powerful are our thoughts?

In today's reading from Swedenborg, he seems to be saying that there are different kinds of thoughts.

There are thoughts from perception; thoughts from conscience; and thoughts from no conscience. Thoughts from perception exist only with the celestial, that is, with those who are in love to the Lord; such thought is the most internal that exists with man; and it exists with the celestial angels in heaven, for it is perception from the Lord by which and from which their thought exists; and to think contrary to perception is impossible. Thoughts from conscience are lower, and exist with the spiritual, that is, with those who are in the good of charity and faith as to life and as to doctrine. Moreover with these persons to think contrary to conscience is impossible; for this would be to think against the good and truth which are dictated to them from the Lord through conscience.

[2] But thoughts from no conscience exist with those who do not suffer themselves to be inwardly directed by what is good and true, but only by what is evil and false; that is, not by the Lord, but by themselves.

The highest kind of thoughts – celestial – come from those who live in the Lord's love; like the angels do. Those thoughts seem to be far stronger than those which come from "no conscience" and without the Lord.

This, of course, raises more questions. How do we know when our thoughts are coming from the Lord, and when they are coming from an ego part of ourselves which does not include God?

Many New Thought people say that thoughts are all-powerful. They are the only thing that exists. I think Swedenborg would agree that thoughts are powerful; but he would say that our thoughts exist within an earthly realm where substance and matter also have power. Perhaps we could say that thoughts do hold some power. But, the thoughts that are part of our prayer life with God and part of our living a loving life of uses on the earth are far more powerful than thoughts without God's love.

This week, you might try combining prayer and thought. Pray to God for guidance in your thoughts. Then, hold loving thoughts in your mind throughout the week – including love for yourself.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we turn to You for help in understanding our using our thoughts for Your loving service. Help us to bring You into our daily thoughts, and trust Your guidance about how to direct our thinking. Show us the ways we can use our thoughts to enhance our closeness to You, to fulfilling Your purpose for us on earth, and in creating Your New Jerusalem on earth.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

A Lifetime of Riches -- and Poverty

February 16, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 19

The Rich and the Kingdom of God

16 *Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"*

17 *"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."*

18 *"Which ones?" he inquired.*

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother, '[c]' and 'love your neighbor as yourself. '[d]'"

20 *"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"*

21 *Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

22 *When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

23 *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."*

25 *When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"*

26 *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

27 *Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*

28 *Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife[a] or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

From Swedenborg

[2] *Now I need to show that we would have no freedom to act rationally and no appearance of independence if we sensed and felt the working of divine providence. This is because if we did sense and feel it we would also be led by it, since the Lord is leading us all by his divine providence and it is only an appearance that we are leading ourselves, as already explained. So if our immediate feelings and sensations told us that we were being led, we would not be aware of our own life. We would then be impelled to make sounds and motions almost like some statue. If we were aware of our life, the only way*

we could be led would be like someone in handcuffs and shackles or like a cart horse. Can anyone fail to see that in this case we would have no freedom, and that if we had no freedom we would have no rationality? That is, we all think because we are free and we all think freely; and anything we think apart from this freedom or in any other way does not seem to be ours but to come from someone else. No, if you look into this more deeply, you will find that we would have no thought, let alone rationality, and that therefore we would not be human.

Divine Providence, NCE, #176

Message

A LIFETIME OF RICHES -- AND POVERTY

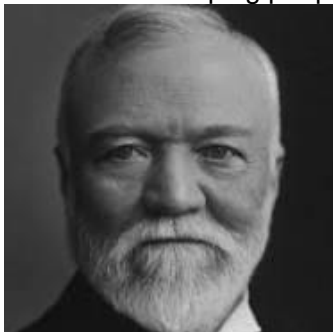
The Story of Napoleon Hill

It was 1908, at a luxurious mansion in New York. A shabby, nervous young reporter was knocking at the door of a 74-year-old multi-millionaire named Andrew Carnegie. A butler showed the reporter into the 4-story 64-room mansion.



The young man, Napoleon Hill, was astounded. He had grown up poor in the hills of Appalachia. He had been a troubled, gun-toting boy whose hero was Jesse James; until his new stepmother offered to exchange his real pistol for a typewriter. He discovered a love for writing. After high school, he went to business school, and eventually got a job for a small, local magazine. One of his first assignments was to interview Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie was a Scottish immigrant who had risen from work as a messenger for a telegraph company, to owning many steel mills – and becoming one of the richest men in the world.

Hill later based his life on what he learned from Carnegie that day. Carnegie had a deep spiritual nature that came from the Swedenborgian faith of his childhood, that “the greatest service one can render to God is by helping others.” Carnegie lived his faith. When he died in 1919, he had given away over \$350 million—over \$2 billion in today’s values. Hill later taught that the philosophy of “service”—of helping people—was the highest goal anyone could have.



Carnegie believed in persistence. He told Hill that day:

“The man who knows exactly what he wants, has a definite plan for getting it, and is actually

engaged in carrying out that plan, has no difficulty in believing in his own ability to succeed. Only the man who procrastinates soon loses confidence and winds up doing nothing."

"But what happens," Hill asked, "when a man knows what he wants, has a plan, puts it into action and meets with failure? Doesn't that destroy his confidence?"

Carnegie smiled. "I hoped you would ask that, because it is important to understand what I'm about to tell you. I believe that every failure carries within it—in the circumstances of the failure itself—the seed of an equivalent advantage. If you examine the lives of truly great leaders, you will discover that their success is in exact proportion to their mastery of failures. Life has a way of developing strength and wisdom in individuals through temporary defeat."

But Hill persisted. "Most people aren't going to believe that every failure has an equivalent advantage when they are overcome with the adversity. What does one do if the experience destroys one's self-confidence?" "The best way to guard against being overwhelmed by failure," Carnegie said, "is to discipline the mind to meet failure before it arrives." He spoke of the need to take full possession of one's mind. The mind, he said, was the true source of infinite power. One's dominating thoughts created one's being—one's persona."

[Ritt Jr., Michael J.; Kirk Landers (2012-02-22). A Lifetime of Riches (Kindle Locations 872-889). The Napoleon Hill Foundation. Kindle Edition.]

Carnegie was impressed with Hill, and invited him to spend the entire weekend with him at his mansion.

That week-end, Carnegie said he was convinced that the average person could attain great success by studying the lives of successful people. He said it would be a priceless gift to millions if someone interviewed and wrote about the lives of the great leaders from all walks of life. It was a project, he said, that would take at least 20 years to complete.



Hill enthusiastically agreed that such a project would be a great gift to the world.

That was exactly what Carnegie wanted to hear. With his usual bluntness, he turned to Hill and, without any further preamble, inquired if he felt equal to the challenge of undertaking this great work himself. Hill was honored—and amazed—that Carnegie saw in him someone worthy of the task. But It took him less than half a minute to accept the offer. In fact, it took exactly twenty-nine seconds, according to Carnegie, who had taken out his stopwatch and was timing Hill's response. Afterward, he told Hill that he had given him a maximum of sixty seconds to come to a decision. If it had taken even one second longer than that, Carnegie said, the offer would have been withdrawn because "a man who cannot reach a decision promptly, once he has all the necessary facts, cannot be depended upon to carry through any decision he may make."

The stunned young reporter couldn't quite comprehend that he was agreeing to take on a project that would take 20 years and for which he would not be reimbursed!

However, he left at the end of that weekend with that commitment in his heart; and he never wavered from it throughout the difficult years ahead of him.

Although Hill's biography is called "A Lifetime of riches," he had a lifetime with more poverty than riches. Several times he accumulated a fortune, and then lost it due to his own ego and his tendency to trust people who later betrayed him. He also had many unhappy years of family life. He left his wife and young children to seek his fortune in Chicago, and he rarely spent time with them afterwards. He often had no money to send back to them, and when he did have funds, he often spent them on the trappings of appearing wealthy to clients.

He developed a highly successful magazine, "Hill's Golden Rules," but then an internal power struggle caused him to lose his magazine. He started another one, and started a local newspaper column. In his column, he took on corruption from local gangsters. The gang murdered the paper's editor, and would have killed Hill if he car trouble hadn't prevented his getting home that evening. He had to go into hiding, and descended into a deep depression. Then he remembered the lessons of Carnegie, and decided it was time to write a book. He put together a series of volumes on "The Law of Success." He found a publisher, and by early 1929, he started to receive royalties. He became wealthy at last! That summer he purchased a mansion in the country for his wife, his children, and himself. They had a gloriously happy summer there.

However, the depression hit them hard. People stopped buying his books. He lost his country property. He again was in poverty. In 1933, when he turned 50, Roosevelt invited him to work for the White House writing encouraging materials for the country. He happily accepted, refusing a salary.

That was the last straw for his wife Florence, who had moved back near her parents with the boys. They were in poverty, but Hill was refusing any salary. They were divorced later that year.

He went out on the lecture circuit, hoping to meet another woman along the way. He did. He met Rosa, who encouraged him in his dream of writing. He finally put together the wisdom he had learned from Carnegie and other successful people in a book, "Think and Grow Rich!" It was a great success!

In 1940 Hill was reportedly worth more than \$1 million. He and Rosa spent lavishly on homes, cars and the trappings of wealth. In a short time, though, a chasm developed between the couple and a divorce followed. A prenuptial agreement gave Rosa virtually all royalties for Think and Grow Rich!. After a lifetime of work, Hill was left with nothing. [[See more](#)]

He was invited to S. Carolina to work on a self-help course and series of lectures. Slowly, he began again. He rebuilt his professional life, working with reliable and trustworthy colleagues. He fell in love with a sensible woman who helped him keep his life on track. He had a popular radio show, and was sought-after as a speaker.

Think and Grow Rich had declined in sales over time, but it was later re-published after a friend purchased the rights to the book and signed them over to Napoleon.

With the help of a good business partner, his wife, and friends, he was able to finally achieved financial success. Late in life, he established the Napoleon Hill Foundation, which still functions.

In one talk, he gave this prayer, which he used every morning and night:

“O, Infinite Intelligence, I ask not for more blessings but for more wisdom with which to enjoy the blessings with which you endowed me at birth consisting of my sole right to take possession of my own mind and direct it to ends of my own choice. Amen.”

[Ritt Jr., Michael J.; Kirk Landers (2012-02-22). A Lifetime of Riches (Kindle Locations 6445-6448). The Napoleon Hill Foundation. Kindle Edition.]

He passed away in November of 1970, at 87 years of age. His third and final wife was left a millionaire.

What had he achieved in his life? He did, in fact, achieve the wealth he had always wanted. However, I'm not sure he did it by thinking positive thoughts, as much as by facing adversity and rising above it. Making connections with family and friends was essential to his happiness and success at the end of his life.

Hill's philosophy was based on using very positive thoughts to over-come all negativity, and through this method one could achieve one's dreams. His life, however, could be seen as a journey of regeneration. Swedenborg tells us that God is always working to guide us, although we usually don't realize it. In fact, we believe that we, ourselves, are achieving success. In Hill's life, he saw his positive thinking philosophy as that which got him through difficult times. In other words, he believed it was his own thoughts that brought him success.

What is the difference between “positive thinking” and the guidance of Divine Providence?

Swedenborg would say that Hill's positive thoughts actually came from Divine guidance, and it was God's help that shaped his life. Swedenborg would say that the times of despair were part of his path of regeneration, when he had to keep learning from his past in order to move forwards.

Just what did Hill write in “Think and Grow Rich” that has been – and continues to be such a popular book – and integral to the Prosperity Gospel movement? How much of the book had its roots in Carnegie's Swedenborgianism – and how much in a secular “positive thinking” approach to life that was popular at that time? How would a Swedenborgian look at Hill's book? Next week, we'll look in detail at his steps to wealth, and consider them from Let us Pray.

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom, Help us to remember that You are guiding us every moment of every day. The times that are the most despairing for us, are times that you are closest to us, whispering in our hearts of Your love and wisdom for us.

Think & Grow Rich

February 23, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible: Matthew 6

5 *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

9 *“This, then, is how you should pray:*

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
10 your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us today our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,^[a]
but deliver us from the evil one.^[b]*

14 *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

From Swedenborg

True Christian Religion (Ager) n. 355

V. FAITH WITHOUT CHARITY IS NOT FAITH, AND CHARITY WITHOUT FAITH IS NOT CHARITY, AND NEITHER HAS LIFE EXCEPT FROM THE LORD.

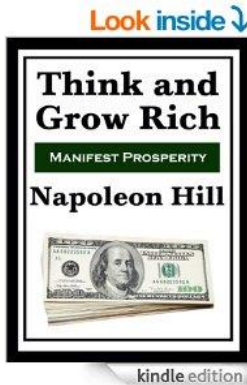
It is very evident from their Epistles that it never entered the mind of any of the apostles that the church of this day would separate faith from charity by teaching that faith alone justifies and saves apart from the works of the law, and that charity therefore cannot be conjoined with faith, since faith is from God, and charity, so far as it is expressed in works, is from man. But this separation and division were introduced into the Christian church when it divided God into three persons, and ascribed to each equal Divinity. But that there is no faith apart from charity, nor any charity apart from faith, and that neither has life except from the Lord, will be made clear in the following chapter. At present, to prepare the way, it shall be shown:

- (1) That man can acquire for himself faith.*
- (2) And also charity.*
- (3) And also the life of both.*
- (4) And yet that nothing of faith, of charity, or of the life of either, is from man, but from the Lord alone*

Message

Think & Grow Rich: The Techniques of Napoleon Hill

Hill's book is probably the most famous self-help book of all time, and is a classic for today's Prosperity Gospel movement.



His book has 13 steps that he says are guaranteed to bring wealth to anyone. Many people credit this book for their success.

These approaches are often called “positive thinking” and sometimes “affirmations.”

Questions for us to ponder together are: What is “positive thinking” or “affirmation”? Is it the same as prayer? How do these ideas fit in with Swedenborg’s writings?

Hill’s preface begins:

IN EVERY chapter of this book, mention has been made of the money-making secret which has made fortunes for more than five hundred exceedingly wealthy men whom I have carefully analyzed over a long period of years. The secret was brought to my attention by Andrew Carnegie, more than a quarter of a century ago. Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents] (Kindle Locations 446-451). . Kindle Edition.

He says it is a secret – a magical formula that has been proven successful.

As a final word of preparation, before you begin the first chapter, may I offer one brief suggestion which may provide a clue by which the Carnegie secret may be recognized? It is this--ALL ACHIEVEMENT, ALL EARNED RICHES, HAVE THEIR BEGINNING IN AN IDEA! If you are ready for the secret, you already possess one half of it, therefore, you will readily recognize the other half the moment it reaches your mind. Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents] (Kindle Locations 563-566). . Kindle Edition.

Here is brief summary of his 13 points.

STEP ONE: Desire

Hill emphasizes that you must have a burning desire to meet your goal. This desire can be

“transmuted” into money by following six steps:

1. *Decide the exact amount of money you want*
2. *What will you do in exchange for the money?*
3. *What is the date by which you want the money*
4. *Create a definite plan, and begin at once*
5. *Write all of this out clearly*
6. *Read it aloud twice daily – once before bed and then first thing in the morning. As you read, visualize yourself having the money*

Similar techniques are advocated in “The Secret” and other modern materials that teach ways of bringing what you want into your life. It is often said that being specific increases your chances of this happening.

STEP TWO: Visualization of your desire and belief that you will attain it

Hill says that faith must be blended with thought vibrations, which then go into the subconscious mind. He does say that it is then transmitted to Infinite Intelligence. This is one of several places where he does make reference in some way to a God.

It is not completely clear to me what he means by *faith*.

He says faith, love, and sex are the 3 most powerful emotions.

Here is Hill’s definition of faith: *FAITH is a state of mind which may be induced, or created, by affirmation or repeated instructions to the subconscious mind, through the principle of auto-suggestion.* Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). *Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents]* (Kindle Locations 1307-1308). Kindle Edition.

Hill seems to see faith as something that we can instill into our subconscious – something that is a state of mind. Swedenborg sees “faith” as something that becomes clear to us through our life experience. It has to be expressed through good deeds. Swedenborg’s definition of “faith” is in the readings for today. It is based more on how we live.

STEP THREE: Auto Suggestions for Unconscious Mind

This again is Hill’s point that we have to give positive statements to our unconscious.

Nature has so built man that he has ABSOLUTE CONTROL over the material which reaches his subconscious mind, through his five senses, although this is not meant to be construed as a statement that man always EXERCISES this control. In the great majority of instances, he does NOT exercise it, which explains why so many people go through life in poverty.

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). *Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents]* (Kindle Locations 1721-1723). . Kindle Edition.

I would take issue with the idea that poverty is caused by negative suggestions to the subconscious mind. We’ll look more at these ideas next week.

STEP FOUR: Specialized knowledge from personal experience or observation

Hill is quite critical of the kind of knowledge that is taught in schools – which is just pieces of information.

KNOWLEDGE will not attract money, unless it is organized, and intelligently directed, through

practical PLANS OF ACTION, to the DEFINITE END of accumulation of money.

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). *Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents]* (Kindle Locations 1867-1868). . Kindle Edition.

He is quite critical of schools, for teaching information. The real power comes from how we organize our information, and getting an education that is specialized to our needs. In particular, he recommends courses in gaining control of the mind.

Could this have some relationship to Swedenborg's concept of "wisdom", which is a deep, inner knowing beyond knowledge?

STEP FIVE: Imagination

THE imagination is literally the workshop wherein are fashioned all plans created by man. The impulse, the DESIRE, is given shape, form, and ACTION through the aid of the imaginative faculty of the mind. It has been said that man can create anything which he can imagine.

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). *Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents]* (Kindle Locations 2180-2183). . Kindle Edition.

This perhaps is a way of letting the inner, more intuitive parts of the self have a stronger role.

STEP SIX: Organized Planning

Here he talks about working with others, to form a "Master Mind" team. It is explained further below.

STEP SEVEN: Mastery of Procrastination

ACCURATE analysis of over 25,000 men and women who had experienced failure, disclosed the fact that LACK OF DECISION was near the head of the list of the 30 major causes of FAILURE. This is no mere statement of a theory--it is a fact. PROCRASTINATION, the opposite of DECISION, is a common enemy which practically every man must conquer.

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). *Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents]* (Kindle Locations 3429-3433). . Kindle Edition.

I'm not sure what kind of research has been done on this. But, I think it is in general a good quality to not put off doing things we have decided to do. On the other hand, one could argue that sometimes our hesitancy to take on a task comes from an inner warning that it was not the right decision or the right time and the delay could bring an unintended benefit.

STEP EIGHT: Persistence

POVERTY is attracted to the one whose mind is favorable to it, as money is attracted to him whose mind has been deliberately prepared to attract it, and through the same laws. POVERTY CONSCIOUSNESS WILL VOLUNTARILY SEIZE THE MIND WHICH IS NOT OCCUPIED WITH THE MONEY CONSCIOUSNESS. A poverty consciousness develops without conscious application of habits favorable to it. The money consciousness must be created to order, unless one is born with such a consciousness.

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). *Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents]* (Kindle Locations 3711-3714). . Kindle Edition.

This is a particularly controversial part of Hill's book – and of much of New Thought. Does poverty from come from one's negative thinking? We'll look more at this issue in the coming weeks.

STEP NINE: The Master Mind

The "Master Mind" may be defined as: "Coordination of knowledge and effort, in a spirit of harmony, between two or more people, for the attainment of a definite purpose."

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). *Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents]* (Kindle Locations 4060-4061). . Kindle Edition.

One could compare this Swedenborg's perspectives on the importance of working with others towards good ends.

STEP TEN: Sex Transmutation

The emotion of sex has back of it the possibility of three constructive potentialities, they are:--
1. *The perpetuation of mankind.* 2. *The maintenance of health, (as a therapeutic agency, it has no equal).* 3. *The transformation of mediocrity into genius through transmutation. Sex transmutation is simple and easily explained. It means the switching of the mind from thoughts of physical expression, to thoughts of some other nature. Sex desire is the most powerful of human desires.*

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents] (Kindle Locations 4202-4204). . Kindle Edition.

This certainly could be compared with some Freud's ideas on the role of sexuality in our lives.

STEP ELEVEN: The Subconscious Mind – Connecting Link

THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND WORKS DAY AND NIGHT. Through a method of procedure, unknown to man, the subconscious mind draws upon the forces of Infinite Intelligence for the power with which it voluntarily transmutes one's desires into their physical equivalent, making use, always of the most practical media by which this end may be accomplished. You cannot entirely control your subconscious mind, but you can voluntarily hand over to it any plan, desire, or purpose which you wish transformed into concrete form. Read, again, instructions for using the subconscious mind, in the chapter on autosuggestion. There is plenty of evidence to support the belief that the subconscious mind is the connecting link between the finite mind of man and Infinite Intelligence.

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents] (Kindle Locations 4667-4674). . Kindle Edition.

Here there is much we could compare with modern psychology. Swedenborg talks of our connections with God in our inner selves.

STEP 12: The Brain

Vibrations of an exceedingly high rate are the only vibrations picked up and carried, by the ether, from one brain to another. Thought is energy travelling at an exceedingly high rate of vibration. Thought, which has been modified or "stepped up" by any of the major emotions, vibrates at a much higher rate than ordinary thought, and it is this type of thought which passes from one brain to another, through the broadcasting machinery of the human brain.

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents] (Kindle Locations 4843-4846). . Kindle Edition.

Swedenborg wrote a lot about vibrations and energy.

STEP 13: Sixth Sense

The subconscious mind is the "sending station" of the brain, through which vibrations of thought are broadcast. The Creative Imagination is the "receiving set," through which the vibrations of thought are picked up from the ether.

Hill, Napoleon (2011-06-02). Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill [with Linked Table of Contents] (Kindle Locations 4855-4857). . Kindle Edition.

Swedenborg would certainly a lot of ideas about the energies beyond our conscious minds that help connect us with the Divine.

There is much here that we can ponder as we compare the approach of Hill – and other New Thought writers – to Swedenborg.

In trying to understand how Hill's New Thought ideas compare to Swedenborg, an important question is: Are positive thinking and prayer the same thing? Halper says "no":

Haler writes:

New Thought went through numerous stages in its development before transitioning to the subconscious mind and the importance of suggestion. In this latter phase, emphasis was placed on the idea of affirmation. God became more impersonal and was referred to as "Principle" or "All Being," terms that easily substituted for a more pantheistic or even mystical view in place of Christianity and the teachings of Jesus.

Haller, John S. (2012-12-01). *The History of New Thought: From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel (SWEDENBORG STUDIES)* (Kindle Locations 2948-2950). Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. Kindle Edition.

This was a question we pondered in our chat this past Thursday. Sue said: "I think that prayer is an act of positive thinking; an act of optimism. Praying to a higher power signals a hope and belief that there is help. That's positive thinking."

I asked: "What's the difference between a prayer *Dear God, help me to know your will*, and an affirmation *I will be wealthy*."

Sue said: "The first is God-centered and the 2nd is self-centered."

We considered many definitions of "wealthy."

Sue said: "Abundantly wealthy can mean wealthy in love, friendship, family, health, God's blessings in our lives. Abundantly wealthy, to me, is an attitude of gratitude for what we DO have."

Phyllis said: "Prayer to me is now really just a conversation with the Divine. I start out the morning with *Thank you, God*," and during the day I just ask for guidance. It is mostly just connecting with spirit and having a conversation during the day as if I was spending it with a friend, which I am."

Elbert posted [an article](#) he has written on the different forms of prayer.

What are your thoughts about this? Visit our [Discussion Forum](#) to share your ideas. [note: if you have not [registered](#) in the community, you'll need to do so to access the forums.]

Let us Pray: Dear Divine Love and Wisdom, help us to keep Your Love in our hearts all throughout each day in all that we do." Amen.

Pray & Grow Rich

March 2, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 4

Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord.

Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us.

Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

From Swedenborg

True Christian Religion (Rose) n. 539

There are two duties that we are obliged to perform after we have examined ourselves: prayer and confession. The prayer is to be a request that [the Lord] have mercy on us, give us the power to resist the evils that we have repented of, and provide us an inclination and desire to do what is good, since "without him we cannot do anything" (John 15:5). The confession is to be that we see, recognize, and admit to our evils and that we are discovering that we are miserable sinners.

Message Pray & Grow Rich



Catherine Ponder was a widow with a small son. She had no job training, and no way to earn a living. She became depressed and got sick. She was poor and felt herself to be a complete failure. She wrote:

It seemed that the whole world was against me, and that everything that I did went wrong. But with my son to provide for, I could not settle for failure. I had to succeed for his sake as well as for my own.

Ponder, Catherine (2013-03-12). Dynamic Laws of Prosperity (Kindle Locations 55-59). Start Publishing LLC. Kindle Edition.

But, then she found answers:

Finally, when I was at my lowest ebb emotionally, physically and financially, I learned about the power of thought as an instrument for success or failure. I came to realize that the right use of my mind could become the key to healthy, happy, prosperous, successful living. As soon as I grasped this wonderful success secret, the tide began to change!

Ponder, Catherine (2013-03-12). *Dynamic Laws of Prosperity* (Kindle Locations 59-62). Start Publishing LLC. Kindle Edition.

Ponder became a Unity minister and then a popular writer and speaker on prosperity.

We looked previously at a classic New Thought book, *Think and Grow Rich* which focused on our thoughts as a way to success.

Now we'll turn to another New Thought book, that brings us closer to the prosperity gospel movement: Catherine Ponder's book *Pray and Grow Rich*, as well as her book *Dynamic Laws of Prosperity*.

Ponder sees prayer as action-oriented – to pray is to do something.

Prayer releases the highest form of energy in the universe, as it links you with a God energy, which is your source.

[Pray, p. ix]

Swedenborg also sees an energy in prayer:

Whenever I have been reading the Lord's prayer, I have plainly perceived an elevation toward the Lord which was like an attraction, and at the same time my ideas were open, and from this there was effected a communication with some societies in heaven; and I noticed that there was an influx from the Lord into every detail of the prayer, thus into every idea of my thought that was from the meaning of the things in the prayer. The influx was effected with inexpressible variety, that is, not the same at one time as another; hence also it was made evident how infinite are the things contained in the prayer, and that the Lord is present in every one of them.

[*Secrets of Heaven*, 6476]

Ponder goes on to say:

When you pray, you stir into action an atomic force. You release a potent spiritual vibration that can be released in no other way.

She links thought and prayer:

In recent times, we've heard much about 'the power of thought' as well as 'the power of prayer.' These two terms are linked. They are twin powers. The mind is the connecting link between God and man. Prayer is a method of thought that links God and man. One prays with the mind.

I think that Swedenborg would talk about prayer with both mind and heart. The mind represents our "wisdom" but the heart our "love." Both are part of the Divine.

There are other ways that her approach moves us away from Swedenborg. She calls poverty a sin.

Poverty is a Sin: And so again I say: It is shockingly right instead of shockingly wrong for you to be prosperous. Obviously, you cannot be very happy if you are poor, and you need not be poor. It is a sin. Poverty is a form of hell caused by man's blindness to God's unlimited good for him. Poverty is a dirty, uncomfortable, degrading experience. Poverty is actually a form of disease, and in its acute

phases, it seems to be a form of insanity.

Ponder, Catherine (2013-03-12). *Dynamic Laws of Prosperity* (Kindle Locations 184-186). Start Publishing LLC. Kindle Edition.

Swedenborg talks about us working to create a New Jerusalem on the earth where everyone's needs can be met.

John Haler, author of the Swedenborg Foundation's *History of New Thought*, is critical of the New Thought trend to blame the poor for their poverty. He makes reference to New Thought author Charles Benjamin Newcomb:

Newcomb was also fond of arguing that the principal human fallacy had been ascribing disease and poverty to the mysteries of Providence. These conditions proceeded not from fate, destiny, or accident, but from a condition of mind; they were crimes of ignorance for which the sufferer alone was responsible. Being one with God meant one was never forgotten or overlooked. "We are never denied anything we crave," he insisted. "The power to wish and the power to execute are one and the same.

Haller, John S. (2012-12-01). *The History of New Thought: From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel* (SWEDENBORG STUDIES) (Kindle Locations 4089-4093). Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. Kindle Edition.

What is the cause of poverty? Is it in society? In the individual's thinking process? God's will? These issues are central to the Prosperity Gospel, which we'll look at more closely next week.

The larger question for this week is whether prayer is an avenue to grow rich. And what does it mean to be "rich"?

In last Thursday's chat, Sue said:

Abundantly wealthy can mean wealthy in love, friendship, family, health, God's blessings in our lives. Abundantly wealthy, to me, is an attitude of gratitude for what we DO have.

What is prayer for you? Phyllis said in the chat:

Prayer to me is now really just a conversation with the Divine. I start out the morning with "Thank you, God." and during the day I just ask for guidance. It is most just connecting with spirit and having a conversation during the day as if I was spending it with a friend, which I am.

Elbert posted [104 different types of Biblical prayer](#).

Ponder integrates prayer with affirmation and positive thinking in order to achieve wealth.

There is also a "prayer of quiet" which involves just being with God.

"Contemplative prayer" is living every day with an open awareness of God's presence.

There is prayer of petition, when we ask God to help us or someone else.

There is prayer of Thanksgiving, when we thank God for blessings.

There is prayer asking for guidance and God's will.

All of these are forms of prayer.

Swedenborg says only a few things about prayer. This is my favorite:

Prayer considered in itself is speech with God, and at such time some internal intuition of the objects of prayer, to which there corresponds a certain similar influx into the perception or thought of the mind of him who prays, so that there is a certain opening of man's interiors towards God; but this with a difference according to man's state, and according to the essence of the object of the prayer; if the prayer be from love and faith, and be about and for celestial and spiritual things only, then in the prayer there exists something resembling a revelation, which is manifested in the emotion of the person praying, as to hope, consolation, or a certain interior joy.

AC 2535

What is prayer for you in your life? What would you like it to be?

With Ash Wednesday this coming week, it is a good time to look at your prayer life, and consider whether you want to change anything about it.

Let us pray:

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: I seek to understand Your role in my life, and how I can best connect with You. Help me to find You inside of me. Help me to find Your Love in the grass and trees and oceans. Help me to see You in my neighbors. Guide me in how best to live my life in a way that reflects Your love and wisdom. Help me find the ways that I can be of best use to others.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Prosperity Gospel

March 9, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 16: 24-27

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

From Swedenborg

217, *Divine Providence*, NCE

Now I need to illustrate these three items individually. (a) Rank and money may be either blessings or curses. Everyday experience bears witness to the fact that reverent and irreverent people, just and unjust people—good and evil people, that is—may have eminence and wealth. Yet no one can deny that irreverent and unjust people, evil people, go to hell while reverent and just people, good people, go to heaven. Since this is so, it follows that eminence and wealth, or rank and money, may be either blessings or curses, and that they are blessings for the good and curses for the evil.

Message **Prosperity Gospel: What is it?**

Does God want you to be rich? When God is pleased with you, do you find more material possessions coming into your life?

In a recent Pew survey, 43% of all Christians said that God rewards the faithful with health and wealth.

Are good health and a big bank account signs of God's favor? Are poverty and sickness signs of God's displeasure?



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Jesus said: "For what profit is it to a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" *Time Magazine* points out that Christians have usually interpreted that as having to be ready to sacrifice – money, autonomy, or even eternal life – to earn a place in heaven. Yet, increasingly, there are Christians wanting both the whole world AND their soul.

For several decades there has been emerging a new movement called by various names, including "health and wealth gospel," "prosperity theology," and "prosperity gospel."

In a nutshell, it suggests that a God who loves you does not want you to be broke. Its signature verse could be John 10: 10: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." In a TIME poll, 17% of Christians surveyed said they considered themselves part of such a movement, while a full 61% believed that God wants people to be prosperous. And 31%--a far higher percentage than there are Pentecostals in America--agreed that if you give your money to God, God will bless you with more money.

Time Magazine, Sept. 10, 2006

This movement hit public consciousness in the 1980's with the hard sell of Jim & Tami Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart – including the scandals that took them down. The prosperity gospel supporters have re-tooled themselves a bit since then to have a softer approach.



Three mega churches today function with prosperity theology: Joel Osteen's Lakewood in Houston, T.D. Jakes' Potter's House in South Dallas, and Creflo Dollar's World Changers near Atlanta. Osteen alone reaches over 7 million in his television broadcasts.

Many mainstream Christians are attracted to this approach. However, there is much controversy about the perspective. In a recent *Belief-net* article, it was argued that the prosperity gospel makes God into a vending machine: *Put in faith and out pops blessings – money, homes, cars, beautiful spouses, clever kids, good neighbors, big churches, and plush vacations.*

Belief-Net: "The Problem for the Prosperity Gospel," by Scott McKnight, Sept. 2013

Mega pastor Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, is not impressed with prosperity theology.

This idea that God wants everybody to be wealthy? There is a word for that: baloney. It's creating a false idol. You don't measure your self-worth by your net worth. I can show you millions of faithful followers of Christ who live in poverty. Why isn't everyone in the church a millionaire?

Is this just a way of justifying a life focused on materialism? "You don't have to give up the American Dream. You just see it as a sign of God's blessing," says Edith Blumhofer, director of Wheaton College's Center for the Study of American Evangelicals.

Time Magazine, Sept. 10, 2006

An opinion piece in the *Washington Post* asks:

But if you're not rich, then what? Are the poor cursed by God because of their unfaithfulness? And if God were so concerned about 401(k)s and Mercedes, why would God's son have been born into poverty?

Nowhere has the prosperity gospel flourished more than among the poor and the working class. Told that wealth is a sign of God's grace and favor, followers strive for trappings of luxury they can little afford in an effort to prove that they are blessed spiritually. Some critics have gone so far as to place part of the blame for the past decade's spending binge and foreclosure crisis at the foot of the prosperity gospel's altar.

[Cathleen Falsani, The Worse Ideas of the Decade: The prosperity gospel. Washingtonpost.com. Jan, 2014.](#)

Historian Kate Bowler researched the prosperity movement for her doctoral dissertation at Oxford University. She says that the prosperity gospel movement comes from three places:

Pentecostalism; New Thought (an amalgam of metaphysics and Protestantism discussed later in this chapter); and an American gospel of pragmatism, individualism, and upward mobility.

Bowler, Kate (2013-05-08). *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (p. 11). Oxford University Press, USA. Kindle Edition.

John Haller researched the movement as part of his historical study of New Thought, published by the Swedenborg Foundation. Haller writes:

The further my examination took me, however, the more dismayed I became with the countervailing voices that pulled this Swedenborgian-inspired belief system toward a more secular ideology of success and prosperity. Although New Thought began as a bridge of practical idealism linking nineteenth-century transcendentalist thinking with the emerging philosophy of pragmatism, it devolved into an unapologetic and shameless commercialism whose spokespeople wandered far from their roots. For a good number of New Thought's representative thinkers past and present, individual access to "revelation," "cosmicconsciousness," "regeneration," "prosperity," "realization," "self-healing," and "unfoldment" lay along a path sentinelled by a series of toll booths for which cash has become the price of admission. As critic Clifford Howard noted as early as 1910, when shorn of their "embroidery," many of New Thought's inspirational writers, speakers, and publishing houses behaved like patent-medicine vendors "marketing the power of God."

[Haller, John S. \(2012-12-01\). The History of New Thought: From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel \(SWEDENBORG STUDIES\) \(Kindle Locations 365-370\). Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. Kindle Edition.](#)

Clearly this is a controversial movement in modern Christianity! It is complicated. We can't completely dismiss everything from the New Thought movement – our attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings do impact us on many levels. And the roots of New Thought include our own Swedenborg. But does our relationship with God impact our health and wealth? In our reading from Swedenborg [above], he says that wealth and status are not signs of either goodness or evil. They can be part of either type of life. What matters, is how we are living that life -- not what possessions or positions we have.

Next week, we'll look in more detail at Swedenborg's theology vs. prosperity theology.

This week, consider the role of prosperity thinking in your own life. Let's all look deeply inside; not just at how we officially articulate our beliefs. When you come upon hard times, do you begin to wonder just how you have displeased God? When you have good fortune, do you feel relieved that God is pleased with you?

When you get sick, do you wonder if God is teaching you a lesson? When your health is good, do you assume that your relationship with God is strong?

On one level, we are looking at theologies – of New Thoughts, of the prosperity gospel, of Swedenborgians. But, on another level, many of us absorb cultural values that strongly influence us – often below the conscious level.

As we move into Lent, it is a good time to examine your relationship with God – and consider what you believe God's role to be in your physical and financial health. And then, you can ask what you want your relationship with God to be like – and how you can develop a deeper relationship with the Divine.

Of most importance is that God is with you every moment of every day. How can you accept and honor that presence to its fullest?

Let us pray.

Dear God, I get so confused at the many different ideas about You and how You work in my life. Some days, I think I have this figured out. Other days, I realize that I'm pretty confused. Please help me to open deeply to Your love and wisdom, to more deeply connect with You as I move to greater wholeness in living my life in accord with Your guidance.



Prosperity & Swedenborg

March 16, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 4: 14-21

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

From Swedenborg

In the Divine-Human One, reality and its manifestation are both distinguishable and united. Wherever there is reality, there is its manifestation: the one does not occur without the other. In fact, reality exists through its manifestation, and not apart from it. Our rational capacity grasps this when we ponder whether there can be any reality that does not manifest itself, and whether there can be any manifestation except from some reality. Since each occurs with the other and not apart from it, it follows that they are one entity, but “distinguishably one.” They are distinguishably one like love and wisdom. Further, love is reality and wisdom is its manifestation. Love occurs only in wisdom, and wisdom only from love. So love becomes manifest when it is in wisdom. These two are one entity in such a way that although they can be distinguished in thought they cannot be distinguished in fact; and since they can be distinguished in thought and not in fact, we refer to them as “distinguishably one.” Reality and its manifestation are also distinguishably one in the Divine-Human One the way soul and body are. A soul does not occur without its body, nor a body without its soul. The divine soul of the Divine-Human One is what we mean by the divine reality, and the divine body of the Divine-Human One is what we mean by the divine manifestation. The notion that a soul can exist and think and be wise without a body is an error that stems from deceptive appearances. Every soul is in a spiritual body after it has cast off the material skin that it carried around in this world. [14]

Message Prosperity & Swedenborg

Advocates of the “prosperity gospel” tell us that God wants us to be rich. Some say God rewards our faithfulness with wealth. Others say that positive thinking is the pathway to riches; visualizing wealth and knowing that thoughts are stronger than matter.

Where would Swedenborg weigh in on these concepts?

Although there are many versions of “new thought” and the “prosperity gospel,” let’s look at some general differences these folks have with Swedenborg.

Spirit vs Matter

Catherine Ponder, as well as many other advocates of new thought, believe that there is a secret to success, which lies in our mind. Ponder writes:

Finally, when I was at my lowest ebb emotionally, physically and financially, I learned about the power of thought as an instrument for success or failure. I came to realize that the right use of my mind could become the key to healthy, happy, prosperous, successful living. As soon as I grasped this wonderful success secret, the tide began to change!

Ponder, Catherine (2013-03-12). Dynamic Laws of Prosperity (Kindle Locations 59-62). Start Publishing LLC. Kindle Edition.

In our chat this past Thursday, Mike said:

Mary Baker Eddy thought matter is an illusion. I always found this odd.

I responded:

Yes, that's where Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science are so different from Swedenborg. Eddy says the material doesn't exist. If you're sick, you only heal the mind; you don't need medicine. Hence, a lot of children die from lack of medical treatment.

For Swedenborg, getting sick and being poor are part of life of earth. And we can all work together to create a healthier and more compassionate world.

If I get sick, I can say I wasn't thinking positive thoughts and that's the cause. But then maybe I just picked up some germs

To Swedenborg, matter and spirit could not be separated; they belonged together.

40 Divine love and wisdom is substance and is form. The everyday concept of love and wisdom is that they are something floating around in, or breathed out by, thin air or ether. Hardly anyone considers that in reality and in function they are substance and form. Even people who do see that love and wisdom are substance and form sense them as something outside their subject, flowing from it; and they refer to what in their perceptions is outside the subject and flowing from it as substance and form even though they sense it as floating around. They do not realize that love and wisdom are the actual subject, and that what they sense as floating out from the subject is only the appearance of the inherent state of the subject.

SWEDENBORG, EMANUEL (2010-01-12). DIVINE LOVE & WISDOM: PORTABLE: THE PORTABLE NEW CENTURY EDITION (NW CENTURY EDITION) (Kindle Locations 778-784). Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Spirit and matter are BOTH important.

WEALTH AND POVERTY

Wallace Wattles wrote:

WHATEVER may be said in praise of poverty, the fact remains that it is not possible to live a really complete or successful life unless one is rich. No man can rise to his greatest possible height in talent or soul development unless he has plenty of money; for to unfold the soul and to develop talent he must have many things to use, and he cannot have these things unless he has money to buy them with.

[Wattles, Science of Getting Rich]

Wattles, as many new thought people, saw wealth as a very positive attribute, and important for our spiritual advancement.

Swedenborg looked at wealth quite differently. He wrote:

217, Divine Providence, NCE

Now I need to illustrate these three items individually. (a) Rank and money may be either blessings or curses. Everyday experience bears witness to the fact that reverent and irreverent people, just and unjust people—good and evil people, that is—may have eminence and wealth. Yet no one can deny that irreverent and unjust people, evil people, go to hell while reverent and just people, good people, go to heaven. Since this is so, it follows that eminence and wealth, or rank and money, may be either blessings or curses, and that they are blessings for the good and curses for the evil.

