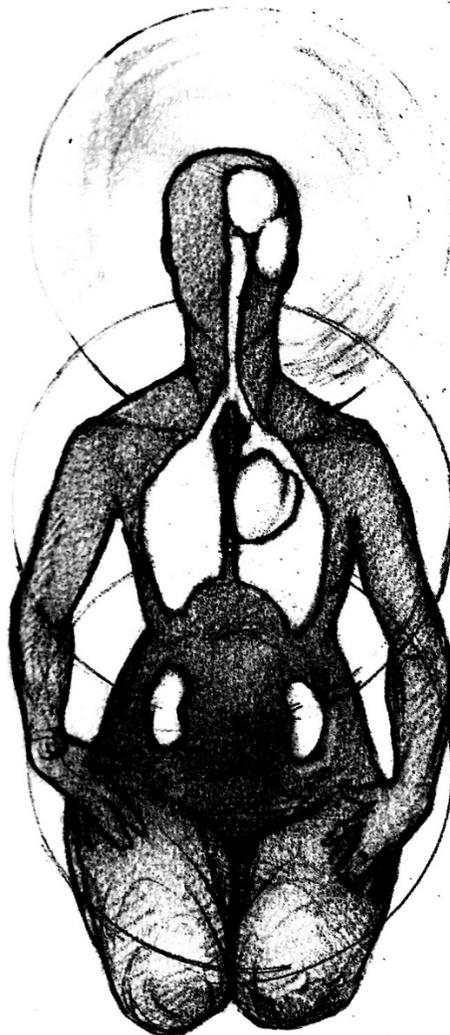




**OUR DAILY BREAD**  
Resources for Spiritual Questers

# *Swedenborg and the Ancient Art of Internal Breathing*

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## Introduction: What is Internal Breathing?

*...At all costs, we must realize that we have two forms of breathing, one of the spirit and one of the body. The breathing of the spirit depends on the fibers that come from the brain, and the breathing of the body depends on the blood vessels that come from the heart and from the vena cava and aorta.<sup>1</sup>*

Internal breathing is one of the most esoteric and mysterious aspects of Emanuel Swedenborg's life story. This energetic breathwork was a constant practice for him which, throughout his life, became an ever-deepening and broadening gateway into internal realms of spiritual reality. He would often lapse into extended breathless trances, flirting with the rough edges of mortality and bringing back the vast psychedelic landscapes of the world beyond death.<sup>2</sup> Swedenborg recorded detailed accounts of how this practice affected his psyche in his spiritual diary, providing a kind of guidebook to the subtle interior realms which define the living currents of the animate domain. He believed that the most ancient people had this different sort of respiration, afforded by the absence of speech "internal breathing" allowed them to have an intense awareness of internal influx and profound intimacy with those who had passed on to the next life.<sup>3</sup>

Before we trace out the narrative of how this ability was understood, born, and evolved, throughout Swedenborg's life we should first define our terms. Interiority, in the Swedenborgian sense, is much more conceptually complex than a simple sense of being inside. From his post-Cartesian paradigm, the universe was divided between the interior stuff of the soul and the stuff of the exterior world and the relationship between the two was up for speculation.<sup>4</sup> Swedenborg and his contemporaries, iantromechanists working to unite the world of the spirit to the world of embodied physics and geometry, conceptualized this relationship as a logarithmic spiral (figure 1).<sup>5</sup> It is a property of this form that from any point along its curve, one may trace their way to infinity by moving both inward and outward.<sup>6</sup> To Swedenborg, every particle of the universe had this spiral form within it.<sup>7</sup> Therefore the "internal" is not only spatial, but a way of describing a finer degree of

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<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, trans. Bruce Rogers (Bryn Athyn, PA: General Church of the New Jerusalem, 1999), 412. All references in Swedenborg citations indicate section numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Spiritual Experiences*, trans. Kurt P Nemitz and Durban Odhner (Bryn Athyn, PA: Academy of the New Church, 1998), 3034.

<sup>3</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper, v. 1 (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2008), 607.

<sup>4</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Rational Psychology*, trans. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, PA: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1950), 167.

