

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I DIE?



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

The Old and New Testaments give us just a few details about what happens when we die. The fact that we pass from this world into the spiritual world is confirmed by the Lord when he talks about people meeting the patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven. In contrast, the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church is full of details. Emanuel Swedenborg, a servant of the Lord, visited with people who had passed from our world into to the world after death, the spiritual world. Under the Lord's direction he recorded his experiences in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church. These accounts give us a vivid picture of what we can expect when we die.

READINGS FROM THE WORD

Do you ever wonder what will happen when you die? If a friend or family member dies, you may wonder what is happening to him. Where are they? What are they doing? Look for answers to these questions in today's readings.

Life Continues After Death

The book of Genesis tells the story of three generations of one family—the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Similar words describe each of their deaths—in this case that of Isaac.

Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years (Genesis 35:28-29).

The ancient people understood that Isaac would see his family again after he died. He would be literally “gathered to his fathers.” And in the New Testament, Jesus refers to this, saying that many will sit down with the patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:10-11).

Both the Old and New Testaments also tell us that the process of resurrection happens about the third day after death. The prophet Hosea wrote:

After two days He will revive us;
on the third day He will raise us up (Hosea 6:2).

And Jesus taught the disciples that:

[He] must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again (Mark 8:31).



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Scripture teaches that when people die they are raised up into the spiritual world within about three days. And there, they will be reunited with family and friends. The Heavenly Doctrine goes further, telling us how people make the transition from this world into the next.

Emanuel Swedenborg Learns About the Spiritual World

Occasionally people have dreams or near-death experiences that help them feel close to the spiritual world. Sometimes these experiences completely change their lives, giving them a renewed sense of purpose and conviction that life will continue after death. In the history of the human race though, only one person has fully experienced the process of death and resurrection without actually dying. This person is Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish scientist, philosopher and theologian. Later in his life (at age 55), the Lord opened Swedenborg's mind to the world of the spirit so that he could learn about life after death, for the purpose of teaching the world about the process of resurrection or resuscitation.

The Resurrection Process

Death occurs when the lungs and heart cease to function and a person's spirit is separated from his or her earthly body. When the body has completely stopped functioning, the Lord resuscitates the person. For rather than dying, a person continues to live in a body composed of spiritual substance (*Heaven and Hell* 445).

After the [spirit is separated from the body], the spirit continues in the body for a short time, but only until the heart's action has completely ceased.... As soon as this motion ceases the person is resuscitated; but this is done by the Lord alone. Resuscitation means the drawing forth of the spirit from the body and its introduction into the spiritual world. This is commonly called the resurrection (*Heaven and Hell* 447).

Waking Up to Eternal Life

When the Lord allowed Swedenborg to experience the process of resuscitation, Swedenborg reported on what happens. First the Lord sends the highest angels to be with a person who has died. These are the angels who love the Lord above all else, and they tenderly care for people who are in the process of dying. They look into the person's face, silently sharing their thoughts. When a person responds by receiving these thoughts, these celestial angels know that the person's spirit is ready to be withdrawn from the physical body.

The angels first try to find out what the spirit's thoughts are. The thoughts of those who are dying are usually about eternal life. They want to keep the spirit's mind in those thoughts (*Heaven and Hell* 249).

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The celestial angels do not leave until the spirit of a person resists their presence. Then spiritual angels come to take their place. These angels appear to roll off a covering from the left eye towards the nose which opens the eye and allows the person, who is now a spirit, to sense a dim heavenly light—like the kind of light we see through our eyelids when we first wake up. Then the person feels like something is being gently rolled off the face, and then he or she passes from natural thought into spiritual thought.

The angels take the greatest care to shield the awakening person from any concept that does not partake of love. Then they tell the individual that he or she is a spirit and they do everything for the newly arrived spirit that they could wish for in that state. They teach the person about the realities of the other life (see *Heaven and Hell* 450).

No matter how a person has died, the Lord ensures that the resurrection process is a gentle transition from life in the natural world to that of the spiritual world.

OPTIONAL READING

The Reality of the Spiritual Body

When a person passes from the natural world into the spiritual, he takes with him everything that belongs to him as a person, except his earthly body. He is in a body as he was in the world that seems no different to him. But his body is then spiritual. He thinks that he is in the same body that he had in the world and does not know that he has died.