To Swedenborg, wealth could be part of a spiritual path, or part of a selfish one.

Unity minister Catherine Ponder calls poverty a sin.

Poverty is a Sin: And so again I say: It is shockingly right instead of shockingly wrong for you to be prosperous. Obviously, you cannot be very happy if you are poor, and you need not be poor. It is a sin. Poverty is a form of hell caused by man's blindness to God's unlimited good for him. Poverty is a dirty, uncomfortable, degrading experience. Poverty is actually a form of disease, and in its acute phases, it seems to be a form of insanity.

Ponder, Catherine (2013-03-12). Dynamic Laws of Prosperity (Kindle Locations 184-186). Start Publishing LLC. Kindle Edition.

Swedenborg said that our purpose on earth has to do with “uses” – doing good works that help us move towards the “New Jerusalem” – a world of charity and justice.

Many Swedenborgians in history have been active in social justice movements, such as ending slavery. I would argue that it is more Swedenborgian to look at contributing factors in society to poverty as well a illness – rather than seeing the causes completely within individuals. Many have been inspired by Swedenborg to work for a more just society.

In Thursday's chat, Page resonated with many Swedenborgians when she said:

...that's where i have problems with new thought - they blame the victim/sick person/poor person for their lot in life

THOUGHTS

To Swedenborg, our thoughts could be connected with God, or with evil and falsity. Thoughts in themselves were not good or bad – but their intentions were.

2] But thoughts from no conscience exist with those who do not suffer themselves to be inwardly directed by what is good and true, but only by what is evil and false; that is, not by the Lord, but by themselves.

AC 2515

Wallace Wattles wrote:

Thought is the only power which can produce tangible riches from the Formless Substance. The stuff from which all things are made is a substance which thinks, and a thought of form in this substance produces the form.

To him, thoughts were powerful and good in and of themselves – in fact they were the only reality.

So there are some basic differences in how Swedenborg and the new thought movement view reality. For much of new thought, it is our thoughts that are powerful and real. The physical world is an illusion. To Swedenborg, the physical world is very real, and our purpose on earth is to work within it.

We do need to note, however, there are also many similarities between much of new thought history and Swedenborg. Early founders of new thought were inspired by Swedenborg. Many Swedenborgians have been involved in new thought movements.

Historically, we are cousins, and we do share some common understandings. Swedenborg believed that our thoughts and prayers are important. There can be real energy in our prayers and our positive thinking can help us in healing and in living our lives. The difference is one of degree. To Swedenborg, we need to turn to the Lord for guidance in how to direct our thoughts to allow us to serve our greatest uses on earth. It is the Lord who helps us in both thoughts and actions.

Swedenborg would agree that our thoughts have energy in inspiring our actions. However, we change our world not through our thoughts, but through our actions.

Some new thought people have said we can create world peace, end poverty, and have a pollution-free environment through right thinking. I think Swedenborg would advocate positive thinking in all of those areas. But, to Swedenborg, our thoughts alone will not change the world. That is because the physical world and matter are real. They exist. God created the physical world to interact with the spiritual; God created them to be together. Swedenborg does not see spiritual growth as a process of letting go of our attachments to the earth to live in our thoughts. Instead, as we grow spiritually, we become more active in the world. We work to make the world a better place for everyone – a world with a healthy environment where people work towards peace and equality.

So there are some overlaps and some similarities between most new thoughters and most Swedenborgians. But, ultimately, I believe that Swedenborg elevates, honors, and celebrates the physical world as the place where God resides – in all of creation as well in each created being. We are on earth to learn to love and live in the physical world; not to try to block it out as not really existing.

We will continue to explore these ideas in our chats and discussions, and all points of view are encouraged.

How do you see your relationship with the world? How do you see your thoughts and your actions working together in this world?

Let us pray:

Dear Divine, help us to love Your creation every day. Guide us in learning to love each other and all of the world. Help us walk every day in Your path, striving to make the world a better place in all that we do.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Horatio Dresser & New Thought

March 23, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

John 9: 1-7

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

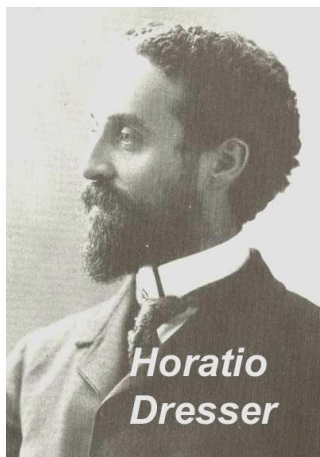
After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

From Swedenborg

There is an inflow from God into us. The inflow comes into our souls because the soul is the inmost and highest part of us.

True Christian Religion 8, New Century Edition

Message Horatio Dresser: The New Thought Swedenborgian Minister



As far as I know, there has only been one person who was a prolific New Thought writer and also a Swedenborgian minister.

His name was Horatio Dresser. He was born Jan. 15, 1866, in Yarmouth, Maine. He was the son

of Julius and Annetta Dresser. His parents met in the waiting room of famous healer Phineas Quimby in the Portland, Maine. It's interesting that Horatio was born the day before Quimby died in 1866, and only a few miles away from Quimby in Maine.

Julius and Annetta learned much from Quimby, and they used his ideas in the early development of the New Thought movement.

Two of their sons, including Horatio, became Swedenborgian ministers serving in Maine

Horatio was ordained at the Swedenborgian Convention in 1919; where the keynote speaker was Helen Keller. He went to serve the Swedenborgian Church of Portland. That same year, he published what has become a classic book on New Thought: *The History of the New Thought Movement*.

Dresser only stayed with the Portland Church for about a year, and he later left the Swedenborgian ministry [although he renewed his Swedenborgian connections later in life.]

At the time he wrote his classic history, he was a newly ordained Swedenborgian minister who had been raised by founders of New Thought.

He felt that Swedenborgian ideals were instrumental in the development of new thought, but that the movement was veering away from Swedenborgian concepts.

In his History of New Thought, he has a chapter called: "*The First Author.*" He writes that the first writer about New Thought was Warren Felt Evans.



Evans is considered by many to be the – or one of the – founders of New Thought, and was a Swedenborgian. He had been a Methodist minister in New Hampshire who had serious ailments, and went to Quimby in Portland, ME, for healing. He started reading Swedenborg around the same time and then transferred his membership to the Swedenborgian Church. He wrote a number of books; some of them about the connection between Quimby and Swedenborg.

Horatio wrote that Evans' first book was excellent, and came from a Swedenborgian perspective. However, Dresser argues that Evans wandered away from Swedenborg and into dimensions of Quimby's views that were clearly not Swedenborgian.

Horatio says, with some sadness, that the New Thought movement evolved out of the later writings of Evans, after they had lost their Swedenborgian roots. He believed the New Thought movement would have been much stronger had it stayed closely aligned with Swedenborgian concepts.

If the later devotees of mental healing had taken account of all the factors noted by Quimby and explained so clearly by Evans in this his first statement of it, they would have inquired into the nature of spiritual influx and correspondence and would have adopted an essentially spiritual view of the whole field. Instead of a new "thought," instead of almost exclusive emphasis on suggestion or affirmation, we might have had a new spiritual philosophy embracing the larger truth of the new age.

He defines the basis of Swedenborg this way:

The life of the soul is received by influx from God, the source of all our life. All men are incarnations of the divine. "In all men the Divinity becomes finitely human." The soul receives its form from the divine spirit within. It is in the human form, yet the significance of this form is that it is made in the image and likeness of God. The mind is not then formless and insubstantial, as we sometimes say in our Ignorance; but it consists of real substance, that is, spiritual substance, and is definitely formed according to the divine ideal.

Dresser says that Swedenborg had a groundbreaking psychology, and the in Evan's work on Swedenborg, "*Mr. Evans anticipates Freud and his school by more than a generation.*"

The real difference is what Dresser calls "idealism." He seems to feel that the approach of Evans—and other new thought writers – is that only ideas exist. The physical world doesn't exist; only the ideas of the mind.

Dresser ridicules this New Thought concept:

One might neglect the bodily conditions of disease and almost come to believe that nothing exists save when we are thinking about it, if one were to take too seriously Evans' statement that a "thing, a world, a disease, comes into our consciousness only when we think of it.... nothing ceases to exist when we cease to think about it.

If to "bring disease into the realm of unconsciousness" be all that we need do to make it "unreal," it would indeed be a simple matter to banish all disease from the world.

He goes to say that ..

Swedenborg ... surely never taught that "all outward things are but the exteriorization of ideas." Nor did Swedenborg teach that "thought is the primal force and the greatest power in the world." He did not identify existence with thought, but characterized God as the "divine love and the divine wisdom," teaching that there are two powers in man recipient of these, the will and the understanding (the intellect).

After some weeks of exploring New Thought and Swedenborg, we seem to be at the crux of a basic difference: the power of thoughts by themselves. Many New Thought advocates say that the physical world is not real – only our thoughts exist.

Swedenborg asserted strongly that the physical world is real AND the spiritual world is real. We are on the earth to put the two realms together.

In this Thursday's chat, we had a powerful conversation with Rev. Kim Morrow, who is a minister of

sustainability in Nebraska. She spoke with us passionately about the beauty of our earth, and the importance of our learning to live lightly upon that earth, walking with God and with each other.

Spring started this week. It is a good time to renew our connections with the earth – and with God. Swedenborg would say that we need to live with an action-oriented focus on Divine Love and Wisdom. We need to work to sustain God creation with our actions – and not just our thoughts alone.

How can you renew your connection this week with God and God's creations?

Let us pray.

Dear Divine Love and Wisdom,

Guide us this week in recognizing Your presence in all that is around us. May we see You in the waters, in the sky, and on the earth. May we see You in the animals and plants all around us. May we especially see You in the faces of each other, and within our own hearts. Amen.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

God Connections: Prayer & Meditation

March 30, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

2 Kings 20: 1-11

New International Version (NIV)

Hezekiah's Illness

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, "Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.'"

Then Isaiah said, "Prepare a poultice of figs." They did so and applied it to the boil, and he recovered.

Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I will go up to the temple of the Lord on the third day from now?"

Isaiah answered, "This is the Lord's sign to you that the Lord will do what he has promised: Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?"

"It is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps," said Hezekiah. "Rather, have it go back ten steps."

Then the prophet Isaiah called on the Lord, and the Lord made the shadow go back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 2535

Prayer considered in itself is speech with God, and at such time some internal intuition of the objects of prayer, to which there corresponds a certain similar influx into the perception or thought of the mind of him who prays, so that there is a certain opening of man's interiors towards God; but this with a difference according to man's state, and according to the essence of the object of the prayer; if the prayer be from love and faith, and be about and for celestial and spiritual things only, then in the prayer there exists something resembling a revelation, which is manifested in the emotion of the person praying, as to hope, consolation, or a certain interior joy.

Message

God Connections: Prayer, Meditation & Healing



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Meditation and Prayer



How would you describe your connection with God? Do you ever feel God's presence in some way? Do you pray? Do you meditate?

The "[Meditation Station](#)" says that "during prayer, we ask God for something ... during meditation, God speaks to us."

The [Shalem Institute](#) says that contemplative prayer is a

"loving quality of presence in which one is open to things just as they are."

They add that meditation is when one is doing something structured – such as repeating a mantra.

Not all prayer is verbal. Dorothy Day said that she sometimes had no words for prayer, but needed to pray with action, like feeding the poor. This is very much like Swedenborg's "uses."

Swedenborg's View

Swedenborg had a number of things to say about prayer. In Arcana #2535 [quoted above], Swedenborg says that prayer is talking with God.

Swedenborg sees the Lord's Prayer as especially powerful.

The ideas of my thought were then always opened toward heaven, and countless things flowed in, so that I observed clearly that the ideas of thought taken from the contents of the Prayer were filled from heaven. And such things were also poured in as cannot be uttered.

Arcana 6619

He sometimes uses the term "meditation" in a negative sense:

I have talked after their death with some people who during their earthly lives had renounced the world and devoted themselves to a virtually solitary life, wanting to make time for devout meditation by withdrawing their thoughts from worldly matters. They believed that this was the way to follow the path to heaven.

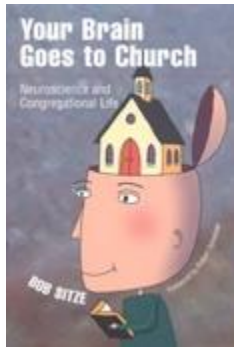
Heaven & Hell, 36

Other times he uses "meditation" as a kind of union with God:

At that point I fell into a meditation based on the myths of the most Ancients, reflecting on how they pictured Aurora, the Dawn, as having Silver wings and carrying gold in her mouth.²⁷⁷ mentally taking great Pleasure in these sights, I came into my spirit.

True Christianity 1, 112

Brain Studies



Neurotheology is a new field that looks at prayer and meditation in terms of our brain. Many studies in this field look at prayer and meditation as one, and see that they produce similar brain change.

Bob Sitz writes about these concepts in his book: *Your Brain Goes to Church: Neuroscience and Congregational Life*.

He writes:

The friendly interplay between theology and brain science is probably best seen in prayer [which includes deep meditation]. [p. 24]

He points out that we know that prayer brings spiritual change into our lives; and also helps us reduce stress and lower blood pressure.

But, he asks, just what is prayer?

That was the question neurobiologists Andrew Newberg and Eugene D'aquili asked. They studied just what goes on inside the brain when one prays. Sitz says that

"Their findings were similar across a broad spectrum of prayer-like activities. Deep prayer or meditation quiets the parietal lobe of the cerebral cortex. The body's arousing and attention-arousing systems are both activated and held in delicate balance." [p. 24]

Newberg and D'aquili (2001, pp3-10) studied Tibetan Monks and Franciscan Nuns as they engaged in deep meditation and prayer.

They found an increase of neurons within the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain associated with attention and concentration.

However the parietal lobe, the area associated with time and space, showed very little activity. With limited neuronal activity, the parietal lobe is unable to distinguish the boundary between the external world and the physical self. This could account for the meditators reporting a 'sense of unity' with the universe and a 'mingling with God' during intense trance (Newberg et al 2001, p7).

Researchers at the University of California, San Diego, believe they have found the 'God Spot', a part of the brain that can become activated during prayer or meditation leading to feelings of peace, healing, and love. This spot is in the frontal cortex, which some Eastern religions consider the "third eye".

Increasingly "neuro theologians" are learning that many forms of meditation, prayer, and experience with the arts can lead us to this spot. Art therapists are finding that drawing, singing, dancing and other arts can lead us to God's spot.

Some researchers look specifically at the outcome when someone prays for the well being of another.

Here is one study:

Spiritual healers from around the world – including Jews leaving prayers at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Buddhists praying in monasteries in Nepal and France, Carmelite nuns in Baltimore offering prayers during vespers, and Moravians, Baptists and fundamental Christians praying during church – each simultaneously prayed for one of several designated groups in the study.

All of the groups did better than the standard care group, with those receiving distant prayers doing best.

These studies are confirming that people are able to influence the health and well-being of people being prayed for, even across great distances, and even when those doing the praying do not know the people they are praying for.

What happens for you when you pray or meditate? Do you feel relaxed or at peace? Do you feel connected with God? Do you believe that God responds to your prayers – as in the story of Hezekiah in today's scripture reading?

We'll continue to explore these questions in the coming weeks.

The Mystic, The Physicist & Prayer

April 6, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 6: 9-13, NIV

This, then, is how you should pray: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation,[a] but deliver us from the evil one.[b]*

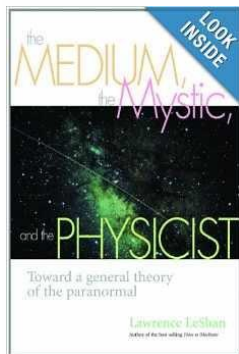
Footnotes: [a] The Greek for temptation can also mean testing. [b] Or from evil; some late manuscripts one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 6476

Whenever I have been reading the Lord's prayer, I have plainly perceived an elevation toward the Lord which was like an attraction, and at the same time my ideas were open, and from this there was effected a communication with some societies in heaven; and I noticed that there was an influx from the Lord into every detail of the prayer, thus into every idea of my thought that was from the meaning of the things in the prayer. The influx was effected with inexpressible variety, that is, not the same at one time as another; hence also it was made evident how infinite are the things contained in the prayer, and that the Lord is present in every one of them.

Message **The Mystic, The Physicist & Prayer**



Lawrence LeShan's book caused a stir when it was published in 1974. It was called: *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist: Toward a General Theory of the Paranormal*. LeShan's central thesis was mind-blowing: the reality being described by Quantum physicists is the same reality that has been described by mystics of all traditions throughout history, and even of "mediums" exploring the paranormal.

Many people found this thesis hard to believe at first, but were convinced by the lists of quotations

LeShan gave, asking the reader to indicate what was said by a scientist, and what said by a mystic. Here are two examples. Which of these is the scientist and which is the mystic?

Every attempt to solve the laws of causation, time and space would be futile because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three.

and

When I, on a certain occasion, asked (Professor Einstein) or (The Lord Buddha) how he found (his theory of relativity) or (Enlightenment) he answered that he found it because he was so strongly convinced of the harmony of the universe.

The first one is the mystic Vivikenanda, and the second one a scientist called Reichenbach, talking about Einstein.

These two groups come from different places with different goals; but end up in the same place. We know that Swedenborg incorporated both perspectives of the universe within himself. He said:

So prayer is, quite simply, talking to God. True prayer comes from our attempt to bring a spiritual perspective to what we are praying for.

Perhaps, then, prayer happens when we bring a spiritual perspective to the physical reality of our lives.

There is a Buddhist story that says this differently.



It is the belief that as one searches more and more deeply into oneself, tearing aside veil after veil of illusion, one comes finally to ATMAN, the true essence of the self. And that as one searches more and more deeply into outside reality, tearing aside veil after veil of illusion, one comes finally to BRAHMAN, the true essence of reality. And that Atman and Brahman are the same.

So, if both inner reality and outer reality are the same, then what is prayer? Can quantum physics help us understand prayer? Bell's theorem tells us that once subatomic particles have been in contact, they always remain connected. A change in one creates a similar change in the other, no matter how far apart they are. Some physicists believe that these events are not just limited to subatomic particles but are part of every-day reality -- including prayer.

During this past Thursday's chat, Page mentioned the "butterfly effect."

and that gives me comfort - that we cannot know the deeper meaning of what we do - to just keep on doing it and knowing that the Lord is transmuting it in ways we cannot understand - a perhaps like the butterfly effect

We looked up “butterfly effect.” Wikipedia says: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly_effect

*In chaos theory, the **butterfly effect** is the sensitive dependency on initial conditions in which a small change at one place in a deterministic nonlinear system can result in large differences in a later state. The name of the effect, coined by Edward Lorenz, is derived from the theoretical example of a hurricane's formation being contingent on whether or not a distant butterfly had flapped its wings several weeks earlier.*

Page added:

The aspect of the butterfly effect that I was getting at is - small acts by individuals, if done through the Lord, can be combined by the Lord to make major changes in the world

Perhaps we pray with every act of love done in the world. And perhaps each prayer of action is combined with other prayer of action – to result in major changes in our lives and in the world around us.

How do we determine what is, in fact, an “action” – as opposed to an “inaction?”



One time Lawrence LeShan was asked to give a healing prayer, from a distance, for a man who was extremely ill. The next day the man had miraculously recovered! The doctors were astounded! Perhaps at last there was concrete evidence of healing prayer. There was a problem, however. Leshan had completely forgotten to do the healing!

So did he pray unconsciously? Was the man healed by his faith in LeShan’s healing? Did God hear and respond to a prayer that no one had prayed? Is the action of prayer the same as the inaction of the forgotten prayer that is grounded in love?

Another type of prayer, of course, is expressing our love of the Divine. Many of the mystics have written incredible poems/prayers of love to Divine.

Here is a work by the Sufi poet, Rumi:

*Since I have heard of the world of Love,
I've spent my life, my heart
And my eyes this way.
I used to think that love*

*And beloved are different.
I know they are the same.*

Let us pray.

Dear Lord,

Help me to pray to You by living in love throughout the day. Help me to stay focused in Your love, so that every thing I do all day -- and every moment when I am doing nothing – are all prayer to You.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Palms, Passions & Prayers

April 13, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 19: 36-40

As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Luke 22: 39-46

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."

From Swedenborg

AC 9212: 6

By the disciples putting their garments on the ass and her colt, was represented that truths in the whole complex were submitted to the Lord as the Highest Judge and King; for the disciples represented the church of the Lord in respect to its truths and goods (n. 2129, 3488, 3858, 6397), and their garments represented the truths themselves (n. 4545, 4763, 5319, 5954, 6914, 6917, 9093) The like was represented by the multitude strewing their garments in the way, and also branches of trees. The reason why they strewed them in the way was that by "a way" is signified the truth whereby the man of the church is led (n. 627, 2333, 3477). The reason why they strewed branches of trees, was that trees signified the perceptions and also the knowledges of truth and good (n. 2682, 2722, 2972, 4552, 7692), consequently "the branches" denote the truths themselves. This was done also in conformity with a customary rite; for when the highest judges and kings rode in their solemn procession, the princes of the people then put their garments on the asses and mules, and the people themselves strewed their garments on the way, or in their place the branches of trees; for the judicial function in heaven is the Divine truth from the Divine good, and the regal one is the Divine truth (n. 1728, 2015, 2069, 3009, 4581, 4966, 5044, 5068, 6148).

TC 132

It is a fundamental error on the part of the Christian Church to believe that the passion on the cross was the real act of redemption. That error, together with the erroneous belief in three divine persons existing from eternity, has so corrupted the whole Christian Church that there is not a scrap of spirituality left in it.

Message Palms, Passions & Prayers



It can be difficult to select a theme for a Palm Sunday message. One can focus on the joy of Jesus riding into Jerusalem with people waving palms of greeting. Or one can focus on Jesus' time in the Garden of Gethsemane praying, "Let this cup pass from me" or the pain and agony of Jesus on the cross praying "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

In our readings today, I have included one passage on the joy of the palms, and one on the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane; a pivotal point that turned the week starting with palms into one ending with pain, passion, and prayer.

Holy Week is a long journey through many stages. Swedenborg's process of regeneration is a long road, with much struggle, before one reaches "union." In many ways, Holy Week is a condensed version of that journey. When you make the decision that you want to walk a spiritual path, then you are also deciding to walk through all of the bumps and potholes in the road.

Often, our first sense of God is a glimpse of something beautiful and peaceful calling to us. To respond to the call feels joyous and liberating. At the beginning, there is excitement about beginning a new journey. There are so many hopes and dreams that lie ahead.

Following God's will is easy on Palm Sunday; riding a donkey into a cheering crowd! It's harder to maintain the commitment through the years ahead filled with conflicts and compromises.

By following the road into Jerusalem, Jesus had an intense week. He attended a Passover supper with his disciples, at which one of them betrayed him. He went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

The path became harder, and Jesus' prayers were deeper: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."

The path strewn with palms led into the Garden of Gethsemane. How many times have you prayed for God to give you something that you want? How often do you pray the way Jesus did, "Not my will, but thine be done."

This is the most important part of the prayer. We live in an era when many people try to “create their own reality” by focusing on the things they want, and trying to bring them into their lives. However, this is often done by focusing on what the ego wants – not on checking out God’s will.

We often pray for something specific: a new job, a satisfying relationship, and good health. So often, our prayers are telling God what we want God to do for us.

In the garden, Jesus asks for what he wants, but he emphasizes that he wants God will to be done.

When the Lord was being emptied out he was in a state of progress toward union; when he was being glorified he was in a state of union itself. The church recognizes that the Lord had two states while he was in the world; one called being emptied out; the other called glorification .

True Christianity 104

The reason why the Lord experienced these two states, the state of being emptied out and the state of being glorified is that no other method of achieving union could possibly exist. Only this method follows the divine design, and the divine design cannot be changed.

The divine design is that we arrange ourselves for receiving God and prepare ourselves as a vessel and a dwelling place where God can enter and live as if we were his own temple. ... This is the divine design we follow, and have to follow, to go from being earthly to being spiritual. The Lord had to go through the same process to make his earthly human manifestation divine. This is why he prayed to the Father. This is why he did the Father’s will. This is why he attributed everything he did and said to the Father. This is why he said on the cross “My God, my God, why have abandoned me?” ...In this state God appears to be absent .

True Christianity 105

Swedenborg is describing a spiritual process that is found in many world traditions. Our spiritual path is leading us to recognize our union with the Divine. To get to this partnership, we must be tempted and challenged to the point where our old ego dies; making room for God's complete oneness with us.

John of the Cross says that we must go through a “dark night of the soul” so that God can remove any barriers that keep us from union with the Divine.

This is what was happening for Jesus in the garden. Swedenborg tells us that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was letting go of his old ego needs and desires. On the cross, Jesus completed the emptying of the ego, and came into union with God. Swedenborg calls this the glorification of Jesus. This is a process each of us must undergo on our soul's journey to God.

What barriers stand between you and God? Where do you need to empty yourself so that God's inflow of love can fill you?

During this Holy Week, think of yourself as letting go of all inner barriers, so that on Easter Sunday you can be completely open to receiving God's joyful gift of love.

During this week, be open to any of the feelings that are present for you. It is a week of celebration, of fellowship, of betrayal, and of painful ego death.

Let yourself have all of those feelings during the week. But don't forget to celebrate the glorious union with God that awaits us all next Sunday.

Resurrection in A Hologram

April 20, 2014

READINGS From the Bible

Matthew 28: 1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

From Swedenborg

True Christianity 114:6

Suffering on the cross was the final trial the Lord underwent as the greatest prophet. It was a means of glorifying his human nature, that is, of uniting that to his Father's divine nature. It was not redemption.

Message Resurrection in A Hologram

Psychologist Carl Jung felt he had a quest to find the deep truths of existence, and his dreams led him to the ancient tradition of alchemy. Alchemy was based on the premise that ordinary lead could be transmuted into gold, if the right formula could be found.

Jung felt that alchemy was actually about changing the lead of ordinary experience into the gold of the mystical union with God.

Evelyn Underhill and other mystical scholars tell us that many alchemists were on a spiritual quest to find union with the Divine. They were trying to find an integration of matter and spirit.

Many images of the alchemists were based on Christian symbols of the Cosmic Christ – the union of human and divine. Most alchemists saw seven stages, ending in union with the divine.

Swedenborg, too, had seven stages of regeneration leading to union. This 7th stage was demonstrated by the resurrection. For Swedenborg, the resurrection was about union of humanity and divinity.

Jesus spent his life living in times of "emptying", when his human ego needed to be let go, and times of "glorification" – or union with the divine. The cross was the final emptying of his ego state when he felt abandoned by God. If you are abandoned by someone, then there are two of you – one does

the abandoning of the other. When you become one, there can be no abandonment; only union.

Dr. Bob Kirven says that Swedenborg had a unique understanding of how the divine and human nature intersected. Swedenborg said that spirit and matter were both real, both different, and both the same! They are “distinguishably one.”



Swedenborg saw separate levels of reality connected by relationships called “correspondences.” All of existence begins with the pure divine, and flows downward – into the heavens, into humans on earth and the animals and plants of the earth. This pure divine keeps flowing down. If we take the very smallest possible thing that exists, even it corresponds to the divine. Everything corresponds to higher levels. That is how both matter and spirit are both real; through correspondence they are all the same.

That is how there is union between humanity and divinity. Swedenborg called it the “Divine human” or the “God-man”. And that is what Easter is all about: showing us the union between human and divine that unite us.

This is one part of Swedenborg’s concept of Easter: the union of humanity and divinity.

Another part of Swedenborg’s Easter can best be understood through the new physics concept of a hologram.

Physicist Michael Talbot in his article, [Swedenborg and the Holographic Paradigm](#), wrote:

“If Emanuel Swedenborg were alive today, it is likely that he would find many aspects of the new physics compatible with his own thought.”

And he wrote:

“perhaps the most astonishing foreshadowing of new-physics ideas in Swedenborg’s writings are the similarities between his world view and a revolutionary new way of looking at nature known as the ‘holographic paradigm.’”

In an older, Newtonian model, we might take apart things in the world to see all their different parts. But from a holographic perspective, if we take things apart and get down to the smallest elements, we find the whole existing in the every part. Or we find the divine in everything.

Every part of a hologram contains the whole. Jesus was a correspondence of God – and we all are. God was not present in Jesus as something unique in existence, but rather in all of us.

Holography shows a process over time. Jesus was in a process between two states of being. In his human state on the cross, he felt abandoned by God. But this was followed by the state of union.

“After this state comes a second one, the state of being in a partnership with God. In this second state, we do basically the same things, but now we do them with God. We no longer need to attribute to God everything good that we intend and do and everything true that we think and say in the same way as we used to, because now this acknowledgment is written on our heart. It is inside everything we do and everything we say. In this same way, ... The Lord glorified his human nature [meaning that he made it divine], in the same way that he regenerates us [meaning that he makes us spiritual].”

George Dole says,

“I see the holographic model as implicit in his [Swedenborg's] Christology. In his view, it is intrinsic to the divine nature to be wholly present in every part of creation, and especially clearly in human beings.”

Dole says this helps us understand the resurrection.

“It is wholly characteristic of the divine to be wholly present in every part of creation all the time.”

The Easter story is about how human and divine became one. It is about the divine being in the smallest pieces of existence. It is about God being written on our hearts. How do we live with God written on our hearts?

The first thing we notice is that God changed. The God that existed when Jesus came into the world was not the same God after human and divine became one. It's like a human commitment between two people: they are each individual people. Yet in a commitment to each other, a new entity is formed: the relationship of the two of them.

God continues to change as we change. God changes us and we change God. We all change each other. That makes everything we do everyday extremely important, for we are impacting the entire holographic universe with every thought and action.

How seriously can we take this Easter message that human and divine are one? We are part of God and God is in us. Do we allow God to be a partner in our lives? So often, we either put God out by the sides to be ignored, or we pray for God to tell us what to do. If we really believe there is a partnership, how would our prayer life change? How would our concept of God change? How do we bring God into the smallest, everyday acts of our day?

How can prayer become a dialog between partners? There is no one answer to that question, but perhaps we are each called to find our own answer. We each must figure out what this partnership with God is all about.

Easter reminds us that the Lord's humanity and divinity are one; we are all part of the Divine human.

It also reminds us that we live in a holographic universe in which the divine is in the smallest of things. This divine is both permanent and changing. God changes as we change. Everything we do impacts everyone else.

What could be more sacred and joyful? We can never cease to exist because we are united with God. As the God-Human, we are always growing and changing. We have eternity in which to explore all that we can be in this universal hologram. Easter is a great day to begin to explore your unique eternal place in the universal hologram.

Being Bright & Beautiful

April 27, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Job 12:7-10

Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Psalm 19:1-4; cf. Psalm 97:6

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Psalm 96:11-13

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord.

Psalm 148:7-10

Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds.

From Swedenborg

Divine Love and Wisdom n.77

The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things.

Heavenly Secrets, #2

So long as man is spiritual, his dominion proceeds from the external man to the internal ... But when he becomes celestial, and does good from love, then his dominion proceeds from the internal man to the external...

Divine Love and Wisdom, #69

The Divine fills all space of the universe w/o being bound by space.

Message Being Bright & Beautiful

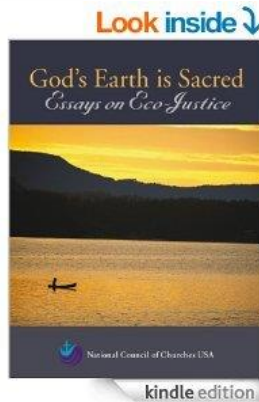
All things bright and beautiful; Creatures great and small.

I love that simple song. It was published in 1848 in a hymn book for children, designed to raise money for deaf-mutes. It was written by Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-95), wife to an Anglican Archbishop, as a way of expressing the opening of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God, the Father

Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

The original song had a verse that seemed to praise social hierarchy, and was removed along the way. The tune, Royal Oak, was arranged by Martin Shaw in 1915 from a traditional melody celebrating the restoration of Charles II in 1660.

The Lord God made them all.



God's earth is sacred. The essays in this book are an ecumenical Christian approach to the environment.

They point out that historically, the Christian Church has not always supported the environment. Author Laurel Kearns discusses the concept of “dominion”. She says that in 1967 historian Lynn White charged that “Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt” for the ecological crisis because of its interpretation of dominion, from Genesis 1:28.

This is Gen. 1:28 in the King James's Version:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

A concept of “stewardship” has grown from Genesis 2:15:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

The concepts of “dominion” and “stewardship” have become terms of ruling over the environment.



Kearns writes:

The dominant interpretation that emerged in the past few hundred years leaned toward interpreting the concept of dominion as a human dictatorship in which all of the non-human subjects are viewed as “resources” for the dictator’s advancement or betterment. This is why so much of the work of contemporary Creation care advocates focuses on reinterpreting human relationships with the rest of the Creation and advocating the human role of caretaker/steward instead of reckless consumer or selfish overLord.

Fortunately, Swedenborg offers a different interpretation of these passages: Swedenborg’s view of Gen. 1:28 from "Secrets of Heaven":

Anything we do on our own is evil through and through, but since we are engaged in the process of being reborn, we have a trace—the smallest possible trace—of goodness. Later, as faith becomes more closely connected with love, it grows larger—a plant. When the connection is completed, it turns into a tree, and then the birds of the heavens (which are true ideas, or the contents of the intellect) nest in its branches (the facts we know). When we are spiritual people or are becoming spiritual, we are subject to conflict; and this is why it says harness the earth, and rule.

Swedenborg sees this as a directive from God to work on becoming spiritual, by addressing our inner conflicts.

From Secrets of Heaven: 122-123, concerning Genesis 2:15.

And Jehovah God took the human and put the human in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to guard it. The Garden of Eden symbolizes everything in a heavenly person, which is the subject here. Cultivating the garden and guarding it means that such a person is free to enjoy all of those things but not to claim personal possession of them, because they are the Lord’s. Heavenly people acknowledge, because they perceive, that absolutely everything is the Lord’s. Spiritual people too acknowledge it, but only in speech, because they have learned it from the Word. Worldly and body centered people do not accept or agree with the idea; they claim as their own any ability they discover inside themselves, and if they lose it, they consider it completely destroyed.

Swedenborg’s perspective is reflected in the environmental statements of a number of religions. Here are some selected statements from various religious traditions:



Christian Statement:

We believe that, in boundless love that hungers for justice, God in Jesus Christ acts to restore and redeem all Creation (including human beings). God incarnate affirms all Creation (John 1:14), which becomes a sacred window to eternity. In the cross and resurrection we know that God is drawn into life’s most brutal and broken places and there brings forth healing and liberating power. That saving action restores right relationships among all members of “the whole Creation” (Mark 16:15). We confess that instead of living and proclaiming this salvation through our very lives and worship, we

have abused and exploited the Earth and people on the margins of power and privilege, altering climates, extinguishing species, and jeopardizing Earth's capacity to sustain life as we know and love it. We believe that the created world is sacred—a revelation of God's power and gracious presence filling all things. This sacred quality of Creation demands moderation and sharing, urgent antidotes for our excess in consumption and waste, reminding us that economic justice is an essential condition of ecological integrity.



Buddhist Statement:

Today we live in a time of great crisis, confronted by the gravest challenge that humanity has ever faced: the ecological consequences of our own collective karma. ...As signatories to this statement of Buddhist principles, we acknowledge the urgent challenge of climate change. We join with the Dalai Lama in endorsing the 350 CO2 parts per million target. In accordance with Buddhist teachings, we accept our individual and collective responsibility to do whatever we can to meet this target, including (but not limited to) the personal and social responses outlined above.

Baha'i Statement:

For over 20 years, the Baha'is of the United States have worked with others to advance environmental awareness and sustainable development. Much of the inspiration for doing so comes from the Baha'i sacred writings, which are imbued with a deep respect for the natural world and for the interconnectedness of all things. For Baha'is, nature is seen as a divine trust that reflects the qualities and attributes of God and, as such, should be cherished. Like the adherents of other faith traditions, Baha'is are called upon to be stewards of the environment.

Islam Statement:

The first Islamic principle that relates to conservation is that of the Oneness of Allah, or Tawheed. This principle is absolutely fundamental to Islam. Every Muslim must believe in this Oneness of Allah. It is said by some Ulamaa that some two-thirds of Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) early preaching—and indeed of the Qur'an itself—were and are dedicated purely to endorsing this very Oneness of Allah. One indivisible God means to a Muslim that there is no separate deity for each of the many attributes that to Muslims belong to the One Universal God who is also God of the Universe.

Hindu:

The Hindu tradition understands that man is not separate from nature, that we are linked by spiritual, psychological and physical bonds with the elements around us. Knowing that the Divine is present everywhere and in all things, Hindus strive to do no harm. We hold a deep reverence for life and an awareness that the great forces of nature—the earth, the water, the fire, the air and space—as well

as all the various orders of life, including plants and trees, forests and animals, are bound to each other within life's cosmic web.

Today's prayer is taken from Creation Justice Ministries, that is focusing on water this year.



Prayer for the Blessing of the Waters

(to be used for blessing water from a local stream, river, or lake)—Adapted from the rite of the Great Blessing of the Water as celebrated in the Orthodox tradition

You are great, O Lord, and Your works are wondrous, and there are no words capable of hymning Your wonders... For of Your own will You brought all things in to being from nothing, by Your power You uphold the whole of creation, and by Your providence You order the world... The sun sings to You, the moon glorifies You, the stars meet together before Your face, the light obeys You, the deeps shudder before You, the water springs serve You... We confess Your grace, we proclaim Your mercy, we conceal not Your gracious acts: You have set free our mortal nature. All creation sings praises to You Who have revealed Yourself. For You, our God, have appeared upon earth and have dwelled among men. Therefore, be present here now by the descent of the Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water. Give it the blessing of Jordan. Make it a fountain of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a remission of sins, a protection against disease, a destruction of demons... and may it be for those who will partake of it, to the cleansing of their souls and bodies, to the healing of their passions, to the sanctification of their homes, to every expedient purpose... Amen.

Brain & Prayer

May 4, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Mark 11: 23-26

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

From Swedenborg

4054.

The brain, like heaven, belongs to the realm of ends which are uses, for whatever flows in from the Lord is an end looking towards the salvation of the human race. This is the end which reigns in heaven, and also which as a result reigns in the brain, for the brain, where man's mind is seated, looks to ends in the body, that is to say, so that the body may serve the soul and that the soul may be eternally happy.

Message Brain & Prayer

[NAMI](#) [the National Alliance on Mental Illness], is an organization that began when some parents reached out to other parents for support in living with mental illness in the family. It has grown into a large organization, and now has a section devoted to faith issues.

The NAMI has a section devoted to [faith issues](#).

They have learned some important ways that our prayer life can impact our mental health.

NAMI asked individuals living with schizophrenia and depression, in two different studies, what most helped their mental illness recovery. They found:

prayer and spirituality as primary, just below medication, psychotherapy or counseling and, for depression, exercise. Forty percent of respondents living with depression reported spirituality as a primary form of treatment. Additionally, a majority reported that participation in their spiritual or religious practices had not been adversely affected by their depression. For individuals living with schizophrenia, 38 percent reported a greater connection to religious or spiritual practices as part of their treatment and recovery.

A study from the University of Missouri examined mental health issues of people from five faith traditions: Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Catholics and Protestants.

Surveys were conducted of individuals self-reporting their physical health and mental health and highlight the relationship between these two conditions. Across all five practices, a greater degree of spirituality was related to better mental health and despite differences in beliefs among the world's main religions, the study reveals that spirituality enhances health regardless.

Dr. Andrew Newberg is a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania trying to learn what happens to the brain during prayer. He uses SPECT [single proton emission computed tomography] to take pictures of the brain while people are praying or meditation. He studied Tibetan Buddhist monks in meditation and asked them to pull on a string when they getting into a meditative state. He then injected radioactive dye to image the brain.

Newberg found increased activity in the frontal lobe, which deals with concentration; the monks obviously were concentrating on the activity. ...

But Newberg also found an immense decrease of activity in the parietal lobe. The parietal lobe, among other things, orients a person in a three-dimensional space..... Newberg hypothesizes that the decreased activity in the brains of the meditating monks indicates that they lose their ability to differentiate where they end and something else begins [source: [Paulson](#)]. In other words, they become at one with the universe, a state often described in a moment of transcendence.

And it seems to matter little to whom or what that religious activity is directed toward, for Newberg found similar brain activity in the brains of praying nuns. Though the nuns were praying to God, rather than meditating like the monks, they showed increased activity in the frontal lobe as they began focusing their minds. There was also a decrease of activity in the parietal lobe, seemingly indicating that the nuns lost their sense of self in relation to the real world and were able to achieve communion with God [source: [Paulson](#)]. [The Brain During Religious Experiences](#)

In another study, Newburg looked at the brain of a Presbyterian minister in prayer.

This study was recently on Science's network's "Through the Wormhole."

Interestingly, the scans showed that the frontal lobes and the language area of the brain experienced noticeably-increased activity. ...

This description of prayer is important, seeing as the frontal lobes and language portions of the brain activate during conversation. As a result, Newberg believes that the brain reacts during Judeo-Christian prayer in the same way that it does when someone is talking to a friend, co-worker, etc.

"To the brain, talking to God is indistinguishable to talking to a person," narrator Morgan Freeman proclaimed.

