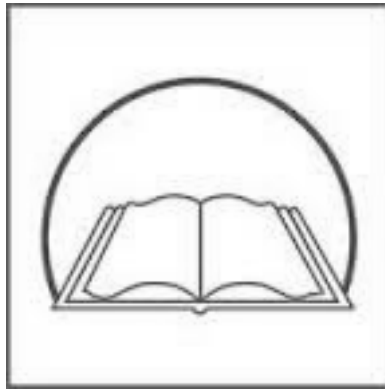


THE NEW AGE

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CONTENTS

Editorial	page 2
Sermon	page 3
President's Page	page 8
Continuing The Lord's Prayer: "Thy Kingdom come"	
Society Reports	page 11
Brisbane, Perth, Roseville, New Church in Victoria	
"God is good for you" - A defence of Christianity in troubled times"	page 17
by John Wilson	
A dietary Bible study	page 20
On Ferns ... a spring tribute	page 23

EDITORIAL

Here's our Spring issue of The New Age and we hope you will have a good read.

Jesus once said, "My kingdom is not of this world" and somehow we seem to intuitively understand what he is saying. "Mine aren't the traditions, values, dealings, prejudices, events etc. of what people get caught up in; mine are the principles, laws, teachings and truths of another kingdom, that of heaven." (...or words to that effect.)

The last two years have been tough, hard-going times where one thing's been followed by another, and you don't need me to spell that out. Commentary abounds, not only in news media, but also in religious journals, books and programs. "God and ____"

Now, some of this may well be helpful, insightful and caring, but is it what our faith is primarily meant to be focused on. "My kingdom is not of this world". I'd suggest that if we start examining world events through the supposed eyes of God we are going to get out of our depth and start saying wild things and get pretty dogmatic in the process of trying explain "why a loving God can allow these things to happen".

I think better ground for us would be to accept that in creation, in this world, things will happen - it isn't a cotton-wool world we're in - and the main thing for those who seek to believe is to look in, on, and at ourselves to see how we are handling being involved in it all.

Are we frightened? Doubtful? That bit less sure of things? Back in the glory days? If you know the Bible story fairly well, you may remember that in the succession of events, the Israelites made pretty good progress forward mostly when they had gone through some upheaval, danger or calamity. This pointed out - and points out to us - that life isn't endless sunshine. The hard times are opportunities for our spirit. We do help people much more when they are struck with an urgent need.

You see, our spirit is what finally matters... Julian Duckworth

SPIRITUAL GRAVITY

A sermon by Rev Grant Odhner

"And He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her." (Mark 1:31)

It takes energy to overcome inertia. In this world everything has a certain mass: a door, a chair, a book in our hand. Our bodies have a mass... our feet as we walk, our arms as we reach for a pan, our torso as we get out of bed. But the reason it takes energy to move is not only that we have mass. There's a force at work called *gravity*. Gravity is the mysterious attraction between things that have mass. The attraction is what gives each thing its weight. Our bodies have weight because they are attracted to the earth's mass. To move, we have to overcome that 'tug'.



Gravity is a property of the natural universe. As such it doesn't exist in the spiritual world (the world of the mind). When we enter the spiritual world, gravity is left behind, like space and time, and set size and set duration. There are different forces at work in the mind's world.

In our story, the Lord was present with a sick woman. He took her hand, He lifted her up, and the fever just left her. In the language of *correspondences* (in which the Word is written), the force by which Jesus lifted up the woman is the force by which a sick mind is uplifted and drawn towards the Lord and wellness. We might call this force *spiritual gravity*. This force is the fundamental force in the spiritual world.

In the spiritual world the Lord is the "centre of gravity". His love is like this spiritual mass. It draws all things towards itself, just like the central mass of a galaxy draws the myriad of stars together and holds them in a relationship with itself. On a smaller scale the Lord's love is just like the sun in our solar system which draws all the planets towards itself and holds them in their orbits.

Or, it is just like the centre of our planet which draws the moon to itself and all the things within its sphere, like us. Swedenborg says that there is actually a sphere which proceeds from the Lord and fills the entire

page 4

spiritual and natural worlds, which raise all towards heaven. It is like a strong current in the ocean which unseen draws a vessel along. And again, The life which is from the Lord has this power of attracting, because it is from love, and all love has this power within it, that it wills to be joined to become one. The Lord draws human beings to Himself as He teaches in John 12:32 "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to Myself."

