

A NEW SPIRITUALITY

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A force is instilled into everything that has been created. However, that force does not do anything on its own; it depends on the one who instilled it. . . . Look at a silkworm or a bee or some little creature and examine it, first physically, then rationally, and finally spiritually. If you can think deeply, you will be stunned at everything. If you listen to the inner voice of wisdom, you will exclaim in amazement, "Can anyone fail to see Divinity here? These are the marks of Divine Wisdom!"

Beyond this even, if you look at the functions of everything that has been created, you will see how they follow in sequence all the way to humanity, and from us to our source, the Creator. You will see how the connectedness of everything depends on the Creator's union with us. And if you are willing to admit it, the preservation of everything depends on this as well. (Divine Providence 3.3)

Seeing Divinity reflected in the beauty and wonder of the Creation is what this issue is all about.



The light and glory of faith and trust in the Divine may be compared to the beauty of the rainbow or of a field of flowers or of a blooming garden in early spring.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG



The Birds, the Bees and God

By Jane Siebert

There is a lesson from God in everything we choose to do, to listen to, to look at, to touch, to read. We call this "influx": the communication from the spiritual world into our natural world. Divine influx can be thought of as God flowing out to us; as his help with every aspect of our lives. The ability to receive this influx depends on our relationship with God. If we want to *know* God better, if we want to strive to *learn* about God, if we want to *enjoy worshipping* God, we must open our lives to receive this divine influx. On the other hand, if we deny God's existence, if we consider only our own wants and needs, we block this divine influx, and even open ourselves to evil influences and hellish influx. Influx is constantly present around and within us. But because our free will is preserved, it is always our choice whether we are open to receive divine influx or hellish influx.

I would like to share a lesson today on influx that comes from the novel *The Secret Life of Bees*, by Sue Monk Kidd. The process that I found so intriguing in the novel was how the author took the habits and life of bees, and drew upon the natural theology and connection between the life of the bees and our own lives, and the lessons we have to learn. It was a beautiful illustration that all things are connected, together with examples of how the natural world is a reflection of the spiritual world. And if we are aware of this, we can learn many lessons from nature in all aspects of our lives.

Take the bee yard etiquette as explained by one of the characters: "The world is really one big bee yard, and the same rules work fine in both places: Don't be afraid, as no life-loving bee wants to sting you. Still, don't be an idiot; wear long sleeves and long pants. Don't swat. Don't even *think* about swatting. If you feel angry, whistle. *Anger agitates*, while whistling melts a bee's temper. Act like you know what you're doing, even if you don't. Above all, send the bees love. Every little thing wants to be loved."

Influx from God flows into all life. The difference between the influx that gives life to animals, insects, and nature and the influx that humans receive is related to whether it is general or particular influx. Animals are in the order of their nature. They follow their instincts. They receive general influx and have no need for further instruction.

Let's go back to the bees. Every bee has its role to play. The nest-builders draw up the comb in a perfect hexagonal pattern. Field bees have good navigation skills and tireless hearts, going out to gather nectar and pollen. There are even mortician bees whose pitiful job it is to rake the dead bees out of the

hive and keep everything clean. Nurse bees take care of the baby bees. The only male bees are the drones that sit around waiting to mate with the queen. And then there is the queen, only one per hive, and her attendants. The attendants bathe her, feed her, keep her warm or cool. The queen is mother of thousands of bees. This is the epitome of order. Bees are born with all the knowledge they need in their life. They know their function and purpose, and fulfill it.

But we are born in ignorance - innocent, yes, but ignorant. We find ourselves often in a quagmire of chaos, rather than order. We require instruction, and thus our influx is into the *particulars* of our lives.