Faith and science are coming together. Swedenborg, of course, wrote about this over 300 years ago. He believed that all of heaven was like a Grand Person, with each part of the body playing a special role. The brain is particularly important:

By the human mind are meant its two faculties, which are called the understanding and the will. The understanding is the receptacle of the light of heaven, which in its essence is wisdom, and the will is the receptacle of the heat of heaven, which in its essence is love.

It was important to Swedenborg to allow opposites to work together: science and religion, matter and spirit, wisdom and love, humanity and God. What we consider dualities are, in fact, a holographic whole. Within that whole, they are "distinguishably one." Each quality continues to exist in its uniqueness, and they blend into a wholeness that cannot exist without both of them.

This concept is a perfect way to understand the human brain. We have two parts to our brain: right and left. To be whole, we have to embrace each side. Yet, we live in a culture that honors the left brain and ignores the right.

Clearly, when we engage in prayer, we activate our brain in positive ways. Science is showing us that these ways can help us become mentally healthier.

In 2013, President Obama proclaimed May as National Mental Health Awareness Month. Let's honor this month through the activity of our own prayer life – praying for ourselves and for others.

Let us pray:

Dear God, help us remember that our prayer is a crucial activity that increases our health and well-being in so many ways. More importantly, it is our connection to You. Help us each find the pathway to prayer that leads to You. Amen.

Mother's Prayer For Peace

May 11, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

2 Timothy 1:3-7 (New Revised Standard Version)

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3167.

And to her mother. That this signifies for natural truth also (namely, that it thence has spiritual things, as is the case with natural good, concerning which see just above) is evident from the signification of "mother," as being the church, which is called "mother" from truth (see n. 289, 2717).

Message A Mother's Prayer For Peace

[The Huffington Post](#) this week points out that we will probably spend some 20 billion dollars on Mother's Day this year, which would have horrified the day's founder, Anna Jarvis. This year is the 100th anniversary of an official Mother's Day.



During the Civil War, Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." As she became more famous, she was frequently asked to speak publicly. She began to speak about the horrors of war, and became an advocate for peace.

She worked with the widows and orphans of soldiers on both sides of the war.

In 1870, she decided that peace and equality were the two most important things in the world. She called for women to rise up and oppose all forms of war. She wanted women to come together from all nations, to recognize what we have in common and to commit to finding peaceful resolutions to conflicts. She issued a Declaration, hoping to gather together women in a congress of action.

She wanted to create a Mothers' Day for Peace.

She wasn't able to implement her idea but she influenced [Anna Jarvis](#), a young Appalachian homemaker who had been working since 1858 to improve sanitation through what she called Mothers' Work Days. She organized women throughout the Civil War to work for better sanitary conditions for both sides, and in 1868 she began work to reconcile Union and Confederate neighbors.



Anna was also influenced by her mother, Ann Reeves Jarvis – who held Mother's Day work clubs to fight disease and improve sanitary conditions, starting in the 1850's.

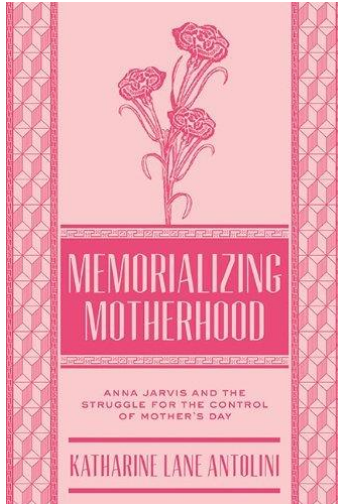
Katharine Antolini of West Virginia Wesleyan College has written a doctoral dissertation on the history of Mother's Day. She says the word was intended to be singular [Mother's Day] rather than plural [Mothers' Day] to be about one's own, personal mother.

After the Civil War, Ann Jarvis and other women had Friendship Day picnics to advocate for pacifism.

Julia Ward Howe issued a Mother's Day Proclamation in 1870, calling on women to be active in promoting peace.

Ann Jarvis died in 1905, and her daughter, Anna, wanted to honor her. Jarvis' mother died May 9th, 1905, and Ann wanted to remember her mother. On May 12, 1907, Ann held a small service for her mother at the Episcopal Church in Grafton, W. Virginia, where her mother had been a Sunday School teacher.

"For Jarvis it was a day where you'd go home to spend time with your mother and thank her for all that she did," West Virginia Wesleyan's Antolini, who wrote [Memorializing Motherhood: Anna Jarvis and the Defense of Her Mother's Day](#) as her Ph.D. dissertation, said in a previous interview.



"It wasn't to celebrate all mothers. It was to celebrate the best mother you've ever known—your mother—as a son or a daughter." That's why Jarvis stressed the singular "Mother's Day," rather than the plural "Mothers' Day," Antolini explained.

Anna Jarvis never had children, but she was active in promoting Mother's Day. She became appalled at the way in which the holiday was commercialized.

On May 8, 1914, the US Congress declared the 2nd Sunday in May as Mother's Day, and it was signed into law by President Wilson on May 9th, especially to honor Mothers who sons had died in war.

Mother's Day has meant many different things. Initially, it was mothers working and praying for peace in the world. Gradually, it became a time to honor our own Mother; and then a day for all Mothers.

Let's today honor all Mothers – including those who have worked and prayed for peace. And let's honor Mother Earth, as we continue the energy of Earth Day 2014.

Let us pray.

Dear God, help us recognize the mothering of others that is done by so many. Help us to find within ourselves the mothering of all in need. Guide us in honoring Mother Earth. Bless all mothers and those who mother! Amen.

We May Not OK Be but God Is

May 18, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Jesus Heals the Sick

Matthew 4: 23-25, NIV

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

From Swedenborg

Divine Providence #141 [NCE]

The reason no one is reformed in a state of mental illness is that mental illness deprives us of rationality and therefore of the freedom to act rationally. The mind is sick and not healthy, and while a healthy mind is rational, a sick one is not. The illnesses are things like depression, imagined or illusory guilt, various kinds of hallucinations, mental anguish brought on by misfortunes, and mental anxiety and pain brought on by physical disorders. These are sometimes thought of as temptations, but they are not. Real temptations focus on spiritual issues, and during them the mind is in possession of its skills. The states I am talking about focus on earthly issues, and during them the mind goes mad

Message

We May Not Be OK but God Is: Prayer & Mental Illness



I was listening to a CNN special program on religion in American. The host, Morgan Spulock, was visiting a Baptist Church in Nashville, and the dynamic preacher there was talking about depression. He said that you have to have God's armor on to keep out the Devil.



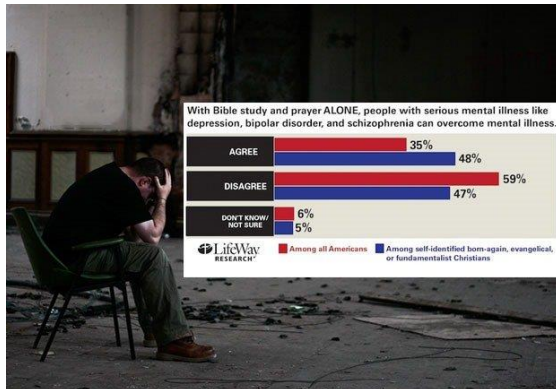
Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

“You can let negativity and evil in and before long there is a thin line between the voice of God and schizophrenia.”

I jumped up. Was he saying that schizophrenia and depression can be kept at bay if you pray to God to protect you from evil?

There wasn't enough of the sermon broadcast to be sure what his point was. But he COULD have been implying that mental illness is caused by the Devil and cured by God.

[A recent study](#) by Life Way shows that *a third of Americans – and nearly half of evangelical, fundamentalist, or born-again Christians – believe prayer and Bible study alone can overcome serious mental illness.*



The poll showed that 54% of Americans believe that churches should do more to prevent suicide, and 64% of evangelical, fundamentalist, or born-again Christians share that conviction.

Ed Stetzer, President of Lifeway Research, wrote in [a blog](#):

So, what can we do as people of faith to address issues of mental illness? Churches need to stop hiding mental illness. The congregation should be a safe place for those who struggle. We should not be afraid of medicine. We need to end the shame. ...

It is also important that we recognize that prayer changes things. In fact, the gospel impacts every area of our lives and God can—and does at times—supernaturally heal every kind of illness. Yet, God often chooses to do so through an approach that includes prayer, study, Christian community, and medical intervention.

Other Evangelical Christians are recognizing the importance of professional treatment for mental illness as well as prayer.



Rev. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church – a Christian mega-church based in Orange County, Calif.-- had to deal with the suicide of his 27-year-old son Matthew in April of 2013. Warren and his wife Kay began a grieving process that forced them to wrestle with tough questions of faith. *Warren told [People Magazine](#).*

"I asked, 'Why God? Why did you allow this?' 'Why have I prayed every day for my son to be healed and it didn't happen?' I've seen miracles. But they are called miracles because they don't always happen."

The Warrens honored the one year anniversary of Matthew's death by co-hosting [a conference](#) on mental illness and the church. The other co-sponsors were the National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI] in Orange County, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange County. The conference was *aimed at encouraging individuals living with mental illness, educating family members and equipping church leaders to provide effective, compassionate ministry to those who confront **mental illness**.*

NAMI national executive director, Mary Giliberti, said of the conference:

It is nationally significant as a model for outreach that unifies spiritual inspiration with mental health needs. It also represents a powerful trumpet call for an end to stigma.

Rick and Kay Warren were among the keynote speakers. Rick opened the conference with:

Rick said:

"I want to write a book called, 'I'm not OK, you're not OK, but that's OK because God's OK,'

The audience, which included people with mental illness and their families, clapped in appreciation. He and Kay talked about their faith journey after their son's suicide.

Kay admitted that she had often felt alone. *"I lay awake at night filled with anxiety, grief, pain and agony. I was like 'Where is God? Where does my faith fit into this?'"*

The key to this, Rick said, is to recognize grief as a valid and good thing. "It's a gift; it's how we get through trials," he asserted.

We want to stuff our feelings down, but there is no growth without change, no change without loss, no loss without pain and no pain without grief.

God grieves; we are made in his image, that's how we are able to grieve too. Jesus wept.

Kay talked about [what we can learn](#) from people with mental illness.

They are among the most courageous people. While we may go through times where we are in the valley, we expect to come out on the other side and climb the mountain. Some people live in the valley.

They can teach us something valuable; to keep going when the darkness doesn't lift or recede. The Church needs to recognize the value of what those struggling with mental illness bring.

FaithNet is a part of NAMI that works with religious leaders and communities in all faith traditions. The Catholic Church maintains the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (**NCPD**) Council on Mental Illness to provide training and resources.

Click the link to read more about Rick Warren's [campaign against mental illness](#).

May is National Mental Illness Awareness Month. How can we use pray to support people with mental illness? A blog by Monica Coleman has these suggestions:

1. *Donate money to a mental health advocacy organization like [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), [Depression Bipolar Support Alliance](#) or [Mental Health America](#).*
2. *Bring a meal (or order food delivery) for someone who you know or suspect is depressed.*
3. *Drop by and take a walk with someone who you know or suspect is depressed.*
4. *Check in on someone you know who has lost a loved one in the last six to nine months – grief lasts far past the funeral or memorial service.*
5. *Sponsor someone for [NAMI Walks](#) – or walk yourself!*
6. *(For clergy) Preach about mental health challenges. Some ideas for getting started are [here](#).*
7. *(For clergy) Establish a relationship with a therapist in your area to whom you can refer people who need help. [Here](#) is a place to get started.*
8. *Call someone who you know or suspect is depressed, and ask how s/he is doing and really wait and listen for the answer without trying to fix it*
9. *Learn about the experiences of people who live with mental health challenges. Some of my favorite books are [Beyond Blue](#), [An Unquiet Mind](#), [Manic](#), [Madness](#), [Willow Weep for Me](#).*
10. *Follow the blog of someone who writes about living with mental health challenges. There is a great list [here](#).*

What does prayer mean for you? How do you pray in your daily life? Is there a way you do or would like to pray so support people who struggle with their own mental illness or that of others?

Let us pray.

Dear Lord:

Thank you for the blessings of community, where we learn and share together. Help us to find ways within our communities of faith to support the journey of those who are suffering from mental illness and its impact on others. Help us honor prayer for all illnesses; and also recognize that medical treatment itself can be a prayer; or an answer to a prayer. Amen.

They, Too, Gave Their Lives

May 25, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

John 14:1, 16-31

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go hence."

From Swedenborg

AC 6821

He who loves his country and from good will benefits it, in the other life loves the Lord's kingdom; for there the Lord's kingdom is his country.

Message They, Too, Gave Their Lives



This picture is of Kim Ruocco, posing outside of her home before Memorial Day of 2014. Her husband, Marine Maj. John Ruocco, killed himself after deployment to Iraq in 2004.

He was a Cobra helicopter pilot who ran 75 combat missions during a five-month deployment in Iraq, in 2004. It was not the first time he was depressed. He suffered from it after a training accident in the 1990s where he lost four friends after two Cobras collided in midair.

In February 2005, he was in a hotel room near Camp Pendleton in California, waiting for his redeployment to Iraq. He was considering mental health counseling, but instead hanged himself.

His wife says: *"He was so ashamed of being depressed and not being able to do his job,"* He was going to seek treatment, but she believes that *"when he sat there and thought about what it meant to get help, how people would see you, how young Marines viewed him, how his peers viewed him ... he thought the problem was him."*

Kim, who is a social worker, is now the National Director of Suicide Education and Outreach at the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors [TAPS].

She knows that Memorial Day can be especially painful for those who had loved ones die by suicide in the military.

Through [TAPS](#), Kim is trying to change policies that can hurt [survivors of a suicide](#) – such as excluding them from state memorials.

One of our ministers, Rev. Susan Turley, has raised important questions about how we are addressing the mental health needs of our troops. She is a chaplain at Department of Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System Perry Point Division where she ministers to veterans.



Turley became a survivor of deployment suicide when her son killed himself in Iraq in 2006.

Her only child, Army Pfc. Keith Moore, committed suicide just two months after deploying to Iraq. The Army now calculates that for the first time since the Vietnam War, its rate of suicide exceeds that of the general population. Here is a photo of her during an interview about Keith's death.



Here is a photo of Keith.

Turley's work with veterans helps her understand what her son went through, but the young men she meets often remind her of Keith. She hopes telling her son's story will help raise awareness about the growing problem of military suicide. Keith seemed to be depressed about their mission and his role. He gave signals of being distressed. If just one person had responded to him, Rev. Turley points out; his life could have been saved. Some days are very hard for her to be at work.

Rev. Turley turns to her Swedenborgian faith to cope with the loss. She is committed to preventing suicide among other military, and tells her story frequently. The military is starting to have more material and training available on suicide prevention.

She does not feel that the Iraq war was a worthy cause to die for. Turley feels Keith's death can only have redeeming qualities by her responding to it in a way that prevents other suicides, and believes in the afterlife, and that she maintains a relationship with him now – as her angel.

Turley finds ways to bring good out of the tragedy by working to change the way the military works with mental health and for us all to understand the high rates of suicide among soldiers – during and after service.

Here is an **account of her journey**.

Sue and her husband, Cliff Moore, will be attending the [TAPS](#) Memorial in D.C. Sue said: *For the first time, Viet Nam, Iraqi, and Afghanistan American Vets are reading the names of those who lost their lives in service since 9/11 at the National Mall in DC on May 24. You will be able to view the streaming video of the reading at www.vvmf.org starting at 9:00am EST.*

Suicide is not just a tragedy for people who are deployed, but also for veterans back home. The Dept. of Veteran's Affairs tells us more veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have committed suicide than the number who died from enemy fire.

In fact, 18 military veterans commit suicide every day. Younger veterans, between the ages of 17 and 24, are four times more likely to kill themselves than are the older veterans. [The US must address these suicides.](#)

This is a sad situation, but there are new flowers of hope popping up in many places. Here is news from Washington this week:

A Senate committee could take action this week on a measure co-authored by Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly of Indiana and Republican Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi that aims to reduce what the pair says is the alarming rate of suicide among military service members.

This article points out that

In 2012, 522 service members -- including 319 active-duty members and 203 reserve members -- committed suicide, according to a recent Pentagon report.

The report said 841 service members had made at least one suicide attempt. It said suicides had decreased among active-duty members but had slightly increased among reserve members, Wilkinson said.

This Memorial Day is an opportunity for us to value and honor all of those who gave their lives for their country. Many of them died in battle, but they were not all on the battlefield. For some of them, the battle was inside of themselves, and the enemy was mental illness. Many of our military personnel and veterans have lost the battle with mental illness.

This is, however, a battle that we CAN win, through supporting better mental health treatment for our military personnel in uniform as well as the veterans. Let's remember to support family and friends who have survived a suicide of someone in the military or a veteran. Let's support programs and legislation that provide more mental health resources to our troops and veterans. And let's remember today all who have died in service of our country.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord,

Please be with all of those who have lost a loved one who was serving in the military. Please bless – and help us remember – those whose loved one died by suicide. Help them in their loss and grief. Be with us all as we take time today to remember all who have fallen in battle for our country. Help us to cherish the freedoms we have, and owe to the many brave people who have defended this country. Raise our awareness of and compassion for those who have died by suicide.

Prayer & The Garden

June 1, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

1 Cor. 3: 5-9

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

From Swedenborg

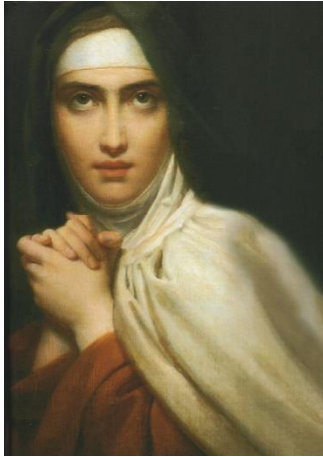
AC 10238

'And put water in it' means the truths of faith by means of which purification in the natural is accomplished. This is clear from the meaning of 'water' as the truths of faith, dealt with in 28, 739, 2702, 3058, 3424, 4976, 5668, 8568, 9323; and from the meaning of 'the laver' as the natural, dealt with above in 10235. Anyone who does not know that 'water' means the truths of faith will fail to grasp the meaning of very many statements in the Word, such as unless a person is born of water and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God, John 3:5. Those who take water here to mean nothing other than water think that the water of baptism is the means by which a person is regenerated. But in fact the water does nothing towards regeneration, only the truth of faith and the good of love do so; for water washes away solely dirt that is on the body and by no means evils present in the heart.

Message Prayer & The Garden

This is the time of year when many of us are planting gardens and are watering them so that our vegetables and flowers can thrive and grow. I find planting and watering to be meditative activities.

It reminds me of St. Teresa of Avila, a great mystic; who wrote that prayer is like watering a garden.



St. Teresa was 47 when she finished her first detailed description of prayer, contained in Chapters 11-20 of the book of her Life. Although this portrayal is less precise than she would give fifteen years later in the Interior Castle, it is simpler and better known. I want to share my sense of it here.

In the book of her Life, Teresa likens the human soul to a garden. She says it is natural for us to want this garden to be a delight for the Divinity Who dwells there. Our role in tending our soul-garden is to water it, and the water is prayer.

Teresa says that there are 4 forms of prayer, just as there are 4 basic ways to water the garden.

Well and Bucket: Centering Prayer

The first way to water the garden is using a well and a bucket. You have to raise up the water from the well, and then carry the bucket of water to the garden. It is a lot of work, and produces a minimal amount of water.

Teresa saw the soul as part of our inner being; just as Swedenborg did later. So prayer is a way of coming to know this deepest part of the self.

Imagine that God has presented you with a lovely plot of land in an arid area. The soil is tilled; God has planted the seeds. God has even removed all of the weeds.

There is only one thing you need to do: water the garden, through prayer.



So, one begins. One might purchase books, and read the prayers that are in the books. Or one might attend church and listen to the prayers being offered. One might try a disciplined form of meditation, and learn to sit and focus and chant a mantra.

These can go on for years. Eventually, however, they lose of attractiveness. They are empty. The prayer takes more energy than we have.

How about a water wheel and an aqueduct?

The Prayer Of Quiet: Aqueduct



This is watering the garden with a water wheel and an aqueduct. It requires less work, and produces more water.

The person's will is quieter and more absorbed in God's grace. One has no desire to move.

Here are some of the things she says about the Prayer of Quiet:

The gardener obtains more water with less labor.

The soul begins to be reconnected and comes upon something supernatural. In no way can the soul acquire this prayer through any efforts it may make.

This prayer is a little spark of the Lord's true love which He begins to enkindle in the soul.

If this quietude and recollection and little spark are from God's spirit and not a delight given by the devil or procured by ourselves, it will be noticed no matter how small it is.

This little spark is the sign or the pledge God gives to this soul that He now chooses it for great things if it will prepare itself to receive them.

This spark is a great gift, much more so than I can express.

The following is from the website of **Inner Explorations**.

The Prayer of Infusion: The Stream

The third way to water the garden is to use flowing water from a near-by stream.



This way is a deeper contemplation; where the faculties are more deeply asleep. The flowers are blooming in the garden. It is “infused” in that one is not doing anything to be in this state of prayer; it just happens. In the prayer of quiet, one just wanted to sit quietly and be with God; like Mary. Now one is energized to be out in the world and do good deeds – uses – for others. One combines Martha with Mary, so that one is engaged in both the active and contemplative life together.

There is an apparent union with God, but it is not yet complete.

The Prayer of Union: The Rain

In the fourth form of prayer, the gardener does nothing to water the ground. God sends the rains. It is “heavenly water” in great abundance; soaking the ground and saturating entire garden.

The soul is now in union with God.

Now how this prayer they call union comes about, and what it is, I don't know how to explain. ...what I'm attempting to explain is what the soul feels when it is in Divine union. What union is we already know since it is two separate things becoming one?

Teresa really cannot explain it. Has anyone ever been able to explain it? She does say the state is very brief; a half an hour is a long time.

Living Life

Teresa seems to say that, in our real world, we are not meant to ignore our gardens and just wait for rain.

If there were no winter and the weather were always mild, there would be no lack of flowers and fruit. But this is impossible while we are living on the earth. Individuals must always take care so that when one kind of water is lacking they might strive for another. The water from heaven often comes when the gardener is least expecting it.

I take this to mean that our prayer lives are not a neat hierarchy. We need different forms of prayers at different times, and need to be open to whatever is right for us at a given time.

Swedenborg's Comments on Water

It makes sense that Teresa would use "water" as a way to help us understand prayer. Swedenborg, too, often talked about water.

2702. 'And she saw a well of water' means the Lord's Word from which truths are drawn. This is clear from the meaning of 'a well of water' and of 'a spring' as the Word, also as doctrine drawn from the Word, and consequently as truth itself, dealt with in what follows immediately below; and from the meaning of 'water' as truth. That 'a well' which has water in it, and 'a spring', mean the Word of the Lord, also doctrine drawn from the Word, and so consequently truth itself, may become clear from very many places.



Water, for Swedenborg, was about truth and clarity.

He also had some comments on the importance of gardens:

Since gardens correspond to our religion, throughout heaven there are gardens that produce leaves, flowers, and fruit according to the spiritual state of the angels. I have been told that in some of these gardens, there are trees of life at the center and trees of the knowledge of good and evil around the edges--a sign that the angels have free will in spiritual matters. In the Bible, our religion is often pictured as a garden, a field, and a sheepfold. It is pictured as a garden because of the trees there; as a field because of the crops that nourish people; and as a sheepfold because of the sheep, which stand for people who are faithful and useful. (Coronis 27.3)

How do you water your garden of prayer?

Praying With Hildegard

June 8, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Isaiah 6:1-13

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

From Swedenborg

Divine Love and Wisdom (Rogers) n. 115

But how the Lord is in an angel, and an angel in the Lord, cannot be comprehended unless one knows the nature of their conjunction. It is a conjunction of the Lord with the angel, and of the angel with the Lord. Consequently it is a reciprocal conjunction.

This conjunction on the part of the angel is as follows. An angel has no other perception than that he possesses love and wisdom of himself, like any person, and thus he feels as though love and wisdom are his as qualities belonging to him. If he did not have that perception, there would be no conjunction; thus he would not have the Lord in him, and he would not be in the Lord. Nor is it possible for the Lord to be in any angel or person unless the one in whom He is present with His love and wisdom perceives and feels that presence as something his own. Because of this the Lord is not only received, but, having been received, is retained and also loved in return. Consequently it is because of this that an angel becomes wise and remains wise.

Who could possibly want to love the Lord and the neighbor, and who could possibly want to become wise, if he did not feel and perceive what he loves, learns and incorporates as being something his own? Who would otherwise retain it in himself? If the case were not as it is, any love and wisdom flowing in would have no seat, for it would flow on through a person without affecting him. Thus the angel would not be an angel, and the person would not be a person; indeed, the angel or person would be only like something inanimate.

It can be seen from this that there must be reciprocity for conjunction to exist.

Message Praying With Hildegard



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Hildegard: Her Life



Hildegard of Bingen (1098 – 1179), at age 42, was the abbess of a convent. She had been a resident since the age of eight, when her parents gave her (their 10th child), to the convent as their "tith" to the church. Despite her religious background, she resisted the call of God. It was a powerful call. She describes the experience:

Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and infiltrated my whole heart and my whole breast, not like a burning but a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch. And immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures ...

She realized that she had been having visions since she was five years old, but always dismissed them as insignificant. Even with this powerful experience of call, she tried to ignore it. She did not feel worthy to be an instrument of God. God told her to write down all that she saw and heard in her visions, but she resisted.

But although I heard and saw these things, because of doubt and low opinion of myself and because of diverse sayings of men, I refused for a long time a call to write, not out of stubbornness but out of humility, until weighed down by a scourge of god, I fell onto a bed of sickness.

Her health only improved when she decided to follow God's call. She started painting and writing -- music, poetry, and books. She became famous in her time, and is perhaps even better known today. Matthew Fox has brought her works back into public prominence, and many are discovering her again today.

Like Swedenborg, she received a dramatic call in middle age and was given new understanding of the scripture. Because of her willingness to respond to the call, she has enriched the world of spirituality. Many of her visions, or "Illuminations" were beautiful and complex paintings that contained spiritual meaning. Her music is deeply haunting. Let yourself become immersed in the experience of her illuminations and of her music.

Hildegard: Her Illuminations



Hildegard's visions are called "illuminations". For Hildegard, it is the Holy Spirit who illumines. She compared her awakening to the experience of Pentecost.

Most researchers now believe that Hildegard suffered from migraines. Her visions were like the visual hallucinations that are part of migraine headaches. After a migraine attack, sufferers usually experience sickness, paralysis, and/or blindness. Hildegard had all of these symptoms. Hildegard, like other patients, felt a sense of well-being -- even euphoria -- afterwards. With God's help, Hildegard turned a serious illness into mystical experience and creative outpourings for the world.

Hildegard: Her Similarity To Swedenborg

Like Swedenborg, Hildegard had a vision that changed her life; she was given an understanding of the meaning of the Bible. She was told to write down everything she experienced during these mystical experiences.



And it came to pass ... when I was 42 years and 7 months old, that the heavens were opened and a blinding light of exceptional brilliance flowed through my entire brain. And so it kindled my whole heart and breast like a flame, not burning but warming... and suddenly I understood of the meaning of expositions of the books...

Swedenborg wrote about the importance of doing "uses". Hildegard's order, the Benedictines, "valued doing good labor". She started out as a nurse, and then illustrated books.

Like Swedenborg, Hildegard felt that her mystical experiences were given to her in order to be shared with others. She did not indulge herself in a "private" mysticism, but rather accepted a mission to educate others.

She valued science as well as mystical experience, and spent her life integrating both aspects of her being.

Hildegard Center for the Arts



Hildegard Center for the Arts is located in Lincoln, Nebraska. Its mission is as follows:

*The mission of the **Hildegard Center for the Arts** is to provide a forum for all who seek to experience God through an appreciation of the visual and performing arts. **Hildegard** will provide opportunities for artistic expression, education and appreciation which will enrich our community and enhance humanity. It is the goal of Hildegard "to affirm that true beauty, which as a glimmer of the Spirit of God...opens the human soul to the sense of the eternal". **

**John Paul II, Letter to Artists, 1999*

Hildegard: Her Music

Spiritui Sancto

Spiritui Sancto honor sit,
qui in mente Ursule virginis
virginalem turbam velut columbas collegit,
Unde ipsa patriam suam
sicut Abraham religquit.
et etiam propter amplexionem Agni
desponsationem viri sibi abstraxit.
Nam iste castissimus et aureus exercitus
in virgineo crine mate transivit.
O quis umquam talia audivit?
Et etiam propter amplexionem Agni
desponsationem viri sibi abstraxit.
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.
Et etiam propter amplexionem Agni
desponsationem viri sibi abstraxit.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Holy Spirit

Honor be to you, O Holy Spirit,
who, through the mind of the virgin Ursula,
brought together a whirling tumult
of the purest doves.
Thereupon, like Abraham,
she relinquished her homeland,
and releasing herself from worldly betrothal,
she entered into the embrace of the Lamb.
So this pure golden army with flowing hair
passed over the sea.
O whoever heard of such as this?
For she released herself
from worldly betrothal,
and entered into the embrace of the Lamb Himself.
Glory to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
She released herself from worldly betrothal,
and entered in to the embrace
of the Lamb Himself.

Hildegard: Spiritual Inspiration

O Holy Wisdom, Soaring Power, encompass us with wings unfurled, and carry us, encircling all,
above, below, and through the world.

--O Holy Spirit, Root of Life

Every element has a sound, an original sound from the order of God; all those sounds unite like the
harmony from harps and zithers.

I, the fiery life of divine wisdom, I ignite the beauty of the plains, I sparkle the waters, I burn in the
sun, and the moon, and the stars.

The earth which sustains humanity must not be injured, it must not be destroyed.

The soul is a breath of living spirit, that with excellent sensitivity, permeates the entire body to give it
life. Just so, the breath of the air makes the earth fruitful. Thus the air is the soul of the earth,
moistening it, greening it.

There is the Music of Heaven in all things and we have forgotten how to hear it until we sing.
Underneath all the texts, all the sacred psalms and canticles, these watery varieties of sounds and
silences, terrifying, mysterious, whirling and sometimes gestating and gentle must somehow be felt
in the pulse, ebb, and flow of the music that sings in me. My new song must float like a feather on
the breath of God.

When the words come, they are merely empty shells without the music. They live as they are sung,
for the words are the body and the music the spirit.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, help us to recognize that you call each of us to a path of service with you. Help us to find
our path, and to feel the joy that it imparts. Amen.

Fathers Discuss The New Church

June 15, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Ephesians 1:9, 10, 2:10. (NIV)

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he proposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment.....to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

From Swedenborg

True Christianity, #772

That this second coming of the Lord does not take place for the purpose of destroying the visible heaven and habitable earth, has been shown in the preceding section. That it is not for the purpose of destroying anything, but to build up, consequently not to condemn but to save those who since His first coming have believed in Him and also those who may hereafter believe in Him, is evident from these words of the Lord.

Message **Fathers Discuss The New Church**



Tom arrived at the neighborhood cafe a few minutes before his friend, Pete, so began pursuing the menu. Pete arrived breathless a few moments late.

"Sorry I'm late! The traffic was brutal. What's the special today?"

Tom and Pete had been boyhood friends through grammar and high school. Their careers and family lives took different paths, but they remained close. Once a month, they met for Saturday afternoon lunch to catch up on their lives.

"I don't have a lot of time," Pete said. "I have to get home and mow the lawn for tomorrow's BBQ for

Father's Day. The kids will all be coming back for the day!"

Tom smiled. *"Even Kim at school in New York?"* Pete nodded. *"Hey, Dude -- congrats! We'll be doing something in the evening for Father's Day tomorrow. We'll be staying late at church for a celebration."*

"Yeah? What are you celebrating?" Pete asked.

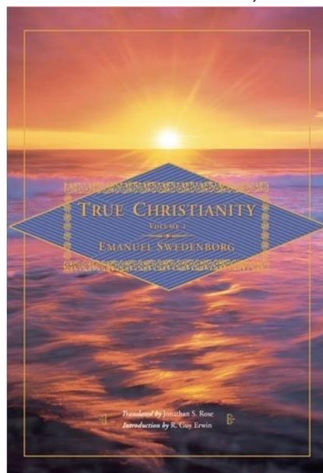
"New Church Day"

"What's that?"

"Well, it's a celebration of the birthday of our church: June 19, 1770."

"Really? I didn't know your church had a specific start day. I'd love to hear that story."

Sandwiches arrived, and the men dug in.



"OK," Tom began between bites. "Here's the story. 1770 was late in Swedenborg's life; he died in 1772. He had just finished writing his 2-volume of True Christianity. He was told that the Second Coming happened in heaven that day."

"Oh, come on! 2nd Coming! I know my church is pretty fundamentalist from your perspective. We have really clear doctrine on the 2nd Coming. Jesus will come back to earth and there will be a final judgment with the believers going the heaven. Others will be left behind – like in those books."

"Well, that is the traditional Christian approach, of course; Swedenborg was quite adamant that it was wrong."

Tom pulled out his Kindle, on which had all of the books of Swedenborg's writing. Pete was impressed. *"Hey, a Kindle! I'm hoping my kids are giving me a Kindle Fire tomorrow!"*

The prevailing opinion in the churches at the present day is, that when the Lord shall come for the last judgment, He will appear in the clouds of heaven with angels and the sound of trumpets; will gather together all who still dwell on the earth, together with all who have died; will separate the wicked from the good, as a shepherd separates the goats from the sheep; will then cast the wicked or the goats into hell, and will raise the good or the sheep into

heaven; and at the same time will create a new visible heaven and a new habitable earth, and will send down upon that earth the city called the New Jerusalem; ...also that into that city will be gathered all the elect, both those who are still alive and those who have died since the beginning of the world; that these will then return into their bodies, and in that magnificent city, as their heaven, will enjoy eternal blessedness. This is the prevailing opinion in the Christian churches of today respecting the Lord's coming and the last judgment.

-True Christian Religion, #768

"Yeah, that's pretty much what we believe," Pete mused.

"After Swedenborg finished True Christian Religion, he was told that Jesus was sending out the disciples. Jesus was coming into everyone's heart and now is inside for all of us."

791. Note: After this work was finished the Lord called together his twelve disciples who followed him in the world; and the next day he sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages ...

This took place on the nineteenth day of June, 1770. This is what is meant by these words of the Lord:

He shall send his angels and they shall gather together his elect, from the end of the heavens to the end thereof

-Matt. 24:31

"That doesn't make sense!" Pete exclaimed. "The 2nd Coming is about separating the true Christians from all others. It can't happen till when the Final Judgment comes."

"See, Swedenborg separates the Final Judgment from the Second Coming. The final judgment was in 1757. It's actually a final judgment about the church: the old church is passing away, as a New Church emerges. We also all have our own judgments inside of ourselves throughout our lives. Ultimately, we judge ourselves in the next world; not God.

Then June 19, 1770 was the Second Coming. Here listen to this" Tom found another quote on his kindle.

TCR 772

That this second coming of the Lord does not take place for the purpose of destroying the visible heaven and habitable earth has been shown in the preceding section. That it is not for the purpose of destroying anything, but to build up, consequently not to condemn but to save those who since His first coming have believed in Him and also those who may hereafter believe in Him ...

"Swedenborg says it's not about being Christian in the traditional sense – or any particular religion – it's about living with this love inside of us. It was the start of a whole new concept of church – a way of living together that was about doing good; not about what one believed. All of those who strive to live with love, regardless of belief, are part of a new concept of church – a 'New Church.'"

"Oh. So that's why you folks call yourselves the 'New Church'. I thought 'New Church' was just another church."

"Oh, no, that's not what Swedenborg meant. It's sort of post-church. It's beyond the concept of there

being different religions. It's people living together based on loving action; not separating themselves by what they believe."

"So Swedenborg said this New Church started on June 19?"

"Yes; it started in heaven. We have a long way to go on earth. But it's part of his concept of the New Jerusalem; heaven on earth; where people are united by how they live; not what they believe."

790. What this church is to be is fully described in Revelation, where the end of the former church and the beginning of the new are treated of. This new church is described by the New Jerusalem, by its magnificence, and by its being the future bride and wife of the lamb (19:7; 21:2, 9). Besides these I will cite only the following quotation from Revelation. When the New Jerusalem was seen descending from heaven it was said:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples; himself shall be with them, their God. And the nations that are saved shall walk in the light of it; and there shall be no night there. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let them come. And he that wisheth, let him take the water of life freely. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen

-Rev. 21:3, 24–25; 22:16–17, 20

"That's so different from my tradition. I was raised that the Second Coming is where only true Christians are saved. Everyone else is 'left behind.'"

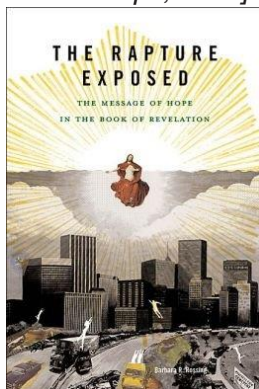
"I know. That's what made Swedenborg so different. He rejected some of the basic concepts of Christianity; and said that being saved isn't about belief – it's about how we live our lives day by day."

774. The Lord's presence is unceasing with every man, both the evil and the good, for without His presence no man lives; but His Coming is only to those who receive Him, who are such as believe on Him and keep His commandments. The Lord's unceasing presence causes man to become rational, and gives him the ability to become spiritual. This is effected by the light that goes forth from the Lord as the sun in the spiritual world, and that man receives in his understanding; for the heat that goes forth from that same sun is love to God and love toward the neighbor. [The 2nd coming], may be likened to presence of solar light in the world; unless this light is joined with heat all things on earth become desolate. But the coming of the Lord may be likened to the coming of heat, which takes place in spring; because heat then joins itself with light ...

"Swedenborg's view of the 2nd coming is like receiving the light of the sun. For those who open their hearts to receive this loving light it is like a spring day with flowers blossoming. This is the 2nd coming. It did happen, is happening, and will always be happening. We do not need to believe any particular thing; we only need to open our hearts to the love, and share it with others.....Look, here's an interesting book on my eBook reader: **The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation** by Barbara R. Rossing. [New York: Basic Books; a member of the Perseus

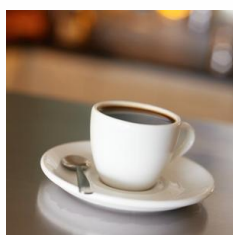


Book Groups, 2004]. She writes:



In Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech he says: "It's alright to talk about 'streets flowing with milk and honey,' but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee.' Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of the New Jerusalem is similar to Swedenborg's. It is not something for us to dream about in the future; it is something for us to create now in this world. Longing for the New Jerusalem is the theme of many African-American spirituals such as "Gonna put on those golden shoes down by the riverside." Rossing asks where that river side is, and answers her own question: "For slaves, the New Jerusalem vision gave hope for freedom even in this life, for a riverside not just in heaven but experienced also as a very real river in their lives that could be crossed to freedom, here and now. They found a glimpse of the riverside of God in the geography of their place. That crossing between the two worlds is key to God's New Jerusalem for us as well.' [165]. The Second coming is about living NOW and changing our world NOW; not about preparing to be snatched off the earth. Swedenborg is all about living in the here and now; not preparing for some judgment and 2nd coming."

10. (2) The human race is the seminary of heaven ...that heaven and hell are from the human race, and that therefore the human race is the...



"Well, Tom, that sure is different from my tradition. But it does make sense. I wish you a happy New Church Day on the 19th as well as a happy Father's Day tomorrow!"

Let us pray.

Dear Lord,

Please bless the many fathers in the world: biological fathers, foster and adoptive fathers, and all those who provide fatherly care to others. Help us to honor and value all the fathers amongst us.

Deep Peace: New Church Day & The Arts

June 22, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Exodus 15:20

Then Miriam the prophetess ... took a tambourine in her hand, and all the other women followed her with tambourines and dancing.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 420 & 8339

Joyful feelings in the heart or interior things erupted into various activities in the body, such as singing and also dancing. Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to dance as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy.

Message

Deep Peace: New Church Day & The Arts

I encountered a central core of Swedenborg's theology in a dream I had almost 10 years ago. In this dream, I was again a faculty member in our previous seminary [the Swedenborg School of Religion]. I was a new faculty member, and for the first time was involved in giving the senior students a comprehensive exam on Swedenborg's theology. The first item on the exam was to pray. The students were scattered among several classrooms, and the faculty passed out written prayers to the students from various traditions. My task was to walk through the classrooms after a few minutes to see who was ready for the next part of the exam. I walked quietly, expecting to see students at their desks with bowed heads.

I was astounded at what I saw! The students were dancing and singing their prayers! Instead of taking the exam as individuals in isolation, the students in each room had formed a group. Each group had developed a different rhythm and melody and movements. All of the prayers were joyous and Spirit-filled. I was greatly uplifted as I saw these vibrant group prayers.

I suddenly realized that there never was anything else on the exam. If the students understood how to pray, then they had all they needed to know. If they realized that prayer could involve music and dancing, then they had grasped the essence of Swedenborg. Those students showed me, without words, what Swedenborg was all about.

I woke up stunned at the profound truth of my dream.

[Last week](#), we looked at some of the concepts of why June 19th is celebrated as the birthday of the New Church – New Church Day.

Today, I want to honor New Church Day by looking at artistic expression by people who, in some way, are part of the “New Church/Swedenborgian Church.”

The opening song was written by Heather Childs [now in the spirit world]. She was a member of General Church.

Here is a song written and sung by our denominational President, Rev. Ken Turley.

Is There a way I can Make a Difference?