Also, a person's spirit enjoys every sense that he enjoyed in the world. He sees, hears and speaks as before. He smells, tastes, and when touched, he feels the touch as before. He also longs, desires, thinks, reflects, loves, and wills as before. And someone who loves studying, reads and writes as before. When a person passes from one life into the other, or from one world into the other it is as if he moves from one place into another. He also carries with him his natural memory, remembering everything that he has heard, seen, read, learned, or thought, in the world from his infancy to the end of his life (see *Heaven and Hell* 461).

And yet there is a great difference between a person's life in the spiritual world and his life in the natural world in regard to his senses and affections. Those in heaven have more exquisite senses, that is, a keener sight and hearing, and also think more wisely than when they were in the world.... This difference in respect to outward senses is like the difference between clear sunshine and dark cloudiness in the world (see *Heaven and Hell* 462).



Focus Points

1. How do we know that the ancient Hebrews expected to see family members who had already died?
2. Looking at the quotations from Hosea 6:2 and Mark 8:31, how many days will it be before a person wakes up in the spiritual world after dying?
3. How do you think you will feel when you wake up in the spiritual world? Do you anticipate feeling different in any way? (See *Heaven and Hell* 461)
4. How can you tell the difference between life in the natural world and life in the spiritual world? Will you be aware of this distinction when you wake up?
5. Give an example of something that you will take with you from the natural world into the spiritual world. What kinds of things will not go with you? (See *Heaven and Hell* 461 in the Optional Reading section.)
6. Will you be able to remember someone or something you love, for example a pet, a person or a favorite pastime, in the spiritual world?

For Further Discussion

7. What determines when you die? (See *Heaven and Hell* 445.) Do current medical practices and modern technology change this? Why or why not?

Activity 1

WAKING UP IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD



Re-enactment Introduction

Emanuel Swedenborg was led by the Lord through the process of dying and waking up in the spiritual world so that people can learn what it will be like. This experience is told several times in the Heavenly Doctrine. This account is adapted for re-enactment from *Heaven and Hell* 445-450. You can read the full account in the book *Heaven and Hell*. You may download these passages at www.heavenlydoctrines.org.

Preparing for the Re-enactment

This activity requires 4-7 people. One person reads the script while others listen and re-enact the resuscitation, taking the parts of the person who is being resuscitated, the angels, and other spirits mentioned. For a small group, people may need to assume several roles. For a larger group, people may need to take turns with various roles.

Resuscitation from the Dead and Entrance into Eternal Life

When someone's body is no longer able to do its work in the natural world...a person is said to die. This takes place when the breathing of the lungs and the beating of the heart stop. But the person does not die. He or she is merely separated from the bodily part that was of use to him in the world. The person himself continues to live....

After the spirit first begins to be separated from the body, the spirit continues in the body for a short time. But only until the heart's action completely stops. This happens in different ways, depending on how someone dies. With some the motion of the heart continues for some time, with others for not so long. As soon as this motion stops the person is resuscitated.... "Resuscitation" means drawing forth the spirit from the body, and introducing it into the spiritual world. This is commonly called "the resurrection."

I have been told how this resuscitation happens and shown it by living experience. The Lord gave me this actual experience so that I might know all about how it happens.

[When a person dies] angels from the celestial kingdom [are present with their spirit], some at a distance, and two sitting near [the spirit's] head....

(I was in this state for some hours.) Then the other spirits that are around go away, thinking that the person is dead.

(I smelled a fragrant odor. When celestial angels are present everything about a spirit who has just left the world smells that way. And when other spirits perceive that they cannot come near. In this way evil spirits are kept away from our spirits when they are being introduced into eternal life.)

WAKING UP IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD (CONTINUED)

The angels sitting at the person's head are silent. They merely share their thoughts with a person. And when their thoughts are received the angels know that the person's spirit is ready to be drawn forth from the body. This sharing of their thoughts is brought about by looking into the face, for in heaven thoughts are shared in this way.

The angels first try to find out what the spirit's thoughts are. The thoughts of those who are dying are usually about eternal life. They want to keep the spirit's mind in those thoughts.

I especially noticed and felt a pulling and drawing forth, as it were, of the inner parts of my mind, thus of my spirit, from the body. I was told that this is from the Lord.

