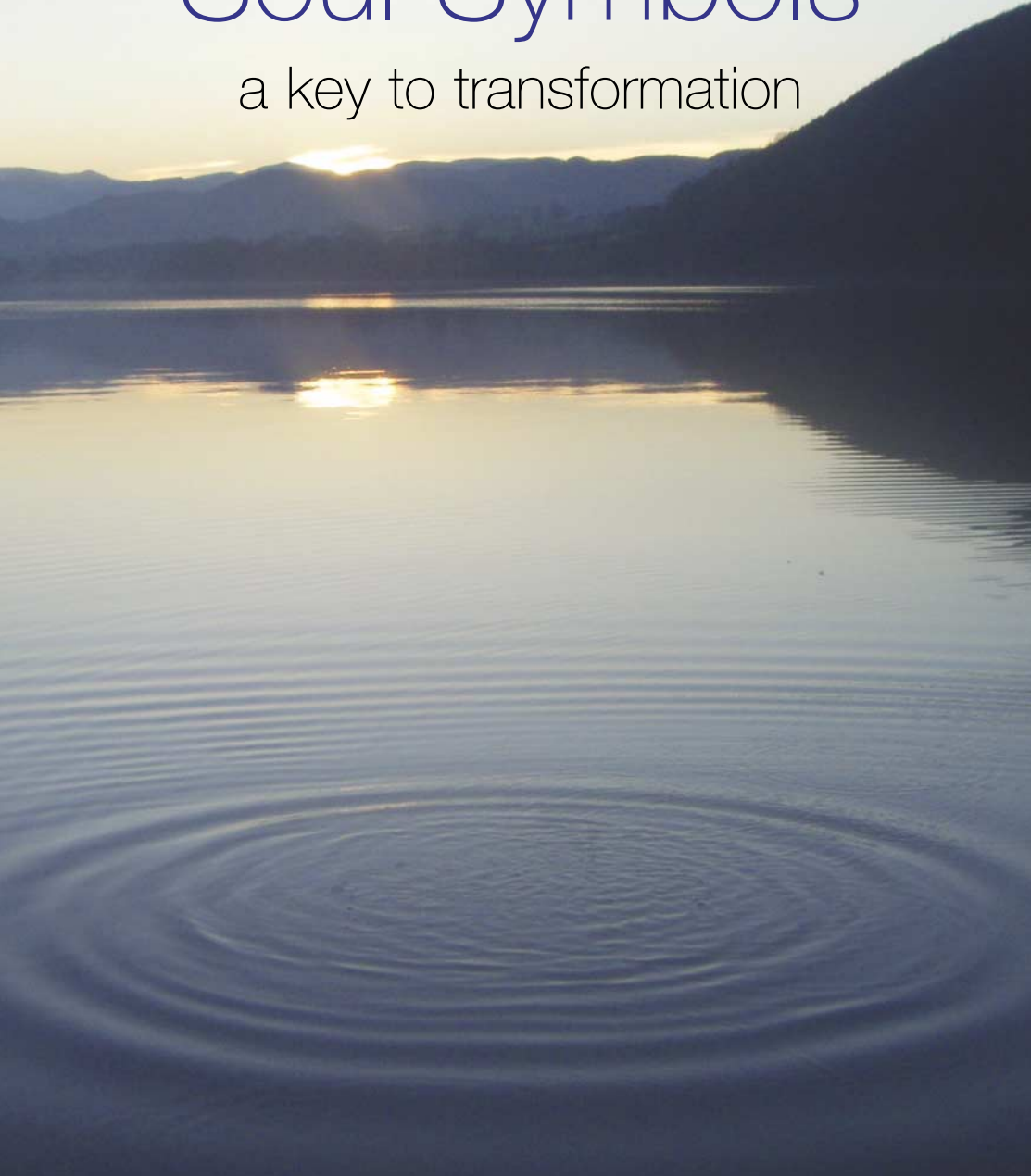


Soul Symbols

a key to transformation



Helen Newton and Becky Jarratt

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Quick guide to using this book

Soul Cards

This book is designed as an accompaniment to the thirty-six Soul Symbol Cards. It is suggested that you draw a card from the pack and give yourself time to reflect on the image, allowing your own perceptions of its meaning for you to develop before referring to the material in the book. The questions on the card may help you or you may prefer just to focus on the image itself.

Symbol material in this book

Soul Perspective

This is a suggestion as to how the physical symbol is an earthly mirror for an aspect of the eternal Divine creative nature within yourself and the world.

Ego Perspective

For those on the spiritual journey this section may provide you with a useful challenge by showing the contrary side of the symbol as it refers to our sense of self and apparent separateness from the Divine.

Application

This aims to help you apply the spiritual ideas to your own life. However, they are suggestions only and you may find it more helpful to tailor this to your own situation.

Introduction

To see the world in a grain of sand, and to see heaven in a wild flower.

William Blake

Are you ever moved by the beauty of a flower or a stately tree? Are you inspired by the wonder of the work of the honey bee; in awe of the grandeur of a mountain range; the power of the sea?

The outer world is a reflection of our inner spirit

What is it about the natural world that illuminates our minds to see beauty or grandeur, or inspires our hearts to feel peaceful and loving? We are affected by the things of nature because they are an outward mirror of the inner reality of life. The visionary and spiritual writer, Emanuel Swedenborg (1), explains that this is because *‘there is nothing in the world of nature that does not portray something in the world of spirit.’* Ancient peoples were in tune with this connectedness between our visible earth and the Divine. The indigenous American peoples intuitively saw in Mother Earth a reflection of facets of their inner spirit, and would, for example, call upon the power of an animal to enable them to be drawn into harmony with the strength of this creature’s essence.

Fortunately, this perception of the link between inward things and the outer world has not been wholly lost. In this new spiritual age it is being reawakened in many. At the most obvious level we now have individuals and governments committed to showing more respect for our planet as they work with nature rather than carelessly destroying it.

We know intuitively from being young children that our facial expressions, body language and tone of voice are a manifestation of our inner thoughts and feelings. A child is affected by the gentle soothing tone of their parent’s voice, or the harsh tones of anger, much more than by the words they are using. The body and what it does are the outward manifestation of our inner self.

What do we mean by our inner self? Is it our human mind with its ability to think and feel, to create and perceive? Through the scientific study of the brain with its neural connections and the science of psychology we certainly have a greater understanding of the working of our mind. Positive psychology identifies the importance of creating a positive self-image and caring attitude towards others if we are to be happy but cannot explain where this positivity originates. There is surely something deeper and more hidden within us.

John O'Donohue (2) writes:

There is a quiet light that shines in every heart. Though it is always secretly there, it draws no attention to itself. It is what illuminates our minds to see beauty, our desire to seek possibility and our hearts to love life.

It is the quiet inner light of the soul which is in all of us. Because the soul or Higher Self is quiet and not demanding, we can forget to pay it attention. One way to get back in touch with our soul is to use this mirror of the human and natural world.

According to Carl Jung, symbols in the form of words, images, ideas, music and gestures, are a means of bringing the unconscious or transcendent into the conscious world and giving it meaning and energy. Such symbols have both a universal and a personal dimension. The thirty six symbols that form the heart of this book are just a start to understanding this key to both the Divine and our own personal, spiritual transformation. The spiritual insights relating to these thirty six symbols are based on

the spiritual symbolism found in Emanuel Swedenborg's spiritual writings. These ideas can be used as an aid to interpreting and understanding our own perceptions of the significance of these symbols for ourselves. A quotation from Swedenborg can be found at the end of each symbol section with its source referenced at the back of the book.

The authors hope that the guidance in this book will help to bring personal understanding of our connectedness with the realm of our soul in new, healing and uplifting ways.

Universality of language

Every person has his or her own unique pathway and means with which to find connection with their God. It has been the intention in this book to use language, which is a symbol in itself, which will be open to as many spiritual seekers as possible, whatever their religious background or whether they have none at all. Different terms for God are used throughout such as Higher Self, Creator, Soul, The Divine and The Lord in the hope that you will feel this is sufficiently open for you to reflect on your own unique relationship with God and nature.

We have used quotations from different sources as well as the Bible. The Bible is used because it was whilst studying this sacred text that Emanuel Swedenborg received enlightenment as to its inner meaning for our own spiritual development.

Soul Perspective

Do you know how God dwells in man? He dwells in the same way as ladies of wealthy families do, behind a latticed screen. They can see everybody, but no one can see them.

Sri Ramakrishna (3)

This quotation conveys a picture of the Divine being hidden but present at the same time. It uses the symbol of a lattice, a structure that provides both a barrier yet allows for communication.

The purpose of the soul perspective for each symbol in the book is to encourage us to stop walking past this lattice without noticing what is behind. Each symbol exists because of the inner reality it contains. By tuning into this higher reality we start to open up, enabling more light to shine through the lattice of the outward symbol into our own lives.

Ego Perspective

What we observe, experience and interpret in every object of nature, every smile or tear, every work of art or act of human behaviour depends on some cause in the human mind, and this in its turn exists because of the Divine, creative mind. There is a direct inflowing from soul, through the mind, to the body. Where then, if the Source is Divine love and wisdom, do all our negative emotions and behavioural responses come from that can cause so much pain, suffering and destruction in the world?

The answer to this lies in our ability to perceive a separateness from God. Whilst the reality is that nothing can exist outside of the Divine, within us we have been given a part of our minds which feels separate – our ego. If we were not able to feel separate then we could not freely choose to grow and develop our human natures and in so doing, 'return to the Source'. Swedenborg has insightfully declared that the purpose of our existence here on earth is 'to create a heaven of angels from the human race'. In other words, we are all in angel school and our ego is an important facet in enabling us to learn, grow and develop. But because we feel separate from the Source, it means that we can create all sorts of mental illusions as to what is real and what is not. We can distort what is good and true to suit our own individual needs if we so wish.

According to the twentieth century mystic Wilson Van Dusen (4), for the mature mystic there is no ego perspective, the only reality is the Divine with its own Divine perspective.

But the difficulty for our human minds is that it doesn't feel like this in our experience. Our sense of individual self is so strong that we need to work on it, to become aware of how easily it can make us believe what is actually not real, and so cut us off from our soul. For example, you can walk around the busy streets of a city and feel like you are completely isolated from the other people hurrying along. Alternatively, you may choose to see God in the smile on a person's face, feel the warmth of Divine love in the sun on your face, and see hope of new things in the green shoots in the park. It is all a matter of perception as to what is the reality of life.

As our ego perspective is so strong, it is probably not surprising that the Creator communicates not only the soul connection but also this ego side of humanity to us, through objectively observable symbols.

For each of the symbols in this book there is an ego perspective which may provide you with a challenge that you feel drawn to take up. As we become more aware of how our ego tends to distort reality it can feel like we are 'being thrown off our high horse' or 'flooded by cleansing waters', to use some of our symbolic language.

A sense of personal weakness from our 'isolated self' perception is normal and part of the growing realisation that everything genuinely good is directly from the Divine, flowing into us but never to be possessed by us. This leads us to true humility and the more humility we develop, the more signs of the Divine we can see around us and within us and the closer we grow to the deep joy and happiness to be experienced deep within our soul.

Application

There is a great difference between knowing something with our intellect and knowing something from our actual experience of it. If we are on a journey of inner discovery and transformation then we need to move from an intellectual understanding of spiritual ideas, albeit a vital stage, to that of allowing it to work in our lives. This can be challenging and inevitably requires some effort. The intention of the Application for each symbol in this book is to encourage you to take up this challenge. The activities suggested are just that - suggestions - and you may come up with something you feel is much more appropriate for your own use. However, the authors hope that by including these suggestions, you will be encouraged to apply any insights you may receive to your own experience of life in the future and in so doing feel more connected to the wonderful Source of your life.

