

A NEW SPIRITUALITY

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Spiritual Fitness

Did you make any New Year's resolutions this year? Maybe you decided to exercise more, eat healthy food, or give up smoking. Losing weight and getting fit are the most common resolutions people make at the beginning of a year. But what about spiritual fitness and improvement? We have an article on page 4 on making spiritual resolutions. Susannah Currie reminds us on page 2 what it is to be human and that we need to be in community with others if we are to grow spiritually.

God's intention for us is to become angels in heaven. He stands at the door and knocks but it is up to us to respond and open the door to his leading. The Writings of Swedenborg reveal the stages to our spiritual growth symbolised in the story of the seven days of creation. Tom Kline sums these up very nicely in his article on page 6 with some practical suggestions for steps we could take in response to the Lord's call. It's never too late. After all, today is the first day of the rest of your life.

Jenny



It is a sure and immutable law that, so far as a person approaches the Lord, so far does the Lord approach the person.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

What it Means to be Human

Susannah Currie

After the death of a close friend ten years ago, I felt this question deeply. It took away all my energy for living. I went about the tasks of my life joylessly wondering, "Why, God, did you bother to create humanity only for a life of suffering?" My son Ben was about three at the time, and one day I spent an afternoon watching him play in our backyard sandbox. As I numbly watched in my silent grief, he dug a tunnel under the hardened sand with one hand, and then he began to dig from the opposite direction with his other hand. Suddenly, one hand felt the other. As he touched his hands under the sand, he burst out laughing. That small voice of joy jostled me from my questioning about why God had created humanity. It gave me the simple realisation that God had to create humanity: human life is just so amusing! I laughed aloud and began to allow the love and joy of my child to lead me from despair to an understanding that human life, even with its suffering, is still an amazing and amusing adventure.

Does God want our lives as human beings to be happy? Yes! The proof of this is the gift of our imperfection. The gift of imperfection is that we can engage in the process of perfection, not attain it. The process of regeneration begins with our feeling of repentance for our sins, not our complete avoidance of speaking and acting for fear of sinning. Our regeneration continues as we work with God and are re-formed into more loving and wise people. Life as a human being is

an individual search for meaning and purpose where we each experience our own unique mistakes so that we can learn from them.

The human condition is imperfect! This is good and this is true! Recognise this, and you receive an influx of wisdom into your discernment saying that you are God's beloved child, and a member of the family of humanity. With this recognition, you begin to love God. Recognise that others are imperfect too, and you receive an influx of love into your intentions, and begin to know how to wisely love your neighbor as yourself.

Human life is a group experience; we learn how to interact more lovingly and wisely with each other through our belonging in communities. As a member of humanity, we are all bound to each other in our imperfection and in our recognition of our common spiritual journey. We have companions on this rough road of life with whom to enjoy the journey. They are with us to help us when we stumble, to smile at our growth, to cry with us in our pain, and to listen to us in our confusion.

The gifts of discernment (or rationality) and intentionality (or free will) are the capacities through which we engage in the process of regeneration. They are the two abilities through which God's influx of love and wisdom reaches us. Our discernment is expressed in our ability to speak. Our intentionality is expressed in our ability to act.



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God means for us not only to have the gifts we need to grow spiritually, but also to enjoy the life through which our lessons are learned. To engage the mind in regeneration, we must strive to discern good from evil and truth from falsity, and to speak the truths of the rational human mind as we grow spiritually. We can enjoy this process as we deepen our appreciation of the beauty of God's order. To engage the heart in regeneration, we must choose to act compassionately on the discernments of the mind, doing the good that we understand. We can enjoy this process as we become closer to others.

Swedenborg wrote that all who are in love to the Lord and charity to the neighbour, and who do good, are in the universal heaven. In all communities where individuals engage in an honest and authentic search for good and truth, and make a commitment to act upon their understanding with compassion, the human beings there create "on earth as it is in heaven."

