

WHERE WILL I BE WHEN I WAKE UP?



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

The Old and New Testaments allude to a place in the spiritual world where good and evil people come after death, but the Heavenly Doctrine gives us a much fuller picture. After waking up in the spiritual world, we will start our journey in a place called the world of spirits. There we will meet friends and loved ones who have already died.

While we are in the world of spirits, angels gently examine us and help us discover what we love most. Good people will gravitate toward others who love the Lord and people who love only themselves will associate with others who are like-minded. And we will be prepared for life in either heaven or hell, depending on the choices we have made here on earth.

READINGS FROM THE WORD

After dying we will wake up in the spiritual world. What will it be like? Who will we see? What will we be doing? Look for answers to these questions in today's readings.

A Great Gulf

The Word assures us that after we die we will be raised up into a new life, but what will this new life be like? The Old and New Testaments give us some clues. The Old Testament mentions that people go to “sheol” after they die. The Hebrew word “sheol” is sometimes translated “hell” and at other times seems to refer to a place where good and bad people go before finding their place in the spiritual world, as in this Psalm:

My flesh will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your holy one to see corruption. You will show me the path of life (Psalm 16: 9-11).

In support of this idea William Foxwell Albright, a prominent Biblical scholar, suggests that “sheol” conveys the idea of being questioned or interrogated (Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia).

In the New Testament, the Lord told a parable in which there is a “great gulf” in the spiritual world between two men—one had been a rich man in the world and the other had been a beggar (Luke 16:19-28). The rich man had worn fine clothing and eaten delicious food, but the beggar named Lazarus lay at the gate of his house wishing he could have the crumbs from the rich man’s table. After death, the rich man found himself in Hades or hell. But Lazarus was comforted by “Father Abraham.” When the rich man asked Abraham for mercy, here is what he said:



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“Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us” (Luke 16:25-26).

In this parable, Jesus made it clear that our actions in this world have consequences and that those who are selfish will not enjoy the comforts of heaven.

Entering the World of Spirits

The book *Heaven and Hell* tells us that people wake up in the part of the spiritual world that is called the world of spirits immediately after they die.

The world of spirits is neither heaven nor hell but a place or state between the two. It is where a person first arrives after death, being in due time either raised into heaven or cast into hell from it depending on our life in this world. The world of spirits is a place halfway between heaven and hell, and it is also our own halfway state after death. The hells were underneath it and the heavens above it. It is a halfway state because as long as we are in it, we are not yet in either heaven or hell (see *Heaven and Hell* 421, 422).

The world of spirits seems to be the great gulf that the rich man was shown between himself and Lazarus. It looks like “a valley surrounded by mountains and cliffs, with dips and rises” (*Heaven and Hell* 429). We may be excited to discover this new world and may be given tours of cities, gardens, and other places.

Welcomed by Friends

We can look forward to seeing people we have known in the natural world—especially if we enjoyed a strong connection with them.

As soon as we arrive in the other life, we are all recognized by our friends and relatives and by people we have known in one way or another. Further, we talk with each other and continue to see each other in keeping with our friendship in the world.... It often happens that married partners meet and welcome each other joyfully (*Heaven and Hell* 494).

After we have been in the spiritual world for awhile, we find ourselves making new friends who care about the very things we love most deeply. And we may see less of old friends who at heart value different things than we do.

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Preparing for Our Eternal Home

While we are in the world of spirits, we will be prepared for our eternal home in heaven or in hell. Angels will teach us about life there and gently examine our thoughts to see what we love most. We will no longer be able to hide our thoughts from other people, and we will start to be aware of our inner hidden thoughts and feelings. We will behave in ways that show what we really think and love. While in this state:

[I]t is obvious what kind of people they really were in the world. They actually behave in accord with their own nature. People who were inwardly devoted to the good in the world then behave sanely and wisely, more wisely than when they were living in the world.... In contrast, people who were focused on evil in the world then behave foolishly and insanely...because they are in freedom and are no longer constrained (*Heaven and Hell* 505).

Gradually people who are moving towards life in heaven separate from the people who are moving towards a life in hell. And people who will be more comfortable living in hell will be drawn toward others like them. This is determined by what they love most in life and is confirmed by the many choices they made during life in the world.

To prepare people for life in heaven or hell, the Lord will help them put aside what is incompatible with their ruling love. For example, good people who are choosing heaven will need to get rid of any bad habits they may still have. The angels teach these people about life in heaven. And when their preparation is complete, they are given angelic clothing and led by the Lord to a path going to a heavenly community suited to them.

What about people who prefer to follow the selfish path of hell? They will be prepared to move into the home they have chosen. How long we spend in this halfway place depends on how much preparation we need for the kind of eternal life we have chosen.

OPTIONAL READING

When spirits have been prepared for heaven...they are clothed with angelic garments, which are mostly glowing white as if made of fine linen. They are thus brought to the way that leads upwards towards heaven, and are delivered there to angel guards, and afterwards are received by other angels and introduced into societies and into many blessings there. After this each one is led by the Lord into his or her own society, which is also effected by various ways, sometimes by winding paths. The ways by which they are led are not known to any angel, but are known to the Lord alone. When they come to their own society their interiors are opened. As these are like the interiors of the angels in that society they are immediately recognized and received with joy (see *Heaven and Hell* 519).



