

## **The Relationship between the Spiritual and the Natural Worlds and its Practical Implications for us : Part 1.**

Last week I spoke about the teaching on the spiritual world and the life after death which is given in Swedenborg's theological writings: particularly in his book, "*Heaven and Hell*". Where the name Swedenborg is known and recognised, inevitably it is in connection with this teaching and, with the book mentioned "*Heaven and Hell*", the most widely read of the many he wrote. And I went on in my talk to discuss the question, "Do I need to know about the spiritual world and the life after death when I'm not likely to die soon?"`

We are aware of the fact that many would say they prefer to leave it all until later, or wait until they get there. Some say that it is enough for us to get on with life in this world as it confronts us here and now.

I would like to look at those areas of our lives, where this teaching on the spiritual world and the life after death has obviously practical applications. We tend to think of all things connected with the spiritual world and the life after death as being in the far future. This is not so. It's very much to do with life here and now. There are two very important areas of our lives where this is so. One of these I will look at with you tonight and the other of which I will take up next week.

Often coupled with the tendency I mentioned to postpone thought about the spiritual world and the life after death until much later, if not until we get there, is another tendency to think of the spiritual world as itself being remote, even in terms of distance from this world. We talk about 'going' to heaven, or 'going' to hell as if a journey is involved. Children talk of heaven as being 'up in the sky', and of hell as being down in the bowels of the earth somewhere. But through Swedenborg we come to have a completely different idea. The spiritual world is not remote in terms of distance from this world at all. The thing is that it is all around us. It is in fact another dimension of consciousness. While we are in this world we are conscious only of the things connected with it. We are conscious of the things we can hear and see and feel and touch and taste. We are conscious of the people here, of the scenery, of work to be done; studies to be finished, responsibilities to be met.

But the human mind or spirit is capable of consciousness at a higher level. And when we die we begin to live and sense at that higher level. We withdraw from consciousness at the lower level at which we functioned in this natural world and we enter into consciousness at the deeper, higher level, which then brings us into an awareness of the spiritual world. Already, now, and at this very moment we are in an unconscious association with the spiritual world. As to the interiors of our minds and spirits, of which we have no present awareness, we are in the spiritual world, or the world of spirit, which is what the spiritual world is.

The spiritual world is not something remote and cut off from this world. It's not a place we 'go' to when we die as if in some fanciful way we will be travelling across the sky to get there. I repeat the point: the spiritual world is all around us, and what is important to note is that the two worlds, the spiritual and the natural, are forever interacting, one with the other. Each depends on the other. The one couldn't subsist and exist without the other. Swedenborg wrote of the relationship between the two worlds in this manner, and by way of an analogy. "All things of nature are like sheaths around spiritual things, and like tunics around muscular fibres". (Documents 302). And, describing the interaction between the two worlds, he wrote, "The substances of the natural world from their nature react against the substances of the spiritual world; for in themselves the substances of the natural world are dead, and they are acted on, from the outside by the substances of the spiritual world ... and thus, from their own nature, react." (*Divine Love and Wisdom*, 260). In yet another place, the spiritual world is referred to as the world of causes and the natural world as the world of effects.

The picture is one of the impulses of life continually flowing in from the spiritual world and acting upon, and infilling, all forms of life in this natural world. As we saw a moment ago, both worlds need each other. The one acts and the other reacts. Because we can't see it, touch it, or feel it, to the satisfaction of our natural senses, we can run away with the idea that the spiritual world is something formless and insubstantial.

Not so. Indeed, far from it. Because something does not have physical properties this doesn't mean it isn't real. "It is in the spiritual world", wrote Swedenborg, "exactly as it is in the natural world, namely, as to the lands, hills, and mountains; and in appearance the likeness is so great that there is no difference whatever, and therefore people after death scarcely know other than that they are still living on earth" (*Apocalypse Explained* 304<sup>2</sup>).

I would at this point, like to take up again the relationship which exists between the two worlds, the spiritual and the natural, the spiritual world acting upon the natural world, and talk about the mechanism of that relationship as it affects you and me and people everywhere. We have already noted how it is that we are unconsciously, of course, living in the spiritual world, or part of it. It doesn't seem to be so, but that's exactly how it is. And I say again that this, along with other things already mentioned, brings home to us that the spiritual world and teaching about it is not something in the remote and distant future of little practical relevance, or application to us now. Shifting moods, changes of feelings, and attitudes, inner conflicts, such as we all know and experience, all of these, part of our day to day lives, have their starting point in the interaction of the two worlds, as that interaction affects us.

Every person on earth lives his or her life in the midst of a close association with angelic and also evilly disposed people in the spiritual world. And that this is should not surprise you. While on earth Jesus spoke about the angels present with children in a passage which you probably know well but may not have thought a lot about. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones", He said, referring to children, "'for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven".

Abraham promised his servant whom he was sending to find a wife for his son, Isaac, that "God will send His angel before you". (Genesis 24:7). In the book of Psalms, the care and protection of angels is spoken about as, for example, Psalm 34, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him; and delivers them" (v. 7). In Psalm 91: "Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For He will give His angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways". (vs. 9-11). And in Psalm 35, there is a reference to the activity of evilly disposed associates who try to bring mischief upon us, "Let them be like chaff before the wind", says the Psalmist, "with the angel of the Lord driving them on! Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord pursuing them" (v 5-6).

The mechanism of the relationship existing between the spiritual and the natural worlds, as that relationship affects us, rests on the association just mentioned, angelic and evilly disposed people in the spiritual world conveying the impulses of life to us,

and acting into, awakening, often inflaming our thoughts and affections. That good impulses come to us or that bad and disorderly impulses come to us, is directly due to this association. And the important thing is that we are free to choose between those impulses and ideas. We have free will. The association is so controlled by the Lord that there cannot be an uninvited domination of the one over the other. In the wake of some evil inclinations being fed or inflamed there is counter balancing activity reminding us of more orderly and just ways of behaviour. And caught in the middle, inclined to do something selfish on the one hand, but aware, on the other, that it is not really right, we are free to make a choice and to determine which of the influences and which of our spiritual associates from whom those influences come, is going to triumph.

What we call temptation is nothing other than the contest between these influences, and these associates, we, of course, determining the outcome.

"It is the office of angelic associates to inspire charity and faith, and to observe in what direction the man's delights turn, and in so far as they can, without interfering, with a person's freedom; to moderate them and bend them to good ... when the evilly disposed associates pour in evils and falsities, the angels insinuate truths and goods, which, if not received, are nevertheless, the means of tempering. The evilly disposed associates continually attack and the angels protect, such is the order". (*Arcana Caelestia* 5992).

We all know changes of mood and the memory of people or things which come to mind unexpectedly and when we haven't been thinking of them. We also know how it is that the most unwelcome thoughts and ideas can come to mind without our inviting them.

All of this results from our living our lives in this close association with people of the spiritual world, who, for the most part, are as unconscious of the association as we are. And it is in everyone's interest that it be that way, that it be largely an unconscious association on both sides. It is the use being served by the association which is the important thing, and our awareness of the personalities involved could all too easily obscure or endanger that use.

It should be noted, also, that actual conversation with spiritual associates is possible, yet, and for the reason just given, Swedenborg does not encourage it. Rather does he go to lengths to point out its dangers.

[The Swedenborg Programme – Number 55.](#)

<http://www.swedenborg.com.au>