

Notes from Swedenborg – Correspondences (Symbols)

Transcripts of YouTube clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGu9KpLBs-s>
based on the insights Emanuel Swedenborg experienced as recorded in his writings.
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Almost everything has got meaning. In fact, the way we talk is full of images that we use to get across an idea or something we can't otherwise explain. So, we say, "I see what you mean" but it's not to do with our eyes. Or, "You've a window of opportunity" but there's no glass. And we all know what's meant. So, these symbols or analogies are instinctive to us. The whole natural world is really a projection of our inner world, and what goes on inside us, like a mirror, if we'll look. The open sky pictures our high soaring spirit; the tree describes just how our mind grows. Fire shows us a lot about love and passion but just as much about hatred and violence. And so on. It is a complete thing.

Swedenborg calls this, correspondence, the perfect matching of a seen or known something with a spiritual reality. He says they correspond, heaven and earth, as above, so below. Ancient myths are full of them, so are our dreams, so are all those fairy tales, and poets of course can't help but use them. Swedenborg tells us that this thing of a form and its meaning is unbelievably ancient and also universal. But down the thousands of years, people got taken up with the things themselves, and rituals, religious dogma, everything we see, have and do, and much of the meaning of correspondences got forgotten and buried.

Trying to get a handle on the whole idea of it isn't that easy. Swedenborg says that it's helpful to see it as a system, as a science ... the "science" of correspondences. This stops us from being over-fanciful and subjective about meanings. So, in nature, there are three kingdoms: mineral, plant and animal levels. Each connects with the others, mostly through nourishment. The correspondence of minerals, like rocks, clay, metals, jewels, lies in them usually being underground, unseen, but providing solid ground to support what's on the surface. Swedenborg says that these correspond to things we know which we can then build on. They don't show evidence of being alive or movement. But they do feed plants.

The plant world is alive; it's usually rooted in the ground, growing upwards and outwards. Some flowers turn to the sun and many plants feed off sunshine – photosynthesise – and there's so much green. Enormous noble trees sky-high and ankle-deep grass in a field. One thing with plants is how they branch to fill up the space round them, and how they put out leaves, which breathe, but still keep good space. And of course they flower – so beautiful – and they fruit – so edible.

Plants correspond to our ability to understand and think and reason and decide things, and see what we believe is true. The roots sink into the ground, so our understanding benefits from what we know (those minerals). The growing upwards is our search for meaning about life, the branching shows the whole connectedness of our mind and thinking. And the fruits is our spiritual wish to bring what we understand and see is true into some usefulness. The scented gorgeous flowers which become the fruits are the delights of all of this. And plants are the food for very many animals.

Animals roam and move freely, independently. We're including birds and fish and insects in this. Most of them have blood in them, warm or cold, but it's there. All of them feel ... feel pain, feel the heat of the sun, feel hungry and thirsty, feel they must mate and maybe feel

tired, weak, ill, old, or bounding in health. Animals correspond to our emotions, our feelings, which can be all kinds, glad, sad, anger, calm, love, fear, joy, acceptance. The fact that some animals don't chew on plants but chew on other animals really shows how our emotions can be self-destructive or raging.

This, then, is the science or the 'map' of the correspondences of the natural world, with its differences and its connections. The purpose of exploring it is to see ourselves more accurately, and to understand our spiritual life and growth. Swedenborg relates it all to a creative divine being, to God, and he says that what we see out there in forests, fields, skies and lakes and so on is simply a more corresponding physical form of the same things that are there in us and which will be the pattern of our spirit to eternity.

Lastly, Swedenborg says that the Bible, the Word of God, is written in these same correspondences. So when it mentions the mountain, it's the mountain-in-me, and this is the same with all the other images and references to natural things. It transforms something like the Bible from being a dogmatic teaching to being a creative personal text.

As we said at the beginning, meaning is intuitive to us, we search for it, sometimes ache for it. Correspondence gives us the key to get into it further and find ourselves.