

Candela



Newsletter of the Swedenborg Centre.

Organisational Details are provided on the next page

WELCOMING MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 2026

ISSUE 125

Welcome to another issue of the Candela! We trust that what you get from it helps you in your spiritual work and in your understanding of the spiritual focus of your life and those of others who you share life with.

I've been involved in some clay pottery work in the last few months. All very new and interesting for me. Several of us worked each with a turntable where you 'throw' the clay, then apply your two hands to shape the pot, bowl or cup, pressing your thumbs carefully down into the clay to make the inside space. Your hands need to be wet and re-wetted constantly to create the surface smoothness. One false move on your part and you're done for. The clay will come out of its circularity and implode or explode. And you start over again from scratch.



(Image on UNSPLASH by Mathilde Langevin)

It's a very ancient activity. My goodness, my fairly pathetic creation was done on an electrical turntable with speed settings. Those ancient Egyptian, Japanese, Greek, African earthenware intricate curvaceous decorated works of art

... how were they done and brought to such beauty and perfection? How was the space inside them achieved? I am humbled.

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Please note: the views expressed in this Newsletter are those of each contributor and do not necessarily reflect any particular position of the Swedenborg Centre.

NEXT ISSUE - DECEMBER 2026

Another interesting edition of Candela; please enjoy reading it. If you would like to write anything for the December edition please get it to me by 24th November. It will be the Christmas and summer edition. Sorry this Spring edition is a little late.

Ruth

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Joe Vandermeer (Director)

.....continued from page 1.....

Clay is such a basic substance. It's down there under our feet. My middle name Clayton simply means 'town built on clay' or it could be 'town built from clay' if you think about all the bricks that towns need. My home city of London was originally a small settlement on a river that topologically was shaped like a huge bowl and all made of this thick clay put down by the river over millions of years. London gardens are not loamy, they are sheer hard work!

Which nicely brings me to what I think is the spiritual meaning of this substance. It strikes me that 'clay' means 'life' but not the magic moments or the fizzy excitements that you remember for years afterward. It's more the Monday morning feeling and another week to get through. But not said with groaning pessimism. I think that would be more in the area of 'mire'! No, just managing another day in your schedule and getting on with what needs to be done. It is what it is. Nothing in it to write home about, but without the doing, life would quickly fall apart.

Ah, the "bedrock". I knew there was a word which captured this ordinary plane of human existence. Chop wood and draw water before you seek enlightenment. And after enlightenment, chop wood and draw

water. It never goes away. Swedenborg's description of heavenly life is not a vision of ecstasy and hanging fruits. Sure, there are wonders, like colours you have never seen before, and beautiful people whose appearance of beauty far outshines anything you saw on earth.

But these are not eternal rewards ... they are the outcomes of us willingly and knowingly getting on with what needs doing, and being okay with the goodness of it all. Doing

good without some expectation of getting something back from doing it, and because that isn't there as a motive, you get tons of fulfilment from just doing it. It is the stuff of heaven, the joy of working with the divine on the earthy plane.

Swedenborg is really neat about this. Yes, there's the natural, the spiritual, and the celestial. (Oooh, the celestial!) But there's also the celestial in the natural and the spiritual in the natural. They sound like spiritual tongue-twisters perhaps, but they are basically telling us that like London, we are to be a holy city built upon the bedrock of clay rather than dazzling lustres of precious stones. Oh yes, they're there too, but only because they've been fashioned by the elements that make them. You can't get away from the drudgery, but for heaven's sake get rid of that label!

Enjoy your Monday mornings

Julian





The many paths that lead to the Divine. By Joe Vandermeer

I was recently reflecting on my childhood, growing up in the Netherlands, where I lived until I was 12 before the family entered into the adventure of coming to Australia in 1972. From the 1940s until mid 1950s my father trained for many years to be a Jesuit priest, and yet at the last moment he felt reluctant to commit to ordination as he wished to understand things that he was told were solely a matter of faith rather than them being an issue of intellectual reason. I won't go further into that angle of the subject in this article. But this meant that instead of becoming a priest, he re-trained, first becoming an army captain focused on administering first aid, and then becoming a high school teacher. He then married my mum, the sister of a fellow student from the seminary who also left (and became my uncle). Four children followed their marriage in rapid succession, of which I am the second.

