

The Word on Fire: The Amazing Ability to Discover the Loving God in a Book:

Secret – It's More than a Book!

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“The Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush. And so, he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed” Exodus 3:2.

I have often thought of the Arizona Desert in the southwest United States when I read this story because the landscapes are so similar. They are both arid. And they are filled with millions of small tenacious bushes. Bushes that seem completely ordinary. And because of the lack of rain, if the bushes are struck by lightening or exposed to a flame, they burst into the most intense, hot fire consuming them and the environment around them almost immediately. Moses would have known that a fire in desert bushes was likely to be fatal.

The actual bramble that Moses saw almost certainly appeared completely ordinary – just like the millions of other desert brambles around it– yet this bush was unique unlike any other.

The Burning Bush that Moses saw illustrates the internal, sacred power of the Word. But if one looks at the Word from a purely external perspective, it appears to be ordinary - filled with ancient, external stories that might be thought to apply to another age. The stories there are sometimes brutal, there are texts that are difficult to understand with teachings that appear sometimes obscure and at other times contradictory.

The Word, similar to one of millions of bushes in the desert, from an external perspective, can seem common, like any other ancient story. But (of course) it is not.

The Heavenly Doctrines use the imagery of the burning bush to teach us about how the Word is organized and how (when we are receptive) it has far reaching and tremendous impact on a person's life. For Moses, as an example, this was the beginning of the Lord calling him to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

To understand the sacred power of the Word, one must first understand that not only is the Lord in the Word, but that Word is the Lord in His outermost expression. And as the Lord's outermost, it contains infinite truths, each conveying something of the Lord's life and love. This is really wonderful to consider.

As to its inmost, the Word is Divine Love and Wisdom Itself (Divine Being and Divine Expression streaming from the Lord Himself). These being infinite and eternal are at a level above creation and are therefor imperceptible. Yet, the Lord orders His Love and Wisdom and makes it finite as it descends. He allows them to transform into forms that the angels can receive – this descent provides for the structure and existence of the angelic heavens and composes the dimensions of the world where they live their daily lives. As these life forms continue to descend gradually becoming more external, they become forms that are perceptible to the human minds on earth. The descent continues to the most external or outermost manifestation of the Lord, conveying His Love and His wisdom to human beings in the external, literal sense of the Sacred Scriptures – the teachings and stories in the Old and New Testaments.

They are in fact such an external presentation of the Lord's love and wisdom that we don't always easily see His life in the detail of some of the stories. Here

it helpful to think of the obscure parts of the Word as the clothing that covers the Lord. It is also helpful to know that this clothing helps to protect the more internal teachings within the Word from harm.

But the point is the stories are utterly external – so external that they can serve as a means for the Lord to reach out to us and communicate with us when we are in their lowest and worst states of life. These stories are suited to reach us when we find ourselves most worldly and self-absorbed states imaginable. With these stories, we are never beyond the hope of rescue. [It could be said that if the human race never ventured into such selfishness and materialism, the Lord would not have needed to present Himself in such a manner].

But the miracle of this is that there is literally no depth of depravity that is so low that the Lord cannot reach us through some teaching in the Word and speak to us in such a way that offers us a way out. And so there are stories found in the Word that illustrate almost every kind of corruption and selfishness. And the external formats of these stories provide an avenue for the Lord to come to us with His Divine Life while still preserving our freedom while gradually lifting us up.

This reach of Lord is illustrated in a story in the Book of Numbers where the Children of Israel are being attacked by fiery serpents as a punishment for their turning away from the Lord (Numbers 21). Jehovah tells Moses to fashion a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole. The people, when bitten by a snake, could look to at the bronze serpent and find healing.

The Heavenly Doctrines teach that the bronze serpent is symbolic of the power of the Literal Sense of the Word and its ability to help us when we are being hurt by the longings of bodily lusts. The Word redirects us and helps us find healing and relief from these selfish obsessions when we are willing to look to the Lord there for guidance.

Such healing can only be provided by the Lord alone. Unless He could be present through teachings in the Word in outermost, grossly external conditions, He could not lift us out of our sins.

This amazing work of the Lord is explained in the teachings of the New Church. We see how it works by considering our lesson from the first chapter of John where we read: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1)**

The Greek term used for **“Word”** is deeper than its apparent meaning in English. In the original Greek the term is **“Logos”**. This term describes how the Lord reaches us through the teachings found in the Scriptures. The term **“Logos”** means the divine reason, or the rational force that organizes the universe and everything in it. That Greek meaning speaks directly to the Divine forces that are available to us through the Word – forces that are miraculously and constantly drawing us into the Lord’s order.

