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Excerpts from **Pray as you Go** by *Revd Helen Brown*

Excerpts from **Pray as you go** – please note that I have included contributions from various members of this face book group without naming them.

The Lord's Prayer

Now let us continue with our reflection on the Lord's Prayer. This is the 4th section:

"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil"

Here it is easy to think that it is the Lord who leads us into these temptations. However this is clearly not so. We create our own hell. We can easily be led to consider self above all else. It is easy to think that what we do comes from ourselves. In order to climb out of the holes we dig for ourselves, we need to turn to the Lord. We need to invite him to lead us on the right path – one of selflessness and humility. By turning to him humbled we are acknowledging that we are weak without him. We need his spirit with us

to help us fight the temptations that can easily grip us. We need to be willing to receive his direction and follow his ways rather than be led onto paths that we have built for ourselves, which of course are so easy to follow!

Let us follow the path leading to the Lord, a path which isn't always easy, but which can lead us so wonderfully to the light of His way and away from temptation.

Prayer by Howard Thurman, who was an influence on Martin Luther King:

"Lord, Lord, open unto me
Open unto me, light for my darkness.
Open unto me, courage for my fear.
Open unto me, hope for my despair.
Open unto me, peace for my turmoil.
Open unto me, joy for my sorrow.
Open unto me, strength for my weakness.
Open unto me, wisdom for my confession.
Open unto me, forgiveness for my sins.
Open unto me, love for my hates.
Open unto me, thy Self for my self.
Lord, Lord, open unto me! Amen."

From Francis of Assisi

O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Dear Lord, the one true life who creates and sustains all there is, your love rises within me like the sun in the morning casting its warm rays over the land. May the light of your truth dawn within my conscious mind bringing with it a sense of tranquillity, that just for a time, peace may reign in a stilled mind, that I may pause to take in the wonder of it all, and come to appreciate life in all its purest forms, just for a time, time enough to strengthen me when more pressing matters return. Amen

This is the link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/276157511029041>

Mindfulness and Swedenborg

by Steve Russell-Lacy

Learning mindfulness

Mindfulness is gaining growing popularity as a secular practice in daily life. It is a coming together of the contemplative traditions, particularly Buddhism, and modern science

Mindfulness is learned through meditation and other practices such as walking and eating mindfully. It involves paying close attention to what is going on in one's body and mind in the present moment: perceiving without striving or rushing to emotional judgment.

In so doing one soon learns to notice how one's mind ordinarily takes one away from the present moment. Without realising it, we automatically get caught up in worrying about the future, mulling over past mistakes and being distracted by the stream of images, fantasies, and other fleeting and inconsequential aspects of consciousness that have been called 'mind chatter'.

Learning mindfulness requires an attitude of openness and curiosity about inner experience. Also understanding that things are as they are rather than as one might wish them to be. The spirit of kindness to oneself is necessary if one is to recognise sensations, thoughts and feelings that are uncomfortable or unwanted, without turning a blind eye to them.

State of mindfulness

When we have learned to cultivate the state of mindfulness, we are able to dispassionately observe the contents of our conscious minds. Instead of treating sensations, thoughts and feelings as though they are our own, we have become aware that these experiences are simply passing mental events: ones we need not immediately identify with as part of ourselves.

As a consequence, in the state of mindfulness, one is likely to be more aware of thought processes, and neither impatiently jump to conclusions nor feel overwhelmed by what's going on around. In such a state, one is more likely to be able to let go of what would otherwise be negatively affecting one and as a result, feel calm and at peace.

Through this process of reflection, practitioners may become increasingly aware of goals or values that are deeply meaningful. This clarification of values then serves as a foundation for choosing actions that are in harmony with the person's values and goals.

A Swedenborgian perspective on mindfulness

The explanation for not identifying with what is in our mind

It is quite a radical shift to distance oneself from the contents of one's consciousness and see them as not coming from oneself.

"The person's nature is such that he would be indignant if anyone told him that his thoughts and desires...did not begin in himself." (AC 6324)

This shift could be helped by Swedenborg's teaching concerning the spiritual world. But this requires a different way of thinking about reality.

"I realize few believe that any spirit is present with them, or indeed that spirits exist at all." (AC 5849)

Despite this, Swedenborg affirms that:

"Present with every person there are good spirits and bad ones. ... When these spirits come to a person they enter the whole field of that person's memory, and from there the whole field of his or her thought. ... Several years' continual experience has taught me that this is the nature of spirits' alliance with people. I am surer of this than anything." (HH 292)

Appropriation

Mindfulness teachers say by not identifying with the contents of consciousness, we are better able to let go of what is hurting us. From a Swedenborgian perspective, examples include envy, greed, malice.

Letting go of passing inclinations is very different from clinging on to them.

"It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." (Matt 15:11)

What comes out of the mouth comes out from the heart - in other words, is appropriated into the will.

"Evil enters the will when it is retained in one's thought, is approved of, and especially when it is acted upon and therefore delighted in." (AC 6204)

It is more likely to be retained in the heart when we believe tempting impulses and darker thoughts to be part of ourselves, for then we ally ourselves more closely with them.

"Because he believes that it begins in himself he takes evil as his own, for his belief causes this to happen." (AC 6324)

Self-examination

Teachers of mindfulness often speak of attention to thoughts and feelings without judging whether they are right or wrong.

This allows us to clearly perceive without ignoring thoughts and feelings actually present with us.

However, it has recently been recognised that what we attend to strengthens neural pathways in the brain and that we can change these pathways by changing where we place our attention: but this takes time and the right sort of effort. Likewise, Swedenborg would point out that only by working alongside our own efforts can the Lord transform us.

Making the effort to observe our own minds is important when it comes to practising what Swedenborg calls self-examination - a crucially important component of repentance.

"They who do not explore the evils of their thought and will, cannot do the work of repentance," (NJHD 164)

Unless we first intentionally focus on and recognise our thoughts and desires for what they are, we cannot then repent and try to change those we customarily entertain that are undesirable.

Peace

In a state of mindfulness, we let go of unhelpful feelings of worry and guilt associated with anxiety and stress and so find calm and related positive feelings. From a Swedenborgian perspective, troubling spirits are no longer present in our minds when we stop identifying with the selfish nature of their desires and thoughts. Then the inflow of good angelic life is not hindered by them and we experience calm and peace.

"There is nothing that a person thinks or wills that can originate within himself. Rather, everything flows into him; goodness and truth flow in from the Lord by way of heaven, thus through the angels present with the person" (AC 5846)

Further reading

Presence of spirits AC 5846-5866

Appropriation DP 78-81

Repentance TCR 528-570

Heavenly peace HH 284-290

Mindfulness "Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World by Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman"