

A BLESSED FORGETFULNESS

By Rev. Donald L. Rose

There is a word in the Hebrew language which means “to forget.” The word is manasseh. When Joseph, famous for his coat of many colors, had a son, he used this word to name him. As the Bible says, “Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house” (Genesis 41:51).

He had another son whom he chose to name Ephraim. This means “fruitful” or something good emerging from difficult times. “And the name of the second he called Ephraim: For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

Affliction Joseph had certainly known. And it was a blessing to be able to put it behind him, to forget the suffering and to look forward.

Joseph is such a good and innocent figure in the Bible. Our heart goes out to him in the Genesis story. In naïve innocence he recounted his dreams to the jealous brothers who cruelly sold him into slavery. As a servant in Egypt his conduct was pure, even when tempted. Yet, he was falsely accused and thrown into prison.

When innocent people suffer we may think of Joseph who languished in dark captivity and said, ‘I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon’ (Genesis 40:15).

But at long last God blessed Joseph, and he rose to a position of glory. And he was thankful that God had enabled him to forget. He not only could forget the suffering toil. He also could forget “his father’s house.”

According to Emanuel Swedenborg’s exegesis of the sacred story this has to do with putting behind us our inherited selfishness. (Heavenly Secrets number 5353). God’s plan for us is that we shall eventually experience angelic love. Can we finally move away from selfish orientation to the point where we put others before ourselves?

Is it possible to love others more than self? We are invited to consider people who have risked their lives for others, those who are willing to brave dangers so that others may be safe. In moments of heroism people have truly cared so much for others that they have forgotten self-concern.

The following quotation is from the book Heaven and Hell, addressing the possibility of loving others more than self.

“As for the possibility of this love, it was said that in this world it might be gathered from the marriage love some people have for each other, people who would rather die than allow their spouse to be hurt. Or they might consider the love of parents for their

children, the mother who would rather starve than see her children go hungry; or the true friendship that leads people to face peril for the sake of their friends.”

The stirring of patriotism, the reaching out to the bereaved and sorrowful, these are God-given things. May God help us to forget our pain, and may He bring about a blessed forgetfulness of mere self-interest.

The book of Job declares that if you allow no evil to dwell in your tent “then you will stand firm and without fear. You will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by. Life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning” (Job:11:14-17).

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