Using this book in conjunction with Symbol Cards

This book is designed to be used alongside the Soul Symbol Cards. It is recommended that you draw a card from the pack, trusting that the image on the card is a symbol of something that is appropriate for you to reflect on at this time. Use the questions on the card if they help you to get into the symbol, but allow your own thoughts and inner perception to enlighten you as to what this is saying about your own soul journey. You may wish to prop the card up in your kitchen or on your desk at work, and to keep returning to it throughout the day. If you would like some further insights then this is where the book comes in. You may find that at a particular stage in your life the soul perspective speaks to you, or at another time it may be the ego perspective. Don't rush the process, but let the angels work with you to lead you to greater wisdom and connectedness with the Whole.

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- (1) *Emanuel Swedenborg quoted in DVD Images of Knowing, Swedenborg Foundation.*
 - (2) *John O'Donohue, Benedictus, Bantam Press.*
 - (3) *Sri Ramakrishna, The gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center.*
 - (4) *Wilson Van Dusen, Returning to the Source, Real People Press.*



Clothes

Through tattered clothes small vices do appear; Robes and fur'd gowns hide them all.

William Shakespeare

Craftiness must have clothes, but truth loves to go naked.

English proverb

How important are clothes to you?

How would you feel if you were not allowed to wear clothes?

Clothes

Outward expression of inner states

Soul perspective

We are often judged on first appearances. Some people find it hard to leave the house without making a great deal of effort with the way they look.

We have characteristics within us that make up our personality. If someone asks us what we like about ourselves, it is sometimes hard to answer. Some people find it easier to say what they don't like about their personality.

When we become spiritually mature, there will be a harmony between what we are like inside and what is seen on the outside. This takes a long time, and most of us would be quite pleased to think that not all of our feelings are obvious to others at all times! We can try to embrace the qualities within us that are loving and sincere and allow them to dominate over less inspiring characteristics. If we do this often enough, we will find that pleasant thoughts come to our minds more often and we can act upon them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him.

Genesis 37:3

Application

If you notice a characteristic that you don't like rising up within you, focus on a more positive quality you have and allow it to quash the negative feelings.

Ego perspective

What do your clothes say about you?

Have you heard the expression 'a sheep in wolf's clothing'? By this we mean someone who is nice enough on the surface, but quite unpleasant underneath. They are disguising themselves as something they are not.

Appearances can be deceptive. We can deceive people by the way we speak and act. On the inside, we may be feeling unhappy, but we can put a brave face on it and smile away. What is worse is if we deliberately try to deceive people with words or actions.

We need to try and work on things within us that we know are not nice characteristics. When we have been unkind or uncaring to someone, we can examine our behaviour and work out what would be a more charitable way to act. In this way, we will move closer to being the same person on the inside and on the outside.

And you took your embroidered clothes to put on them, and you offered my oil and incense before them.

Ezekiel 16:18

Application

Over the next week, think about times in which you have been unkind or uncaring. Consider what you could do differently next time.

Affirmation

My inner beauty can shine through my actions



The interior parts of their beings (angels) shine from their faces, while the exterior are represented both in their bodies and in the clothes they are wearing, so completely that anyone there may recognise the character of those angels simply from the clothes they are wearing.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Clouds

Clouds

Shield

Soul perspective

Clouds shield us from the power of the sun. In hot countries, clouds can be a relief because they protect people from getting burnt, and they can also herald rain, which can nurture dry earth.

We sometimes need to be 'shielded from the truth'. There are times in our lives when knowing the whole truth would be too much for us. People do not always tell us what others have said about us as the truth would hurt us.

We can be shielded from negative influences and the challenges they bring like clouds shield us from the sun. God is there, a barrier between us and the things that try to tempt us in life. If we are prepared to listen, God helps us to keep our desires under control, and to be able to have reason in our judgements when otherwise we would be more likely to do something we might regret.

You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

Isaiah 25:5

Revelations are found in clouds.

Serge Kahili King

Every cloud has a silver lining.

Traditional

What do you associate with clouds?

What elements of change can you see represented in clouds?

Application

Next time you feel like you may be making a rash decision, take a step back and allow God's protection of a cloud to give you a chance to reconsider.

Ego perspective

Do you allow clouds to darken your happiness?

Sometimes we say our judgement has been 'clouded'. We usually mean that we have done something we would not normally have done under different circumstances. An example of this may be to take revenge on someone when they have hurt us.

At times, we move through life as if we were walking through a cloud or fog. We cannot really see what is ahead of us, as if our senses are being shielded from any light. These are times in which we may have turned away from God. We are being governed by our own thoughts and feelings, and are not letting the light of God through. Thoughts of revenge and hatred may block God's influence on us.

We need to turn back to God, to allow loving forgiveness to filter through the clouds. He is always with us, and it is up to us to embrace this light in our lives.

And if one looks at the land, he will see darkness and distress; even the light will be darkened by the clouds.

Isaiah 5:30

Application

If you ever have the urge to take revenge on someone who has hurt you in some way, turn to God to ask for help to remove those dark feelings from you.

Affirmation

I can embrace the protection of the clouds.



Good fortune was represented to them by means of a bright cloud, and ill fortune by means of a sombre one.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Crown

Arrogance is a kingdom without a crown.

American proverb

The slave begins by demanding justice and ends by wanting to wear a crown.

Traditional

What does a crown represent to you?

What is there in you that is like a crown?

Crown

Wisdom

Soul perspective

A crown symbolises wisdom given to us from the Divine. Crowns are placed upon the head, which is close to our thinking.

If you were King or Queen for a day, what quality would you like to possess? Some people may say 'power' as being a ruler of a kingdom lends itself to controlling what is around us. What authority would you work for? To use power to benefit others, you must also have wisdom.

Wisdom is not just intelligence or knowledge; it is using the knowledge of what is right and true with judgement and insight. This is not always easy, and we need to be prepared to think long and hard about difficult decisions. We can try to live according to our 'inner code' and trust in the wisdom that we have been given.

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.

1 Kings 4:29

Application

Over the next few days, think about when you have had to trust your 'internal code' whilst making decisions that have involved both knowledge and judgement.

Ego perspective

Do you always use your wisdom for the benefit of others?

People can use their knowledge and intelligence for their own devices. They may use their wisdom and know what is right but discard it and do what they want instead.

We need to think about the motives for our actions. Have we used the wisdom we have all been given for our own benefit, rather than for the greater good? Are we acting on behalf of our own needs, or are we taking into account the needs of others?

The knowledge we have been blessed with can be like a crown of thorns if we indulge in our own successes and ambitions. We need to be aware that our wisdom comes from the Divine, and we can look to the Divine for help in our decisions and actions.

The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head.

John 19:2

Application

When you find yourself thinking about past actions you are not proud of, think about whether you acted for yourself or whether you used wisdom and had the needs of others in your mind at the time.

Affirmation

I can use the precious gift of wisdom to direct my decisions and actions.



A crown signifies wisdom, because wisdom holds the supreme place with man, and thus crowns him.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Day/Night

We need society, and we need solitude also, as we need summer and winter, day and night, exercise and rest.

Philip Gilbert Hamerton

Laughter is day, and sobriety is night; a smile is the twilight that hovers gently between both, more bewitching than either.

Henry Ward Beecher

There are twelve hours in the day, and above fifty in the night.

Anonymous

Are you a morning or an evening person?

How do you feel at the start of a new day?

Day/Night

Higher understanding/misunderstanding

Soul Perspective

Have you ever lain awake in the dark hours of the night worrying over a problem and then in the morning woken to feel much better and not sure why you felt so concerned during the night?

We use the phrase 'a new day' to imply that we can have a fresh start in our life. Whatever is in the past is in the past and we can put it behind us and start afresh. The light of the new day, which helps us to see what is around us, is linked to the idea of our understanding, for example, 'I was in the dark but now I see /understand.' We need many new days in our spiritual lives, new levels of understanding and experience, in order to help us develop and move to a deeper level.

We also need quieter times for reflection on what we have learnt and experienced during the day. Although we may not be taking in new ideas and understanding during the night, it is still a vital time for us. We know we cannot do without sleep and dreaming – important things are happening during this process - so too we need quieter more reflective times in our spiritual life.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Isaiah 9:2

Application

During the next few days, reflect on your motive for doing an act of kindness. Enjoy it for the pleasure it brings to another and you will feel blessed.

Ego perspective

How does being in the dark make you feel?

We associate night-time, with darkness. We say 'I am completely in the dark' about a subject we know nothing about or about which information has been withheld from us. When we revert back to believing what our ego and senses alone tell us, which happens to most of us regularly, we are being misinformed. These are times when we create our own spiritual night time and unhelpful thoughts and feelings can take us over for a while if we allow them to.

We have to remember that we are not alone in these negative or self-centred states. Remember there is usually some light from the moon and stars at night, some residual connection with the Divine in our understanding which helps to see us through, back into the light of day again.

Weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning.

Psalm 30:5

Application

If you feel you are getting too wrapped up in yourself to the exclusion of others:

1. remember that this is an illusory world you are creating and that the reality is a life of love and connection with others and God
2. consciously change your thought patterns and plan to do something for someone else to help move your spirit back into the light of day.

Affirmation

Life is full of ups and downs and I give thanks for the contrast of day and night.



Whatsoever is of the Lord is compared to day because it is of the light; and whatsoever is a person's own is compared to night.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Door

He who is outside his door already has a hard part of his journey behind him

Dutch proverb

When the doors of perception are cleansed, man will see things as they truly are - infinite.

William Blake

Do you look before you open your front door?

What might a locked door represent in your life?

Door

Connecting to your Higher Self

Soul Perspective

A door is an entrance at the end of a path, or at the front of a building. A door can be open or closed, locked or unlocked. If we open the door, we can begin to connect with our higher selves.

When we are open to others, wonderful things can happen for us. We can open up to people who are genuine, loving and giving, and develop warm and lasting friendships with them.

We cannot be sure what will happen when we open the door. On the path to eternal happiness, we will have to go through many doors. The Lord is always on the other side, helping us on our way. If we want to move forward on our spiritual journey, we must be prepared to open the door to the Lord and be receptive to the truth and love that is being passed on. Through this open door, the Lord will communicate with us, for example, through our intuition.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and him with Me.

Revelation 3:20

Application

During the next week, give yourself some time to sit quietly and allow the positive influence of the Lord to come into your life.

Ego perspective

Do you open the door to the right influences?

Have you ever found yourself taking pleasure in others' misfortune? This may be a thought that you push away as quickly as it comes to you. However we may have experienced times when we are secretly pleased that someone we don't like or who has caused us problems is finding life difficult. This is a time when we need to challenge what we let in through the door and what we ask to leave.

We do not always have to open the door. We can leave ourselves open to negative influences if we do not let Divine influences in first. We need to be prepared to shut the door when we bear grudges and enjoy dwelling on them. The door is there to protect us, and we need to be aware that if we are not in a good, healthy state of mind, we are closing the door on Divine influences, and letting the bad, unhealthy ones in. We must think about who or what is behind the door before we open it, as we can then allow it to become part of our lives.

*Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you;
hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by.*

Isaiah 26:20

Application

If you find yourself being amused by something that causes unhappiness to others, allow yourself to push the thought away and close the door on it, and open the door to positive, loving thoughts.

Affirmation

I can open the door to Divine influences.



Behold, I have set before you an open door, signifies that heaven is open to those who are in truths from good from the Lord.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Eagle

There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud.

Carl Sandburg

One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar.

Helen Keller

What is it like to experience soaring high above the earth like an eagle?

What perspective do you gain from an eagle's 'bird's eye view' of your life?

Eagle

Thinking from a higher perspective

Soul Perspective

Just as birds move around quickly and freely, so do our thoughts. People talk about thoughts 'flitting' in and out of our minds. Your mind can give you an idea of a spiritual state or concept even though you may not have had the experience yet.

