

Swedenborg on Angels

Angels - Their Origin

The most widely held belief about angels is that they are a divinely-created separate race of beings. Not so according to Emanuel Swedenborg who tells us that all angels and spirits are people who began their life in the physical realm and now live in the spiritual dimension after bodily death. In essence, the order of creation is to first allow us the opportunity to freely choose our own responses to situations, others and life generally, which this gross material world permits. Once a general pattern is established, we continue to develop this chosen pathway in the spiritual plane as angels in "Heaven" or selfish spirits in "Hell" (Heaven/Hell are states of being rather than places). Swedenborg is emphatic that each of us is born to become an angel. Anyone, of whatever religion, can reach angelhood if they believe in a Divine creator and try to live in loving harmony with other people in accordance with what they genuinely believe to be true.

Angelic Environment and Work

Angels live in communities with homes, gardens, countryside, places of work, etc. much like we do here except that all aspects of their environment are more beautiful and perfect. Everything seen is an outer reflection of individual and collective inner states. A person's sex remains after death and angels live as married couples either with the partner they truly loved in this world or with one having a deeply complementary nature. They communicate using a universal language (perceptive, verbal and written) which conveys their inmost thoughts and affections. Angels, says Swedenborg, can express in one word what we cannot do in a thousand! Angels are involved in innumerable activities and tasks, all related to ensuring the greatest perfection and happiness for the whole of heaven - no unemployment there! Each angelic community is distinguished by the activity carried out such as divine or civil government, productive occupations or domestic responsibilities. Special functions include caring for young children (all children who die grow up in heaven) and educating newly arrived persons from this world.

Guardian Angels

Another special use is their ministry with each individual in this world protecting us (so far as we allow them) against selfish thoughts and desires coming from the activity of evil spirits by bringing counterbalancing influences leading us to make spiritually healthy choices. We are generally unconscious of this process except when difficult choices trouble our conscience - the tip of the spiritual temptation "iceberg". At least two guardian angels are constantly with us and it is this presence, bringing teaching, healing and comfort, of which we can become directly aware, *but only if that is what is best for our eternal, spiritual welfare.*

What do Angels look like?

Every angel continues to be fully human to eternity and has a body - head, eyes, ears, trunk, arms, legs, hands and feet - of spiritual substances more real and responsive than material substances. Most accounts and pictures of angels express them in the human form, usually more perfect, beautiful and peaceful than mere mortals, supporting Swedenborg's assertion that angels in heaven "*constantly advance to the spring-time of their youth.*" Angels wear clothes that are a perfect representation of their inner qualities, and as their states of love change, so do their clothes.

"Harps and Wings"

The language of sacred scriptures, dreams and visions expresses spiritual realities in a way which is understandable to human experience in this world. The feelings of inner peace and bliss from unselfish service and being useful was best represented to those living in drudgery in earlier times by the creating of sweet and uplifting tones glorifying the Divine ('harps'). Similarly, wings (which only began to be added to paintings of angels after 4th century A.D.) convey a spiritual truth to mortals, held in the constraints of time and space, of an angel's ability to apparently move swiftly from one place to another as a result of a change in their thoughts and feelings.

Angelic Life Now

We do not have to wait until after we die to experience heavenly joy, for Swedenborg writes:

Heavenly love is loving what is good, honest, and fair because it is good, honest and fair, and doing it because of that love. So they have a life of goodness, honesty, and fairness, which is a heavenly life. If we love these things for their own sake and do or live them, we are also loving the Lord above all, because they come from him.

Swedenborg: Heaven and Hell 481

Angels - A History

The last quarter of the 20th century has witnessed a remarkable change in people's willingness to talk more openly about paranormal experiences. The extensive publicity surrounding the Near Death Experience phenomena, to which modern scientific research has given some credence, seems to have "broken the shackles" of society taboos on talking about incidences such as meetings with supernatural beings, communications from spirit guides, clairvoyance, clairsentience, E.S.P. The mostly positive experiences involving rescue in life-threatening situations, bringing unexpected physical healings, creating changes to outlook and direction, etc. have caught the imagination and interest of many others, bringing encouragement to those with a belief in the spiritual dimension.

Cultures throughout history have recorded stories of supernatural beings - "Messengers from the Divine Realm" - within their sacred texts. Angels, Cherubim, Seraphim, Devas, and Orishas are some of the names given to these beings or "shining ones" that guide, help and inspire. Yet, explanations of who and what angels are vary within and between the religious and spiritual traditions.

The term Angel comes from Hebrew and Greek words meaning "a messenger" or "one who is sent". Over the centuries, angels in varying forms have taken a prominent place in religious art and literature. No other author has dealt with angels (and devils, too) at so great a length or in such precise detail than Emanuel Swedenborg. In a massive output of thirty large volumes resulting from experience in the spiritual realm continuously over 27 years, there are more than 7,000 references to angels and angelic life. He addressed what he believed to be many misconceptions about angels that had developed within orthodox Christianity.