The celestial angels who are with the person that is resuscitated do not withdraw from him or her, because they love every one. But when the spirit comes into such a state that he or she can no longer be with celestial angels, he or she longs to get away from them.

When this takes place angels from the Lord's spiritual kingdom come. Through them the use of light is given. For before this the spirit saw nothing, but merely thought. I was shown how this is done.

The angels appeared to roll off, as it were, a coating from the left eye towards the bridge of the nose. This is to open the eye and enable it to see. This is only an appearance, but to the spirit it really seems to be done.

When the coating seems to have been rolled off, the spirit senses light slightly, but a very dim light, like what we see through our eyelids when we first wake up from sleep. (To me this dim light took on a heavenly color, but I was told afterwards that the color varies.)

Then the spirit feels that something is being gently rolled off from the face. And when this is done spiritual thought is awakened. This rolling off from the face is also an appearance, which represents the spirit's passing from natural thought into spiritual thought.

The angels are extremely careful that only such ideas as savor of love will come out of the person who's being resuscitated.

They now tell the person that he or she is a spirit. When the person has come into the enjoyment of light the spiritual angels render to the new spirit every service he or she can possibly want in that state. And they teach the person about the things of the other life so far as he or she can understand them.

Activity 2

How Would You Live Your Life If...?



“Let him who wishes to be eternally happy know and believe that he will live after death. Let him think of this and keep it in mind, for it is the truth”
(*Arcana Coelestia* 8939:3).

- How does the concept of eternal life affect our life decisions?
- If you did not know about life in heaven, what might you do differently?
- What if you thought that admittance to heaven depended on what church you joined rather than having to do with your behavior and attitudes?

Use the T Chart below to explore the potential impact of eternal life on attitudes toward marriage, education, what constitutes the “good life,” etc.

Concept of Eternal Life	No Concept of Life Beyond Life on Earth



SURPRISE! YOU'RE STILL ALIVE

The Heavenly Doctrine gives numerous first-hand stories about people waking up after death and finding out that they are still alive. Many people are very surprised by this because while they were living in the world, they had no idea that this would happen.

I once saw three spirits newly arrived from the world, who were wandering about, gazing around and asking questions. They were surprised to find that they were still living as human beings, and seeing familiar sights. For they knew that they had departed from the previous, natural, world, and that there they had not believed that they would live as human beings until after the day of the Last Judgment, when they would again be clothed in the flesh and bones they had left in their graves. So to free them of all doubt...they took turns to examine and touch themselves and others, handling objects and finding a thousand proofs that they were just as much human beings as in their previous world, with the one difference that they could see one another in brighter light...that is to say, more perfectly (*Conjugal Love* 44).

Here's how another newcomer expressed his thoughts:

He confessed that he had not believed in a life after death.... "Thinking about it I said, how can souls be corporeal beings? Does not every remnant of a person lie dead in the grave...? If anything of a person should live after death, would it be anything other than something ghostlike? How can a ghost eat and drink...? Where does it get its clothing, housing, food, and so on...? But now that I have seen it all and touched it all with my hands, I have been convinced by my very senses that I am as much a person as I was in the world (*Conjugal Love* 182:7).

Discussion

1. What proof convinced the newcomers that they were alive?
2. Have you discussed the life after death with friends who are not familiar with New Church teachings? What kinds of beliefs do they have about life after death?
3. What facts revealed in the Heavenly Doctrine may surprise people when they awaken after death? (See *Conjugal Love* 182 above.)
4. The full title of the book *Heaven and Hell* is *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen*. Have any of your friends been surprised when you have shared these reports from the spiritual world? How did they react?
5. Burial customs often reflect beliefs about life after death. Ancient Egyptians buried people with many possessions, while others have buried the dead above ground or facing east. What kinds of burial customs or rituals might reflect the new teachings about life after death?

TAKING IT HOME



Here are a variety of activities that can help you bring this lesson into your life.

Ideas for Journal Entries *(choose one)*

Use one of these journal ideas to help you think about life after death.

- ◆ How does the Heavenly Doctrine change what we know about the process of dying?
- ◆ Write about someone you are looking forward to seeing in the spiritual world. This person could be someone you know well, or someone you have never met but would really like to (*e.g.* a grandparent, a great grandparent, a hero from the Word, someone you admire, *etc.*)

For Reflection

- ◆ How might knowledge about eternal life change your daily choices?
- ◆ Think of someone you know who could really benefit from knowing about eternal life—a friend who has recently lost a loved one, a friend who is dying, *etc.*—reflect on what you can share that might bring them comfort.