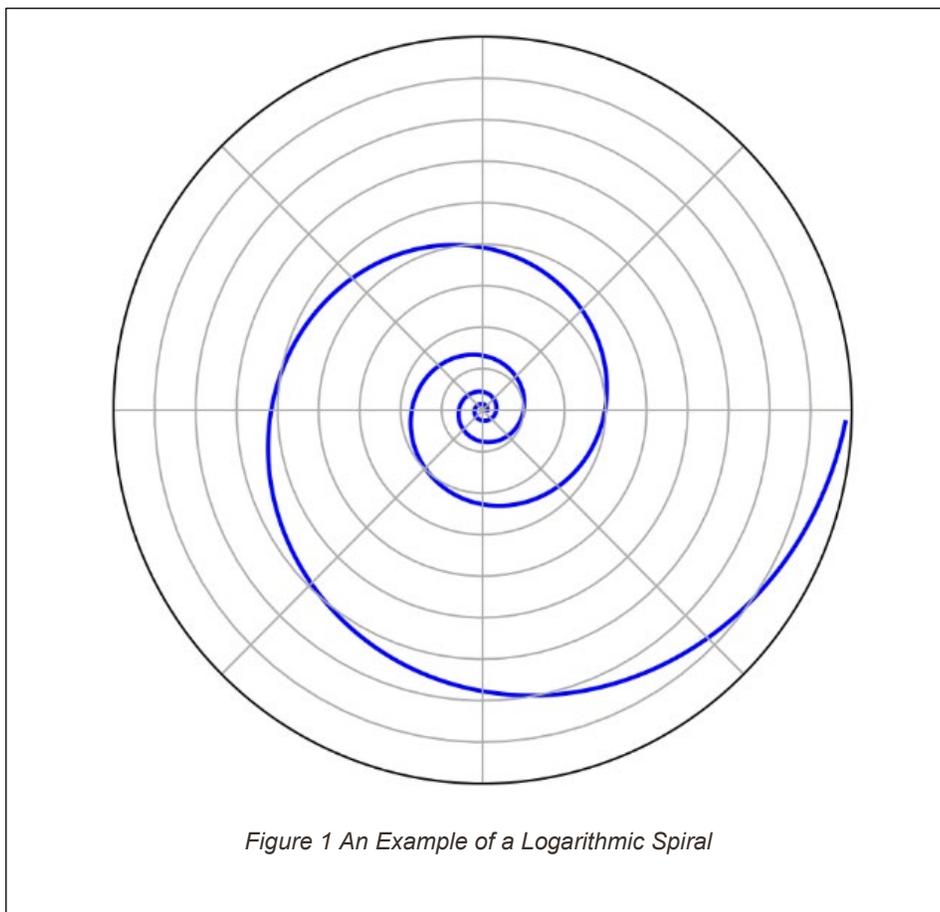
<sup>5</sup> David Duner, *The Natural Philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg: A Study in the Conceptual Metaphors of the Mechanistic Worldview*, trans. Alan Crozier, v. 11, *Studies in the History of Philosophy of Mind* (London: Springer, 2013), 72.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:323.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:326.

consciousness; a higher vibration, an undying world of spirit, and mind slipped between the atoms of so-called reality.<sup>8</sup> It's almost as if our normal perception was formed of large, clumsy corpuscles, each of which could be compressed, refined or unwound in such a way that our perception would change as the texture of the particulate universe became more refined. But Swedenborg complicates this spiral continuum by making the degrees *discrete*, like Einstein's quantized beams of light, Swedenborg's universe has a tendency to self organize into levels of energy - natural, spiritual and heavenly.

The body also aligns to these degrees of reality. We have a natural (external) body of flesh, a spiritual (internal) body of spirit, and a celestial (angelic) body formed of all the heavenly societies working together in harmony. Our spiritual anatomy is not some spectral sprite, but a fully embodied reality<sup>9</sup> that uses corporeal anatomy to transmit subtle tremulations through the strata of our internal cosmos. To Swedenborg, the language spoken between the estranged degrees of reality was called *correspondences*. These sacred allegories served as points of co-respondence, symbolic metaphors where the literal and the psychospiritual respond to one another in kind, and thus their connection to what Swedenborg called the "internal sense" of scripture. Breath itself follows this



<sup>8</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Cerebrum*, first., v. 1 (Bryn Athyn, PA: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 2010), 604.

