

The findings in *Life After Life* and the Teaching in *Heaven And Hell* Compared.

In the past I have referred to "*Life After Life*" by Dr. Raymond Moody, first published in 1975, and republished many times since then. The book brings together the results of Dr. Moody's research with people who had had near death experiences. He explains that as far back as 1965 his interest had been aroused when a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Virginia revealed that on two occasions he had "died" and been resuscitated and that he remembered and could describe in some detail the things which he had experienced. Several years later and by then a professor himself, Dr. Moody heard about, and began to more actively investigate, the experiences and things said by other people who had similarly, 'died' and been brought back to life to tell the story. The impressive thing was the similarity between what these different people said and described.

"What has amazed me since the beginning of my interest" wrote Dr. Moody, "are the great similarities in the reports, despite the fact that they come from people of highly varied religious, social and educational backgrounds." (page 15). In all, there were some 150 cases investigated, and whilst the description of these near-death experiences do not agree in every detail, a certain, general sequence, emerges. "In fact", wrote Dr. Moody, "the similarities among various reports are so great that one can easily pick out about fifteen separate elements which recur again and again in the mass of narratives I have collected." (page 21.)

We are not going to mention every one of those fifteen elements or go into detail on any one of them. The main common elements are these. At a point of maximum physical distress the person hears himself or herself, pronounced dead. The person is then engulfed with feelings of peace and quiet. Then there are noises, sometimes pleasant and sometimes unpleasant. For some, it was a loud buzzing or whistling sound. For others, it was the beautiful sound of bells. Many people spoke of the sensation concurrent with the noise just spoken of, of travelling rapidly through a dark tunnel. And following this, as was so often the case, was the recollection of floating on high and even looking down on their physical body. The interesting thing here is that though "out of the body"; yet they still possessed - as in one person's words - "an entire body". Next comes the meeting with people, also in this "out of the body" state and presumably living on the spiritual plane; even the recognition of others who had died beforehand, such as relatives and friends.

All who recounted these meetings also recalled the non-verbal communication which took place between them. So many people described an encounter with a being of light from whom emanated indescribable feelings of love and warmth and whom some people spoke of as Jesus, others of "an angel" (page 59). This same being, it seems, causes a rapid, panoramic, and intense review of the person's life. There is then, apparently, a sensation of reaching some kind of border, or limit, indicating - or taken to indicate, that they are to go no further. And a return, or the resuscitation, takes place.

It is no wonder that the book *Life after Life* causes such a sensation and became the bestseller it did. Apart from the light it possibly sheds on the death experience itself, it confirms - or can be taken to confirm - what many people, if not the majority instinctively feel, and that is, that man is far more than a physical being, and that there is in existence both beyond death and beyond time and space. Life it would seem, doesn't abruptly come to an end when we "die". And, what comes afterwards is, apparently, nothing to be frightened of. It's interesting that the people involved in these near-death experiences said that they subsequently looked upon death in an altogether different light and were no longer afraid of it.

Since the book *Life after Life* was published there have been other researchers in this field and publicity given to their findings. But what especially interests us here is the striking parallel which exists between the descriptions of those who had such close encounters with death and what is said and revealed in the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, especially in his book, *Heaven and Hell*. On the one hand we have tantalizingly brief glimpses, apparently, into what life beyond the death of the physical body holds for us. On the other hand, and through Swedenborg we have a most detached and calmly-stated description of life in the spiritual world. And the one so very much seems to bear out the other. (Dr. Moody, it should be noted, was aware of the parallel and mentioned it, among others, in the latter part of his book).

Emanuel Swedenborg (who lived, by the way, between 1688 and 1772) did not come to his awareness of the spiritual world, or of life beyond death, as a result of some near death experience. In his case, he said, his spiritual eyes were opened, and there was a particular purpose or reason behind it all. And whereas in Dr. Moody's book we are reading about people who at best consciously brushed with the spiritual world for only a matter of minutes, Swedenborg wrote of his "intromission" into the spiritual world, often for hours on end, over a period of something like 27 years.

In one of the earliest books of what comprises his theological writings, Swedenborg wrote that,

"of the Lord's divine mercy it has been granted me now for some years to be constantly and uninterruptedly in company with spirits and angels, hearing them speak and in turn speaking with them. In this way it has been granted me to hear and see wonderful things in the other life which have never before come to the knowledge of humanity, nor entered into his idea. I have been instructed in regard to the different kinds of spirits; the state of souls after death; hell, or the lamentable state of the unfaithful; heaven or the blessed state of the faithful, and especially in regard to the doctrine of faith which is acknowledged in the universal heaven." (*Arcana Caelestia* 5).

It was, however, in his book, *Heaven and Hell* that Swedenborg wrote so fully and so comprehensively about the life after death. And it is in this book that we have these striking parallels to what near death experiencers" reported.

You will remember, for example how those people spoke of being, as it were, "engulfed" with feelings of peace and quiet. They reported being in possession of a body as completely human in form and appearance as the physical body from which they had seemed to separate. They spoke of being welcomed by people and of recognising friends and relatives who had pre-deceased them. There was non-verbal communication. And most, you may remember, encountered a being of light who seems to have been instrumental in causing a rapid review of the person's life.

In the book *Heaven and Hell*, Swedenborg wrote very insistently about the ongoing nature of life beyond death, death itself being scarcely more than an 'interruption' along the way. Here are just two of the things said in connection with this point:

When someone's body can no longer perform its functions in the natural world in response to the thoughts and affections of its spirit (which it derives from the spiritual world), then we say that the individual has died. This happens when the lungs' breathing and the heart's systolic motion have ceased. The person, though, has not died at all. We are only separated from the physical nature that was useful to us in the world. The essential person is actually still alive. (*Heaven and Hell* 445).

I can positively declare that as soon as a person dies he is in the next life, living as a spirit among spirits. (*Arcana Caelestia*. 3939:3).

More than that, when a person dies and though they leave behind the material or physical body, they have a body which is so completely human as before. Once again, from the book *Heaven and Hell*; "when we move from the natural world into the spiritual, which happens when we die, we take with us everything that pertains to our character except our earthly body. (*Heaven and Hell* 461). It's like where Paul says there is a natural body and a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:44).

Swedenborg also wrote of an angel, or angels, whose special job it is to welcome newcomers to the spiritual world and who may be the 'being of light' the people spoke about. The teaching he brings us also endorses their reports of non-verbal communication. There again, he showed how it is that when people die they take with them their memory, the contents of which can be brought to mind quite easily. And this would seem to tie in with the rapid and intense review of their life which some near-death experiencers recounted.

Not surprisingly, when we consider how fleeting these encounters with life after death were, there is much which is missing or unclear. For example, it seems to be assumed or thought that what was experienced of life after death in those brief moments is a very real indicator of what life, would always be like. Swedenborg explains, however, that while there is special provision such as makes our early experiences of the spiritual world a pleasant one, yet the state or existence into which we have awakened is in fact, an 'intermediate' one, and that only after a certain time do we move on into heaven or take ourselves to hell.

Another thing is the role which God plays in our resurrection. Not that we see Him. But the point is that He oversees the whole process and calls upon the different resources which He knows we will need at that time.

This indeed highlights what runs throughout all of what Swedenborg wrote about life after death, and this is that it is something to be regarded and appreciated within the context of the Divine order and scheme of things. God create us. And He created us to live in heaven, and to know the happiness that is possible there, to all eternity. We are born into this world for a purpose, and don't just "happen" to die, or "happen" to go on living in the spiritual world afterwards. These are both things which fall within the overall Divine scheme of things. Indeed, very much so.

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