Words of Hope

Reflect on how these truths could change your perspective on a tough situation. Cut them out and share these words with someone in need.

Eternal Life

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

(Psalm 23:6)

**The death of the body is but
a continuation and also a perfecting of life....**

(Arcana Coelestia 1854)

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.

(John 12:32)

**The Lord is love itself and mercy. He wills to save everyone,
and by His mighty power to draw them towards heaven,
that is towards Himself.**

(Arcana Coelestia 1038)

Further Reading

THE SPIRITUAL BODY

by the Rev. Douglas Taylor

The Lord arranges for us to be awakened two days after death, that *is*, on the *third* day. The first angels to come to us are from the celestial heaven. Then come angels from the spiritual heaven. Finally, good spirits visits us from the natural heaven.

It is important to know that when we wake up in the spiritual world, we are not in heaven or hell. We are in a place in between called “the world of spirits.” The angels and spirits that welcome us do not live there, but come to greet us.

Heavenly societies are on mountains and hills. The societies in hell are in caves and caverns underground. But the world of spirits (which is where every new arrival wakes up) is in a valley beneath the mountains of heaven. In the book of the prophet Joel, the world of spirits is called “the valley of decision.” This is a good name because it *is* a valley of decision. It is where we decide whether we belong in heaven or in hell.

But what do we look like when we wake up in this world of spirits? In a way we look exactly like we do here. We have a body that looks so much like our physical body that many spirits do not realize they are in the spiritual world. They have to be told about it. We have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin that look and feel just like our earthly sense organs. We see, hear, smell and taste things as before. And when we touch things or are touched, we will feel the touch exactly as we do now. We will be in a spiritual body. It will be just as real and just as solid as our physical body. Also, we will look the same age as at the end of our life in this natural world. That gradually changes until we reach the age of a young adult.

People are in complete human forms and shapes in the spiritual world. There are many places in the Word where this is made plain. Take, for example, those verses from the Book of Revelation that we read as our lesson. They tell us that the angel who was speaking to John had feet. “John fell at his feet.” It is also said that the servants of the Lord in the spiritual world “will see His face”—so they must have spiritual eyes. Also, they must have foreheads, because it is said that the Lord’s name will be in their foreheads. Other parts of the spiritual body are mentioned in the Word. In the Lord’s parable about the rich man and Lazarus, it mentions the tongue and the tip of the finger, as well as the eyes. We can also conclude that in the spiritual world they must have ears and mouths because spirits talk to one another.

In the Old Testament we read that King Saul wanted to speak to Samuel who had recently gone into the spiritual world as an old man. Saul saw him as an old man—in other words, in the human form and of the same age as when he died.

In the Old Testament, when an angel appeared to someone on earth, that angel was often mistaken for an earthly person. This shows that angels are in the human form. The angel did not put on a physical body so that the person could see him on earth. No. Instead, the person or prophet who saw the angel had spiritual eyes or ears opened. For a while they were in the spiritual world. They were aware of what was going on in the spiritual world. And each time the person on earth mistook the angel for a man on earth. In Genesis, you can read about two cases when this happened to Abram and Sarai. And in the Book of Judges it happened to Manoah and his wife.

There can be no doubt, then, that after resurrection we will have a spiritual body with all its senses. And when what is spiritual sees or touches what is spiritual, it is exactly the same as what is natural seeing or touching what is natural.

But what do we see in the spiritual world? We see land, sky and a sun with its warmth and light. We see hills, valleys, fields, trees, gardens and houses. There are toys and balls and other things for playing games, as well as books, schools and places where people work. In many ways the spiritual world seems so like this world that at first some spirits do not realize they are there. But slowly, differences appear.

The Lord will arrange for us to have similar surroundings to what we left on earth, and we will be with people similar to those we left behind. Why is this? It is because the Lord is merciful. He does not want anyone waking up in the world of spirits to feel strange and lost. He wants everyone to feel at home.

Lessons: Revelation 22:1-4,8,9; *Heaven and Hell* 461:1, 2