

A NEW SPIRITUALITY

No. 12 October 2006

Heaven Within

There is another world. Life is not all surface. Our thoughts and feelings move in a real world that is not bound by the physical world and that death cannot destroy. Heaven is not a place beyond the clouds. It is closer to us than that. We live in it here already. Its reality is within. It is also all around us in the goodness within other people and within the angels who surround us. Angels are our loved ones who have gone before us. They are not a special creation but the spirits of people who have passed over into the world of the spirit and are being continually perfected. As God's messengers (which is what the name angel really means) they are channels through whom his love is passed on, his will done, and his truth expressed. This does not mean that God lives somewhere apart and at a distance from us. He is near to us as life itself, living, breathing and moving within us. The Spirit of God is omnipresent which means he is everywhere. His Spirit dwells within the soul of every person and his presence inspires every good, just and loving action. The face of God can be seen all around us in the faces of all people through whom his love is manifested. We are God's hands and feet. He works through us to reach one another with his love. As we open up to God's love and channel it into the world, shunning all those thoughts, intentions and actions that would stand in its way, God prepares us to become angels ourselves. This is the theme for this issue.



Heaven is granted only to those who know the way to it and walk in that way.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

The Illusion of Hiding from God

Donald Rose

Can you remember the first time you did something wrong and wanted to hide? Maybe you sought the refuge of your bedroom and concealed yourself behind the bed or even hid yourself under the covers. One illusion is that you will not be discovered. Another we will mention in a moment.

This is a recurrent theme in holy scripture and in human lives. Adam and Eve, according to the story, hid themselves from the Lord God.

And the voice of God gently asked, "Where are you?" "I was afraid," said Adam, "and I hid myself."

It was from "the presence of the Lord" that they sought to hide. The same was true of the famous Jonah. He fled from the presence of the Lord by boarding a ship and sailing away. Sailing away from God? The Psalmist put it into words, "Where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there ...".

Even there, what?" this brings us to the other illusion. God's hand is not stretched out to punish you. According to the Psalm, his hand is extended to lead and "to hold" you. Does the child fleeing from his mother think it is in his self-interest to get away from her arms? What hope could the child have if it could get away from the parental embrace?

The more you understand the nature of God, the less you will want to hide from his presence. In fact, you may come gradually to see that he actually is your

refuge, and, so to speak, your hiding place. Just read Psalm 91 and take in the pervading feeling of protection. "He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you shall take refuge." Or Psalm 27, "He shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret place of his tabernacle he shall hide me."

But what about the things you have done wrong and of which you are ashamed? Would you attempt to hide them from God? That's absurd.

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Speaking to God requires total honesty. "I acknowledge my sin to you and my iniquity I have not hidden. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" (Psalm 32).

People do manage in this world to keep something deeply secret. Will this become open and clear in the life to come? The gospel says that covered and hidden things will be made known, and whispered secrets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

A confirmation of this comes from Emanuel Swedenborg, who says that he was allowed to learn some of the things that take place after we die. He says that the lies of hypocrites are indeed exposed, and crimes done in secret and undetected in this world will be solved (Heaven and Hell). There is no way to conceal things in the life to come.

The runaway prodigal son resolved to turn his life around. "Father I have sinned against heaven and before you." his father saw him even at a distance, brought him to the right path, and welcomed him home.



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Editorial Swedenborg

Many of you will be picking up this paper for the first time from our booth at the Visionary Living Show (Auckland Show Grounds, 3 - 5 November) and are perhaps wondering who this Swedenborg is. Emanuel Swedenborg was an eighteenth century scientist who had a spiritual experience in which he was called by God to write about things he would be shown in the spiritual world. His experiences in the spiritual realm lasted many years (the rest of his life), over which time he wrote many books. His book Heaven and Hell is probably his best known and is the most detailed account of the life hereafter ever to be written. It describes the process of dying; the life of the angels; what happens to children when they die and much more. His other books cover a range of subjects, his biggest work being the Arcana Coelestia or Heavenly Secrets, which gives a detailed explanation of the inner meaning of the first two books of the Bible, using the science of correspondences known to the ancients.

