

Swedenborg and communication with Spirits.

Recently, and quite out of the blue, I had a phone call from a youngish woman who was interested in contact with spirits, or, as it is called, 'spiritualism'. Did we have meetings or séances, she asked? No, I told her. We don't. In fact we haven't in the past and wouldn't now, or in the future, be having them. But, she replied, Swedenborg spoke of his awareness of the spiritual world and reported countless conversations with people who were by that time living there. I thought you would, she said. We talked for several minutes more and, in the end, sorted it out, I think.

You may remember that in talk number 2 on the subject of 'The Bible and life after death' I spoke of the different things said, especially in the Gospels; things said which are too often overlooked or disregarded but which are surprisingly clear and direct about the life hereafter. Because of the different things we can learn about ongoing life in the spiritual world from it, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, from Luke's Gospel chapter 16, was quoted in full. What suggested the topic for this talk is that at the end of the parable the rich man, by that time in hell, asked that someone be sent from the spiritual world to warn his five brothers, still living, to amend their ways, 'lest' he said, 'they also come into this place of torment'. The request was refused. "Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead'."

I'm talking tonight about communication with spirits, how it is possible, and whether it is advisable or not. I can't but look, also, at the point the lady on the telephone raised with me. Swedenborg was openly aware of the spiritual world for the last twenty-seven years of his life and continually spoke with people living there. If it was alright for him, why isn't it alright for others?

Something which is very real but which, at the same time, we are slow to grasp, is that the spiritual world is not cut off and far away, distant from us, or lost in the universe somewhere. To the contrary, the spiritual world is here and now, all around us. Indeed, it is best described, and most easily thought about, as being - exactly what it is - another dimension of consciousness.

I have a radio at home which, at the flick of a switch not only picks up FM but also short wave broadcasts from overseas. Perhaps you have one as well. The interesting thing is that those radio waves are already in the air but I'm not aware of them until I turn the switch on a radio capable of receiving them. Crude, as that analogy may be, our minds are like such a radio. So long as the switch is turned one way we are conscious only of this world. At death the switch is flicked. We withdraw from consciousness of this world, but awaken to consciousness of the spiritual world. We become conscious of impulses and life forces from the spiritual world always around us but of which we were previously unaware.

When people die we no longer see or hear or touch them. And they in turn are no longer conscious of what is happening here. But it doesn't mean they are lost to us across vast distances. I know of people who have felt the presence of a much-loved partner, for example, though passed on, very close at hand. The two worlds, the spiritual and the natural, are inter-linked, the one with the other. We live our lives both in the presence, and under the guardianship of those who are in the spiritual world far more than we realise. I once went through my Bible Concordance and counted 96 references in the Old Testament alone where the word 'angel', or 'angels', or 'the angel of the Lord', is mentioned. Psalm 34, verse 7, reads, for example, "[The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them.](#)" Then look at Psalm 96, verses 9 to 11: "[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.](#)" And I am reminded of what Jesus said, Matthew chapter 18, verse 10: "[See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.](#)" We have the impression - and there are reasons why it should seem this way - that we live our lives here in this world, as it were, isolated, and quite independent of any spiritual forces playing upon them. But that's not so.

I've said all this to show how communication with people in the spiritual world is possible. The way things are structured makes it possible. We have such close association with people in the spiritual world that it has got to be possible. And there is just this I would add about that association. It's not so much an association with people we know; it's an association brought about by the things we love and think and desire. A 'like attracts like' situation.

Well, possible it is. Whether, however, such communication is advisable or not is another thing. And this is what I now want to look at.

I think the question that needs to be asked here, first of all, is why we should want such communication? Most people would say it's because they want evidence, reassurance or proof. They want to believe in a life hereafter; or they want to believe that someone very close to them is alive despite death. And so they seek out signs. But must there be proof? And furthermore, will proof give faith that has not previously been there?

The answer in both instances is No.

On the day of the resurrection, the first Easter Sunday, the Lord appeared to ten of the twelve disciples then gathered together in the room of a house in Jerusalem. Judas had killed himself. Thomas was absent. When he returned, the others told Thomas what had happened, but he demanded proof. The Lord appeared to them again eight days later and gave Thomas the proof he had asked for. He went on to say, however, "[Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe](#)" (John 20:29). It's far better for us, and we are much stronger people for it, if we can trust the teaching given - whether it is about the existence of God or the reality of the spiritual world - rather than that we go looking for proof first. What is more (and this brings us to the second point) proof by no means establishes, strengthens, or confirms faith in the way people think it will or say it will. It may compel faith for a time. But lasting faith comes from convictions which grow within. That's the first thing which makes communication with spirits inadvisable. But there is another.

Swedenborg shows how it is that there are always spirits willing to respond to overtures from this world, not the best types by any means, who, he wrote, "fabricate and lie... have a passion for inventing things" and skillfully impersonate others. Hence the danger involved. They can play around with people's emotions. Mislead them. And pretend the accuracy of conversations which are just not true. I say again, it's not that communication with spirits isn't possible, and doesn't fleetingly, take place. The warnings apply where it is actively sought after. By now, I guess, you are wondering about Swedenborg. Yes. What about Swedenborg? If there is danger involved, why wasn't it dangerous for him?

Let's be quite clear on this point. Swedenborg never actively sought communication with people in the spiritual world. The first inklings of it came on him uninvited. As time passed he realised his experiences of the spiritual world had a specific purpose, for in no other way could he adequately and effectively carry out his work as a revelator. In effect, therefore, we are looking at two different things. On the one hand we have the Lord permitting something for a specific purpose. On the other hand you have people groping for re-assurance and running the dangers we have just been talking about.

Life takes on a completely different perspective when we realise that here in this world is just the beginning, or first wonderful chapter in it. And the more deeply we become convinced of this, the richer and more fulfilling can life be here.

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