

# A NEW SPIRITUALITY

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## Bless and be Blessed



God's mercy is spoken of many times in the Bible. References to His "tender mercies" occur ten times in the Psalms where they are often coupled with mention of His "lovingkindness." Mercy has been defined as "love grieving" (see the quote from Swedenborg below), and Psalm 145:9 says that "The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works." God is not responsible for the bad things that happen but is reaching out to each of us with love and mercy, inviting us to come to Him so that He can bless us. We, in turn, must pass these blessings on to others in need. We are His hands in this world. In doing His work, we are more blessed.

We can be of help to the angels

We think of the angels watching over us to keep us safe, but we can also be of help to the angels. Find out how in 'Want to Help

Others?- Start with the Angels' on page 2. For things to think about when counting our blessings, see 'Counting His Blessings' on page 3, and for a reflection on the meaning of one of the best known blessings, see 'The Aaronic Blessing' on page 4. If God really is love, can He ever be angry? We explore this on page 6 in 'Is God Angry?'

Read on and may God's blessings be on you.

It is well known that weeping is an expression of grief and love; it is consequently an expression of mercy since mercy is love that is grieving. Divine love therefore is called mercy.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

## Want to Help Others? - Start with the Angels

Norman Heldon



Yes, it's true; we can help the angels. In fact, they need our help and, of course, we need their help. In Swedenborg's book Heaven and Hell we read: "The human race without heaven would be like a chain without a hook, and heaven without the human race would be like a house without a foundation." (No. 304). It is a graphic illustration—picture your own house if its foundations suddenly collapsed. That same number in Heaven and Hell tells us that the outmost form (the last or final thing) of the Divine design is in the human race and, because we are its outmost we are also the basis and foundation on which it rests.

All right, but how do we help the angels? For a start, by reading the Word (Bible). We are told that in the Old and New Testaments, the Word "is in its fullness, holiness and power." That is because the way in which it is written is so that there is a heavenly meaning in every single expression. The Word is written, we are told, by correspondences.

When we read the Word reverently, even if we remain in the literal sense, angels are perceiving the internal or heavenly meaning and so are greatly delighted.

Just a word or two about correspondences, which help us to understand the close relation between the natural and spiritual worlds. The origin of everything in this world is from the spiritual world—all that is good and useful from heaven and what is useless and evil from hell.

We know that a lamb means innocence; it corresponds to innocence. Innocence is the cause of the lamb's creation. So with all other things—mountains, rivers, trees, flowers, rocks, animals, birds, and the wonders of the human mind and body; all come into existence because the uses they perform correspond to heavenly uses. This is the reason why the Word could be written in correspondential language. In some ways it is like poetry, for the best poems also have a deeper meaning so that we need to study them and think deeply to uncover that meaning. The Word, however, far excels anything people can write, for it contains Divine Wisdom, Infinite Wisdom.

When we read the Word reverently, even if we remain in the literal sense, angels are perceiving the internal or heavenly meaning and so are greatly delighted. What is wonderful is that this happens especially when little children read the Word. We can better understand

this if we read No. 1767 in the work Arcana Caelestia (Secrets of Heaven): "When the Word of the Lord is being read by someone who loves the Word and leads a charitable life—even by one who, because he is simple-hearted, believes what is written and has not formed opinions that are contrary to the truth of faith that lies within the internal sense—the Lord also sets the Word before the angels. The Lord does so in such beauty and such loveliness, using representatives as well, with indescribable variations, each of which accords with the angels' entire state at the time, that every detail is perceived as if it had life. This life is that which is present within the Word and from which the Word was given birth when it was sent down from heaven. By reason of this, although in the letter it appears rough and imperfect, the Word of the Lord is such that inwardly there are concealed spiritual and celestial things, which are fully visible to good spirits and to angels while it is being read by us."

We can be in even closer fellowship with angels as our understanding of the internal sense increases and we begin to think from it when reading. As the Writings of Swedenborg put it: "If a person knew that there is such a (spiritual) sense and should think from a knowledge of it when he reads the Word, he would come into still closer conjunction with heaven, because he would enter into ideas similar to those of angels." Heaven and Hell No. 310.

"O taste and see that the Lord is good." Ps. 119. Taste corresponds to the perception and affection of knowing, learning and becoming wise. Sight corresponds to the understanding. So, if we love to learn about the Lord, His heavenly kingdom, and His providence; if we come to relish those knowledges as we relish the taste of good healthy food, then we will see, that is, understand that the Lord is good.

