

Swedenborg on Life After Death

The Inescapable Fact

Our birth and living will give way to dying and death at some future time. For most of us, to some degree at least, this is quite confronting due to apparently unanswerable issues such as -

- ▶ *The physical pain factor*
- ▶ *The anguish of separation from loved ones*
- ▶ *Simply ceasing to exist*
- ▶ *The possibility of living in an unknown world or realm to eternity which might be pleasant or equally unpleasant*

All the world's major religions and spiritual movements have beliefs about ongoing life in a spirit world or spiritual dimension. Death rituals of many different kinds - *Rites of Passage* - can be traced right back to the earliest times of humankind. Information offered by religious and spiritual movements on the non-physical dying process and following experience is mostly quite general. Much of it is a symbolic expression of what awaits us rather than the underlying reality. The modern mind tends to need to work with "facts" although, thankfully, some people can hold to a simple trust that doing the right thing now will inevitably bring its own rewards - why worry!

Proving Life After Death?

There is no current scientific proof. Research into the near-death experience has provided a body of collective information about the spirit leaving the body and reaching a transcendental realm threshold. This might be considered evidence but science does offer other plausible explanations. It is probable that there never will be scientific proof. Clearly, any existence after bodily death must be non-physical and beyond the reach of science, (the two realms are separate). Also, if life after death and its nature were somehow proved without doubt, we would be compelled to believe, denying us the freewill to decide about spiritual life, which brings faith and the needed sense of hope. Yet it is a belief strongly, widely and intuitively felt.

What details do we have?

If true, near-death experiences do give some useful insights but they are very limited to an initial stage. Researchers into these experiences have looked for parallels in earlier philosophical writings and found a number which closely correlate, such as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the spiritual writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Others have recorded their experiences in other realms, incorporating astral travel and meetings with spirits there. Still, considerable differences arise between these accounts. The Bible, too, gives some helpful insights, for example Luke 16.

Swedenborg's Uniqueness

Until his mid 50's, Swedenborg was essentially a scientist taking a very methodical and analytical approach to all his studies and work. His other-worldly visions came to him "out of the blue". He did not seek them and somewhat reluctantly accepted the role as a Christian seer. His scientific training stayed with him. What Swedenborg records over a 27 year period of dual mind consciousness ~ being able to experience the spiritual realm while carrying on everyday life here ~ is not simply a factual travel diary. He was able to integrate his physical and spiritual senses into a much greater Divine-centred Cosmology where every individual aspect is part of a greater, purposeful whole. Swedenborg's accounts of life in the spiritual realm are fascinating, yet their real purpose is to provide a framework to understand:

- ♥ *The Divine creative process*
- ♥ *The inter-connectedness between the material and the spiritual*
- ♥ *The spiritual evolution of humankind*
- ♥ *The laws governing our spiritual life*
- ♥ *The reason for our existence*
- ♥ *How to achieve our highest, eternal potential*

Armed with such knowledge, we can set about properly getting our aims and motives more clearly established before leaving this world, when our physical bodies cease functioning.

Swedenborg's Basic Principles

- ★ *We are spiritual people, although for the most part unaware of our active spiritual nature*
- ★ *Existence in a fixed environment gives us free choice over our aims and motives*
- ★ *The basic choices we make here determine the direction of our life in the spiritual dimension*
- ★ *The spiritual realm is a real, substantial environment*
- ★ *Heaven and Hell are essentially states of being which we actually experience now through our own responses to life; there is no fixed time and space as we know it here*
- ★ *The Law of Affinity applies*
- ★ *Everyone in the spiritual realm has previously existed in the material world but now lives there in a spiritual body*
- ★ *We each freely choose the type of life we wish to live there*

Whilst some of these principles differ little to those given in other teachings, in total they provide new concepts on the afterlife.

New Concepts of Transition

The timing and nature of our death generally cannot be predicted. Whenever, and whatever the circumstances, there is:

- ▶ *No sense of pain or discomfort*
- ▶ *We go through a gentle waking process quite soon after physical death being greeted by specially appointed angels*
- ▶ *Surroundings initially reflect our last worldly ones screening the change from our senses*
- ▶ *An earth-life review ensues, allowing us to sort out the mixture of motives behind our actions and determine our actual life's delight ~ either others-centred ("heavenly") or self-centred ("hellish")*
- ▶ *We can then choose how we want to live to eternity; no other judgment occurs*
- ▶ *If we desire to be with those who are others-centred (heavenly), a period of preparatory instruction and experience of truth takes place*

New Concepts of Heaven

- ✧ *A real world with communities, streets, homes, trees, rivers, oceans, governments, etc.*
- ✧ *We all have a unique role - or use - to perform in the spiritual cosmos*
- ✧ *There will be times of recreation and relaxing*
- ✧ *Living in communities with others having similar uses enhances the total happiness*
- ✧ *It is the communities acting collectively which makes heaven perfect as the body's well-being is dependent on the health of its cells and organs*
- ✧ *Progress in heaven is not through upward promotion but in developing our use to its fullest potential - a never-ending possibility*
- ✧ *Partners, friends, etc. meet if they wish to; staying together depends on inner loves*
- ✧ *There are only genuine marriages in heaven. Earthly marriages will continue where couples are growing together. Otherwise spouses will amicably part to seek their eternal partner*
- ✧ *Children who die go directly there; specially appointed angels look after their welfare and development*

New Concepts of Hell

- ▶ *Hell is a reality for those who prefer to live from self-centred desires. They come together in communities with like-minded people*
- ▶ *Such desires are all-consuming and can never be satisfied as all are seeking the same result (the "fire and brimstone" symbolism)*
- ▶ *It is a state allowed from Divine mercy and is not Divine retribution or punishment; yet those there are compelled to serve a use for others*
- ▶ *For those in hell, this is their heaven, freely chosen after constantly giving in to selfishness*

"Once our physical body can no longer function in this world, which happens when the motion of the lungs and the heart stops, we are said to die. However, we do not die but are simply separated from the body which served us in the world. We live on because we are in a spirit, simply crossing over from one world into another."

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