As a result of dad's vocation as a teacher, combined with his interest in religion, he often took us kids to the Catholic high school where he taught in the town where we lived. There, a Franciscan nun, Sister Celestine was the school Principal. Sister Celestine was to me the epitome of kindness. I still remember her as a role model in my young life. I regarded her as a saint, like a grandmother. She was intelligent yet humble, patient yet firm. One stern look from her would make any child think twice about misbehaving, but she never lifted a finger to cause harm. She was knowledgeable, kind and gentle, and – as I learned later – a model of progressive thought in education, who always put the faculty and student needs first. Her insightful guidance of the people under her care was applauded long after they left her sphere. She was everywhere,

and saw everything, not to judge, but because she was observant out of an inquisitive nature. She dedicated herself tirelessly for 30 years to the harmony of her faculty and to the success and growth of her students. All the school staff and most of the students had nothing but respect and praise for her and her communal attitude of inclusiveness and sharing. Once she was publicly recognised with a highly prized commemorative medal for her service to the community, which she immediately handed around to the faculty and school as theirs for their teamwork. So my dad



Dad (middle) with Sr Celestine at the 50 year school celebration.

loved his job there in the mid 1960s.

My mum at that time was subject to some stresses. Mothers generally didn't work then, and perhaps it would have been better for her mental health if she had given her active mind something more to do than household chores. As a child she had grown up in a large family as the daughter of a very astute businesswoman who ran an early version of a department store – groceries, haberdasheries, pharmaceuticals, etc. But mum left her childhood home at 17 to find freedom from being confined to helping out in running the busy growing store, and decided to train as nurse.



When her four kids, along with other factors (of which I knew nothing then) she needed a break from us kids and responsibilities for a few weeks. So, we were shuffled off to an orphanage in the town where we lived, which was run by the Sisters of Mercy. I still remember feeling the stark atmosphere of the place. Metal beds, noisy, cold. Loads of



The four of us (me, second from right).

kids, many of them there permanently, either there as abandoned kids, perhaps their parent had died, or born out of wedlock, and so on. I especially remember Sister Alberdine as someone who was easily angered, harsh and seemingly uncaring. Some staff had themselves once been institutionalised in religious cloisters as a result of being orphaned. So in my recent reflections on it, trying to recall the orphanage, I found out it had been closed since 1975, and that even more recently it was the subject of a Royal Commission finding various forms of abuse of children who had lived there in the time when we had stayed there. Fortunately, I was never personally the recipient of any serious abuse there, but compared to the Catholic school principal whom I regarded as a saint, this temporary place of 'refuge' certainly seemed a big and obvious contrasting experience to me. I even heard the staff behaviours had turned quite a few of the children in their care strongly against religion once these became adults.

Anyhow, all this led me to reflect that we are all offered ample opportunity and responsibility for examining our drift, our motivations and actions, and to reflect on times when we did not make the ideal choice, and can therefore resolve to make amends in our present and future decisions and actions in the light of the greater wisdom we are gaining from our experience and its consequences. To do this, we need principles to help us reflect, nuggets of the good and of wisdom which leads to the good.

Such guidelines have always existed. In days of old they were revealed to individuals on a personal basis, later written down for transmission to others, and subsequently treasured and transmitted by astute practitioners of the advice. These resources have in some form always been with. Ultimately this guiding wisdom comes from God, the one God of all the major religions.

So it does not surprise me to find evidence of the principles which Swedenborg tries to alert us to in the revered writings of other religious traditions.

One such source comes to us via the Persian Sufi master, Sheikh Abdul Qadir Gilani (1077–1166), founder of the Qadiri Sufi order. He wrote *Futuh al-Ghaib* (*Revelations of the Unseen*), in which we find the following principles expressed, which I find rather reminiscent of Swedenborg's work (thanks to my partner Lily for introducing me to that book):



Stained glass by Gwendoline Payne

- Detachment from ego and desire: renounce craving for status, praise, spiritual experiences, or security; these reinforce the false self.



