

### **What Happens When I Die? - Part 3.**

When we die and awaken in the spiritual world we shall neither be in heaven nor in hell. We shall find ourselves in an intermediate region between the two and which is neither one nor the other. For the fact is that we need time to come to terms with ourselves. We need time to come to terms with ourselves as we really are. Here in this world people can so often seem to be what they are not., They can seem to be good when they are evil and they can seem to be evil when in reality they are good. And even they themselves may be deceived and not know. Hence this intermediate region into which after death we come first of all; a place where, in time, our true character will emerge and from which we will. gravitate and take ourselves either to heaven or to hell.

"The world of spirits is neither heaven nor hell but a place or state between the two. It is where we first arrive after death, being in due time either raised into heaven or cast into hell from it depending on our life in this world."

*(Heaven and Hell 421).*

There are in fact three states or phases through which we can expect to pass after death and while in this intermediate region called 'the world of spirits'. At the outset we shall pick up life virtually just as we left it. We shall be very much the same kind of person we were before we died. And if we were accustomed to do so we shall put on the same kinds of masks and pretences. Concealment of inner feelings, thoughts, and desires, at first continues.

"Our first state after death is like our state in this world, since we are then similarly involved in outward concerns. We have similar faces, voices, and character; we lead similar moral and civil lives. This is why it still seems to us as though we were in this world unless we notice things that are out of the ordinary and remember that angels told us we were spirits when we were awakened. So the one life carries on into the other, and death is only a passage." *(Heaven and Hell 493).*

In all cases, however, this lasts only a relatively short period. The law of the spiritual world is that there should be no dissembling or hypocrisy; no seeming to be what we are not; no speaking and acting differently from the way we think and feel. And so it is that in time people unconsciously glide into a state in which the person they inwardly are comes to the surface.

A state when they no longer pretend; a state when the restraints are put on one side, and their basic character and essential nature emerges. "When in this second state, spirits, it is said, become visibly, just what they had been in themselves while in the world. What they then did and said secretly being now made manifest; for now because external things do not restrain them, they speak such things openly, and also try to do them, not being fearful for their reputation as in the world." (*Heaven and Hell* 507). As it is said in the Gospels, "whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and words whispered in hidden places will be proclaimed on the housetops". (Luke 12: 2-3).

It cannot but be that at this stage there is a separating, of the good from the evil, and of the evil from the good. Each desires to get away from the other. This, though, is to be noted. No one sits in judgement of another. People judge themselves. If there are people in hell it is because they have taken themselves there. It is what they have preferred and chosen in the face of every effort which has been made to get them to change. The teaching is that it is granted to every person after death ample means to amend their lives if possible." (Divine Providence 328<sup>9</sup>). And when we think of the Lord and of His love for all people and merciful concern for their happiness and eternal well-being, it could not be otherwise. But those in evil grow weary of the effort and long, for other company.

Many people have an expectation of punishment after death for sin they have committed here and wickedness they have done. In fact no one is punished after death for things done in this world. The Lord entirely forgives the past. But the question is to what extent instances of sin and wickedness have become woven into the fabric of our characters. What determines our eternal destiny is not what we have done in the world but what, it is discovered, we would like to do in the spiritual world, (The two things are intricately related). And this is what becomes apparent in this second state or phase about which I have been speaking.

For the evil, this second state marks their departure from the world of spirits for a life in hell. There is no purpose served in their further remaining there. But for the good there is a third state in which they learn to think like the angels. It is spoken of as a state of 'instruction', for though basically good and unselfish, people can be in ignorance and even in falsity, and their ignorance needs to be enlightened and their falsity discarded.

People, for example imagine heaven and heavenly life to be what it is not, and they have to be taught otherwise. They have perhaps misconceptions about it which need to be corrected. There may be misunderstandings in a number of directions which need to be clarified.

It is not however, perfection which is required of people for entrance into heaven, nor are people in heaven themselves perfect, for those in heaven go on being perfected to eternity. And this is one of the wonders of it. People in heaven are forever growing in their appreciation of what a certain truth or teaching means and is saying to them. New insights are constantly coming to them. Enlightenment is always flowing in. Surprising though it may sound, it is possible for an angel to blunder through ignorance, for angels are still people and are fallible as people are. A person's spiritual growth doesn't stop the moment they reach heaven. Much to the contrary, it goes on being developed. And this is one of the rich and exciting things about it.

And what is also exciting about it is the variety which exists there. Few things are more obvious than how different people are. Isn't this so? Some of us are practical and work well with our hands and others don't. People vary widely in the degree of their interest in things. Each of us has widely different capacities. This is why there are different communities in the heavens, able to absorb the different types there are, and each with a different function to perform. Heaven is not a place of stereotyped personalities and uniform interests. It is a place of tremendous variety, and it is this variety from which stems the beauty and perfection of the whole.

In general there are three heavens or heavenly regions, within which are to be found innumerable communities, and these three reflect the three basic types of good people there are. Swedenborg, spoke of them as the celestial, spiritual and natural heavens. People who are motivated by a deep and ardent love of the Lord are those who find their homes in the celestial heaven. Those who desire to reason out religious concepts, much as they love them, are those who go to the spiritual heaven. And those good people who live well and believe in God, though they do not care greatly about being taught, are in the natural heaven. Everyone goes where it is best for them to be. And, as has been said, every region "offers unlimited mobility and development for the human soul." (*Insights into the Beyond* page 22).

Memory is an amazing faculty upon which everything we ever see, hear or do is impressed and from which, though it may be temporarily forgotten, nothing is lost. In time in the spiritual world our memory of this world, of who we were here and where we came from and what we did will become quiescent. Instead, and should we go to heaven, we shall lose ourselves in service to others and in bringing happiness to those around us. And this, as much as anything, is what distinguishes heaven from life in this world, that people there so forget themselves, because they are so unconcerned about themselves or the impression and impact they are making and are mindful and caring only for the well-being of others.

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