The purpose of the theology given to Swedenborg is twofold. Firstly, it is to inform and to give hope to people with regard to the life after death and the future of the human race. Secondly, it is to give us a way to become angels in the hereafter. Knowing about the life after death is one thing. Preparing for angelhood is what our life here is all about. This is the crux of Swedenborg's writing. We are all born with the potential to become angels. The process of becoming an angel is a lifelong one of overcoming the negative traits within us and consciously choosing the good. The life of becoming an angel is one of being open with God about the wrong we have done and endeavouring to turn ourselves around. However, it must come with an acknowledgement that we have no life of our own and that it is God who does the work of making the changes in us and all the good that we do is his working through us.

Every person is somewhere on the path to angelhood. We were all born for heaven. It is up to us to choose to cooperate with the Divine and become the people we were created to be. This is what the Swedenborg Centre for Spiritual Development stands for. We have books and courses designed to help you along your spiritual path. Please let us know how we can help.

Jenny



The Arrivals **Naomi Gladish Smith**

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Light in My Darkness **Helen Keller**

Her spiritual autobiography. Explains how the Writings of Swedenborg were her greatest incentive to overcome her limitations.

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Angels of Heaven and Earth

Rachel Rivers

One of the hardest things I know to do is to live out the simple truth of the ninety-third Psalm: to let ourselves



Actually, it is only recently in human history that there has been a widespread *doubt* about the existence of angels. The

hear the mighty roar of God's love and truth in the silent depths of our lives. The purpose of spirituality is to help us remember God, and to connect us with this loving heartbeat of the universe. In life we are meant to bring heaven to earth, opening ourselves in such a way that we allow God's love and joy to pour into the very cells and molecules of our being, and into our world. It is this linking of the spiritual with the physical that truly brings us to life.

Bible has hundreds of stories about angels being messengers of God. And the Writings of Swedenborg have a lot to say about angels and the role they play in helping to connect heaven and earth.

Angels are with us all the time. Most often we are not aware of their presence or their influence. They are usually subtle and very respectful of our freedom and our sense of independence. They can bring thoughts to our

Heaven is a spiritual reality that is present within us and in our world now. The spiritual is the energy, the essence, that animates life. It infuses the physical world. The physical world is like a shell, a container for the nectar of life. This nectar is heaven.

While there are many forces at work in the world trying to drag us down, get us discouraged, make us cynical and hopeless, there are also angelic beings, messengers from God, who are with us always.

mind, but it is up to us what we do with those thoughts. Usually, angels work undetected.

Heaven is us at our best. It is being human and alive totally from God - that is, totally from the purest of love and the deepest of truth. It is complete joy and peace. While on earth, we are subject to very positive, heavenly influences, to very negative, hellish influences, and to everything in between. It is up to us to sort out what's what. We are each capable of being a heaven in miniature. We can each bring to earth a unique aspect of heaven that no one else can.

Sometimes, though, the messages we get from angels are more startling. When I was in my early twenties I was driving my motorcycle down highway 101 from Santa Rosa to Petaluma one evening. I was in the left lane, going about sixty miles an hour. All of a sudden I got a very uneasy feeling. I slowed down

and moved into the right-hand lane. I still felt ill at ease, and I found myself slowing down even more and moving into the breakdown lane. And then my front tire blew. Now, since a motorcycle only has two tires, for one of them to go is bad news. Even traveling as slowly as I was at this point, I still had trouble holding the bike up until I was able to come to a complete stop. Traveling down the highway at sixty miles an hour, I wouldn't have had a chance.

And we have help. While there are many forces at work in the world trying to drag us down, get us discouraged, make us cynical and hopeless, there are also angelic beings, messengers from God, who are with us always. They are here to help us remember heaven: to help us get in touch with our souls again. They are here to help us hear God's voice; to help us bring heaven to earth.

Someone might say that the tire was starting to go before it blew, and that the motorcycle started to handle differently, giving me a clue that something was wrong. Someone else might say that it was coincidence - that I just happened to feel uncomfortable, slowed way down, and then the tire happened to blow. We tend to see things as fitting within our mode of

Is it possible that there really are angels?

belief. How I see it is that God was speaking to me, and in my heart I heard the message. As I see it, the message was carried by an angel.

I was quite shaken up, standing in the breakdown lane with my lame motorcycle. And I wasn't there more than two minutes before an angel appeared to me. He was driving a blue pickup truck, and he pulled over in front of me. Before I knew it, my bike and I were in his truck heading for the nearest repair shop.