In the reading from Swedenborg today, we see his exuberance for dance and singing. Here are two modern statements about dance as a form of worship:

Kathryn Mihelick, Development Director and Director of the Leaven Dance Company says:

Movement is the universal language which integrates us, speaks across cultures, and transcends the spoken word to manifest the spirit. "To move is human....to dance is divine."

Connie Tyler, Resource Director of the dance company, says:

We have Jewish dancers, participants in Dances of Universal Peace, people who do Yoga dance, Buddhist dance, the traditional temple dances of both Northern and Southern India ...What is important is what is in the heart and the soul of the dancer, the connection to the divine

How about playing musical instruments? Swedenborg is enthusiastic about the tambourine that Miriam played. Here is a delightful clip of Rev. Eric Allison playing a harmonica at a worship service. This was after he had a stroke, and was drawn to play music.

Drawing and painting are another way to express the Divine through the arts.

Many religious traditions honor the prayer in art.

“The purpose of traditional Buddhist art is to express the indescribable beauty of the Buddha’s enlightened qualities so that they remain deeply imprinted on our memory.” [Van Dusen, p. 81].



Let’s explore the work of Swedenborgian artist George Inness [1825-1894], who was an influential American landscape painter. His work was influenced, in turn, by that of the old masters, the [Hudson River school](#), the [Barbizon school](#), and, finally, by the theology of Emanuel Swedenborg, whose spiritualism found vivid expression in the work of Inness' maturity.

He was born in the Hudson River town of Newburgh, New York, in 1825; the 5th of 13 children. His household included a Baptist, a Methodist, and a Universalist.

His father was a successful grocer, and Inness began work as a grocer's clerk when he was in his

teens. He taught himself to paint, and began painting seriously in 1841 [age 16]. He had his first exhibition at the National Academy of Design four years later.



He became Swedenborgian in 1860 at the age of 35, when a fellow painter, William Page, introduced him to Swedenborg. From then on, he attempted to express Swedenborgian theology in his painting.

At the **1893 Chicago World's Fair**, Inness was the best-represented American, with fifteen paintings.



He wanted to express the Swedenborgian concept of the presence of the Divine in the earth. He wrote:

The paramount difficulty with the artist is to bring his intellect to submit to the fact that there is such a thing as the indefinable, God is always hidden, and beauty depends upon the unseen--the visible upon the invisible.

He often stated he was not out to glorify nature, *but to express its hidden spirit and underlying character*. At the heart of this approach to painting was Inness's understanding of the aim of art, which was *not to instruct, not to edify, but to awaken an emotion*.

He wanted his paintings to show divine influx, and wrote:



The intelligence to be conveyed by it [art] is not of an outer fact, but of an inner life. The greatness of art is not in the display of knowledge, or in material accuracy, but in the distinctness with which it conveys the impressions of a personal vital force, that acts spontaneously, without fear or hesitation.

Inness's devotion to Swedenborgian doctrine and his desire to find new ways of seeing the world, led to the creation of a new form of landscape painting. His innovative style and his studies in psychology and philosophy distinguish Inness from other American painters of his time; give his work a deeply spiritual quality.

There are many more examples of Swedenborgian artistic expression. Some of you have sent me some great examples.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord,

Help us remember that the arts can help us express our connections with You, and can be forms of prayer. Help us each to explore the many ways that Your inflow of love can be expressed in the world.

On Psalm 1

June 29, 2014

READINGS

Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One

-Revelation 1:17

One for all, and all for one!

-The Three Musketeers by Alexander Dumas

From the Bible

Old Testament: Psalm 1:1-6

Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of the sinner, or sit in the seat of the mockers. Rather, their delight is in the law of the Lord and on God's law they meditate day and night. They are like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither, whatever they do prospers. Not so for the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

New Testament: John 17:20-22

(Jesus, in praying for his disciples said:) My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so . . . that they may be one as we are one.

From Swedenborg

Adapted by Ken Turley from the writings of
Emanuel Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia 457

Every one is formed from the harmony of many things;
and such as the harmony is,
such is the one:

A thing which is absolutely one cannot subsist;
but only a harmonical one.

Every Society in Heaven thus forms a one;
and all the Societies together a one;
and this from the Lord alone,
through love.

**Message
On Psalm 1**



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Introduction



Let us begin with two fundamental concepts drawn from the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg: first, the Bible is a portrayal of the establishment and growth of the relationship between human and divine portrayed in the correspondence of the places, characters and actions of the biblical narrative; and second, the first of anything contains the essence of all that is to follow in that thing.

Concept No. 1

Swedenborg presents correspondence as the representation of spiritual qualities, characteristics and dynamics represented in the literal places, characters and events of the biblical narrative portrayed in the Old Testament, the Gospels and the Book of Revelation. Rather than limiting the meaning of the Bible to a questionably accurate historical record of a people 2000 years ago in a far away place and a culture with which we have very little in common, Swedenborg's presentation of correspondence allows us to hear the Bible speaking to us individually and collectively about who we are becoming in our present day to day relationship with God.

The Bible is portraying, on all levels of meaning, the covenant between God and humanity. If we accept that the Bible is the Word of God and read it as sacred text, it begins to speak not about then, but about now. It begins to speak to our own spiritual growth from the moment the breath of God touches the surface of our consciousness to the point at which all that is not who we are is stripped away and we are left in our purest state before God.

From the awakening of our consciousness to the presence of God and a kind of table of contents portrayed in the creation story, the Old Testament portrayal of Abraham is about agreeing to be in relationship with God. Following this, the stories of Isaac, Jacob, David and Moses are about growing, getting to the place of learning and then venturing out into the wilderness of life itself,

With settling in the Holy Land and accepting a king, we see ourselves finding a sense of worldly identity and the center of our spirituality. From the trusting willingness of Abraham to the Law of Moses to the reflections of the Prophets, we see the guiding force in our lives changing from intuitive inspiration to regulated rules to the midlife crisis in which we look with mixed emotions at who we have been and where we are going.

In the New Testament we can see a dramatic transformation of our relationship with the Divine when the Living Word enters our life in a personal way and we relate to God not so much by rules imposed as by love freely given.

And finally, in the Book of Revelation, we see the ultimate revealing of our true inner self and the annealing process testing our metal, and separating out within us the good from the evil. We see in the dynamic events of the apocalypse, not so much the end of the earth, but the end of our earthly existence, as we enter fully into the spiritual world and make the final choice as to what we let go of, and what we claim as who we are and hold at our core being to be of ultimate value. This is our personal apocalypse and the full revelation of who we have become.

Somewhere in the middle of this long involved spiritual journey, which we are all engaged in

right now, we find the Psalms. A collection of poems, song lyrics actually, which portray every conceivable thought, emotion and state of being a human can experience in life and in relationship with God.

Concept No 2

Swedenborg says numerous times, that the first of anything contains the essence of all that follows. For example, the first part of the Bible, i.e. the creation story contains the essence of all that is contained in the Bible; the first words of the Bible, i.e. "In the beginning, God" contain the essence of all that is to follow; the first paragraph of a chapter, the first sentence of a paragraph, the first word of a sentence, all contain the essence of what follows. Perhaps the numerous translations from the original have had an impact on this concept, but perhaps God has a way of preserving the spiritual truth within the literal words, in spite of humanity's attempts to improve that which is given. No matter, it is still worth considering when we read Scripture.

With the above two concepts in mind, let us look at Psalm One.

First, we must remember where in the totality of the spiritual narrative, the Psalms occur, i.e. midway, after much of the spiritual journey is behind us and yet before the and in preparation for the personal presence of the love and wisdom of Jesus are manifest. In part the Psalms are repentive reflection and inner processing, and in part they are deep expression and personal preparation. As a whole they are a thorough and exhaustive expression of the human condition.

In looking at Psalm One, we recognize it as the first, and so containing all that is to follow in the rest of the Psalms. But we must first read and know the literal words before we can begin to understand the spiritual meaning within. In an attitude of worship, we have heard Psalm One read, we have spoken the words out loud, we have heard it sung. This and all reverent meditation on the psalm with an open heart and an open mind are preparation for deeper insight.

The first word contains the essence of the first sentence: "Blessed"

The first sentence contains the essence of the entire psalm: "Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,"



God's reward is the blessings that come from not just obeying rules but from a way of life that honors the love and wisdom that is God. When we read the word "walk" we can see that it corresponds to how we live. We've heard the phrase "Don't judge another until you've walked a mile in their shoes." We've heard many references to living life as being a journey, and to walk means the way in which we live, the way in which we make progress on the journey of life. Swedenborg says that the first key to the heavenly life, is to shun evils. And we see this stated clearly in this first sentence of the first Psalm. And to elaborate, we can understand "the counsel of the wicked" to

correspond to the thinking and influence of selfishness and cruelty; “the way of the sinner” as the life style of those who continue in doing what they know is hurtful and destructive, in behaviors that turn away from the way of God and the qualities of heaven. To continue, when we read “sit in the seat of the mockers” we can see this corresponding to settling into, even sinking into cynicism and negativity, sabotage and tearing down of others and of self that is often observed in those who want to bring others down to their own level. When we do not fill out time and attention with these kinds of influences the result is that we make room in our lives and in our state of being for the blessing of God.

We see this represented clearly in the next phrases, “Rather, their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on God’s law they meditate day and night.” These words turn the negatives of the previous statements into positives.

So what is the Law of the Lord? All the rules of Leviticus and Deuteronomy? Being follower of Jesus, I would recommend that instead of getting caught up in the detail of Jewish law, we look instead to what Jesus says. If I may paraphrase: all of what the Law and the Prophets intend is contained in the two great commandments: love God with all you are and love your neighbor as yourself. That is the law of the Lord. That is God’s law.

Is that hard to understand? No.

Is it easy to forget? Yes!

And that is why it is a blessing in God’s eyes to meditate on this concept. To meditate is to empty the mind, open the heart and to intentionally focus on the meaning of these words the way you would focus on the flame of a candle. To be with this meaning as the guiding, uplifting, inspiring source of light and warmth in our lives. To keep this concept before us all the time no matter what we are doing, in good times and in bad.

And next we read about the results of living life in this way: “People like this are like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither, whatever they do prospers.”



Can you see how the image of a tree corresponds to the image of a person? Both are living things that start as a seed, emerge and begin life young and tender and in time, with the passing of the seasons, grow into maturity with many parts, rooted in the earth, reaching out and up to heaven, serving useful functions and providing results which are of benefit to others.

Swedenborg tells us that water, in its various forms, corresponds to truth in its various forms. In the case of this Psalm “Streams of living water” correspond to the living Word as the ever flowing source of truth, understanding and wisdom that gives, maintains and renews life.

“Whatever they do prospers” In looking into the meaning of this phrase, we must as in all things look to the deeper meaning. First, think of this not as the gaining of wealth, power and prestige in the world, but as referring to the things that are of value to God. In other words, those parts of oneself that are drawing life from God and in turn serving others in love that is wisely manifested and the rewarding results of investing ourselves in this mindset and way of being. This phrase does not refer to our attempts at success in the outward arena based on worldly values and criteria by which the materialists of the world measure success and prosperity. God cares nothing for that, only about the state of our souls. What is wealth without love and charity? What is power

without wisdom and understanding and faith? What is success without caring for the well being of others as well as yourself?

The answer to those questions is portrayed in the phrases that come next: "Not so for the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away!" Here, we must read this not as speaking about "those other people" rather we must read this as speaking about those aspects, behaviors, patterns of our own selves! Those aspects of our own life style that are not focused on serving God and the well-being of our neighbor, that put our own self-interest and well-being as what we serve as the highest good, and the neighbor as being of concern only as they serve our selfish needs. Each and every one of us has our own wickedness, our own selfish tendencies that we must struggle with. Our evil tendencies (i.e. the things that take us away from what is heavenly) are always there, and we are constantly making choices for God or for ourselves, to love the neighbor as ourselves, or to love the neighbor for what they can do for us. It is such a subtle switch in values and priorities, and yet such a crucial distinction in terms of the spiritual results. It is our hope and prayer that that which is evil in us will be blown away as chaff and leave what is of value.

The results of our choices are stated again when the psalm says, "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous."

These days, many people have trouble with the concept of judgment. But I ask you to consider if the results of a life of kindness, generosity, love and wisdom versus the results of a life of cruelty, selfishness, fear and destructiveness are rewards and punishments arbitrarily imposed by God or is it simply the inescapable results of the life-style itself? Is the separation of good from evil into separate states because God imposes, or is this an affirmation of the inevitability of self-selection? I prefer to think the latter. The wicked will not stand in judgment nor sinners in the assembly of righteous because those aspects cannot stand the comparison with what is good and will hide themselves! And this is true whether it is individual people or aspects of ourselves. All are intended for, and welcome in heaven! It is just that people who embrace and cling to wickedness refuse to enter into heaven. Clinging to their own ego, they reject the company of the good and kind and seek out the company of others like themselves. The blessings of heaven and the suffering of hell is not God imposing reward and punishment, it is natural consequences of the state of being that results from one's own choice of the company we choose to keep.



Judgment in the spiritual world is just an extension of what happens right here on earth. Surely you have been with people who behaved in ways that made you feel isolated, afraid, anxious, self conscious and you self selected yourself out of their company. And perhaps you have experienced being around people that made you feel uncomfortable because they were just too darned nice! That is a subtle and gentle example of what happens in the spiritual world. Souls gravitate to those who are like themselves, and away from those who are not. In fact one way to look at the final judgment is that when you die, you are condemned to be in the company of people just like yourself!!! Think about that for a moment! Is not that motivation to make yourself a more loving, compassionate, accepting, kind and supportive person?!?! And is that not motivation to train away your tendencies to be impatient, judgmental, cruel, selfish? Think about spending eternity with your good self and your not so good self. Is that not reason to become that better self now, so you don't get stuck in the company of your not so good self later!

What is more, to the degree we choose to cultivate our divine self, God will enter in and help that process. As we embrace the Lord and the ways of heaven we are embraced in return and lifted up, even higher than you could imagine. The ways that are evil will simply die away and be no more because they receive no life energy.

But in choosing the way of evil, we turn away from and reject God and all that can be done for our benefit. And then it is that which we are begins to wither and die away. This is portrayed in the last sentence: "For the Lord watches over the way of righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

To perish means to cease being. All life is of God, so ultimately what is not of God dies away, at best it is the hell of a living death. But when we welcome and make room for God in our lives, that which is evil we let go and it ceases to be a part of who we are and we are lifted up and made into the angel God intended us to be from the beginning.

That is Psalm One, the first Psalm that within its few lines contains the essence of all that is to follow. It portrays our life journey, our choice to embrace God and goodness or self and selfishness; it puts before us our choice for life or death. There's no question life is a struggle, filled with beauty and blessings, but also with trials, tests and temptations. God offers us heavenly life but requires us to choose of our own free will. And it is through the evil we are exposed to and the trials we suffer through, that God ensures that we are making an informed choice. It is all there for you in those few lines of Psalm One. May you be blessed.

Helen Keller & The Arts

July 6, 2014

READINGS From the Bible

John 9 (New International Version)

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

"How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

"Where is this man?" they asked him.
"I don't know," he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

From Swedenborg

Heavenly Secrets 18-20, NCE

Before we can learn what is true and be affected by what is good, the things that stand in the way and resist have to be put aside. The old self must die before the new self can be conceived.

The Spirit of God stands for the Lord's mercy, which is portrayed as moving constantly, like a hen brooding over her eggs. What is being brooded over in this instance is what the Lord stores away in us, which throughout the Word is called "a remnant" [or "survivors"]. It is a knowledge of truth and goodness, which can never emerge into the light of day until our outer nature has been devastated. Such knowledge is here called the face of the water.

Genesis 1:3. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

The first step is taken when we begin to realize that goodness and truth are something transcendent.

People who focus exclusively on externals do not even know what is good or what is true; everything connected with self-love and love of worldly advantages they consider good, and anything that promotes those two loves they consider true. They are unaware that such "goodness" is evil and such "truth" false.

When we are conceived anew, however, we first begin to be aware that our "good" is not good. And as we advance further into the light, it dawns on us that the Lord exists and that he is goodness and truth itself.

Message Helen Keller & The Arts



Helen Keller is the inspiration for many people with disabilities to express themselves through the arts.

At the core of Helen Keller's life was her Swedenborgian faith, which she adopted at age 13.

I do not know whether I adopted the faith, or the faith adopted me. I can only say that the heart of the young girl sitting with a big book of raised letters on her lap in the sublime sunshine was thrilled by a radiant presence and inexpressibly endearing voice ... the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg have been my light and a staff in my hand, and by his vision splendid I am attended on my way.

If you don't know much about Helen Keller and Swedenborg, be sure to visit [our page](#) about her on our site. While there, you'll be able to read the [text of the talk](#) she gave to our 1919 convention.

And you can read a [sermon](#) by her good friend and minister in the NY Church, Clayton Priestnal.

These are some of the words he spoke at her memorial service, after her death in 1968 at the age of 85.

At least two foundation stones of Miss Keller's religious philosophy were hewn out of Swedenborg's teachings on the afterlife. The first was hope. She began to see clearly that this world was not an end in itself, but a seminary of heaven--a proving ground for the life eternal. Her faith assured her that she would not be burdened forever by sightlessness and a total inability to hear and distinguish sounds. Helen Keller could now look upon her handicaps as a challenge, as a means of spiritual

growth, as an education for a future life when she would be able to see, hear, and speak without impediment. There was no bitterness in her towards divine providence, for she knew the Lord was good to all, and he was not in any way accountable for the visitation of a dreadful affliction. This hope that shone forth so radiantly in her personality shone into the dark corners of despair where sat others who were also without sight.

The other foundation stone of her faith was this: love and use are synonymous. Over and over again her thoughts turned to this basic doctrine of Swedenborg: "The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of uses" (Heaven and Hell #387). This truth became the driving force of Miss Keller's life. Love has no reality, no existence, no meaning, until it goes forth into the lives of others in the form of some essential service.

As a teen-ager, Helen came to have many questions about spirituality. It so happened that a very prominent Swedenborgian wandered into her life about that time. He was John Hitz. He worked with Alexander Graham Bell in an organization to provide material about deafness. When Helen took her questions to him, he provided her with a Braille volume of his writing.



Reading it in Braille, she had a spiritual awakening similar to the one she had had years earlier with her teacher, Anne Sullivan when she realized at the water pump that letters had meaning.

Helen Keller was an ardent advocate of the rights of the disabled and others socially disadvantaged by society.

Eugene Taylor, PhD, was a Swedenborgian who was a Lecturer on Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, and the 1983 William James Lecturer on the Varieties of Religious Experience at Harvard Divinity School. In his book, *A Psychology of Spiritual Healing*, he writes this about art and disabilities:

Often, we think of sickness as something transitory; but for millions of people, illness is chronic, even lifelong. The loss of limbs, a radical disfigurement, terrible pain, all of these may be permanent adjustments that a person has to make. Chronic illness, however, can also be a stimulus to kinds of internal growth that would not have been other possible. ... Beethoven composed symphonies while completely deaf. Jackson Pollock, as well as numerous other artists, used conditions of psychopathology to produce new dimensions in modern art. ... while terrible things might happen to us, there is simply no telling what new doors will open up for us in our response to pain, sickness, and infirmity. Our illness can always become the vehicle toward the actualization of a spiritual destiny higher than the physical or psychological. [140-41]

Swedenborg wrote:

"There is a constant inflow from the spiritual world into the physical world. " [DLW 340] and "The true principle of cure is the divine love brought by the Lord's humanity and life of divine truth ..." [AC 571]

The more we align with the spiritual influx, the more we are in a state of healing; regardless of the circumstances of the body.

Physicist Stephen Hawkins says of his severe disabilities:

I guess we're all pretty disabled on the cosmic scale. What difference are a few muscles more or less? Disability does not really affect my consciousness. I see it as an inconvenience like color blindness.

Through reading Swedenborg, Helen Keller came to have a similar view on her disabilities. It was only her physical sight and physical hearing that were impaired. Internally, everyone has impairment of the spiritual eyes and ears. Hers, however, were far more developed than for most people around her.

The Helen Keller Art Show was established in 1983, as a project among agencies in Alabama that serve children with visual impairments. It presents winning entries of art by children who are visually impaired, blind and deaf blind; using a variety of media.

For Helen, her darkness was only to the physical world. Her spiritual eyes within saw God, giving her far clearer sight than those of us with physical seeing.

We think of these as physical terms that describe aspects of our bodies. To Helen Keller, they had a deeper spiritual meaning. Ponder these "impairments" as spiritual, rather than physical. How might they apply to your own spiritual life? How does the hope of Helen Keller inspire you in your life's journey today?

As you enjoy the following art work shown at the Helen Keller Art Show, consider the concept of being "blind" or "deaf." They have a spiritual meaning for all of us, and are healed through God's inflowing Love.



Children Playing in the Park
C.C. Perry
Gardendale High School – Jefferson County
Teacher: Liz Jansen, O & M
Medium: Acrylic Paint



Purple in my Mind

Matthew Calhoun

ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

Teacher: Stephanie McGhee

Medium: Acrylic Paint, Textured Brushes



Stars

Curtis Taylor

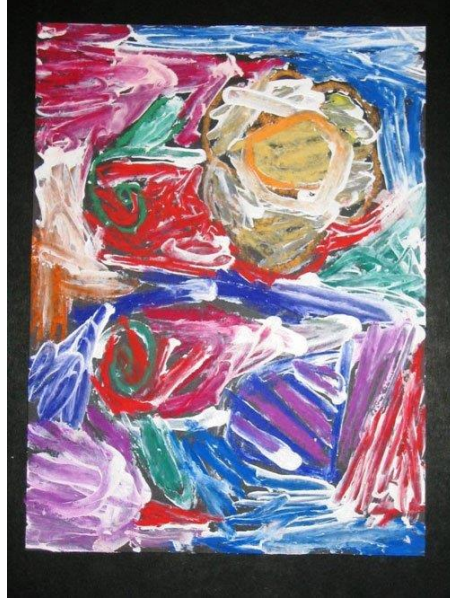
Center Point Elementary – Jefferson County

Teacher: Bonnie Armistead, VI - Kimberly Brodie-Art

Medium: Watercolor



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



Jumble

Haley Haynes

ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

Teacher: Muffet Conover

Medium: Paint and Pastels



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Edwin Markham: Poetry As Prayer

July 13, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 21: 18-22

The Fig Tree Withers

Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked.

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 885

That a "leaf" signifies truth, is evident from many passages in the Word where man is compared to a tree, or is called a tree, and where "fruits" signify the good of charity, and a "leaf" the truth therefrom (which indeed they are like); as in Ezekiel:

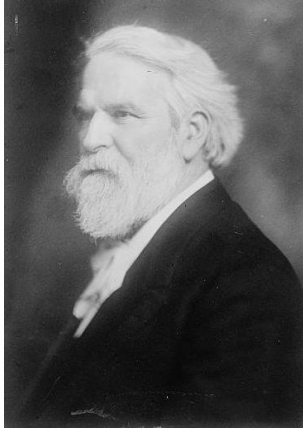
And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, there cometh up every tree for food, whose leaf doth not fall, neither is the fruit consumed, it is reborn every month, because the waters thereof issue out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for food, and the leaf thereof for medicine
(Ezek. 47:12; Rev. 22:2).

Here "tree" denotes the man of the church in whom is the kingdom of the Lord; its "fruit" the good of love and of charity; its "leaf" the truths therefrom, which serve for the instruction of the human race and for their regeneration, for which reason the leaf is said to be for "medicine."

Message

Edwin Markham (1852-1940): Poetry As Prayer





Edwin Markham was born in Oregon City, Oregon, as the youngest of 10 children. His parents separated several years later, and he and his mother moved to central California where he lived on a farm. He studied literature and then attended San Jose Normal school, and taught for several years and then became superintendent of the county schools.

Markham began writing poetry around 1872, and he had sold a poem by 1880. He wrote poetry for *Harper's*, *Century*, and *Scribner's*. At the end of 1898 he wrote, "The Man with the Hoe." The poem was based on the 1862 painting by Jean-Francois Millet. Markham read the poem at a New Years' Eve party, and it was published by the *San Francisco Examine*.

"The Man with the Hoe" received a great deal of publicity. It supported the labor movement and working conditions, and started Markham's reputation as a social reformer and champion of the working class. He became a popular speaker at labor meetings.

In 1922 Markham, read his poem "Lincoln, the Man of the People" at the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial. On his 80th birthday in 1932, he was honored at Carnegie Hall by Pres. Hoover as one of the most important poets of his time.

THE MAN WITH THE HOE



The Man with the Hoe, by Jean-Francois Millet

The Man with the Hoe
by Edwin Markham

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world.
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?
Is this the Thing the Lord God made and gave
To have dominion over sea and land;
To trace the stars and search the heavens for power;
To feel the passion of Eternity?
Is this the Dream He dreamed who shaped the suns
And marked their ways upon the ancient deep?
Down all the stretch of Hell to its last gulf
There is no shape more terrible than this --
More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed --
More filled with signs and portents for the soul --
More fraught with menace to the universe.

What gulfs between him and the seraphim!
Slave of the wheel of labor, what to him
Are Plato and the swing of Pleiades?
What the long reaches of the peaks of song,
The rift of dawn, the reddening of the rose?
Through this dread shape the suffering ages look;
Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop;
Through this dread shape humanity betrayed,
Plundered, profaned and disinherited,
Cries protest to the Judges of the World,
A protest that is also prophecy.

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
Is this the handiwork you give to God,
This monstrous thing distorted and soul-quenched?
How will you ever straighten up this shape;
Touch it again with immortality;
Give back the upward looking and the light;
Rebuild in it the music and the dream;
Make right the immemorial infamies,
Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
How will the Future reckon with this Man?
How answer his brute question in that hour
When whirlwinds of rebellion shake the world?



How will it be with kingdoms and with kings --
With those who shaped him to the thing he is –

Markham's Beliefs & Swedenborgianism

Markham was raised a Methodist. He came to know Thomas Lake Harris around 1876, and may have learned about Swedenborg from him.

[Harris was a Universalist minister who came to know Andrew Jackson Davis, and became involved in Spiritualism, and then became a Christian. He discovered the Swedenborgians, and before long considered himself and his congregation to be Swedenborgian. This view was not shared by the Swedenborgian Church! For more on Harris and David, see [Wings and Roots](#).]

Markham wrote a poem about Swedenborg, and often quoted Swedenborg. He spoke at Swedenborgian Churches, but never officially joined the church.

This is a quotation from *New Church Life*:

The New York Society has, on a number of occasions, been addressed by the poet, Edwin Markham, who is a professed Newchurchman. In January, Mr. Markham addressed the congregation at the close of the services. After a sketch of his own life, and his study of the Bible; Mr. Markham then told how he had been led to see "that a revelation of truth had been made through Swedenborg," whom he characterized as "the eye of the eighteenth century," and whose writings he has been studying for forty years. Mr. Markham also addressed members of the Church in Boston, Brookline and Cambridge, Mass. He has an original and forceful style.

In Marguerite Block's *History of the New Church*, she refers to Markham as representing the "Social Gospel" dimension of the church. She quotes him as saying this in the Boston Church:

If Swedenborg had never expressed another idea than his immortal saying, "All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good," he would have given the world enough to inspire a hundred seers. I never speak his name without emotion. He lifted me out of a quagmire of theology; he lifted me up to see the stars. [Block, p. 348]

MARKHAM'S POETRY AS PRAYER

Here are two poems by Markham that are like prayers. Read them as prayer, and see if, to you, they are a form of worship.

A Song to a Tree

Give me the dance of your boughs, O tree,
Whenever the wild wind blows;
And when the wind is gone, give me
Your beautiful repose.

How easily your greatness swings
To meet the changing hours;
I, too, would mount upon your wings,
And rest upon your powers.

I seek your grace, O mighty tree,
And shall seek, many a day,
Till I more worthily shall be
Your comrade on the way.

A Prayer

Teach me, Father, how to go
Softly as the grasses grow;
Hush my soul to meet the shock
Of the wild world as a rock;
But my spirit, propt with power,
Make as simple as a flower.
Let the dry heart fill its cup,
Like a poppy looking up;
Let life lightly wear her crown
Like a poppy looking down,
When its heart is filled with dew,
And its life begins anew.

Teach me, Father, how to be
Kind and patient as a tree.
Joyfully the crickets croon
Under the shady oak at noon;
Beetle, on his mission bent,
Tarrys in that cooling tent.
Let me, also, cheer a spot,
Hidden field or garden grot—
Place where passing souls can rest
On the way and be their best.



Robert Frost: Poetry As Prayer

July 20, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

John 12: 23-36

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ[f] will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 6476

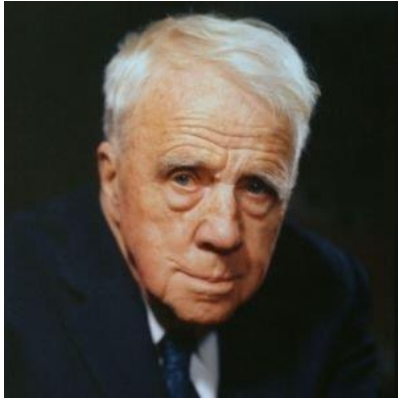
Whenever I have been reading the Lord's prayer, I have plainly perceived an elevation toward the Lord which was like an attraction, and at the same time my ideas were open, and from this there was effected a communication with some societies in heaven; and I noticed that there was an influx from the Lord into every detail of the prayer, thus into every idea of my thought that was from the meaning of the things in the prayer. The influx was effected with inexpressible variety, that is, not the same at one time as another; hence also it was made evident how infinite are the things contained in the prayer, and that the Lord is present in every one of them.

Message **Robert Frost: Poetry as Prayer**

Our rousing opening song was sung at our Annual Convention during the Ordination Service. It was inspired by an Irish melody and Mary's Magnificat; beautiful poetry and singing in the Bible.

Our theme this month is "Poetry as Prayer: Poets & Swedenborg." We'll be experiencing poetry as a restful form of worship, by reading poets who were or are Swedenborgians or influenced by

Swedenborg. Today, our poet is Robert Frost.



Robert Lee Frost was born March 26th, 1874, in San Francisco. He was named after General Robert E. Lee. His father, William Prescott Frost, was a Confederate, a Universalist, and an active alcoholic.



The Frosts had not been in San Francisco for long. Mrs. Frost was Presbyterian, but not finding the right worship community with Presbyterian churches. She enjoyed books of UU minister Thomas Starr King, so they attended King's former San Francisco congregation for a while. She started reading Emerson, and soon found herself reading Swedenborg. Frost's mother joined the Swedenborgian church in San Francisco.

When Robert was in 2nd grade, she had him baptized by Swedenborgian minister Rev. John Doughty. Not long afterwards, Robert started hearing voices. When he told his mother, she said that he had "second sight," as she did. She encouraged him not to talk about it with others.

In 1885, his father died of TB, and Rev. Doughty did the service. Then Robert, with his mother and little sister, moved to Lawrence, Massachusetts to live with his father's family. He hated the discipline of the Frost household. He started attending Universalist services with his grandparents.

His mother moved the children to Salem, New Hampshire so that she could teach school there.



And so Robert grew to adulthood. He attended Harvard briefly, and fell in love with fellow student, Elinor White. In 1895, when he was a reporter in Lawrence, they were married.

Neither of them belonged to a church, but Rev. John Haynes, the Salem Swedenborgian minister, performed the ceremony December, 19, 1895. The service was held in the school where Robert's mother had her private school and Elinor was a teacher. The Lawrence Swedenborgians met in the same rented downtown office space, where the Frost family also lived. Most of the guests at the wedding were Swedenborgians.

In 1923, Frost wrote:

What is my philosophy? That is hard to say. I was brought up a Swedenborgian. I am not a Swedenborgian now. But there is a good deal of it that's left with me. I am a mystic. I believe in symbols. I believe in change and in changing symbols. Yet that does not take me away from the kindly contact of human beings. No, it brings me closer to them.

Frost died Jan. 29, 1963. He died on Swedenborg's birthday! His daughter, Lesley, asked the Unitarian minister Palfrey Perkins to conduct a service.

Some of Swedenborg's concepts that are in Frost's poetry include: Love as the essence of reality, Correspondences, and a process of spiritual growth.

Can you experience any of this poetry as prayer?

Music and dance can also be forms of prayer. The closing song, Happy by Pharrell Williams, is certainly now familiar to everyone. The song was performed during the final worship service of our Annual Convention, where we ended by dancing in the aisles as we sang along.

E. B. Browning: Poetry as Prayer

July 27, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Isaiah 59: 16-21

And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.

For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence.

So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.

And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.

As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.

From Swedenborg

True Christian Religion (Rose) n. 116

Many passages in the Word make it clear that while he was in the world the Lord fought battles against the hells, conquered them, brought them under control, and made them obedient to himself. I will extract just a few.

In Isaiah:

...

These words are about the Lord's battles against the hells. The clothes in which he was honorable and which were reddish mean the Word, to which the Jewish people had done violence. The combat itself against the hells and victory over them is described by his trampling people in his anger and stamping on them in his rage. The fact that he was alone and fought from his own power is described by these phrases: "there was no man from the people with me;" "my arm performed salvation for me;" and "I made the enemies' victory go down into the ground." His bringing salvation and redemption as a result is described by these phrases: "That is why he became their Savior;" and "because of his love and mercy he redeemed them." The fact that this was the reason for his coming is meant by these phrases: "the day of revenge was in my heart and the year of my redeemed had come."

Also in Isaiah:

He saw that there was no one and was astounded that there was no one interceding. Therefore his own arm performed salvation for him and justice made him stand up. Then he put on justice like a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head. He put on the clothes of vengeance and covered himself with zeal like a cloak. Then the Redeemer came to Zion. (Isaiah 59:16, 17, 20)

Message

Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Poetry as Prayer



In 1988, I was attending the Swedenborg School of Religion in Newton, MA, and preparing for my 1990 ordination in General Convention.

Trying to find my spiritual home, I had recently come into the denomination from my journey thru the Unitarian-Universalists and then the Episcopal Church.

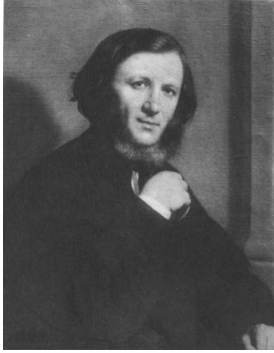
I had been reading Swedenborg for years but didn't know anything about the church, so soaked up every bit of knowledge I could. I was fascinated to realize that the year – 1988 – was the 300th anniversary of Swedenborg's birth in 1688. The Swedenborg Foundation honored the occasion with the release of a beautiful thick book called: [Emanuel Swedenborg: A Continuing Vision](#), a pictorial biography and anthology of essays and poetry. It was edited by Robin Larsen. It's a gorgeous volume, packed with essays, photos and poetry. I was thrilled that there was so much poetry by so many poets who had been influenced by Swedenborg. At the end of each of the five sections, Alice Skinner offers a Swedenborgian theme including selections from poets that reflect that theme.

Skinner wrote this about Elizabeth Barrett Browning [1806=1861]:

[She] was introduced to the works of Swedenborg in 1851 by a friend from London, Miss E. F. Haworth. Her letters to friends include references to her reading of Swedenborg and discussions of his ideas. In a letter to her sister Henrietta in 1857, Browning called herself "a Swedenborgian." [p. 180]

Elizabeth Barrett was born in 1806 in Durham, England. The Barrett's were wealthy plantation owners in Jamaica, where they used slave labor. The family was part Creole. She was tutored at home, and had read many of Shakespeare's plays before she was ten. When she was twelve she had written an epic poem! At fourteen she suffered a lung problem, and the next year she sustained a spinal injury. These problems were with her the rest of her life. She continued reading the classics, and became involved in her local church. By 1832, the family fortunes were exhausted, due in part to the abolition of slavery in England.

Her family lived in a cottage by the sea, where she spent one year. During that time her brother died sailing nearby. She was devastated. She then lived in London with her father, who was a tyrant. She spent the next five years, a recluse, living in the bedroom of her father's London home; but continued her writing.



In 1844, she published a volume of her poetry, in which she praised the poet Robert Browning. He wrote her a letter. Despite his being 6 years younger than she, they exchanged hundreds of letters in less than two years. Her father was opposed to the romance, as portrayed in the 1930 play, [*The Barrettes of Wimpole Street*](#), by Rudolf Besier (1878-1942), later made into a 1934 movie and several TV movie versions. In 1846, they eloped and moved to Italy, where they had a son; Robert Wideman Browning. Her father never spoke to her again. In 1850, her book, [*Sonnets from the Portuguese*](#), was published, dedicated to her husband, and based on the letters they wrote before their marriage. It is considered to be one of the most widely-known romantic poems in English.

Political and social themes embody Elizabeth's later work. In 1857 she published a verse novel, [*Aurora Leigh*](#), which has the theme of male power over woman. In her poetry she also dealt with issues like the oppression of the Italians by the Austrians, the child labor mines and mills of England, slavery, and other social issues. This focus made her less popular as a poet. Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in Florence on June 29, 1861. Her final poem was set to music.

SWEDENBORGIAN INFLUENCE

Our two romantics, Robert and Elizabeth, read Swedenborg's *Conjugal Love* together in Florence early in their marriage. Elizabeth often mentioned reading Swedenborg and she acknowledged his influence on *Aurora Leigh* (1857). Robert didn't directly talk about a Swedenborgian influence, but he and Elizabeth were both friends of the English Swedenborgian, Charles Augustus Tulk, and Robert was an early friend of James John Garth Wilkinson. As mentioned above, she may have been introduced to Swedenborg by a friend, E.F. Haworth. In a letter, Browning called herself a Swedenborgian.

SWEDENBORGIAN CONCEPTS

Alice Skinner notes that Elizabeth lived out the Swedenborgian values of "uses" in her work. She took on the causes of many who were oppressed. In *Aurora Leigh*, she "examines the meaning of useful work at length, including a confirmation of the value of simply performing one's everyday tasks." P. 361 In addition to her social justice themes, her poetry is filled with a celebration of love and references to God.

POETRY

A poem about Love

How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

A poem about God

Chorus of Eden Spirit

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

HEARKEN, oh hearken! let your souls behind you
Turn, gently moved!
Our voices feel along the Dread to find you,
O lost, beloved!
Through the thick-shielded and strong-marshalled angels,
They press and pierce:
Our requiems follow fast on our evangels,—
Voice throbs in verse.
We are but orphaned spirits left in Eden
A time ago:
God gave us golden cups, and we were bidden
To feed you so.
But now our right hand hath no cup remaining,
No work to do,
The mystic hydromel is spilt, and staining
The whole earth through.
Most ineradicable stains, for showing
(Not interfused!)
That brighter colours were the world's foregoing,
Than shall be used.
Hearken, oh hearken! ye shall hearken surely
For years and years,
The noise beside you, dripping coldly, purely,
Of spirits' tears.
The yearning to a beautiful denied you,
Shall strain your powers.
Ideal sweetnesses shall over-glide you,
Resumed from ours.
In all your music, our pathetic minor



Your ears shall cross;
And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,
With sense of loss.
We shall be near you in your poet-languors
And wild extremes,
What time ye vex the desert with vain angers,
Or mock with dreams.
And when upon you, weary after roaming,
Death's seal is put,
By the foregone ye shall discern the coming,
Through eyelids shut.

Do any of these poems inspire your own worship of the Divine? What would it be like to write your own poem/prayer/hymn to God?



Music as Prayer & Worship

August 3, 2014

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Psalm 19 ^[a]

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

⁴ Yet their voice ^[b] goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.

The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹ By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

¹² But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.

¹³ Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Footnotes:

- a. Psalm 19:1 In Hebrew texts 19:1-14 is numbered 19:2-15.
- b. Psalm 19:4 Septuagint, Jerome and Syriac; Hebrew *measuring line*

FROM SWEDENBORG

Apocalypse Revealed (Whitehead) n. 276

276. Having everyone of them harps, signifies confession of the Lord's Divine Human from spiritual truths. It is known that confessions of Jehovah were made in the temple at Jerusalem by singing, and at the same time by instruments of music which corresponded; the instruments were principally trumpets and timbrels, and psalteries and harps; the trumpets and timbrels corresponded to celestial goods and truths, and the psalteries and harps to spiritual goods and truths; the correspondences were with their sounds. What celestial good and truth is, and what spiritual good and truth, may be seen in the work concerning Heaven and Hell (n. 13-19, and 20-28). That "harps" signify confessions of the Lord from spiritual truths, may appear from these passages:

Confess to Jehovah with the harp, sing unto Him with the psaltery of ten strings (Ps. 33:2).

I will confess to Thee on the harp, O God, my God (Ps. 43:4).

I will confess to Thee on the instrument of the psaltery, I will sing unto Thee with the harp, O Thou Holy One of Israel (Ps. 71:22).

Arouse me psaltery and harp, I will confess Thee among the nations, O Lord (Ps. 57:8, 9; 108:2-4).

Answer to Jehovah by confession, play on the harp to our God (Ps. 147:7).

MESSAGE

Music as Prayer and Worship: The Ministry of Rev. Ken Turley

We've been exploring ways that poetry can be a form of prayer and worship. Now we turn to look at music as a connection with the Divine.

When the Israelites successfully crossed the Red Sea, Miriam and the women celebrated with timbrels and dancing.

19 When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen[e] went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. 20 Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. 21 Miriam sang to them:

*"Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.*

Both horse and driver

he has hurled into the sea."