The force of the Lord's love is incredibly powerful, just like the sun's pull, yet no human being is ever drawn completely to Him. From ourselves we have a contrary motion that draws us away from the Lord, just as the planets have a motion that keeps them from being drawn into the sun. No human being could ever acquire enough spiritual mass to overcome that pull away from the Lord and be drawn into a complete oneness with Him.

The Lord Himself, when He was in the world, took on a human that acquired infinite "mass". His human became one with the Father by becoming perfect love. But with finite people it is different. Swedenborg says that the Lord draws all people to Himself. But since angels and people are finite, they can only follow the current of the attraction according to their measure. Still, the force of the attraction persists to infinity.

What gives us the spiritual mass to be drawn towards the Lord at all is the love and wisdom that we receive from Him. The more we receive, the more fully we are drawn to Him, for it is His love and wisdom with us that are drawn toward their source.

So, each of us finds an "orbit" at a certain "distance" from the Lord, so to speak, according to our capacity for receiving His love and wisdom. The Arcana Caelestia reminds us, "A person can't lift up anything of themselves into heaven, but the Lord lifts it up. In a human being there is merely the capacity that this can be done and a person is endowed with this capacity during regeneration. But all the activity and life of this capacity are from the Lord. (Arcana 10203)

Putting all this into other words... The Lord flows into the goods and the truths that are within a person and raises them to Himself, and with them He raises the person. So, when a person is in good, and from good is in truth, he is drawn to the Lord and is joined to Him.

Essentially then, the Lord alone is raised into heaven! "No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven, even the Son of Man" (John 3:13) *We ascend in Him, that is, in what is His with us.*

This drawing towards the Lord of all the good and truth that resides with us isn't just a matter of words; it is a reality. In the spiritual world the reality of this is quite obvious. Swedenborg tells us, The interiors of a human being are lifted upward by the Lord when the person is in the good of faith and charity. This uplifting by the Lord actually takes place, and from it comes a removal from evils and falsities. The angels perceive this by the very sense. This is like the tendency to the centre of gravity. The angels' heads are lifted up towards this centre, but the feet of spirits from hell are lifted up.

This sounds strange to us. But in the spiritual world, evil spirits actually appear upside down to angels (though not to themselves!). "Feet" symbolise the outer person, the "head", the inner person or the real us. Angels' heads are drawn upwards towards the Lord, because love for the Lord and the neighbour make up their "inner selves" and rule in them, and these loves have "mass". Angels' "outer persons" are made up of a love for themselves and for life's accessories. This "weighs down" their feet (where they belong).

Evil spirits, on the other hand, make love for themselves and for life's accessories the head, and love for the Lord and for others the servant or "feet". As a result, their feet, which have more "mass" and are drawn upward and their heads appear to be "weighed down". Of course, all this sounds like mere symbolism, yet in the spiritual world (the world of the spirit) mental realities are reflected symbolically in the way things appear.

Another way in which this symbolism is seen in the spiritual world is to do with apparent *location*. Heaven appears "on high", hell appears "below" and the world of spirits appears "in between". The good and true things with people "lift" them into heaven, towards the Lord. The evil and false things with them "weigh them down" into hell. As long as there is a mixture of good and bad qualities in people, they are in the world of spirits.

But as good spirits in the world of spirits are prepared for heaven, they give up the lusts and false persuasions that had plagued them in the world, and as they let go of them, they come into a state of heaven. This appears as a casting off of weights and as a rising or walking upward. As evil spirits are prepared for hell, they give up pretences of goodness and the true ideas that they had merely used to appear good on the outside in order to harm others and get their own way. As they release these, they come into a full state of hell, which appears as a "clipping of their wings" or a sinking down and falling.

Note an interesting thing here: in the spiritual world, gravity does not draw downwards like on earth; it draws upwards. Spiritual gravity is continually drawing all things upward into closer harmony with the Lord. Evil seems to have a power to draw spirits downward against the gravity of the Lord's love. In fact, it actually has no such power. Think of a helium balloon:



It seems to have power to draw away from the earth's centre of gravity. In fact, it is not drawing away ... it is receding from the earth because it lacks the mass to draw nearer.

