

The Use of the Senses

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First comes the shock of new sensations—the first breath—a cry. A new individual is born, responding to the Lord’s love, but also responding to the natural world of experience. From this time on, the newborn acts as if from self, because the baby experiences life in two worlds. The inflow of affections and delights from heaven meet sense experiences within the infant mind. An eternal human character begins to form, as heaven brings life to natural sensations. The Lord stirs affections from within even as the newborn experiences the world with all five senses.

It is useful for parents to consider the part that sense experience plays in building an angel. We learn from the Writings that Divine order finds a resting-place in external sensations. The whole eternal character of a person rests upon the internal memory of experiences here in the world. A person’s eternal use is defined by those experiences which have been remembered because they were linked to the individual’s delights. Upon the basis of delightful experience, each unique spirit grows and progresses to eternity.

The Writings teach that “mother’s milk denotes the truth of first innocence” (*Arcana Coelestia* 9301). The image of a mother fondling and caring for her baby is a picture of deep affections in an age-old experience which is wonderfully renewed in each generation. Remains—heavenly affections vital to the life of any human being—are implanted during such sense experiences.

The Lord in Providence is watching over the creation of remains. Countless states of affection and delight are given to our children. The sensations they experience can have far-reaching spiritual consequences. Many of these experiences are the result of *our* choices, not theirs alone. For this reason it is important that parents consider the basic truth that delights and affections from heaven flow into ultimate sense experiences.

In the light of this truth let us look briefly at each of the senses and their correspondences. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 4404 for a summary.)

The **sense of smell** corresponds to perception (*True Christian Religion* 569: 5, *et al*). Our favorite smells give us a sense of inspiration akin to that which comes with a clear sight of truth. Flowers remind us of shared states, of states of mutual happiness, or of the affectionate support of friends that flowers can bring at a time of trial or death. If we stay in a keenly elevated perception for a prolonged time, the state can become almost “heady”, as from a pungent odor. A first perception which kindles our appetite to learn more is like the mouth-watering odors of wholesome foods. When you encourage your children to notice different odors, you are forming a basis in their experience for what perception can mean in spiritual life.

The **sense of taste** corresponds to the appetite or affection for knowing and learning. I do not say that we should turn our choice of what to eat at every meal into a spiritual decision. Yet our attitude toward exploring the wonderful varieties of flavors which the Lord has created can effect our whole attitude toward individual tastes—not just the “eat your spinach” atmosphere at the

table in future years. Cultivating the sense of taste can even become a basic plane for understanding the variety of goods and truths we find in human society.

There are times when we must tolerate the “spinach” people with whom we live because they are good for us. But a balanced diet of friendship, a balanced diet of truth and good, is what we all should seek. Even the affectional remains of de light a child has experienced in food and drink can effect, for example, his or her later reception and understanding of the Holy Supper. Understanding what appetite is, is an ultimate illustration of what the affection for truth can be in our lives. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1480: e).

Hearing is not fully developed in the newborn (although one of our children at a week old would stop violent, hungry crying when a music box was played). Lullabies can have a soothing gentleness, even from parents who would protest that they cannot sing. Hearing corresponds to obedience (*Arcana Coelestia* 3684). Response to sounds with delight and love is the beginning of response to the commands of the Lord’s Word, the ultimate beginning of obedience.

Melody, birdsong, rhythm—yes, even the thumping beat of rocking the crib or head banging at 3 a.m., unison and harmony, voices speaking recitations and prayers together, nursery rhymes, musical instruments, loud shouts, gentle consolations—all these form the world of sound through which we can help pattern the tender affections our infants feel. These experiences are an affectional preparation for the time when the Lord’s Word fills our hearts to respond “All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do and hear.”

It is fascinating to watch babies learn to reach, to grasp, and to explore the world around them. The **sense of touch** corresponds to the affection of good (*Arcana Coelestia* 4404: e). We all know how important the sense of touch is in relation to Conjugal Love. The human hand gives us power to perform uses, but it also enables us to convey affections from our hearts. When we caress or spank children, when we urge them to smooth a soft coat, to dangle their feet in a flowing stream, affections are stirred. Yet the very phrase, “Don’t touch that!” indicates our control of these affectional experiences.