<sup>9</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, trans. John C. Ager (NYC: Swedenborg Foundation, 1900), 73

organization, we have physical breath, spiritual breath which manifests as living energy, and a collective heavenly breath which we perceive as truth itself.<sup>10</sup>

The spiritual body has every nuance of embodied flesh, biological sex, physiology and sensory acuity.<sup>11</sup> The spiritual body has a pulse, it breathes and eats and defecates; the spiritual body experiences both pleasure and pain, it has chemistry, gravity and all the subtle beauty of our natural rhythms and harmonies. The most important difference between these levels is that the spiritual body responds to our psychological and spiritual state, becoming perfect, healthy and beautiful according to the state of the soul. The soul itself is influenced by societies of spirits with which it conjoins its breathing and thus becomes connected to the whole angelic system.<sup>12</sup> Describing a heavenly choir, Swedenborg says that “although there were a host they nevertheless all thought and spoke as a one, thus they all represented as a one; and this because no one was desirous to do anything from himself, still less to preside over the rest and lead the choir; for whoever does this is of himself instantly dissociated. But they suffered themselves to be led mutually by each other, thus all individually and collectively by the Lord. All the good who come into the other life are brought into such harmonious agreements.”<sup>13</sup>

To Swedenborg, the breath was a transmitter of life force, of will, language and cognition.<sup>14</sup> He observed how the motion of the lungs and the activity within the brain were highly synchronized.<sup>15</sup> Within the nervous system the quality of breath neatly aligned itself to the quality of spirit.<sup>16</sup> We might point out the etymological link between the Latin words for “spirit”

## The Vagus Nerve

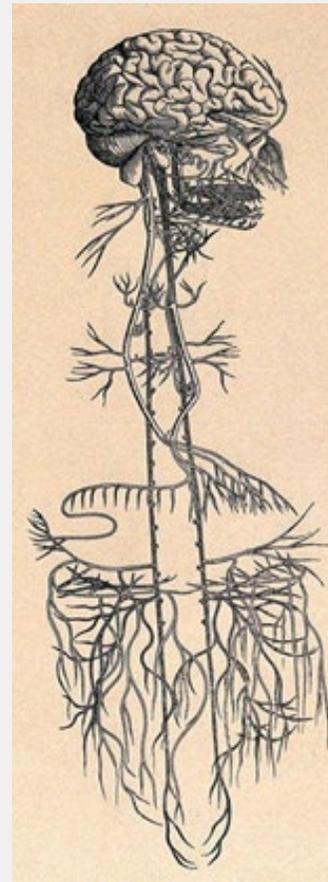


Figure 2 the Vagus Nerve As Swedenborg Would Have Seen It Illustrated

<sup>10</sup> Swedenborg, *Spiritual Experiences*, 3464.

<sup>11</sup> Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 485.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

<sup>13</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, v. 1 (West Chester, PA, 2008), 3350.

<sup>14</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, trans. Augustus Clissold M.A., 2nd ed., v. 2 (Philadelphia: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1955), 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:43.

<sup>16</sup> Swedenborg, *Spiritual Experiences*, 242.

(*spir-itu*) and “breath” (*re-spir-atio*) to illustrate that his was an ancient and intuitive connection.<sup>17</sup>

Today, we can set up experiments that clearly demonstrate the relationship between internal cognition and cardiopulmonary rhythms. For instance, we can explore the neuropsychological function of the vagus nerve, (fig. 2) how it moderates the flow of information from the gut and the heart up into the brain and vice versa, emotionally rooting us into the natural world through deep belly breathing.<sup>18</sup> We can use fMRI technology to watch how breathing through the nose entrains the oscillations of the limbic system and effects our cognition and our consciousness.<sup>19</sup> Swedenborg himself noted that these deep recesses of the sinus cavity responded to the motion of breath, which closely informed his understanding of the function of the pituitary gland.<sup>20</sup> As he moved into deeper levels of anatomy, he moved into correspondentially deepening levels of the soul, so that the internal, spiritual breath became closely associated with the activity of the interior organs, the gut, the kidneys, the heart and the nervous system and our abstract internals, that is, our receptivity of the influx of good and truth from God.

Today, neuroscientists understand, in anatomical detail, how our awareness of the inside of our bodies and awareness of our interior psychological states affect one another, how they use the same parts of the cortex, and strongly cross-activate.<sup>21</sup> Swedenborg and the mystics of other traditions, teach us how this relationship between physiological interoception and spiritual wellbeing is one that can be trained and strengthened so that a focused physiological interoception can become raised up into an intimate awareness of the influx of the living fire of consciousness from the spiritual dimension.