We are *born* rather self-absorbed, crying out to have our needs met. We are *created* to love the Lord and our neighbor; this is the heavenly order. But this is not our natural order, which, unfortunately, is love of self and the world. We are born in freedom, and have to choose to receive divine influx into our lives. It almost seems as if it would be easier for all of us to just be born with our natural order like the bees, knowing what our purpose in life is, and doing what we were created for. But then we would have no freedom. And it is this freedom that allows us to draw near to the Lord; that enables us to know God and become the image of God for which we were created. Because of our freedom, there is *no limit* to the love and goodness we can receive and feel . . . that is, when we make the right choices--choices that open our souls to receive this divine influx.

Scripture tells us that as God notices when a sparrow falls to the ground, even the hairs of our heads are numbered. This relates back to the influx that we receive into the *particulars*. In every part of our life, God's influx is available. Nothing is insignificant. We can ask for guidance in all things. When we feel anger rising, we can ask God to help control it. Those times when we are envious that someone seems to have it better or easier, we must ask God to help us get beyond our envy.

The danger we must always keep in mind is the effect of choosing *not* to receive divine influx - because evil influences and influx are also constantly around us. We feel this when we are tempted to lie to get ourselves out of a bind; when we want to be acknowledged for every good deed we do; when we fight the desire to be seen as smarter than someone else, or prettier, or better in some way. We are in balance between the good and bad, but both are trying to affect our choices, in little things as well as big. And our choices in the little things set the stage for our choices in the big things.



Editorial Deeper Meanings

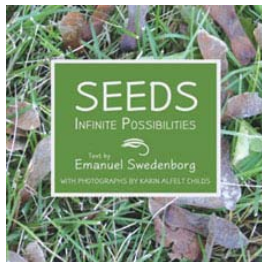
I always get a lift when spring is in the air. Flowers, new green leaves, the fragrance in the air, the sight of newborn lambs, the buzzing of bees and the sun shining through. After the grey of winter, I can't help noticing the beauty of nature in the springtime. I am a student of floristry and it is good to have flowers to play with again after the shortage of blooms during the winter months.

The articles in this issue bring to our attention the way that the Creator has built in to nature the science of correspondences, making the natural world a theatre representative of his spiritual kingdom. We see deeper meaning in the changes of the seasons. We also see deeper meaning in the growth and development of plants through all their stages. We don't have to know all the details to appreciate God's handiwork in all of his creation. However, knowing that there are messages for us in what we see enhances our appreciation of it.

For the most ancient people on the earth, the world of nature was God's Word. Before any of it was written down there were messages for these people in everything they saw. They were very close to God and were given intuition as to the deeper meanings contained therein. Swedenborg visited these people in their heaven accompanied by an angel and saw that they had fashioned artworks of things in nature such as fish or birds as symbols of what lay within. Later, legends were told to convey spiritual truths within earthly stories. The story of the Creation in the book of Genesis is one of these. Through the Writings of Swedenborg the inner meaning is revealed to the world again. Copies of these Writings may be ordered through the Swedenborg Centre.

Jenny

Seeds: Infinite Possibilities



Excerpts from *Divine Love and Wisdom* by Swedenborg with full colour photographs by Karin Alfelt Childs. A hardcover gift book.

Divine Love and Wisdom describes ways that the nature of God is present and pictured in the world around us. This little book takes excerpts from *Divine Love and Wisdom* on the subject of seeds. The quotes, paired with beautiful photographs, lead us to think of the never-ending abundance that God provides in all aspects of life. Just as the cycle of seeds to plants to seeds never ends, so do God's love and wisdom perpetuate themselves – in the world around us and also inside of us – to eternity. \$30.00 + p&p



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Spring Flowers

Reuben Bell



Let's talk about flowers. There is no better subject at this time of year. And when we search the Writings of Swedenborg for divine wisdom on flowers, there is a wealth of information to be found, on more than a single level. We find pleasure in flowers on more than a single level, too: we enjoy planning and planting them, growing them and tending them as they grow. We enjoy giving them and getting them, and we enjoy just having them around. What is it about flowers?

