

Spiritual Journey Series

PART 5 (of Six)



**Drawn from the spiritual writings of
Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 - 1772)**

Part 5 - Emanuel Swedenborg's Spiritual Awakening

*After 56 years of being fairly well in control of the direction in which he wanted his life to go, all was about to change for Emanuel. In 1744 he published *The Infinite and Final Cause of Creation* discussing the relationship between the soul and the body. Still very much a scientist in approach, he was certainly drawing even closer to the deep involvement in spiritual matters which, unbeknown to him, lay ahead. Later that year would see him beginning to have a whole series of dreams and visions. He experienced extremes of mood from ecstasy to depression. Analysts suggest that the pattern he experienced follows the archetypal sequence of the dark night of the soul before rebirth and illumination.*

*His dreams, which he recorded and examined himself, showed him aspects about his own sinfulness and his intellectual pride. They had a profoundly humbling effect on him. For example, his gross thoughts were represented to him in a dream as a heap of rags and his impurities as vermin which had to be picked out. He saw himself as living in an untidy hut in which he had invited the Divine to visit him, and he thought he ought to be punished for his presumption. When he heard and saw soldiers marching past his window in another dream, for him this was a sign that he was to be protected from harm. It should be mentioned that Swedenborg's *Dream Diary* is probably the first of its type.*

By taking on board what he understood these dreams and visions were telling him, changes in his personality and desires began to take effect. A few months later, he had a decisive experience upon retiring to bed, he heard a roaring noise like many winds rushing together. He immediately started trembling which threw him out of bed. He then had a vision of Jesus Christ who told him to do what he had promised. Other dreams and visions continued during the time that Emanuel completed publishing works already started. Then in April 1745, Christ appeared to him again telling him from that time forth to devote himself only to spiritual things. His ability to fully experience the spiritual dimension began from then.

(This life of Swedenborg to be continued in Part 6)

Relationships in today's society

The twentieth century has seen a remarkable change in society's attitudes towards gender sexuality, roles and relationships. Traditionally understood roles and identities of men and women which maintained cohesion and stability within families and community life for generations - centuries - millennia, have radically altered leaving many people with a sense of personal freedom whilst others have been left confused.

On the one hand, the release from set patterns of living has created the challenge of new approaches and opportunities for more satisfying and meaningful lives in the home, at work and social activities. On the other, concern has been created over a perceived view of declining moral values leading to easy breakdowns in relationships, insecurity and diseases. So far as the very ancient institution of marriage is concerned, today people view it in many different ways.

Out of date and irrelevant; Nothing short of legalised prostitution; Contract between consenting adults; Useful for the protection of families; Insoluble religious union; Of God's making and therefore holy; Spiritual union lasting beyond death.

All these views are true of course, because in the end, marriage is what those in such a relationship make it. Today sexual matters are talked about quite openly and this is good, because we are all sexual beings and Freud has demonstrated what harm can come if we deny or repress these strong feelings.

It often appears to the older generation that young people are rejecting all the old standards but perhaps this is simply the fruit of the emptiness of marriage in the eyes of children who look at their parents and other adults and say "Love ought to be more meaningful. We want to find something different, which is more alive and joyful."

More people today get married in the registry office than at church. This may reflect a more honest attitude on the part of those who do not wish to make promises to a God in whom they no longer believe. But equally this could be a result of the failure of the churches in showing just where the sacredness of marriage lies.

Marriage - The Model for eternal happiness

List some differences between females and males, both physical and in dealing with life situations. Can you see ways in which the differences help make a female/male relationship strong?