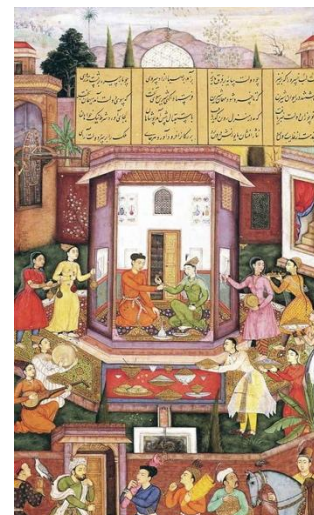
- Patience under trial: hardship is a divine instrument for stripping illusion and forming sincerity.
- Truthfulness and sincerity: act for God alone, not for reward, fear, or recognition.
- Inner transformation over outward piety: external religious practice without inner surrender is empty.

Then there is the 12th century Islamic mystic Ibn 'Arabī (a medieval Swedenborg, since they experienced similar spiritual encounters), in his work *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* (*The Bezels of Wisdom*) and his magnum opus *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*). It is a presentation of Ibn 'Arabī's mature mystical philosophy on Divine Wisdom and has informed Islam and Sufism for centuries. Some key points in it are:

- God is the only absolute Reality, while creation exists through continual divine self-disclosure, though God in Himself infinitely transcends every manifestation. The universe is like a mirror in which the divine names and qualities—mercy, knowledge, power, beauty, majesty, and so on—become visible.
- Human beings have a special role, being a microcosm of the whole cosmos. The fully realised human being, "the complete person" or "the perfect human", reflects the whole range of divine qualities and acts as a kind of meeting point between God and creation.
- Each prophet reveals a different "wisdom". Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc, each exemplify a particular way in which divine Reality is expressed and understood.
- God cannot be confined to any single concept or belief. Every religious conception apprehends something real, but becomes mistaken when it claims that its particular image of God exhausts the Divine.
- Unity appears through multiplicity. The many things, persons and religions of the world are genuinely different, yet all

ultimately depend upon and disclose the one Reality.

- Knowledge of God involves knowledge of oneself. By understanding the deepest reality of our own being, we come to recognise the divine source continually manifesting through us. The spiritual journey is ultimately a journey of self-knowledge.



Ibn Arabi. Source:
Fundacion de Cultura

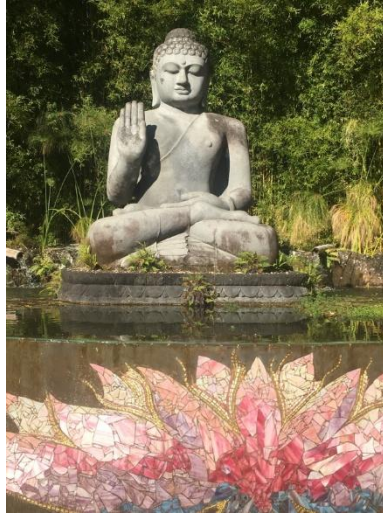
Islamica

- Spiritual maturity means receptivity rather than rigid certainty. Ibn 'Arabī famously advocates a heart capable of recognising the Divine wherever and however it appears.
- Love is fundamental. Divine love motivates creation itself: God brings forth creation so that the hidden divine qualities may become known and loved.
- Spiritual knowledge is experiential, not merely intellectual. True understanding comes through purification, contemplation, revelation and direct inner "unveiling".
- There are many spiritual stations and states. The path involves disciplined transformation of the self, increasing awareness, surrender and refinement of character.
- Imagination is a real intermediate realm, not mere fantasy; it mediates between spiritual and sensory reality and is crucial for dreams, visions and symbolic revelation.
- Every person encounters God according to their capacity and preparedness. Divine revelation is one, but its forms vary according to the receiver.
- Love, mercy and divine generosity underlie existence. Creation is not separate from God, yet neither is it simply identical with God.



And finally (my thanks to Bede for introducing me to this work), I love the more recent reminders of the Tibetan Buddhist, Chögyam Trungpa in his work *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, in which a few of his key points are:

- Spiritual materialism: ego can appropriate spirituality to strengthen itself rather than transcend itself.
- Three "Lords": ego seeks security through form (comfort/control), speech (ideas/beliefs), and mind (spiritual experiences/practices).
- Enlightenment is uncovered, not acquired: awakening is already present; practice removes the confusion obscuring it.
- Meditation means "letting be": Neither suppressing nor indulging thoughts and emotions, but seeing them clearly.
- Don't collect spirituality: accumulating teachings, teachers and experiences can become another ego possession—the "spiritual junk shop."
- Surrender expectations: genuine practice involves relinquishing spiritual ambitions, self-images and the demand for reassurance.
- Disappointment can be valuable: it punctures our fantasies about ourselves, teachers and the spiritual path.
- The teacher is not a saviour: a genuine teacher helps expose ego and self-deception rather than confirming the student.
- Confidence rather than blind faith: direct experience and openness replace dependence on beliefs and authority.