Here is a story as told by Swedenborg about a man who discovered flowers growing in heaven: A certain person who had been famous and renowned in the learned world because of his expert knowledge of botany heard in the next life, after he had died, that flowers and trees could be found in that life also. At this he was astounded and, because botany had been the delight of his life, he was burning with the desire to see whether what he had heard was true. He was therefore taken to the paradise gardens where he saw beautiful plantations of trees and lovely flower beds extending in all directions.

Because he had now entered into his heart's desire, he was allowed to wander through those grounds and not only to see each thing growing there, but also to pluck it, hold it up to his eye, and examine whether it was really what it appeared to be. He spoke to me from there and said that he had never believed anything such as this, and that if people in the world were to hear of such things they would regard them as absurdities. He went on to say that the flowers visible there were more abundant than those he had seen at any time in the world, and could scarcely be appreciated by any worldly kind of perception.

He also said that each flower glows with unimaginable brightness because it was a product of the light of heaven. He was not as yet able to perceive that the glowing had a spiritual origin, namely, that in each one there existed some measure of intelligence and wisdom - the attributes of truth and goodness - as the source of their glowing. He said further that people on earth would never believe this, because few believe in the existence of heaven or hell.

That story alone is delightful on its surface. What a wonderful image of heaven, and this man's great happiness in being there! But when we examine it a little, there is more to the story. The flowers in those gardens "glowed with the light of heaven," it said, because there was in them "something of intelligence and wisdom, which are the attributes of truth and goodness." What might that mean? Truth and goodness are the two attributes of the Lord himself, and in operation they go forth from the Lord, flowing into the spiritual world, and from there into the natural. They glowed because the creative power of the Lord was shining forth from them! Imagine what that might look like. . . .

This man was new to the next life, and we are told that he didn't yet understand what this glowing was all about. Yet he could still see the glowing! There is a lesson in this. He could see the effects of spiritual causes even though he didn't understand them. We do that every day. For example, with flowers: they are beautiful effects of even more beautiful spiritual causes, but understand them or not, the flowers are there for our enjoyment.

Seeing effects and perceiving that they have unseen causes is what spirituality is all about. The spiritual life is living the awareness that there are spiritual causes, whether we fully perceive them or not. With practice and perfection, we can learn to see these causes more clearly all the time. The angels see them plainly. With no effort, they perceive the marvellous spiritual depth to all the things in their experience. Imagine what that might be like. . . .

But we are not angels. We are natural. How can we expect to do this? Can we see the light of heaven glowing from a natural flower? Yes. We can see it in our mind's eye, knowing that it is there. How do we know? We are told so in the Writings of Swedenborg. Listen to *Arcana Coelestia* 3942:

Among the most ancient people, all fruits and flowers were symbolic. For they knew that all nature is a theatre representative of the Lord's kingdom, and that each thing represents some specific thing in the spiritual world, and therefore also each fruit and flower.

This is about spiritual causes for natural things. There

is more:

I have spoken to angels about representatives, suggesting that the plant kingdom on earth included nothing that was not representative of the Lord's kingdom. They replied that everything beautiful and glorious in the plant kingdom has its origin in the Lord by way of heaven, and that when celestial and spiritual influences from the Lord enter nature, such things are really created - and that this is the origin of the vegetative soul or life. So they are representatives.

They are representatives, created by the operation of correspondence with the spiritual causes from which they flow. This is spiritual influence from the Lord right into our world for us to see, in the form of natural things.

And if we do not perceive the spiritual causes? If we don't even know about them? The things are still there. But if we do? The Writings of Swedenborg tell us this:

A tree appears before the eyes lush with branches, leaves, and fruits. All these are effects. But if you could examine all the parts of a tree - the filaments within a branch, the fibers in a leaf, every single invisible part in a fruit, the invisible parts of a seed - you would see that countless indescribable things lie hidden from our eyes. Once the interior, or spiritual parts of a flower were opened before the angels. When they saw this, they said that it was as if there was a whole paradise within it, constructed of indescribable things.