[from Exodus 15]

Swedenborg talked of the life in heaven as filled with music, concerts, and singing. He said that music originated in the heavens before coming to the natural world. In a 1914 New Church Life article, "Was Swedenborg a Music Lover?" the author concludes that he was, and cites a story by a contemporary of Swedenborg enjoying music.



Our denominational President, Rev. Ken Turley, has an active music ministry. He composes music and performs it in churches and many other locations. I asked Rev. Ken how music has impacted him, both for personal healing and for the healing his music has brought to so many.

A Portrait of Rev. Ken Turley commissioned by the Fryeburg New Church when he retired from parish ministry.

He told me that when he was in the first and second grade, his music teacher taught his class folk songs. Rev. Ken writes:

I remember "Eating Goober Peas", an old Civil War Song, which I still sing to myself when I am or want to feel silly and happy, but my favorites were the spirituals like "Wade In The Water", "Climbing Jacob's Ladder" and "Go Down Moses". Those melodies are even today the reason I have a love for the Blues and the Spirituals that make up the foundation of modern Gospel music.

Ken was raised by his parents, Rev. Cal and Marilyn Turley. Ken has fond memories of his father's love of music.

He [Cal Turley] loved music and purchased and played many records around the house. His tastes were very eclectic ranging from Big Band Swing to the Folk Music of the early 60's. I listened to the Limelighters, Peter, Paul and Mary, Judy Collins, Pete Seeger, Harry Belafonte and Odetta. What was most notable was that my dad, using his reel to reel tape recorder and a foot pedal that he used to start and stop songs while remaining seated (cutting edge technology of the day!?!), played many of the songs with spiritual messages in church services on Sunday mornings. I was at an age where I was required to attend church and while I didn't much like the service, I loved the music and remember the experience of hearing Odetta in church even today.

As a young adult, Ken Turley continued to explore the world of music:

During the late 60's and early 70's I was doing Alternative Service to the draft as a Conscientious Objector to the Vietnam War and living in San Francisco. I was an early member of a group called Mother Goose, Inc. which took the arts to kids confined in institutions. We performed as a band and then worked with kids on our individual instruments. Within a relatively short time we were able to bring the kids together and they were able to perform as a band for their peers in the institution. Until that time music was a very personal experience, it was during these years that I truly understood music's power to change one's inner experience and outer life's circumstances as well.

At this point, **music became a healing presence in Ken Turley's life.**

Later in the 70's while I was back in college earning a degree in music I was fortunate enough to be involved in two different productions of Godspell. One was a production put on by the University of Puget Sound where I was enrolled which eventually took second place in a regional competition of university dramatic productions. The other was a semi-professional production that travelled around the Seattle area doing three shows over a weekend at local churches. I played guitar in both productions and was music director of the second. After a hundred or so performances, it dawned on me that popular

music, i.e. rock'n'roll, could actually convey a spiritual message that young people would actually listen to and enjoy! Some of us are slow learners.

This was a dramatic perspective in the 1970's; that **popular music can bring spiritual messages to young people [and many older ones as well!]**

It was shortly after graduation while searching for a way to earn a living as a musician that I committed myself to be a church musician and devote my musical talents to serving God.

This was another pivotal moment in Turley's life as he recognized a call to service God with a ministry of music

Unfortunately at that time, no one would even consider my application because I did not play the organ, even though musicals like Godspell and Jesus Christ Superstar were so successful and the popularity of the Folk Mass was growing rapidly. Moved by this and the need for theological studies, I enrolled at the Swedenborgian seminary and that has resulted in my serving as a minister in which music has been such an important part.

It's hard to imagine Ken Turley not being considered for music ministry because he didn't play an organ! His guitar and other instruments have brought energy to numerous churches and denominational events, like our annual convention.



Throughout my life music has been an essential means for keeping me focused and spiritually healthy and growing. It has been a cathartic expression of my sorrows and loneliness and my joys and happiness as well. It has been an expression of my love and gratitude for God's guidance and blessings in my life and an essential tool in leading others in worship and a wide variety of spiritually focused activities and events. To this day, whether I am playing in a church or in a bar I see music as a means for lifting the spirits and influencing people's attention and inner state to the good things of life, which of course, whether stated and/or acknowledged or not, come directly from God. While I take great joy from my musical creations and the act of playing, at the end of my life here on earth, what I hope for is that the music that has come through me will have helped others in their spiritual journey and ultimately brought them closer to God, as it certainly has for me.

For your own experience of Rev. Ken's music as leading to spiritual healing and wholeness, listen to "Pergamum" at the end of this page. It was written in honor of the angel.

Now, re-read Psalm 19 at the top of the page, and then listen to the music Rev. Ken wrote based on this Psalm [also at the end of the page].

Music as Prayer & Worship, Pt. 2

August 10, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15, King James Version

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.
What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?
I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.
He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.
I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.
And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.
I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.
That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.*

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 994: 2

Pleasures are of two kinds, those of the will, and those of the understanding. In general there are the pleasures of possession of land and wealth, the pleasures of honor and office in the state, the pleasures of conjugal love and of love for infants and children, the pleasures of friendship and of converse with companions, the pleasures of reading, of writing, of knowing, of being wise; and many others. There are also the pleasures of the senses: as the pleasure of hearing, which is in general that from the sweetness of music and song; and that of seeing, which is in general that of various and manifold beauties; and of smelling, which is from the sweetness of odors; and of tasting, which is from the agreeableness and wholesomeness of foods and drinks; and of touch, from many pleasing sensations. These kinds of pleasures, being felt in the body, are called pleasures of the body. But no pleasure ever exists in the body unless it exists and subsists from an interior affection, and no interior affection exists except from one more interior, in which is the use and the end.

Message Music as Prayer & Worship: The Ministry of Rev. Ken Turley, Part 2



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Ken Turley is the son of Rev. Cal and Marilyn Turley. He came to love music at an early age, and often heard it in church services. He received a bachelors degree in music, and then decided that he wanted to go into ministry; a music ministry. He applied to seminaries. He writes:

Unfortunately at that time, no one would even consider my application because I did not play the organ, even though musicals like Godspell and Jesus Christ Superstar were so successful and the popularity of the Folk Mass was growing rapidly. Moved by this and the need for theological studies, I enrolled at the Swedenborgian seminary and that has resulted in my serving as a minister in which music has been such an important part.



Rev. Ken has spent many years in parish ministries of our church, and is now President of the Denomination. Through all of these years, he has had a special interest in using music as part of worship.

I asked Rev. Ken how he sees music connected to worship and to our spirituality. Here are some of the points he made:

Music as Spiritual Practice

In church, we sing hymns, and it usually enhances our worship. However, most of us have not explored the range of music that can be a form of worship; in church and outside of it. There are many other ways and other settings in which music can bring us closer to God.



One powerful spiritual experience can come from playing a musical instrument. The discipline to learn an instrument can be a spiritual discipline. One must practice "religiously" to be able to share spirituality through a musical instrument. Just as one might pray or meditate or read the Bible on a regular basis to enhance spirituality, one can practice a musical instrument for the same experience.

Music as Connection with the Divine

Music can be an experience of wholeness and connection: with each other and with God. When we share music, we may be singing [sharing sacred breath together], listening [using our ears and hearing to connect with our emotions], and moving our whole body with the music. Our body itself becomes an instrument to connect with the Divine.

Music as Experience of the Intuitive

We can experience God and share Divine Love in many ways through the use of music. Consider all of these forms of "uses" through music:



Listening to music
Writing music
Playing music
Incorporating music into other arts
Singing
Dancing

When you write music, play an instrument, sing or dance for others -- you are helping others experience the Divine.

When you sing or dance with others, you are sharing the Divine together. Playing instruments, singing, and dancing together all involve ways of finding a common wholeness in God.

We can worship God in many ways through music. Sometimes we perform in public for others. Sometimes we sing, play, or dance together in church. Sometimes we are just alone with God, and we can pray to God through our breath, our ears, our voice, and our body movements. What's important is that it be a spiritual experience.



Do you do any of the following in your life? If so, in what ways are they a spiritual experience for you?

Play an instrument -- alone or in a group? What is it like to practice? To perform? ... Or just to play?

Write music for others to sing/ play? What is that like for you?

Dance -- alone? In groups? In church? In prayer?

Sing -- alone? With others? In church? In prayer?

Rev. Ken says that he does not want to teach us facts about music. He wants to invite us into the experience of all forms of music as part of our spiritual life.

Gillian Bedford: Painting as Prayer

August 17, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 54: 1-7, New International Version

*Save me, O God, by your name;
vindicate me by your might.
Hear my prayer, O God;
listen to the words of my mouth.
Strangers are attacking me;
ruthless men seek my life—
men without regard for God.
Selah
Surely God is my help;
the Lord is the one who sustains me.
Let evil recoil on those who slander me;
in your faithfulness destroy them.
I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you;
I will praise your name, O LORD,
for it is good.
For he has delivered me from all my troubles,
and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.*

From Swedenborg

Heaven and Hell (Dole) n. 185

*I have seen palaces in heaven that were so splendid as to be beyond description. Their upper stories shone as though they were made of pure gold, and their lower ones as though they were made of precious gems. Each palace seemed more splendid than the last. It was the same inside. The rooms were graced with such lovely adornments that neither words nor the arts and sciences are adequate to describe them. On the side that faced south there were parklands where everything sparkled in the same way, here and there the leaves like silver and the fruits like gold, with the flowers in their beds making virtual rainbows with their colors. On the horizon of sight there were other palaces that framed the scene. The architecture of heaven is like this, so that you might call it the very essence of the art-and small wonder, since the art itself does come to us from heaven.
Angels tell me that things like this and countless others even more perfect are presented to their view by the Lord; but that such sights actually delight their minds more than their eyes because they see correspondences in the details, and through their correspondences they see things divine*

Message

Gillian Bedford: Painting as Prayer

One of the highlights of my summer of 2010 was attending [Gathering Leaves](#) in Byrn Athyn, PA. One of the highlights of *Gathering Leaves* for me was a visit to [Orchard Art Works](#).



Their website explains their mission:

The purpose of Orchard Artworks is to provide a high quality showcase, a marketplace, and supportive, cooperative fellowship for artists and craftspeople primarily in Bryn Athyn and the tri-county area; to encourage artistic creativity and excellence in craftsmanship; to provide community arts education, and to promote fine art and craft art as a viable means of livelihood.



One of the artists active at this gallery is [Gillian Bedford](#).

Gillian grew up in the General Church in Bryn Athyn, PA. She went to church every Sunday, and attended services in her home that her father conducted. She has vivid memories of creating art with her mother. Her mother guided her into baking, making candles, drawing, and coloring. Gillian was grief-stricken as a teen-ager when her mother died.

Today Gillian is married to Allen Bedford and they have two daughters: Amara and Michelle.

Painting has always been a special time for Gillian; a time of getting in touch with her feelings and to be aware of God's presence.

This past April, Gillian gave a talk about her art to the Swedenborg Foundation. She started off saying:

Thinking back on my career I think of how Bryn Athyn College helped me think more deeply. I thought I would be either an artist or a historian and decided to apply to Tyler school of Art after getting an AA in history and sociology from Bryn Athyn. At Tyler I went from being encouraged to be an art historian, to a jeweler, to making tile mosaics. I finally realized I wanted to be a painter after being encouraged by my teachers, Jim Wilson, Margo Margolis and Richard Cardona. Since then I've never looked back and love the act of moving paint around on my palette and canvas. Now I invite the viewer into my world...

She talked about how Swedenborg influenced her painting.

Using symbolism is a big part of Swedenborgian thought. Reading Swedenborg influences my themes such as birth and rebirth, regeneration, and life after death.

When I start a painting, I use a scene or object to get things going, but my painting goes beyond that physical scene. What I see before me is really just a launching pad or foundation for an exploration of an inner space or emotional response to the object, scene, or an experience.

So I start with an object, for example, a pinecone, or a photo, or a scene out a window to begin to work from. Often I quickly move away from the object and into my intuition and allow my painting to be true to those feelings rather than being true to the physical scene.



Artist's Palette

When I paint, I am building up from nothing rather than taking away from everything. While some may paint to replicate a concept, I paint to develop one. In this example, an early version of my painter's pallet, notice how the white of the canvas shows through and the painting looks like it is still being created.

The subjects of my paintings change with my intuition; they can move from the initial idea and sometimes come back to it; most of my paintings flow from one idea to another until I realize I'm done—either with that painting or with that idea. I start new ideas as the passage of time tells me to.



enduring flowers #2

In enduring flowers the background is very dark and the white has movement on the top of the painting. It brings your eye to the Black Eyed Susans and Yellow Yarrow. The flowers are calm while their surroundings are full of action. The flowers are like remains or good memories. The background is like turbulent thoughts.

Also, a flower can mean something upsetting and difficult and meaningful, and other times transformational and yet other times just about good memories. In "early spring" I used a famous Elliott Porter photograph and was thinking of the flowers and the big softly painted green leaf being fully present while the fall leaves disintegrate into the earth.



Early Spring



Childhood #2

“Childhood no. 2” reminds me of the warm fields I grew up in playing as a child.



new beginnings

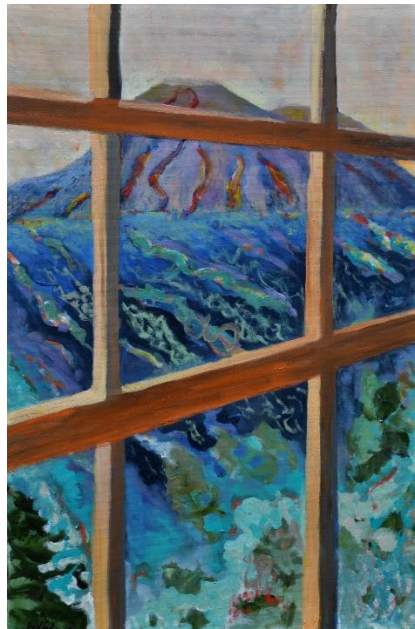
“New Beginnings” is about the vibrancy of something new.

A lot of my paintings are very joyful, about the flowers that remind me of growing up with my dad’s gardens



new playful life

I use art as a way to move thru difficult feelings so I can get into happy states quickly. For example I have made many paintings thru the years of window scenes that hold the viewer on the inside while looking out at beautiful scenes.



New Life



Monet's Heaven

They also are about the transition from this world into the next. The physicality of being in one space while looking out a window can symbolize the passage from one state or this world into a beautiful scene. This scene can be of my back yard.



Van Gogh's heaven

Or can be what I would imagine another person's heaven being like. Usually the scene describes the best part of ones life or what it could be in heaven. After loosing my mother, my brother and father I did a number of paintings on this idea and it helped heal the pain of loss.



Window #3

In 2010 she had an intense spiritual journey of regeneration. It began with feelings of loss, and of just simply surviving. It ended with Gillian finding the pain, joy, and hope in her spirituality.

During this year, she found that as she put paint to canvas, deep feelings were released. She cried in grief over her mother's death many years earlier, and the more recent death of her father. As she painted, she cried. And she healed. Painting brought her feelings of deep serenity, and a sense of awe in the majesty of the Divine. Painting has become for her a time to worship and to pray. She emerges from her painting time feeling uplifted and connected to God.

Gillian shares the spiritual journey of that year. However, it is not a story that can be told in words; it can only be told through her paintings.

Below, are the 11 paintings of this journey, in sequential order. Gillian provides some words to guide our understanding of her process. She invites us into a sacred space beyond words to join her on this journey.

The paintings and the words of "Gillian's Journey" are all Gillian's own.

Gillian's Journey

The first three paintings are a triptych of leaves. In the first two paintings, set in early and late fall, the leaves resemble a couple dancing. As they fall through the sky the dead brown oak leaf reaches out to the lively green one.



Falling Leaves

In "Leaves," the second of the series, the sky is a reddish black color, there are glowing streetlights, and the moon is in the background. The earth boasts of tilled rolling hills.



Leaves

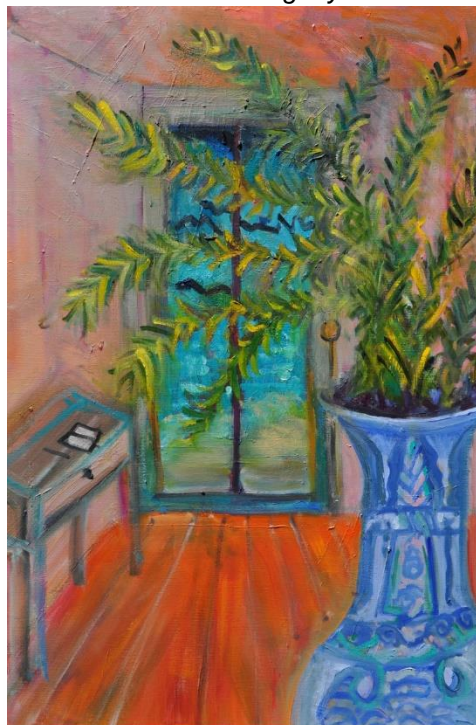
The third is set in early winter, here; the leaves are covered with sleet.



Gone

The final painting of the triptych, "Gone," is about the experience of losing a loved one; the family members are standing above as the form disintegrates onto the earth. There are green stones for remembrance around the brown fallen leaf. Even though the sky has blues and there are spirited colors in the background, there is much pain in the subject.

During the painting process, I rhythmically scraped into the paint while it was still wet, with my thumbnail, to achieve the effect of gritty loss.



Van Gogh's Heaven

In “Van Gogh’s Heaven” I was thinking of Van Gogh’s struggles, waking up in an intermediary place before heaven, and about the visionary, Emanuel Swedenborg, writing of Van Gogh’s experience. The room is apricot colored, and the glass door looks out onto a warm, tropical scene. Van Gogh’s “crows”, the crows he painted before he took his life, can be seen through the glass doors. They represent working through life’s difficulties before moving to heaven. The colors are bright and encouraging. The floorboards hearken back to Van Gogh’s paintings.

This painting is the first of the series in this collection about windows to eternity.



Monet's Heaven

In “Monet’s Heaven” the window represents earthly attachments opening up to Monet’s wild poppy dreamland, this signifies the transition from life on earth to heaven. The right windowpane opens up and begins to dissolve into the garden. I used large brushes with thin layers of paint to create movement and give the feel of wispy transitions. The poppies on the hillside are painted with thicker paint and smaller strokes that have rhythm and joyful bright color.

This painting was also influenced by Matisse’s window paintings.



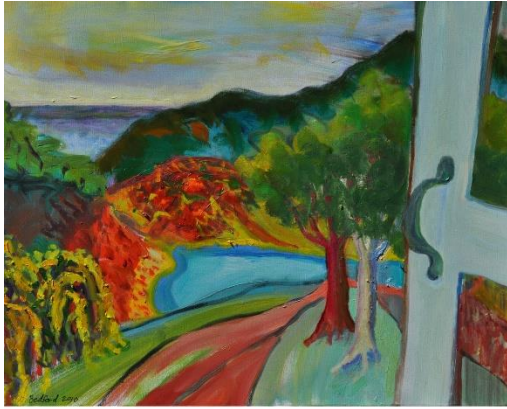
New Playful World

“New Playful World” describes a person moving emotionally from a restrained life on earth to a more lighthearted one. In this painting I was influenced by Fairfield Porter’s playful color filled landscapes. I sought to paint a story of a person who moves from a dark world to a lighthearted spiritual world. The trees are talking to each other joyfully, and the sky echoes the foreground.



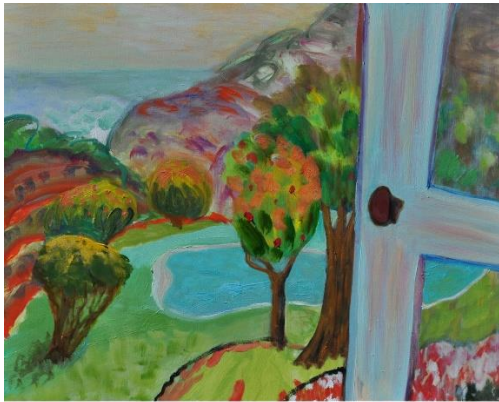
New Life

In “New Life,” the windowpane acts as a transition from this life crossing over to the next. The scene through the window has multiple perspectives from looking downward onto foamy water to looking outward, across a lake at two volcanic mountains. The mountains symbolize eternal married partners. In this painting the window frame shows resistance to moving over, yet the water and mountains are alive and encouraging.



Hockney's Heaven

“Hockney’s Heaven” is full of brilliant colors and leads the eye to two trees representing two eternal married partners. There is a reddish path that leads behind the trees, beyond the pool and back into the landscape. The red and whitish trees represent the marriage of good and truth. The ocean in the background is the Pacific. I was influenced by David Hockney, a colorful California painter, and by my family camping trips in California where we saw beautiful scenic areas.



Child's Play

“Child’s Play” is similar to “Hockney’s Heaven” but is about a grouping of childlike friends, which are the bushes and trees, all enjoying life together.



Celestial Heaven

“Celestial Heaven” is about the highest love because it is of God’s love and light pouring inwards on two pots. The pots are symbolic of two married people in the highest heaven, receiving the Lord’s ever-present love and wisdom. It evolved out of the other paintings as a way to describe an immediate feeling of God wrapping us in warmth.



Becoming

And finally, “Becoming” describes me thinking of waking up in heaven, to my favorite spot of peace in my house, my deck. There I am looking out at my favorite old apple tree, which my father planted on the property as a sapling many years ago. It is called “Becoming” because it moves from rigid branches to sweeping, lively branches peering out the other side of the deck’s beams.

Painting this series of works has taken me on a journey through loss, survival, hope, pain and joy.

Reflection

What is your experience of walking through this regeneration journey with Gillian? As you look at the paintings, can you feel the sacred space that she was in when she painted them? Can they be, for you, a form of prayer?

In your life, when do you feel most connected with the Divine? In church? Walking in the woods? Listening to music? Drawing? Writing? Find those moments in your life when God’s inflow is most clear to you. Can you let yourself have more of those moments, as your time of prayer?

Photography As Prayer: Page Morahan & Kathy Webb

August 24, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Isaiah 65: 17-19

New Heavens and a New Earth

See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

From Swedenborg

Divine Love & Wisdom: 33

All human feelings and thoughts arise from the divine love and wisdom that constitute the very essence that is God. The feelings arise from divine love and the thoughts from divine wisdom. Further, every single bit of our being is nothing but feeling and thought. These two are like the springs of everything that is alive in us. They are the source of all our life experiences of delight and enchantment, the delight from the prompting of our love and the enchantment from our consequent thought. Since we have been created to be recipients, then, and since we are recipients to the extent that we love God and are wise because of our love for God (that is, the extent to which we are moved by what comes from God and think as a result of that feeling), it therefore follows that the divine essence, the Creatress, is divine love and wisdom.

Message

Photography As Prayer: The Art of Page Morahan & Kathy Webb



Dr. Page Morahan is Director, Research and Founding Director of Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine® (ELAM®) (www.drexelmed.edu/ELAM). She is Founding Co-Director, FAIMER® (Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research®) Institute, and is a Professor of Microbiology and Immunology. She is

also active in the Central Committee of our web community.

She is also an artist who has contributed many of her photos for use on our web site. In her artist's statement, she says:

My father was a journalist and photographer, and I used his old heavy Rolliflex for years to take photographs of nature and close-up views of flowers. As a child, I also loved taking art classes from my artist cousin, Maribland Bryant, and in college moved into set design and painting for plays and aquatic shows, as well as editing and taking photographs for our college yearbook. Now I search for unusual views of flowers, architectural details, or nature in rambles through cities and countries around the world. I combine photographs and other materials into interesting collage combinations of colors, metallic hues, fabrics and quotations for 'small art': greeting cards, calendars, bookmarks, and the like – each a 'one-of-a-kind' original piece of art. This is creativity that can be completed in the small windows of opportunity in my life as a leadership educator for health professions faculty in the U.S. and around the world. I hope that you enjoy my art pieces as much as I enjoy creating them!

Do you feel God's presence during selecting photo objects and taking the photos? [is it a sense of a spiritual guidance for you?] Is it a prayerful experience for you?

I definitely feel God's presence when I am wandering around with my camera and looking for interesting patterns – new ways of seeing this world that Higher Power has created for us. I particularly like to take close up photos of flowers. I tend to go into a sort of meditation, and marvel at the beautiful perfection in the symmetrical design of the stamens and pistils, or the fantastic colors and surfaces of petals. Every time I see a passion flower, I marvel at the incredibly beautiful complexity within this small flower. This is the one I have paired with Blake's quote.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



To see a world in a grain of sand & heaven
in a wildflower,

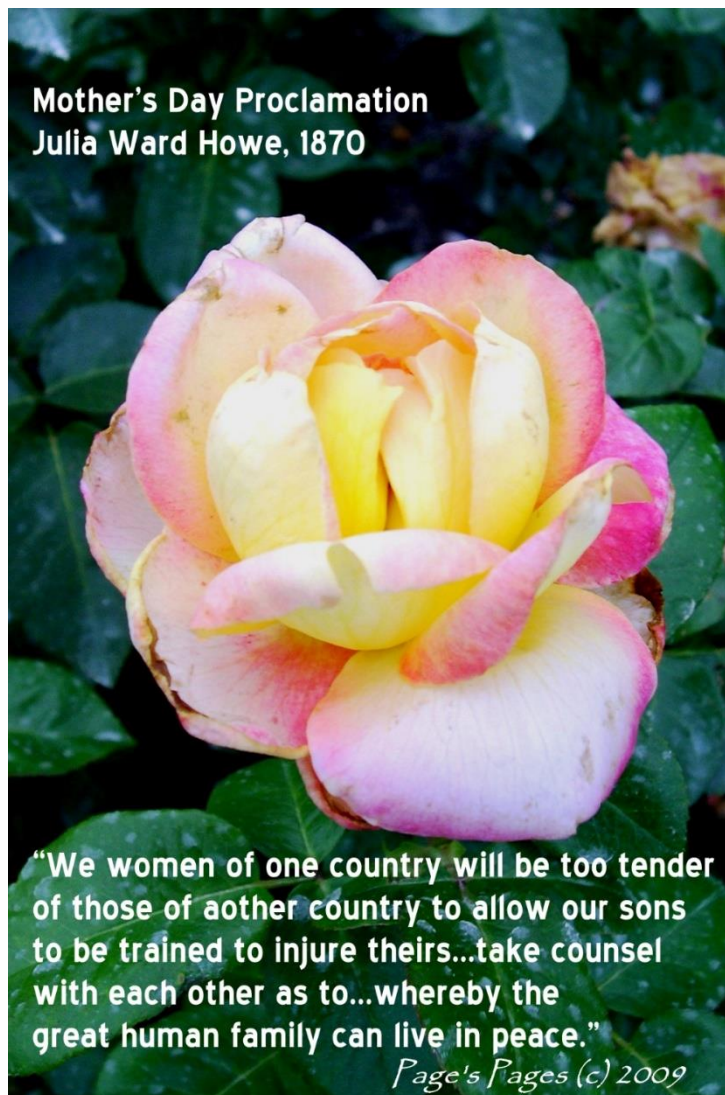
hold infinity in
the palm of
your hand &
eternity in
an hour.

*William
Blake*

Passion Flower on Beach,

Near Fortaleza, Brazil

Page S. Marahan ©
All Rights Reserved



**Mother's Day Proclamation
Julia Ward Howe, 1870**

**"We women of one country will be too tender
of those of another country to allow our sons
to be trained to injure theirs...take counsel
with each other as to...whereby the
great human family can live in peace."**

Page's Pages (c) 2009

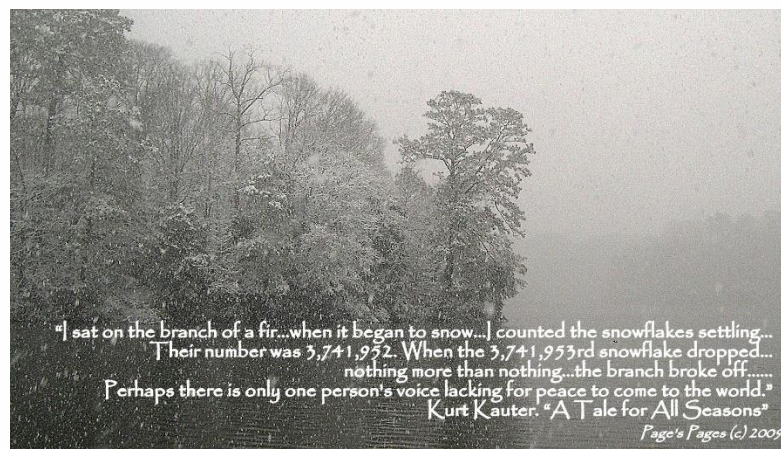
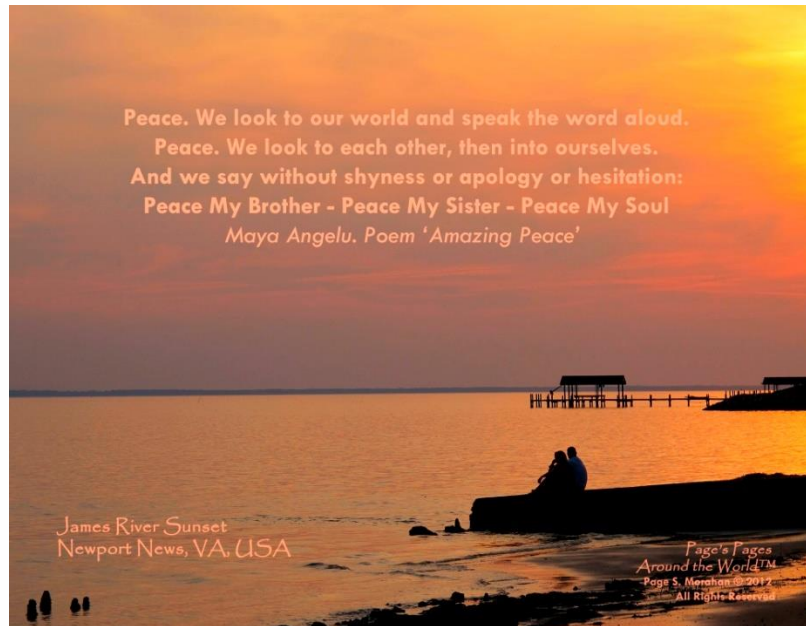


Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

I don't get upset if I don't get the 'perfect photo' – like when I do not get a bird, a tiny flower detail, or a flitting butterfly in focus. When I am really into the spiritual creative process, I see myself in a discovery process – sometimes I will get a stunning winner, other times it just wasn't to be – and I move on to another subject. The Lord always puts many other interesting images in my path!



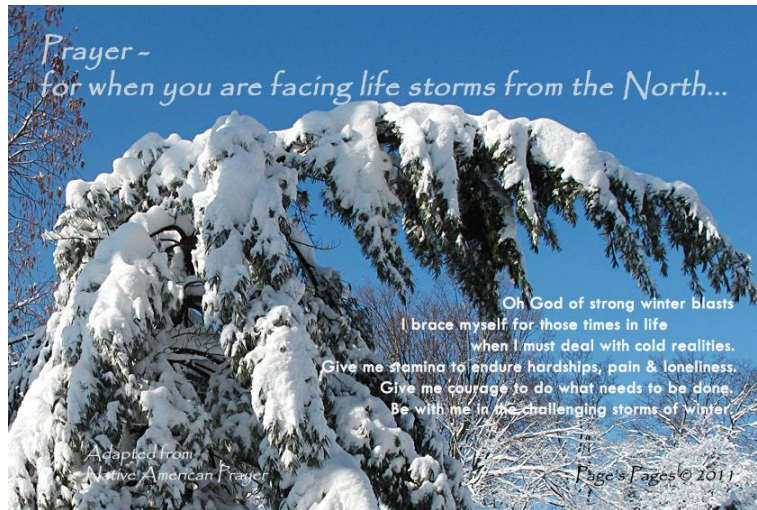
I also like 'touching' photos, physically working with them. I crop photos to whatever shape and size I think is most pleasing – sometimes I even cut out images of flowers or building details, or the like! While I am doing that, I go into a sort of meditation – it takes full concentration to decide exactly what to cut out and what to keep. And then...I also enjoy the physical work of selecting the right color and texture greeting card paper stock, or mat to pair the photo with.



And another definitely spiritual part of the process is selecting the quote that I feel fits best with a particular photograph, and how to place the quote on the photograph to give the message.

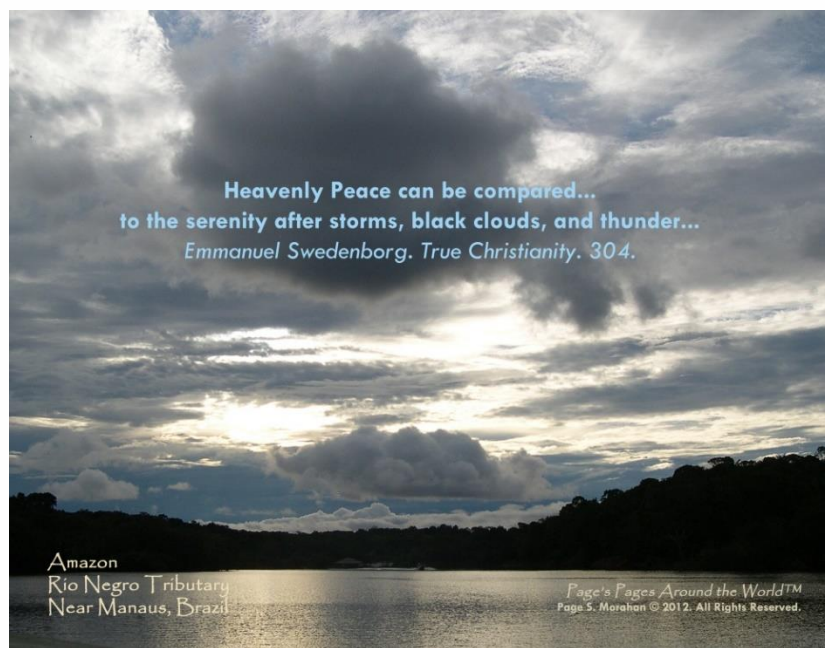


Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

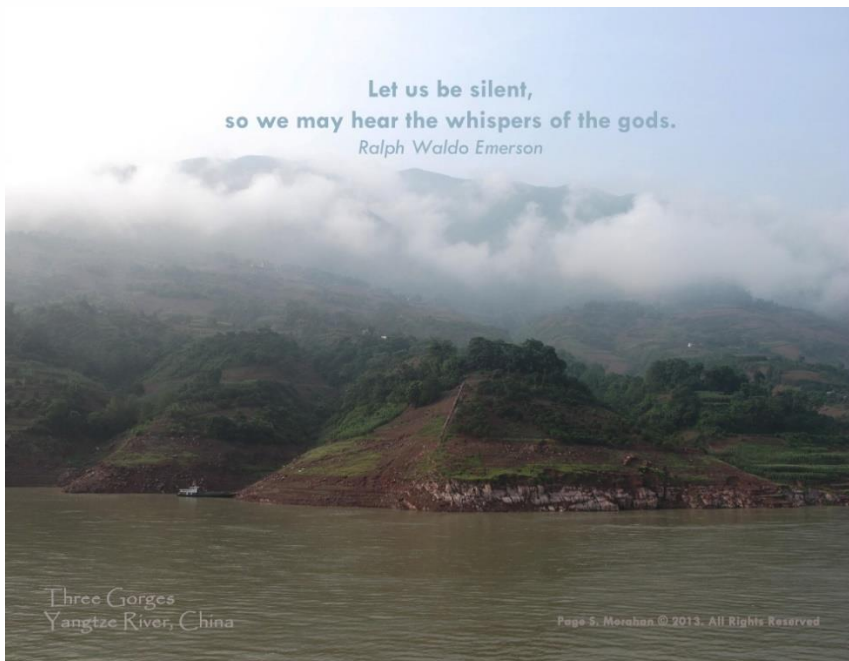


Do you feel inspired by Swedenborg in terms of a relationship between the arts and God?

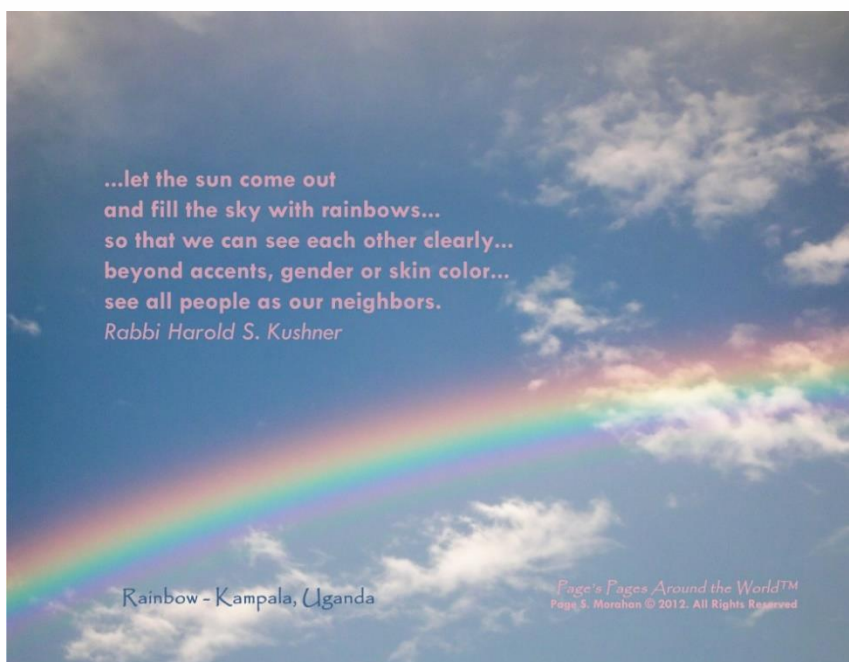
As a relative newcomer to Swedenborg, I have found it very rewarding to try to combine some of Swedenborg's key concepts with photographic images. In a collaborative effort, photographer Jared Alden created four, and I created two images like this for the SwedenborgianCommunity.org website. This process helped me really learn about 'love and wisdom joined', 'respect for all religions', the regeneration process, uses, and correspondences between the natural and spiritual worlds. And I keep a list of Swedenborg's passages that are waiting for the right photo to give me inspiration for more pairing!



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



It has been very interesting to find that Swedenborg respected and honored all the arts – very different from religious views like the Puritans. His wisdom has obviously influenced a great many artists and artistic medium – in writing, visual arts, dance, music and more.



Thanksgiving Address

Greetings to the Natural World by Iroquois Six Nations

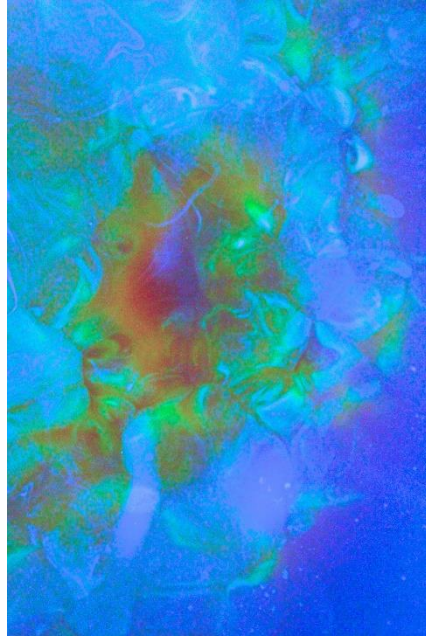


Kathy Webb grew up on a farm in Iowa, and attended a country school.

She had limited exposure to art, but says:

I loved food coloring. Once, when I was about 6 years old, I used the middle of celery as a tiny forest, and dropped different colors of food coloring on it to turn it into a magical forest and used it for a table center piece.

Next, I made a cake with white frosting and then dripped different food colorings all over it. Unfortunately, I used too much and when my family ate the cake, it dyed their lips all different colors!



Kathy grew into a woman with deep spirituality, and she often expresses that spirituality through the arts.

One of her favorites is photography of colors and shapes. Her medium is often coffee and cream, or food coloring and india ink.



She says:

For me, I believe that God is in the process and in the end result. There are actually 3 phases:

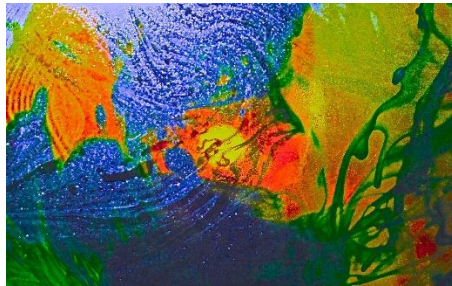
First Phase: Setting Up

Setting up my space to do art is like arranging an altar. It's done with mindfulness and sacredness as I feel like I'm preparing a place where mystery becomes visible. For me, mindfulness is prayer - it is being fully present. Everything else falls away.

Send Phase: The Process

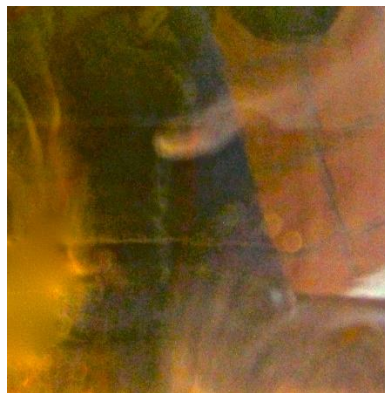
When I pick up the tubes of color or the eyedropper full of india ink, I show up 'without agenda.' I try not to think too much and just let my hand choose the color and move where it seems to want to move.

