



Turn Toward the Lord

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The Sunflower has the ability to follow the sun as it moves across the sky! In other words, it turns its beautiful, golden face toward the sun and continues to do so throughout the day. In the Lord's Kingdom of Heaven, one of the beautiful ways that Emanuel Swedenborg describes the universal qualities of the people there is that they love turning their face toward the Divine One, toward the Lord, who most often is experienced as the most glorious Sun up in the sky of Heaven. He also wrote that even though the Sun in Heaven is even brighter than our natural sun at the center of our solar system, people have no discomfort looking directly at it—for God's Light is the pure Light of Divine Love!

Yesterday at Pat and Steve Tukos' pool party, I was mesmerized by the beauty of the flowers around their house and swimming pool. The same thing happens to me often by the flowers in my family's backyard. I love the Daffodils, the Lilies, and most of all the Pansies! I love the sweet, silly and sometimes sad faces that appear in faces of those precious flowers.

Did you know that like everything in nature, flowers also correspond to (or symbolize) spiritual elements of our minds? In New Church theology they represent flourishing, blossoming thoughts, living and bright intelligence growing out of vital spiritual growth. They are bright, colorful thoughts leading toward a fruitful or good way of life. So, the Sunflower exists on Earth for more than just ecological reasons; it also exists because it corresponds to the thoughts and insights we feel and have when we freely choose to continue turning our way of life over to God and toward the living presence of the Divine One inside our hearts and minds.

No matter what is going on in the world, no matter what is going on around you, and, even when we may have chosen for some time to turn away from God and God's good ways of living, the Lord ensures that the power shall remain inside of you to turn back toward the Divine again, toward a pathway of goodness and truth. As Isaiah learned so very well after Israel had chosen as a large tribal nation to betray the Lord and a holy way of life, God responded to them in their desperate time saying, "I arm you, though you do not know me, so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from

the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other....”* The prophet continued, “Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength.”

The ancient Jewish faith, which Christ was raised in, talked a lot about the spiritual way of life that leads us in the ways of God. God said to Moses, “You must therefore be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess..” (Deut. 5:32-33) And Moses later taught the people, “For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, turning aside from the way that I have commanded you.” (Deut. 31:29) And Isaiah wrote elsewhere: “Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, ‘And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”” (Isaiah 30:21) The Jewish faith teaches that the devoted follower of God’s Word learns and knows much about the way of God that faithful disciples must walk, such as the core truths of life found in the Ten Commandments. Thousands of years later God enabled our world to learn through the awesome spiritual journey Swedenborg was given that when the inner meaning of the Ten Commandments is opened up (like flowers opening up in Springtime), there is more than enough spiritual truth and Light for us to understand what the goodness and truth of God is, so that in good times and in lean times we will know how we can turn our hearts and minds toward the Lord--toward a way of life that is good and true.

I have found it remarkable how easy it is to begin turning my attention away from the Lord in life. Whether it be from feeling like I have too many tasks in the day to accomplish, or simply because from that general, self-centered craving we all have inherited from our ancestors over the past 5,000 years, it seems inwardly that my natural will and mind enjoy straying off the pathway God has given in His holy Word. But the inward spiritual tendencies we are all challenged to deal with get even more intense than this. As we read about in our insight for worship earlier, we tend to want to thoroughly invert ourselves spiritually speaking! That is, we tend to want to turn ourselves in the opposite

direction from how the Lord hopes we will live---in other words, that inherited inner craving inside is to want to set ourselves up as all-important, in fact far more important than the Lord!

And so, rather than having our deepest focus and thoughts on God and godly ways of living, we can suddenly find ourselves wanting to love ourselves more than the Lord, and in this way, it can be easy to want to worship ourselves more than God. I have noticed in life from so many people's journeys, including my own, that there are many ways for us swerve off the pathway of gradual salvation in life. The lesson from our New Church teachings before us, is that we can know and understand that whatever the reasons may be for us to swerve off the pathway of spiritual growth and wanting to serve God most of all, the Lord provides the means for us not to perish!

The essence of these means is that God protects and maintains the power inside of us to always be able to turn toward the Lord, if we really want to. But in order for this to happen, I need to seriously acknowledge that every good of love and every truth of wisdom is from God, and nothing from myself. That is, I need to get seriously real with myself that nothing divine is stemming from my finite selfhood, but rather, I am a recipient of Divine spiritual influx! Thus, all goodness and truth flow out from God's Essence and into Heaven and into life. This is the core element of humbleness that all "angels in training" need to come to from within our own understanding, and not because someone else says so.

Even our good friend, Peter, one of Jesus' best disciples, had these inherited cravings toward worshiping himself above the Lord. On the toughest night of Jesus' life, the disciples began arguing who among them was the greatest. Jesus then reminds them that the truly great human beings are those who prefer to serve others, rather than being served by them. He taught them saying that His desire is that each of them shall enjoy sitting together as His table, in a spirit of love and brotherhood. He then told them that Satan was going to sift them like wheat, and that even Peter was going to betray Him. But then Jesus tells Peter that he will choose to turn back, and that after Peter turned his heart and mind back toward the Lord, he needed to help his brothers to do the same. Swedenborgian teachings add to this wisdom that when we are choosing (like the Sunflower) to turn our lives toward

the Lord's Divine Love and Truth again, the reality is that way deep down inside of us, it is actually God's will affecting us invisibly so that in reality it's really the Lord turning our wills back toward Him! The Lord turns us toward Himself, even though it feels like the power doing this comes from us. We are thus receiving the Divine's influence into our will and affections! This happens in a general way, which then flows gently into our thoughts in particular, conscious ways.

The bottom line for me to remember each and every day is, that I seriously need to remember to turn my deepest affections toward the Lord each morning through prayer, through meditating on even one verse from God's Word, as God says to each one of us, "Turn to Me, and be saved."

For in the Lord is my strength and deliverance. Amen.

Suggested Readings:

Isaiah 45:5-8, 22, 24

Luke 22:24-34

Doctrine of Charity 204.4

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