With this relationship in mind, the meaning of the phrase “Internal breathing” might come to light. It is a form of breath that corresponds to the oscillations which Swedenborg observed in both the deepest points of the anatomy and the deepest parts of the mind. It is the place where the animating force becomes incarnate. It is the breath of consciousness itself, the place where the movement of energy within the spine and the brain become the motion of the soul, the animating force, and indeed, all of heaven and the spiritual world.<sup>22</sup>

In the early morning of April 10 1744, Swedenborg woke up:

*This night as I was sleeping quite tranquilly, between 3:00 and 4:00 in the morning, I wakened and lay awake but as in a vision; I could look up and be awake, when I chose, and so was not otherwise than waking; yet in the spirit there was an inward and sensible gladness shed over the*

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<sup>17</sup> Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, 1:97.

<sup>18</sup> Bethany E. Kok and Barbara L. Fredrickson, “Upward Spirals of the Heart: Autonomic Flexibility, as Indexed by Vagal Tone, Reciprocally and Prospectively Predicts Positive Emotions and Social Connectedness,” *Biological Psychology* 85, no. 3 (December 2010): 432–436.

<sup>19</sup> Christina Zelano et al., “Nasal Respiration Entrain Human Limbic Oscillations and Modulates Cognitive Function,” *The Journal of Neuroscience* 36, no. 49 (December 7, 2016): 12448–12467.

<sup>20</sup> Swedenborg, *The Cerebrum*, 1:1110.

<sup>21</sup> Hugo D Critchley et al., “Neural Systems Supporting Interoceptive Awareness,” *Nature Neuroscience* 7, no. 2 (February 2004): 189–195.

<sup>22</sup> Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, 1:4041.

*whole body; it seemed as if it were shown in a consummate manner how it all issued and ended. It flew up, in a manner, and hid itself in an infinitude, as a center. There was love itself. And it seems as though it extended around therefrom, and then down again--thus by an incomprehensible circle, from the center, which was love and so thither again.*<sup>23</sup>

## The Archaic Scripture of the Body

*In every age... there has been a revelation. Various forms of revelation have succeeded each other on this earth. With the most ancient people, who lived before the flood, and whose time was called the golden age, there was immediate revelation; and for that reason, Divine Truth was written on their hearts.*<sup>24</sup>

Swedenborg strongly associates the “most ancient church”<sup>25</sup> with internal breathing. This is the first of five stages or “Churches” which he believed the world and each individual progressed through;<sup>26</sup> the Most Ancient, the Ancient Church of indigenous cultures, the Israelitish church of the Old Testament, the Christian Church, which at his time was in a fallen state, and finally the New Church, the “crown of all the churches”.<sup>27</sup>

He believed that the earliest humans, in whom language had only just started to evolve, would have a deeper awareness of the motion of the vital energy within the body without the encumbrance of external speech. A version of this idea shows up in contemporary anthropological circles, where a close study of the skulls from preindustrial societies reveals how our jaws and nasal passages have gotten smaller, and with it our capacity to breathe properly has degraded.<sup>28</sup> The Most Ancients or the people of the “Golden Age” represent a state of mind that is utterly innocent of all the horrors of history. Humanity without language or possessions comes into a state of direct enlightenment spoken in the trembling waveforms of their heartbeats and then falls into a hell so deep that they are described as being beneath a rock, under “the heel of the left foot” in the spiritual world.<sup>29</sup>

This fall in spiritual state is accompanied by a physiological fall of the breath which at first comes from the space near the heart and gradually falls to beneath the base of the spine which, Swedenborg claims, resulted in the mass separation from their internal state and physical

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<sup>23</sup> David Duner, *The Natural Philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 394.

<sup>24</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The White Horse*, trans. B. Willmott (London: Swedenborg Society, 1955), 6.

<sup>25</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Conjugal Love*, trans. William Wunsch (NYC: Swedenborg Foundation, 1937), 75.

<sup>26</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Five Ages: Swedenborg's View of Spiritual History* (London: Swedenborg House, 2009), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, trans. Jonathan Rose (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010), 786.

<sup>28</sup> James Nestor, *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* (NYC: Riverhead Books, 2020), 16.