The Lord's Prayer seems simple and straightforward enough; but is it? Swedenborg said that he read the Lords' Prayer morning and evening, and then the ideas of his thought were opened towards heaven and countless things flowed in. He adds that in this Prayer there are more things than even the angels can comprehend, and that as our thought is opened towards heaven, so we can receive more, but those whose thought is closed see only the natural meaning.

So let us read the Word daily, knowing that we can be of service to angels, and at the same time to ourselves and to other people.

(From the New Church Courier, March 1991)

## Counting His Blessings

Donald Rose



A time-honoured saying or piece of advice is “Count your blessings.” We might rather say, “Count the Lord’s blessings.” Even on the very external plane, there are more than enough blessings to count. We have so much. We can surprise ourselves if we put a little effort into counting blessings as we start including in the list the people who are dear to us, the loves and virtues the Lord grants to us. Sometimes a new appreciation of our blessings comes when we see other people less fortunate than ourselves, perhaps due to health or personal difficulty. And it can be occasioned by our own adversities. A sickness that deprives us for a while occasions gratitude for simple well-being to be able to function.

Counting. A miser counts his money. But we sense that the miser is missing out. Does the person who glories in his talents really count his blessings? The prophet said, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might. Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord exercising loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Imagine making a list of the best blessings of your life and leaving out the Lord’s promises about heaven. “Human life from infancy to old age is nothing else than a progression from the world to heaven, and the last age, which is death, is the transition itself” (AC 3016). What kind of a list of blessings is a list that leaves out the prospect, the goal, to which the Lord is inviting us?

There is in the Writings of Swedenborg a passage with a dramatic ending urging us to think of something and to keep it in mind. It is probably the most emphatic such urging in the Writings. “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” (AC 8939). Notice that it does not say to bear in mind that you are going to die. It says keep in mind that you are going to live.

This striking passage (AC 8939) is actually a passage about blessings, unfolding the words in Exodus 20, “I will bless you.” It starts out by saying that when people think about blessings, they immediately start to think of things like money and honours. It says they think about things which are relatively nothing. They call them the blessings. The passage continues, “That worldly blessing is nothing in comparison with heavenly blessing, which

is eternal, the Lord thus teaches in Matthew, ‘What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?’ (16:26) But the man who is in worldly and earthly things does not apprehend this saying, for worldly and earthly things suffocate it, and cause him not even to believe that there is an eternal life. And yet I can affirm that as soon as a man dies he is in the other life, ... that death itself is a continuation of life but in another world ... As I know this from the living experience of so many years ... I solemnly declare it. I still speak and I have spoken with almost all whom I had known in the world and who are dead, with some after two or three days from their decease. Very many of them were exceedingly indignant that they had not believed at all in a life which was to continue after death ... Wherefore 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.”

When we are thinking with this reality in mind, a numbering or counting takes place in our values. To count things in the internal sense is to “give thought to their quality” (AE 453:10). Counting means setting in perspective (see AC 10217). We ask the Lord to “number our days” that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. This text is about the Lord’s thoughts. The Lord’s thoughts are related in this way to blessings: The essence of love is to love others outside of oneself, to desire to be one with them and to render them blessed from oneself. “These same three things constitute the essence of His wisdom; love desires these three things and wisdom brings them forth” (TCR 43). The working of the Divine Wisdom, the Lord’s thoughts, is called Providence. We tend to underestimate it. The Writings refer to Providence in quantity, vast quantity. Thinking merely naturally we “cannot possibly know the innumerable arcana of Providence, which are as many in number as the contingencies of everyone’s life” (AC 3833).

To count is to think of quality. And the quality in the myriad workings of Providence is a love that is toward us. And so it is said, in Psalm 40:5, “Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works, which you have done; And Your thoughts which are toward us cannot be recounted to You in order. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.”

**Worldly blessing is nothing in comparison with heavenly blessing, which is eternal.**

# The Aaronic Blessing

David Moffat



The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” (Numbers 6:22-27)

I have long had a fascination for this little poem. I have memories of my father using it at the end of services, although I struggle to remember the words of the blessing itself. Somehow, they always seems to blend into one. It is because of this fascination that I have wanted to spend some time reflecting upon its meaning and message. I could do this by saying things like the first line is three words long, the second, five, and the third, seven – but it hardly seems appropriate to divide and analyse it like this. Like any living thing, it is far more alive when one contemplates it as a whole.