So with us: when we are involved in evil, it seems to drag us downward (and it is sometimes useful to think according to this appearance). But the reason why evil seems to pull us away from the Lord is that it lacks spiritual mass, and so it must recede from Him. It can't be drawn by the current of the Lord's attraction. And because it

lacks mass and drags behind, living a good life requires more force from us when we are in evil. Evil feels heavy! Nothing saps our energy more. It weighs us down so that we lose spiritual force or power.

Being in a state of love for others and for the Lord does not require so much force. It's like going with the current or breeze. It's like riding in a car that has mass to it. Force or power is provided by the Lord's love and truth as they are drawn to Himself. When we have these in us and let them work there, the Lord does the work even as we do it. So the Lord says, "Come to Me, you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.....For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

The real labours and burdens of life do not come from living for others and living for what is eternal; they come from being self-centred and materialistic. The Lord's yoke appears heavy when we are labouring after the food which perishes. In reality, that yoke is light! It is being down upwards continually.

Here is the wonder of the truth that we take upon ourselves. It has the power to lighten our burdens. In the midst of a selfish slumber, when we wake up to ourselves, it restores force to us. For when we let truth enter our minds, the Lord's love flows in and gives our minds mass. And this mass is drawn silently upward closer to heaven, toward the Lord.

And as we are lifted up by Him, the fever leaves us. "And He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her." Amen



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Continuing looking into the Lord's Prayer **"Your kingdom come"**

ελθετω η βασιλεια σου

In the Lord's Prayer so far, we have acknowledged the Lord as the source of all that is good in our lives ("Our Father in the heavens"). We made the commitment to "hallow the Lord's name", in the daily practices of life. But, how does that commitment begin to become reality?

The Lord Jesus, in His teaching ministry, has much to say about "the kingdom". It is variously expressed as "the kingdom of heaven" or "the kingdom of God". Interestingly, it is only in Matthew's Gospel that we find the phrase, "kingdom of heaven", Mark and Luke preferring "kingdom of God", and the terms appear interchangeable in the literal text (compare Matthew 3:2 and Mark 1:15). There are a number of significant parables about kings and their kingdoms (for example, Matthew 18:23-35). Other parables begin with the phrase, "The kingdom of heaven is like ..." (for example, Matthew 13:19,24,31,44). The kingdom is offered as a reward in two of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3 & 10), it is said to be "within you" (Luke 17:21, and may also be translated "among you"), and when he appeared before Pilate, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36)

Turning to the Old Testament, we find laws for a king set out in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, Daniel foretells an "eternal kingdom" (Daniel 4:3; 7:27), and there's the famous story of Samuel's despair when the people ask for "a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). It's here that I find the clearest suggestion as to what "kingdom" means. We often think of a "kingdom" as a piece of land, but of course it is actually called that because a king rules over it: if there's anything a kingdom must have, it is a king. The word "kingdom" in English as well as the Biblical languages actually refers to the right or authority to rule. To Samuel, the people of Israel seemed to reject the "theocracy" - the rule of God - replacing Him with their desire to have some other

ruler. So, it doesn't matter whether we speak of a tract of land, or the people who live there, or simply my own heart: if it has a king, it is nevertheless a kingdom.

The question it raises is this: Who (or What) rules in your life?

And what about, "come"? The word is, "equivalent to: to come into being, arise, come forth, show itself, find place or influence" (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). We could reasonably express it as, "May Your rule establish its influence in me."

The thing is, a kingdom demands loyalty but not love. As much as we would like have rulers we love and admire, the kingdom functions perfectly well so long as its subjects are all obedient. Once we grasp the true significance of that principle, it becomes a powerful weapon in our spiritual arsenal. You see, there's no demand for me to like a principle for it to rule, or to begin practising it. In fact, when you do insist upon liking something first, you can be sure that you will never truly practise it. You might begin by liking the idea of it, but it won't last.

Here's an example. You want to lose weight, or build a stronger body, or focus upon long-term stamina and health. So, you decide upon a regime of diet and exercise to achieve that goal. You like the idea of how you will look and feel once you've done that, and so you begin. But after a short while you discover it means accepting some discipline: hard work, and giving up a few comforts and luxuries that you've grown accustomed to. You begin to wonder, whether it's worth the effort after all. So, what do you do at this point? Well, if you have to like something in order to succeed, you're not going to succeed are you? You're going to give up, and settle back into the old, comfortable habits you do like.