<sup>29</sup> Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, 1:581.

asphyxiation.<sup>30</sup> This alienation from internal reality seems to be a common theme in the fall of each subsequent spiritual epoch. It should be noted that, when one begins to search for them in earnest, enlightened remnants of the Most Ancient and Ancient churches abound in nearly every corner of the globe. In the nineteenth century artist and researcher George Catlin traveled through north and South America speaking with people from a host of disparate civilizations and found that a deliberate awareness and control of breath has been retained in many indigenous cultures as a form of medicine. We can also point to Yogic traditions out of India and Taoist traditions out of China, both of which have their origins in the cradle of human consciousness. It seems that the wisdom of our ancestors has never left us.

Swedenborg also aligns the state of the most ancients with the innocence of infants. This comparison does not necessarily imply an infantilization of cultures who retain their ancient wisdom, the people of the Golden Age are not described as “savages” but rather as angelic communities “in the highest degree of light”.<sup>31</sup> Swedenborg himself describes experimenting with breath manipulation at a young age in his diary, saying:

*... for many years from early childhood I had been introduced to such [internal] breathing, most of all during intense moments of insight, when breathing comes to rest, and if it does not, an intense insight of truth is not given.*<sup>32</sup>

In the same place, Swedenborg describes “tacit breathing” an experience of a subtle internal breath when his family would pray in the morning and evening. As he grew older, he applied the same practice to the practical problems of a natural scientist. He used the deep concentration which he discovered in this trance state to fuel his immense graphomania. He would learn to use his ability to control his own heart and lungs to explore the mechanism of anatomy in general. Swedenborg delves deeper and deeper into the practice until he learns to suspend his breathing for a full hour and place himself into a trance state from which he could explore the internal realms of spirit.

From this, we can see how Swedenborg himself was keenly aware of a kind of embodied influx radiating from these ancient spiritual societies. Like the ancients, his own body, and his own childhood becomes the seat of revelation. His “species of respiration” therefore have both developmental and mytho-historical correlates that allow the macrocosmic cycle of the Churches to correspond to our personal microcosmic histories. Elsewhere we are told how the Lord could see fit to give anyone spiritual awareness by means of their internal vision.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the capacity for an awareness of the internal breath (and therefore an awareness of the whole of the spiritual world) seems to be implanted in each one of us in the very blueprint of our development. To use the language of contemporary neuroscience, this awareness becomes inhibited as we grow and gradually, the custom of speech separates us from the scripture of the body.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1:1120.

<sup>31</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*, trans. John Whitehead (NYC: Swedenborg Foundation, 1892), 247.

<sup>32</sup> Swedenborg, *Spiritual Experiences*, 3464.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 2021.

The implication is that anyone could learn to become sensitized to these interior realms. But at what cost? An abrupt opening of the internal levels of the mind would likely drive many people insane. And Swedenborg himself often seems tortured by his experiences which vacillate wildly between visions of heaven and hell.<sup>34</sup> With this in mind, it would be wise to avoid the complications of using these methods of internal acuity for simple spiritism and necromancy. The goal must *always* be loving unity within the sphere of our own little heavens. However, we can use these sensitivities to become more keenly aware of the spiritual spheres which are structuring our own psyches and thereby raise up our spiritual states into the infinitely pervasive sphere of divine love and wisdom.

To Swedenborg, the action of breath was not only in the motion of the lungs but in the living integration of the whole corporeal, spiritual, and cosmic system. Any one point of anatomy could become the center of breath, as well as spiritual activity.<sup>35</sup> As Swedenborg observes in his diary of spiritual experiences, “Each society of the grand human being has its own kind of respiration, which all flow in and determine the ordinary respiration of mankind.”<sup>36</sup>

## Ecstasy

In the early 1740s, Emanuel Swedenborg was deeply immersed in his study of the brain and his search for an anatomical correlate to consciousness and the soul when he turned his attention to the *morbi cerebri* or diseases, dysfunctions, and abnormalities of the brain. He wrote extensively about various ailments which he believed had some origin in the dysfunction of the central nervous system, everything from epilepsy<sup>37</sup> to paralysis<sup>38</sup> to migraines<sup>39</sup> to hypnagogia,<sup>40</sup> and memory loss.<sup>41</sup> Each section describes the ailment, makes some attempt to explain it with swellings, hardenings, or lesions within the brain and, importantly, associates it with a particular kind of *breathing*. One of the most interesting parts of this work is a brief essay titled *de Ecstasi* or *On Ecstasy*.<sup>42</sup>

The type of ecstasy which he is describing is the ecstasy of what we might call a near-death or out of body experience, “when the mind or the soul seems to be separated from the body” although they both still live. Swedenborg associates the phenomena with shamanic drumming, enchanters, drowned sailors, heart attacks and hangings, but also with Plato and Aristotle’s experiences of an elevation of the senses into a higher, undying reality and “so great a light that it cannot be expressed in words”.