To be human is to be a unique creation and a part of the universal heaven. The New Jerusalem - the term Swedenborg uses for the new age that is upon us - is being created by human beings in cooperation with God. It requires our caring, our unity, our understanding, our compassion and our respect for diversity. When we are united in love to God we can come into a love for our neighbor that transcends vocabulary and styles of worship. Our individual

spiritual journeys are strengthened by coming into community with others who honour our authenticity and our participation in life's challenges, joys, struggles, and recreation.

As humans we have received the gift of life from God. This greatest gift, and the other gifts of being human, come with responsibilities. In our imperfection, we are responsible for finding in our hearts the forgiveness for ourselves and for others that God always offers us. In our rationality, we are responsible for seeing our falsities and faulty understandings, and seeking wisdom. In our free will, we are responsible for choosing to give up our unkindnesses and to act lovingly and compassionately. These gifts guide us to obey the two greatest commandments: to love God and to love our neighbour. We are interdependent in this, for we need each other to be the neighbour to be loved.

Remember the sandbox? When Ben found his own hand under the sand, part of his delight was in finding himself! Our gift as humanity is that we have each other to help us find ourselves and to discover and enjoy one another. We have each other to get close to and love, to learn from and challenge, to entertain and annoy. No one can convince me that isn't fun! Because remember, to be human is to laugh. Let's not take ourselves so seriously that we look to the goal of enlightenment, or perfection, and miss the adventures, mishaps, comedies, and tragedies along the way.

Start With Yourself

When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world. As I grew older and wiser, I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country.

But, it too, seemed immovable.

As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only my family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it.

And now as I lie on my deathbed, I suddenly realise: If I had only changed my self first, then by example I would have changed my family.

From their inspiration and encouragement, I would then have been able to better my country and, who knows, I may have even changed the world.

Author Unknown

Spiritual Resolutions

Mark Perry

Our lives can be defined as the events that happen to us and the responses we make to those events. For example, something small happens to us: say we are running late for an appointment, and we get all bent out of shape. We choose to use the event of “running late” to vent an emotion like anger or blame. We choose to get upset. There are even times when someone does something to us and we get so caught up in that issue or event that on account of our negative emotion we lose control. We waste time and the moment with that person. Our negative or ego moments quite literally rob us of healthy spiritual life and time.

Living is about the now, the present. How we react to the events that surround us is how we spend our present, how we spend our lives. The challenge of course is to learn to cherish each moment, and not to allow our negativity to steal the moments of our lives. We are beginning a new year. I would encourage you to make for yourself a spiritual resolution. Make a commitment to face and deal with one of your negative attitudes or lower loves. The importance of our efforts to resist our selfish and worldly cravings is made abundantly clear to the Lord’s Word. “For where your heart is, there is your treasure also” (Matthew 21:6).

In the process of spiritual life or regeneration we are invited, by means of the process of self-examination, to look to the Lord and shun evils as sins against him. Certainly this is true! Part of cultivating spiritual life is also about *not* torturing oneself, learning to release resentment and other forms of selfishness and worldliness, not harbouring the resentment and bitterness that cause such terrible self-torture. In learning to release resentment, perhaps we can make a commitment to the love that comprises heaven. That is mutual love.

In illustration: There was one time a young

man taking a plane flight. He liked to be able to get up and move about the cabin without having to get others to move, so he always chose the aisle seat. With his arms resting comfortably on the arm rests he put his head back and closed his eyes to enjoy a moment of relaxation. In his effort to negotiate the aisle, another man returning to his seat accidentally knocked the man’s arm as it ventured just beyond the edge of the rest. Without apologising, the man returning to his seat just kept on walking. Just a short time before, the first man had been calm and relaxed. Now anger replaced the face of relaxation and serenity. So what changed? An arm was bumped. No big deal, right? No big deal!! But

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as soon as motive is ascribed to this event all hell quite literally breaks loose. “That jerk!” thinks the man, “That inconsiderate beast. I bet he meant to do that!” The negative attitudes and false notions cultivated by the ego create a great mountain out of that molehill arm bump.