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One of the very distinct, even unique teachings given in Swedenborg's spiritual writings concerns marriage and the male/female relationship. It is centred on the concept that as God (Divine Creator) is the source and origin of all life, then the Divine character and purposes must be imprinted on creation. Swedenborg's teachings do help us to see and interpret these purposes in the marvellous and varied forms which are around us, but above all indelibly imprinted upon us. The sacredness of marriage does not lie simply in a Divine *fiat*, just because *God said*, and having said so does not like being contradicted. It lies in the Divine's very nature, being composed of two realities:

LOVE and WISDOM

In God, these exist in perfect harmony and balance, so that God acts from love, but always expresses that love in a wise and orderly way. They are called realities for two reasons:

1. *Nothing can ever come into existence unless the life of God wills it and the Divine wisdom forms it.*
2. *In our personal experience, nothing is truly real to us, unless it affects our love in some way and unless we can comprehend it with our understanding.*

This is the reason why marriage can be so real to those engaged in its process and why it can make people supremely happy, or if it fails, supremely

despondent: so much of love, and therefore of life, is invested in it - thoughts, hopes and ideals.

The creation of 'man' could have been a simple act of making a single-sex individual in whom love and wisdom could have found perfect harmony. To some extent this ideal MAN is hinted at in the book of Genesis 1:27, where we read that in the beginning: "*God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him.*"

But then another dimension is introduced as the text goes on to declare: ". . . . male and female created He them."

From reading some of the old theologians one could conclude that this introduction of bisexuality into creation was a most unfortunate mistake. It is therefore often argued that sexual differences belong to the body or flesh only. The spirit is regarded as pure and non sexual. Swedenborg maintains that this is not so, and that nothing can exist in the body which is not a direct expression of the spirit, for the body is in correspondence with that which forms it and controls it.

The words in Genesis express a marvellous and universal truth about human beings, which is that the sexes - the male and the female - are mystically part of each other on all levels of their being, but are temporarily separated so that they can find joy and fulfilment of returning where they truly belong: to each other.

What is our experience as we look at the opposite sex? What do we make of them? Is the pleasure and frustration of our relationship with the opposite sex derived from our similarities, or on the contrary from those differences? Here we must not think simply of the physical differences of organs and outward looks because the reality goes much deeper.

It is useful to make the point at this junction that in order to function as a person, we must all have a will and an understanding. We must be able to love and choose as well as have the ability to think rationally. Yet Swedenborg presents the idea that whilst the appearance might be otherwise in certain circumstances, at the level of the mind, man has intelligence/understanding on the surface and affection/love beneath, whereas woman has love on the surface and intelligence beneath. In a real way, this does express itself in physical appearance with the rougher bodily attributes of the male compared to the softer features of the female.

In terms of underlying drive in life, it shows itself in the male so often being single minded in whatever is taken on, the need to succeed being a priority. The

female primarily adopts a nurturing attitude in all decision making which generally covers a broad range of functions at any one time. We are not the same, but essentially different. Yet we are complementary and the continuation of life depends on the endeavour to become one.

A deepening relationship will actually result in a bonding of love and wisdom at the level of the mind, reflecting the divine process in creation itself. Fruits will flow with a sense of joy and contentment at the higher level and the potential for procreation at this level. Only together, in the close union of their fruitfulness, can the male and female attain the true humanity which is the perfect image and likeness of God.

Whatever we might feel about same sex relationships, and there should never be any judgment on those involved, it is obvious that such unions must remain unproductive in terms of the potential for procreation, and so cannot seriously be compared to the heterosexual relationship. They are something else.

Our life is a perpetual becoming and seeking after perfection. We are born male or female and will never cease to need to express our essential sexuality. When united in partnership, especially in the sanctity of marriage, the woman is drawn by the intelligence of the man while her love is the bonding mechanism which gives cohesion to the relationship.

The two sexes have been so designed to complement each other and fit together at all levels - physical, mental and spiritual - and where love is present on every level, then the relationship/marriage with a true partner continues beyond death. Those who are not married, or are wrongly married, have a new opportunity to discover their true consort in the spiritual world with whom to be united forever.

True love, when it is experienced, can only think in terms of eternity. Swedenborg was permitted to see angelic beings united in such true marriages and living in joyful happiness. In such relationships couples realised their unions were pure and sacred because they reflected the everlasting union of the Divine Love and Wisdom.

