

A NEW SPIRITUALITY

No. 10 Winter 2006

Our Life Force

The following is an excerpt from *Observing Spirit* by Peter Rhodes, reprinted with the permission of Chrysalis Books, Swedenborg Foundation:

The Work (Gurdjieff's spiritual method) talks about a centre within you that is like a magnet; this centre has an affection for truth. That affection searches for the truth in religious teachings or divine revelation. A person has what the Work calls "magnetic centre" if he or she has an affection for truth, especially for the kind of truth that can transform or change him or her to being more spiritual. We are searching for that kind of religion or truth. We are searching for states that can elevate us...

According to Swedenborg, although it feels as though we have power to act ourselves, this power or ability to act actually comes from the Lord. Further, Swedenborg explained that it is important for us to acknowledge that all power to do comes from the Lord. There is a huge difference, spiritually, between experiencing your life from the Lord as if it is your own, and living your life believing that it is your own.

The Lord is life. It is possible to turn your life over to him, trusting that he will take care of it. If you do this, you can enter the peace of real faith:

*The only approach to further inner development is through humility, through the real experience, constantly renewed, that one does not know - in fact, that one knows nothing but is always pretending to know (NICOLL, *Commentaries*, 940).*

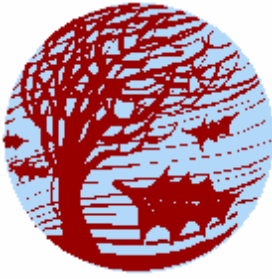
*The appearance is that a person with magnetic centre is searching for something, but in actuality it is the Lord, within the person's affection for truth who is doing the searching. A distinguishing is going on, and the Lord is searching for what is **his** in a person. He looks for those things that he has planted in a person with whom he can have a conjunction. The Lord is searching, and he is going to find what he is looking for when we cooperate. Divine providence is constantly leading toward conjunction.*

In this issue we follow this line of thinking and enlarge on the idea that God is our strength.



Peace has in it confidence in the Lord, that he directs all things, and provides all things and that he leads to a good end.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG



A Meditation on Life

By Eddie Askew

Lord, wouldn't it all be better
if things were organised and predictable?
If I knew the result of my actions beforehand.
If I could work out the interest on my investment
before I made it.
If I could always plant in neat little rows
and watch the seedlings grow exactly right.
I don't know if it would be better.
It would certainly be safer, and more comfortable.
Tidy.
I could work out my plans,
Build my dreams, organise my life.
My plans, my life?
Lord, I think that's the point.
I'm looking at the world
and the work I have to do,
As though they were mine.
But it's your world
And the only long term plans are yours.
I can build my own ideas,
I can do what I think best and wise,
But the wind is yours too.
and it blows through my life at your will.
Sometimes it's a cool breeze
Sighing through the willows by the river.
Comforting.
Sometimes it's the strong wind
Hurling rain in my face
As I walk in the hills.
And it can be the screaming gale,
With purposes I don't understand.
Taking my plans and tearing them to shreds
Or so it seems.
Lord, help me to realise that your ways are beyond knowing.
Strengthen my faith,
That when the wind blows my world wide open
And carries the seed beyond the horizon,
I can be confident
that it will grow in other places.
And other times.
Make me see that all those other times and places
are yours too.
Lord, my job is to keep my face to the wind.
To let it blow through my life.
Refreshing. Disturbing.
Sometimes frightening.
But always knowing that it's your wind.
And when I'm facing it
I'm facing you.





Editorial

Water from Rock

According to the ancient science of correspondences, explained to us in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, water corresponds to truth. This means that what water does for our natural bodies - cleansing, slaking our thirst, refreshing us - the corresponding truth does for our spiritual selves. We can thirst for the truth and, when we find it, it is refreshing.

Rocks also correspond to truth but of a different kind. These are the foundation stones upon which a person's faith is built. For me, they are the things my parents taught me as I was growing up - that there is a God, that we should not steal, lie, kill, etc. because God said so, that God's providence is over every least particular of our lives, that his Word is true and has deeper meaning within it, and so on - the nitty gritty of what I grew up to believe. These can be seen to be true but they don't always touch our hearts. After all, you can't drink a rock. There is a thirst for a different kind of truth, the experience of the truth. If we have a dry, lifeless faith and are thirsting for more purpose in life, God can quench our thirst as he did for the children of Israel when they were beginning to die of thirst in the wilderness. He commanded Moses to strike a rock with his rod and water gushed out.

The truth of this has been brought home to me at different times in answer to prayer. Recently, when I searched for the way to go with regards to one of my children, a prayer for direction was answered in a real way, giving me a sense of God's nearness as a very present help in times of trouble. It is the experience of God working in our lives that brings a rock-like faith to life. It is the difference between knowing a thing to be true and the experience of it. The way to unlock or tap into the living water within the foundation stones of our faith is to seek the Lord prayerfully in times of need, knowing that he will provide. We can draw strength from the rock-like principles that we stand on - God can make living water come out of them as we seek to put them into practice in our lives. But, unless we possess those foundational truths to begin with, he cannot bring about the miracle of a living faith. We need to gain a knowledge of what is true for these things to become the rock from which a living faith can flow.

