

Swedenborg on the Language of Inner States

A Key to Ancient Wisdom

In our language there is no living 'organic' link between the object or experience, and the word used to denote it, either spoken or written. Yet, those in very ancient times did use a 'language' possessing such a living organic link for it centred around images for recording and passing to future generations their wisdom. Emanuel Swedenborg was one of the first western minds to realise that such a language, communicating spiritual insights, existed. He came to recognise this universal language, which he called *Correspondences*, was the key to rediscovering the ancient wisdom of holy texts and myths. Further, he appreciated that it could open up wonderful insights regarding the physical world all around because within creation the mind and the purposes of the Creator can begin to be seen.

Language of Inner States

The laws of the natural world, which science helps us understand, can become a guide to our own spiritual conception, birth, education and fruitfulness. They reveal the inevitable decay and shedding of outer layers to bring about newness, showing how our spirit, mature and enlightened, may be raised to a higher level of consciousness. Even a simple grasp of the flow of creative energy, which the knowledge of correspondences reveals, can open a new understanding of ancient myths and all sacred literature, including the Bible. These were carefully composed, or inspired, so as to contain spiritual symbolism or correspondences to teach that the life of the mind can be retold in simple earth-images. Here we are dealing with something far more profound than some contrived code. We are delving into the very causes of everything around us and within us, because everything in the physical world mirrors its cause, which is spiritual. Now, Swedenborg has clearly outlined and detailed this language in order that our communication with these profound meanings may support our spiritual growth and deepen our relationship with the Lord God.

Correspondences in Human Life

We are used to correspondences on a natural level and take for granted this form of symbolic communication. For instance, in saying of an idea that we reject - "I refuse to swallow that"- or of a thought in harmony with our spirit - "I just sat and drank it in" - we already have the beginnings of an understanding of this language. It is still universal even if our grasp of its grammar is undeveloped, and our sense of what it is spelling out to us is a little confused. The spoken word corresponds to the thought which germinated it.

A genuine smile corresponds to the happiness and affectionate warmth which gave it conception and birth. We could go through every human expression on the face, every gesture of the hand, and discover the mystery which occurs whenever we take some action, and the inner meaning contained in so much that we see. We must remember, though, that at this level of existence we have the ability to interrupt the correspondential link, changing it to suit our own selfish purposes if we wish.

The ancients called the individual person a microcosm because each of us reflects the macrocosm, that is, the universe in its entirety. The ancients learned to call the individual a microcosm or little universe from the knowledge of correspondences that the earliest people enjoyed from their communication with angels of heaven.

Correspondences found in Nature



The forms to be found in the physical world are like a shorthand means to describe the inner world of spiritual states, for not only do smiles correspond but also sunshine, butterflies, singing birds, rainbows and so on. Within the world's images of the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms are contained affections and feelings that move us, and communicate spiritual states.

A garden, in general terms, corresponds to heaven in respect to intelligence and wisdom, which is why heaven is called the garden of God and a paradise, and why we call it heavenly paradise. Trees, species by species, correspond to perceptions and first-hand knowledge of what is good and true, which yield intelligence and wisdom.

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The Bible and Parables

The Bible itself is absolutely packed with correspondential teaching, as for instance the numerous references to wine, fish, rivers, mountains which are simplified explanations of the great founding principles of love and wisdom. Also, there are the many references to battles which are descriptions of our struggle towards the higher principles in ourselves despite our natural urges towards self-interest.

The Gospels tell us that whenever Jesus spoke, he always did so in parable. It is easy to mistake these for simple sayings or anecdotal examples. But they are based on the law of correspondences which shows that all things in creation are related to the originating love of the Creator. Here is one of the simplest and best-known parables:



A sower went to sow his seed. Some fell along a path and were trodden down. Some fell on rocky ground, grew for a while, but withered away for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns where they were choked. Some fell in good soil and produced a rich harvest.

There is not a great deal to be gained from the story as it stands, but when Jesus' disciples asked him what was its real meaning, he explained that it was about the way the human mind reacts to the truth, the spiritual seed. Some truth is not received at all; some is accepted with shallow enthusiasm which soon evaporates; some is accepted for a while, but worldly cares and wealth push it out and choke it; but some truth is received into life and it begins to bear a harvest of goodness. The seeds of truth really behave in that living way when they enter our minds and memories. We must 'cultivate the mind' by applying truth and not allowing the weeds of purely worldly thoughts and values to clutter it.

Universal Application

This subtle, yet eloquent language of images is found in all great poetry, music and works of art. It is also found in the details of our dreams and inspirations. It could be said that it is sewn into our very being and is an intimate part of our consciousness, and we therefore have a natural disposition to seek it, understand it and utilise it for the betterment of our soul-growth.