

## “A Spiritual ‘Overview Effect’ for The New Year”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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### Scriptures

Ezekiel 11:18-20

Revelation 22:16-17

### Hymns/Songs

"There Is Sunshine In My Soul Today"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNIDZjKWcuY>

"Kum Ba Yah"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFffX-3wGLc>

"For The Beauty of The Earth" 64 (tune: DIX)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy7t2Uasqe8>

### **Ezekiel 11:18-20**

<sup>8</sup> And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. <sup>19</sup> And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, <sup>20</sup> that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

### **Luke 17:11-19**

#### ***Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers***

<sup>11</sup> On the way to Jerusalem He [Jesus] was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> And as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance <sup>13</sup> and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." <sup>14</sup> When He saw them He said to them, "**Go and show yourselves to the priests.**" And as they went they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; <sup>16</sup> and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus answered, "**Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? <sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?**" <sup>19</sup> And He said to him, "**Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.**"

### **Insight for Worship**

*True Christianity* 43 by Emanuel Swedenborg

*“The essence of love is loving others who are outside oneself, wanting to be one with them, and blessing them from oneself. Two things—love and wisdom—constitute the essence of God; but three things constitute the essence of God’s love: His loving others who are outside of himself, His wanting to be one with them, and His blessing them from Himself. The same three constitute the essence of His wisdom because in God love*

and wisdom are united. It is love that wants those three things, however, and wisdom that brings them about.”

### **SERMON: “A Spiritual ‘Overview Effect’ for The New Year”**

For those of you who have been a long-term Swedenborgian or New Church Christian, for a decade or more, I would imagine that the name the Rev. Dr. George Dole means something to you. George was one of my seminary professors back in the early 1990’s when I was one of his students in Boston, Massachusetts, and I enjoyed knowing and relating with him for 30 years. George died this past year at the age of 89 on June 29, 2021 after suffering a brief bout of pneumonia, brought on after he had an accident. When I heard about his death it hit me like a ton of bricks. I really loved (and still do love) George, and I discovered after he died that subconsciously I had been relying on him as one of my expert Swedenborgian thinkers, theologians and interpreters of New Church wisdom. After George died, I grieved, because for the rest of my life on Earth I won’t have the joy of listening to or reading more of his deep insights about God, life and spiritual growth.

The reason I am mentioning my friend and mentor Dr. George Dole right now, is because I had the good fortune of connecting and relating with George monthly online via Zoom not long before he had his unfortunate fall. He and I were a part of a Non-Violent Communications Group (NVC) online in Zoom during the worst part of the pandemic in late 2020 prior to the vaccinations rolling out. And one of George’s favorite modern day spiritual phenomena he talked about at times during our online group meetings is what we call, “The Overview Effect.”

Have you ever heard of that term before, “The Overview Effect”? For a science-fiction or space junkie like myself, the Overview Effect is a term that’s been a part of our world’s modern day lexicon for decades, ever since the first NASA Gemini and Apollo space missions began blasting off in those huge Saturn-V rockets, launching human beings up into space where for the first time in human history people like you and me were able to look back at our amazingly beautiful and captivating planet Earth from up in space. So, from way up there...248 miles above our normal ground level...which is the altitude needed to achieve a stable orbit flying around our planet, people can get a whole new perspective about what it means to be a human being citizen living very, very fortunately here on Earth.

This morning we began our worship service reading over a new litany I put together this week, made up of actual comments and insights spoken by real life astronauts and space walkers, who were fortunate enough to work on the International Space Station or who have been on one or more space flights that rocketed them into space or landed them on the Moon. One of my favorite Overview Effect quotes, which I did not have room to include it in the litany I constructed, is from Alan Shepard, an Apollo 14 astronaut who said: “When I first looked back at the Earth, standing on the Moon, I cried.”

To describe for you again what the Overview Effect is using our normal jargon, it is a huge, life-altering cognitive and emotional shift deep within the consciousness of many astronauts when they are fortunate to look back upon our world from outer space. Many of these brave space men and women say that they no longer identify with a specific nationality or culture after their minds were transformed by seeing Earth from outer space. Instead, they came to perceive themselves and all citizens of planet Earth as one people, living on one world. Instead of always feeling like they are just one person among 8 billion other people, randomly living their own day-to-day struggles and stressors, now their consciousness has been radically changed—because of having witnessed this “Overview Effect” personally. Their once egotistical and more self-centered mindset has been replaced by a much higher and more spiritual one. The Overview Effect has been documented by numerous astronauts and cosmonauts, who describe what it felt like for them to look upon Earth from this extraordinarily high vantage point. They describe looking at Earth from space first-hand like seeing “A tiny, fragile ball of life hanging in the vast void of space, shielded and nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere.”