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<sup>34</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg’s Journal of Dreams 1743 -1744* (New York, NY, USA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1986), 157–58.

<sup>35</sup> Swedenborg, *Spiritual Experiences*, 3320.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3318.

<sup>37</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, “Opus de Cerebro (codex 55)” (Bryn Athyn, PA: n.p., n.d.), 665.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 679.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 809.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 837.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 845.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 832.

He goes on to describe how the ecstatic phenomenon is caused by “the inhibition or suffocation of the respiration of the lungs while the pulsation of the heart and arteries, and the movement of the cerebrum and cerebellum, medulla oblongata, and the spinal cord, survives.” So the oscillations of the nervous system, having been entrained to the motion of the lungs throughout life, take over the action of breathing aided only by the final desperate pumps of a mortal heart.

Swedenborg leads us through a precise sequence of events, saying, “a mutation of the state of the entire system is then ushered in.” first, “whatever is corporeal suffers” and wavers, growing weak and releasing its hold on consciousness. Second, then the soul, having her seat in the nervous system, is able to rise up and “govern absolutely.” The blood no longer carries vitality to the body, and the only surviving signal is the last flicker of the living spirit in the nerve fibers of the spine and brain. In the last moments of life, released from the “bridles and prisons” of flesh, the soul takes the whole system into the same sphere of timeless ecstasy which she experienced in the womb.

But Swedenborg provides a caveat, not everyone is capable of surviving this kind of ecstasy. The *foramen ovale* is a passage in the heart between the left and right ventricle which, in the womb, allows for blood to pass back into circulation without going through the lungs (Figure 3).<sup>43</sup> In about twenty-five percent of the population this passage remains open with no ill effects.<sup>44</sup> Swedenborg believed that ecstatic near-death states could only be survived by those with this particular abnormality, it served as a kind of pressure release valve which allowed blood to flow backward and therefore not burst the coronal arteries.<sup>45</sup>

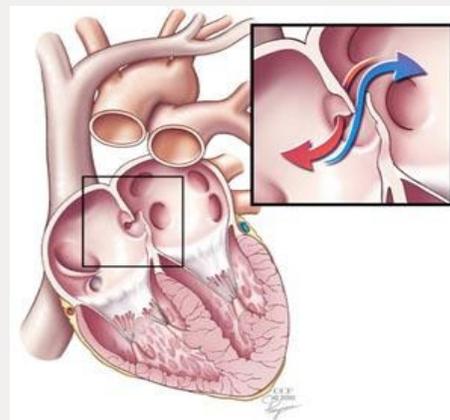
It seems as if this essay planted a seed. This is one of the earliest articulations of the idea of internal breathing, and soon afterward Swedenborg himself would start experimenting within his own meditation practice, flirting with the edges of death and bringing back detailed accounts of what lay beyond in the galaxy of inner space. A record of which he would publish in his vast theological works. The longer he looked inward, the more he saw and aided by the gentle oscillations of his own subtle anatomy, his spiritual eyes began to open.

<sup>43</sup> Homma Shunichi et al., “Patent Foramen Ovale,” *Nature reviews, Disease primers* 2, no. 15086 (January 21, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Cleveland Clinic Staff, “Patent Foramen Ovale (PFO),” *Cleveland Clinic*, accessed July 11, 2020, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/17326-patent-foramen-ovale-pfo>.

## Patent Foramen Ovale



Cleveland Clinic Staff, “Patent Foramen Ovale (PFO),” *Cleveland Clinic*, accessed July 11, 2020, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/17326-patent-foramen-ovale-pfo>.

## A Pre-Adamite Initiation

*About the most ancient Church*

*The most ancient Church had inner breathing, thus from the inner person, which was in the company of spirits and angels, toward the outer [person]. But later the way was closed, and the breathing became an outer [breathing], so that there was no communication, hence no speech [with spirits,] etc.  
1749, 19 Febr.<sup>46</sup>*

Swedenborg's shift from a scientific discussion of the ecstatic state towards his own psychonautical journeys seems to start out from a place of practical necessity that quickly goes out of his control and into the hands of a higher power. With the limited resources of an eighteenth-century anatomist, a primitive microscope, anatomical theatre and illustrations, and a strong desire to understand the mechanics of anatomy, he turned towards interoception to understand how the body was working in its living condition.

