

On Meditation

A SERMON

"His delight is in the law of Jehovah, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2).

All of us want to have happy, joyful lives, full of goodness and delight. We all want things to go smoothly, and to feel satisfied and fulfilled. However, so often it seems that this is just a dream that will never come true. We may experience fleeting moments or short periods of real happiness and contentment, but what must we do to have lasting and enduring peace?

The Lord's Word is full of good ideas and suggestions of things we can do to have happiness in life: shunning our evils, praying, reading the Word, listening to preachings, singing songs of praise, giving thanks to the Lord, looking for the good in others, using our spiritual talents, being of use to others and many more. Our dream of peace and happiness in life can come true. In fact, this is exactly what the Lord wants our lives to be filled with. It is His dream too. Furthermore, He has the power to make these dreams come true. We don't have the power to acquire happiness for ourselves, but He gives us the power to cooperate with Him, to work with Him, to use His power. He has power over all the evil spirits and hells that try to stop us. He rules over all things. All we need to do is use the power He gives us and the freedom we have from Him to compel ourselves to cooperate with Him.

Today we will look at the quiet activity of meditation, so often given to us by the Lord in His Word as a prescription for healing that results in happiness. We have the examples in today's lesson of Isaac meditating in the field, which means "to meditate in good" (AC 3196), the result being that the Lord gave him a good wife and family. When we meditate on good things, good things happen. When we meditate on evil things, evil things happen. This is a law of spiritual life. We have the example of Isaac's praying for children and receiving them from the Lord. We have Rebekah's inquiring of the Lord about the trouble she was experiencing in her womb, and the Lord's giving her an answer. Isaac and Rebekah are real people who lived in this world just like you and me. Just as the Lord answered their prayers and meditations, so He will answer ours. This is the fact, the truth.

The Lord tells us in His Word that it is a good thing to meditate. In His second coming He tells us that Sunday ought to be a day "for meditating on things related to salvation and eternal life, and for loving our neighbour" (TCR 301). He tells us that a "temple" or church is to be built for "various acts of worship, preaching, instruction and devout meditation to be possible in it" (DLW 190:2).

In the many quotations from the Psalms we read for a lesson, He tells us over and over again to meditate, not just once a week, but daily, saying: *"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day"* (Psalm 119:97).

There are many different forms of meditation, and many different techniques. We need to find the form and technique which are most suited to us. Nevertheless, there is one form of meditation which we all do naturally, and it is this form of mediation which is most often meant when the Lord suggests that we practice meditation on the Word. This type of meditation is simply taking a little time to focus and concentrate our minds on one thing. We do it naturally when we are intent on fixing or repairing something, or when we intensely concentrate on just about anything. This form of meditation is all the Lord is asking us to do.

What does He suggest we meditate on? Most often He tells us to meditate on His Word, His teachings, His laws, His statutes, as we read in our lessons from the Psalms. He tells us to meditate on good things, good feelings, good experiences. This means we ought to meditate on positive things, positive people and positive results for the future, positive dreams. He tells us to meditate on the things He has done for us in the past, on the ways His providence has led us, on the things we see Him doing in the lives of others. He tells us to meditate on the beauty of creation, on the

incredible order He has put into all things of the universe and life. He tells us to meditate on things for which we can be thankful to Him, and for which we can praise Him.

Basically, what the Lord usually means by meditating is to focus intensely and concentrate our minds on something good and/or something true (see DP 296:5). When we focus and concentrate in this way, our meditation is more productive and useful, even as our church or a business is more productive and useful when it is focused and concentrated on one purpose.

When we take time to be in a quiet place to meditate for a little while, what happens is that we become unaware of our bodily sensations, which allows us to rise up out of our natural minds. Our spiritual mind is actually opened, we are taught (see DLW 257), and we begin thinking from love (see DLW 404:3). This is contrasted with how we think when we are in the company of others, when we are thinking in our natural minds from our understanding (see DLW 404:2, DP 61).

At times, when we are in deep and intense meditation on spiritual things, our spirit is actually seen in the spiritual world (see DP 296:5). When this occurs, we are taught that the meditating person's spirit is easily distinguished from other spirits because "he goes about meditating and in silence, not looking at others, and apparently not seeing them. As soon as any spirit speaks to him he vanishes" (HH 438). I wonder what the spirits in the other world think when that happens.

