

Lesson 55: SHIELDS AND BREASTPLATES
The Golden Heart by Amena Pendleton

INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION:

I'm sure you've heard many stories that involve battles, both in the Word and not in the Word. What, would you say, are typical tools that are used by people in a battle? (Weapons – swords, spears, bows and arrows, shields, armor, breastplates, *etc.*)

Which tools in battle are used to actually fight, and which are used for protection?

Think of the stories that you know about battles, either in the Word or elsewhere. Are these tools of battle used by just the good guys, just the bad guys, or by both?

Would you say a weapon is a good thing or a bad thing? Actually a weapon can't be good or bad. The only thing that can be good or bad is the person who's using it. Is the person using the weapon to attack people, to gain power over them? Or is the person using the weapon to defend something that's good, to drive away enemies that want to destroy it?

Weapons can be used for good purposes or evil, and so in the Word they represent something very good, or very evil.

Do you think everyday people like you and me are ever involved in battles? The answer is yes. All the time, we have both kind and unkind ideas coming into our heads. We feel both kind and unkind feelings. Those thoughts and feelings battle against each other – the bad ones try to capture and use us, and the good ones try to defend us and keep us free. All of these thoughts and feelings can be used as weapons, either for good or for evil.

Knowledge can be used as a weapon. Say someone knows something embarrassing about another person. He or she can use that knowledge to attack that person and do harm. That's using knowledge as an evil weapon.

Say a policeman is trying to catch a criminal, and spends time learning all he can about how that criminal thinks and operates. That knowledge can be used as a weapon to finally catch and stop the criminal so he can't do any more harm. That's using knowledge as a good weapon.

Is the Lord ever involved in battles? All the time! Since evil spirits are always trying to capture us and force us to do evil, the Lord is constantly battling against them to protect us. But we have to want Him to protect us, and as we grow, to learn how to cooperate with His battle plans.

What can we use to gain the Lord's power and fight against evil spirits? The answer is, true ideas that we learn from His Word. Evil spirits, for instance, might attack us with the idea that we're stupid and worthless. If we don't know that that's not true, they can conquer us with that idea. But if we know from the Word that the Lord values each and every person, we can fight against those evil spirits. That knowledge is like a sword.

And how does the Lord protect us from attacks? With His love. His love is a shield, a real shield that is extremely powerful. In fact, no evil spirit could hope to harm a person who is protected by the Lord's love. And the more we know about the Lord, the stronger that shield will be. So

Lesson 55 – Oak Arbor New Church Sunday School, page 2

learning true ideas from the Word, especially about the Lord, is the best way to be protected in battle, when evil spirits come attacking.

Right after people die, they live for a while in the world of spirits, which is between heaven and hell. Here they learn more things, and prepare to go to the final place that they want to live. But the world of spirits has both good and evil people in it. Good people will sometimes be approached by evil spirits who want to harm them.

So the Lord provides protection for those who want it. One way that Swedenborg saw this protection being given was by means of a breastplate that a good person could put on. When you're thinking of protective armor, do you know what a breastplate is? It's a covering that goes over a person's chest. This is an especially important place to protect, because of the fact that our heart and lungs are right there in our chest.

So these good people in the spiritual world were given a breastplate that was in the form of a golden heart. If a robber or other kind of evil spirit approached them, they only had to pull aside their garment and show the golden heart breastplate. Then the evil spirit would not dare to do anything, because if he did, he knew he would encounter the power of God, and become very hurt himself!

I'll read to you now something written by a New Church author named Amena Pendleton. She had read Swedenborg's description of the "golden heart" breastplate, and was inspired to write the following story.

READING:

Now read "The Golden Heart" by Amena Pendleton. (Please see attached text of the story.)

PROJECT: ORIGAMI SHIELDS

For today's activity we'll make origami shields, to symbolize the Lord's protection. If you want, you can make and cut out some symbols to put on your shield. I'll hand out a list of some symbols of things that can strengthen the Lord's protection in us.

Supplies:

Sheets of origami paper – shiny colors would be best
Other paper to cut out decorative symbols
Scissors and glue

Procedure:

Take them step-by-step through the process of making an origami shield (see directions included). They may then decorate it with any of the symbols listed below. Some may want to make more than one shield.

An arm – power.

Bow and arrow – true ideas, and knowing how to live by them.

Eagle – learning and understanding true ideas.

Fire – love.

Lesson 55 – Oak Arbor New Church Sunday School, page 3

Fruit – doing good things.