But there's another way. Put aside your need to like what is important, and recognise the benefits to be gained from just getting on with the

page 10

job. Compel yourself - no matter how you feel about it - to do whatever it takes to achieve your goal. Now - for the first time - that principle really rules your life.

Now, that's a physical example. I don't know about you, but I get so many examples of this pop up when I look at news sites and on social media. People who lost weight, people who built strength. Then there's the people who build wealth, reduced their debt, build a passive income stream, whatever. They all adhere to the same basic principle of discipline. They have taken a spiritual, universal principle, and found that it has application to a natural problem. Don't get me wrong, that's a good thing. But my purpose here is primarily concerned with spiritual life, that is, taking a principle from the Word of the Lord and applying it to my life. That rarely makes the headlines, but the reality is those external changes won't last unless they spring from some deeper compulsion. So we might just as usefully focus upon allowing principles of love to rule: kindness, forgiveness, controlling one's temper, generosity. Or principles of truth: honesty, integrity, fairness, justice. I'm sure you can think of many others. All these can become means through which we allow the Lord to establish His kingdom.

Jesus talks about this in many different ways:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

And as he sowed, ...Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ... But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. (Matthew 13: 4,5, 20,21)

“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.” (Luke 11:24-26)

So, what principle can you take from His Word today, and will you allow it to rule?

David

SOCIETY REPORTS

BRISBANE AND S E QUEENSLAND

We have been very fortunate in Queensland in not having to endure the extended lockdowns that those of you, in particular Victoria and NSW, have incurred. Our family services each month continue to be well attended, though without the usual feast of delicacies that we normally enjoy! We are however very fortunate to have the services of our wonderful commercial coffee machine that Sarah and Sean Bao so kindly installed and operate to meet our individual requests.

John Sandow passed into the spiritual world on Monday, 14 June, 2021 and Rev Darren Brunne conducted a service of farewell and celebration of John's life on 23 June, 2021 at Allambie Park Gardens on the Gold Coast. The weather was kind and lifting of lockdowns enabled dear friends from Port Macquarie and Sydney to join Lenore, their family and Qld friends in celebrating a life well-lived and our friend well-loved.

Roland G. Smith's depictions of scenes from the Book of Revelation, plus accompanying explanations of the spiritual meanings, are now available over the internet in Chinese thanks to Guang bin Liu, and his translation of Heaven and Hell is now online via Steve David's website, "New Christian Bible Study Project". Guang is fast becoming an expert

page 12

in the computer world, recording all our services and translating Swedenborg's works into Chinese for e-consumption! (Is there such a word?!)

Glen and Haly Harris' son, Ben, left for Bryn Athyn recently to start his studies at the College and his sister, Claire, left a week earlier for studies at Edinburgh University. We wish them both well in their endeavours.

Jordan Brunne is in her final year of her 4 yr Teaching Degree in Bryn Athyn and is going well. Hopefully Covid restrictions are lifted by the end of the year, so she can enjoy some well-earned holidays back home.

A wonderful opportunity to spread the Word was given to Rev. Brunne on Wed. 1 September when he was asked to speak on behalf of the BSNC to the Theosophical Society in Brisbane and chose the subject of 'The Soul's Journey to Peace and Union'.

Our hearts go out to those that are struggling with the lockdowns. I keep reminding myself that these things will pass eventually and it's a constant reminder that the Lord is in charge, despite what might seem to be the opposite.

Gaye Heldon

PERTH

We in Perth are so very grateful for the freedom we are enjoying , and being able to continue with our regular fortnightly services. At present we are meeting alternately in the homes of Ros and David Walker and Joy and Trevor Moffat, generally with a shared lunch to follow. After our next service we plan to take advantage of the beautiful spring weather, and an abundance of wildflowers, and take a picnic to a nearby bush land area . A walk in the bush is a great way to recharge and catch up with each other. However we are very aware of our friends in the east where lockdowns are still a way of life. Our prayers go out to you all.

It has been a pleasure to welcome Ros Thwaites among us for services recently. Lyn and Cliff Rocke are often in our thoughts as they are unable to attend at the moment.