His was the consciousness most immediately available, just as he observed his own cardiopulmonary rhythms to understand the harmonies of the heart and lungs, Swedenborg also observes his own conscious awareness, to understand the mechanics of the "domain of the soul" within the brain and the nervous system. He was an obsessive data synthesizer who, upon awakening to his own internal life, immediately started taking notes. By means of this observational hermeneutic, we get the subtitle to several of his most popular works, "from things heard and seen." Although he often seems beset by moments of temptation, emotional instability, and visions of hell<sup>47</sup> he consistently goes back to the practicality of a scientist.

It is during this time period when the spiritous flux from his work on the brain, which flows effortlessly through the nerve fibers<sup>48</sup> become the "spirits" of the world beyond death. The gyres and vortices of the subtle anatomy which is described in the work on the brain<sup>49</sup> become the gyrating choruses in the Grand Human of heaven.<sup>50</sup>

In the late 1740s, Swedenborg began recording his spiritual experiences in his personal journals. As he converses with entities and angels, he is instructed in more and more complex forms of breath control. He organizes these systems of breathing in several different ways according to the nature of the experience. In his diary Swedenborg describes four stages of breathing, one unfolding

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<sup>46</sup> Swedenborg, *Spiritual Experiences*, 4145.

<sup>47</sup> Swedenborg, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Journal of Dreams 1743 -1744*, 199.

<sup>48</sup> Swedenborg, *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, 2:219.

<sup>49</sup> Swedenborg, *The Cerebrum*, 1:749.

<sup>50</sup> Swedenborg, *Spiritual Experiences*, 1015.

after the other in the moments after death. Then later, in *Heavenly Secrets*, he describes four energy centers of breathing in the body. Let us take a look at both systems.

*At this point several species of respiration were shown to me about which I also spoke quite a lot, i.e. that there is an external kind with the normal breathing, which is the one common to the world of spirits; then an inner one together with an imperceptible outer one - this being quite good; then there is an inner one without any outer, which is better; then there is also an imperceptible one almost none of which I could perceive, and which is angelic. These are the kinds of respiration.<sup>51</sup>*

So the shift from physical breath to angelic breath is a four-step process:

1. External – This is the normal kind of breathing that we use when we speak. It involves a strong motion of the lungs and sustains normal consciousness.

2. Imperceptible External + Internal – in this stage the external breath becomes suppressed but not suspended. As was explained in the essay on Ecstasy, an inhibition of the lungs will allow us to become aware of the motion of the beating of the heart and the breathing of the brain and the nervous system. The soul becomes raised up into a sphere of intense pleasure.

3. Internal – the external breath becomes wholly suspended and awareness turns inward toward the gentle oscillations of spiritual energy in the heart, the spine, and the brain. The pleasure becomes bliss.

4. Angelic – and finally, abandoning the physical respiration all together we become aware that it was never us breathing at all, but that our breath is the breath of myriads of living minds all belonging to the unified consciousness of love and wisdom.

Neatly aligned with these four stages are four anatomical points which Swedenborg outlined a few years later in *Secrets of Heaven* no. 3884.<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that there are hundreds of spiritual experiences and nearly every spiritual entity has its own way of breathing which reflects their character and state. But this particular passage outlines four points in the specific context of the connection between an individual and the Grand Human, therefore I think it is written in such a way that it may be used as a guide for our own meditation.

He starts by explaining how the Universal Human corresponds to the smallest parts of the body, how we, “come into being and are kept in being from it”. The implication is that the Grand Human of the heavenly collective is expressed in each one of our bodies. Every breath we take, every particle and tremulation of our flesh is intimately bound to cosmic consciousness. Swedenborg records an experience when “the interior heaven was opened” to him and he was speaking with angels. Here the author makes a parenthetical to remind his readers that he had *not* left his body behind because “heaven is within a person wherever they are situated” he was, therefore, able to

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 3464.

<sup>52</sup> Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, 1:3884.

place the different points of influx into his own living flesh. He describes four distinct centers of spiritual activity within the body.