The great eagle, soaring high above the earth without effort and with such excellent vision, pictures our love of spiritual thought of the most searching kind.

Being able to lift our thinking above the everyday in a rational way helps us to get our life into perspective. Thinking from God's eternal perspective can be very different from thinking from our own perspective, which is so often influenced by the appearances around us and our own ego needs.

You yourselves have seen...how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

Exodus 19:4

Application

Next time you have a higher spiritual thought, meditate on it to discover how it might change your living for the better. Share with someone what you are going to do differently and then work on this.

Ego perspective

What does the eagle swooping down to earth to feed suggest to you about your thoughts?

When we become aware of a higher dimension to life, we can get fascinated by these new perspectives as intellectual ideas and forget to use them to change our attitudes to life and other people. Perhaps we misuse what we have received by using it to judge others rather than looking at how we live. Our thoughts may swoop back down again to think from our illusory ego perspective which so easily seems to be what is real.

Why do we shy away from working on our natures? Are we afraid what we might find? Our eagle tells us that we are all children of God and part of his creative loving plan so we need not fear - his wings will support us.

This ability to lift our thinking away from ourselves can be very useful in observing and dealing with uncomfortable emotions. We can train ourselves to stand outside of an unhelpful emotion such as anger or jealousy which is threatening to swamp us. In this way we learn to deal with negative states effectively.

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

Application

Next time you feel swamped by a negative state, use your rational thought to lift yourself above it and look down on it like an eagle and see it for what it is. This will give you the choice not to continue in this state but to choose a more helpful, positive one.

Affirmation

I will let my mind soar to see life from a higher perspective.



As eagles fly high and are sharp-sighted, they signify rational things.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Eating

Appetite comes with eating; the more one has, the more one would have.

French proverb

Reading without reflecting is like eating without digesting.

Edmund Burke

What makes you hungry?

Do you eat until you are full, or until you have finished?

Eating

Absorbing spiritual ideas

Soul Perspective

In the same way our bodies tell us when we need sustenance, so our minds can become 'hungry' for knowledge. In this sense, we have a desire to learn and understand more and more. This may be about things in the world around us, or it may develop into a desire to be educated in our spiritual lives.

Just as we need physical food for strength for our bodies, spiritual food helps to make our souls strong and beautiful. It also has all of the spiritual 'vitamins' we need to live a healthy life. The Divine is a constant source of nourishment for our souls. Spiritual teaching comes from the Divine, and if we are open to this, we can eat freely.

We need to allow ourselves time to meditate on what we receive from the Divine. When we do this, we can absorb and digest the spiritual teaching we have been given in the same way in which we absorb and digest physical food into our bodies when we have eaten.

Listen, listen to Me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

Isaiah 55:2

Application

Over the next few days make a conscious effort to take time to open up channels to the Divine so you can be nourished spiritually. This may be done by seeking inspiration from spiritual teachings and guidance.

Ego perspective

Do you find some foods easier to digest than others?

Sometimes we say that someone 'eats like a horse'. We do not literally mean that they graze on hay all day, but that they can take in large amounts of food in one sitting.

It can be hard for us to take in all of the spiritual teaching that comes from the Divine at times. We need time to digest it. We may also be getting many messages from different sources, like the media, which conflict with what we believe inside.

It is important for us to acknowledge the influence of the Divine in our lives. We need help in processing all of the information that we are given, and it can be confusing. If we appreciate that the Divine only wishes the best for us, and is a constant support in our spiritual development, it can help us to decide which pieces of that spiritual teaching we want to become part of us.

Meanwhile, His disciples urged Him, "Rabbi, eat something". But He said to them, "I have food to eat, that you know nothing about".

John 4:31-32

Application

When you are next struggling to make sense of the world, ask the Divine for support in deciding what is nourishing to your spiritual wellbeing.

Affirmation

I can eat spiritual food for the wellbeing of my soul.



When 'according to the mouth of one's eating' refers to food it means in accordance with what is requisite and necessary to nourish (the body); but when the expression refers to the good of truth it means in accordance with the ability to receive and make one's own, since eating in the spiritual sense means making a thing one's own.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Feet

Your feet will bring you to where your heart is.

Irish proverb

The foolish man seeks happiness in the distance, the wise grows it under his feet.

James Oppenheim

How would you cope without your feet?

Do you ever need to take the weight off your feet?

Feet

Everyday life

Soul Perspective

Our feet represent our everyday lives. A lot of the time we don't think about our feet or what they do for us, just as many of us don't think about our spiritual lives very often. Our feet are the part of us which is in contact with the earth.

They do all the walking, and we sometimes say that we have to 'stand on our own two feet'. We have to make our own way in the world, and this involves making choices that will affect our lives.

As our feet are so close to the ground and therefore closest to worldly influences, we should allow our feet to be guided in walking along the right path. In doing so, we will be guided towards the peace of life with the Divine.

Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Luke 1:78-79

Application

Next time you find yourself being guided by worldly influences, trust in your inner judgement and allow your feet to be guided by influences coming through from the Divine.

Ego perspective

Do you ever feel like your feet need to be nurtured?

People who live in hot countries where shoes are not part of their culture and sandals are standard footwear, wash their feet more often than we might, as their feet get dusty much of the time.

As our feet are close to the ground, they will inevitably get dirty and we will feel the need to wash them. Symbolically, when we wash our feet, we purify our outer lives. We need to get our own natural lives in tune with our spiritual lives. If we become aware of something in our lives that is not in tune with our 'inner code', we should not be afraid to wash it away. In this way we will allow ourselves to become closer to the Divine.

Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!"

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

John 13:8

Application

If you find yourself doing something that is not in tune with your 'inner code' during the next week, ask yourself what you would do differently if you were put in the same situation again.

Affirmation

My everyday life is a channel for the Divine.



By 'the feet' and the parts of the feet are represented natural things (things of everyday life) and the different kinds of these.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Fish

The sea hath fish for every man.

William Camden

Memory is a net: one that finds it full of fish when he takes it from the brook, but a dozen miles of water have run through it without sticking.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

What do you think life would be like as a fish in the sea?

Do you let ideas slip through your net?

Fish

Gathering knowledge from the world

Soul Perspective

Fish are like our natural curiosity, gaining knowledge wherever we go. Think about the way fish eat up everything in their path, and how excited pet fish are when they are fed.

We can be like fish when we take a great interest in something and start a project. We may do some research, talk to people about what we want to know and to achieve, and eventually enjoy talking to people about what we have learned when we feel more knowledgeable about it.

This does not just have to apply to our physical state. We can also 'fish for knowledge' in our spiritual lives. Working with our curiosity and thirst for knowledge can help us put things into perspective, and to see our place in the world. This, in turn, can help us to develop our own spirituality within the world in which we live.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea."

Genesis 1:26

Application

Next time you are really enthusiastic about something you have learned, see if there are any spiritual principles you have gained that you can apply to your own life.

Ego perspective

Can you trust what your senses tell you?

Have you heard the expression that something is 'fishy'? This usually means that someone does not believe what they have heard, or that something is not true. Trusting purely in what we are told can be 'fishy'.

In our age of technology, people like to look at cause and effect. It is sensible to work out the effect from the cause, but looking at the world from the opposite perspective is not always sensible. To try to discover the cause from the effect does not always give you a true insight into what has happened.

Rather than trusting everything because the physical world of science and technology says it is so, we must work out what is right by using our judgement and our 'inner code'. We need to examine the information we have been given, and see if it feels right for us in our heart of hearts.

You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler.

Habakkuk 1:14

Application

Consider how you would feel if something you believed in was proved not to be true. Would that change your perspective on the world?

Affirmation

I can gather information from the natural world.



In the Word fish mean facts that spring from sensory evidence, for there are three types of facts - intellectual, rational, and sensory. All are implanted in the memory - or rather, in the memories - and in someone who is regenerate are summoned from there by the Lord by way of the internal man.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Flood

No individual raindrop ever considers itself responsible for the flood.

Anonymous

The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, the divine floods of light and life no longer flow into our souls.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

What do floods represent to you?

Are floods always negative?

Flood

Spiritual Struggles

Soul Perspective

A flood symbolises the beginning of a time of struggle within. When we are following a spiritual path towards God, we discover that spiritual struggle is a part of this process.

Sometimes we say that we feel we have been 'flooded by ideas'. These may not all be good ideas and can get us down. Many people can relate to being flooded by struggles of a spiritual nature. God is with us more at times like these, even if we are not aware of it. We need to go through times of spiritual struggle to grow and develop.

The spiritual challenges represented by floods can enable negative ideas to be washed away. We can be self-aware and realise that we are being challenged, and we can resist if we wish to become one with God. We should ask for spiritual help at these times.

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King forever

Psalms 29:10

Application

When you next find yourself going through a time of spiritual challenge, take time out to think about all of the good things in your life. Don't be afraid to ask God for help.

Ego perspective

Do you ever feel overcome by a flood?

Many people have experienced occasions when they have been 'flooded with paperwork'. This is not a pleasant experience as it is hard to see an end to what we have to do.

We might have felt that we have been carried away with a flood. In our lives, there may have been times when we have allowed ourselves to be taken along with the flow, even when we know it is not right. We might have become involved with gossip about someone that is not necessarily cruel and unpleasant but, on the other hand, is not something we would like to have said about us either. We may have allowed a lie to be passed on without standing up and being counted by challenging it.

In these circumstances, we need to hold back from the flood, and be honest with ourselves and in our actions, even if it is not easy to do so.

And the rain poured down, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

Matthew 7:27

Application

If you hear other people speaking about someone in a way that makes you uncomfortable, find a way to make your feelings known or be prepared to remove yourself from the situation.

Affirmation

Spiritual struggles bring me closer to my God.



The flood, the ark, and therefore descriptions concerning the flood and the ark, mean regeneration, and also the temptations that precede. This is something learned people of today are aware of, for they too compare regeneration and temptations to the waters of a flood.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Gold

All that glisters is not gold; often have you heard that told.

William Shakespeare

When the Japanese mend broken objects they aggrandise the damage by filling the cracks with gold, because they believe that when something's suffered damage and has a history it becomes more beautiful.

Barbara Bloom

What do you associate with gold?

Would owning lots of gold bring you happiness?

Gold

Love of good

Soul Perspective

Gold is an enduring, pure metal, not liable to tarnish or rust and as such is associated with enduring love and used in a symbolic way in the wedding ring.

Gold is a mineral with the quality of endurance found in all rocks and metals so is a spiritual principle on which we base our life. Unlike rocks and precious stones, however, gold can be moulded into shape. This suggests higher principles which we can apply to different human situations in a flexible way without hard rules, but with a very sound fundamental basis.

The warm colour of gold mirrors the warmth of love which can be found in all of us. One of the most fundamental spiritual principles is that our life can be built on love because this is the nature of the Divine to be found in all of us. The nature of love is that it wants to express itself through acts of goodness. We want only good things for those we love.

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich.

Revelation 3:18

Application

Look for the good in your life and give thanks for it and all the blessings it brings you.

Ego perspective

What is your favourite 'extravagance'?

As quoted in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice; 'all that glisters is not gold' because we know that as human beings we are so often misled into thinking something is desirable and expending our energy to get this when in fact it will not give us inner happiness. We are deluded by the external beauty or desirability of new clothes, a new car or a new house. We so often feel that this will satisfy us and make us happy.

Whilst we have our senses and appreciation of beauty we can enjoy this world around us. From experience we probably know that material things alone do not bring true inner peace and happiness. The answer to inner happiness is the love within all of us which flows from the Divine Source.

Do not make any gods to be alongside Me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.

Exodus 20:23

Application

Take time to reflect on your priorities. Are you spending too much time on 'false gold' which is not bringing you inner contentment and happiness? If the answer is 'yes', then you can choose to change and focus on spending your time and money from a heart full of loving goodness.