So do flowers glow with the light of heaven? You decide.

We have learned that there are spiritual causes for natural things. If we learn to "see" them with our mind's eye, we might see whole paradises within every created thing that we encounter. Imagine the infinite dimensions that are present in every ordinary experience! It boggles the mind. But these spiritual correspondences are not there just for our enjoyment alone (although that is reason enough for them). They are also there to instruct us in the nature of spiritual reality. There are lessons in those correspondences to remind us of our eternal, spiritual lives, and the mechanisms by which they work.

Our topic here is the flowering plants of the natural world - angiosperms to be specific. Angiosperms are

the crown of the plant kingdom, surpassing in complexity and design all other plants - the algae, the mosses, the ferns, and the conifers - in the unique way that they reproduce. They make seeds from marvellously complex organs called flowers, and enclose those seeds in a tough, nutrient-rich protective organ called the fruit. There is nothing else like them in all the living world.

Given the knowledge that natural things have spiritual causes and spiritual lessons to teach, what might we expect to learn from the flowering plants in our natural world? Here are some correspondences: Leaves correspond to things of intelligence, or "truths of faith," blossoms to things of wisdom, or "the good things of faith," and fruits to things of life, or "the works of charity." These three things together make a complete set - a "trine," as it is called in the Writings of Swedenborg - found in all things of creation. It is the trine of goodness, truth, and the two of these together in action.

*There are
spiritual
causes
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Our reading from Swedenborg tells us that there is a model of our regeneration in the flowering plants simple enough for children to understand, but deep theology nonetheless - a model of the step-by-step nature of our journey to the Lord's kingdom.

How does this model work? Simply stated, blossoms represent the spiritual state before regeneration, and the fruit that comes forth from the blossom represents a person's spiritual rebirth. Stated more completely, the lesson is this: a person's regeneration is a process, and it resembles the growth of an embryo. And although this growth process is continuous, it can be divided into three main developmental stages, or spiritual states:

"Becoming green from the leaves" is the first state, called repentance, presented to our senses as the first greening of spring - the tiny leaves unfurling from their buds; the trees awakening from their dormant period of life.

"Blossoming" is the second state, called reformation, manifested as the blooming of all the flowering plants as spring comes into fullness.

"Fruiting" is the third state, the state of regeneration itself.

Note that this last is another state, or developmental stage along the way to spiritual perfection, but it is not the destination. Perfection is a thing we do

Spring Flowers continued

eternally: even the angels of the highest heaven continue to develop in spiritual perfection. Only God is that perfection itself. Regeneration is a verb - an action word. It never stops moving forward. And here's the good news: you don't have to be perfect to be regenerating - only in stage three. Greening, blossoming, and fruiting: there's the trine again:

Truth: knowing right from wrong, the spiritual state when the light comes on. Here we know that there is good and evil, and that there is a world of difference between the two. It is the doorway into the kingdom of heaven. That's repentance.

Goodness: seeing that good is to be done and evil shunned; desiring to do good from the knowledge of it; the decision to change the direction of one's life in the direction of heaven. That's reformation.

These two bearing fruit in operation: that's called charity; doing truth because of the obvious good that the truth leads to. That's regeneration.

These are the spiritual principles of regeneration visibly presented to your eyes, out your window, every moment of every spring day. It is right out there: the spiritual lesson of regeneration, in "all nature, a theater representative of the Lord's kingdom," with "the Divine in every particular."

Sometimes just for fun, I used to tell my Environmental Biology students that my goal for the course was to ruin them; to fix them so that they couldn't go out in nature, couldn't even drive down the road anymore, without seeing food chains, photosynthesis, energy and materials in motion, changing landforms, competition - all those natural processes that together make up the living world. "No more just enjoying nature," I would tell them. "Those days are gone. Now you're educated."