Horse – knowing and understanding the Word.

Lion – the power of the Lord's truth.

Moon – believing in the Lord.

Mountain – love of the Lord.

Precious stones – true, spiritual ideas.

Rain – blessings.

Rainbow – a joining with the Lord.

Rings – the power when love and true ideas join together.

Stars – knowledge about the Lord.

Sun – the Lord's divine love.

Sword or spear – true ideas that fights against evil.

Throne – the heavens.

Tree – the way that a person grows and learns.

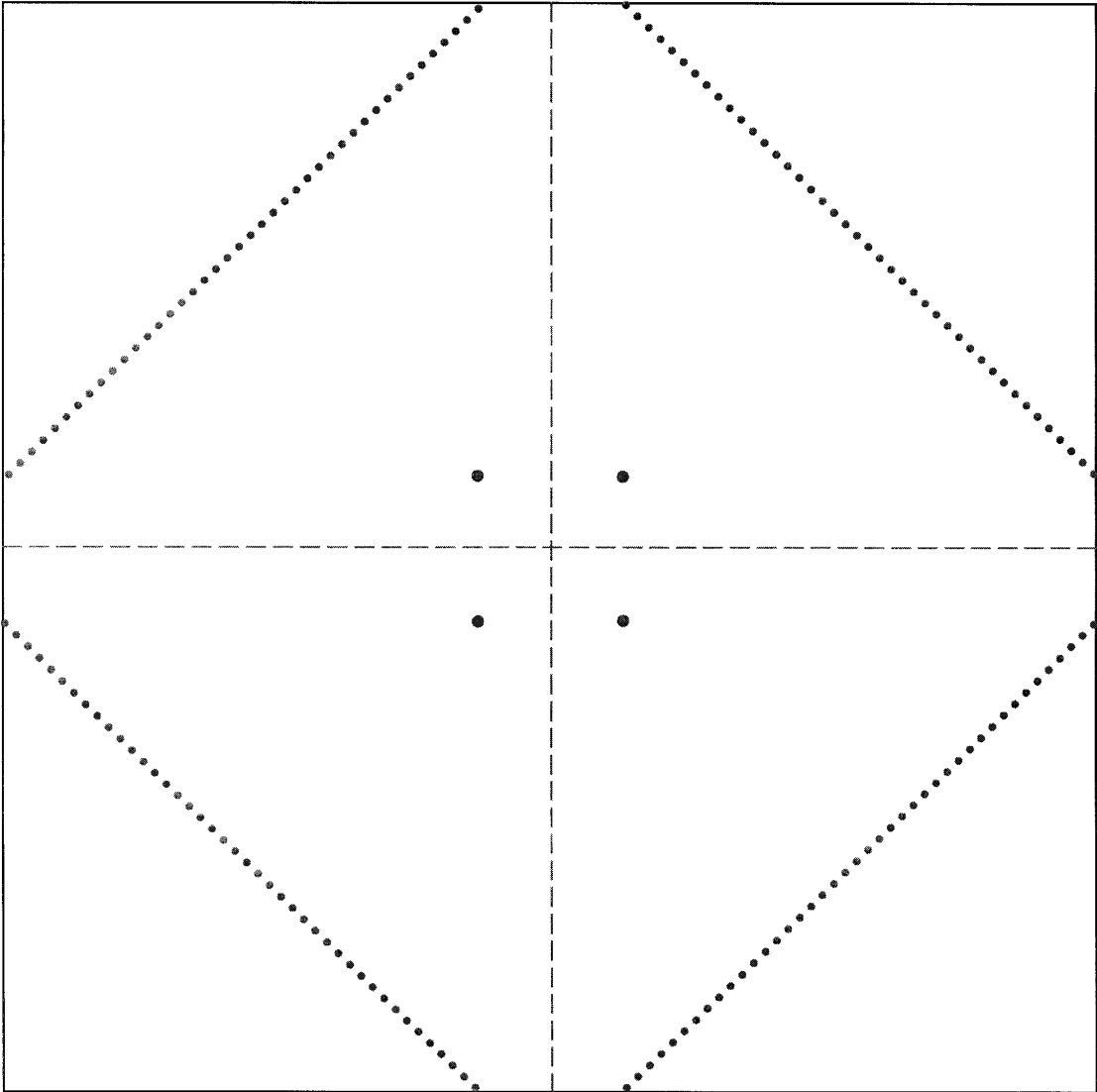
White Bear – the power of the stories of the Word.