- Liberation: ultimately, freedom comes through relinquishing the struggle to maintain and defend a solid, separate self.

I hope, like me, that you find some of these guidelines meaningful. I encourage you to search for their manifestation in Swedenborg's work, but I also acknowledge that while Swedenborg revealed so many precious details of spiritual reality (truth), I am delighted to find them reflected in so many other valuable sources.

🌱 ♡ **SPRINGTIME** ♡ 🌱

"It is much the same for all the things that occur as a result of time, such as the four seasons of the year called spring, summer, autumn, and winter... When we think about them, it is from a temporal standpoint; but an angel thinks about them from the standpoint of state. Consequently, anything in them that is temporal for us changes into an idea of state for the angel. Spring and morning change into an idea of love and wisdom the way they are for angels in their first state..." (Heaven and Hell 166)

In other words, while we experience spring simply as a season of the year, angels perceive it spiritually — as a state of love and wisdom in their first, freshest degree. Just as spring brings new life, warmth, and growth to the natural world, it corresponds in the spiritual sense to the dawning of love and wisdom in the heart and mind.

And in Conjugal Love 137, he describes how "human beings enjoy a perpetual inflow of spring-like warmth from the Lord," meaning that the freshness and vitality of spring — spiritually understood — can be present in a person's life at any time, not merely in a particular season, because it flows from the Lord's unceasing love.



The Beauty that is God

By Julian Duckworth

When I go out walking, I often muse about this and that, and one time recently, the combination of God and beauty came to me, to sort of hold together and just see what comes up. Almost immediately, I remembered a Bible phrase about 'beholding the beauty of the Lord.' So I quickly got the thought that God and everything about God is always beautiful, must be, but why...?



Let's start out simply – We can say that 'a person is beautiful' and we can also say that 'a person is a beautiful person'. Do you see the difference? The first one suggests that what they look like is very beautiful. The second one suggests that their beauty hasn't really got anything to do with what they look like, but it has everything to do with what they themselves are like on the inside. I've known a few of each type, the stunningly beautiful people and the amazingly beautiful depths in some people's natures and auras. And there is a connection between the two, where the outward beauty we see is made from a

perfect-like coming together of everything physical, and the inward beauty we feel is made from a perfect-like coming together of everything personal, spiritual, and good.

One of the fascinating teachings we have about living on after we die is that once we have transitioned into being spirit, there will soon be a matching up of our outward appearance and our inward nature. The two will come together ... and to put it quite bluntly, we will appear to others exactly the way we are being inside ourselves. At that very moment no less. No more pretending. No more making out I'm being nice when I'm not.

Now, this openness isn't meant to frighten or worry us. It is simply how eventually it must come to be like that. What we've made of ourselves over our lifetime makes us who we are inside and this must be seen to be so, us seen and known to be who we really are. The challenge of that for us now is that we shouldn't wait for our afterlife but start being genuinely who we are now, start throwing out those aspects in us which are not beautiful but privately judgmental, critical, envious or however they come up in us.

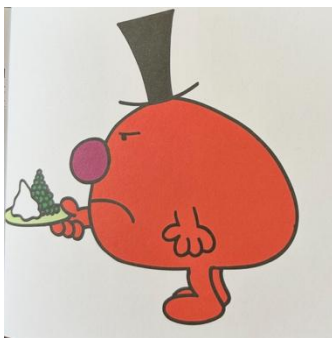
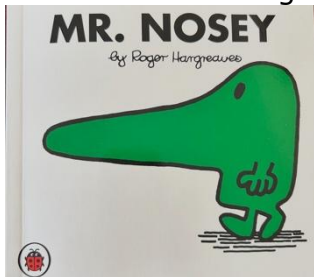


Now, God is *always* beautiful because God is absolutely consistent, *always* the same. God doesn't ever change.