So, imagine, if you will, Aaron or his sons standing before the children of Israel, blessing them with these words. Imagine how the Lord flows into the words as they are uttered, filling each with meaning. What follows is a dialogue if you like, between the priest and the Lord, as the people are blessed:

## **The LORD bless you and keep you;**

“What am I to bless you with, my child? Is it wealth, or power that you need? Is it safety and food? Is it the love and respect of your brothers and sisters? If these are not needs, they cannot truly be blessings. For any given thing which does not satisfy need is mere luxury. It is more of a burden than a blessing, requiring careful handling – responsibility even – lest instead of blessing you it becomes a trap and a snare. He who hoards his blessings will become bloated and weighed down. Surely I can only bless you when you in turn bless others.

And in what are you to be kept? If it is in perpetual safety, will you not loose your concern

for the welfare of yourself and others? Laziness will overtake you. If it is in a state of satisfaction, will you not loose your hunger, and the satisfaction of having it filled? Happiness in a job well done will become as foreign to you as the effort required to achieve it. How will unending beauty serve you, except to rob you of finding acceptance in My arms?

## **the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;**

My child, can you not already feel the warmth of My smile upon your soul? The love and grace which you ask for is already yours, as it has been from the day of your birth. It is pleasant to be asked, I suppose – but never, never think that it is lacking because you do not seek it. I know that you cannot think of Me at all times, through the everyday struggles of life. You get so absorbed in providing for your own needs, the needs of your children, your brothers and sisters. I

know that you don’t always feel My presence, even when you do look for it. But surely you know how sweet it is to kiss the sleeping child. Do you need to be asked for that simple, unknown act of love? How, then, can I?

## **the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.**

I cannot turn away, though it may seem so at times. How then can I turn towards you? Oh, I know what it looks like. Famines, wars, disasters – and then, so often through the course of your life, you feel that doors are closing before you. But, I ask you, who has turned? When you look for me in the world out there, when you plead with Me for opportunity, for riches, for safety, for satisfaction, are you not looking the wrong way? Do not look without to find Me, to feel My warmth. In that way you will only find a cold uncaring world of people trying to steal the warmth they long for from one another. Turn, look within. There you will find Me to be a source of heat so great that you in turn can radiate it to others.

**Look within.  
There you will  
find Me to be a  
source of heat  
so great that you  
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others.**

This is the peace I offer you – the wholeness that without Me, you are incomplete. The more incomplete you can become, the more whole I may make you. Quietness and rest are nothing without quietness of soul. How can the active spirit ever find peace? But, oh, what activity I have in store for you! Activity far beyond your own limited capabilities. Activity in which you may find all you have ever wanted, all you could ever ask – blessing, satisfaction, warmth. And peace. A peace which is constant throughout the bustle of this busy world you have created for yourselves. The peace that with all things, and without all things, you are a child of God.

For I bless you with My Name. A Name which means being, existence. With Me you are all. Without me you are not, nor can you ever be. The greatest peace is simply to be. In the midst of fighting, anger, bitterness, pain, suffering,

simply to be. In the midst of friendship, wealth, power, luxury, simply to be. For in that peace of being, you will see My Eternity beyond the moment, My Infinity beyond all distance.

What am I to bless you with, my child? My blessing upon you is My call – your prayer to Me, the response.”

The LORD bless you and keep you;  
the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

“From this, unfolded by means of the internal sense, it is evident what “blessing” as a whole involves namely, that Jehovah, that is, the Lord, from Divine love flows in with Divine truth and with Divine good with those who receive;” ... (Apocalypse Explained 340.11)

## Facing the Storm



A little girl walked to and from school daily. Although the weather that morning was questionable, and clouds were forming, she made her daily trek to school. As the afternoon progressed, the winds whipped up along with the lightning.

The little girl's mother felt concerned that her daughter would be frightened as she walked home from school. She was also worried that the electric storm might harm her child.

Full of concern, the mother got in her car and quickly drove along the route to her daughter's school.

As she did, she saw her little girl walking along. At each flash of lightning, the child would stop, look up and smile. More lightning followed quickly and with each flash, the little girl would look up at the streak of light and smile.

When her mother drew up alongside her in the car, she lowered the window and called, "What are you doing?"

Her daughter answered, "I am trying to look pretty because God keeps taking my picture."

Blessings on you today and every day as you face the storms that come your way!



# Is God Angry?

John Odhner

Readers of the Bible may have noticed references to the anger of God—even to times God seems excessively angry. For example, in Deuteronomy 32:22 God says, “A fire is kindled in My anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell.” in Jeremiah 21:5, “And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath.”