Expressions of the world of spirit

"There is nothing in the world of nature that does not portray something in the world of spirit". Can you relate to this statement by Swedenborg and if so, in what way?

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Today, the mysterious origins of the physical world and the equally mysterious origins of the human psyche are being probed. What, for instance, is the origin and meaning of those strange exciting vibrations we feel when reading some of the old myths, legends and fairy tales that have been handed down for centuries or millennia?

Remember Sleeping Beauty wandering alone through the great palace till she opens a tiny door at the top of a tower to be confronted with an evil fairy in disguise? Or Bluebeard's wife with the key in her hand to a forbidden room, how our heart beats as she opens the door. Do we not dimly sense the hidden forbidden doors into our own psyche?

The age long persistence of so many myths, legends and fairy tales with their underlying themes in different guises (both within and across cultures) is evidence of an origin in a deep common level of the human psyche. It is an unconscious level which must express itself periodically by clothing itself in representational forms from nature and visible human life.

Since Sigmund Freud we have become familiar with the power and drive of the human unconscious to emerge through myths and dreams via the repressed urges of our animal instincts; and since the work of Carl Jung we have begun to recognise that in these emergent depths, the highest qualities of the human psyche lie, as does the ultimate meaning and purpose of human existence.

How are particular myths, dreams, etc. to be interpreted? Any one of them can be given as many interpretations as there are interpreters. Is it a "secret code" or meaningless forms of the imagination?

Every Cause has an Effect

Swedenborg, both from his experiences as a natural scientist and spiritual explorer, came to understand the relationship between an emergent human perception and its natural representation as one of cause and effect. Further, he recognised all nature as an arena of effects arising out of an arena of spiritual causes, a spiritual cosmos of potentially perfect human desires and thoughts.

The origin of the contents of this spiritual cosmos was the Divine Creative Mind Itself, inflowing into ever more diverse channels of evolving potential qualities of finite human affections and perceptions, and by means of that into ever more diverse forms of life in nature.

Humankind's own myths and dreams were themselves streamlets in this endless outpouring of creative life, ultimating themselves within the individual's senses not bound by space and time - that inner world in which the faculty of imagination operates.

This universal law of spiritual creativity, which Swedenborg himself termed 'Science of Correspondences', was far ahead of its time (150 years before Freud). It was noticed by few, and understood and accepted by even less. Now myths and dreams are being reinstated as respectable vehicles by which the psyche conveys humankind's universal sensing of their own inner and, for the most part, unconscious world. Today, Swedenborg's approach to unlocking the underlying process is being given more credence.

An illustration of this correspondential relationship between things natural and things spiritual is a *smile*. When two good friends greet one another after a long absence, inevitably both will break into a smile. The smile (an outward representation) *corresponds* to the happiness being felt within. Yet, so universal and so "natural" is the method and language of representations or correspondences that it comes as no surprise to find how much men and women have been making use of it in daily life.

For example, consider the concept of 'light'. The physical eye sees objects by light from the sun. Yet we talk of the mind 'seeing' meaning in ideas or thoughts. Thus the mind observes a whole world of mental objects, and we find ourselves talking about warm or cold hearts, fiery natures, burning desires, and so on.

In the science of correspondences it is a universal truth that loves (or desires) in the spirit, correspond to heat in the physical world, and perceptions (or insights) in the spirit, correspond to light in the physical world.

Think of the rainbow arch - a backdrop of dark clouds with the sun shining through rain droplets. Can you relate to the clouds, sun and rain as inner qualities? Think of the colours produced. What do they mean for you in connection with the process of your life?

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In that dreams and myths are presented through images and happenings in terms of the outer world experience (even though at times distorted, bizarre, and incomplete), these can be interpreted by means of Swedenborg's law correspondences:

"*Dreams*" providing us with a microscope into our individual inner states; and "*Myths*" with an understanding of processes that take place in the human psyche.

