

New Age View of Heaven

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According to the old way of thinking, an entry or permit to Heaven is a REWARD, given at death (or to be given at some future Judgment) to those lucky people who have found special favour with God. However there has been a wide range of opinions as to what a person must do to win a visa. Some say he must have lived a good life on earth. Others protest that this has nothing to do with it, that "how we have lived" makes absolutely no difference; we are saved solely by our Faith that Jesus Christ died for us on the cross.

Others say we must have belonged to the right religion or sect, or have had the right kind of Baptism. We have been immensely rich and have endowed churches; or on the contrary, we must have been desperately poor! It's all very confusing. Most of these points of view can apparently be supported by passages from the Bible taken literally, but these passages are not always correctly understood.

Today in this New Age, more and more thinking people are coming to realize that Heaven is not a REWARD or PRIZE for anything we have thought or done on earth. Rather, Heaven is the continuation of a good life, and Hell is the continuation of an evil life, under the liberating conditions of the spiritual world. This earth on which we are now living is a kind of college or training ground preparing us for the life of Heaven. If we make the grade, we automatically pass on into Heaven after the death of the body. To "make the grade" means to develop a heavenly character, if instead we develop a hellish character while here on earth, then naturally we shall slip down into Hell at death. It is as simple as that!

To illustrate the point, think of a college or school on earth - say a medical school. The students are preparing to become doctors. At the end of their course, if they have qualified satisfactorily, they get a medical practice, either as a hospital doctor, or as a G.P., or even perhaps as a Consultant in some specialized field. On the other hand, if they have wasted their time at medical school, going to parties and joining the best clubs and taking their girls around in sports cars, etc. etc., they will flunk their exams and fail to qualify as doctors. Very well. But a successful practitioner does not regard his lucrative job as a "prize or reward" for good work done at medical school! Rather his studies at college were a preparation enabling him to serve his fellowmen in his own chosen field. Moreover, every good doctor goes on continuing his studies until the end.

So by analogy, we can say that admission into Heaven is not a REWARD for a good life on earth, or given to the recipient on account of any of the other qualifications mentioned. When we die and wake up on the other side, no one is going to ask us what church we belonged to, what our beliefs were, whether we were baptised, or even what kind of life we led. The only thing that will matter is what kind of a Person we are, as a result of the life we lived - whether we have developed heavenly values or hellish values (and we shan't even have to be asked that, as it will be shining forth from our faces!)

This earth then, is a school for the training of angels; and no angel exists, or can exist, who has not graduated from this earth or some other earth in the material universe. (There were no angels in existence before the creation of man and are no fallen angels in hell.) What are the qualities which make a man an angel? Jesus defined them very distinctly. All our training boils down to the Two Great Commandments: "Thou shall love the Lord your God, with heart, soul, mind and strength. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself".

There you have the full curriculum for our lifelong course of study in this earth-school. "Love the Lord Love other people; and have a healthy respect for yourself".

What will Heaven be like for those who have made the grade?

Emanuel Swedenborg gives an entertaining account of how some newly arrived spirits from this world were instructed as to what constitutes the joys of Heaven. First they were asked what their own ideas of Heaven were - what they imagined Heaven would be like. Then by a hallucination easy to perform in the

spiritual world, they were allowed to experience their own concepts of heaven, until they found how unsatisfactory they were.

This is what Swedenborg saw. The newly arrived spirits divided themselves into six groups. The first group imagined that heaven consisted of endless festivities like a marriage party on earth, to which the lucky ones were admitted who had found favour with God. The second group opted for delightful social gatherings, with pleasant conversations among interesting people. The third group believed that Heaven consisted of endless banquets, with delicious food and noble wines, followed by games and dancing and music and stage performances – and so on, every day to eternity. The fourth group said that Heaven, of course, was a Paradise and therefore was like the Garden of Eden, as its name implied. They would lie on banks of flowers under wooded bowers, and eat luscious fruit and adorn one another with garlands. The fifth group wanted power, wealth and honour: to be allowed to live in kingly magnificence, ministered to by numerous servants, and allowed to rule vast dominions. The sixth group were church folk, who assumed that Heaven would consist of perpetual worship and glorification of the Lord, singing hymns, praying, joining in colourful processions and listening to eloquent sermons.

(Which of these groups, if any, would you have joined?)

Well as an educational exercise, all these groups of newly arrived spirits were allowed (even forced) to experience what they had imagined Heaven would be like, until they were almost screaming with boredom, or sick with over indulgence. Eventually the angel instructors had pity on them and let them go. It was then explained to all of them that the inhabitants of heaven do indeed participate in all the activities mentioned, but only for short periods and at reasonable intervals, with great variety.

They also have periods of sleep. But their main occupation consists of useful and interesting work. In fact, life in heaven is not so very different from the best features of life on earth (which is not surprising, surprising, considering that life on earth is designed as a preparation for life after death.)

What then, is the actual source of heavenly joy and happiness? There is a special chapter on this in Swedenborg's book "Heaven and its wonders, and Hell from things heard and seen". From this chapter we can gain a lot of useful information on how to obtain true happiness and satisfaction during our lives in this world.

Basically, there must be useful activity serving other people by doing what we are expert at, without thought of reward or recompense, or even acknowledgment. The angels are never happier than when they have some project in hand which will be useful to society and which occupies their whole attention. There are a far greater variety of jobs or employments in the economy of Heaven than there are on earth - including the care of people on earth (the Bible is full of "guardian angels".) There is no unemployment in Heaven! Contrary to the usual opinion, idleness is a curse, not a blessing, and is a characteristic of Hell, not Heaven. The angels express their love to the neighbour by the performance of uses; and since they do all they do on the Lord's behalf, it expresses their love to Him also.