Affirmation

My heart is full of goodness



Gold is still gold, whether it gleams in the firelight or is blackened with smoke on the surface; or whether it is cast into a lovely shape, a child for instance, or an ugly shape such as a rat...for gold means internal good.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Hands

To receive everything, one must open one's hands and give.
Taisen Deshimaru

Many hands make light work.
Traditional quotation

Look at your hands. Do you see strength within them?

How do we make the best use of our hands?

Hands

Power

Soul Perspective

How often do you think of all the things you do with your hands? They are the tools of the body, and can be very powerful. We can make a connection with the things of the world around us by using our hands.

We use our hands in almost everything we do, like gardening, writing, playing a musical instrument, or helping another person in a practical way. It would be very difficult to cook a meal without using our hands!

Have you ever heard the expression that someone has 'healing hands'? Having healing hands laid on you means that you are in a position to receive Divine power, and that it is being transmitted through the healing hands. When your inner self is wounded, it can be healed in this way.

And He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them.

Mark 10:16

Application

When you use your hands to bring comfort or support, be aware of the Divine strength and power that is being channelled through you.

Ego perspective

Can thinking about our hands remind us of ways that we can misuse power?

Sometimes we use the power of our hands with only our own needs in mind, and we can do something of which we are not proud. If we are put in a position of power over someone who challenges us, it can be difficult to rise above our initial feelings and not use this power to our own advantage.

At times we think about 'washing our hands' of someone or something. This can be very healthy for us if we are removing an element of our lives that is not helping us on our spiritual journeys, but we should not be too hasty. We can think about why we wish this to happen.

We can examine any act we know to be wrong, and think about what effect this may have had upon others. We can then resolve to use our hands or the power they represent for good purposes.

May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.

1 Samuel 25:33

Application

If you find yourself acting in a particular way because of a desire to have power over others, seek guidance from above so that you don't abuse the power you have.

Affirmation

My hands are channels of Divine strength and power.



This laying of His hand on children and on young children likewise means the transmission and reception of Divine power, enabling a person's interiors to be healed, which is salvation.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Hearing

Hearing

Obedience

Soul Perspective

Sound touches both our understanding and how we feel. Hearing represents obeying what we understand. Our ears have a close connection with the part of the brain that deals with our feelings.

Think about a beautiful piece of music that you enjoy listening to. Does it move you? Can it bring you to tears? Listening goes beyond understanding that you can hear music or someone you love talking to you. It also touches your feelings and emotions.

When someone tells you to 'listen' to them, they are asking you to process the information they are giving you. Often when a parent asks a child to 'listen', they expect them to do what they are told. This is the same with our 'inner code'. When we truly know something is right, we must be prepared to take it into our hearts, obey it, and live it in our lives.

He who has ears, let him hear.

Matthew 11:15

We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.

Epictetus

The quieter you become, the more you can hear.

Baba Ramdas

What would life be like for you if you were unable to hear?

What makes a good listener?

Application

Next time you hear a value spoken about that makes sense to you, make it part of your 'inner code' and try to live it in your everyday life.

Ego perspective

Do you always listen to what you are being told?

We sometimes say that our words have 'fallen on deaf ears'. What we mean by that is that someone has heard what we have said, but has chosen not to take any notice of it.

There are many people in this world who think that areas of the law are not worthy of their notice. How often do you see motorists speeding, or people talking on their mobile phones whilst driving? Do you know people who avoid paying tax on their savings or on part of their earnings?

Not only do we need to understand laws and moral values, we need to heed them and take them to heart. By hearing them and deciding to ignore them, we become spiritually 'deaf', and are in danger of losing our way in life. We need to unstop our ears, listen, and take on board what we understand to be right and true.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Isaiah 35:5

Application

Think about times when you have ignored instructions or what someone has told you. Decide what you might do differently next time.

Affirmation

I will obey what my 'inner code' tells me.



That 'to hear' is of the sense of hearing, it is needless to explain; but that in the interior sense 'to hear' is obedience, and in the internal sense faith in the will, is evident from many passages in the Word.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Heart

Heart

Our desires

Soul Perspective

The heart has been linked to love as far back as we know. Not just romantic love but what we love in terms of what we really desire, sometimes referred to as our 'will'. We talk about 'our heart's desires' meaning that deep inner force which directs our thoughts and motivates our actions. Just as we are not alive if our heart is not pumping oxygenated blood around our bodies, so we are not spiritually alive until our desires and motivation are towards the Higher Good.

Divine wisdom desires for us an abundance of all the good things that are necessary for our highest wellbeing, not for a love of money or to be acquisitive, or to have power over others which our ego can delude us into wanting.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

Mark 12:30

As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he

H.T. Hamblin

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen, or even touched, they must be felt within the heart.

Helen Keller

What do you associate with your heart?

How important is this in your life?

Application

During the week, reflect on:

1. what is your heart's desire?
2. Is this in line with the Higher Good?
3. If the answer to 2 is 'no' - what do you need to do to change your heart?

Ego perspective

Have you ever had a 'change of heart' over something?

We use the phrase a 'hard heart' for someone who does not show compassion. Our hearts' desires can quite naturally be just for our own self-interest. We want to be popular, to have the latest gadgets, a new home or car, the latest fashion in clothes etc. We also all want to be happy. Does satisfying the list above make us truly happy and content or is our heart misleading us because it is not focused on the Higher reality?

An understanding of the higher reality of life can help us to realise how necessary it is to have a 'change of heart' if we are allowing our own ego-centred desires to rule our life. This idea of a rebirth of our will is fundamental to all religions. It requires a conscious choice on our part to move from ego to soul so that our desires are based on harmony and love towards others and the whole of creation.

Create in me a pure heart, O God

Psalm 51:10

Application

If you notice your self doing or saying something during the next week from a 'hard heart', stop and have 'a change of heart'. Make amends for this hardness of heart, whether that means an apology to someone, a different form of action, whatever it takes and you will find inner peace.

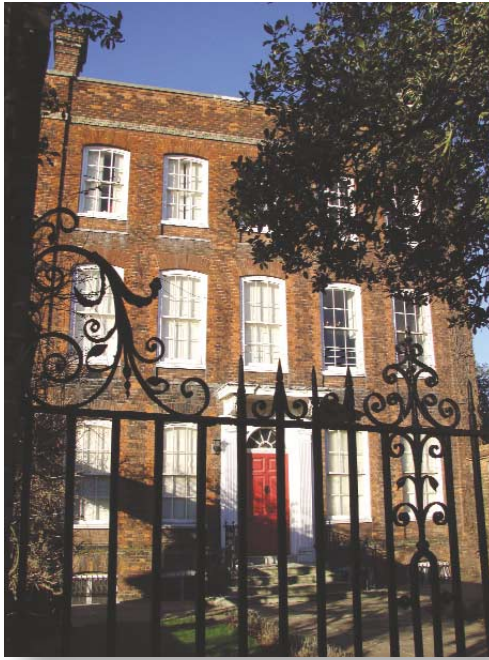
Affirmation

My innermost desires stem from a love of God and others.



Heaven consists in this, that from the heart we wish better for others than for ourselves, and desire to be of service to others in order to promote their happiness, and this for no selfish end, but from love.

Emanuel Swedenborg



House

House

What we love to do

Soul Perspective

Have you ever watched the TV programme 'Through the Keyhole' where we are shown around a celebrity's home and are asked to guess whose house it is? The presenter gives us clues by directing us to particular items which might indicate the home owner's personality and interests, whether sport, travel, film etc. Our homes often reflect our personalities, our interests, what we do in our lives.

When we feel most comfortable in a situation or whilst doing something we may use the phrase 'I feel at home'. The thoughts and desires we are attached to, and the impact they have on how we live our lives, are all part of constructing our spiritual home.

Just as a house has many rooms furnished to indicate their use - bedroom, study, sitting room, and kitchen - so our spiritual house is about the things we love to do - the uses we perform, whether as a family member, in our job or for our community. If we have found an inner peace in our lives then we feel like we have 'come home', and it is a wonderful state to be in.

In My Father's house are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you.

John 14:2

Application

During the week, identify those things where you feel most 'at home' because they are tapping into the love and wisdom in your soul. These are the thoughts, desires and activities for you to develop.

If there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person. If there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the house.

Traditional Proverb

Bring love into your home for this is where our love for each other must start.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

What would be your ideal house?

Which is your favourite room in your house?

Ego perspective

What does your home say about your personality?

We all want to be happy and we know that this requires us to feel safe and secure, physically, emotionally and spiritually (if we acknowledge this aspect of life). Our sense of self tries to construct this inner home of peace and happiness. We usually use the ego part of us which can mislead us, particularly by focusing on superficial happiness. We might rush around being busy, buying things to entertain ourselves, taking holidays and so on, all in an attempt to find happiness. However, this is not reaching the soul or higher part of us, and we will continue to drift and feel homeless deep within.

When we get to the point of being able to acknowledge that all goodness is from a higher source and we are leading a useful life, then we are constructing a spiritual home where we will find true inner peace and contentment. Build your spiritual house from your soul.

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain.

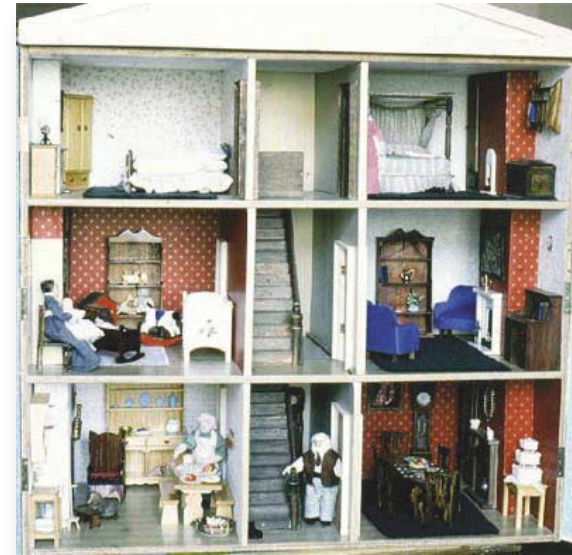
Psalm 127:1

Application

1. Consider what you are doing when you feel most true to yourself or 'at home' and reflect on whether this is in tune with the Higher Good?
2. Do you spend enough time doing the things that are creating your soul's home?
3. Resolve to make changes to your life if you would like to spend more time on something.

Affirmation

I am building my eternal home with loving actions from my Higher Self.



These three (body, rationality and the spiritual) are like a house. The body is like the foundation, the rational is as the house built upon it, the spiritual like those things which are in the house, and conjunction with the Lord like dwelling in it.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Ivory

The elephant has a thick skin, a head full of ivory, and as everyone who has seen a circus parade knows, proceeds best by grasping the tail of its predecessor.

Adlai E. Stevenson

I don't want to live in an ivory tower, being the songwriter who just turns inward.

Traditional quotation

What do elephants mean to you?

Does the strength of ivory play a part in your life?

Ivory

Strong sense of justice

Soul Perspective

Ivory comes from the tusks of elephants. Elephants are intelligent, perceptive animals that are strong and hardworking, but can also get angry and indignant if they are pushed too far. The tusks are two teeth that have grown out of the elephant's upper jaw. These tusks represent knowledge of justice.

We sometimes see things in the media that make us so angry that we feel we just have to do something about it. This can be, for example, when people in poorer countries earn a tiny wage to produce cheap clothes for Western supermarkets, or when hunters kill elephants for their ivory tusks.

If we grasp this sense of justice when it comes upon us, we can use it to improve the situation we are angry about. We can fight to make a difference. Rather than letting angry thoughts dominate our minds, we can use our sense of justice in a productive way.

Justice and judgement are the foundation of Your throne: mercy and truth shall go before Your face.

Psalms 89:14

Application

Next time you see something in the world that makes you angry, work out what you can do that is productive to improve the situation you feel is unjust.