What there is, is what you get, with God. What God looks like doesn't really matter. You can think about God as a doting bearded old man or as a mathematical point, but what God is really like is the important thing. God is completely wholly good and true and kind and real. God is the substance of everything we call 'good', and God is the origin of everything we say is true (or as I like to say, is real.) Every beautiful action that ever happens, every beautiful thought that comes to us, is God.

We have two young grandchildren where we live and Ruth bought a box set of all fifty Mr Men books that Roger Hargreaves wrote. Ollie and Noah love them and some of the stories they want to act out after hearing them. Mr Silly, Mr Uppity, Mr Nice, and so on.



The other day, Ruth said that she soon wants to tell Ollie, who is nearly seven, that all these different Mr. Men, they are all there in us. Sometimes we're Mr. Kind. Sometimes we're Mr Unkind. It is **not** just the one we think we are. And that is one of life's perennial lessons. We must keep

choosing kindness and we must keep on managing our unkindness. And the point is that when we know that and we actually do that, we start walking the path towards being a beautiful person inside us.

Now, obviously, the moment we think 'I am now a beautiful person!' we plummet right back to square one! The whole point is that beauty or beautifulness is provided to us by God, and a thought or feeling or action becomes something beautiful when God is colouring our life, and we're not. But of course, you can have

some people who are beautiful people ... and they don't believe in God.

How can that happen? It's because God is always advocating the need for goodness, and for choosing goodness as the centre of everything, and along with that God is always advocating not choosing badness, harm, wrong, and hurtfulness but shunning these when we see them there as much as we possibly can. Never excuse one bad feeling or it will stay and invite in seven other devil feelings worse than itself. And if we do that, then in the right way, God can take second place to the power of the good, and some time down the track we can learn that God is the cause of us being good, not ourselves.

Someone told me that beauty comes where two things meet. I really like that, and I can see it in many things. One I like is the crashing of the ocean against a cliff. The spray is utterly beautiful and so powerful. A rainbow – one of the most beautiful emblems we ever see and never grow tired of ... a rainbow happens where sunlight and dark clouds meet up. And of course, the rainbow is Biblical and said to be set up by God. Day meets night with a vivid sunset splendour, and night meets day with a glorious sunrise. Boy meets girl and suddenly there's the beauty of love.





Now, I want to share a spiritual one with you. One of our church teachings talks about the marriage of good and truth, and you think, why 'marriage'? That's between two people isn't it? Well, the marriage bit is the closeness, interaction, and mutual oneness of all that is good with all that is true. And where they meet there is the beauty. Here's a simple example. We often say and rightly so that all the good we do is brought about by God. The good is good, and attributing it to God is the truth. Put those two together and it's a marriage of good and truth. And when we see this and love it for how it helps us coming together, it's beautiful. Let me give you one more marriage ... when we really turn away from wrong impulses then God will be able to make a new person of us. Turning away is good, making a new person is true. The effect is the beauty. And we're told that this marriage of what is good and what is true is there in everything, like it's the blueprint.

If you know the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John – you will probably know that quite a good number of Jesus' events happened at weddings, or Jesus' parables were set in a wedding background. So, Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. When Jesus was challenged about his disciples eating when they should be fasting, Jesus answered that wedding guests do not fast while the bridegroom – that's Jesus – is with them. The wise and foolish virgins attending a wedding with oil or without oil make the parable. And when the king's son is to be married, the king invites the guests who refuse to come and he tells his servants to go out everywhere and bring all to



celebrate the wedding. And lastly, the man who came into the wedding and was thrown out of it for not having on the right wedding garment.

Now, that is quite a lot of Jesus and weddings. And the wedding background is because the Bible is for ever emphasising the real union in us of God and ourselves is a wedding feast which is so beautiful, just as it is for the happy couple getting married as the bride and the groom. The beauty where we meet God and

God meets us is more beautiful for us than any ocean spray, rainbow or banquet, which in themselves are very beautiful, but God and us is even more beautiful because it is an eternal outcome.

One more important point about beauty. I checked with an online health company to see if our appreciation of beauty and also beautiful actions like kindness are good for our physical and mental health. They said that there is now a lot of growing evidence that noticing, appreciating and experiencing beauty and kindness supports people's overall health, even physical things in us align when we meet beauty. It is all in the area of what gives us wellbeing. And they added that there is a distinction between pleasurable and appreciating something beautiful. Pleasure is a nice moment, but appreciation involves attending to it and valuing it and thinking 'This is wonderful'. So we need to pause and register and take in the beauty to kind of put the beauty of whatever it is put inside us. We are, right there and then, in an experience with God who gives us life and lift.