Angels take many forms. Some might say the angel driving the truck was really just a kind, thoughtful person doing a good deed. But I say that a kind, thoughtful person doing a good deed *is* an angel, working on bringing heaven to earth.

All goodness comes from God, and as much as we participate in that goodness, we are angels. Swedenborg writes in his book *Heaven and Hell*, "To the extent that people accept what is good and true from God, they are angels and are heaven. . . . For the measure of their acceptance is the measure of their involvement in love and faith, and in the light of intelligence and wisdom - and also the measure of their resultant heavenly joy." To be an angel, bringing heaven to earth, is a true joy.

Angels, then, are spiritual beings who live in heaven. We are angels too, to the extent that we let in and express heavenly life. But we have something that pure angels don't have: a

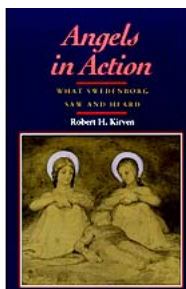
presence not only in the spiritual world, but in this physical world at the same time. We hold dual citizenship in the spiritual and natural worlds. Angels generally communicate with us through our more inward elements - our thoughts and our feelings. They are also very often present in our dreams. It is up to us to bring the gifts of God from the angels all the way out into the physical world - into our daily lives.

We are angels too, to the extent that we let in and express heavenly life

God is not an absentee landlord who created us and then abandoned us, though it can certainly feel that way at times. With a listening heart, and by seeking to attune ourselves to what is heavenly, we can find ourselves walking in the fields of heaven right here on earth, with the angels at our side.

When we are open to heaven in this way, we feel joy and peace even in the midst of chaos. Our senses are attuned to the exquisiteness of our world: the touch of a hand, the innocence of a child playing, the glory of a ray of sunlight, the music of rain. And we feel love and compassion for all that is. We feel blessed. There is a sense that everything is okay - not meaning that it is all as we wish it to be, but that somehow it is okay, and we are in good hands. I hope you can each remember such delicious tastes of heaven. And I wish for you many more.

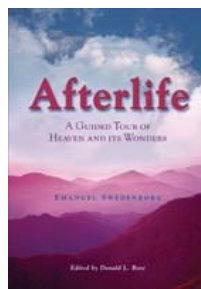
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Entering Angelhood

Emanuel Swedenborg was given the experience of dying so that he could record it. The following is an excerpt from his book Heaven and Hell:

As to my bodily senses I was brought into a state of insensibility, nearly into the state of the dying, but with my interior life and thought remaining unimpaired, so that I could feel and remember the things that happened to me, and that happen to those who are resuscitated into the spiritual world.

I felt that the respiration of my body was almost completely taken away, but the interior respiration of my spirit went on in connection with a slight and tacit respiration of my body. Then at first a communication of the beat of my heart with the celestial kingdom was established, because that kingdom corresponds to the heart in a person. Angels from that kingdom were seen, some at a distance, and two sitting near my head. Thus all my own affection was taken away although thought and perception continued. I was in this state for some hours.

Then the spirits who were around me withdrew, supposing that I was dead and an aromatic odour like that of an embalmed body was perceived since, when the celestial angels are present, everything to do with the corpse is perceived as aromatic, and when spirits sense this they cannot approach. In this way lower order spirits are kept away from a person's spirit when he is being introduced into that world.

The angels seated at my head were silent, merely sharing their thoughts with mine. When their thoughts are received, these angels know that the spirit of a person is in a state in which it can be drawn out of the body. This sharing of their thoughts was effected by looking into my face, for in this way thoughts are shared in heaven. As thinking and perception remained with me so that I would be able to know and remember how resuscitation is effected, I perceived that the angels first tried to ascertain what my thinking was, whether it was like the thinking of those who are dying, which is usually about eternal life, also that they wished to keep my mind in those thoughts. Afterwards, I was told that the spirit of a person is held in its last thought when the body expires, until it returns to the thoughts that are from its general or ruling affection in the world.

In particular I was permitted to see and feel that there

was a pulling and drawing forth, as it were, of the interiors of my mind, thus of my spirit, from the body and I was told that this is from the Lord, and that the resurrection is effected in this way.