Even modern classic fairy tales such as Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" readily demonstrate a representation of the great existential themes of spiritual forms of good and evil opposed to one another. They meet each other in conflict on the ground of our spirit and life, and our ultimate quest or mission to defeat the evil powers with special aid from the heavenly forces of good. As the drama unfolds, each of the characters through their personalities, circumstances and decisions can be related to qualities present in our spiritual lives.

Myths and dreams, therefore, when understood in spiritual terms, can provide us with a pool of valuable experiences on which we can draw in dealing with our own spiritual life. They are transformed from something without much apparent

intrinsic value, and often incomprehensible, to an account of the personal journey we are all engaged with, whether we appreciate it or not.

Outer and Inner Revelations

The living mind is beautifully represented in its three kingdoms of nature as illustrated by the following diagram:

KINGDOM	MIND'S CONTENTS	MIND'S DEVELOPMENT
Mineral	Facts	Memory Knowledge
Vegetable	Thoughts	Understanding Perceptions
Animal	Affections	Affectionate Feelings Wise Living

The mineral kingdom depicts the “building blocks” of the mind, the strong, constant factual elements that are a necessary basis for any thought or developing wisdom.

The vegetable kingdom represents the mind developing with living thoughts, often reaching great heights and branching out in all directions like huge trees, and multiplying indefinitely, as one thought leads to another.

Finally, the animal kingdom mirrors the mind teeming with warm blooded affections and desires which move out to touch other persons in a living way.

In the structures and processes of nature, we can see reflections of the structures and processes of our own minds. They are distinguishable as given in the above diagram, with each segment being made up of a myriad of slightly different inner and outer forms, but they are not independent functions.

There is an ecology within us as intricate as the one without, both corresponding so inner and outer wholeness are inseparable. We cannot become whole as individuals, or as a human race, unless we discover and participate in the wholeness of our world.

This may sound altogether simplistic. It is the theoretical basis for a distinctive style of perception, one which demands we attend to the cause - our spiritual states - before there can be any lasting change for good in our outer world. It offers a subtle awareness of our own mental processes, a richer and more supportive understanding of ourselves and others, and a pervasive realisation of the oneness of the inner and the outer realms.

The Role of Sacred Writings

Swedenborg came from the Christian tradition and understanding the direct link between the physical and spiritual levels of life, he quickly realised that, irrespective of its literal and historical accuracy or otherwise, the Bible contained dream like imagery and was written like a myth. He wrote extensively on this 'discovery' which has subsequently helped many people who were either questioning its relevance or had discarded it for the apparent contradictions and non scientific form, to view the Bible in a completely different light.

Throughout the Bible you can find stories that are clearly symbolic in nature - designed to convey some truth or moral lesson. Swedenborg goes much further in saying that every story in the Word of God is a parable - even when it is 'true' history. In other words, there is an inner or heavenly meaning within, in some parts even down to the words and letters themselves.

It makes no difference whether or not the literal story is a true or made-up history. The writers of the Bible thought they were writing history or describing the politics of the day or the shortcomings of some king. And this is true. They were. Yet, they were doing something else although they were not conscious of it. They were providing words and details which God could use, like a parable, to convey truths which would always be of importance to everyone in every age.

So according to Swedenborg, the sole reason for the inclusion of any story, event, parable, etc. is due to the inner meaning it conveys and through it we can learn a great deal more than is usually thought possible about the way spirituality applies to life. The inner meaning gives a wealth of welcome detail about life in the spiritual world, about what men and women actually do there, and the peace and satisfaction that they can enjoy when they become permanently conscious of and in the spiritual world. Further, it tells us about our minds and the laws by which they work.

Again, it is the law of correspondences outlined earlier which enables us to 'tap into' this inner, spiritual meaning underlying the literal text. The basic principle to be followed is:

What the natural thing does for the natural level of existence, the spiritual counterpart does for the mind.