Ego perspective

Does your sense of justice ever take over your rational thought?

Have you ever been in a situation where all you can think about is how unfair it all is? This could be, for example, if your boss favours someone else and seems to continually give them all of the interesting work or promote them rather than you.

This sort of situation can take over our lives, and we can become totally absorbed in our sense of justice, rather than trying to move on and work out what we could do ourselves to improve our circumstances.

Our sense of justice can work for us if we are careful not to let it dominate us. If we allow it to dominate, we open ourselves up to negative influences. It can be like a downward spiral - the more we get angry about it, the more reasons to be angry come into our minds. We need to take a step back, try to be rational, and ask for help from above to see a way forward.

You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves.

Amos 6:4

Application

If you find yourself in a situation that makes you so angry you can't think straight, take a step back, and ask for help from above to move on.

Affirmation

I can use my sense of justice to help those in need.



Ivory signifies natural truth (concerned with everyday living), because it is white, and can be polished, and because it protrudes from the mouth of an elephant, and likewise makes his strength.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Lamb

Being part of the natural world reminds me that innocence isn't ever lost completely; we just need to maintain our goodness to regain it.

Jewel (American singer, songwriter)

The greater our innocence, the greater our strength and the swifter our victory.

Gandhi

What do you think or feel when you see a field of new lambs?

What in you is lamb-like?

Lamb

Innocence

Soul Perspective

The child-like, gentle and trusting playfulness of lambs is often associated with innocence - 'as innocent as a lamb'. Lambs picture the innocence of childhood, but have you ever come across an adult who has this innocence?

Innocence comes from the Divine which means it is not only a state which young children inhabit but one we can all reach as we mature spiritually and look to and are led by the higher states within us. When we live from loving goodness in our hearts then we find this innocent, trusting, playful sense of our human nature. This type of inner goodness is something we develop as we learn to deal with our ego nature which has a tendency to shut us off from others and gives the illusion of our being separate.

Jesus instructs his disciple Peter three times to *"Feed my lambs; feed my sheep; feed my sheep."* (John 21:15-17) showing the need to strengthen and keep alive this innocence in our human hearts.

Application

You have gentle, innocent affections entrusted to you.

Over the next few days *either*:

- a) give someone you love a hug and tell them you love them just as an innocent child would. Note how you feel and the effect on the other person *or*
- b) embrace the state of innocent joy in simple pleasures e.g. in the beauty of a flower or the delight of a young child.

Ego perspective

What is it that makes a sheep 'go astray' and what brings it back?

Although lambs and sheep are social creatures they are sometimes tempted by the grass that looks greener down in the ravine and can get separated from the flock. Are we sometimes drawn by our powerful 'self' to do things which cause us harm spiritually, at least in the short term, such as getting our own way, using others for our own ends?

We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.

Isaiah 53:6

This is bound to happen and we can recognise this as part of our spiritual growth. In this recognition we can choose to move away from this and allow the Divine loving goodness to live in us and through us and so connect us with others again. We will want to regain the joyful innocence of the lamb which brings inner peace.

Suppose one of you who has one hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?

Luke 15:4

Application

Next time you are aware that you are trying to manipulate a situation or a person for your own ends, stop yourself falling into this spiritual ravine by seeing them as an innocent child of God, the same as yourself.

Affirmation

I have the gentle innocence of the Divine within me.



A lamb; the innocence of the interior man.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Lion

The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.

William Blake

A lion sleeps in the heart of every brave man.

Turkish Proverb

What do you associate with lions make you think of?

Who are the lions in your life?

Lion

Spiritual Strength

Soul Perspective

Have you ever heard the expression that someone is 'as brave as a lion'? These days, we do not have to tackle wolves to protect our flocks and our children, but we have to have courage in other ways. Lions represent spiritual strength and courage, which come from the Lord within.

At times we have to be spiritually strong, like when we are being pulled away from our moral code. We can draw upon the strength of the Lord, as He will always come to our aid. Just knowing someone is listening when we ask for help can help us to be strong and have courage in our convictions.

The Lord's love is the strongest and most powerful love in our lives, even if we are not always aware of it. The Lord is always protecting us from negative thoughts and desires. We can accept the Lord's protection, and can turn to the Lord for spiritual strength and courage in times of need.

Like a lion he crouches and lies down; like a lioness - who dares to rouse him?

Genesis 49:9

Application

If you feel yourself being pulled away from what you know is right, ask the Lord to give you the strength to stand your ground and to have courage in your convictions.

Ego perspective

Is the lion inside you too proud to ask for help?

Lions are fearless, but can also be proud. Have you heard the expression 'pride comes before a fall'?

There are times in all of our lives when we have been unwilling to ask for help, thinking that it shows weakness. For example, have you ever tried to put up a piece of flat-pack furniture on your own, then realised that you cannot hold up two pieces and hammer in a nail at the same time?

By the same token, we sometimes think we can cope on our own in our spiritual lives. There are times when we think we are strong enough to work without the strength of the Lord. We can feel bold, and have an intense feeling of power in our own ability. If we look beyond our own ego to the Lord's strength instead of our own, we will avoid thinking we can work alone, and our foolish pride will not be allowed to hurt us.

You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and serpent.

Psalms 91:13

Application

When you next think you have achieved something by yourself, take time to acknowledge that without the Lord's strength, you can achieve nothing at all.

Affirmation

I have spiritual strength and courage within me.



A lion in the internal sense of the Word means the truth of the Church, on account of its strength, truth being that which fights and overcomes.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Lungs

What oxygen is to the lungs, such is hope to the meaning of life.

Emil Brunner

Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.

Anonymous

Are you conscious of the work of your lungs?

How does it feel to be short of breath?

Lungs

Wisdom working with love

Soul Perspective

Our lungs breathe in air, extract the oxygen and pass this into the bloodstream where it is sent to the heart which pumps this life-sustaining gas to the tissues and organs that require it to function.

As the lungs process air, they are the only internal organs that are constantly exposed to the external environment so we can see the link between the spiritual and the worldly part of us. When what we understand in terms of our spirituality has an effect on how we live our life in the world, then our understanding is like our lungs, oxygenating our life with spirit. Then our heart - what we desire - pumps to the parts that need it. Just as our lungs and heart work closely together, so at a spiritual level, Divine love (heart) and Divine wisdom (lungs) are inseparable.

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

Genesis 2.7

Application

Sit quietly and become aware of your breathing. Breathe in through your nose, aware of your diaphragm expanding down and out and then release this air out through your mouth. As your mind starts to wander, gently bring it back to focus on your breathing. Give thanks to God for this gift of life-giving Spirit that fills your body every instant of every day.

Ego perspective

What would you like to expel out of our life?

Gas exchange and purification of the bloodstream is a key function of the lungs; ridding us of gases that have built up. They are of no use to our body, and indeed will poison us if not removed.

Through both our inherited tendencies and our life experiences, we will have things in our inner life that we would like to get rid of because we know that they are not helping us to achieve inner peace and harmony. These may be directly linked to the breath from our lungs, for example, in the words we use. Do we use words in anger or in a demeaning or hurtful way sometimes? Or perhaps we refuse to use our breath to speak when we know we should to help a situation. When we think of the purification process of the lungs we can use it to meditate on a similar process in our spirits thus cleansing ourselves of unhelpful aspects of our character that are blocking us in our spiritual journey.

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live".
Ezekiel 3:9

Application

Identify an aspect of your character that you feel is blocking you on your spiritual journey. It may be something that is affecting a relationship or your contact with your Higher Self. Choose a positive characteristic or behaviour to replace it with so that next time a situation arises you are prepared and have a choice of how to act.

Affirmation

I breathe in God's life-giving spirit and use it to transform myself, and breathe out unhelpful tendencies.



The human being breathes outwardly and he breathes inwardly; outwardly he draws breath from the world, but inwardly from heaven. When a person dies he ceases to breathe outwardly, but his inward breathing, which is soundless and is undetectable by him while he lives in the world, continues. This breathing is regulated altogether by his affection for truth, thus by the life of his faith.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Money

The real measure of your wealth is how much you'd be worth if you lost all your money.

Anonymous

Money is a good servant, but a poor master.

Anonymous

What would your life be like if you did not have to worry about money?

How do your financial issues reflect your spiritual issues?

Money

Studying our beliefs

Soul Perspective

Money in itself is not useful to us. Its only use is to buy and sell things, or, as we might say, to trade. If we were to take all of our money with us on a trek across the desert, we might die of starvation before we found somewhere to spend it.

Before money was invented, people would trade camels or food. The coins and paper we use today, and, increasingly, plastic cards, help us to trade with others.

Developing our understanding of our beliefs can help us to become spiritually rich. We can read books and religious texts, and apply what we read to our own lives. We can pass on what we have learnt to others - 'trade' this knowledge - and try to live according to what we know is right. In this way, what we have learnt about spirituality will have value in our lives.

You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it.

Genesis 34:10

Application

To all those you meet try to bring your spirituality into your dealings with them. If appropriate, share with them the impact it has had on your life.

Ego perspective

How would you feel if you won the lottery?

Many people buy lottery tickets every week, and for some, it becomes a kind of religion. They think that having all of the money in the world would make them truly happy. If we read articles about lottery winners, we find out that this is not always the case. Some find that rather than happiness, the money has brought them distress.

A person who loves having money for its own sake, and rejoices in collecting great sums of money, is known as a 'miser'. The very word can make us think of someone mean and unpleasant. If we become one of these people and just enjoy collecting money without any thought for how we can help others with it, we can miss something important.

Loving money moves us away from our spiritual side, and we become more attracted to worldly matters. We can focus on our inner beliefs and decide whether having lots of money is really important to us.

No-one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Matthew 6:24

Application

Think about your financial situation. Consider whether it would be possible for you to make a monthly payment to a charity of your choice, however small.

Affirmation

My beliefs can make me spiritually rich.



That which man loves above all things is continually present in his thought, and also in his will, and constitutes his most essential life. As for example, he who loves riches above all things, whether money or possessions, continually revolves in his mind how he may obtain them.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Moon

Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody.

Mark Twain

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.

Buddha

When I admire the wonder of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in worship of the Creator.

Mahatma Gandhi

When you look at the moon what do you think?

How do you feel when you see a full moon?

Moon

Enlightenment from true ideas

Soul Perspective

We have always been fascinated by our moon, its effect on the earth's tides and growing cycles, to eventually setting foot on its surface.

Moonlight can be very reassuring on a dark night to show us the way. The amount of light affects how clearly we can see. We use the expression 'I see' meaning 'I understand' and 'I am in the dark on that' meaning 'I don't know about it or don't understand it'. The moon reflects this light of understanding from the sun which represents the Divine source.

Just as the sun and the moon work together so we would have no understanding of the truth without the warmth of love in our hearts. Sometimes though we do not feel this love and then the sun has metaphorically 'gone down in our lives' and we rely on the colder light of understanding to help us continue to live in the way we believe in. We continue to be helpful to others, for example, because we know it is the right thing to do, even though we may not be feeling very loving towards them in our hearts

God made two great lights - the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night.

Genesis 1:16

Application

If you do not feel in a particularly loving mood towards someone, allow your understanding of what is right to shine through and guide you in how to behave towards them.

Ego perspective

What might the monthly cycle of the moon suggest to you about your inner life?

Think about how we vary from day to day in how spiritually aware we are in terms of our understanding. Sometimes we hear or read something or reflect on an idea and it seems really meaningful and useful to us, we feel enthused by it and want to put it into practice in our lives. At other times we slip into our ego state and start to think less and less about other people and just about ourselves.

Perhaps this is pictured by the phases of the moon. A full moon is when we are in an enlightened state and thinking about other people. However, just as the moon disappears from sight, so we gradually let our own needs overtake our thoughts for others until we are totally absorbed in ourselves again. It can feel like quite a black and depressing time spiritually but we can move out of this phase again into a new spiritual state, just like a new moon appearing.