## God Is Merciful

In contrast with the teachings about God’s anger are the teachings about His mercy. We are told that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). He is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth.” (Exodus 34:6).

This picture of God as merciful and loving is quite a contrast to the picture of Him as vengeful and fierce. If these were all the teachings we had, we might suppose that He alternates between the wrath and mercy: condemning one moment, redeeming the next. The view of God as fluctuating does not take into account all the teachings about His mercy. There are dozens of passages which speak of God’s mercy as enduring, constant, never ceasing. “His mercy endures for ever” (Psalms 100:5).

Now some people might try to explain this apparent contradiction by saying that the Lord is constantly merciful to good people, but that He takes vengeance on those who rebel against Him. But the fact is that the Lord is merciful to everyone, all the time, in everything He does. “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 6:45). “The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Ps 145:7).

## How We Think of God

If the Lord is always merciful to everyone, then He can never be angry and vengeful. In God Himself there is “no variation nor shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Yet He appears in a variety of ways according to the spiritual state of

the individual. “With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; with a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; with the pure You will show Yourself pure; and with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd” (2 Samuel 22:20).

It almost seems as if God’s actions toward each of us depend on our actions towards God and others. If you forgive others, He will forgive you; if you do not forgive others, He will not forgive you (Matthew 6:15). If you draw near to God, He will draw near to you (James 4:8). If you forget Him, He will forget you (Hosea 4:6).

It is as if each kind of person looks at God through differently tinted glasses. A person wearing blue glasses will see everything blue. “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled” (Titus 1:15). A person who is himself vicious and vengeful will tend to see others, including God, as vicious and vengeful: “The children of your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ But it is their way that is not fair!” (Ezekiel 33:17).

God uses our concepts of Him to communicate with us, even when those concepts are distorted.

## How God Communicates

God uses our concepts of Him to communicate with us, even when those concepts are distorted. The result of this is that God is often described in terms of imperfect human qualities—not because He actually has those qualities, but because certain imperfect humans think that He does.

For example, the Bible speaks of God “coming down,” (Genesis 11:5) and “going up” (Genesis 35:13) or “going away,” (Genesis 18:33) when really, He cannot go or come because He is already constantly present everywhere (see Psalm 139:7; 1 Kings 8:27).

The Bible also says that the Lord “forgets” people (Jeremiah 23:39). In actual fact, God never forgets (see Amos 8:7). But the Bible speaks of Him forgetting, because our

impatience and ignorance of His plans make us feel like He has forgotten.

The Lord speaks of Himself forgetting, remembering, coming, going, and so on, so that we can identify with Him more easily. That's why Paul, speaking of God's wrath, says that he speaks "as a man" or "in human terms" (Romans 3:5). He makes it clear that His real nature is different than ours—different than it appears. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways," says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8).

**The Source of Evil**

God has no desire to punish anyone. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). When He does tolerate evil it is because He sees that good can come from it.

What has seemed to mankind to be evidence of God's anger, has usually been not from God at all, but from the cruel influence of hell. For example, in the story of Job, Satan was eager to torture Job, and it was only with reluctance that God allowed Satan to bring disaster on Job. Job did not know that the real source of his disaster

was Satan, he supposed it was from God (see Job 1:6-21, 2:1-10, 30:21).

In another incident, we are told that God tempted Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son. But the fact is that "God does not tempt anyone, but each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:13, 14). Although temptation may appear to be from God its actual source is hell. Hell is the source of the trouble which God unwillingly tolerates for the sake of our freedom. Yet because we suppose God is the source, the Bible speaks as if God were the one who is angry.

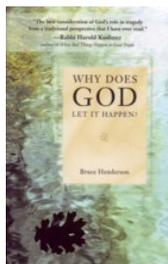
**Who Sees the True God?**

God appears in many different ways to many different people, and at times His genuine qualities of love and mercy are veiled behind an appearance of anger. "The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance" (1 Samuel 16:7). Yet it is possible to know God as He truly is. People who are good and wise can know the nature of His mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

(from New Church Connection Issue Four 2008)

**Why Does God Let it Happen?**

Bruce Henderson



"The best consideration of God's role in tragedy from a traditional perspective that I have ever read" - Rabbi Harold Kushner (author of When Bad Things Happen to Good People). In the wake of life-changing events -- whether as global in reach as a terrorist attacks or as personal as the death of a child -- the first question that springs to mind is "Why?" Why do good people suffer pain and loss? Why does God allow these things to happen? \$20 plus p & p



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