Our two worship leaders Trevor and David have both had health issues recently but both now are gradually recovering. We are grateful to both for their continued support with their services.

So we send our thoughts and prayers to all readers and look forward to when you can all return to some sort of normality.

Joy Moffat

SYDNEY (ROSEVILLE)

Not much to report on the church front from Sydney. Two and a half months of COVID lockdown naturally has been difficult, but generally it seems people have coped well enough. Of course, live church activities have been closed down. We have been receiving videos of shorter services from our minister Howard. He is currently doing a weekly series on the children of Israel in the Wilderness. I guess the Wilderness stage of the journey to the Promised Land corresponds to the time of reformation in the regenerative process. But currently we don't necessarily need to be personally in that state to relate to it since being in lockdown feels very much like being in the wilderness anyway.

When the lockdown in Sydney was suddenly called in late June Joe Vandermeer, the manager of the Swedenborg Centre, was visiting friends in Bowral in the Southern Highlands, about an hour south of Sydney. He has been there ever since. This means he has escaped State government restrictions for most of this time... and he's been able to do it in a very scenic part of the country. With his expertise as a former IT professional he has managed to keep everything running from there. He has continued to host ZOOM sessions, keeping everybody not only in NSW but around the country and the world enlightened and entertained. It allows us to have a life that seems a lot more normal when we can take part in these virtual meetings. The sessions are

page 14

advertised on the Swedenborg Association of Australia website and all are welcome to join in.

Wishing everyone around Australasia particularly good health and blessings.

Wayne Kasmar

THE NEW CHURCH IN VICTORIA

Over the past 18 months, across the Planet has been the suddenness and sheer awfulness of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic is the greatest medical disaster to have affected the world since the start of the flu pandemic 103 years ago.

Here in Victoria, we are still living under the world's toughest lockdown for well over 200 days. So many in the state are depressed finding their lives are rapidly becoming monotonous and bereft of joy. Many feel they are not living but merely existing. Even the simplest of pleasures – whether it is catching up with friend for a coffee, a family gathering to share a meal or just watching the children play school sport on a Saturday afternoon have been stripped from our lives. It is also clear in addition to facing a dangerous strain of Covid-19, we are also being hurt by a small minority of people who are not doing the right things by obeying the lockdown rules to stay at home.

As a community it is never been more important for us to come together for a common aim to move forward and get to the other side of the crisis. Now that we have emerged from the cold days of winter, spring has suddenly arrived. Flowers are sprouting up and we hear countless birds chirping, heralding the rebirth of nature. The rebirth of nature gives us hope for rejuvenation in our own lives as well so that we can continue on our path with renewed spirit and energy.

On the first of August, we enjoyed a barbecue lunch at our new premises. The barbecue was gifted to the church by Rev. and Mrs Moffat. It was a joyous occasion for everyone.

Rev.Moffat continues utilising the internet to make our services, Bible study and other ongoing projects available to members during lockdown on Zoom and / or You tube.

Doctrine of Sacred Scripture

On Sunday, 8th of August, we had begun reading the Doctrine of Sacred Scripture. We read the first chapter, discussing passages and moved on how we might practice those principles in our day to day lives.

Bible studies are conducted fortnightly on Mondays at 8.30 pm. We are continuing our journey through the book of Genesis.

Question Time takes place on Thursdays at 10.00 am and 8.00 pm on a weekly basis. This program is an invaluable tool to build a strong and cohesive community. Community is so vital to the health and well being of the planet that psychiatrist Dr. Scott Peck, author of the book the Road Less Travelled said "in and through community lies the salvation of the world. Nothing is more important or personally rewording."

Community is the antidote for aloneness, alienation and organisation paralysis. It's something that answers a deep need of the soul. Experts tell us that true community is hard to define. It must be experienced. Yet we intuitively know many of the things that make up a community. Connection, companionship, sharing, caring for others and being cared for.

Experts also tell us that community is or can be many different things. It is a family, the people in our neighbourhood. A group of people we work with or the members of what sociologists' call "intentional communities" groups of people who come together for a specific purpose. Just because we meet people does not make our community a community. We don't automatically make a connection or good connection. It is something we have to work at. Whether our community is as small as a family or large as the world we must remove the barriers that separate us and strengthen the ties that unites us.

page 16
Heaven and Hell.