Wings – the power to be lifted up.

Project Instructions:

1. Photocopy template or use template as a guide and use origami paper.
2. If you are using the template cut out the square along the solid line.
3. Fold in half vertically along the gray dotted line and unfold. Repeat vertically, folding and unfolding.
4. Fold the corners down to the gray circles along the gray dotted lines. If you are using origami paper the distance can vary but be sure to do all of the corners the same.
5. Turn the paper over; there will be a top, left, right and bottom point. Fold the top, left and right points into the center, making sure that they line up.
6. Turn the paper over to see the Holy Shield. For best results color one side of the paper before you begin or use two toned origami paper.

Project Template



The Golden Heart

By Amena Pendleton

A long time ago a young man named Joel was taken prisoner and carried captive to a wicked City. In this City dwelt many evil doers. But Joel was not wicked, he believed in the Lord. Every day he mourned and wished he could escape from the wicked City and go to a beautiful City of which he had heard, called the City of Palm Trees. But he knew he could not escape unless the Lord helped him, for the City in which he was held captive was guarded by a Black Giant. So he prayed every day and waited on the Lord.

At last one day an Angel appeared to him and said:

“Arise, Joel, and cease thy mourning. The Lord will deliver thee from bondage and sorrow.”

Then Joel said, “I pray you, Sir, take me with you from this wicked City.”

“No,” said the Angel, “You must go alone. The Lord will be your guard.”

But Joel wept and said, “Sir, I cannot go alone. There are Robbers without the City who will set upon me and slay me!”

“Fear not,” replied the Angel, “ten thousand devils cannot prevail against the Lord.”

Then the Angel took from beneath his robe a breast-plate of gold, and putting back Joel’s robe he buckled it across his breast. And Joel looked down at the gold breast-plate which was upon his breast and saw that it was shaped like a Heart. And he marveled at the beauty of the Golden Heart.

“The Lord be with thee, Joel,” the Angel said. “Dread not the Robbers; when God blows they fly like chaff.”

So saying, the Angel departed.

Then Joel arose and went out to the gate of the City; he opened it, and no one stayed his hand. Quickly he left the City, and, walking down a stony path, he came to a grey bridge and stretched over a chasm.

And as Joel crossed the bridge he dared not look over the parapet into the chasm beneath, for he knew that there below was fire and brimstone. When he reached the other side he saw guarding the bridge a great Black Giant. The Giant barred the way and would not let Joel pass.

The Golden Heart

Then Joel bethought him of his Golden Heart which the Angel had given him. And he drew back his robe and the Giant saw the Golden Heart. And when the Giant saw that sign upon Joel's breast, he uttered a loud cry and rushed down into the chasm, and was seen no more. Then Joel quickly departed from that place, and followed the road that led through a Forest. The Forest was peopled with evil spirits and beasts, but Joel was not afraid because of the Golden Heart.

When he left the Forest he came to a place more terrible than the City or the Forest. It was the abode of Thieves and Robbers. The ground was stony, and on every side were caves whose deeps were shrouded in darkness. Birds of night and bats flew about uttering strange cries, and the face of the sun was covered so that it shone not.

Then Joel trembled, for there came forth from one of the caves a band of Robbers. They surrounded him to slay him.

The leader of the Robbers approached Joel; he was terrible to see. His face was covered with black hairs, his eyes were like burning coals, and he had large teeth. He took hold of Joel to slay him, and roughly pulled aside his outer garment. And lo, there was the Golden Heart glistening upon Joel's breast! The Robber uttered a piercing cry, and said to his companions:

“Beware, the Golden Heart!”

Then he fled, and they all followed him, running into their caves like rats into their holes, and crying for mercy.

And when Joel saw that the Robbers were fled, he fell upon his knees in the mire of the road, and, lifting his face toward Heaven, prayed to the Lord. And all fear and sorrow departed from him. Then he arose and saw before him a straight path leading upward that he had not seen before.

He followed it, and it led him through gardens and vineyards where birds sing and bees gather honey. The sun now shone in the heavens, and Joel saw in the distance the beautiful City of Palm Trees. This was the City he had longed to live in when he was held captive by the wicked.

He came to the gate of that Heavenly City. It was opened to him, and he entered and dwelt there forever.

“The Golden Heart” is from *The Golden Heart and Other Stories* by Amena Pendleton, illustrated by Eudora Sellner, published by the General Church Press, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, 1987. Used by permission.