The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.

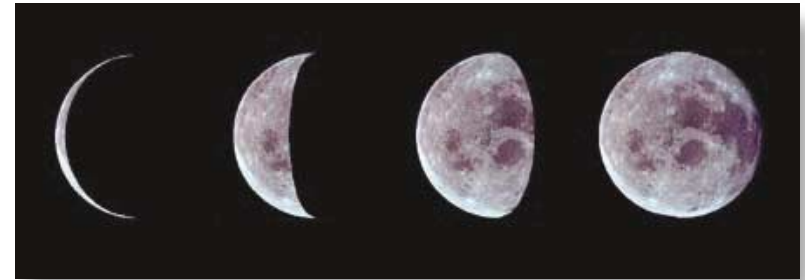
Matthew 24:29

Application

In noticing that you are getting bogged down in your own needs, picture a new moon shining its light into your spirit so that you realise what you are doing and can make a conscious effort to think about others' needs as well as your own.

Affirmation

I will rule my life by my understanding of what is good and true, even in the darker times.



The moon is faith received from the Lord, thus belief in the Lord.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Mountain

Mountain

Higher states

Soul Perspective

High places like hills and mountains are symbols of our higher inner states - our spiritual life.

We talk about people acting from higher motives when they are not thinking purely about personal gain. The Divine is in these higher thoughts and actions, which we can think of in symbolic terms as 'going up the mountain'. Just as climbing a mountain can be hard work, so the inner spiritual journey requires effort but the summit experience - that experience of inner joy, harmony and love when we feel connected to God - is worth the effort. Whilst we will invariably return to the valley of everyday life we can have this higher goal in view.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 1:9

It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.

Edmund Hillary

When the ancients saw any high mountains they thought of heaven and the Lord.

Emanuel Swedenborg

There are many paths to the top of the mountain, but the view is always the same.

Chinese Proverb

With what do you associate mountains?

What metaphorical mountains do you aspire to reach the heights of?

Application

Next time you feel yourself getting bogged down with the daily grind of life, take some time out to raise your thoughts above the mundane to restore a true perspective.

Positive time out is different for all of us but the following may be helpful suggestions:

- take a walk
- meditate
- read something spiritually uplifting
- go on retreat
- listen to uplifting music.

Ego perspective

What mountains are making your spiritual development a challenge?

We sometimes talk about people getting 'above themselves'. Pride, which comes from our ego perspective, can make us feel we are on the mountain top because we can look down on those we feel are less successful, less clever, less 'good' than ourselves, and it makes us feel superior. This feeling of superiority brought about by pride is an illusion that our ego perspective plays on us. It can be like a mountain that is blocking our way to the true reality of connectedness with others and God.

Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low.
Luke 3:5

Application

If I find myself feeling superior to others, I will remember that we are all equal beings when looked at from Divine love.

Affirmation

I can reach the highest level of my soul.



The Lord always dwells in highest things.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Path

If we are facing in the right direction, all we have to do is keep on walking.

Ancient Buddhist wisdom

Understand that the right to choose your own path is a sacred privilege. Use it. Dwell in possibility.

Oprah Winfrey

How do you feel when you set out on a walk along a path which is new to you?

Has your path of life had many ups and downs or been relatively smooth?

Path

Guiding ideas

Soul Perspective

A path takes us from one place to another, possibly in a straightforward way but often meandering and sometimes with choices of direction on the way.

We are all on two journeys in life; the outward one of our life 'from childhood to the grave' which is visible to everyone, but also an inner spiritual journey. Just as a path takes us from one place to another, in spiritual terms a path represents something which leads us from one state to another. These are the ideas that guide us in our spiritual journeying.

How do we know which way to go, whether to turn this way or that in our choices in life or whether to take off in a different direction altogether? If our path is based on the higher principles of the soul then compassionately we can reconstruct our 'inner code', our values and actions, to become wiser and more loving. This feels like heading down the path to our true home.

This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls".

Jeremiah 6:16

Application

During the next week, when you have to make a choice about what to say or what to do, reflect on which you feel is the higher path, using the light of wisdom from your soul, and choose this way.

Ego perspective

Have you ever taken a path in your life which you later regretted?

We talk about being 'led up the garden path' when we have been misled by something or someone. How often is this the case with our spiritual path? We are misled by others, as the old proverb says: 'A well-beaten path does not always make the right road'. Our sense of self misleads us into putting our needs before others, thinking we are right or of more worth than others. These misleading ideas can be like signposts pointing into a jungle of self which affects our choices and actions.

What are our signposts on the way? Are we being led by unhelpful and misleading ideas which have us going around in circles, trapped in the world of superficial talk, weary roles and pointlessness? The true path is within us. We have the power to awaken to this Higher Self which leads us on the path to inner peace and happiness and to feeling truly alive.

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth,

Isaiah 42:16

Application

Before you speak to those around you, think about the words you are going to say. Are you choosing the path of your Higher Self or following a path which leads into the jungle of unhelpful ideas and actions? If your words are going to be unhelpful to you or the other person, then rethink them from your compassionate heart.

Affirmation

I am walking my soul path to become truly alive.



The outward path by which truth enters lies through hearing and sight into the understanding, but the inward path by which good flows in from the Lord lies through what is inmost in the person into the will.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Pearl

God's Name is the Jewel, the Pearl. It cannot be stolen or taken away.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh sacred text)

We are bound to our bodies like an oyster is to its shell.

Plato

What is the pearl in your life?

When have you experienced times when you like to be protected, like the oyster protects the pearl?

Pearl

Spiritual and worldly knowledge

Soul Perspective

Oysters are molluscs that live in the sea. They are creatures that flourish by lying still and feeling safe. Oysters have pearls growing inside their shells.

We can enjoy being like oysters at times - curling up in front of the fire on a stormy night and feeling safe from the elements. We can also get this feeling of safety if, for instance, we commune with the Divine through meditation, by being very still and silent. The more we commune with the Divine, the more our spiritual strength and beauty increases, like the beauty and strength of the growing pearl.

The Divine protects us from all kinds of worldly influences. We can sometimes be hurt by learning the true facts of a situation, such as when something is not what we expect, and it upsets us. Through the Divine, we can enjoy protection, like the pearl inside the oyster.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:45-46

Application

Take time out to commune with the Divine. Allow yourself some time every day or every week to sit quietly, and to become one with the Divine.

Ego perspective

How do you cherish your pearl within?

Have you heard the expression 'pearls of wisdom'? By this we often mean precious gems of knowledge that can help us. People enjoy sharing their own pearls of wisdom, especially when others enter a new phase in their lives. For instance, when teenagers go off to university, those who have been before them often tell them what it will be like, and how they should be careful.

This advice is valuable, like a pearl, but we may switch off if we hear too much of it. We may choose to discard what we have heard, think we know better and end up learning through painful experience what was good and sound advice. We can also receive advice from within if we listen to our inner voice when we are in need of some direction.

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

Matthew 7:6

Application

Next time you feel that you do not need to listen to the advice of others, take time to reflect on whether this is a well-judged position or whether you are actually throwing away useful 'pearls of wisdom'.

Affirmation

I can use my pearls of wisdom.



Pearls signify the knowledges of good and truth which are of the Word.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Precious Stones

The jewel of the soul is priceless, and yet it is being squandered like this, in exchange for a mere shell.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh sacred text)

When the mind is cleaned with the jewel of spiritual wisdom, it does not become dirty again.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh sacred text)

What is your favourite precious stone and why?

What are like special jewels in your life?

Precious Stones

Love of true ideas

Soul Perspective

What is it about a sparkling gem that makes people put such value on them? Is it the way they reflect the light and catch our eye?

Stones are opaque, light absorbing, and represent true ideas we take into our minds - lots of different ones, just like the variety of stones. Precious stones like diamonds, rubies and sapphires are therefore going to represent a true idea that is very special to us; one we really feel attached to. What are your special gems? An example might be the idea of constancy and care so that the affection you feel for your friends ensures you are always there for them in times of difficulty.

When we not only understand what it means to lead a life from higher principles but we actually love both the spiritual ideas and the good that follows from this, then this is seen in how we behave and speak to others. You may know someone whose inner love of what is good and true sparkles from their eyes.

I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.

Psalms 54:12

Application

Meditate for two minutes a day on something of God's nature within yourself which you would like to reflect more to others e.g. happiness, tolerance, care, joy, positivity, generosity.

Ego perspective

What might the fact that precious stones are formed under very intense heat say to you about your own life?

Life experiences, which can sometimes be challenging and painful as well as joyful, can help us to change and develop. Diamonds and sapphires don't look like they do in our rings when mined from the ground. First they are polished - we have to experience things in life which can be testing, such as relationships and family life. This helps to 'knock off our corners' helping us learn flexibility, humility and to be caring. Then the precious stone is cut by an expert. We have to have some of our mistaken thinking, which comes from the distortion of reality by our ego, removed. This is expressed in Buddhist terms by 'the removal of desire', and in Christian terms as 'the putting of God and others before ourselves'.

We are never going to be perfect - we might be boring if we were - but it's interesting to note that the colour in jewels comes from their chemical impurities. We all have our own personalities, strengths and weaknesses but we can develop into the sparkling souls we all have the potential to be.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:45-46

Application

Over the next few days:

1. reflect on how your life experience has 'knocked off some of your corners'.
2. Is there another facet of your character that you would like to see removed e.g. impatience, intolerance, anger, controlling others, laziness?
3. Then ask for this to be removed and replaced by something more helpful.

Affirmation

My soul reflects the Divine love within me, out to the world, like a sparkling jewel.



Stones in general signify truths; and precious stones, truths which are transparent from good.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Roots

For a tree to become tall it must grow tough roots among the rocks.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Kind hearts are the gardens, kind thoughts are the roots, kind words are the flowers, kind deeds are the fruits.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The roots of true achievement lie in the will to become the best that you can become.

Harold Taylor

What do tree roots make you think of?

How 'rooted' does your life feel?

Roots

Acceptance of a useful idea

Soul Perspective

We use the term 'roots' when referring to a person's original home, environment, and culture.

Picture a seed settling into the soil and then breaking open with new growth. One of the first things it does is to send out roots into the earth to create a firm hold for the growing plant and to gain nourishment.

When we receive a new idea and are really enthusiastic and committed to the usefulness of it in our own lives, then this corresponds to the seed sending out roots. We start to mull it over to see how it fits with what else we understand and our circumstances in life and, ultimately, how we might use it in our own lives. It is an acknowledging and securing of an idea in our own mind because we really believe in it. Without willpower, no good idea would ever see the light of day.

He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:8

Application

Next time you hear or have a really useful idea that you think should be acted upon, give it nourishment. See how it fits with your other thinking and your life. Let it really take a firm hold in your heart and mind so that new action can come from it in your life.

Ego perspective

What do the gnarled and twisted roots of a tree make you think of in terms of life?

Roots are normally hidden underground, just as parts of our own human natures are unseen by others and often by us. When we look at the roots of a tree above ground we can see how gnarled and twisted they are. Over the years, we become used to ourselves and our little idiosyncrasies; they are what make us who we are. Sometimes it takes someone else to point out a particular part of our nature to us we are unaware of. On these occasions we may not be sure that we particularly like what we see. Or sometimes we become aware ourselves of some ingrained habit or attachment to an idea which we realise is not so helpful in our lives anymore. It may, like old roots, be fairly inflexible and not helping us to adapt to a new stage or state in our lives. It might be that we feel this particular root needs to loosen its grip, to stop being active in our lives, so as to encourage other newer roots to grow.

Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.

Matthew 15:13

Application

Reflect on whether you have become too inflexible in an area of your life; a relationship perhaps or a way of behaving. If you think this is preventing you from developing, then resolve to cut free of this particular root and replace it with something new. There maybe a new way of responding to a loved one that is more helpful, so that there can be new growth in your spirit.