But in reality, the opposite was true. Knowledge of those hidden processes makes nature all the more fascinating, and all the more beautiful as well, because with a knowledge of the causes, the effects are that much more delightful. And that's exactly what our readings are telling us about knowledge of the spiritual causes of natural things. How much more delightful is spring when we know what greening, blossoming, and fruiting are all about! Does it make them any less delightful in the purely natural sense?

On the contrary. The delight is infinitely multiplied. What did the angels find when they opened a flower in heaven? "A whole paradise, constructed of indescribable things." Will knowing that our regeneration is "now showing" in the theatre representative of the Lord's kingdom diminish our enjoyment of spring and all it has to offer to the senses? I don't think so.

It is interesting to look at the sequence of events in the Garden of Eden story. The Lord created the man first, it says: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." But where could the Lord put him? "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed." And what did the Lord put in that garden, with the man? What did he consider essential for his habitation? "And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." That's the

Knowledge of those hidden processes makes nature all the more fascinating

flowering plants - the angiosperms that the Lord gave the man, with all that they represent. "And then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it." God knew the delight that tending it and keeping it would bring.

The Lord doesn't do anything by accident. Creation, down to the last detail, has purposes within purposes, uses within uses, and spiritual meanings embedded within the obvious appearances of all things. These meanings are correspondences: spiritual strings tied to natural things - strings that we can follow; that will lead us inward to the kingdom of heaven. The poet William Blake knew about correspondences. They were more real to him than the natural things that they represent. Here is how he described it:

*I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it into a ball.
It will lead you in at Heaven's Gate,
Built in Jerusalem's Wall.*

Flowers. They are everywhere this time of year. Enjoy them. Let your senses delight in their colours, their forms, and their fragrances. Enjoy this season for the natural pleasure that it brings. That's what it's for. It is like the Garden of Eden: the Lord made it for us, and put us in it to tend and keep it. But don't forget to let your higher mind delight in the spiritual lesson of every detail of the season. That's what it's for as well.



The Honey Bee
By Stephen Gladish

Where would we and the flowers be without the honey bee? Bees are another wonderful detail in God’s providence. Nothing so happy as blossoms and flowers and fruits is left to chance. Some say flowers are the earth laughing.


What indeed might a bee do if she had an individual will such as humans? She might plunder and pirate. She might invade the flower, use it up, and throw away the nectar and pollen, just as last century the buffalo hunters exterminated fifty million mighty buffalo merely for their hides and humps. Or with a human will, the bee might store the pollen solely for her own use. Or the bee could collect pollen or honey in a selfish way, drinking the nectar to inebriation.

But the bee is turned to angelic ways and obeys the voice of the Creator. She is always attending to bee business. She never deviates. She never malingers. she lives for beauty. She smells beauty. She sees beauty. She is happy and purposeful. She is a “humble bee.” she knows without flowers she would be useless, unemployed and purposeless. Living in divine order the bee subordinates self to usefulness and to the good of the human race. She loves and services each flower carefully, gently, industriously. She knows nectar and pollen must be shared to be enjoyed, and to bear fruit.

Flowers are lovely, fragile symbols of God’s tender love, ever following the sun and looking to him. Each flower is individual, though there are hundreds on just one lemon, apple, peach, orange or grapefruit tree. The bee acknowledges and separates each flower, prizing each flower’s gift. No flower is too small, too wilted, or too homely to visit.

The flower never knows when the bee will come. It is always ready, open for bee business. The bee is an emissary of God. indeed we can see God in the bee. God does the same things with us as the bee does with the flowers. He visits us and takes to other people the goodness implanted by himself and growing in us. Cross-pollination results - the wonderful work or re-creation and regeneration. We can stand and blossom like the flowers, representing the beginning of rebirth and regeneration, or we can become the bee and spread God’s wisdom.

Bee sayings to “bee-lieve” and to live by:
We are *beeloved* by God
We must *beehave*
Beefriend others
Never *beelittle* others
No detail of growth and service to other is *beeneath* us
Heaven is not *beeyond* us
This is just the *beeginning*.

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A New Spirituality

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