During this coming week, or whenever you will, keep your eye open to see beauty being shown, and let it





lift your heart and your mind. Look for it out there but also look for it inside you with a thought, a feeling, a coming together marriage of something you never saw or felt before.

We desperately need more beauty. Try and give out beauty, your beauty, life's beauty. Let people share their beauty with you. And let God reveal himself through beautiful moments.

Here are three beautiful things from Swedenborg's writings which say helpful things linking God and Beauty.

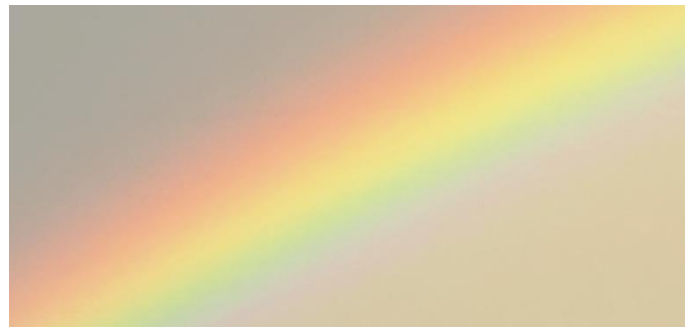
Spiritual Diary 2461

"I talked with spirits about beauty and pleasantness, with the idea that beauty is a form in which and so from which pleasantness arises. Indeed, the opposite is also true, that when pleasantness in life is reduced to a visible form, there comes about a something of beauty. But even more, there is scope for many pleasant things to take all manner of new forms of beauty, and from these newer and deeper forms, comes all kinds of real happiness. So, all kinds of delight flow in what is beautiful and repeatedly so, from the highest and inmost right through into what is material and visible."

Secrets of Heaven/Arcana Caelestia 5199

"The reason spiritual beauty is a desire for inner truth is that truth is the form of goodness. Goodness itself from the Divine in heaven is the source of life for angels, but the form of their life comes through truth rising out of that goodness. It is not faith's truth that creates beauty, though, but the desire within that truth, and desire stems from goodness. Beauty resulting merely from religious truth resembles the beauty of a face that has been drawn or carved, but beauty resulting from the kind of desire for truth that springs from goodness resembles the beauty of a living face animated by heavenly love. The nature of the love or desire beaming from the form of the face determines the nature of the beauty.

"That is why angels look indescribably beautiful. From their faces shines love's goodness expressed through faith's truth. Not only do this goodness and truth present themselves before the eyes, they are also perceived from the auras the angels give off. The reason this is the source of their beauty is that the whole of heaven is a universal human and corresponds to each and every thing in a human being. Anyone with a loving goodness and consequently with religious truth, then, is in the form of heaven. Such a person possesses beauty, and the beauty contains heaven, where divine energy from the Lord is the all-in-all."



Heaven and Hell 17

"All my experience in heaven bears witness to the fact that the divine nature that comes from the Lord, affects angels, and constitutes heaven, is love. In fact, all the people there are forms of love and thoughtfulness. They look indescribably beautiful. Love radiates from their faces, from their speech, from every detail of their behaviour. Further, there are surrounding auras of spiritual life that emanate from every angel and from every spirit and envelop them. By means of these auras one can recognize even from a distance the quality of the affections of their loves, since these auras flow out from the life of their affection and consequent thought — that is, from the life of their love and consequent faith. The auras that emanate from angels are so full of love that they touch the deepest reaches of life of the people they meet. I have been aware of them a number of times, and they have moved me deeply."



Six reasons why I get things wrong

By Stephen Russell-Lacy

In a world filled with information, with knowledge at our fingertips and opinions filling every corner of our devices, it can seem as if we're more enlightened than ever before. But are we?

What if our understanding — of life, of truth, even of ourselves — isn't quite what it seems? What if the light we think we're basking in is, in fact, just a flicker from a screen? Perhaps, now more than ever, we need a different kind of enlightenment.

Here are six reasons why.

Our understanding is exposed to illusion.