On the other hand, our complex and opulent society is very prone to deprive its children of a deep affection attached to a few treasured belongings. We tend to give our children so many things that the sense impressions must come to them like a traffic jam; certainly their play areas look like one. The security of what is familiar is important, even if it is a “Linus” blanket. Personally, and by inference from doctrine, I feel there is real value in simplicity, particularly in the early years, but also throughout childhood and youth, and even into adult life. The long-range affectional effects of what young children have around them to touch can be very powerful throughout life.

Sight corresponds to learning truth (*Arcana Coelestia* 896). All truth comes from the Lord with indefinite variety according to the receptacle’s reflection of it. The world of color and our response to it is one example. I had an art teacher once who used to say over and over, “In order to draw you must first learn to see. Look at what you are drawing, Jungé.” Over and over he would stress that to actually see, apart from preconceptions, takes practice and time. No matter what we do, we must first take in sense experiences from the world around us. Look, taste, smell,

listen, feel—then we can respond to the life the Lord gives us from within. To see truth, taste and perceive an affection for it, hear and obey it, and so learn to *feel* an affection for good: this is the universal pattern of internal response.

Both the sciences and the arts draw upon sense experiences. In fact, all human learning does. Nuclear physicists, for example, come from people who have experienced nature's wonders and been moved to want to explore them deeply, who have learned to be curious, to reach out even if they get stung, later to examine nature with a magnifying glass, or even an electron microscope. There are no limits to the expansion of a person's sense experience. But the delights that drive a human being toward a quest for understanding are born in childhood—on nature walks, in fairy gardens of moss and rocks, through lullabies and stories, tasting and smelling honeysuckle, petting a kitten.

Natural experience, then, is the basis for all natural and spiritual life. Through sense experiences the unique affections of truth and good are born and defined in our lives. But these experiences will be disjoined and meaningless unless the Lord enters into them through the Word. Nature is important only because it is the Lord's creation.

The experience of life itself has value as a gift from God. You can lead your children to the fullest breadth of experience, but if you do not teach them where their experiences come from and why they are important, you have given nothing of permanent value.

We cannot learn about the Lord from nature alone. We cannot find Him or discover Him in our experiences, unless we are led to see Him in those experiences through the Word. The Word must become an integral part of a child's experience. This happens in two ways. Informally, we teach our children that the Lord made everything, that His Providence leads us in every detail of life, and that we obey His Commandments because He asks us to. Through this teaching, children come to sense the intimate presence of the Lord in creating and sustaining humanity. But this is not enough.

Children must also be taught about our spiritual responsibilities to the Lord through formal worship—through regular time set aside to learn about Him, to acknowledge Him, to bow before Him in prayer, and later to read and study the Word for themselves. It is not enough for us to suppose that the school will interpret our children's experiences for them and teach them in science, history, art, etc.

We must talk with them, not sanctimoniously, but naturally, about the Lord in their lives and in ours. Nor are we really leading our children to recognize that the only true way to learn of the Lord is through reading the Word unless, from their experience, they see and hear us read the Word and worship our Heavenly Father.

Nevertheless, the very real power of sense experiences can be used in our church services and in family worship.

As we plan our family worship let us make it as rich in sensation as we possibly can. Let the children prepare and light the candles. Let them hear music. As we teach the stories to them, let

them imagine the sounds such as cymbals, shouting, and trumpets as the Children of Israel marched around Jericho. Help your children imagine the odor of incense or of sacrifices roasting upon the altar. Help them picture the taste of whole wheat bread or figs. Let them feel what it would be like to make bricks from clay as the Children of Israel did. Show them pictures of the stories you read. Make the Word a living experience for your children.

It is not so difficult for any of us to teach the Word in a way that is delightful to little children. Looking for the simple order of nature; exploring the variety of experience, yet seeing the oneness of the Creator who made it all; seeking to let every detail of the Word come alive for ourselves and the whole family: these are not really difficult tasks. Life is not a superficial experience.

When we reach out with love to guide our children to see and love our Heavenly Father, experience is raised out of the superficial. For then love dwells within every sense impression and gives it life. This is what the Lord wishes for all mankind, young and old, that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.