During this time, I feel a heightened sense of electric energy course through my body - an intense focus. Once I have added color to the water in the glass dish, I quickly grab my camera and start shooting pictures, sometimes tilting the dish, sometimes holding a flashlight on the dish.



Once that step is complete, I download the pictures on my laptop and see what is there. First, I rotate the picture and look at it from all different angles, then crop it and modify the light and color. My aim is to work quickly and not to think too much.

Sometimes I see amazing animals or faces and believe them to be miracles because I didn't plan them or draw them. They just appeared. Other times, I feel this deep connection to the shapes and the colors and just feel them without imagining a deeper meaning other than joy. And then I wonder 'is this a part of God becoming visible?' Or 'what is God communicating to me through this art? Is this a reflection of something going on in my life right now?'



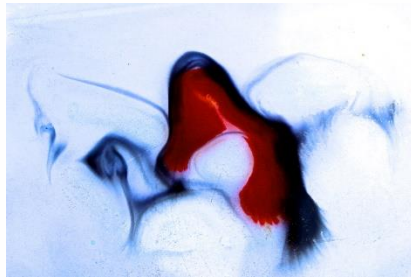
I also throw out several dishes of water with color as I don't see anything that speaks to me. It's sort of like panning for gold. And then, there is something that appears that

sometimes takes my breath away.



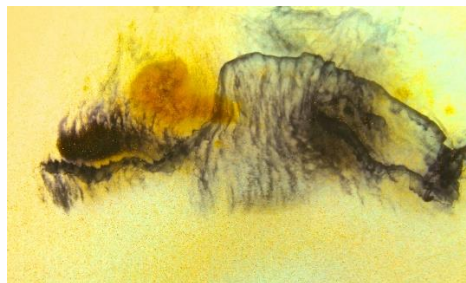
The final process is to have them printed on card stock and share them with friends. And the friends point out so many new images or ways to look at the picture then I have ever imagined. And I listen to spirit speak through them or sometimes I disagree with them. But it always amazes me - how we can look at the same picture and see so many different images?

*I want to know what is in my heart.
Art helps me with this process.*



What relationship do you see between creativity and God?

God and I are co-creating together. That's really all I can think of - it's a partnership.



What else would you like to share about your work?

I guess I would like to encourage others to try the process because it's so simple, inexpensive and yet it can be so profound.

I'm actually going to work with homeless women to help them make cards so they can sell them and make a little extra money.



Artisan...by Rev. Kevin Baxter

August 31, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Deuteronomy 6:3-9

Love the Lord Your God

Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

John 21:1-14

Jesus and the Miraculous Catch of Fish

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but

even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 4747.2

How these things are circumstanced may be seen from what has been already said, and also from what follows. This only need now be said in advance: they who are within the church and have confirmed themselves against Divine truths, especially against these - that the Lord's Human is Divine, and that the works of charity contribute to salvation - if they have confirmed themselves against them, not only by doctrine but also by life, they have reduced themselves to such a state as to their interiors that afterwards they cannot possibly be brought to receive them, for what is once confirmed by doctrine, and at the same time by life, remains to eternity. Those who do not know the interior state of man may suppose that anyone, no matter how he has confirmed himself against these truths, can yet easily accept them afterwards, provided he is convinced. But that this is impossible has been granted me to know by much experience in regard to such persons in the other life. For whatever is confirmed by doctrine is absorbed by the intellectual part, and what is confirmed by life is absorbed by the will part; and that which is inrooted in both man's lives, the life of his understanding and the life of his will, cannot be rooted out. The very soul of man which lives after death is formed thereby, and is of such a nature that it never recedes therefrom. This is also the reason why the lot of those within the church with whom this is the case, is worse than the lot of those who are out of the church; for those who are out of the church, who are called Gentiles, have not confirmed themselves against these truths, because they have not known them; and therefore such of them as have lived in mutual charity, easily receive Divine truths, if not in the world, yet in the other life. (See what was adduced from experience in regard to the state and lot of the Gentiles and other peoples in the other life, n. 2589-2604.)

Message Artisan...Fishing from the Rightside of the Boat

by Rev. Kevin K. Baxter



A little while ago, there was a bit of a controversy surrounding Dunkin' Donuts. Fueled by the desire to compete with "elite" fast-food restaurants like McDonald's, DD rolled out a more refined menu option they called "artisan bagels."

As part of their campaign, the company launched a series of commercials in which people asked what the term "artisan" means. The first commercial linked the concept to the word's actual definition, involving a craftsman or skilled handwork. But after some time, they rewired those commercials. They replaced the original answer, shifting from the traditional definition to defining an artisan bagel as a "really good bagel." This change might have been the result of lawsuits and criticism that the term "artisan" implies the actual participation of a skilled craftsman, not a machine-driven assembly line. The issue becomes about more than ingredients, encompassing the process of the object's creation (bagels, in this case).

So, what is the difference between an artisan and a non-artisan? One might simply say that artisan is a person working at his or her craft, while a non-artisan is a computer-controlled factory line. Some might argue that a computer with the proper programming can take into account all the variables and produce a more consistent product than any person or group of people can. In fact, there is much proof of this phenomenon, and yet we still believe for the most part that handmade or artisanal things are somehow "better." While I could examine the socio-economic level of this valuation, the larger issue of artisanal versus non-artisanal seems to me to be about something a bit more difficult to quantify.



Simply put, the artisan puts his or her heart into it. One might say that there is an energy that is put into the world, but that is not something that can be quantified. The artisan may make more mistakes and not produce a perfectly uniform product, but the artisan cares about the work he or she does. An artisan, in fact, can turn mistakes into works of art, rather than discarding imperfect products via a quality assurance system. When an artisan has worked on something, he or she will have a sense of pride and accomplishment in what has been created. This focus

and this purpose is what is celebrated by an artisan's fans—not just the perfectly uniform quality.

When it comes to our reading, then, one might say, that the disciples fished off the right side of the boat, but let me examine our text from today a little more closely.

Here were the disciples, master fisherman, who took possibly two to three years off while touring and learning with the Lord. What do you think they thought when the Lord, who was on land, told them to fish off the right side of the boat? Let's be honest: how much would one side of the boat or the other really make when we're talking about enormous schools of fish? The answer is "very little." This story is not about proper fishing technique (though if we read it literally, I guess we would claim that you can only catch fish on the right side of a boat).

There they were, fishing and throwing their nets on the left side of the boat all night—and then, on advice from a guy they did not know who told them to throw on the other side of the boat, they landed the catch of catches.

Two things interest me about this story. One is that the disciples were fishermen again, and two, it seems as if their fishing skills had waned.



Perhaps they have returned to their previous fishing careers out of desperation about their future. Perhaps they simply needed to eat. Whatever the reason, they were not on the water because of a love of fishing; after all, they had left that life to follow the Lord. They were there because they did not know what else to do. It is a scene reminiscent of the call of the first disciples, and is supposed to remind the reader of this scene.

We learn from our tradition that "to fish from the left side of the boat" is to live life according to obedience to faith. People sometimes think this is a bad thing, but it is not. To live according to obedience of faith is a useful and good thing. The question is not "is it good or useful?" but "is it rewarding?"

One might say that living according to the obedience of faith is not and is therefore not good or useful. But I would say that to act from obedience to faith *is* good, *is* useful, and *is* rewarding. The disciples were doing just that when the Lord appeared to them and told them to stop and fish on the other side. If the left side were not important, the Lord would have appeared to them as they were about to throw the net into the water on the left side of the boat and yelled, "Stop! What are you doing? Throw the net on the right side of the boat!"

The act of fishing off the left side of the boat is not a mistake. It is essential, in eventually hearing the Lord's call, to look to the left side and the rewards thereafter. The process of trial

and error is at the heart of the issue for the disciples, just as it is for the artisan.

To be an artisan or a spiritual person require some degree of work. We do not just fumble around and accidentally start loving people or the Lord; we must work at it. Anyone can decide to take up an art or craft. They can fiddle with it for some time, but to break through the wall separating the casually interested person from the artisan takes obedience to the art. In the case of the disciples, the difference between the casual follower and the disciples is obedience to the Lord. After all, “disciple” means student, which means there must be some homework.

How is it that the Lord uses obedience to help us transform, one might ask? When I work with wedding couples, I often tell them that I require the wedding service to be finalized at least a month before the wedding, because that will give us the time to work on it once we have finalized the ceremony. In other words, until we make a choice to be obedient to something, we will not have the opportunity to act according to it.

When I was younger, I tried out church; honestly, I didn't like it much. Not until I had the experience of obliging myself to go, by my own choosing, did I really start to uncover the deeper good.

When we discuss Swedenborg's concept of living your love, we often miss a crucial piece of it. We are always living our love, even if our love is selfish. We must do something to elevate our love from a self-directed place. This is often living according to obedience.

Entering into a new life takes work, and that work rests in the work of commitment. If we simply dabble in things without commitment, we do not have what we need to develop the deeper understandings required of spiritual transformation.

This obedience is found in our reading from Deuteronomy when it talks about reciting the goodness of the Lord to your children and binding it to your forehead. The passage is not talking about just saying God is good. It is about telling the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and so on.

Then we are to discuss it. But first we must learn what it is we are going to discuss.

In its deeper sense, the disciples are the parts of us looking for truths in the world around us. It is only through our efforts in obedience that these parts of ourselves are shifted by the Lord toward seeking a deeper love. And the rewards of this transformation are endless.



It is from this point that the disciples leave the fishing world forever and dedicate their lives to spreading the Lord's word. One might say that this is the moment where the student becomes the teacher, the novice an artisan, the follower a disciple. To do this, we must show our love by

our work at obedience. Through the process of ridding our lives of our selfishness (which can only be done through obedience), the Lord's love will fill in the gap. Then we may truly understand what it means to live from love for others and the Lord.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

One Day at a Time

September 7, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 1: 1-5

The Beginning

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

From Swedenborg

Heavenly Secrets, parts of #16-17. NCE

Before regeneration a person is called the void, empty earth, and also soil in which no seed of goodness or truth has been planted.. Void refers to an absence of goodness and empty to an absence of truth. The result is darkness, in which a person is oblivious to or ignorant of anything having to do with faith in the Lord and consequently with a spiritual or heavenly life. ...

Message One Day at a Time

I first heard about the Swedenborgian Church when I was a seminary student with the Boston Theological Institute. I was excited to learn that there was a Swedenborgian parish in Cambridge and a seminary in Newton. [At that time, our seminary – Swedenborg School of Religion – was in Newton, MA.]

I called the school and asked to come for a visit, and as soon as I walked in they took me right to a classroom. There, one of our future ministers was giving a presentation on similarities between Swedenborg's regeneration and the 12 steps of A.A. I was amazed! I had long admired the 12 steps as a process of spiritual growth, but I had never heard that they had similarities to Swedenborg's writings.

That was many years ago. I have since read books and talked with people about this topic. Many people see a similarity between Swedenborg and the steps. There are two ways that similarities are noted:

1. Historically -- The 12 steps may have been influenced by Swedenborgians involved in the emergence of A.A.
2. Theologically -- There are many similarities between the steps and Swedenborg's regeneration, because truth is found in many forms.

Personally, I feel certain that #2 is true, and that these basic concepts of growth are found in many spiritual traditions. Regeneration and the 12 steps are both tools to guide us on a spiritual path.

We will never know about any Swedenborgian influence on early AA and the steps, but it really doesn't matter. What does matter, to me, is that there is such spiritual truth in both. I am intrigued by the Swedenborgians who were involved in early A.A.

I'd like to share a little bit about the background of Lois [Burnham] Wilson who founded Al-Anon, and was the wife of Bill Wilson who wrote the steps and co-founded AA.

Then I'd like to consider how we could use the 12 steps as a tool to more deeply understand regeneration as expressed in Creation.



LOIS BURNHAM WILSON [1891-1988]

She was the daughter of Dr. Clark and Matilda Burnham. Her grandfather, Nathan Burnham, had been a Swedenborgian minister and served in Lancaster, PA. Her father was an active participant in the circle of New York Swedenborgians. Her family purchased a vacation home on Emerald Lake in VT.

One of the Swedenborgian families who spent summers on that lake was the Seekamp's. Young Lois Seekamp knew the Burnham kids; in fact, she was named after Lois Burnham. Dr. Burnham was their family physician. As an adult, Lois Seekamp married George Dole – our Swedenborgian minister in Bath, Maine.

Lois' brother, Roger, became friends with a young man who lived near the lake: Bill Wilson. When Lois was 22, Bill came to their home selling lanterns. They were married in at the NY Swedenborgian Church.

A few folks are still around who remember Dr. Burnham and Lois in church, and then remember Bill and Lois attending together for awhile.

Rev. Jim Lawrence wrote to Lois [Burnham] Wilson in 1987 asking whether her Swedenborgian roots had influenced the development of the 12 steps. She wrote back: *"I don't believe being a Swedenborgian had a direct influence, but it did much to make me ready for the message of the 12 steps which based on the 6 principles of the Oxford group."* One of the New Church ministers [I think it was Grant Schnarr] also wrote with a similar question and got back a similar answer, with her adding that even if it were true, she wouldn't tell anyone because of the importance of AA being separate from any religion.

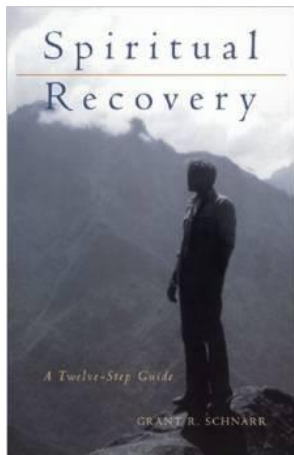
Regeneration and the 12 steps

We begin a new worship theme this month. Our denominational theme for 2014-15 is "Regeneration."

That is Swedenborg's word for the process of spiritual transformation.

We'll look at the 7-stage version of this process in *Heavenly Secrets*, that Swedenborg says corresponds to the 7 days of creation. We'll also look at the 3 stage version in *True Christianity*: Repentance, Reformation, and Regeneration.

Swedenborg wrote that the story contains an inner meaning about our process of spiritual growth: he calls it "regeneration." As we move through the six days of creation, we'll talk about the 12 steps and consider how they can intertwine.



Grant Schnarr's book: [*Spiritual Recovery, a 12 Step Guide*](#), uses the 12 steps to facilitate our spiritual growth. He says: *"The similarities found between Swedenborg's teachings about spirituality, and those found in the twelve-step philosophy are astounding."* [page x]

He also says:

These steps ... have existed in many religions, philosophies, and psychologies throughout the ages. ... they work not only for the addictive-compulsive person, but for all people who desire to grow spiritually." [xiii]

Schnarr rewrites the first step to be applicable to everyone: *we admitted that we were powerless over our destructive tendencies and that, when we followed them, our lives became*

unmanageable.

He points out the importance of recognizing our powerlessness.

I have come across some people – esp. women – who are not comfortable with the word “powerless.” Swedenborg has another way to talk about it:

an individual's overall spiritual devastation--a preliminary step to regeneration. (The prophets have much more to say about it.) Before we can learn what is true and be affected by what is good, the things that stand in the way and resist have to be put aside. The old self must die before the new self can be conceived.

Swedenborg gives us a universal truth: we must let the old self die before a new self can be born. To become aware of our spiritual devastation can be overwhelming. We are not who we thought we were; there is so much more hidden in our depths.

This realization can feel powerless, as we discover that so much of our inner depths are beyond our conscious control. We have to let go of the illusion that we are just our surface self, that we have control over. Letting that old self die – with its comforting illusions – is a process of grief. We must grieve the old self before we are ready to embrace our new self.

Let There Be Light

September 14, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

John 1: 1-9

The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

Genesis 1: 1-8

The Beginning

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3223

There are two lights whereby man is enlightened—the light of the world, and the light of heaven. The light of the world is from the sun; the light of heaven is from the Lord. The light of the world is for the natural or external man, thus for those things which are in him, and although the things which are therein do not appear to be of this light, they nevertheless are so; for nothing can be comprehended by the natural man except by such things as come forth and appear in the solar world, thus except they have somewhat of form from the light and shade therein. All ideas of time and ideas of space,

which are of so much account in the natural man that he cannot think without them, are also of the light of the world. But the light of heaven is for the spiritual or internal man. Man's interior mind, in which are his intellectual ideas that are called immaterial, is in this light. Man is unaware of this, although he calls his intellect sight, and ascribes light to it; the reason is that so long as he is in worldly and corporeal things he has a perception only of such things as are of the light of the world, but not of such things as are of the light of heaven; the light of heaven is from the Lord alone, and the universal heaven is in this light.

This light (namely, that of heaven) is immensely more perfect than the light of the world; the things which in the light of the world make one ray, in the light of heaven make myriads; within the light of heaven there are intelligence and wisdom. This light is that which flows into the light of the world which is in the external or natural man, and causes him to perceive sensuously the objects of actual things; and unless this light flowed in, man could not have any perception, for the things which are of the light of the world derive from it their life. Between these lights, or between the things which are in the light of heaven and those in the light of the world, there exists a correspondence when the external or natural man makes one with the internal or spiritual man, that is, when the former is subservient to the latter; and the things which then come forth in the light of the world are representative of such things as come forth in the light of heaven.

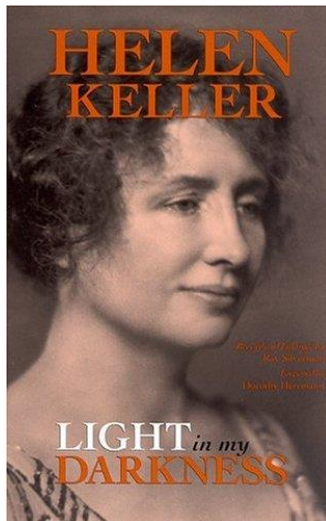
Message Let There Be Light

“This Little Light of Mine” has been one of my favorite songs since I sang it in my Baptist Sunday school as a child. I rediscovered it during the Civil Rights movement as a **folk song**.

This one is by Bruce Springsteen with the Sessions Band Live in Dublin in 2006.

This song is a **Negro spiritual**, and also claimed as a **gospel children's song by Harry Dixon Loes** [1895-1965].

God's light coming into our darkness is the first stage on the spiritual journey.



There are so many people who come to mind whose lives demonstrate how God does this in our lives. Probably my favorite is Helen Keller, whose book *Light in My Darkness* tells of her spiritual journey that was guided by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Like many people, when I first became interested in the Swedenborgian Church, I had no idea that Swedenborg's writings had been so central to Helen Keller's life. She wrote:

I do not know whether I adopted the faith, or the faith adopted me. I can only say that the heart of the young girl sitting with a big book of raised letters on her lap in the sublime sunshine was thrilled by a radiant presence and inexpressibly endearing voice ... the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg have been my light and a staff in my hand, and by his vision splendid I am attended on my way.

If you don't know much about Helen Keller and Swedenborg, be sure to visit [our page](#) about her on our site. While there, you'll be able to read the [text of the talk](#) she gave to our 1919 convention.

Clayton Priestnal, minister of the New York church, spoke at a memorial service, after her death in 1968 at the age of 85. He said:

At least two foundation stones of Miss Keller's religious philosophy were hewn out of Swedenborg's teachings on the afterlife. The first was hope. She began to see clearly that this world was not an end in itself, but a seminary of heaven--a proving ground for the life eternal. Her faith assured her that she would not be burdened forever by sightlessness and a total inability to hear and distinguish sounds. Helen Keller could now look upon her handicaps as a challenge, as a means of spiritual growth, as an education for a future life when she would be able to see, hear, and speak without impediment. There was no bitterness in her towards divine providence, for she knew the Lord was good to all, and he was not in any way accountable for

the visitation of a dreadful affliction. This hope that shone forth so radiantly in her personality shone into the dark corners of despair where sat others who were also without sight.

The other foundation stone of her faith was this: love and use are synonymous. Over and over again her thoughts turned to this basic doctrine of Swedenborg: "The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of uses" (Heaven and Hell #387). This truth became the driving force of Miss Keller's life. Love has no reality, no existence, no meaning, until it goes forth into the lives of others in the form of some essential service.

As a teen-ager, Helen came to have many questions about spirituality. It so happened that a very prominent Swedenborgian wandered into her life about that time. He was John Hitz. He worked with Alexander Graham Bell in an organization to provide material about deafness. When Helen took her questions to him, he provided her with a Braille volume of his writing.

Reading it in Braille, she had a spiritual awakening similar to the one she had had years earlier with her teacher, Anne Sullivan when she realized at the water pump that letters had meaning.

Helen Keller was an ardent advocate of the rights of the disabled and others socially disadvantaged by society.

Her spiritual comprehension is profound. When we talk about God's light in our darkness, most of us are using the term metaphorically, to refer a spiritual or emotional state. Most of us see physically with our eyes, but encounter many periods of spiritual darkness.

In our opening song, Johnny Cash sang:

*Just like a blind man I wandered astray
Straight is the gate and narrow the way
then like the blind man that got back his sight
Praise the Lord I saw the light.*

*I saw the light I saw the light
No more darkness no more night
now I'm so happy no sorrow in sight
Praise the Lord I saw the light.*

He wasn't really singing about a physical light, but rather comparing God's light that is beyond the physical eyes.

For Helen, her darkness was only to the physical world. Her spiritual eyes within saw God, giving her far clearer sight than those of us with physical seeing.

What we need to see God are spiritual eyes; not physical eyes. We need to hear God whispering in our heart; we don't need physical ears for that.

Helen Keller did not just say those words ... she lived them in her busy life of social activism. As

a Swedenborgian, she believed that action is the greatest form of spirituality.

If Helen Keller could find God's light in her darkness, then so can the rest of us. Some days it feels so hard to sense any Divine presence in our lives. We can feel very much cut off and alone. In those times, remember Helen Keller who could not see or hear on this physical plane. But she came to learn that those senses are of little lasting value. It is our capacity to hear and see God in our hearts that is important. And this hearing and seeing are preparation for the spiritual senses we will have for eternity.

She wrote:

*I cannot see the stars scattered in the heavens; but other stars just as bright shine in my soul.
Soul is very real and important to me.*

When we despair of God's light guiding us through darkness, let's remember that God's light is inside. We may not see the divine light with our physical eyes. But we can see clearly with our spiritual eyes. So many of us have "spiritual disabilities" and are fortunate to have the leadership of one with such perfect spiritual sight as Helen Keller.

Join in our closing song, "I Can See Clearly Now." As you sing, focus on "seeing" with spiritual eyes, as Helen Keller taught us:

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*

I am singing this song with you this morning, and I can assure you that it is not literally true, for yet another snow storm blankets the clear skies of Maine.

However, that only matters to the physical. As you sing this, let it be true in your heart:

*Here is the rainbow I've been prayin for
it's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*

Johnny's Apples

September 21, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples: if you love one another. (John 13:34, 35)

From Swedenborg:

The goal of creation is a heaven of angels from the human race; so human beings are the goal of creation. All other created things are intermediate goals. Since all of them relate to humanity, they focus on these three aspects: our bodies, our rationality, and our spirituality--which looks toward our union with the Lord.

We cannot be united with the Lord without being spiritual, nor can we be spiritual without being rational, nor can we be rational without being in a state of physical wholeness. It is like a house: our body is like the foundation, our rationality is like the structure of the house built on it, and our spirituality is like the furnishings of the house. Living in the house is being united with the Lord. (Divine Love and Wisdom #330)

MESSAGE

Johnny's Apples

Rev. Wilma

Last September, I had the pleasure of spending time with Rev. Mary Duckworth, New Church minister visiting from England. She enjoyed the produce of early fall, such as sweet corn and apples. I told her that our local apple cider was outstanding, and I purchased a gallon of it. I poured a big glass for each of us, and took a deep gulp of the cider. Mary looked a bit aghast, and took only a small sip of hers. I asked her if she liked it, and she said she did, but she didn't want to get inebriated. Now I was confused. Mary explained the cider she was familiar with in England was an alcoholic beverage. I laughed, and said, "oh, we call the alcoholic beverage "hard cider," but our apple cider was just fresh apples pressed into a juice. Then Mary, too, took a big gulp and said it was utterly delicious!

I read this in Wikipedia: *Apple cider (also called sweet cider or soft cider) is the name used in the United States and parts of Canada for an unfiltered, unsweetened, non-alcoholic beverage made from apples.*

... Although the term cider is used for the fermented alcoholic drink in most of the world, the term hard cider is used for the alcoholic drink in the United States and much of Canada.

Ah-ha! That explained the cultural difference we had encountered! I remembered that one of the reasons Johnny Appleseed's apples were so popular is that they could be fermented for a cheap alcoholic beverage on the frontier.

Tomorrow, September 22, is the Fall Equinox. It is one of two days in the year when day and night are approximately equal in length. In some traditions, it is a time of reflection and preparation for the winter that lies ahead.

It is a good time to reflect on what Johnny Appleseed means to us.

Here is a conversation I've had many times with various people.

Uh, your religion is WHAT?

Swedenborgian. We honor the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. We're also known as the New Church.

Never heard of you.

Johnny was a Swedenborgian. He was one of the first Swedenborgians in this country. In a way, he was a Swedenborgian missionary, giving out apple seeds and loaning people chapters from Swedenborg's books.

WHAT! I love Johnny Appleseed. I thought I knew everything about him. But I NEVER knew about his religion!

This person is not alone. This week-end in Maine, our country roads are full of farm stands teeming with apples and cider. In Ft. Wayne, Indiana, people are gathering for the annual Johnny Appleseed Festival. Yet, few people know the full story of Johnny's amazing life. Did you know that Johnny Appleseed was a Swedenborgian on a mission? Did you know that his birthday is Sept. 26?

Let's go back in time

.... To Leominster, Massachusetts, on September 26, 1774. A baby was born to Elizabeth and Nathaniel Chapman. They named their son "John." Less than a year later, he was baptized in the Congregational Church. When John was two, his mother died, so John and his sister were raised by relatives while their father served in the Continental army. Later their father re-married and had ten more children.

When John was 18 [in 1792], he felt a strong yearning to "go west", and persuaded his half-brother Nathaniel to join him in the adventure. He took on the profession of "nurseryman." Along the way, he encountered the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg [who had died in 1772]. The very first General Convention of our denomination was in Philadelphia in 1817. Shortly before this first convention convened, there was a fascinating article in a Swedenborgian newsletter from England:

There is in the western country a very extraordinary missionary of the New Jerusalem. A man has appeared who seems to be almost independent of corporeal wants and sufferings. He goes

barefooted, can sleep anywhere, in house or out of house, and live upon the coarsest and most scanty fare. He has actually thawed ice with his bare feet. He procures what books he can of the New Church Swedenborg, travels into the remote settlements, and lends them wherever he can find readers, and sometimes divides a book into two or three parts for more extensive distribution and usefulness. This man for years past has been in the employment of bringing into cultivation, in numberless places in the wilderness, small patches (two or three acres) of ground, and then sowing apple seeds and rearing nurseries. These become valuable as the settlements approximate, and the profits of the whole are intended for the purpose of enabling him to print all the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and distribute them through the western settlements of the United States."

John became active in Ohio, where the government was giving land grants to people from Canada and Nova Scotia who had fought on our side in the Revolutionary War. Johnny was planting trees before settlers even arrived. He continued westward, planting trees, just ahead of the wave of immigration.

As an elderly man, he returned home to Ohio in 1842. He died there 3 years later, and was buried near Ft. Wayne.

It is fascinating to know that Johnny Appleseed was a Swedenborgian. But the real story is not what he believed; it is how he lived his life. What was there about Johnny [Chapman] Appleseed's life that exemplifies Swedenborgian theology?

I see 4 central Swedenborgian themes in his life:

1. He lived **both with his heart and his mind**. He learned about his profession and the Van Mons theory of planting fruit as seed rather than grafting. He learned what kind of soil the trees needed, and he would go back often to check on the growth of his trees. Yet all that he did was focused in his love of people and of the Lord. He felt that he was called to be a preacher and healer; to help God care for people on the plains. He also planted medicinal herbs, and often shared them on his journeys. Swedenborg said that both Love and Wisdom are central to life. They represent spirit-matter; God-humanity; heart-mind. We must bring these "dualisms" into oneness in our lives.

2. He was **friend of all**. He learned many Indian languages and was held in high regard by many of the tribes. He cared about the concerns of both the Indian tribes and the white settlers, and often intervened in conflict. He never killed – either people or animals. He lived in complete harmony with nature. "In field and meadow and forest, he walked, concerned with the spacious thoughts of God. The singularity of his thinking and his living was inextricably entwined with his religious views". Swedenborg emphasizes our oneness with all creation; we are part of a web of existence and we contribute to and are nurtured by the whole.

3. His life was **focused on "uses"**. He lived to be of service to others. Yet, he also attended to his own needs and, as always, that inner leading. He made a living, but money was not his motivation. He would accept cash for his trees – or clothing or food or even nothing at all. He never asked a person to pay a debt, for he reasoned that if God wanted him to have the money, God would move the customer to pay. Besides, the customer knew that he or she owed the

money, without being reminded of it. However, he was not poor, and had some assets that he rarely used. Swedenborg tells us that Love and Wisdom must be expressed by our living a life of useful service to others. Johnny saw himself as a minister, and often said he was bringing *good news; fresh from Heaven*.

4. He lived by the **guidance of his inner calling**. Swedenborg tells us that God's Love is always inflowing to our very being and essence. We can connect with the Divine by looking inward, to find the deep guidance at the depth of our soul. For there we find our deepest love and passion; and it is out of this that we live in oneness with God and the world.

What about Johnny can inspire our lives today? How can we celebrate Johnny's birthday this week?

Let us pray.

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of apples and for the nourishment they bring to our souls and our bodies. Help us use this time of equinox to reflect on all that we have done through this summer, and to prepare our souls for the coming wintertime.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Recognizing Powerlessness

September 28, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 7: 13-29

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord,' did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

From Swedenborg

Heavenly Secrets, #34

All this makes it clear that people who have consequently heavenly life. The same cannot be said of those who claim to have faith but do not lead a loving life. Faith without love is like sunlight without warmth. -- the type of light that occurs in winter, when nothing grows, and everything droops and dies. Faith arising out of love, on the contrary, is like light from the sun in the spring, when everything grows and flourishes.

Message Recognizing Powerlessness

The Experience of an Alcoholic

The alcoholic man had tried everything he could think of to stop drinking, but nothing had worked. One night, quite drunk, he wandered into the Calvary Mission, where a preacher invited people to give their souls to Jesus. The man jumped up and joined others at the railing.

Almost immediately, he felt his desire to drink lifting from him. He was able to walk home passing many bars, without stopping to drink. When he got home, he excitedly told his wife that he knew he had finally stopped drinking! His new-found faith would be enough.

After his wife left for work the next morning, he realized he needed a few drinks to get through the day. He kept drinking for several days, and then staggered to the hospital where he had dried out before. He was very discouraged; even suicidal.

A good friend, and fellow alcoholic, visited him and brought him a copy of William James' [Varieties of Religious Experience](#).

William James was the son of Henry James, who became an avid convert to Swedenborg as a young man, and raised his children Swedenborgian. William had issues with his father, and wouldn't claim his religion. However, his work as a psychologist focused on mystical experience, and seemed quite Swedenborgian in its viewpoint.



Bill wasn't interested in reading, so his friend, Ebby, left the book with him. That night Bill – Bill Wilson, our alcoholic – reached the absolute bottom of despair, and shouted out, *“If there be a God, let him show himself.”*

“Suddenly,” he later wrote, *“my room blazed with an indescribable white light. I was seized with an ecstasy beyond description. Every joy I had known was weak by comparison. Then, seen in the mind's eye, there was a mountain. I stood on its summit, where a great wind blew. A wind, not of air, but of spirit. In great, clean strength, it blew right through me. Then came the blazing thought, ‘you are a free man.’”*

And Bill Wilson was, in fact, a free man at that moment. He never again had another drink, and

was a primary inspiration for the founding of A.A.

We now might say that Bill had just experienced the first two steps. He admitted his powerlessness, and he came to believe in a power greater than himself.

But how had that happened? And why didn't it happen before, such as when he gave his soul to Jesus at the mission a few days earlier?

Swedenborg on Faith

Perhaps the answer lies in what Swedenborg wrote about faith.

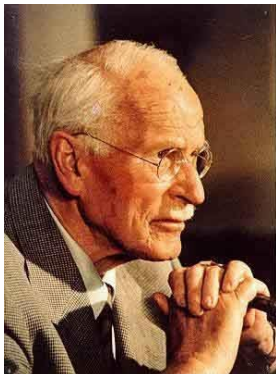
To Swedenborg, faith had to be part of love, to be in the heart; not just in the mind. Many people have a "faith" that is theirs because they were raised with it. They never question it, and they call it their faith. But, they haven't experienced it with their heart; they have only absorbed it as words in the mind.

When Bill saw the light in his room, he was having a spiritual experience. It was not something he thought he ought to believe. It was his own true belief from the experience of his heart that night. And it changed his life forever.

How is it that Bill, Ebby and others came to understand "belief" in that way?

We cannot know for sure, but it does seem that Swedenborg's writings had an indirect influence on early A.A.

Carl Jung and A.A.



One of the earliest influences on the first members was Carl Jung.

In 1931, Roland H. discouraged by his inability to stop drinking, went to learn from Carl Jung in Zurich. He had a year of successful treatment, but as soon as he left, he drank again. He returned to Jung for treatment, but Jung told him that further treatment would be useless. He needed to have a true spiritual awakening, and he suggested a religious group. Roland became involved in the Oxford Group, out of which came most of the early AA members.

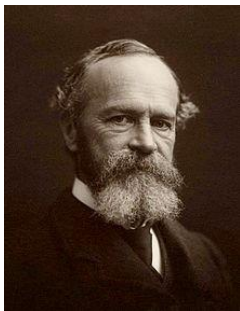
Roland passed the good news about a spiritual awakening on to his friend and fellow alcoholic, Ebby. Ebby also came to the Oxford Group, and learned there of a popular book many members were reading: *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James. It was the book he brought to Bill during his stay in his hospital.

Years Later, Bill Wilson wrote to Carl Jung:

"This concept of [of spiritual experience] proved to be the foundation of such success as Alcoholics Anonymous has since achieved. This has made conversion experience ... available on almost a wholesale basis." In his closing, Bill wrote: "...as you will now clearly see, this astonishing chain of events actually started long ago in your consulting room, and it was directly founded upon your own humility and deep perception."

Carl Jung had read Swedenborg's work during medical school, and had a spiritual psychology similar to Swedenborg's.

William James and A.A.



William James, a professor at Harvard, was an early spokesperson for a spirituality that is personally lived and experienced.

William James wrote:

The simplest rudiment of mystical experience would seem to be that deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula which occasionally sweeps over one. "I've heard that said all my life," we exclaim, "but I never realized its full meaning until now." "... First of all, then, I ask, What does the expression "mystical states of consciousness" mean? How do we part off mystical states from other states?

I simply propose to you four marks which, when an experience has them, may justify us in calling it mystical for the purpose of the present lectures.

Ineffability.—The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, which no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others.

Noetic quality.—Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who

experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect

Transiency.—Mystical states cannot be sustained for long. Except in rare instances, half an hour, or at most an hour or two, seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day.

Passivity.—Although the oncoming of mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, as by fixing the attention, or going through certain bodily performances, or in other ways which manuals of mysticism prescribe; yet when the characteristic sort of consciousness once has set in, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power.

James is writing about the knowing of spirit through experience, rather than the learning words about spirit without experience.

Our Own Experiences

As I grew up, I was given a faith tradition by my family and my church. It was our tradition, and I was to have “faith” that it was true. To even question its validity was to lack faith.

By college years, I had wandered away from that tradition, as it had nothing to attract me. However, when I learned to meditate, I came to have my own experience of a peace and love that had to be Divine.

This is what Swedenborg calls upon all of us to do. We need to open our hearts to Love, and to live our spirituality in our daily lives. We come to know God for ourselves. This “knowing” is not because someone tells us it is so. It is because we open our hearts and live our daily lives with Love.

A personal knowing of God is not always through a mystical experience – such as James wrote about and Bill experienced – it could be through opening our hearts to love.

Swedenborg talks about experience that comes into one’s heart. It changes who you are; not the words that you utter. *A life of faith without love is like sunlight without warmth.*

That may be the deeper meaning to “came to believe.” Not in the sense of learning a creed. But in the William James sense of having a real experience; an encounter with the Divine.

Jung was right that it took such an encounter to bring an alcoholic to recovery.

The same is true for each of us everyday of our lives. God is not expecting us to come to accept some belief system in our minds; but an experience of the Divine in our hearts.

As Swedenborgians, we honor and respect the spiritual encounters we all have in our lives.

What are the experiences in your life that have formed your beliefs?

Mental Illness Awareness Week

October 5, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 4: 23-25, NIV, Jesus Heals the Sick

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia: 4054

The brain, like heaven, belongs to the realm of ends which are uses, for whatever flows in from the Lord is an end looking towards the salvation of the human race. This is the end which reigns in heaven, and also which as a result reigns in the brain, for the brain, where man's mind is seated, looks to ends in the body, that is to say, so that the body may serve the soul and that the soul may be eternally happy.

Message **Menal Illness Awareness Week**

During the 1980's, I had the privilege to be studying in and around the Boston area for both social work and ministry. There are some universities that integrate these two disciplines into one program. But, back then; I rather haphazardly put together my own combination through the Boston Theological Institute and the Boston University School of Social Work. At the time, it was an incredible amount of work and I often questioned why I was doing such an intense undertaking.

In the years since, I have been overwhelmingly grateful that I was trained in both fields. In social work training, I learned extremely valuable understanding of people and mental illness that I have called upon many times in my ministry. During my seminary training, I learned deep spiritual connections that I use everyday as a social worker. I no longer feel that I have two professions, but rather one, that God has united in my heart. I feel incredibly sad when I see the lack of communication between treatment for mental illness and spirituality. I wish I could share with the world the integration that lives in my heart.

I always ponder these thoughts during the first week of October. This week was declared Mental Illness Awareness Week [MIAW] in 1990 by Congress through the lobbying efforts of [NAMI](#) –

National Alliance for Mental Illness. ??Tuesday of this week, October 7th, is designated as a National Day of Prayer for Mental Illness Recovery and Understanding. We'll be integrating some special prayers in our Sunday evening prayer service this week.

NAMI has developed a special section called [Faith Net](#), to integrate spirituality in mental illness recovery.

A recent article on Faith Net is "Building Bridges between Faith and Science" By Nathan Caruso.

He writes:

All too often science and spirituality are seen as mutually exclusive, and for religious or spiritual individuals living with mental illness, this antiquated view can hinder recovery.

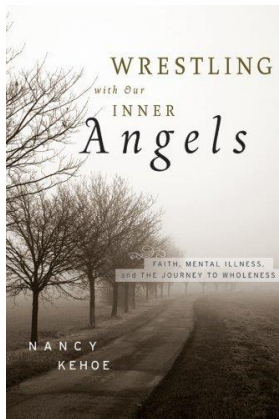
He points out that when a person with mental illness goes to their pastor, Rabbi, or other religious leader, they may encounter someone who had no seminary training in mental illness and is not comfortable recommending mental health treatment. On the other hand, in going to a mental health professional, one may encounter someone who is not comfortable with spirituality or in integrating one's faith tradition into one's treatment process.



Dr. Nancy Kehoe is a psychologist and religious leader in Cambridge, MA. I remember her name from my student days in Cambridge/Boston/Newton where she was so highly respected both in social work training and in seminary. I recall her speaking in a couple of my classes.

She has written a book entitled *Wrestling with Our Inner Angels*. She is working to help integrate mental illness and spirituality, and shared her experiences at the 2010 NAMI conference. She said that she became aware of how the spiritual needs of mental health clients were ignored while she worked in a day treatment program.

She eventually started a "spiritual issues" group, where clients could discuss how their faith impacts their recovery process. Her group model has been replicated around the country.



Recently, NAMI has been reaching out to find ways to integrate spirituality with mental illness recovery.

They write:

A recent study shows that many seminaries fail to adequately train clergy members to help congregants with mental illness. This year, because most religious leaders desire more education, NAMI, through the efforts of national NAMI FaithNet leadership, is joining hands with the American Association of Pastoral Counselors and Pathways to Promise to train seminarians and clergy about mental health issues relevant to their own personal well-being and that of those they serve. The long-range plan is to tap into the resources of other local and national mental health-related organizations and offer six full-day trainings, one each semester for the three years of seminary.

On Oct. 14, 2014, these partner organizations are launching the first pilot Seminary Training Project with a full day conference in Indianapolis at Christian Theological Seminary. Central to this pilot is the educational session, Mental Health Basics for Life & Ministry: What Every Pastor Needs to Know.

The goal of the pilot training project is to raise awareness of mental health issues faced by clergy over their lifetime of ministry, to provide basic skills, models and resources to help equip emerging clergy with the information, understanding and insight they need to respond and refer their congregants affected by mental illness appropriately. Yes, we need each other!

This is putting into practice the wisdom of our own Emanuel Swedenborg. He was relentless in his insistence on the need to integrate mind and heart; science and spirituality; love and wisdom; body and mind.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord of all Being, guide us in our efforts this week to gain deeper understanding of mental illnesses and of those who suffer from them. Help us to see the oneness of healing with mental health professionals and also healing with our communities of faith. We ask Your special blessings this week on all who suffer with mental illness, and their families and friends. Deepen our understanding as we reach out our arms in a healing embrace of loving oneness.

Came to Believe

October 12, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 91: 1-16 (New International Version)

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.