From orbit or from distances beyond an Earth planetary orbit we humans cannot see national borderlines or boundaries. All evidence of division and separateness vanish. As a resulting effect from this massive spiritual experience, our common, everyday conflicts, prejudices and that sense of “us vs. them” kinds of thinking melt away. What rises up into prominence is the need to form a united, peaceful planetary society and consciousness—one that works together to protect this “pale, blue dot” we all live and subsist upon. Commander Edgar Mitchell, who is the 6<sup>th</sup> astronaut we sent to the Moon, added these insights: “There was a startling recognition that the nature of the universe was not as I had been taught...I not only saw the connectedness, *I felt it*. I was overwhelmed with the sensation of physically and mentally extending out into the cosmos.”

Using biblical and spiritual language, these fortunate men and women who were blasted off into space, were given a much more overarching ability to marvel and wonder at life itself. They were better able to slow down their intrapsychic feelings and thoughts and allow themselves to be overwhelmed by a very deep-down **GRATITUDE** for all we’ve been given by God upon this “pale, blue dot” in space we call Earth. And that powerful sense of gratitude and oneness they share about is what changed them from having hearts of stone to instead having “hearts of flesh,” as the Prophet Ezekiel wrote. Instead of focusing on so many negatives about life, they were opened up inside to have **“one heart, and a new spirit.”** (Ezekiel 11:19) It’s not that our daily problems and issues are not real, they are real. But, as deeply spiritual human beings living for a time on this living spaceship called Earth, we were born out of God’s Love to regularly return to the spiritual equivalent to what these astronauts share who get to see our world from a much, much higher vantage point.

The story of the 10 lepers in Luke's Gospel this morning is an example of how everyone of us is having "overview effect" moments in life as well. Most of us will not be fortunate enough to see our gloriously beautiful planet Earth from up in space. But still, we can and do have "overview effect" experiences nonetheless. Our Lukan reading today can help us to radically re-imagine how we experience gratitude also. The 9 healed lepers who chose not to return to the Lord and express their heartfelt gratitude probably did feel thankful after their health returned. In fact, I can imagine all of them immediately running to their estranged family members and friends, from whom they had been separated from for years. I can easily picture them embracing their loved ones in joy and thankfulness because of their restored health. They may not have intended to forget to say thanks to the Lord, but they let their emotions take over, causing them to **miss out on a ripe moment to commune with and give thanks to God.** Only 1 out of 10 of those previously leprous peasants remembered to stop and say thank you to God for the generous gift they'd been given.

So, where do you see yourself in this story of the 10 lepers? I can confess that for me it is still easy during the pressing hours of the day to be like those 9 lepers. They are the ones who thought, "This is awesome!" and then they kept on moving. They did not stop to pause and allow for their awe and wonder to more deeply or spiritually sink in and then take a moment and commune with the Lord about it. There is a danger inherent within that approach, when we forget to take time to honor the small and large miracles happening all around us each day. When we make this mistake, we are not allowing ourselves to experience our own spiritual "overview effect" in life.

You see, when we allow ourselves to experience life's wonders and awe, it is then impossible to ignore the dignity inherent in our world around us. From the smallest flower to the largest mammal we may experience each thing as a miraculous gift—a special creation from God's galactic and planetary forces within evolution. From such a spiritual "overview effect," we can deepen in our ability to recognize each human being as an expression of God's creativity, regardless of their nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Our New Church theological perspective tells us that when those 9 lepers did not return to Christ to express their gratitude to Him, Jesus was not upset with them. Rather, He knew that when people choose to miss out on pausing to commune with the Lord in gratitude because of some form of healing we've experienced, we risk becoming indifferent to a genuine sense of unity and solidarity with other people and the Earth.

In closing I ask each one of you listening to or reading my message today, to ask yourself, "In this New Year of 2022, how is the Lord inviting me today and every day to pause long enough to experience my own 'overview effect' in life? Am I missing out on vital moments of awe and wonder in small or large ways, while working to protect and safeguard this awesome and beautiful 'pale, blue dot planet,' which is the only life-sustaining world we've been given?" Amen.