Switch on the television, scroll through your phone, open a glossy magazine — and you're met with a very particular view of what matters: beauty, wealth, success, celebrity. These are the currencies of modern culture. The unspoken message? *You need this. You should want that.*

"I need to stay late at work. I have to look good. I must keep up." These phrases reveal more than urgency — they expose subtle beliefs: that how long we work each week defines our value, that attractiveness determines our worth, that popularity is a measure of success.

But perhaps you've felt, quietly, that something doesn't sit right. That these values ring hollow. That, in chasing them, we're slipping into a trap — one we didn't set, but one we reinforce every day.

Our understanding is shaped by technology.

Few would deny the marvels of modern technology. Where would we be without the car, the washing machine, or the internet? Science has given us tools,

knowledge, speed — and a whole new way of looking at the world.

But there's a shadow side. As technology increasingly defines our lives, it can also narrow our sense of what's real. The scientific worldview, focused on what is measurable and material, often leaves little room for mystery — or for meaning that transcends the physical.

We can start to believe that nothing exists beyond what science can verify. That truth is only what can be proven. And yet, love, justice, hope — these cannot be dissected in a laboratory. Perhaps we've lost touch with the light that guides us through the intangibles.

Our understanding is manipulated by consumerism.

Advertising works by igniting a want — a desire we didn't even know we had. The latest phone, the perfect holiday, the car that makes a statement. We swipe, we buy, we justify. And then we do it again.

The psychologist Albert Ellis warned about the language we use: "must", "should", "need". He called these signs of irrational beliefs. "I must have that," we say. "I need to feel good." We chase possessions to fill a gap we can't quite name.

But the gap remains. And the more we consume, the more it grows. Could it be that the real hunger is not for things, but for something more enduring — more meaningful? An inner richness, not found in the checkout basket, but in insight.

Our understanding is limited by our circumstances.

History teaches us that our understanding evolves. Once, we believed the Earth was the centre of the universe. Then, that the atom was indivisible. Today's scientific truths may well become





WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au for details of **group events** which are held online, but you can also be physically at various locations around Australia.

Follow the "about → contact" menu items on the website for a list of locations and contact info of your nearest group convenor, and see the "events" menu item for Zoom links so you can join online events.

Our new website is continually being updated with new study material and latest news and information.

tomorrow's misconceptions.

Our ideas about life — about love, morality, purpose — are just as subject to change. They're shaped by culture, tradition, family, faith, experience. We absorb them without even knowing. Yet they vary vastly from one person to the next.

As the 18th-century philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg observed, each of us perceives truth through the lens of our own condition. What we grasp is only an approximation of something deeper. And so our task is not to be certain — but to keep seeking.

Our understanding is influenced by personal fears and needs.

We want to fit in. To please. To belong. Our beliefs are often inherited from parents, peers, and communities. And it's hard to let go of them, even when they no longer serve us. Especially when doing so feels disloyal, or frightening.

Doubt can feel dangerous — yet it can also be liberating. To question, to wrestle, to re-examine — this is how understanding deepens. But it's not easy.

There's a story — a joke, perhaps — of a man who, upon dying, finds two signs at the gates of heaven. One points to God. The other to a discussion about God. He takes the second. Sometimes, we prefer to talk the talk, rather than walk the walk. Eventually, we need to act on what we discover, and then perhaps we will see more deeply.



Drawing by David Fitzjohn

Our understanding falters before something greater than ourselves.

At some point, each of us meets a limit. A parent's 'No'. A mountain's immensity. The body's decline. These moments remind us that we are not all-powerful. That there are forces larger than our will, stronger than our knowing.

We start to ask: *What is behind all this? Who — or what — holds it together? Is there a deeper thread running through it all?*

Whether we call it nature, spirit, humanity, or God — something stirs in us when we face the mystery. Not the mystery of gaps in knowledge, but the mystery of existence itself.

And perhaps, that's where true enlightenment begins.

I'm sure all scientists would admit that their scientific instruments cannot directly measure the origin of compassion, honesty, or justice. We can't see the source of virtue, any more than we can see the wind. But we feel its presence — in acts of kindness, in beauty, in the good moments when life seems to hold more meaning. The eye sees the surface of things. But the inner eye — that sees further. And so, in a world teeming with information, we might still ask for light. Not the glare of the screen, but the kind of light that brings insight. Not just knowledge — but wisdom. Not just facts — but understanding. Because it's only with that inner illumination that we begin to discern what truly matters.

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