We are continuing our project reading and commenting upon Swedenborg's most well-known work Heaven and Hell.

Chapter 15: Light and Heat in heaven. Audio is available for download.

Chapter 16: The 4 Quarters in Heaven. Audio is available for download.

News of People

Graham Scoble passed on to the higher life on 25.6.2021 at the age of 80. He was our church organist from 1997- 2015 at our High St Road church. Graham was inspirational and his passion was music. He was an empathetic man, looked for the good in each person and usually found it. He was always busy, but never too busy to share his love of life with those around him. His family were his life; he would do anything for them. He also was a great help and support to Rev. Chris Skinner. He had attended every church function including the craft sessions which were run by Mrs Margaret Skinner. He was the only male member of our church who was on the duty roster and excelled himself with his beautiful flower arrangements for our Sunday services. Graham will be sadly missed by his wife Isabella, his three children, two grandchildren and all of us in the church.

At these troubled times I wish you all good health and happiness. May you be filled with strength and enthusiasm for life and above all a deep desire to help anyone and all creatures in need of assistance wherever you are. If you are in a position to assist either in a meaningful way or through your private devotion and kind wishes for that person or that troubled species of animal which you know is in need of assistance for its very survival, then please do help. We need to develop a non-anthropocentric ethic, which extends the concept of rights and justice to all living creatures.

With Love and Light, Marika Sivak

"GOD IS GOOD FOR YOU"



'God is good for you - a defence of Christianity in troubled times' is a book published in 2018 authored by Greg Sheridan. Greg is a well-known Australian conservative political journalist. He is also a committed Christian adhering to the Catholic tradition. His predominant argument is that holding onto a belief in a

higher power is actually good for you and he backs this assertion by pointing to various scientific studies that supports this notion.

I have no intention of reviewing this book – better minds have already done this anyway. However, I was struck by a reoccurring theme. Sheridan interviewed many Australians who are well known. A few identify themselves as Christian while others, it appears, are quite comfortable to take on board many of the Judeo – Christian principles such a love and forgiveness but balk at the idea of an everlasting hell. I got the impression that they would be happily identified as being Christian if it was not for this belief. In short I thought I detected a certain wistfulness there.

It got me wondering what would happen if the doctrine of 'ruling love' was better known and understood. That is, it is not so much God consigning us to hell but, for some people, their self - love and their immersion in all kind of evil are so absolutely paramount that would be unthinkable if they found themselves in a place where love for others and for God was the order of the day. As one writer pithily put it - heaven would be their hell.

CS Lewis had the same idea. In a novel called 'The Great Divorce' he had a group residing in hell being offered a trip to outskirts of heaven by bus. They were so repulsed by what they saw there that they were happy to return their own environment.

page 18

Every now and again, in my mind's eye, I see a plain surrounded by low hills. It is in semi darkness but in one direction is the loom of a golden light rather like a newly risen sun. In the opposite direction is another loom but it has a dark sickly red-purple glow.

There are many people milling around this plain. They seem to be forming circles or groups. A few are walking quickly towards one or the other of the lights.

'What is that?' The question was asked. 'You mean the reddish glow over there?' 'They call it the New Vegas. You can get anything you want there. Of course you have to pay for it. But that shouldn't be a problem – you are not squeamish, are you?'

In one group a person speaking appears to be some kind of mogul. Or at least had been.

'I got what I wanted through hard work. Devoted every waking moment I did. Anyone can do it.'

In another cluster someone is telling how they managed to successfully organise a crowd funding project to help a sick child. 'Through everyone's remarkable generosity we were able to send her and her parents to the USA. There is every hope that she will be cured.'

Another responded telling everyone how she had been able to set up a school-run roster for the children of a recently widowed mother.

A sinister looking person seemed to be dominating another cluster of people. 'No one gets away with crossing me. I watched him suffer.' Most quickly moved away from him. But clearly not everyone thought that way. Some wanted more details while others wanted to tell their own story.

A woman was saying 'You should have seen her face when I told her. Served her right; she was always such a.....'

Interspersed in the crowd are people dressed in bright clothing somewhat reminiscent of those guides at the Sydney Olympics 2000. Intuitively you felt they could be trusted and indeed, many were in deep conversation with them.