Meanwhile the other man walks quietly back to his seat, completely oblivious that he bumped the arm of another passenger, oblivious that behind him sits someone harbouring great anger, and taking delight in planning revenge. The questions are: Who has the torment? Who has the problem? Who is the one suffering? Who is in need of life - spiritual life?

More often that not, it is not what happens to one in life that matters, but how one chooses to deal with what happens - how we respond to the situations we face in life. What are your intentions? The Writings of Swedenborg tell us, as plainly as words can, that life - spiritual and natural human life - depends on our intentions, motives or purposes when they declare, “Love is the life of man.” In daily life things happen to us all the time. We are mentally and physically challenged. Values we cherish and love are often called into question. At times we respond to such situations as if we were God. we act as if we really know and have all the

answers. We act as if we have a clear understanding of all things, and no one else can see them as clearly as we do. Though there are numerous teachings concerning the ego's desire to rule and have complete dominion, we ignore them. We allow the selfish will to lead by giving in to the desire to believe we are omniscient (therefore God). In so doing we dispense both judgment and punishment at each and every opportunity. This kind of living is actually a form of insanity. It is living life based on the things that happen. This reactionary or mechanical response to situations is not human. It is not living life from higher delights within, from charity and mutual love. Human beings were not meant to live and operate like machines. Rather, people were designed by the Lord to be animated by deeper loves formed by genuine truth, to trust in the Lord and to do what is good, to feed on his faithfulness, so that he can give us the desires of a heavenly heart (see Psalm 37:4).

Love is the life of man. Love is our life. Our life, then, is about our motives and motivations. It becomes imperative that we make a spiritual resolution for ourselves, that we make a commitment to regenerate, that we make the choice to live in accordance with what Divine Truth teaches. As individuals we are always being called by the Lord to be regenerated, to put away our selfish negative states and desires, and to follow the way of the Lord. In the calmer states of clear reflection, we all know this. The Lord makes this abundantly clear when he says: "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

So we are presented with a question: Are we going to answer the call and open the door? Answering the Lord's call can be a frightening thing. It is scary because it means making new beginnings, making a change, changing to

something different and heavenly. The selfish (old) will does not like or want this change and does all in its selfish power to prevent it. In these times an illusion is painted. The ego endeavours to show how hard is the way to heaven, and few are they that find it and, taking it one step further, the hells hold up the old way in an effort to show how easy and good it is. And like the Children of Israel we too "long for the fleshpots of Egypt" (Exodus 16:3). Without resolution to turn to the Lord, the old ways of the ego seek the destruction of our spiritual lives.

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At times we all long for the flesh pots of Egypt. But this is not the way to spiritual life. This is not answering the Lord's call. Answering the call requires that we make personal and private resolutions, resolutions by which we can live in an unselfish heavenly way. Sadly there are times that we fool ourselves into believing we are answering the call. This state is one of self-righteous indignation, times in which we indignantly insist that we are doing the right thing when deep down we know that this is not true. When we reflect on it, we have a sense that there is still selfishness at work. We are alone with the Lord. We can be honest with ourselves. We can know from perceptions given to us by the Lord through his Word that we are not being as fair and as honest in our actions and dealings with others as we have fooled ourselves into believing.

Once we begin to recognise this attitude or motivation within, the Lord is letting us know that it is time for yet another beginning, a time for a new and spiritual resolution, a time to stand with resolve for our first and true end, namely the Lord. So the Psalmist writes: "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope, for with the Lord there is mercy and with him is plenteous redemption" (Psalm 130:5). This year, may you hold firm to your spiritual resolutions.