“The first is into the brain at the left temple” a point which he associates with “the organs of reason”. He goes on (in the same number) to explain how the left hemisphere is the organ of cognition and the right is the organ of will and affection. The idea that (in most people) the left hemisphere is involved in language production and the processing of factual information has entered into the general discourse aided by twentieth-century neuroscientists such as Broca and Wernicke<sup>53</sup> and been endlessly postulated over by theoreticians like Julian Jaynes.<sup>54</sup>

The prescience of this intuitive understanding of cerebral lateralization aside, it is very important that Swedenborg specifies that the influx is into the *left* hemisphere. He knows that this point in his body, the left temple, is the organ of factual, verbal knowledge, and so by focusing embodied awareness on this point, the cognitive act becomes an embodied one. This changes the way that the two halves of the brain interact and brings the meditator into a direct perception of the spiritual action of thought.

“The second general activity which I perceived was into the breathing of the lungs.” This activity, Swedenborg says, “was gently controlling my own breathing. But it did so from what was interior and so I had no need to call on my own will to control my breathing or drawing of breath.” At this point, he becomes aware of the “actual breathing of heaven” high above normal human awareness and yet intimately entraining our every living breath and sustaining our life in every moment. By starting from the interoceptive knowledge of the function of the left frontal-temporal area of the brain, he separates himself from the centers of will which he associates with the right. This hemispheric disassociation allows his normal sense of “will” to dissolve, the ego bifurcates and he becomes intensely aware that something outside of “himself” is carrying on the work of breathing.

“The third activity which I perceived was into the systole and the diastole of the heart.” He describes his heartbeat as “gentler in myself than it had ever been at any other time”. He describes the rhythm between his breath and his heart rate as “about three beats for every breath that was taken” It is interesting that the cycle of a single breath itself has three parts, inhalation, retention, and exhalation, with a heartbeat for each. He describes how this harmonizing of the two vital waveforms causes a change in the lungs and therefore the brain as well.

“The fourth general activity was into the kidneys.” Elsewhere in the *Arcana*, Swedenborg explores the spiritual significance of the kidneys in detail saying: “By 'the kidneys' are meant truths that serve to explore, purify, and correct; they derive this meaning from the function they perform.”<sup>55</sup> The left hemisphere of the brain and the kidneys serve as two poles; on one hand, we

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<sup>53</sup> David Presti, *Foundational Concepts in Neuroscience: A Brain Mind Odyssey*, 1st ed. (w. w. Norton and Company, 2016), 212.

<sup>54</sup> Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976).

<sup>55</sup> Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, 1:10032.

have the Celestial truth, within the “heavenly form”<sup>56</sup> of the Brain, and on the other, we have the natural truth of the kidneys. In the center of the body we have the heart and the lungs which seem to separate the spiritual functions of good and truth into blood vessel and nerve fiber. The “inner breath” is therefore in the motion of energy between the celestial body (the form of which is in the brain) and the natural body, whose vital energy floats upon the purifying fountain of the kidneys. The body has three “flows” according to the three degrees, liquid in the kidneys, air in the lungs and energy in the brain.

In this way, the internal breath harmonizes the degrees of reality (as shown in the cover image). The first description, from Swedenborg’s diary, shows the ascending path of the soul after death, rising up into the blissful awareness of angelic consciousness. The second description presents us with a descending flow, from the brain to the lungs to the heart to the kidneys. The descending flow is the flow of energy down into our natural bodies from the divine source and heavenly sun. In this way it is the rebirth of Christ, the divine influx become suddenly immanent in our own living breath. Between these two currents, ascending and descending, we may, with every living breath, become aware of the oscillating energies of cosmic bliss.

## Conclusion – Recognizing Heaven Within

*Clearly, too, it is thought that gives rise to breathing and it is love's desire that gives rise to thought, since thought without desire is exactly like breathing without a heart--impossible. We can therefore see that love's desire marries itself to discernment's thought, as just stated. It is the same with the heart in the lungs.<sup>57</sup>*

Deep knowledge of the self is the birthright of every living being. The “Heavenly Secret” is that it’s all right here, Heaven and Earth are as close as the words on this page and your reading of them. As close as thought is to breath. The “Heavenly Secret” is that the first scripture was written in the electricity of your own living neurons. As we emerge from the illusion of externalization, humanity is waking up. Each one of us must learn that we possess the ability to feel our own spiritual fire, and that fire is love. To enter into the state of the New Church is to remember our own innocence and become wholly new. Every breath we take is brimming with the songs of myriads of angels.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1:4041.

<sup>57</sup> Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, 412.

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