There were a large body of people who clearly had no doubts. They were already hurrying toward that bright white light talking excitedly about how they are so looking forward to 'meeting the Lord'.

A few walk in one direction and then stop apparently undecided. Turning back they seek more information from the 'Guides'.

Finally the whole area is cleared.

.....I recognise and acknowledge that this depiction is not particularly theologically accurate but I am hoping it serves as an illustration.

It may also serve to depict another reason why I love the 'ruling love' principle so much. This yardstick, I would like to hope, can be applied to anyone. No matter what religion they adhere to, or indeed, if they have no belief system at all. The question can be asked of absolutely everyone. What is the most important thing to you in your life? What do you love most deep down?

So, in the end, not one person is left. All had been drawn by their most inner feelings and desires in one direction or the other. As it says in John 3. 19. 'This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light.... '

'A newly arrived spirit or new spiritual person is taken about and conveyed into various societies, both good and evil and he is examined to see whether he is affected by truths and in what way, or whether he is affected by falsities and in what way.

'If a person is affected by truths, he is led away from evil societies and introduced into good ones and various good ones, until he comes to a society corresponding to his natural affection...' Apocalypse Revealed
153

A DIETARY BIBLE STUDY - DANIEL CHAPTER 1

While the Bible frequently mentions food - think of the Passover, the permitted and forbidden foods, manna, loaves and fish, bread and wine - there doesn't seem to be a dietary story apart from Daniel chapter 1.

Daniel and many Israelites were taken into captivity and exile in Babylon. Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah seemed to be rather special. They were young men with no blemish, good-looking, gifted with wisdom, very knowledgeable and quick to understand, and capable of serving the king. Wow!

Now look at this from the Babylonian point of view. First, capture them, then change their names to Babylonian names (Belteshazzar, Meshach, Shadrach and Abed-Nego), then teach them the local language and culture, give them the King's rich food to enjoy and soon, they'll be as Babylonian as we are! They'll forget where they came from. Too easy!

Now we come to the diet factor. The chief of the eunuchs who was in charge of these men told them they'd have the best food, best wine, best training and in three years they'd serve the king. Imagine that! (Note: Eunuchs! Men who've lost something... that says something about the spiritual state of Babylon!)

Daniel spoke up. He declared he wanted vegetables and water, not the king's rich food. The chief eunuch trembled and said his job, even his life, might be on the line. So Daniel said, "Test us for ten days, give us only vegetables and water, and then see how we look." And in ten days these men looked better, fitter, fatter and altogether their best.

So they continued to be given vegetables and water. Soon, the king summoned them and they went to him. He interviewed them and found them ten times better in understanding and wisdom than his own magicians and astrologers. And they served the king from then on.



Now we'll look at what all this can mean for us, personally and spiritually. The thing about Daniel is that he was always faithful to the Lord and this protected him. The idea is that our faithfulness to the Lord will

always protect us.

The diet of demanding a **simple** kind of food and only water to drink has a clear and fairly obvious meaning for us. This describes Daniel's simple but strong decision to stay faithful to God. Having the king's rich food and his choicest wines would have gradually led them into spicy forgetfulness and sumptuous indulgences. We should really take good note of that point.

But, there's more to this than meets the eye. It's a classic case of where the original word used carries a lot more meaning than the translated word we use. Bear with me and I'll explain, but I promise you it's a stunner.

Most translations today put what Daniel insisted on eating as 'vegetables'. This gives the idea that perhaps we are talking about cabbage...broccoli?...carrots, turnips. No, we aren't.

Some translations get a bit nearer and refer to Daniel's chosen food as 'pulses' which would include beans, peas, lentils and some other things. Perhaps this makes us think of dahl, or lentil soup or stew. But the question is this "What - exactly what - do these basic foods called 'pulses' have in common? Yes, they are all seeds, but so is wheat and almonds, and they aren't 'pulses'.

Let me put you out of your misery. Beans, peas and lentils are seeds in a pod. And it is this which makes Daniel's choice the perfect choice.



The word which is used in the original Hebrew for these 'vegetables' or 'pulses' is ZERO'IM

and it specifically means seeds which are in a pod, or a case. At the risk of this becoming a kind of podcast,

let's think about the idea of seeds in a pod.

This is very much a picture of the Word (the pod case) in which are a number of seeds (truths to nourish and guide us).