Looking ahead to the future of this publication, we have lately been trialing quarterly issues but will be returning to bi-monthly mailouts again thanks to reader support, which is much appreciated.

Jenny



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The Moses Moment

Julian Duckworth

Right at the very end of the book of Deuteronomy, God tells Moses - the leader of the children of Israel on their long journey from Egypt to Canaan - to go up a mountain called Nebo and look across the river Jordan into the land of Canaan. He tells him to view the whole of the land from the far north to the deep south, from the immediate land across the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea. There it all is.

Imagine how Moses must have felt seeing for himself the very culmination of his lifetime's purpose of leading and serving. And then God says to Moses, "I have caused you to see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross over there." That seems a rather cruel prohibition, doesn't it? You can see it, but you yourself won't be part of it.

To understand exactly why God said this to Moses we need to go back to the book of Numbers 20. There, at Kadesh, for the second time, the children of Israel complained to Moses about their thirst, and how they would rather have died before setting out on their journey. The first time they did this God had told Moses to strike the rock. When he did, water gushed out to revive the people. Now, at Kadesh, God told Moses to speak to the rock and it would yield its water. Instead, Moses struck the rock twice, and received a severe rebuke from God: "Because you did not believe me, to honor me as holy in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land that I have given them."

Moses had to carry this realisation with him for the rest of the journey through the wilderness - and if my memory is accurate, this was thirty-eight of the forty years. Finally, the prohibition was fulfilled: Moses stood viewing the land on Nebo, and was told that he would never enter the land. It was a pivotal moment, with Israel poised on the threshold of entry, looking ahead to a very different future, and looking back at the mistakes of the past.

Any moment in our life can be seen as a moment of opportunity and a time for reflection. We take stock at various milestone moments, such as the turn of the year or our birthday or anniversary, but these are simply artificial divisions of measured time. Real time, *spiritual* time, is much more unbroken. It consists of living in the present with many things from the past still affecting us, and looking ahead to the future from where we see life now.

Real time isn't chopped up or demarcated; it flows and lasts for as long as it needs to, or until a new state takes over. Time in the spiritual world is a sense of changing states as one outcome naturally leads into some new

beginning almost without break or interruption. While it is virtually impossible for any of us here to escape the tyranny of deadlines and date books, even so, all of us carry a sense that deeper time is personal and continuous. I can look back to a number of things in the last year that seemed to happen only yesterday, and to very recent

things that now seem years back. Time is like that.

Here is a little tip: If you want to make real time much longer - just suppose you are on holiday or doing something very enjoyable - then slowly and deliberately savour every moment, luxuriating in it, and it will stretch out the seconds, the minutes and hours, and slow them down. I am working to find a technique for speeding up the tedious parts of life, but apart from knowing that it is just a matter of attitude, I am still at the drawing board!

To return to Moses on the mountain, seeing the land of the future but forbidden to enter it himself, herein is a huge and moving truth, if not several. I would like to look at two closely related ones. First, we are not the creators of what comes to pass, but participators in an unfolding sequence of developments. The future is not ours to engineer; the spirituality of the human race is not for us to determine. These

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are things that God is already foreseeing and providing for. Like Moses, we are involved in our part of the process; we should take responsibility for that, and leave the world in a better condition than we first found it. Anything more is a kind of arrogance. There is a nice joke: How do you make God laugh? Tell him your plans!

Moses was shown the vision of the length and breadth of the land into which his people would come, but not with him. If we really do believe that the Lord's providence is over everything, with purpose and meaning, we will be confident that the future is already being set in motion, no matter how new and different and even worrying it may look to us, who tend to look at things from the nostalgia of the present, never mind of the past . . . and then we're only a hair's breadth from controlling it.

The other truth from this Moses moment is personal. There is hardly a thing about our life of which we can be absolutely certain, except for the facts of things that we know have happened. I know that I have four children, and that we came to Australia over twelve years ago. I know how old I am and that it is the first day of June. But more than that is not mine to know.

The deeper stuff lies mercifully hidden from me. I don't know whether I have made much improvement as a person; I certainly don't know whether I am good or bad, selfless or selfish; I do know from experience that I can be self-centered and led by my ego very often. I don't know for sure if I will go to heaven or to hell, but I think I trust God to lead me to the environment in eternity where I will be the happiest. I do not know what is going to happen tomorrow, when events may overtake normality and my whole life might change.

