



“With”

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There is a fundamentalist Christian book called *My One Word* that I had the good fortune to encounter. It is about a simple practice. One just prays and asks for one single word that is to be one's keyword for the year. You think of it, pray with it, maybe get it carved on a plaque to put on your desk. And that word becomes the center of your life for that year. I tried it and for me the word that came was "With." Just that one word. Company, accompaniment, companions. It was all of those to me. And it was also the experience of unseparation, un-distance. It is the opposite of loneliness. Not that those things come easily or immediately. But gradually, by a kind of perfusion, "with" spread through my experience. Instead of no company, and unwanted solitude, there was a sense of there being a crowd of people and beings that I know, not very far away. We move in a cloud of company.

But is this any sort of realistic? Do we not live essentially alone? There are a several ways to look at this. One is by pressing hard on common sense - going beyond the first assessment, and trying for a deeper sense of natural reality. That is what Swedenborg might call "donkey sense". Is it true that we are essentially, permanently solitary? It can seem so, as we observe everyone around us hunched over their phones. We are born alone, and we die alone, right?

Time to press harder. We are not born alone. We are born of a mother who will always be our mother - an easy relationship or a hard one, but ineradicable. Even if we are adopted, we were not born alone. Think for a moment of the air we breathe. It is shared. We are in a coffee shop, with those phones, and we breathe in fresh air. But it is the air others have breathed. We take in a bit of oxygen from plants and share our carbon dioxide with them. We take in molecules that have passed through others back to the beginning of life. We drink and eat and (forgive my indelicacy) excrete through a cycle of sharing. That person reading their tablet there in the coffeeshop? We are aware of them, their mood, their carriage, how they are dressed. They are likely aware of us. Often in a lonely time we seek out public places where we can be un-alone without engaging.

But that is false. We do engage with others around us by knowing them. So the donkey, whom Swedenborg said corresponded with natural sense, will report that we are not as alone as we think. We are WITH these people. We are WITH our pets including the little dog we hope to get in about a week. We are WITH the trees and the wind that blows across the Pacific from Asia.

But does that satisfy our hearts? No. It helps. We need more. The donkey switches her ears and watches us go beyond her realm. I suspect most of us have felt the falling of barriers that happens with love and empathy. Suddenly we are no longer alone, we are connected with another being. Something, a delight, flows back and forth between us. I think this is the auric reality Swedenborg spoke about. We are more with, certainly.

My guess is that this is the experience Swedenborg referred to as the spiritual heaven. We are feeling the reality of another, in empathy for our neighbor. Sure, it is just one neighbor, and we should love more people more. But for this moment, we allow someone else into our well-guarded castle. We are WITH them. If we cultivate this relationship, it may last for many years, a lifetime. It is the connection we have sought, filled with angels garbed in white garments. Other people are suddenly real to us. In the story from the gospel the Samaritan “felt moved by compassion.” And Jesus said the Samaritan was the neighbor because he was the one who acted out of that feeling of kindness. These are heart feelings, and heart actions.

Beyond this, Jesus said and Swedenborg elaborated, is the realm of loving God. What in heaven’s name (heh heh) could that mean?

When Jesus said, “Love the Lord Your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your might,” he was quoting Torah. It comes from Deuteronomy 6:5. I looked it up on a Bible

website, and apparently it could have as well been translated “*Love God with all your innerness, all your passion, and all your abundance.*”

So - what does this mean, this loving God? Is God WITH us? The psalm says so, telling us there is no place we can go to hide from God. The gospel says we are always with God. The old Greek-Egyptian text from the *Corpus Hermeticum* says it is our job to “leap out into God” (but leave our body behind). Jesus and Swedenborg suggest opening the door and letting God in.

Suggested Readings:

...from the Corpus Hermeticum (Sir Walter Scott Transl.)

If then you do not make yourself equal to God, you cannot apprehend God: for like is known by like. Leap clear of all that is corporeal and make yourself grow to a like expanse with that greatness which is beyond all measure; rise above all time, and become eternal; then you will apprehend God.

Think that for you too nothing is impossible; deem that you too are immortal, and that you are able to grasp all things in your thought, to know every craft and every science; find your home in the haunts of every living creature; make yourself higher than all heights, and lower than all depths; bring together in yourself all opposites of quality, heat and cold, dryness and fluidity; think that you are everywhere at once, on land, at sea, in heaven; think that you are not yet begotten, that you are in the womb, that you are young, that you are old, that you have died, that you are in the world beyond the grave; grasp in your thought all this at once, all times and places, all substances and qualities and magnitudes together; then you can apprehend God.

But if you shut up your soul in your body, and abase yourself, and say ‘I know nothing, I can do nothing; I am afraid of earth and sea, I cannot mount to heaven; I know not what I was, nor what I shall be’, then, what have you to do with God? Your thought can grasp nothing beautiful and good, if you cleave to the body, and are evil.

For it is the height of evil not to know God; but to be capable of knowing God, and to wish and hope to know him, is the road which leads straight to the Good; and it is an easy road to travel. Everywhere God will come to meet you, everywhere he will appear to you, at places and times at which you look not for it, in your waking hours and in your sleep, when you are journeying by water and by land, in the night-time and in the day-time, when you are speaking and when you are silent; for there is nothing in which God is not. And do you say ‘God is invisible’? Speak not so. Who is more manifest than God? For this very purpose he has made all things, that through all things you may see him. This is God’s goodness, that he manifests himself through all things. Nothing is invisible, not even an incorporeal thing; mind is seen in its thinking, and God in his working.¹

¹ Scott, Walter, trans. *Hermetica*. Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 1985.

Psalm 139:7-12

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.²

Luke 10:25-37, 15: 31

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

[...]

"Child, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours."³

² New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

³ Ibid.

Revelation 3:20

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.⁴

Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity* §766

“Urget et instat ut recipiatur” - “He urges and presses that he be received”⁵

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *True Christianity*. Translated by Jonathan S. Rose. West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010.