We are taught in places like the Divine Love and Wisdom that the divinity that flows from the Lord shines like a Sun with its heat and light. This divine light is constantly recreating us (throughout our lives). It works to reform us, increasingly making us human in the image and likeness of the Lord Himself.

The statement at the beginning of John tells us that this humanizing force called **“Logos”** is constantly working to bring us into true ‘order’ flowing into us through our relationship with the Word.

The imagery of the Burning Bush with the fire in the bush illustrates a fire that was constructive rather than destructive. This is descriptive of the ‘Logos’ which brings life rather than taking life. Such a flame is the Divine Love that flows from the perfectly ordered teachings in the Word. And if we are open to it, these teachings with their **“Logos”** change us and cause us to become more human reflecting the true nature of the Lord Himself.

So, while the stories of the Word might look ordinary (like the desert bush), they are **THE** source of unquenchable, eternal, life altering, healing love – a love that is constantly working to change us for the better. [It is absolutely amazing to remember that the Lord is constantly at work through these teachings to reshape our lives?]

But how do we become more receptive of this fire that burns within the stories of the Word? How can we learn to recognize it and allow it to move us and change us for the better?

The answer is that we need to respond to the Word in ways that are in **harmony** with the Lord's wishes if we are to experience its full power. And by contrast, if we approach the word from selfish motive (from a **dissonance** with the Lord), we become increasingly blind to all it offers.

This is explained in the book The White Horse, which states: **“The Word is brought to life for us depending on the amount of life that is in our love and faith. The products of a self-oriented intelligence have no life in them, because nothing good comes from our self-centeredness”** (W.H. 7) (see also AC 1776, 8941 and 8944).

The underlying principle here is that the Lord enters our motives and uses them when they are in harmony with Him. When our motives are good, He joins with them to open our minds allowing us to see what we need there to see to live a heavenly life.

But when we are controlled by selfish and materialistic motives which have no connection with the Lord (because these motives are purely natural) we see nothing of the Word's spiritual nature. The reason for this is that purely natural motives have no relationship with the Lord's spiritual life – therefore they do not recognize that life. It is as the Lord said to Nicodemus: **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit”** (John 3).

To be clear, our ability to see spiritual truth within the Word depends on our willingness to seek guidance to live a heavenly life, for that motive brings us into contact with the Lord's gifts of Love and Wisdom.

This is sometimes mistakenly taken to mean that the literal sense of the Word with its teachings is of **no importance** to our spiritual development – that it is only the internal 'spiritual sense' that we need to pay attention to. The idea is that the natural principals found in the Word don't apply in heaven.

But this is not true. We are supposed to think of the Spiritual sense of the Word as being grounded in the teachings and stories that we find in the literal sense of the Old and New Testaments – not separate from them. This is especially true in the clear statements of truth such as the Ten Commandments and many of the open teachings of the Lord recorded in the New Testament.

The book Divine Love and Wisdom states this with utmost clarity. We read: **“Divine Love wishes to save all people, but it can only do so through Divine Wisdom, and Divine Wisdom encompasses all the laws by which salvation is made possible. Love cannot transcend those laws since Divine Love and Divine Wisdom are One and operate in union”** (DLW 37).

The goal is enlightenment: that our internal, spiritual mind is opened and light shines from within illuminating our external thoughts and experience. This light bathes our understanding of the teachings of the Word. It allows us to understand the literal sense in the light of heavenly light – This light allows us to understand external truths and see how they support internal principles.

Recall our lesson from the Arcana Caelestia stating that the Word **“is so marvelous that there is nothing that is more marvelous”** (AC 10634). The Word is a book that is sacred and 'marvelous' because it burns with the Lord's Divine Love for saving each of us. When we read the Word for the purposes of living a heavenly life, we are connecting with the Lord Himself. It is, in fact a

connection that extends through the heavens, and one that that actually interacts with the angels in heaven.

This an incredible concept. The Word is the living link between the Lord, heaven and earth. A true understanding of the Word inserts us into one all-encompassing community with the Lord together with all the angels who reside in heaven. We are therefor never alone when we are reading the Word. The angels are with us, transmitting the Lord's love and faith into our hearts and minds.

Think of the strength, hope and healing in our states of need that is quietly provided by this community through this connection. Therefore, let us all pray that the Word be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths. (Psalm 119: 105)

Amen.

Lessons:

Exodus: 3:1-10

John 1:1-5

Arcana Caelestia 10634 (portions)