The following was recorded by Swedenborg in his book Apocalypse Revealed to explain how a person entering angelhood finds their heavenly home after death:

Everyone who is prepared for heaven, which happens in the world of spirits, midway between heaven and hell, feel a strong desire for heaven after a period of time and presently see a way leading to some community of heaven. They enter this way and go up. At the top there is a gate, and a guardian there. The guardian opens the gate and they go in. Then an examiner meets them, who tells them from the governor, that they may go farther in and see whether there are any houses which they can recognise as their own, since there is a new house for every novice angel. If they find it, they send back word and stay there but if they do not, they come back and say they have not seen their home. They are then examined by a wise person there, to see whether the light that is in them agrees with the light of that community, and especially whether the heat does. This is because the light of heaven in its essence is divine truth, and the heat of heaven in its essence is divine goodness, both proceeding from the Lord as the sun there. If any other light and any other heat than the light and heat of that community is in them, they are not received, that is, if any other truth and any other goodness is in them. If so they leave there and go along the ways which are opened among the communities in heaven until they find a community which agrees in every respect with their affections, and here they settle. They are here among their own people, as among relations and friends that, because they are in a similar affection, they love from the heart. There they are happy and in deep joy from inner peace since there is in the heat and light of heaven an ineffable joy, which is shared. This is how it is for those who become angels.

This passage goes on to describe how those whose life has not met the criteria of an angel go to another place with others of a similar nature. IK

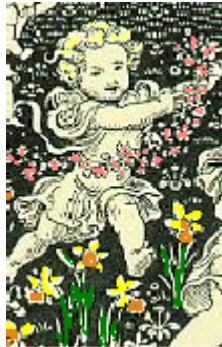


Children in Heaven

The following excerpts from the Writings of Swedenborg describe what happens to children who die:

Children who die are just as much children in the other life. They possess the same childlike mind, the same innocence within their ignorance, the same gentleness in all respects. They are only in beginnings in order to become angels, since children are not angels but do become angels.

As soon as children are revived (which happens immediately after their death), they are taken into heaven and entrusted to angel women who, during their physical life, had loved children tenderly and had also loved God. Because they had in the world loved all children with a motherly tenderness, they accept these as their own. And the children, from their inborn nature, love them as though they were their own mothers. Each woman has as many children as she wants from her spiritual parental affection.



All things are instilled into them by delightful and pleasant means suited to their genius. I have been permitted to see little children most charmingly attired, having garlands of flowers resplendent with most beautiful and heavenly colours twined about their breasts and around their tender arms.


It was shown me what the ideas of little children are when they see objects of any kind. Each and every object seemed to them to be alive and so in the tiniest idea of their thought there is life. And it was perceived that little children on the earth have nearly the same ideas when they are at play, since as yet they do not think as adults do about what is inanimate.

Many may think that young children stay as young children in the next life, and are as young children among the angels. But in fact it is not at all as they suppose. What makes an angel is intelligence and

wisdom. As long as young children do not possess these, though they do indeed live with angels, they themselves are not angels. But as soon as they have become intelligent and wise, they become angels for the first time. Indeed, what has amazed me, they no longer appear as young children, but as adults, since their character is no longer that of a young child, but of a more adult angelic disposition.

People who know nothing about the state of the life after death may think that young children acquire angelic intelligence and wisdom the moment they enter the next life. But I have learned through much experience that this is not so at all. Those who die not long after birth have the minds of young children, almost the same as on earth. Nor is the amount of what they know any greater, since they possess only the potential to know, and from this the potential to have intelligence and from this to be wise. Yet that ability is more perfect because they are not living in the body but are spirits. That this is the mental condition of young children when they first enter heaven I have not only been told but have also been shown.

How little children are taught in heaven will also be briefly told. From their carer they learn to talk. Their earliest speech is simply a sound of affection, which gradually becomes clearer as thoughts enter, since thoughts from feelings are what make all angelic speech. Things that they see which are delightful are first instilled into their affections, which all come from their innocence and, as these things are from a spiritual origin, the things of heaven flow in with them at the same time, and by means of these heavenly things their interior minds are opened. So day by day they become more perfect. When this first stage is completed they are transferred to another heaven, where they are educated by teachers and so the process continues.

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A New Spirituality is a bi-monthly publication of the New Zealand Swedenborg Centre for Spiritual Development, a not-for-profit organisation which exists to promote awareness and appreciation of the theology contained in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg— eighteenth century scientist, philosopher, theologian, and revelator. Subscription is by voluntary donation. Your questions and comments are welcomed.

A New Spirituality

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