Several things in one whole thing. This is a description of our faith. Why do we have a faith and what does our faith consist of?

Below are some possible 'pea-like' contents of our faith

○ belief in God ○ belief in goodness ○ belief in commandments (or the Word) ○ belief in God's care ○ belief in eternity ○ belief in love and care for others etc.

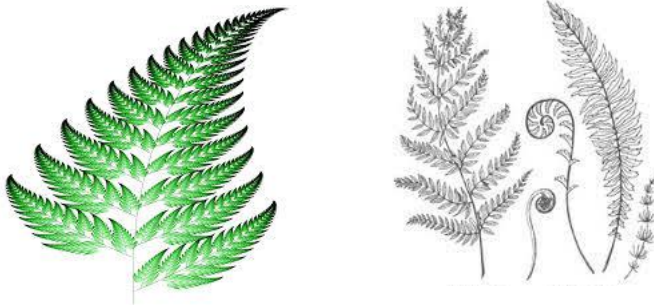
By all means, feel free to think and add your own faith specifics.

So, what Daniel was choosing to eat (and eating stands for 'taking in to sustain oneself') was his faith in God in this exact representation.

Our spiritual food and nourishment is the Word which has within it the many laws and requirements for true spiritual life. If we make this our diet - rather than the king's food, the world's food, which is spicy, tasty, just so good to our taste buds but is so alluring you are not sure of what's actually in it - then we will appear and feel at the end of those ten days to be in better condition than ever. Ten times wiser than the magicians and astrologers that enchanted the king of Babylon.

ON FERNS a tribute to Spring

Ferns, overall, are a very attractive plant form with their delicate separating fronds which started out as a tightly-wrapped spiral before it slowly unfolded and opened up into leaf. Another visual with many ferns is that they form one of nature's fractals where the very small is the same as the full size. A botanical geometry.



The majority of ferns develop spore cases on the undersides of each small frond or 'leaf', each containing countless spores, like dust, which, when ripe and ready, explode from off the frond and get carried up and away by the breeze to land eventually on fertile ground to begin their new ferning.

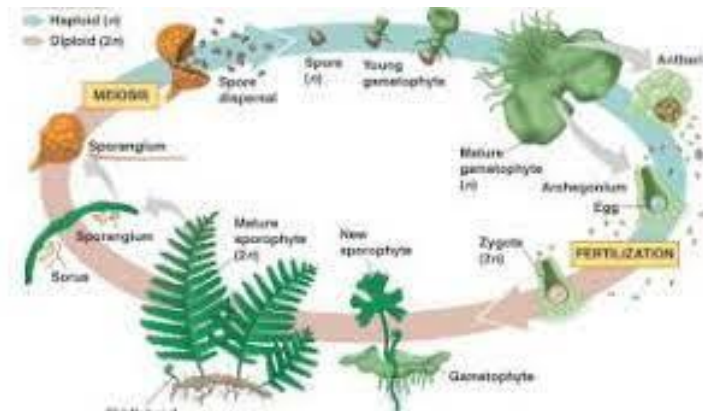
And it is at this point of germination where the fern becomes an illustration of no less that spiritual regeneration.

The developing spore first anchors itself firmly on something and sends out a root and then a shoot. There is nothing fern-like about this initial form. It's a fairly ugly commonplace item designed to build up a rapid robustness so as to survive.

The first form is like a tiny jigsaw piece, called a gametophyte. As it matures it begins to produce sperm and egg cells and these fertilise, and then the gametophyte 'job done' dies off, leaving the new second

page 24

new plant which will grow to become the actual fern. Take a look at the diagram.



Look most at the pictures and don't bother trying to read the scientific words. Begin with the spore on the far left. Continue round to the recognisable fern. And repeat...

The spiritual parallel here is that our first state in our life is quite natural and even self-centred, and needs to be in order to survive towards maturity. But the point of our life is ideally for us to become spiritual, which is God-centred and service-centred towards others, and bears little resemblance to the first temporary energised form.

This first form itself produces egg and sperm, or spiritually, love and wisdom, good and truth, which, on fusing, begin the production of the "new person" which like the mature fern is orderly and aesthetic in appearance, an angel in a plant.

Jesus said to him (Nicodemus), "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the spirit. John 3:6-8

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