He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

If you make the Most High your dwelling—
even the LORD, who is my refuge—
then no harm will befall you,
no disaster will come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread upon the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

He will call upon me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.

With long life will I satisfy him
and show him my salvation."

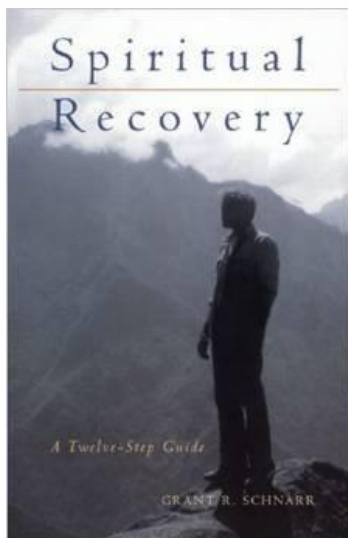
From Swedenborg

Divine Providence 325, #2

Since many Christians (though not all) have a belief that there is a wider church called "a communion," it follows that there must be some very general principles of this wider church that comprises all religions, so that they do make up one communion. We shall see that these most general principles are belief in God and living a good life, in the following sequence. (a) Belief in God brings about God's union with us and our union with God; and denial of God brings about severance. (b) Our belief in God and union with him depends on our living a good life. (c) A good life, or living rightly, is abstaining from evils because they are against our religion and therefore against God. (d) These are the general principles of all religions, through which everyone can be saved.

Message Came to Believe

The 2nd step of AA is: "*Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*"



Grant Schnarr points out that accepting this step means we admit that we are insane and have been leading a life of spiritual insanity. He says,

"Spiritual insanity is knowing what is right, is hearing what is right, but doing the opposite anyway. In its purest interpretation, spiritual insanity is an aversion to or rejection of the truth. It is freely choosing to believe and follow something false over what is true." [*Spiritual Recovery, a 12 Step Guide*, p. 18].

How do we get beyond this insanity? Schnarr says:

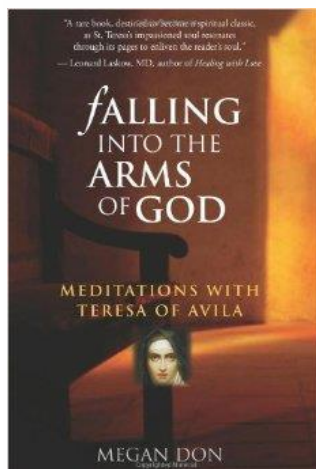
"At times it takes a leap of faith to recognize the reality of God. But it is not a blind leap. It is not the kind of faith where we close our eyes and jump toward God out of fear. A faith based on fear is not true faith. Rather, this leap of faith is a leap with understanding, not one of blind acceptance or doubt, but one of accepting the possibilities with an open mind." [p. 25]

How do we "come to believe" without having to make a blind leap of fear?

Swedenborg says that "belief" in God is about our relationship to the Divine. It is a coming into union with the Divine. And that cannot happen through an intellectual idea about God. He says: *Our belief in God and union with him depends on our living a good life.*

As we strive to live a good life, our relationship with the Divine becomes deeper. What is that like? Perhaps one component of a good relationship with God is trusting the Divine guidance in our lives.

Mystic Teresa of Avila suggests that God may not work in our lives in a way that makes sense to our logical minds. One of the great classics of spiritual literature is her *Interior Castle*, where she shows how God leads us through seven rooms of a mansion until we reach complete union with the Divine. But she warns of the danger of being confident that God take us through each room in succession.



Author Megan Don says:

Believing herself incapable of meditation after many attempts, Teresa [temporarily] gave up the practice. She warned against such nonsense and called for perseverance, saying that we need to release any expectation of what we think should happen and rely on God to guide us. There

are many rooms in the castle, she reminded us, and we may be taken to any of these rooms at any time –it's not up to us to decide where we need to go. Our meditations and prayers can take us into places of deep peace, or into longing or pain; unbidden memories may surface, or feelings of lightness and grace may pervade our soul. As we journey toward the center of our being, may we be open to visiting all the rooms of our castle. [p. 45 of Don's book] Megan Don, ***Falling Into the Arms of God: Meditations with Teresa of Avila.***

How disorienting to think that God might take us anywhere at any time; instead of up a neat and concise staircase! We often think of the spiritual journey as like the public school system of the U.S. We mostly all start in kindergarten or first grade. We know the exact status of every other student by grade – they are in the 4th grade, or the 8th or the 12th. We get a glance of the curriculum that's ahead. We're smug in knowing what the kids behind us will encounter.

But the journey with God is more like a creative home schooling program! There is no failure. Megan Don writes:

We are constantly being given opportunities to re-awaken; that is to remember who we are – divine children of God. Teresa [of Avila] reminds us that this awakening occurs throughout our lifetimes and is not a once or twice only opportunity; rather, it occurs every day in our lives. [p. 45]

There are stages and steps to undertake. Swedenborg talks about regeneration as having seven stages as in the days of Creation in Genesis. The 12 steps of AA show us a similar version of this journey. Some things have to come before others. God had to create the earth before he could put animals on it. One has to acknowledge their addiction to alcohol before making amends for the harm it has caused.

But what if there is a Guiding Spirit leading each of us – not necessarily up a neat step ladder, but through mazes and labyrinths and spirals? It's reassuring to complete a program of study and get a diploma or degree. But God's curriculum isn't tidy with a definitive graduation point. Teresa reminds us that at any point, God might take your hand and lead you into the 4th grade to review an old lesson that never registered. Or lead you into an advanced college seminar far beyond your ability, but contain people and experiences that you need.

Swedenborg presents the stages of regeneration in a linear fashion, but for most of us, I suspect the journey is more like Teresa's journey through the 7 rooms of the mansion – taking God's hand as we are led on a circuitous and challenging individual pathway through the mansion.



Pema Chodron, a Buddhist nun, writes:

The journey of awakening happens just at the place where we can't get comfortable. Opening to discomfort is the basis of transmuting our so-called negative feelings. We somehow want to get rid of our uncomfortable feelings either by justifying them or by squelching them, but it turns out that this is like throwing the baby out with the bath water.

According to the teachings of vajrayana, or tantric, Buddhism, our wisdom and our confusion are so interwoven that it doesn't work to just throw things out. By trying to get rid of negativity, by trying to eradicate it, by putting it into a column labeled bad, we are throwing away our wisdom as well, because everything in us is creative energy-particularly our strong emotions. They are filled with life-force.

On the first day of creation, God brought light into a dark world. God separated light from dark; day from night. The journey begins with dawn – when we see light and realize we have been in darkness.

Awakening to the Divine also means awakening to our selves, and seeking for a true nature under the veneer of our social mask.

Here is a powerful poem by the Sufi, [Rumi](#).

*For years, copying other people, I tried to know myself.
From within, I couldn't decide what to do.
Unable to see, I heard my name being called.
Then I walked outside.*

*The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.
The desire to go back to sleep can be intense.*

In this translation, Rumi sounds like an adult child of an alcoholic, or other dysfunctional upbringing. One can end up trying to copy others rather than finding one's true self. You have to wake up and walk outside.

We must constantly fight the intense desire to go back to sleep.

Yet we can live with the reassurance that no matter how many times we drift into sleep, into spiritual insanity; we are invited to awaken each moment of our lives. By striving to live a good life, we find ourselves coming closer to the Divine, and trusting to put our hand to be guided. That, to Swedenborg, is "coming to believe."

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, please guide me in my journey to come to believe in your Love. Help me to put my hand in Yours, and trust in Your guiding Wisdom. Amen.

Seeing God Face to Face

October 19, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Isaiah 6:1-8:

In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.” And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

Luke 5:1-11:

While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennes'aret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zeb'edee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Message Seeing God Face to Face



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

by Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

I find the Bible readings for this morning both interesting and comforting. They both concern a meeting between man and God. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah sees God above the awe-inspiring cherubim. And in the New Testament reading, Simon Peter, James, and John meet Jesus while they are fishing. In both passages, God comes to the people—they don't seek Him out. And God comes to the people where they are in life. He doesn't appear in a period of prayer, or meditation—He comes right in the middle of their lives. The first response of the people to whom God comes is the same. They both feel conscious of their own unworthiness. Isaiah says, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts (6:5). Likewise, Simon Peter bows down at Jesus' knees and says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). The striking thing about these responses is that they come from the people themselves, not God. It is Isaiah and Peter who see themselves as sinful, not God. And God stays right there with them; He does not depart. He cleanses Isaiah with a coal taken from the temple and despite his fear, Peter follows Jesus straightaway.

I take two basic ideas from these readings. One is how God sees us. And the other is God's response of cleansing when we are brought into His presence.



I was comforted by the way God acts when He appears to Isaiah and Peter. Both men feel their own unworthiness, in fact, their sinfulness. Yet this is no offence to God. God comes to us regardless of our own spiritual state. We don't have to be perfect for God to come to us. We need not be saints to encounter God. In so many passages in the Old Testament, we hear of God being angry, or punishing, or even vengeful. But Swedenborg teaches that these are all appearances. They are ideas about God that were given to a primitive, warrior people, who themselves thought that way. So they saw God that way. But Swedenborg sees God very differently. He makes a beautiful statement about how God views the human race. He says that God does not see our evils. And furthermore none of those dreadful images of God represent who God actually is.

The Lord imputes good to every person, but hell imputes evil to every person. That the Lord imputes to man good and not evil, while the devil (meaning hell), imputes evil is a new thing in the church; and it is new for the reason that in the Word it is frequently said that God is angry, takes vengeance, hates, damns, punishes, casts into hell, and tempts, all of which pertain to evil, and therefore are evils. But . . . the sense of the letter of the Word is composed of such

things as are called appearances and correspondences . . . when such things are read these very appearances of truth, while they are passing from a person to heaven, are changed into genuine truths, which are, that the Lord is never angry, never takes vengeance, never hates, damns, punishes, casts into hell, or tempts, consequently does evil to a person (TCR 650).

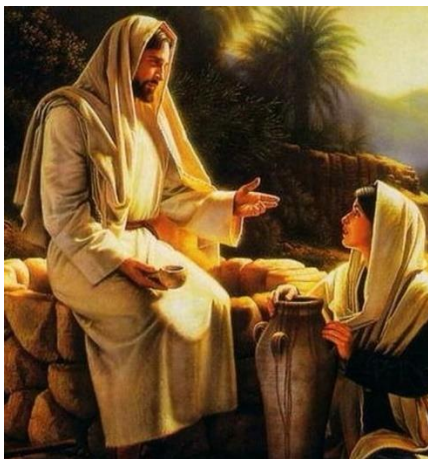
In another place, Swedenborg tells us that God cannot even look at us sternly,

as He wills only what is good he can do nothing but what is good. . . . From these few statements it can be seen how deluded those are who think, and still more those who believe, and still more those who teach, that God can damn any one, curse any one, send any one to hell, predestine any soul to eternal death, avenge wrongs, be angry, or punish. He cannot even turn Himself away from humanity, nor look upon anyone with a stern countenance (TCR 56).

God doesn't even judge us, let alone damn anyone to hell.

That the Lord imputes good to every person and evil to none, hence that He does not judge any one to hell, but so far as a person follows raises all to heaven are evident from His words: Jesus said, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all persons unto Myself" (John 12:32); "God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17); Jesus said, "I judge no man" (John 8:15) (TCR 652).

And God's love extends to the whole human race—good and bad. "The love of God goes and extends itself, not only to good persons and things, but also to evil persons and things" (TCR 43).



What would it feel like to see God face to face? Perhaps like the Bible passages we heard this morning, meeting God face to face might make us feel our own unworthiness. In the presence of infinite goodness and infinite love, we would probably see how far from infinite goodness we are. This brings to mind the second aspect of these Bible readings. In Isaiah, God purifies the prophet with a coal taken from the altar. And in the New Testament, despite his own feeling of sin, Peter drops his nets and immediately follows Jesus. When God comes to us, He brings us purification.

What purification means is seen differently in different churches. Some Christians say that Jesus bore our sins, and our sins are atoned for if we believe. Swedenborg sees the matter differently. For Swedenborg, our sins have become a part of our personality. They are in our emotions, our thoughts, and our behaviors. They are part of who we are. In order to be purified, we need to examine ourselves and see for what it is each self-limiting thought and response. We need to weed the garden of our personality and root out those aspects that would choke off the fruit of the Spirit.

Sins are removed so far as a person is reborn, because rebirth is restraining the flesh that it may not rule, and subjugating the old man . . . Who that yet has sound understanding, cannot conclude that such things cannot be done in a moment, but successively, as a person is conceived, carried in the womb, born, and educated . . . For the things of the flesh or the old man are inherent in him from birth . . . as an infant grows, reaches childhood, then youth, and then begins to think from his own understanding, and to act from his own will. Who does not see that such a house which has been thus far built in the mind, . . . cannot be destroyed in a moment, and a new house built in place of it? Must not the lusts . . . be themselves first removed, and new desires which are of good and truth be introduced in the place of the lusts of evil and falsity? That these things cannot be done in a moment every wise person sees from this alone, that every evil is composed of innumerable lusts; . . . therefore unless one evil is brought out after another, and this until their connection is broken up, a person cannot be made new (TCR 611).

Even though this is a lifelong process—indeed a process that continues to eternity in the next life—the good news is that everyone can be reborn if they are but open to God’s influence. Swedenborg states this in no uncertain terms, “Since all men have been redeemed, all may be regenerated each according to his state” (TCR 579). This idea of rebirth is inclusive, rather than exclusive. It means that everyone has their own path to take in the process of spiritual rebirth. One person’s path may be very different from another’s. Our path may be very different from someone else’s. The variety of ways in which people are reborn are as infinite as there are faces in the human race.

All may be regenerated, each according to his state; for the simple and the learned are regenerated differently; as are those engaged in different pursuits, and those who fill different offices . . . those who are principled in natural good from their parents, and those who are in evil; those who from their infancy have entered into the vanities of the world, and those who sooner or later have withdrawn from them . . . and this variety, like that of people’s features and dispositions, is infinite; and yet everyone, according to his state may be regenerated and saved (TCR 580).

There is a powerful force emanating from God that draws everyone in the whole human race upward to heaven.

There is actually a sphere elevating all to heaven, that proceeds continually from the Lord and fills the whole natural world and the whole spiritual world; it is like a strong current in the ocean, which draws the ship in a hidden way. All those who believe in the Lord and live according to His precepts, enter that sphere or current and are lifted (TCR 652).



I find these passages remarkably refreshing. It isn't only people who have been brought up good who are regenerated, but even those who Swedenborg says "are in evil." When I read this, I think about those unfortunate young people who are brought up in neighborhoods where gangs dominate the culture. Or others who have had difficult upbringings. All these can be reformed and regenerated—each according to his or her upbringing and state of mind.

I think the main point in all this is to be open to God when He comes. In Revelation, Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Let us all listen for that knock. And let us all, regardless of what state we are in, open the door and eat the holy supper with our Lord.

Spiritual Journeying

October 26, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 35:1-15:

God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him,

"Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; then let us arise and go up to Bethel, that I may make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."

So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem. And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were round about them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, and there he built an altar, and called the place El-bethel because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. And Deb'orah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel; so the name of it was called Al'lon-bacuth. God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So his name was called Israel. And God said to him,

"I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you."

Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

Matthew 2:13-23:

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained

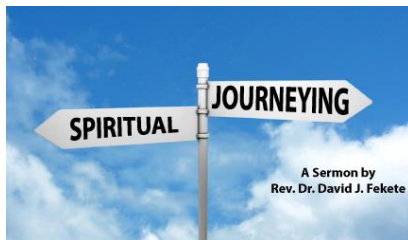
there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt have I called my son.” Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled,
because they were no more.”

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archela’us reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

Message Spiritual Journeying

by Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete



We rarely reflect on our psychological states — the various moods we feel or our mental processes. Yet the states of mind we go through are what make up our spiritual life. Actually, when Swedenborg talks about our states, he means more than the passing emotions we go through throughout the day. I think he means more like the general personality we have and how it changes through our lifetime. And this general personality is what our spiritual life is made out of.

Our Bible readings are all about journeys. The stories in Genesis are filled with journeys. I picked a segment out of Jacob’s journeys. In our reading this morning, God tells Jacob to go to Bethel and settle there. This journey is cyclical. Jacob had been living in Bethel earlier, then he traveled all the way to Paddan Aram in Mesopotamia, where present day Iraq

is. Then he returns to Bethel, where he has a vision of God, just as he also had a vision of God during his first visit. But with all the experiences Jacob had between visits, when he came to Bethel for the second time, he was a different person that he was at his first visit.

Likewise in the New Testament story, we hear of Jesus' family leaving Israel to go to Egypt. They remain in Egypt until Herod dies, whereupon they return to Israel. So in the New Testament story, too, we have an account of a cyclical journey. And no doubt spending however long they spent in Egypt must have had a profound effect on the family. They must have returned changed from when they left.

I chose these travel stories, because our spiritual development is a kind of journey. In Swedenborg's Bible interpretation, all the journeys of the Biblical people and the places they go are symbolic of spiritual states. In life and in the afterlife, our states will undergo changes. Our souls are on a journey through different spiritual states. Swedenborg writes,

The changes of state in the other life are as the times of day in the world, morning, midday, evening, and night, or twilight, and again morning. It is to be known that in the spiritual world there are perpetual changes of state, and all who are there pass through them (AC 8426).

So in our spiritual development, we will be led through various states.

By journeying through different psychological states, we learn and develop as individuals. Swedenborg tells us that the states we go through perfect us. So the leading idea here, is that we are constantly being perfected. Heaven is not a static place, we continue to grow and develop there, as we do here on earth, too. Here is where Swedenborg's theology is so different from traditional Protestants. He really emphasizes the perfection of the soul. And in this, he may be closer to those yoga traditions of the East that emphasize clarification of the spirit through meditation. Swedenborg's system is not one of meditation, but his emphasis on the real project of spiritual perfection is just as radical and rigorous.

It is to be known that in the spiritual world there are perpetual changes of state, and all who are there pass through them. The reason is, that they may be continually perfected, for without changes of state, or without variations continually succeeding one another in order, they who are in the spiritual world are not perfected. . . . When it is morning, then they are in love; when it is midday, then they are in light or in truth; but when it is evening, then they are in obscurity as to truths and are in the enjoyment of natural love (AC 8426).

The changes of state that we go through in our spiritual journey reflect the levels of our soul. As we have seen just a few Sundays ago, we have inner and outer aspects to our personalities. We have actually three levels, in Swedenborg's system. The lowest level is called natural, and concerns life in this world and the cares of the body. Then there is the spiritual level, which is internal. Finally, there is the heavenly level which is the highest and inmost. We are brought through these levels in succession. We find our consciousness sometimes in spiritual heights and sometimes in worldly concerns. The best part about this process of alternating states, is that all the levels we find ourselves on are things we love. We

love God and heaven, but we also love the world and the things of the body. So the changes we go through reflect these differing aspects of what we love. Notice that in the quote I just cited, in the lowest state we are in the **enjoyment** of natural love. Through this cyclical journey from the spiritual heights to the natural lows, we become more and more keenly aware of the delights given by God and more and more keenly aware of the negativity of pleasures of ego.

The different states we have gone through remain impressed upon our soul's memory. And in the next life, they all return. We will experience the innocence of childhood, the excitement of learning from youth, the adult desire to make a contribution to society, and old age's calm and serenity.

. . . every state of a person, from his infancy to extreme old age, not only remain in the other life but also returns, and this just as they were when he was living in the world. Not only do the goods and truths of memory thus remain and return, but also all states of innocence and charity (AC 561).

The return of these states and their alternation are how we are perfected. Swedenborg does not just assert that we are perfected, he also describes the process. Our states of evil return too, but they are modified and softened by the states of good that we have been through.

And when states of evil and falsity or of malice and fantasy recur—which also remain and return, every one of them to the least particulars—then these states are tempered by the Lord by means of the good states (AC 561).

As an interesting aside, Swedenborg describes the theological terms evil and falsity as malice and fantasy. This leads me to think we can replace some of the perhaps outworn theological terms in his writings with more contemporary ones. Malice and fantasy sound more descriptive and are perhaps more acceptable to the modern ear than the terms evil and falsity.

We can't really control this process. And it's a good thing. God leads us imperceptibly through the different states of our spiritual journey. We can't see where we are going all the time, but God's Divine Providence can see just what our spiritual growth requires.

Providence continually regards what is eternal and continually leads unto salvation, and this through various states, sometimes glad, sometimes sad, which a person cannot at all comprehend: but still they conduce to his life eternal (AC 8560).

Borrowing Paul's terminology, Swedenborg describes the process by which we die to the old self and are resurrected into the new self. Paul writes,

Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-23).

The purpose behind the states we go through is to break up the passions of the world and ego and let in heavenly affections. So like Paul, Swedenborg talks about the old self dying and the new self being born,

The new man is altogether different from the old; for the new man is in affection for spiritual and heavenly things, and these make its enjoyments and blessedness; but the old man is in affections for worldly and earthly things, and these make its enjoyments and pleasures. . . . When a person, therefore, from the old man is made new, that is, when he is regenerated, it is not done in a moment, as some believe, but during many years, and indeed, during the man's whole life, even to its end. For his lusts are to be extirpated, and heavenly affections to be implanted; and the man is to be gifted with a life which he had not before, and of which indeed he scarcely knew anything (AC 4063).



We are led out of worldly passions into heavenly affections by God's Divine Providence. It is a journey that will be glad at times and sad at times. But we need to trust in God, that what we are living through will conduce to our spiritual progress. I like that phrase in Swedenborg that says, "man is to be gifted with a life which he had not before, and of which indeed he scarcely knew anything." People in AA often say that if they had made a list of what they wanted when they first came into the program, they would have shorted themselves. We have no clue what beauties lie ahead of us in our journey. We can't know how delightful heavenly affections will feel until we have been brought into them. What we wanted when we were in a lower spiritual condition seemed good to us then. But as we grew into a more elevated condition, those delights paled before the new joys we discover. The road we walk may be at times one of sorrow, doubt, even despair. But those of us who have the gift of years most likely can look back on their life, and see a more profound joy and clearer thinking than they knew in earlier years.

The Amazing Coat

November 2, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Gen. 37:12-36

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

"They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'"

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing - and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?"

Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."

He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him.

Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

From Swedenborg

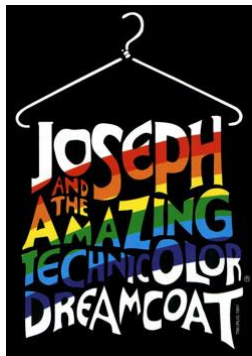
Arcana Coelestia 4776

An evil wild beast hath devoured him. That this signifies that the cupidities of evil had extinguished it, is evident from the signification of an "evil wild beast," as being a lie from a life of cupidities (n. 4729), ... A life of cupidities consists in loving self only, and not the neighbor except from self, or for the sake of self. Hence those who are in this life extinguish charity in themselves; and those who extinguish charity, extinguish also love to the Lord; for there is no other means of loving the Lord than charity, because the Lord is in charity....

That no one can be saved unless he has lived in the good of charity, and so has become imbued with its affections, which are to will well to others, and from willing well to do well to them; and that no one can receive the truths of faith - that is, become imbued with them and appropriate them to himself - but he who is in a life of charity has been made manifest to me from those who are in heaven, with whom I have been permitted to converse. There all are forms of charity, with beauty and goodness according to the quality of their charity; their delight, satisfaction, and happiness are from their being able to do good to others from good will. The man who has not lived in

charity cannot possibly know that heaven and its joy consist in willing well and in doing well from willing well, because his heaven is willing well to himself, and from this willing well doing well to others, when yet this is hell. For heaven is distinguished from hell in this, that heaven, as above said, is doing good from good will, and hell is doing evil from ill will. They who are in love toward the neighbor do good from good will; but they who are in the love of self do evil from ill will. The reason of this is that they love no one but themselves, and others only so far as they see themselves in them, and them in themselves; they also regard these with hatred, which manifests itself as soon as they recede and are no longer theirs. This is like robbers, who so long as they are banded together love one another, but still at heart desire to kill one another, if plunder may thus be obtained.

Message The Amazing Coat



A number of years ago, I went to a local summer theater with friends to see the musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*. I was delighted by the rousing program of singing through the story of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery because they were jealous of the beautiful coat his father had made for him. When I first heard the song *There's One More Angel in Heaven*, I couldn't stop laughing! When Joseph's brothers return to give a cover story to Dad about the wild beast that devoured Joseph as he fought to save them, I was quite amused at how, through music and dance, they try to convince their father that Joseph died a hero. I've heard the musical many times since then, but I still can't stop chuckling when I hear the music. If you haven't seen this Webber and Rice musical – or haven't seen it for a long time – you can follow [THIS LINK](#) to the 1999 movie version in a series of YouTube presentations. Like in the play, there is no spoken dialog; the story is told through music and dance.

Swedenborg, of course, gives us the deeper meaning of this well-known Biblical story.

An evil wild beast hath devoured him. That this signifies that the cupidities of evil had extinguished it, is evident from the signification of an "evil wild beast," as being a lie from a life of cupidities (n. 4729), ... A life of cupidities consists in loving self only, and not the neighbor except from self, or for the sake of self. Hence those who are in this life extinguish charity in themselves; and those who extinguish charity, extinguish also love to the Lord; for there is no other means of loving the Lord than charity, because the Lord is in charity....

The lie the brothers tell comes from self-love. They think only of themselves, and cannot see the needs of others. They have no love for others, or for the Divine.

This is the story of all of us before spiritual growth begins. ... *The first stage is called void, emptiness, and darkness.* [Arcana Coelestia 7] However, in the second stage, *a distinction is made between the Lord's, and the things that are our own.* As the story unfolds, we see the many tragedies impacting the lives of all of the characters, until the second stage can be seen. Swedenborg tells us that this stage rarely comes *into play without grief, trouble, and misfortune.* This story is one that demonstrates the trauma, fear, and starvation that impacts the lives of all of these people. By the end, we see the spiritual growth in everyone.

This second stage in Swedenborg's account of spiritual growth is sometimes compared to the second and third steps in Alcoholics Anonymous.

#	12 STEPS	SWEDENBORG
		REPENTANCE
#1 Sept.	We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol. That our lives had become unmanageable	Void 1st glimmerings that there is an "inner self" and that "Goodness" and "Truth" exist
#2 Oct.	Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.	Remains Separation between inner and outer self. Inner self has good feelings and true ideas. It is "heaven."
#3 Nov.	Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him	Outer self is "earth" and starts to realize existence of "heaven." Often trouble, misfortune and grief happen as worldly things [the outer self] fade in importance.

This section of our 2014-2015 Theme Schedule compares these. [Click Here](#) to view the entire year's schedule of our journey this year, exploring Swedenborg's stages of growth with the 12 steps of A.A.

This month we're looking at the 3rd step, "made a decision to my will and life over to the care of God as we understood God" and we are noting the similarities with Swedenborg's 2nd stage of growth.

Swedenborg's understanding of the seven days of creation [six days of creation; one of rest] are themes that we find other places throughout mystical literature.

One of them is St. Teresa's *Interior Castle*, where she describes seven rooms en route to God. Swedenborg tells us that it is a long journey from our first awareness of something beyond ourselves, to our recognition of a Divine, to now. Her 7 rooms have much similarity to Swedenborg's seven stages. Here is what Teresa says about the 2nd room of the mansion:

These souls hear our Lord calling them, for as they approach nearer to where His Majesty dwells He proves a loving Neighbour, though they may still be engaged in the amusements and business, the pleasures and vanities of this world. While in this state we continually fall into sin and rise again ... Yet such are the pity and compassion of this Lord of ours, so desirous is He that we should seek Him and enjoy His company, that in one way or another He never ceases calling us to Him. So sweet is His voice, that the poor soul is disconsolate at being unable to follow His bidding at once, and therefore, as I said, suffers more than if it could not hear Him. [The 2nd Mansions, Chapter 1, Point 4].

Evelyn Underhill, noted author on mysticism, also describes a series of stages on the mystical journey of spiritual growth. After the initial awakening [perhaps similar to Swedenborg's first stage], she talks about a period of **"purgation:"**

Primarily, then, the self must be purged of all that stands between it and goodness: putting on the character of reality instead of the character of illusion or "sin." It longs ardently to do this from the first moment in which it sees itself in the all-revealing radiance of the Uncreated Light.

There are so many we can look to see the story of spiritual growth. Swedenborg's account of creation is a story of everyone's spiritual journey. Similar themes are found in the 12 steps of A.A., and in much mystical literature, such as St. Teresa's *Interior Castle* and Evelyn Underhill's **Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness**.

Of course, the most important place to find this story unfolding is in all of lives. How does this journey of spiritual growth play out within your own life?

The closing song is a scene towards the end of the story of Joseph, where there is growth and reconciliation. This is a delightful calypso: It takes place when Benjamin and the brothers have been through 7 years of starvation, and go to Egypt to beg for food. They don't recognize Joseph, and he has an item hidden on Benjamin and accuses him of theft. Soon, Joseph reveals himself, and a happy family reunion takes place.

Surrendering to God

November 9, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 16-24

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

"Which ones?" the man inquired.

Jesus replied, " 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 5650

'So that he may come down on us and fall on us' means that for this reason they were subjected to its absolute power and control. This is clear from the meaning of 'coming down on someone' as considering him blameworthy; and from the meaning of 'falling on someone' as making him subject to one's is absolute since the statement 'take us as slaves, and our asses' follows after this. The implications of all this are as follows: Before the natural man is joined to the spiritual, or the external man to the internal, he is left to consider whether he wants the strong desires that spring from self-love and love of the world, also such ideas as he has used to defend those desires, to be done away with, and whether he wants to surrender dominion to the spiritual or internal man. He is left to consider this so that he may choose in freedom what he pleases. When the natural man without the spiritual contemplates this possibility he rejects it; for he loves his strong evil desires for the reason that he loves himself and the world. Such a

contemplation fills him with anxiety and he imagines that if those desires are done away with his life would be finished; for he locates everything in the natural or external man. Alternatively he imagines that after they have been done away with he will be left with no power of his own and that all his thought, will, and action will come to him through heaven, so that he will no longer have any responsibility for these. Once the natural man has been left to himself in this condition, he draws back and becomes resistant. But when some light flows from the Lord through heaven into his natural he starts to think differently. That is to say, he now refers the spiritual man to have dominion, for then he is able to think what is true and to will what is good and so is able to enter heaven, which is not possible if the natural man has dominion. And when he considers that all the angels in the whole of heaven are like this and as a consequence experience joy defying description, he goes to war with the natural man and at length wishes to make the same subject to the spiritual. This is the condition into which someone who is to be regenerated is brought, so that he can in freedom turn where he wills; and insofar as he does in freedom turn in that direction he is being regenerated. All these matters are the things under consideration here in the internal sense.

Message Surrendering to God

I discovered the 12 steps and become a feminist about the same time in my life.

Those two parts of my life sometimes clashed.

This was especially true with the Third Step:

3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of **God** as we understood Him.*



God was not a “him” to me. Furthermore, I had no intention of turning my will and life over to anyone – human OR Divine. I knew that my spiritual wholeness was about recognizing and claiming who I was; not surrendering my essence. The term “surrender” made me think of being on a battlefield, and being defeated.

I was working on a Doctorate of Ministry at the time, and decided to do my thesis on the 12 steps, bringing in the feminist-liberation theology focus of my doctoral work, as well as Swedenborgian theology to help me find meaning in the steps.

I knew that many 12-step meetings read the 3rd step this way:

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

I was much more comfortable with that version. As I researched, I discovered a great many other ways that that step had been rewritten:

One feminist version goes “*became willing to change and asked for help.*”

Another one from [Charlotte Kasl](#) suggests:

We make a decision to become our authentic selves and trust in the healing power of the truth.

In her book, *Thirteen Steps: An Empowerment Process for Women*, Bonita Swan wrote: : “When I nurture the bond between my higher self and daily choices, I create energy.”

[Women for Sobriety](#), a national program for women alcoholics, used: Happiness is a habit I will develop. Happiness is created, not waited for.

I find the concept of “surrender” in Eastern spiritual traditions to be quite meaningful. This is by Rumi’s:

How did you get here?

Close your eyes and surrender.”

“They are the chosen ones who have surrendered.”

“The hurt that we embrace becomes joy.”

~ [Rumi](#)

This is from the Buddha:

“In the end these things matter most: How well did you love? How fully did you love? How deeply did you learn to let go?” ~ [The Buddha](#)

[Ron Rattner](#), a mystic, wrote his understanding of “surrender”:

The idea of spiritual “surrender” is encapsulated in the maxims: “Let go, and let God”; “Go with the Flow”; and “Not my will, but Thy will be done”. Both Eastern and Western religious and spiritual teachings stress the importance of allowing the inconceivably immense power of Nature, the Tao, or the Divine to guide our lives; of simply surrendering to Life, and allowing it to live us as it may. Before surrendering, we may egoically think ourselves separate from other beings and life-forms, and that we are in ultimate control of our lives. But, as we gradually realize that we are inextricably part of Nature, not separate from it, and that Nature Knows best and is in control, we more and more allow Nature, not ego, to guide us.

I think that these Eastern approaches come close to how Swedenborg approaches this issue.

He points out that we can surrender to evil:

Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 8550

Each individual is born into the evils of self-love and love of the world inherited from parents. Every evil which has become second nature through habitual surrender to it is transmitted to offspring, thus from one generation to the next by parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and so on going a long way back. The evil transmitted in this way becomes at length so great that the whole of a person's own life is nothing but evil. ...

AC 5650

Before the natural man is joined to the spiritual, or the external man to the internal, he is left to consider whether he wants the strong desires that spring from self-love and love of the world, also such ideas as he has used to defend those desires, to be done away with, and whether he wants to surrender dominion to the spiritual or internal man. He is left to consider this so that he may choose in freedom what he pleases.

Swedenborg doesn't often express a concept of "surrender" in our relationship with the Divine. Rather, he talks about a slow process of growing towards union through regeneration.

Heaven and Hell (Dole) n. 300

Heaven's union with us is not like the union of one person with another, but is a union with the deeper levels of our minds and therefore with our spiritual or inner person. There is, though, a union with our natural or outer person by correspondences, which union will be discussed in the next chapter when I deal with heaven's union with us by means of the Word.

He describes it like a marriage:

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 10168

Love truly conjugal is the union of two minds, which is a spiritual union; and all spiritual union descends from heaven. From this it is that love truly conjugal is from heaven, and that its first being is from the marriage of good and truth there. The marriage of good and truth in heaven is from the Lord; wherefore in the Word the Lord is called the "Bridegroom" and "Husband," while heaven and the church are called the "bride" and "wife;" and therefore heaven is compared to a marriage.

I have come to value the concept of "surrender" in Swedenborg's writings, but to understand it differently from what I once thought. I have come to see "surrender" as "coming into union" with the Divine. It is giving less attention to my ego desires, and aligning my will more often with the Divine focus on love and loving actions.

Through the regeneration process, Swedenborg has a stage of "reformation," where one is trying to live by Divine will rather than ego will. But it is an effort, and one needs rules and reminders to maintain it.

Later, in regeneration, our will becomes aligned with God's, so that "God's" will and my will are merged together. Living with love makes me happy. I doubt that any of us obtain perfection in earthy life, but we make progress.

I think of the third step now with a Swedenborgian flavor. Perhaps it is something like this in my mind:

I open my heart to the inflow of Divine Love and Wisdom, and grow towards the union between my humanity and God's divinity.



Perhaps others of you can think of better ways to word a Swedenborgian approach to “surrender.” I think what is important to him is a gradual process. It might begin with a moment when I say I’m turning my ego over to God, but it is starting a long slow process of opening myself to an inner connection with the Divine. It is not the kind of surrender where my ego must be stamped out, but rather where it slowly intertwines with the Divine, so that what “I” want becomes at one with Divine Love and Wisdom.

I’ve come to feel a new integration with the twelve steps, my feminism, and Swedenborgian theology. I feel they all exist together now, within Swedenborg’s “regeneration.”

How do you understand “surrender”? How does it work in your life? How do you think Swedenborg might word the third step?

In the Beginning Was the Word

November 16, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Jeremiah 1:4-10:

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”*

Then I said, *“Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.”* But the Lord said to me,
*“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’;
for to all to whom I send you you shall go,
and whatever I command you you shall speak.
Be not afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”*

Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me,
*“Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.
See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.”*

John 1:1-18:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, *“This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.’”*) And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia 3735

. . . a person who reads the Word in a holy manner, is by such correspondence conjoined closely with heaven, and through heaven with the Lord, . . . The holy itself which is then with a person, is from an influx of celestial and spiritual thoughts and affections such as angels have.

Message In the Beginning Was the Word

by Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete



In our New Testament reading this morning we heard the words, "In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This Word is the first proceeding of God, or God's Divine Truth. And it is this Divine Truth, this Word that was in the beginning with God and was God, this Word is our Bible. Swedenborg tells us,

There are two things which proceed from the Lord, Divine Love and Divine Wisdom; or, what is the same, Divine Good and Divine Truth; for Divine Good is of His Divine Love, and Divine Truth is of His Divine Wisdom. The Word in its essence is both of these (Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture 3).

The Bible is entirely holy and of God. It is spiritual in all its parts and as a whole. Swedenborg states that,

The style of the Word is the Divine style itself, with which no other can be compared, however sublime and excellent it may seem. The style of the Word is such that the holiness is in every sentence and in every word, even in some places in the very letters (TCR 191).

This may be evident in parts like the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, or the two great commandments of the New Testament.

But then there are many parts of the Bible that don't appear so holy. Swedenborg comments on this.

The Word treats now of Egypt, now of Assyria, now of Edom, of Moab, of the sons of Ammon, of the Philistines, of Tyre and Sidon, and of Gog. He who does not know that by their names are

signified things of heaven and the church may be led into the error that the Word treats much of peoples and nations, and but little of heaven and the church (TCR 200).

And there are countless other passages that don't seem particularly holy. There are the descriptions of the historical wanderings of Abraham and his children; there are the wars of conquest in which the children of Israel come into Canaan; there are those tedious descriptions of the construction of the tabernacle and temple; there are descriptions of geography such as hills, mountains, seas; there are nature descriptions of vines, cedar trees, forests, groves, and gardens; there are descriptions of animals like sheep, goats, oxen, calves, lions, bears and other things. "Where is the holiness in all this?" a person may wonder. "How does this relate to my spiritual life and my relationship with God?"

Swedenborg's answer is that these apparently worldly things are symbols of spiritual things. He calls them "correspondences." These are natural objects that contain spiritual realities the way our body contains our soul.

The Word of the Lord is like a body in which is a living soul. The things belonging to the soul do not appear while the mind is so fixed on bodily things that it scarcely believes that there is a soulSo it is with the Word of the Lord: its bodily things are those which are of the sense of the letter, and when the mind is kept in them, the internal things are not seen at all So likewise the histories of the Word and the particular expressions in the Word are common, natural, and indeed material vessels, in which are things spiritual and heavenly; and these in no way come into view except by the internal sense (AC 1408).

So the story elements in the Bible that appear to be taken from this world are like the Bible's body that holds spiritual and heavenly realities. The spiritual and heavenly realities are what Swedenborg calls the Bible's internal sense.

Swedenborg isn't alone in thinking that the Bible has an internal sense. The Jew Philo of Alexander interpreted the Old Testament symbolically. And the Christians Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas also thought that the Bible has an internal sense. And these theologians pointed to the same things I have alluded to. There are too many things in the Bible that don't appear spiritual, and at the same time, we know that the Bible is God's Word.

So it is clear that the Bible treats of spiritual matters by means of natural objects. Some of these correspondences are described by Swedenborg,

by Egypt is signified knowledges, by Assyria rationality, by Edom the natural, by Moab adulteration of good, by the sons of Ammon the adulteration of truth, by the Philistines faith without charity, by Tyre and Sidon knowledges of good and truth, and by Gog external worship without internal (TCR 200).

By the tabernacle built by Moses in the wilderness was represented heaven and the church . . . wherefore the form of it was shown by Jehovah on Mount Sinai; consequently all the things which were in the tabernacle--the candlestick, the golden altar for incense, and the table upon which was the bread of presence--represented and signified the holy things of heaven and the church (TCR 220).

But I don't think that we need to decode the Bible in such a literal way when we read it. The spiritual and heavenly realities that form the internal sense of the Bible come to us as we are reading it. They come to us intuitively. Not as a correlation of this-with-that, but rather as a warming of our heart and an illumination of our mind. If we approach the Bible in a holy manner when we read it, the angels will come near us and still our minds, warm our hearts, and illuminate our minds.

the Word vivifies the affections of the will of a person who reads it in a holy state, and from the light of that life enlightens the thoughts of his understanding (AR 200).

The Bible came from God, through heaven to the prophets on earth. And since that is its origin and descent, all those higher realms open to us when we read the Bible. We are moved by the heavenly presences that come to us when the Bible is read devoutly.

. . . a person who reads the Word in a holy manner, is by such correspondence conjoined closely with heaven, and through heaven with the Lord, . . . The holy itself which is then with a person, is from an influx of celestial and spiritual thoughts and affections such as angels have (AC 3735).

In fact, since the Bible is the Word and was in the beginning with God, and is God, God Himself is present in the devout reading of the Bible.

By means of the Word the Lord is present with a person and is conjoined with him, since the Lord is the Word, and as it were speaks with the person in it; also because the Lord is the Divine Truth itself, and the Word is too. It is manifest from this that the Lord is present with a person, and at the same time is conjoined with him, according to his understanding of the Word; for according to this understanding the person has truth and hence faith, and also love and thence life (Doctrine of the Sacred Scriptures 78).