Much, even most of life is kept from our interference or gaze. That is according to good order, because were we able to know these things, we would surely abuse them just as easily as we would abuse knowing the first three winners in the next race. God alone

knows our states. This is a truth given to us, not to stop us from thinking about life anymore, but to help develop our trust that behind the arbitrary happenings that puzzle us, there is a constant purpose being unfolded. As described in this passage from the Writings of Swedenborg , if the hand of providence were to stop or err for the least fraction of a moment over our salvation, the result would be for it all to be way off target. It is that precise, that unceasing:

If a javelin thrower or musketeer were to aim at a target, and a straight line a thousand feet long were drawn behind the target, then if the aim were off just a hair, at the end of that thousand feet the javelin or ball would have strayed far from the line behind the mark. That is what it would be like if the Lord did not

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have his eye on eternity at every moment, even the least fraction of a second, in his foresight and provision for everyone's place after death. The Lord does this, though, because to him the whole future is present, and to him everything present is eternal. (Divine Providence 333)

Divine providence is infinitely wise. It is totally aware of everything, outside of all time and space considerations. That sounds

a bit impersonal, as if God were simply a universal unfolding life-force. But God is also very personal, and I think that the idea of God having a loving purpose for each one of us keeps us mindful that God is love, and that God feels for our sadness and shares in our gladness. And providence is incessantly at work to lead us, if at all possible, from ignorance to understanding, from fear to trust and love, from self-centeredness and ego-dependency to freedom, and from hell to heaven. "The activity of divine providence for our salvation begins at our birth and continues to the end of our life."

The story tells us that while they buried Moses when he died, no one knows his grave to this day. We do not know our exact place or use or role in the broad sweep of divine planning. Thank goodness for that prohibition! It is enough for us to take part in what we can see, but can never claim to own.

Strength from God

Donald Rose

There is a chapter in Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* about the great power of the angels. Swedenborg witnessed the power of angels that goes beyond belief. They can chase away thousands of evil spirits:

Numbers are of no avail against the angels; neither are devices, cunning or alliances; for they see through them all and shatter them in a moment.

But following this emphatic paragraph about great power we have the following:

It must be known, however, that the angels have no power whatever of themselves, but that all their power is from the Lord; and that they are powers only so far as they acknowledge this. Whoever among them believes that he has power of himself instantly becomes so weak as not to be able to resist even a single evil spirit. For this reason angels ascribe no merit whatever to themselves, and are averse to all praise and glory on account of anything they do, ascribing it to the Lord (No. 230).

It is an angelic truth repeated in the Writings of Swedenborg that strength is to be ascribed to God, and that we are strong or weak depending on our doing that ascribing. This angelic truth has found its way into human affairs and has been the way of uplifting for countless thousands who seemed hopeless. We refer to the twelve step programmes. It began with alcoholics anonymous. The twelve steps actually mention

alcohol very little. There is an emphasis on power, an acknowledgement that one does not have power. There is a turning to a higher power. It is an ascribing of strength to God. This has led to several successful twelve step programmes.

The Writings give the striking teaching that if we come through temptation with a sense of our own credit, the feeling that we merit the victory because of our own strength, we are going to

have to endure similar or worse temptations until we are reduced to the sanity of mind in believing we have merited nothing (see *Arcana Coelestia* 2273).

People who have a close experience with their own lack of power are testimonials to a fundamental truth. The same is true of people who have known

paralysing illness or those whose bodies have grown old and feeble and yet who have found a higher strength. This is in accord with the words of Scripture:

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might he increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:29-31).



Observing Spirit \$30 + p & p **Evaluating your Daily Progress on the Path to Heaven with Gurdjieff and Swedenborg** by Peter Rhodes

Stressing personal responsibility for overcoming negative traits, each chapter explains how we can realise our true spiritual potential by applying the tools of Gurdjieff's spiritual method, "The Work," to our everyday existence. Draws on the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg to enhance our understanding of spiritual reality. Practical steps are suggested for measuring our progress.

This book was rated among one of the best spiritual books for 2006 by the American *Spirituality & Health* magazine.

Out of the Mouths of Babes Children speak to God



Dear God,
I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it. Nan

Dear God,
In school they told us what you do. Who does it when you are on vacation? Jane

Dear God,
You don't have to worry about me. I always look both ways. Dean

Dear God,
Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident? Norma

Dear God,
Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy. Joyce

Dear God,
Who draws the lines around the countries? Nan

Dear God,
Are you really invisible or is it just a trick? Lucy



Dear God,
Please send me a pony. I never asked for anything before. You can look it up. Bruce

Dear God,
If you give me a genie like Aladdin, I will give you anything you want, except my money or my chess set. Raphael

Dear God,
I want to be just like my Daddy when I get big but not with so much hair all over. Sam

Dear God,
I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions. Ruth
Dear God,

What does it mean you are a Jealous God? I thought you had everything. Jane

Dear God,
I think about You sometimes, even when I'm not praying. Elliott

Dear God,
We read Thomas Edison made light. But in Sunday school they said you did it. So I bet he stole your idea. Sincerely, Donna



Dear God,
I didn't think orange went purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool.
Eugene



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