Affirmation

I love to be of use to others.



It is just like seed that is cast on the land. While it is still winter-time, that is, when the land is frozen hard, there it indeed lies but does not take root. But as soon as the warmth of the sun which arrives in early spring warms up the land, the seed starts to grow roots for the first time and then to strike down into the soil. The same applies to spiritual seed that is sown. This never strikes root until good that stems from charity (love) warms it up so to speak. Only then does it grow a root on itself which it then pushes forth.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Seasons

Spring passes and one remembers one's innocence. Summer passes and one remembers one's exuberance. Autumn passes and one remembers one's reverence. Winter passes and one remembers one's perseverance.

Yoko Ono

For the unlearnéd, old age is winter; for the learnéd it is the season of the harvest.

The Talmud

Which are your favourite seasons?

Do you find the season affects how you feel?

Seasons

Changes in spiritual state

Soul Perspective

If you are a gardener, living in a temperate climate with four distinct seasons, then you are probably very grateful for these changes. If we didn't have the period of dormant winter we would not have the new growth in the spring, the flowers of summer or the fruit of autumn. We can probably see that these changes reflect what goes on in our own inner lives.

Spring, with its longer daylight hours, warmth and new growth, is a wonderful contrast to the cold dark days of winter. On a beautiful spring day we can feel full of renewed energy to do things, to be concerned for others, to be creative and to get on with things purposefully. This corresponds to the state we are in when we are in the flow of our inner soul energy. We may feel that we should always be in this positive state. However, nature is showing us that we need the contrast of the seasonal cycle. We need to go through the giving, productive phase of autumn and the quiet reflective state of winter in order to change and develop spiritually.

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Application

Use your spiritual states to the full:

- Spring for its energy and creativity
- Summer for its consolidation of new things
- Autumn for its sharing of your gifts with others
- Winter as a quieter time for inner reflection.

Ego perspective

How do you get yourself from a winter to a spring state?

We all have times when we feel wrapped up in our own concerns and worries, which can feel like a state of winter because we are lacking in energy and drive. We may even feel we are immersed in a state of cold-heartedness. Whilst this is a normal part of our cycle of states, we want to ensure that our winter state doesn't go on too long. In nature, the transition from winter to spring takes place when we have more daylight and warmth from the sun. What it takes to move from a winter state to one of spring is often a little more of the light of understanding and the warmth of love. We can be helped with this transition by encouragement and teaching from others, but ultimately it is up to us to choose to move into this state. We can then progress through the active summer, to the autumn state of helping others to do the same by the fruits of our labours and the seeds or ideas we share.

While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.

Genesis 8:22

Application

When you feel like you are living through a winter state, use it as a time for inner reflection and spiritual learning and before long a new light of understanding and the warmth of love will come to you.

Affirmation

I have a time for quiet reflection and a time for active participation in the world.



Summer and winter means the state of a regenerate person (someone on the spiritual path) as regards things belonging to his new will, which by turns come and go in the way that summer and winter do.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Seeds

Seeds

Ideas in the Mind

Soul Perspective

How amazing is it that so much can grow from a tiny seed? A seed symbolises ideas we have. We sometimes use the expression that we have had a 'germ of an idea'. For a seed to take root, it needs to be planted somewhere where it will be able to grow and last.

Lots of people have traumatic times in their lives. These struggles can sow an idea, which can grow and develop into something truly worthwhile, like starting off a charity to support others who have been in a similar situation. This can all happen with one tiny seed of an idea.

If we work with a seed that is good and true, like the desire to help others, we will become spiritually joined with our Creator. We will continue to grow and develop spiritually as long as the seed is allowed to take root and the connection with our Creator is maintained.

It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.

Luke 13:19

A harvest of peace is produced from a seed of contentment.

American proverb

The first principle of success is desire - knowing what you want. Desire is the planting of your seed.

Robert Collier

What seeds have you sown recently?

Can you recognise different types of seeds in your life?

Application

Next time you have what you think may be a good idea, follow it through in your mind's eye and see what could eventually come from this tiny seed of thought. Allow it to germinate in your mind, spirit and life.

Ego perspective

Do you always sow seeds in the right type of ground?

We all have good intentions, but do we always follow them through? Sometimes we may have a good idea, but we put it to one side as it is all too easy to think about how busy we are in our everyday lives. If the idea is about helping others, it can be easy to tell ourselves that we already do enough to help other people, such as our own families, without taking on something extra as well.

When we hear or read something that we know to be true, we should try to embrace it and live it in our lives. This is not always easy, and sometimes we choose to forget it, if this is more convenient. If we are successful, our rewards will be great. We should trust our 'internal code' if it is telling us that that idea should be taken seriously.

What was sown on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

Matthew 18:20-21

Application

During the next week, embrace any good ideas you have that you may have dismissed at other times, and see if you could put them into action.

Affirmation

I can receive good ideas and put them into action with help from my Creator.



Good and truth are like seeds and the soil. Interior good is like seed that is productive, though not unless it is sown in good soil.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Serpent

We must combine the toughness of the serpent with the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart.

Martin Luther King Jr

Look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under it.

William Shakespeare

How do snakes make you feel?

What is the serpent in your life?

Serpent

Sensory pleasure

Soul Perspective

Serpents are symbolic of our senses, and the pleasure that we can gain from them. We need our senses to access the outside world, and seeing something beautiful can give us a great deal of pleasure.

Our senses help us to know if we are too hot or too cold, and protect us from being burnt or from getting frostbite. In the past, people used their sense of taste to help them work out which plants were safe to eat, and which were poisonous. If we use our senses with wisdom, they can help us.

We can also 'sense' when someone is upset, and this can help us to be 'sensitive' and to use our judgement about what to say next. We may have to be careful when we talk to others about our spirituality as they could find it threatening or use what we say to demean us.

Look, I send you out like sheep among wolves; be wary as serpents, innocent as doves.

Matthew 10:16

Application

Next time you talk to someone about a sensitive subject, use your senses to connect with all of you, to be aware of how the other person feels. This can deepen your understanding and empathy.

Ego perspective

Does the serpent within creep up on you?

One of the dangers of a serpent is that it can 'creep' up on us. Serpents can hypnotise prey with their eyes, then slowly coil themselves around their prey until it is very difficult for the prey to escape. A serpent can seduce us into thinking sensory pleasures are always good for us.

We experiment with things that involve our senses as we get older, like drinking alcohol or eating rich food. These things can be good for us, in moderation, or in the right circumstances, but we have to use our 'inner code' to help us to know when we are being seduced by the serpent within, otherwise addiction or obesity can creep up on us.

Physical pleasure is an important part of our lives, and we do not have to totally deny ourselves. However, it is important to realise when something more spiritual is missing. We should not just trust our senses, which can give us a distorted view of reality, but should look to our 'inner code' for guidance.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made.

Genesis 3:1

Application

If you find yourself absorbed with what you consider to be superficial activities then look to your 'inner code' to help you get your life back in balance so you are nurturing your spiritual self too.

Affirmation

I can use my senses with judgement.



Serpent...does not mean a serpent, but the sensual man, and in a general sense the sensual itself, which is the ultimate of the human understanding.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Sight

Out of sight, out of mind.

Traditional quotation

Life is one big road with lots of signs. So when you're riding through the ruts, don't complicate your mind. Flee from hate, mischief and jealousy. Don't bury your thoughts, put your vision to reality. Wake Up and Live!

Bob Marley

How would you cope without your sight?

Does seeing something mean you believe it exists?

Sight

Understanding

Soul Perspective

We can all see things before us, but do we truly understand what they mean? And are we always prepared to believe what is in front of our eyes?

The sight of the body relates to the sight of the spirit, which is our understanding. Unless we understand what we see, it means nothing to us. Imagine the person that was blind from birth who had their sight restored. Even though they may have been told that the sky is blue, 'blue' would mean nothing to them until they actually saw the sky.

When somebody says, 'I see what you mean', they are actually saying that they understand what is being said. When we understand what we see, we know it to be true. If we believe in something, we accept that it is true. Being open to the Divine can help us to grow in our understanding of spiritual truths. This can happen when reading, meditating, or talking with others.

Blessed are your eyes because they see.

Matthew 13:16

Application

If you find something difficult to understand, hold it in the back of your mind, and allow the Divine to open your eyes to the truth.

Ego perspective

Do we always see what is before us?

We may have used the expression that someone 'looked straight through me'. This implies that someone we know saw us but didn't acknowledge us, or pretended that they hadn't really seen us. We may have done these ourselves, if we were too busy to stop and chat, or if we saw someone we didn't want to acknowledge.

Just as we may have pretended not to see someone, we may pretend not to know something, or to deny knowledge of it if it makes our lives difficult. This is like not sticking to our 'inner code' if it means we feel we cannot enjoy ourselves. We may also deny our beliefs to ourselves if it causes conflict and difficulty in our lives.

We have a choice as to whether we acknowledge our belief in the Divine in our hearts, or allow the less important things of the world to obscure this knowledge. We should not be afraid of the belief we have in the Divine and eternal life, and be prepared to acknowledge this to ourselves. Perhaps at times we are confused or feel spiritually blind and lost. But it is possible to open the eyes of our spirit and once again see our path ahead clearly.

Though seeing, they do not see.

Matthew 13:13

Application

If you find yourself denying your beliefs, examine your moral code and use it to help you decide what to do.

Affirmation

I can use my understanding to determine my choices in life.



To see' signifies to understand because the sight of the eye corresponds to the sight of the mind, which is understanding.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Stone

Man is harder than iron, stronger than stone and more fragile than a rose.

Turkish proverb

Character is the firm foundation stone upon which one must build to win respect.

R.C. Samsel

What is it like to feel a smooth pebble in your hand?

What gives your life structure and a firm foundation?

Stone

Fundamental spiritual ideas

Soul Perspective

Rocks and stones form the basis and support of the earth. We associate stone with strength e.g. a man 'stands like a rock' implies someone who is immovable and firm in his beliefs.

This firm, immovable nature of rock makes it ideal for foundations and building with. Is there something within our minds which is firm and unchanging? Our basic understanding or beliefs about life are what give us a firm foundation for living the way we do. For example, if we believe that the universe is created and everything in it is in a delicate balance then this is likely to affect how we treat our planet. If we truly believe we are spiritual beings with eternal life then this is a fundamental concept which does not change and affects the way we live our lives. Settled facts about life, of which we have a firm conviction, are our mental rocks.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Matthew 16:18

Application

During the week reflect on what your basic principles for living are.

- How firm are your principles in influencing how you live?
- How might you make your life foundation firmer?

Ego perspective

What affects your basic beliefs about life?

You may be familiar with the story Jesus told about the foolish man who built his house upon the sand, rather than on the rock, and when the storms came it fell down. Do you have a firm foundation to your life with a strong inner spiritual code or are you easily swayed by the people you are with, your circumstances or just by what your ego wants?

Although rock and stone has such a strong structure, man has learnt how to be able to shape stones with the use of tools. Whilst this can be seen as an image of helping to fit our basic beliefs into some structure in our lives it could also be seen conversely as us taking a basic true idea and then start making it fit what we want, by changing and distorting it. We need to become aware of when we change true spiritual ideas to fit our own ego needs rather than using them as a stepping stone to help us grow spiritually.

If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it.

Exodus 20:25

Application

Next time you feel the desire to forget or modify what you know to be true about life because it is easier or will suit your needs better, remember the picture of the house on the rock. Listen to your Higher Self and your higher principles.

Affirmation

I will build my life on sound spiritual ideas of loving goodness to everyone and the whole of creation.



A stone in the Word means the truth that composes faith.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Sun

God is the Sun and when His rays fall upon your heart, not impeded by the clouds of egoism, the lotus blooms and the petals unfold.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

To love and be loved is to feel the sun from both sides.