We are warned by the Lord in the Heavenly Doctrines not to spend all our time in intense meditation. Those who renounce the world and live almost solitary lives so that they can escape worldly things and devote themselves to pious meditations "in the other life are of a sad disposition" (HH 360). This is because they meditate in excess and are not performing uses. All genuine happiness comes from performing uses.

Nevertheless, we can be focused and concentrating on one passage of the Word all day long, keeping it in our minds while we do our work, applying it in all the situations in which we find ourselves. While this is a slightly different form of meditation, it still requires concentration and discipline. Keeping one truth or one good in mind all day, or for an entire week, praying about it regularly, is the kind of focus required when we are shunning an evil. Keeping some truth in mind throughout the day is an excellent discipline and habit to form, stretching our mind and bringing us closer to the Lord.

The fact is, meditation has many benefits. We are taught that it stretches the mind, particularly the rational mind (as represented by Isaac; see AC 3196). Just as it is good to stretch our physical body, so also it is good to stretch our mind by concentrating, focusing, and disciplining ourselves. When we meditate on good, good things happen. We can create goodness and happiness in our lives when we use the power the Lord gives us to meditate.

We have seen that through meditation our spiritual minds are opened. Our spiritual mind is in the light of heaven, in the light of the Lord as a spiritual sun. Some, we are told, even see the Lord as a sun, as it were, when they meditate (see TCR 767). This is why some meditation techniques include facing the sun of the natural world. The benefit from having our spiritual minds opened is that people "acquire intelligence from their own meditation," we read, especially when they are "kindled with a love of knowing truths for the sake of truths, thus for the sake of uses" (EU 38). When people meditate on the Word and the teachings of the Lord, whether in intense meditation times or lightly all through the day, for the sake of applying truths in their lives in the uses they perform, their minds are enlightened. With new light they see things in life more clearly. Their darkness, confusion and fears fade away in the light of the spiritual world. We read in the Psalms: "*My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall bring understanding*" (Psalm 49:3). "*I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation*" (Psalm 119:99).

While having more intelligence, wisdom and clarity in life is a good benefit of meditation, an even greater benefit is that the Lord removes evils by means of our meditation. That's right, the Lord removes us from evil loves and evil habits when we practice meditation! Our lives can become easier and struggle-free; we will have more peace and tranquillity when we meditate.

"Withdrawal from evil is effected by the Lord in a thousand most secret ways," we read in Divine Providence. "For instance, the enjoyments of lusts, of which a person knows nothing, are let into his exterior thoughts where they appear in a feeling of pleasure, delight or longing and mingle with his natural and sensual enjoyments. There [in the exterior thoughts] are the means of separation and purification, and the ways of withdrawal and unburdening. The means are chiefly the enjoyments of meditation, thought and reflection on ends that are uses" (DP 296:10, emphasis added).

When we practice meditation, especially on how we can be more useful and good, and also on our purpose in life, not only do we become enlightened from the light of the spiritual world, but the Lord also withdraws evil loves, thoughts and habits from us. In other words, meditation is one of the things we can do to cooperate with the Lord so that He can regenerate us. This is just some of the good news from the Lord in His second coming.

The benefit of practicing meditation is not only that we can be more intelligently enlightened in wisdom, or that the evils and shortcomings which cause all our unhappiness can be removed by the Lord. A real benefit of meditation is that we come into a closer friendship and working relationship with the Lord. We are more closely conjoined with Him in our lives. We are bringing His Word into our lives, which is the same as bringing Him into our lives. We are bringing His love and life into our lives. We begin to have the Lord dwelling within us, and so we also begin to dwell more in the Lord. He becomes an intimate and personal friend to us. Since coming into a closer and closer relationship with the Lord is what life is all about, we can see that the real benefit of practicing meditation is that it leads us to closeness with God.

This opportunity is before us. We have the freedom from the Lord to discipline ourselves. We have instructions from the Lord. We are told the benefits of practicing meditation. We have the power from the Lord to make this change in our lives and to make use of this tool to get closer to Him and to find more peace and happiness in our lives. Make a decision today to make a commitment to yourself and the Lord to begin or increase your concentrated meditation time. Then you will say, as the psalmist did, "*May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in Jehovah*" (Psalm 104:34).

Amen

References to Emanuel Swedenborg's writings:

AC -Arcana Celestia

DLW – Divine Love & Wisdom

DP – Divine Providence

HH – Heaven & Hell

TCR – True Christian Religion