Water satisfies thirst and cleanses the body - if it is conscientiously applied to it. On the spiritual plane, it is the knowledge of truth that satisfies the mind's thirst for knowledge, and also cleanses the mind - if conscientiously applied to it. So water corresponds in every respect to the knowledge of truth. The work that it

does for the body, is the same as the work that truth does for the mind. When we read of water in the Bible, we need to appreciate that it is providing an insight on how truth works in our spiritual lives. This is but one example; it is possible to show that every created object in the physical world corresponds or mirrors something at a spiritual level. The Divine created the whole universe in such a way that what the natural thing does for the body, the spiritual counterpart does for the mind. It is quite obvious, then, that this is not just a clever way of interpreting Bible stories. This is something that is interwoven into the very fabric of creation itself. One useful suggestion when reading the Bible, or any sacred writings for that matter, is to add the words 'in me' after every phrase - even every word sometimes. This personalises the story and helps focus on the inner processes which the story is really there to convey.

At the macro level, it is very easy to challenge the literal accuracy of the Bible. Did the events actually take place? Did they take place in the way recorded? There is very little evidence from other sources as corroboration. Once we no longer dwell solely on the literal level but seek the inner meaning for our personal, spiritual guidance, such questions no longer have relevance.

One helpful example is the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. Debate has raged over whether or not this is how our world and everything in it was created. It has to be acknowledged that the details do not agree with the laws of physics as we understand them. We are told that on the first day the light dawned and day was separated from night. Yet the sun and moon were not made until the fourth day! The earth brought forth grass and trees on the third day before there was any sun!

Swedenborg's explanation is that this story has nothing to do with the creation of the physical universe. It has everything to do with the creation of the inner, spiritual world of every human soul born into this world and all the possibilities of reaching the very highest state when God rests - communion with the Divine. This spiritual creation goes through seven main stages - the seven days of creation. Swedenborg describes them in great detail; our aim should be to pass through them all. The Psalmist prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, O God". The creation of a clean heart is the recreation or rebirth of our mind! That is what the parable of the Genesis creation story is describing through the use of the science of correspondences.

In his spiritual writings, in fact in nineteen volumes, Swedenborg provides very detailed accounts of the inner meaning within many of the literal accounts in the Bible. Again, space prevents detailing them but whether one is considering the Genesis account of creation, the life of Christ or the bizarre events recorded in

the Book of Revelation, what is written is simply a vehicle for conveying truth and teaching which will always be relevant to the human situation and life as we experience it.

Looking at the Bible from this rather unique viewpoint - that there is an internal or heavenly sense within the letter of the Word - opens up an exciting new prospect, and allows us to see and understand that the Divine has in fact not neglected us, but rather has fed us with the truth that we need. What we need to know has been revealed in a form that we can understand. And this does not stop with the Bible.

Swedenborg would see that the other ancient scriptures have the essence of Divine Truth within them, in their imagery and stories, adapted to developing the spiritual condition of the particular peoples who used them. Certainly in general, if not in particular, the world of symbolism, representations and the underlying genuine power of personal awareness has application to them also.

Today, as we begin to turn back to our own spiritual resources, we are beginning to find scientific technology bankrupt as a source of deep happiness and fulfilment. We need to rediscover the age old phenomenon of spiritual symbolism and representation, which in itself has never ceased to operate in nature, in dreams, in myths and sacred writings.

With the rediscovery of this fundamental truth we will once again be in touch with and begin to comprehend the source of life in general and our own life in particular, and so find that meaning, purpose and fulfilment - which is perhaps the fundamental drive of the psyche underpinning all our aspirations and endeavours.

So the challenge is there for us: and for the westerner, perhaps the greatest tool we have available is the Bible, when understood from its underlying spiritual meaning.

Reflect in general terms on the Exodus story in the Bible - Moses leading the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land with all the difficulties and hardships faced. Can you see parallels for your spiritual journey?

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**Tributes to
Emanuel Swedenborg**

Swedenborg has much to contribute to our modern life.

NORMAN VINCENT PEALE

Swedenborg the works of this visionary are the
foundation for grand things.

WILLIAM BLAKE



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