I am often affected when I read the Bible at home. I notice my breathing slow and become regular. My mind stills and grows peaceful. I feel greater love in my heart. And this happens whatever I seem to be reading. But this doesn't happen when I read the Bible for the purposes of historical study. This happens to me when I read it as God's Word and with reverence. I don't often find answers to my life's worries and concerns when I read the Bible. Rather, I feel as if I am lifted out of that whole state of mind into a more elevated consciousness. The worries and concerns I came to the Bible with, dissolve and I am at peace with life.



I commend to everyone regular reading of the Bible on your own at home. I think we all would benefit for a few moments taken aside from the cares of this life to read a short Bible passage and to breathe with heaven's respiration as we read. You may find that your life evens out, becomes more orderly and peaceful. You may not know where Moab is, or Edom. But there are passages that you will be able to follow with some clarity. And while you are reading, your spirit will open up to the angels around you, and ultimately bring you into God's presence. That would be a fine place to begin or end your day.



Unthinkables & Thanksgiving

November 23, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Psalm 69: 30-34

I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hooves. The poor will see and be glad—you who seek God, may your hearts live! The LORD hears the needy and does not despise his captive people.

Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them.

From Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained (Whitehead) n. 689, Verse 17

Saying, we give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, signifies the acknowledgment that all being, living, and ability are from the Lord. This is evident from the signification of "saying and giving thanks," as being to acknowledge, since "to fall upon the face and to worship," and then "to give thanks," can have no other signification than to acknowledge, here the omnipotence of the Lord. Also from the signification of "the Lord God," as being the Lord in respect to Divine good and Divine truth; for where Divine good is meant in the Word the names "Lord" and "Jehovah" are used, and where Divine truth is meant the name "God" is used, therefore "the Lord God" and "Jehovah God" mean the Lord in respect to Divine good and Divine truth. Moreover, "Jehovah" in the Old Testament, is called "Lord" in the New. It is also evident from the signification of "Almighty," as being to be, to live, and to have ability of Himself, and also that the being, life, and ability of angels and men are from Him. (That this is meant by omnipotence, may be seen above, n. 43; also that Divine omnipotence means what is infinite, n. 286.)

Message

The Unthinkables & Thanksgiving

This past week I spent several days in Sudbury, MA, for a training on "[Social Thinking](#)®."

It is a [program](#) developed by Michelle Garcia Winner on how to help children with social deficits learn to connect with others.

Sometimes, but not always, "social deficits" come from neurological differences, like autism. Autistic children can have difficulty in understanding what other people are thinking or feeling.

We observed a two hour assessment of a child to test her capacity for “social thinking.” About half-way through, Nancy -- the interviewer -- dropped a pencil on the floor. The little girl immediately picked it up for her. That demonstrated an awareness that Nancy had a need in that moment – to get her pencil from the floor. Many other children don’t even notice the dropped pencil, as they are absorbed in whatever topic they’re talking about at the time.



It was fascinating to watch the groups in which the Social Thinking® staff helped children become aware of the needs of others. Often, a small group will work together on a project, with the coach reminding them to consider how their actions can impact others. “If you don’t do your part of the project, how do you think others will feel about that?” Children are shown “inflexible thinking” – demonstrated by a series of selfish cartoon characters called the Unthinkables®. They are contrasted with the heroic Thinkables® who demonstrate flexible thinking that incorporates the needs of others.

I thought about how different this is from the usual model of psychotherapy that we therapists often use: “how do you feel about this?” “Are your needs getting met in that situation?”

Both perspectives are important in a balanced life: I need to discover who I am – who it is that God has created and is nurturing to grow. And I need to learn how to recognize the needs of others. Swedenborg gives us a beautifully balanced picture of how we need to integrate the humanity and divinity within us.

However, much of history is about people conquering and destroying others. This is true in our own history of Thanksgiving.

Chuck Lawson is a public school teacher and historian of American and Native American histories. [He writes:](#)

For an Indian, who is also a school teacher, Thanksgiving was never an easy holiday for me to deal with in class. I sometimes have felt like I learned too much about "the Pilgrims and the Indians." Every year I have been faced with the professional and moral dilemma of just how to be honest and informative with my children at Thanksgiving without passing on historical distortions, and racial and cultural stereotypes.

He points this out about the Puritans:

... were not just simple religious conservatives persecuted by the King and the Church of England for their unorthodox beliefs. They were political revolutionaries who not only intended to overthrow the government of England, but who actually did so in 1649.

They had a belief that that they were

... the "Chosen Elect" mentioned in the book of Revelation. They strove to "purify" first themselves and then everyone else of everything they did not accept in their own interpretation of scripture. Later New England Puritans used any means, including deceptions, treachery, torture, war, and genocide to achieve that end. ...

A generation later, after the balance of power had indeed shifted, the Indian and White children of that Thanksgiving were striving to kill each other in the genocidal conflict known as King Philip's War. At the end of that conflict most of the New England Indians were either exterminated or refugees among the French in Canada, or they were sold into slavery in the Carolinas by the Puritans.

If you want a story to read your children about Thanksgiving that tells the entire story, in a gentle manner, you can go to this [web site](#).



So early Thanksgivings in the New World involved a lot of "inflexible" thinking – engaging in ego-centered activities ignoring the needs of others.

But, the good part of the story is what Larson says here:

But I strongly suggest that there always has been a Thanksgiving story of some kind or other for as long as there have been human beings. There was also a "First" Thanksgiving in America, but it was celebrated thirty thousand years ago. ...At some time during the New Stone Age (beginning about ten thousand years ago) Thanksgiving became associated with giving thanks

to God for the harvests of the land. Thanksgiving has always been a time of people coming together, so thanks has also been offered for that gift of fellowship between us all.

So the story of the Pilgrims and Indians celebrating together is told with many inaccuracies. But, that one story is not the most important one.



Thanksgiving has been a part of the human story since Creation. We humans have always sought to find ways to give thanks to our Creator. We have always looked for ways to “pass it on” in terms of showing love to fellow human beings.

Swedenborg tells us many times that we are here to engage in our regeneration – in a process that moves us from a selfish ego-centric perspective to one that unites our humanity with God, and gives us the love and compassion to strive to engage in loving actions for others.

Let us pray

Dear God,

Thank you for the many blessings of our lives; and for the ultimate blessing of life itself. Help us to share this blessing with others as we seek for the regeneration brings us to the joy of living a life of service to others. Amen.

Silent Surrender

November 30, 2014

READINGS **From the Bible**

John 15: 1-8, New International Version (NIV)
The Vine and the Branches

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

From Swedenborg

Divine Providence (Dole) n. 92: 6

The Lord's union with us and our responsive union with the Lord come about by means of these two abilities. Union with the Lord and regeneration are the same thing, because we are regenerated to the extent that we are united to the Lord. So everything I have already said about regeneration can be said about union, and what I am about to say about union can be said about regeneration.

Message **Silent Surrender**

I carefully maneuvered my small rental car around the steep hills and sharp curves of coastal California. It was the summer of 1995, and our church Convention had just ended. It had been held in San Francisco that year, and I couldn’t miss the opportunity to visit The Golden Sufi Center at Port Reyes Station, just over an hour away.



I had read quite a bit about Sufis, especially this sect – The Golden Sufi's. I had been on several retreats, and occasionally attended a meditation group in New Hampshire where I lived at the time.

I especially appreciated the head of the order: Llewyn Vaughn Lee. [In fact, he later wrote a short statement for the back of my book, [Crystals, Crosses, and Chakras](#).]

The center in Port Reyes Station was part of the branch of *Naqshbandi Sufis* (named after Bahâ ad-dîn Naqshband, d. 1389) and they are often called the "silent Sufis," since their prayer and meditation is done in silence – a silent meditation of the heart. Groups often meet together to meditate in silence, and then to share and discuss dreams as a way of gaining deeper connection with spiritual wisdom.

Here is an edited portion of an interview with Llewlyn in 1998:

***An Interview with Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee
from the Sounds True Catalogue - Summer 1998***

ST: *For many years you have lived as a Sufi, and have written a number of books on Sufism. I know that technically, Sufism is the mystical branch of Islam, yet you describe it as a universal path of love. What does it mean to you to be a Sufi?*



LV: *You begin with a difficult question—originally, Sufis were known as "wayfarers" or "travellers on the mystical path." Later, these mystics, or lovers of God, as they were also called, became known as Sufis. Sufis follow a mystical path in which the relationship with God is*

that of lover and Beloved. To put it simply, Sufis are lovers of God.

ST: *Many people think of the Whirling Dervishes when you mention Sufism. But this is an ancient tradition with several branches.*

LV: *That's correct. I belong to an order known as the "silent Sufis" which was named after the 14th-Century Sufi, Baha ad-din Naqshband. He taught that God is silent and is most easily reached in silence. We are called the silent Sufis because our spiritual practices are done in silence. We practice a silent meditation of the heart, and a silent dhikr, which consists of the repetition of the name of God. Our path also incorporates psychology, and we have always used dream work: ... Nobody knows outwardly if you are a silent Sufi or not. We have very little regard for outer form. We focus on what happens within the human being, within the heart of the wayfarer.*

ST: *What are the devotional practices specific to the silent Sufis?*

LV: *I mentioned our two practices. One is the silent dhikr, which is the silent repetition of the name of God, "Allah." When we practice the dhikr we are not just repeating a word. We are seeking to remember God with each and every breath. ... Our other practice is the silent meditation of the heart. In this meditation we use the energy of love to still the mind. We immerse ourself in the feeling of love within the heart, until the mind and its thoughts are drowned in love. ...*

I was delighted to have a few days at the retreat center, and be part of some meditation and discussion groups. I flew back home to New Hampshire with great peace – from both the annual church convention and the retreat time at the Sufi center.

Our worship focus this month has been *surrender to God*, and I think of the Sufis who have such a rich heritage on the concept of aligning our consciousness with the Divine – much the same way Swedenborg talks about “union.”

A Sufi scholar writes:

*After nearly 30 years of the study of Sufism, I would say that in spite of its many variations and voluminous expressions, the essence of Sufi practice is quite simple. It is that the Sufi surrenders to God, in love, over and over; which involves embracing with love at each moment the content of one's consciousness (one's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, as well as one's sense of self) as gifts of God or, more precisely, as manifestations of God. [From **Sufism's Many Paths**, by Dr. Alan Godlas, University of Georgia.]*

Much of the poetry by Sufis is about the surrendering to/merging with the Divine. The poetry of Rumi* is especially rich in expressing this theme:

This We Have Now

This we have now
is not imagination.

This is not
grief or joy.

Not a judging state,
or an elation,
or sadness.

Those come and go.
This is the presence that doesn't.

*From Essential Rumi
by Coleman Bark*

Here is a YouTube video of a well-known Rumi translator, Coleman Bark, reading a Rumi poem:

Moving Water

When you do things from your soul, you feel a river
moving in you, a joy.

When actions come from another section, the feeling
disappears. Don't let

others lead you. They may be blind or, worse, vultures.
Reach for the rope

of God. And what is that? Putting aside self-will.
Because of willfulness

people sit in jail, the trapped bird's wings are tied,
fish sizzle in the skillet.

The anger of police is willfulness. You've seen a magistrate
inflict visible punishment. Now

see the invisible. If you could leave your selfishness, you
would see how you've

been torturing your soul. We are born and live inside black water in a well.

How could we know what an open field of sunlight is? Don't

insist on going where

you think you want to go. Ask the way to the spring. Your
living pieces will form

a harmony. There is a moving palace that floats in the air
with balconies and clear

water flowing through, infinity everywhere, yet contained
under a single tent.

*From The Glance
by Coleman Barks*

**Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.**

When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*
doesn't make any sense.

*From Essential Rumi
by Coleman Barks*

Allow this poetry and music to sit in your soul today, bringing you closer to the Divine



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Hope For Peace

December 7, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 1: 26-38

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called[b] the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

From Swedenborg

Heaven and Hell, NCE: 284, 286, 287.2, 289

284. Anyone who has not experienced heaven's peace cannot know what the peace is that angels enjoy....In order to perceive it, we need to be the kind of person who as to thought can be raised and taken out of the body and brought into the spirit so as to be with angels. Since I have perceived heaven's peace in this way, I can describe it, but not in words as it really is, because human words are not adequate. ...

There are two things at the heart of heaven, innocence and peace. We say that they are at the heart because they come straight from the Lord.

286. First, we need to say where peace comes from. Divine peace is within the Lord,

arising from the oneness of his divine nature and the divine human nature within him. The divine quality of peace in heaven comes from the Lord, arising from his union with heaven's angels, and specifically from the union of the good and true within each angel. Those are the sources of peace... in to its essence, it [peace] is the divine joy of the Lord's divine love, arising from his union with heaven and with every individual there. This joy, perceived by the Lord in the angels and by the angels from the Lord, is peace. It flows down from there to provide angels with everything that is blessed and delightful and happy – what is called 'heavenly joy.' ...

287. 2. ... Because peace means the Lord and heaven and also heavenly joy and the delight of good, greetings in ancient times were – and consequently still are – 'Peace be with you.' ...

289 Since divine peace arises from the Lord's union with heaven – and in particular with each individual angel by virtue of the union of the true and good – when angels are in a state of love they are in a state of peace, because this is when the good within them is united to what is of peace, because this is when the good within them is united to what is true...

Message

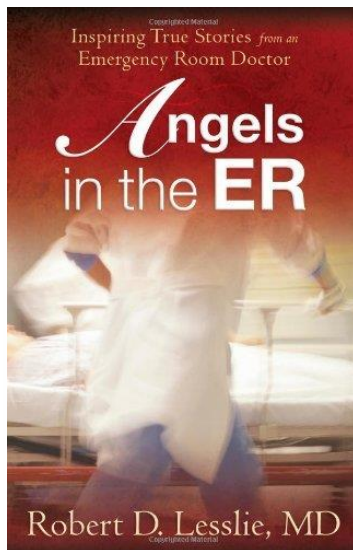
Hope for Peace in a Troubled World

On Swedenborg's trips to heaven, he chatted with the angels about peace. He said that on the earth, we consider ourselves at peace if we are not at war. Or, on a personal level, when we are successful in our earthly affairs and can take a rest. However, the angels pointed out that in heaven, peace is only possible with the Lord's inflow. Without that, peace doesn't exist. An evil person cannot be at peace, because one must have love and innocence to experience it.

Swedenborg describes the peace in heaven like this:

This peace may be likened to morning or dawn in springtime, when, the night being passed, with the rising of the sun all things of the earth begin to live anew, the fragrance of growing vegetation is spread abroad with the dew that descends from heaven, and the mild vernal temperature gives fertility to the ground and imparts pleasure to the minds of men, and this because morning or dawn in the time of spring corresponds to the state of peace of angels in heaven (Swedenborg says that as long as we are in our bodies on the earth, we cannot comprehend peace. We have to be in the heavens to fully grasp it.

The angels live in this peace -- this combination of peace and innocence. How do we begin to find any peace on the earth?



It was about 9:30 in the morning, and Dr. Lesslie was beginning his day in the E.R. There was an emergency message from an ambulance racing to the hospital. A woman, driving quickly to the hospital to deliver her baby, had been in a terrible accident, and might not live. The E.R. raced into action, having everything in place moments before the bleeding woman was wheeled in. Quickly, it was clear that the woman was dying and could not be saved. The baby had to be delivered. The Ob-gyn in the hospital rushed down to do a C-Section, and a squalling baby boy was born. The mother died. Her husband and their 4 year old daughter showed up moments later, and Dr. Lesslie had to go to the waiting room to give them the bad and the good news. This story is from Robert Lesslie's book, [*Angels in the E.R.*](#)

Dr. Lesslie called this chapter, "Out of Death Comes Life." We have had a difficult week of news in the U.S., with people dying violent deaths at the hands of the police, and questions being raised about whether the shooting was necessary. There is tragedy and violence around the world. This song is filled with hope:

O Little Town of Bethlehem.

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.
For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth!
How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.
O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.*

*We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!*



"O Little Town of Bethlehem" was written by Phillips Brooks [1835-1893] in 1868. On Christmas Eve of 1865, he had been in the Holy Lands and rode by horseback to the fields where the angels had proclaimed the "good tidings of great joy," There were still shepherds watching over their flocks. He look at the star-lit sky, and was deeply inspired. Three years later, Brooks was putting the Christmas Eve service together in his church, and wanted a song the Sunday school children could sing. He jotted down words that reminded him of his Christmas Eve in the Holy Lands three years previously. Brooks gave the words of this hymn to his organist and Sunday School superintendent, Lewis H. Redner, asking him to compose simple music for the children. Redner couldn't seem to put a tune together. But, on Dec. 23rd, he suddenly work up during the night and heard a tune that he wrote out. He felt that that inspiration had been from angels. It was the "O, Little Town of Bethlehem" that we now know and love.

Phillips Brooks was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1835. In 1859 he graduated from Harvard and the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia. He then began a long and distinguished career serving as pastor in Philadelphia at the Church of the Holy Trinity Church and then in Boston at the Trinity Church. He was appointed Bishop of all of the Episcopal churches in Massachusetts shortly before his untimely death in his late fifties.

One of Brooks favorite pastimes was sitting on the floor of his study playing with children. After his death, a five year old girl asked where he was. When told by her mother that Bishop Brooks had gone to heaven, the child exclaimed, "Oh, Mama, how happy the angels will be." Brooks' life was touched by Swedenborg and Swedenborgians. Helen Keller corresponded with him. A question that Bishop Brooks had been unable to answer for her concerned the apparent condemnation of Jews and other non-Christians. It was only when her Swedenborgian mentor Hitz put into her hands a Braille version of Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* that she learned that heaven was for everyone. Brooks was a reader of Swedenborg, and wrote:

I have the profoundest honor for the character and work of Emanuel Swedenborg. I have from time to time gained much from his writings.

It is these words that we can hold in our hearts this week:

*Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

There is tragedy in our country and around the world. But there is an everlasting light that is bringing eternal hope and peace.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Held by Angels

December 14, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 1: 26-37, Good News Translation, The Birth of Jesus Is Announced

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you! Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. The angel said to her, Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end! Mary said to the angel, I am a virgin. How, then, can this be? The angel answered, The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God. Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. For there is nothing that God cannot do.

From Swedenborg

Doctrine of the Lord (Dick) n. 21

Many at this day think of the Lord only as of an ordinary man like themselves, because they think only of His Human and not at the same time of His Divine; when yet His Divine and His Human cannot be separated. "For the Lord is God and Man; and God and Man in the Lord are not two, but one Person; indeed, all together one, as the soul and body are one man." This is according to the doctrine prevailing throughout the whole Christian world and received from its Councils, called the Athanasian Creed. Therefore, lest any one should henceforward separate in thought the Divine and the Human in the Lord, I entreat him to read the passages quoted above from Luke, as well as the following from Matthew:

The birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise. His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph; but before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins....

Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth her first born Son: and he called His name Jesus. --Matt. 1: 18-25.

From these words, as well as from the relation of the Lord's nativity in Luke, and from the other passages adduced above, it is evident that the Son of God is Jesus, who was conceived of Jehovah the Father, and born of the Virgin Mary, concerning whom all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

Message Held by Angels

Where can you find joy this week? Is there any joy for you in your relationship with God? In what ways can it be joyful?

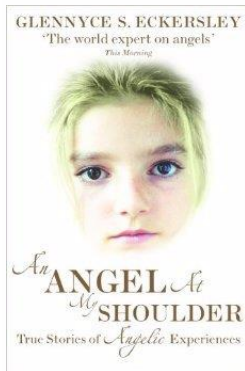
Many people find joy in thinking about angels. The angels are always with us, but we often think about them more during this season.

Of course, people who have an actual angel encounter probably think about the topic the most!

To learn about people's real life angel encounters, I turn to the work of author Glennyce Eckersley.



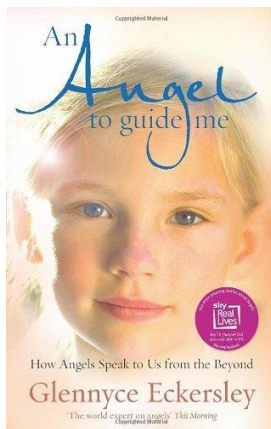
Glennyce Eckersley is a woman in England who started writing down the many stories people told her about angels in their lives. Then she put the stories in categories, and added some Swedenborgian theology about angels. Her book, *An Angel at my Shoulder*, became quite popular in the British Isles and then on the Continent. Then even more people told her their angel stories, and she wrote more books.



I was privileged to meet Glennyce in 2002, when I was in England to be a guest faculty member at New Church College for 6 weeks. I found her to be absolutely delightful with a pure faith around her!

Here is one story she recounts in her book, *An Angel to Guide Me*.

The Advent season of 2008 was extremely cold in Great Britain. The ice was very thick on sidewalks and roads.



Edith was an 85-year-old woman who lived in a little cottage on the British coast. She tried to stay inside during the bad weather, but she knew that eventually she would have to go out for groceries. After four days inside, the sun came out, and the world looked peaceful and beautiful. She bundled up, and stepped outside. It was extremely cold, but many people were out shopping and walking. She started to cross a road to a shopping center, when she suddenly lost her balance! She felt her body propelled towards the concrete road. She braced for broken bones - - and perhaps even death.

But suddenly, she felt herself being lifted up by loving arms and placed gently down on the ground.

A couple walking their dog appeared at the top of the steps that led from the beach. They rushed to her aid. 'Are you OK?' they asked, helping her to her feet. Edith looked around but there was no one behind her. 'I'm fine,' she replied shakily. 'If it hadn't been for the kind soul who caught me as I fell I'd surely have broken several bones.' The

couple with the dog stared at her in confusion. 'No one caught you,' the man said. 'We saw you fall and rushed up the steps to help – you were completely alone on the promenade.'

Edith KNEW that arms had picked her up. She had always believed in angels, but this was her first encounter with an angel.

Another story in the same book is “An Angel in the Alps.”

It was summertime in the French Alps. Penny was with a group of friends who were mountain climbing for their vacation. Her friends were more experienced climbers than she was, but she bravely tried to keep up. By the 4th day, she was exhausted. Tragically, her foot slipped and she was propelled forward, free falling until her rope caught her and she landed on a small ledge. She saw above that her friend roped to her, had also slipped, but clung to a rock and pulled herself to safety.

Penny was in extreme pain, and clearly was badly hurt. It was too risky for her friends to try to pull her up. They called for help, but there was going to be a long wait. Glennyce writes this:



This painting is by John Flaxman, *Angels Guiding a Soul to Heaven*, (based on Swedenborg's wingless angels)

Her pain became increasingly intense, and she wondered just what the extent of her injuries would be. Inevitably the worst possible scenarios rushed through her thoughts. At that moment, a warm shaft of sunlight landed on Penny's face – or so she thought at first – as she turned her face away from the rock. Although the day was bright, the sun was well hidden behind the clouds and the intensely bright light was certainly not from sunshine. The warmth and light washed over her, taking her pain with it. In the centre of this light, Penny made out a face, beautiful and smiling and very clear. It brought a sensation of calm and confidence. Incredible though it seemed to

Penny, she was in no doubt that this was an angel sent to calm her. The angel was with Penny for only a moment, but she knew instinctively that she would be rescued and that all would be well. Although it took a long time for the rescue teams to reach Penny, the feeling of calm and peace stayed with her the whole time. Despite a badly broken leg and wrist, she experienced no more pain, even when being lifted onto a stretcher.

Penny was quite certain that she had not been hallucinating, but was having an angel encounter. She felt that her grandmother, in the spirit world, had helped in her angelic experience.

I can't think of any other explanation for these stories than the presence of

angels. These are just two of the thousands of angel encounters from all over the world in all traditions.

Swedenborg tells us that we rarely see our protective angels – or feel them or hear them. But they are ALWAYS with us.

In what ways do you think angels might be with you during this Advent season?



Silent Night

December 21, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Luke 2:1-2

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

From Swedenborg

Heaven and Hell (Dole) n. 286^[L]_[SEP]a.

In the highest sense, peace means the Lord, because he is the source of peace; and in the inner sense it means heaven, because people there are in a state of peace: 3780, 4681. Peace in the heavens is the divine nature profoundly touching everything good and true there with a blessedness that is beyond our comprehension: 92, 3780, 5662, 8455, 8665.

Arcana Celestia, 3900:9

The coming of the Lord is not according to the letter, that he would again appear in the world, but it is his presence in each one, which takes place as often as the gospel is



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

reached, and its holiness is thought about.

True Christianity, #89

Now, because God came down, and because he is the design ... there was no other way for him to become an actual human being than to be conceived, to be carried in the womb, to be born, to be brought up, and to acquire more and more knowledge so as to become intelligent and wise. Therefore in his human manifestation he was an infant like any infant, a child like any child, and so on with just one difference: he completed the process more quickly, more fully, and more perfectly than the rest of us do.... He grew up more quickly, more fully, and more perfectly than the rest of us ...

Message Silent Night

The First World War began in the summer of 1914. Everyone expected it to end in a few weeks, but the cold winds of December came onto the Belgium battlefield as Christmas was approaching. Pope Benedict XV pleaded for a Christmas truce, but both sides dismissed that as out of the question. The *New Republic* wrote: "If men must hate, it is perhaps just as well that they make no Christmas truce." The leaders of the war were clear that war could not be halted for Christmas.

But, then – there was a moment – that became buried in history. There were some rumors – assumed to be myths – that there had been a spontaneous truce on the battlefield Christmas Eve.

Then in 1985, historian Stanley Weintraub was researching the events of the Armistice at the end of the war. He kept coming across stories of a halt in the war on Christmas Eve. He began work on a new book, *Silent Night*, about that Christmas Eve. He found a lot of information in archival newspapers for January of 1915. Troops could write letters without censorship, and families sent some of those letters to local papers. Then he found more affirmation in military archives.

This is a special year. Christmas Eve will be the 100th anniversary of this event!

The truce was an embarrassment to all sides, and they tried to minimize the story in official records. It is not helpful to war when enemies fraternize together; it makes it so much harder to go back to shooting at each other afterwards!

The truce seems to have been on various battlefields, but the best-known one took place near Ploegsteert Wood in Belgium. The only memorial to that spot is a simple cross that some folks from the U.S. put up in December of 1999, which was reinforced by the villagers.

To get the story in more depth, you can read Weintraub's book, or watch the movie that was made of the event.

The trenches were absolutely dismal places. They were temporary shelters that were cold and shared with rats and insects.

Yet, early on Christmas Eve lights appeared around the German trenches. At first some thought that there was fighting, but then realized the lights were lighted Christmas trees adorning the ground around the trenches! Then, the Germans began singing “Silent Night” in German And then others joined in singing in their own language.

About 100,000 soldiers were involved in this truce; primarily German and British.

At our Christmas Eve reflection, we’ll have more stories of that Christmas Eve. On Christmas Day, we’ll look at what happened on the battlefield Christmas Day in 1914.

The officials put a lid on the peace as quickly as possible afterwards, and many of the leaders were punished.

Why? War is based on the ability to stereotype a group of people as bad or evil. The movie *Joyeux Noel* begins with the school children of that era reciting poems about how horrid their enemy was, and how great their own country was!

A kind of “dehumanization” takes place in order to kill people in war. If “the enemy” becomes Tom or Joe or Jane whom you shared good times with – it becomes far more difficult to engage in battle with them.

We see the same thing happening in incidents of violence around the world. Children in school gunned down; coffee drinkers in a café become faceless pawns to be used in a political struggle. There are many demonstrations protesting the alarming rate at which young black men are killed by police; suggesting that white police officers might easily see white youth as “neighbors” but black youth as “a dangerous other.”

Swedenborg was about moving beyond “us” and “them” to find a “we” approach to life.

It is not easy to live that way; but it is worth the effort. Thousands of soldiers made that leap in the midst of war on one particular Christmas Eve.

Christmas Eve 2014

December 24, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Psalms 96: 1-13

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.
Say among the nations, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity."
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the
world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

Luke 2:8- 20

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Message

Christmas Eve 1914

It was 100 years ago tonight: Christmas Eve of 1914. It was the first Christmas of the first World War.

One soldier in the trenches that night wrote about what happened:

It was a beautiful moonlit night, frost on the ground, white almost everywhere; and about 7 or 8 in the evening there was a lot of commotion in the German trenches and there were these lights -I don't know what they were. And then they sang "Silent Night" - "Stille Nacht." I shall never forget it, it was one of the highlights of my life. I thought, what a beautiful tune.

Another soldier wrote about what happened next:

Then suddenly lights began to appear along the German parapet, which were evidently make-shift Christmas trees, adorned with lighted candles, which burnt steadily in the still, frosty air! ... First the Germans would sing one of their carols and then we would sing one of ours, until when we started up "O Come, All Ye Faithful" the Germans immediately joined in singing the same hymn to the Latin words Adeste Fideles. And I thought, well, this is really a most extraordinary thing - two nations both singing the same carol in the middle of a war.

A German soldier wrote:

I shouted to our enemies that we didn't wish to shoot and that we make a Christmas truce. I said I would come from my side and we could speak with each other. First there was silence, then I shouted once more, invited them, and the British shouted "No shooting!" Then a man came out of the trenches and I on my side did the same and so

we came together and we shook hands - a bit cautiously!

Another soldier wrote:

We shook hands, wished each other a Merry Xmas, and were soon conversing as if we had known each other for years. We were in front of their wire entanglements and surrounded by Germans - Fritz and I in the center talking, and Fritz occasionally translating to his friends what I was saying. We stood inside the circle like street corner orators. ... What a sight - little groups of Germans and British extending almost the length of our front! Out of the darkness we could hear laughter and see lighted matches, a German lighting a Scotchman's cigarette and vice versa, exchanging cigarettes and souvenirs.



Christmas Morning 2014

December 25, 2014

READINGS

From the Bible

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

From Swedenborg

Heaven and Hell 287

Because these are the origins of peace, the Lord is called the Prince of Peace and says that peace comes from him and that peace is in him. So too angels are called angels of peace and heaven the dwelling place of peace, as in the following passages:

A child is born to us, a son is given to us, on whose shoulder the government [shall rest], and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, God, Hero, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace; of the increase of government and peace there shall be no end. (Isaiah 9:5–6 [6–7])

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you, not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14:27) I have told you these things so that you might have peace in me. (John 16:33)

May Jehovah lift his face to you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:26)

The angels of peace weep bitterly, the highways are ruined. (Isaiah 33:7–8)

The work of justice will be peace, and my people will live in a dwelling place of peace. (Isaiah 32:17–18) [2]

We may also gather that "peace" in the Word means divine and heavenly peace from other passages where it is mentioned, as for example in Isaiah 52:7; 54:10; 59:8;



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Jeremiah 16:5; 25:37; 29:11; Haggai 2:9; Zechariah 8:12; Psalms 37:37; and elsewhere. Because peace means the Lord and heaven and also heavenly joy and the delight of good, greetings in ancient times were—and consequently still are—“Peace be with you.”

Message Christmas Morning 2014

One hundred years ago today: Dec. 25, 1914, troops awoke in the trenches of the battlefield. They included French, German, Scottish, Belgium, and English soldiers. They had experienced an amazing Christmas Eve – truly a miracle on a battlefield! Enemies had shared lighted Christmas trees and had sung Christmas carols in their respective languages.

What would Christmas hold? Would hostilities begin again on this holy day?

It was a shock to look outside of the trenches – the battlefield was full of the dead soldiers from the hostilities before Christmas Eve.

Historian Stanley Weintraub writes:

In the darkness of Christmas Eve it was possible to celebrate the phenomenon of light in the German candlelit trees and what the British called electric torches. But daylight exposed the casualties beyond the barbed wire— none of them pretty and many already putrefying. By night they had been stumbled upon; by day they inhibited any festive rapprochement. The dead could not be put out of mind—

On the other hand, the battlefield was also filled with enemy soldiers chatting together!

Even after the extraordinary Christmas Eve, soldiers were astonished by what they saw at daylight on Christmas Day. “I awoke at dawn,” Bruce Bairnsfather recalled, “and on emerging on all fours from my dugout, became aware that the trench was practically empty. I stood upright in the mud and looked over the parapet. No Man’s Land was full of clusters ... of khaki and gray ... pleasantly chatting together .” To Bryan Latham of the London Rifles, No Man’s Land “had the appearance of a football pitch at half-time.”

The first task of the day was to bury the dead. All agreed to a truce while they put their dead comrades in the ground.

But then, they couldn’t end the truce. It was time to share rations for Christmas dinner. Many soldiers had received packages from home and they shared delicacies from their own land with enemies.

According to a “trench yarn” in which officers from the opposing sides “strolled about” between the lines chatting, an English subaltern identified only as “Harry” and obviously

a clubman, confessed, “I would give a good deal for a bottle of the Boy now!”— a term for champagne popularized by Edward VII when Prince of Wales. “My dear chap, nothing easier,” said the Bavarian. “We’ve got quite a decent cellar at Headquarters on our side. Come and have a noggin in our Mess, won’t you? Of course it’s well behind our line, but I can promise you you’ll be safe....

After dinner, it was time for football! The games continued through the afternoon and evening.

Yes, it had to end; mostly on the 26th. But in some locations it lasted a few more days.

Today, as we honor the birth of Light, we also celebrate the 100th anniversary of this Christmas miracle!

Regeneration in the New Year

December 28, 2014

From the Bible

Genesis 1

The Beginning

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 Now the earth was [a] formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

From Swedenborg

“The beginning” includes the first period of regeneration too, as that is when people are being born anew and receiving life. Because of this, regeneration itself is called our new creation. ...

Before regeneration a person is called the void, empty earth, and also soil in which no seed of goodness or truth has been planted. Void refers to an absence of goodness and empty to an absence of truth. The result is darkness, in which a person is oblivious to or ignorant of anything having to do with faith in the Lord and consequently with a spiritual or heavenly life. ...

Heavenly Secrets, parts of #16-17. NCE

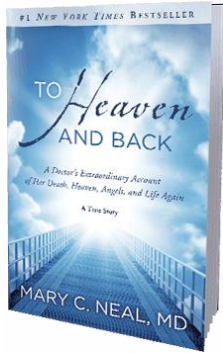
Before we can learn what is true and be affected by what is good, the things that stand in the way and resist have to be put aside. The old self must die before the new self can be conceived. [Secrets of Heaven, #18]

Message Regeneration in the New Year

This past weekend, I was watching CNN for shows about preparing for a new year. I saw a re-run of a show that had fascinated me last year.

It was called “To Heaven and Back.” It featured several people who had had “near death” experiences. One of those guests was Dr. Mary Neal. She had a terrifying accident while kayaking. She almost died, but her experience was one of pure joy in heaven.

I was so fascinated with her story that I downloaded her book into my Kindle: *To Heaven and Back; a Doctor’s Account of her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again. A true story.*



I'd like to again review some basic aspects of her story, and then look at the meaning it can give us for the new year.

Neal begins her book with this quote:

"The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart." —Helen Keller



Mary Neal grew up in Michigan, and attended the University of Kentucky and UCLA. She received advanced training in orthopedic spinal surgery. While in training, she met Bill, her future husband. They married and set up practice in orthopedic surgery. They had children, and were living an idyllic life.

She and her husband took a trip to South America, where Mary took a kayak trip with friends. Her kayak capsized and she was caught under a waterfall. She was technically dead for half an hour, before she was revived for a long recovery journey.

Mary revealed that during that half an hour, she went to heaven and back; returning reluctantly only because she was told that she had to. She writes:

Many have described my accident as terrible and tragic. I describe it as one of the greatest gifts I have ever received.

When she first realized that she was pinned under the waterfall, she didn't panic, but did use tools she knew from her considerable experience. However, they did not work this time.

She writes:

I thought about my family and desperately tried to raise my head out of the water in search of air. I quickly realized that I was not in control of my future. God had saved me more than once in the past so I, once again, reached toward God and asked for His divine intervention. I did not demand rescue. I knew that He loved me and had a plan for me. I asked only that His will be done. At the very moment I turned to Him, I was overcome with an absolute feeling of calm, peace, and of the very physical sensation of being held in someone's arms while being stroked and comforted. Neal MD., Mary C. (2012-05-23).

[To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again: A True Story (p. 57). The Doubleday Religious Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]

She felt loving arms around her, and was certain that it was Jesus holding and comforting her. Jesus took her through a life review. However, it wasn't based on the events themselves, but rather the ripple effect that each event had on others.

When I no longer felt myself trying to breathe, I assumed that I would die. My thoughts returned to my husband and children and as I pondered what would become of them without my presence as a wife and mother, I was deeply and profoundly reassured that they would be okay; even if I died.

Meanwhile, her friends were trying desperately to save her. They despaired of reaching her capsized boat to pull her to safety, when rocks suddenly appeared – just where they needed to take a stop to reach Mary. Later, they called it a miracle.

They pulled her out of the water and started CPR. In the meantime, Mary was being greeted by 15-20 glorious beings, sent by God. She writes that she felt: *the most overwhelming joy I have ever experienced and could ever imagine. It was joy at an unadulterated core level.*

She couldn't specifically name any of the beings, but she was certain that she knew them. They were celebrating her arrival and her making it across the "finish line."

She says: *My arrival was joyously celebrated and a feeling of absolute love was palpable as these spiritual beings and I hugged, danced, and greeted each other.*

They all felt great excitement about "returning home" as they walked along a path.

She glanced back at her body; now like an old, comfortable friend.

Her friends were desperately trying to revive her. They begged her to take a breath. She didn't want her friends to be sad, so she asked her new companions to wait a bit while she returned to her body to take a breath.

Then, she again left her body to return to the heavenly beings. She found that they were walking towards an incredible light from a shimmering building. She felt great desire to reach

that building, and knew that it was a central stopping point for all souls after death of the body.

There was only one obstacle to her entering that building: her friend on earth kept begging her to breath. Then her new companions suddenly became very sad, and told her that it was not yet her time to enter that building.

She protested loudly that she did not want to return; she wanted to stay in this heavenly place. However, the beings were insistent that she had more work to do on the earth. Reluctantly, she laid down in her body and began to breathe again.

She returned to her earthly life with renewed passion and commitment. She says on her [website](#).

I wrote it [her book] because more than anything I want people to know that God's unconditional love for each of us is intense, complete, and is reflected in all of Heaven. Before we return to Heaven, our real home, we have an incredible opportunity on Earth to face challenges that will help us learn, grow and to become more Christ-like in the fruits of our spirit. Our time is so short that we need to be about God's business every day.

She explains in her book how she has changed:

Is God present in our world today? Do miracles still occur? Are there really angels all around us? Does God keep His promises? Is there sufficient reason to live by faith? I believe the answer to each one of these questions is a definitive "yes" and I believe that you will come to this same conclusion as you read about the miracles I have seen and experienced.

Mary went through some hard times after the experience as she integrated its meaning into her life. Now, she lives with a sense of peace she had never known before. Joy is now a part of ever-day life for her. She has a renewed purpose as she travels, speaks, and writes of her time in heaven.

People often ask her:

What was your faith like before your kayaking accident, and how did your spiritual life change afterward?

Her response is:

Before my near-death experience, I was a Christian and believed that the Bible was the absolute and historically accurate Word of God. I was not, however, what anyone would call deeply spiritual or deeply religious and had no preconceived notions about life after death. My experience changed me profoundly in both spiritual and religious ways. I now know the promises of God to be true, that there is a life after death, and our spiritual life is eternal . While recognizing the limitations of organized religion, I fully participate in and support it.

This week we will celebrate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. It's a time when we often

think about getting a fresh start in our lives; beginning anew. New Year's can be the moment we have been awaiting for a new burst of freedom; like for the blackbird in our opening song. We don't need to go through a near-death experience, like Dr. Neal did, to re-awaken to God's presence in our lives and God's power to transform us.

To Swedenborg, new beginnings were part of the process of spiritual growth, which he called "regeneration."

He saw the days of creation as telling this story of spiritual growth.

The first day of creation was when God created light, and separated it from darkness.

Swedenborg says that there are deeper, spiritual truths in the Bible than are expressed in the story itself. The early verses of Genesis are about opening our inner, spiritual eyes to God's light.

We often think of the end of a year as a chance to let go of old parts of our selves; and the New Year as a chance to claim new ones. Often, we make resolutions for the New Year to change our behaviors in some way: to lose weight, to exercise more, eat better, budget money, etc. It is a hard way to start a new year, and most of us forget about the resolutions within a few weeks.

For Swedenborg, the way to begin a spiritual journey is not so much about what we do, but who we are.

In his commentary on Gen 1:3 [*and God said let there be light*], he wrote:

The first step is taken when we begin to realize that goodness and truth are something transcendent. [SH, 20]

We start the journey by letting in the light – of God.

In order to see God, we need spiritual eyes; not physical ones. We need to hear God whispering in our heart; we don't need physical ears for that.

Helen Keller wrote:

"I cannot see the stars scattered in the heavens; but other stars just as bright shine in my soul. Soul is very real and important to me."

Our closing song is "*I Can See Clearly Now.*" As you listen, focus on "seeing" with spiritual eyes, as Helen Keller taught us:

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*

*Here is the rainbow I've been prayin for
it's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, help us welcome the inner light of the new year. Help us recognize that we can leave behind whatever has been impeding our progress, and we can open our hearts to new depth of Your light. We want to make the new year a time of "beginning anew" in our spiritual journey and in our relationship with You. Thank you for Your guiding presence in this process. Amen.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life