Note that there is telepathic communication in the spiritual world, "each to all, and all to each". So, since everyone in Heaven is perpetually striving to make all the others happy, there is a build up of joy which is always increasing like a chain reaction, until the whole atmosphere is stimulated and rich with it.

I will end with a quote from Swedenborg's book Heaven and Hell No. 413, concerning the joys of Heaven:

"I perceived that the joy and delight of each angel comes as from his heart, diffusing itself very gently through all the inmost fibres and thence into the bundles of fibres, with such an inmost sense of enjoyment that every fibre is as it were nothing but joy and delight. Everything capable of perception and sensation (in the body) seems in like manner to be alive with happiness. Compared with these joys bodily pleasure, as experienced on earth, is as a thick and pungent fog in contrast to a pure and gentle atmosphere. I have noticed that when I wished to transfer my delight to another person, a more interior and fuller delight flowed in to take its place; and the more I desired this, the more it flowed in. This I perceived to be from the Lord."

There is so much more that could be said about the state of angels in Heaven. There are chapters in Swedenborg's book on the spiritual Sun, which is the Lord's first appearance in His finite universe; on Light and Heat there; on the clothes the angels wear; on their speech and their reading and writing; their operations as Guardian Angels with people on this earth; on their states of innocence and peace; and - most important - the question of marriage in Heaven and the pure chaste happiness derived from it. But enough has been said in this brief leaflet to show that, if you and I are to become angels capable of living in the rare and refined atmosphere of Heaven, we shall need a great deal of preparation and training, which has to be undergone in this world. Unless by the time of our death we have learned to "Love the Lord and the Neighbour", we shall scarcely be able to endure, let alone enjoy, the Heavenly way of life.

God bless you and support you in your efforts towards this end.

The following are extracts from Swedenborg's "Heaven and Hell"

312. 5 Many people who have just died, when they have discovered that they are living persons just as they were before, and in a similar state (for our first state after death is like the one we were in on earth, although this changes gradually for us either toward heaven or toward hell), have been moved by a newfound joy at still being alive. They have said they would not have believed it. They were absolutely amazed that they had been in such ignorance and blindness about the state of life after death, all the more so that this is true of people within the church, who could be in more light about such matters than all the rest of the whole world. ¹ Now for the first time they were seeing the reason for this blindness and ignorance, namely, that their outward concerns, their concerns for worldly and bodily matters, preoccupied and filled their minds so completely that they could not be raised into heaven's light and look into ecclesiastical subjects beyond the formalities of doctrine. When bodily and worldly matters are loved as much as they are today, nothing flows in from them but darkness when the mind tries to press further.

54. It can never be said that heaven is outside anyone. It is within; because every angel accepts the heaven that is outside in keeping with the heaven that is within. We can see, then, how mistaken people are who think that getting into heaven is simply a matter of being taken up among the angels, regardless of the quality of their inner life, who believe that heaven is granted merely because of [the Lord's] mercy. On the contrary, unless heaven is within an individual, nothing of the

Angels

61. This is the angelic concept of person, so angels never pay attention to what someone's body is doing, but rather to the intent from which the body is acting. They call this the essential person, together with the intellect to the extent that it is acting in unison with the intent.

In the entire heaven all have one language and, from whatever society they come whether near or remote, they all understand one another.

Language there is not learned but is implanted by nature with every one, for it flows from their very affection and thought. The tones of their speech correspond to their affection and the vocal articulations which are words correspond to the ideas of thought that spring from the affection; and because of this correspondence the speech itself is spiritual.

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494. Since this is what we are like as spirits immediately after our life in the world, our friends and people we had known in the world then recognize us. Spirits perceive who we are not only from our faces and voices but also from the aura of our life when they come near. In the other life, whenever we think about someone, we call up that individual's face in our thought along with many details about her or his life; and when we do this, the other is called to us. Things like this happen in the spiritual world because thoughts are shared there and because space is not what it is in the natural world. This is why as soon as we arrive in the other life, we are all recognized by our friends and relatives and by people we have known in one way

or another. Further, we talk with each other and continue to see each other in keeping with our friendship in the world. I have heard many people who had just come from the world overjoyed to see their friends again, and their friends overjoyed that they had arrived.

It often happens that married partners meet and welcome each other joyfully. They stay together as well, but for a longer or shorter time depending on how happily they had lived together in the world. Ultimately, unless they had been united by real marriage love (which is a union of minds from heavenly love), they separate after having been together for a while.

If the minds of the partners disagreed, however, and if they were inwardly repellent to each other, they break out into open hostility and sometimes actually fight with each other. Still, they are not separated until they enter the second state, which will be described shortly.

366. Marriages in Heaven

Since heaven comes from the human race, which means that there are angels of both sexes there, and since by creation itself woman is for man and man for woman, each for the other, and since this love is inborn in both sexes, it follows that there are marriages in the heavens just as there are on earth. However, the marriages in the heavens are very different from earthly ones. In the following pages I will be explaining how marriages in the heavens do differ from earthly ones and in what respects they agree.

369. Both man and woman are endowed with intellect and volition, but for men intellect tends to take the lead, while for women it is volition that does so; and people are characterized by what is in control. There is no controlling, though, in marriages in the heavens. The volition of the wife actually belongs to the husband and the intellect of the husband belongs to the wife. This is because each wants to intend and think like the other, mutually, that is, and reciprocally. This is how the two are united into one.

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