David Viscott

People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

How do you feel when the sun is shining?

Do you prefer to be on a beach in full sun, or in the shade, on a sunny day?

Sun

Divine Love

Soul Perspective

Life on earth would not exist without the sun, its heat and light are the very fundamental of life. What is it that is the fundamental of eternal life; this life energy which we recognise in another human being when we say 'the sun shone out of her face'?

Love, the very nature of the Divine is the source and sustainer of all life. We may know how it feels to lose the love of someone close to us through death. It can for a while feel like the light and warmth has gone out of our life. Divine love is reflected by the sun in that it brings warmth and light to our lives and is also the source of all our creativity and new growth.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield.

Psalm 84:11

Application

Next time you are out on a sunny day, turn to the sun and feel its warmth on your face and then:

- give thanks for this warmth for your body and the love and life it represents
- give thanks for the love of family, friends, strangers and the energy-giving nature of this love which has its source in the Divine.

Ego perspective

How do you feel on a cloudy day when there is no sun?

Just as we need the sun to sustain life, we know it can also be harmful, both to the earth where the thinning of the ozone layer allows too much heat through, and to our bodies which burn if our skin is in direct sunlight for too long.

Divine love by its very nature can never be harmful but we humans in freedom can use this loving goodness and distort it for our own ends. It may feel good at the time when, for example, we say something hurtful to a loved one, or when we take control of a situation and ignore others' views. This misuse of our power, however, does harm to our spirit, just as the sun burns our skin.

The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

Psalm 121:6

Application

When you are aware of not feeling the warmth of the Divine love in your life, focus on someone else and in the forgetting of yourself you will find an experience of love and connectedness.

Affirmation

In the core of my soul is perfect love which shines out through me to others.



'Sun' stands for love.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Sword

Sword

Integrity

Soul Perspective

A sword relates to integrity; to following a moral or ethical code. Integrity is important in the world of business. Customers will return if they feel they have been treated fairly, and word will spread. People like to feel that they have been dealt with in an honest and ethical way, and companies who promote this as one of their values seem to do well in their levels of customer satisfaction.

Having personal integrity can also reap spiritual satisfaction within us. When we know we have followed our own personal moral code, we sometimes feel better about ourselves. It can be challenging to have to stand up to someone who has a more self-confidence than us, but in the end it is rewarding to have followed our moral code, even if it was difficult at the time.

The integrity of our moral code helps to protect us from negative influences. We can use it to fight spiritual battles within ourselves if we listen to it.

Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one.

Psalm 45:3

Humour is a rubber sword – it allows you to make a point without drawing blood.

Mary Hirsch

The tongue is more to be feared than the sword.

Japanese proverb

He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword.

Traditional proverb

With what do you associate a sword?

Do you control the sword, or is the sword in control of you?

Application

When you are challenged by someone who thinks their opinion is more valid than yours, look to the integrity of your moral code for help in this situation.

Ego perspective

Do you find it difficult to use your integrity in certain situations?

It can be hard to use your integrity at times. People sometimes talk about a 'double-edged sword', which often means that something good or nice also has a bad or unpleasant side to it.

Has a friend ever asked you to be honest with them about something? This may be an outfit they have bought, or it could be something as serious as whether you think their partner is being unfaithful. It is very difficult to be as honest as they have asked you to be, if you know they may not like the answer. There is a line between missing something out that will hurt someone and actually being dishonest.

In our spiritual lives, we need to consider this. If we allow our integrity to be compromised, we leave ourselves open to negative influences. We need to listen to our 'inner code' when we are struggling to be honest with someone, or we could make a habit of only telling half-truths. We then face the likelihood of others being less than honest with us. We can also fall into the trap of not looking honestly at ourselves and our motivations.

If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed.

Revelation 13:10

Application

Next time a friend asks you to be honest with them and you think it will hurt their feelings, reflect on how to use your sword of integrity wisely. Use your integrity to deal honestly with yourself and others.

Affirmation

I can use my integrity when dealing with myself and others.



In the internal sense a sword means the truth of faith engaged in conflict.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Tree

Life without love is like a tree without blossom and fruit.

Khalil Gibran

Though a tree grows so high, the falling leaves return to the root.

Malay proverb

Good timber does not grow with ease; the stronger the wind, the stronger the trees.

J. Willard Marriott

If you were a tree which variety would you be?

What characteristics of a tree have some resonance with your life at the moment?

Tree

Spiritual growth

Soul Perspective

Picture a seed, sprouting in the soil and growing over the years into a strong trunk with spreading branches, leaves that change with the seasons and then eventually blossom and fruit. These stages in the growth of a tree correspond to the stages in our spiritual development.

Can you identify with hearing or perceiving a useful idea, letting it take root in your mind and then planning how to realise this by learning more so that eventually you are ready to put this idea into action in your life? We talk about the 'fruits of our labours' as the results of our actions. In spiritual terms when we are living from our Higher Self and acknowledge that any good we do is from a source higher than just our own, then we are like a fruiting tree, able to spread true 'life' to those with whom we come into contact. We are spiritually strong, flexible and useful like a tree.

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:7

Application

Over the next few weeks, focus on whichever aspect of your spiritual tree needs to grow at the moment:

- roots & trunk - new spiritual ideas
- branches and leaves - understanding and planning how to put this idea to work in your life
- flowers and fruit - take delight in putting this idea into useful activity in the world.

Ego perspective

What do you think about a plum tree that does not produce plums?

Tree which stops bearing fruit

How do we use the useful ideas we understand? Do we sometimes think about doing useful actions but then, even when the opportunity arises, fail to do so? Do we enjoy our spiritual knowledge for its own sake but do not bother to apply it to our living?

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus by their fruit you will recognise them.

Matthew 7:19-20

Tree with withered fruit

How easy it is for us to take all the credit for our good actions although we know intellectually that everything good is from God? It is important for us to keep reminding ourselves of this fact otherwise the good we do in the world does not benefit our own soul.

Application

When you think about doing something good, imagine yourself as a tree with beautiful blossom. You want to change this blossom into your favourite succulent, useful fruit so bring it to fruition - carry it out!

Affirmation

When I am rooted in God then I can grow spiritually.



Indeed, like a tree, a person who is being born again begins from a seed, which is why in the Word 'seed' means truth obtained from good. Also, like a tree, he brings forth leaves, then blossom, and finally fruit; for he brings forth the kind of things that belong to intelligence, which again in the Word are meant by 'leaves', then the kind of things that belong to wisdom, which are meant by 'blossoms', and finally the kind of things that are matters of life, namely forms of the good of love and charity expressed in action, which in the Word are meant by 'fruits'.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Water

Nothing on earth is so weak and yielding as water, but for breaking down the firm and strong it has no equal.

Lao-Tsze

The water in a vessel is sparkling; the water in the sea is dark. The small truth has words which are clear; the great truth has great silence.

Rabindranath Tagore

On a hot day, how does a glass of cold water make you feel?

What is it that refreshes your mind?

Water

Useful true ideas

Soul Perspective

70% of the earth's surface and around 70% of our bodies are water, making it the most important constituent of life on this planet.

There can be nothing more refreshing on a hot day than a glass of cold water. What is it that refreshes our minds and cleanses it from our tendency to make the world revolve around ourselves? Understanding spiritual ideas, such as that happiness is to be found within ourselves, is refreshing for our soul.

Can you remember having to learn something at school which you found really 'dry' and boring? Imagine it was a foreign language but then your teacher took you on a holiday to that country and you suddenly saw the practical usefulness of learning it. True ideas that can inspire us to act in a useful, caring way in the world are like fast moving water which can move huge boulders.

To him who thirsts I will give from the spring of living water without price.

Revelation 21:6

Application

Set yourself the task of reading some spiritual material that you find helpful.

1. Meditate on an idea that speaks to you and see how you could apply this to your life;
2. apply the idea over the next few days;
3. record any resulting changes.

Ego perspective

Can you think of negative aspects to water on our planet?

How might this be reflected in your thinking?

Whilst water is so vital to our planet it is also possible to see that it can have a negative, destructive impact through heavy rain storms, floods and tsunamis. As well as being life-giving, water can also take away life.

Do we live by egocentric ideas sometimes in the way we make our choices? In our thoughts and behaviour how often do we put ourselves before others? This thinking is so easy for us to slip into but is not helpful because it cuts us off from others and the source of Life.

As well as the destructive force of water we can also picture the stagnant pool. What does this say to us about our thinking and the spiritual truth we understand? It is up to each of us as individuals to use what true ideas we know to make a positive difference in our lives and the world.

Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

Genesis 9:15

Application

If you feel that some or all of your inner life has become stagnant, now might be a good time to have a clear out by making space for fresh spiritual ideas to flow in and rejuvenate you.

Affirmation

I allow true ideas to influence and guide me.



The people thirsted there for water means an increase in the desire for truth.

Emanuel Swedenborg



Wheat

There's a season for sowing, a season for reaping. Self-discipline helps you know which is which.

Gary Ryan Blair

You have to separate the chaff from the wheat.

Traditional Proverb

There would be no advantage to be gained by sowing a field of wheat if the harvest did not return more than was sown.

Napoleon Hill

What does a wheat field ripening in the sun make you think of?

Would you miss wheat flour in bread, cakes, biscuits and pastry if you could not eat it?

Wheat

Daily acts of usefulness

Soul Perspective

Wheat and other grains are small, light plants which need to be grown together in large numbers to thrive and be of use. Grains are hard and dry and less attractive than succulent fruit, but are more important on a daily basis as a basic food source.

All seeds are like true ideas in our minds, helping us to plan and carry out useful acts. The wheat, because it is short lived and has to be replanted every year, can help us to reflect on those numerous, small but important tasks we do daily such as cleaning; washing up; holding open a door for someone; giving a lift and so on. These are the things which sustain us in life. They may be done out of a sense of duty or necessity, but can also be done from a loving heart which is like wheat, the king of the grains.

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

John 12:24

Application

Choose one small task you do daily that you dislike doing. For the next week, consciously do it with positive thoughts of the wonder of life and gratitude for all you have.

Ego perspective

What do you think when you see a wheat field full of weeds?

Nature, left to herself, does not allow only wheat seeds to grow together. As the wheat grows so too do other plants and grasses, which we refer to as weeds. These weeds are often indistinguishable from the growing wheat. They cannot be removed until the combine harvester comes along and is able to separate them.

When we go about our daily tasks, it is not usually obvious to others what our motives are. Even in our own minds we are often not aware of the inner motivation. It is only as we develop our Higher Self that we start to become more aware of, and perhaps unhappy with, some of our motivations for doing things. This is because we can see they are from the ego perspective and not helping us to grow. We need the light and warmth within our soul, just as the wheat needs the sunlight to ripen. Then we can start to see the weeds in our lives and do something about them.

Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters, "First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn".

Matthew 13:14

Application

As you go about your daily tasks, become aware of how you are feeling about them and your inner motivation. If you are not happy with some of your motives, then make a conscious effort to change them.

Affirmation

I do my daily tasks with a joyful and thankful heart.



The fact that 'bread' in general means good...and so specific kinds of good are meant by the grains and beans that have been mentioned - nobler kinds of good by wheat and barley, but less noble by beans and lentils.

Emanuel Swedenborg

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In engaging with symbols I can key into a universal wisdom and spirituality which I can also relate to on a personal level. I would recommend this set of cards and book as an aid to each person's journey towards wholeness - it's both enriching and freeing.

Helen Brown, Jungian therapist.

The purpose of this book and accompanying set of cards is to encourage us to stop, take notice of the world around us and reflect on the inner reality it contains. Everything in nature exists because it is a reflection of something of spirit.

The thirty six symbols that form the heart of this book are just a start to understanding this key to both the Divine and our own personal, spiritual transformation. By tuning into this higher reality we start to open up, enabling more light and love to shine into our lives.

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