Seven Days of Re-Creation

Tom Kline

Is the Creation Story from the Bible relevant to my life? The Writings of Swedenborg reveal a deeper meaning within the stories of the Word of God. Through this understanding, many of life's questions are answered. The Rt Rev. Tom Kline explores the days of creation (Genesis 1:1-31), showing how each day represents a step on our spiritual path.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”

We all begin our spiritual life in void and darkness. No matter how successful we are in the things of the world, without the Lord we are nothing. Yet the Lord is “hovering” over our life. He is there, anticipating great opportunities and possibilities in our lives. He is waiting for us to invite him into our lives and begin the process of spiritual creation.

Take the time to pay attention to the Lord's presence in your life.

Day 1: “God said, ‘Let there be light.’”

Our spiritual life begins when we truly see the light, that is, when we acknowledge something higher than ourselves. This first day of creation can be a gradual realisation of the Lord's presence or a specific time when our lives are transformed. There is a world of difference between the void and darkness and the first day of creation - the difference between night and day.

Make time to read the Lord's Word.

Day 2: “And God said, ‘Let there be a firmament (expanse between the clouds and the seas) in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.’”

Our acknowledgement of the Lord begins to transform our faith (the “waters” of truth that we hold in our mind). We come to see that there are “higher waters”- truths that are divine, holy and sacred - and “lower waters” - truths that are of a human origin. We begin to set spiritual priorities in our lives, putting the things of God at the top.

Make a list of truths you wish to be led by.

Day 3: “And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb, and the fruit tree ...’”

On the third day our actions and deeds are transformed. We no longer just think, but we do. When our faith leads to actions of loving kindness, this is the substantial new “ground” of our spiritual life, a foundation for the living actions of service and ministry pictured by the herbs, plants and fruit bearing trees.

Be of service of someone in your life.

Notice the pattern in the first three days: first, something descends from above; second, the waters are transformed and, finally, substantial and living things are created. The next three days repeat this series, this time not merely from the light of truth, but from the warmth of love

Day 4: “God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day ...”

The sun appears on the fourth day; we are no longer ruled by truth, but the warmth of love. Love becomes the very centre of our lives. This is an important step in the spiritual growth of our minds: love now takes the first place and truth comes into the second place.

With love, do something special for someone.

Day 5: “Then God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly ...’”

Because of the warmth of the sun, the waters of the second day now bring forth life: fish below and birds above. This day is characterized by truth that comes from feeling the Lord's love deep within us. It is truth that doesn't have to be reasoned or learned. It is spontaneously known to be true simply because of love.

Make prayer a regular priority

Day 6: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image ...’”

The ground created on the third day brings forth living creatures, in the image of God. Because of the power of love, Divine love, the Lord begins to form us in his image. We become “human in the image of the Divine Human. We serve with actions and deeds

that flow from the truly human qualities of kindness, humility, and a laying down of our lives.
Take the time to appreciate the beauty of people around you.

Day 7: “...And God rested ...”

The seventh day is a day of peace. It is a peace that is

beyond all description, a peace that becomes the very core of our being. As you do the work of spiritual growth, peace flows in. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27).


Take the time to slow down, to be with the Lord in the quiet and peace of his creation.

Take Time

In her book The Simple Path, Mother Teresa mentions that the following inspirational poem was written on the wall of a children’s home in Calcutta.

*Take Time to THINK ...
It is the source of power.
Take Time to PLAY ...
It is the secret of perpetual youth.
Take Time to READ ...
It is the fountain of wisdom.
Take Time to PRAY ...
It is the greatest power on earth.
Take Time to LOVE and BE LOVED.
It is a God given privilege.*

*Take Time to BE FRIENDLY ...
It is the road to happiness.
Take Time to LAUGH ...
It is the music of the soul.
Take Time to GIVE ...
It is too short a day to be selfish.
Take Time to WORK ...
It is the price of success.
Take Time to DO CHARITY ...
It is the key to heaven.*

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