FOCUS POINTS

1. Explain the difference between the terms “world of spirits” and “spiritual world.”
2. In what ways do you think that the world of spirits will be like our natural world?
In what ways might it be different?
3. Why do you think the Lord arranged it so that everyone goes to the same place at first rather than directly to heaven or hell?
4. What kinds of experiences do you anticipate having in the world of spirits?
5. When people have spent some time in the world of spirits they may no longer see some of their good friends. Why might this happen?
6. In what ways do you think your life will be different when everyone around you can see what you are thinking and feeling?
7. Explain how the experiences in the world of spirits are different for spirits who are going to heaven and spirits who are going to hell.
8. Why might it be a good idea to try to overcome your bad habits while you are living here on earth?

SEPARATING GOOD FROM EVIL



While we are living in the world of spirits, our good and evil qualities will be separated to prepare us for either heaven or hell.

Identify Good and Evil Habits

In the following chart, mark habits that you think are good with a ✓ and habits you think could be bad or evil with an ✗.

complaining	cheerfulness	sharing
having courage	being “prickly”	criticizing
being sarcastic	usefulness	helping others
forgiving	being jealous	honesty
obeying laws	graciousness	laziness
hating others	kindness	meanness
swearing	appreciating others	saying kind words
stealing	making others afraid	being happy for others
lying	putting others first	hurting

Discussion

1. Choose a good habit from this list, or another good habit that comes to mind. What are the positive effects and long term consequences that may come from practicing this habit?
2. Choose a harmful habit, such as lying. What are the negative effects and long term consequences that practicing this habit could bring?
3. Can people “earn” their way into heaven by simply doing good deeds? Does it make a difference if someone appears to do something nice for another person, but their real goal is to get something out of it for themselves? Is this really doing good?
4. Everyone living in the world has a mixture of good and bad habits. How will these be sorted out in the world of spirits?
5. Do angels in heaven still have bad habits? Do people who choose to live in hell still have good habits? Why or why not?



THE GRAND HUMAN

Activity 2

Suggested Activity: Gather a variety of foods to sample while reading. Think about how these foods might be absorbed into the body depending on their nutritional value, etc. Reflect on how foods relate to the ideas we take into our lives. Good and true ideas, like nutritious foods, build a strong framework. False and bad ideas are like poisonous foods that are expelled from the body. Groups may enjoy discussing this.

Introduction

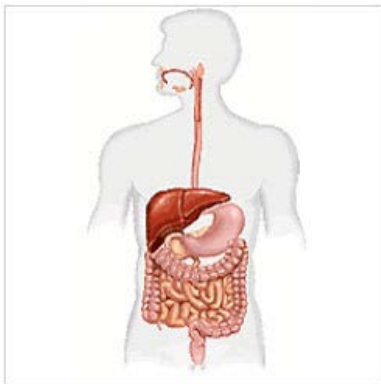
What does heaven look like? The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that heaven, as a whole, appears in the form of human being—a Grand Human.

In the Lord's eyes heaven is a human on the grand scale, and may be called the Grand Human (see *Earths in the Universe* 9).

Some people choose not to live in heaven, but to live in hell. They live outside the Grand Human and symbolize things that are full of disease (see *Arcana Coelestia* 2996).

Comparing What Happens in the World of Spirits to the Digestive Tract

The Writings compare the journey people take when they are being prepared for heaven or hell to the way food is processed in the alimentary canal. Afterwards people are either assimilated as angels into the Grand Human like nourishing food, or rejected as evil spirits into hell.



When a person dies and enters the next life, his life may be likened to food which is received in a gentle manner by the lips and is then passed down through the mouth, throat, and esophagus into the stomach, the whole process being conditioned by his character which has been formed during his lifetime by the things he did.

To begin with, the treatment that most spirits receive is mild, for they are kept in the company of angels and good spirits. This is pictured by what happens to food, when at first it is touched gently by the lips and then tasted by the tongue to see what it is like. Food that is soft, containing that

that which is sweet, oily, and spirituous is received instantly through the veins and carried away into the bloodstream, whereas food that is hard, containing that which is bitter, disagreeable, and of little nutritive value, is harder to break down. It is sent down through the esophagus into the stomach where it is refined by various methods and violent actions.

Food that is even harder, even less agreeable, and of even less value is forced down into the intestines and at length into the rectum where the first hell is situated, and is then finally expelled and becomes excrement. Analogous to all this is a person's life after death. At first he is confined to matters of an external nature. Because he has led a decent life externally, he is among angels and upright spirits. But once he ceases to be confined to them, what he had been like inwardly—what he had been like so far as his thoughts and affections were concerned, and at length so far as his ends in view were concerned—is revealed. Those ends determine the life that awaits him (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5175).

For Reflection

Choose one or two foods—perhaps one that is nutritious and one that is not. Think about and discuss how these might relate to the ideas we take into our lives *e.g.* Sugary drinks taste good, but can rot teeth and have little useful nutritional value. Teasing someone can seem like fun, but afterwards you feel rotten that you have hurt a friend.

Activity 3

WHAT KIND OF TOWN IS THIS...?

(Adapted from Donnette Alfelt's book, *From the Top of the Yardstick*)



There is a story attributed to a famous American, Benjamin Franklin, that goes like this:

Ben was standing outside of the city of Philadelphia when a stranger approached him and said, "I'm thinking of moving to Philadelphia. What kind of a town is it?" Ben answered with a question. "It depends. What kind of town do you come from?" The stranger said that where he came from people were friendly, kind and helpful. Ben then said "Welcome to Philadelphia. You are going to be very happy here."

Another stranger came along and asked the same question: "What kind of town is Philadelphia?" Ben again asked "What was the town like that you came from?" The stranger answered that where he came from, people were rude, inconsiderate and unpleasant. Ben gave him this reply "You won't be happy here. You will find that people in Philadelphia will be pretty much the same as where you came from."

- What kind of place is your town or community?
- How do you judge other people?
 - On a few negative experiences
 - By seeing what is good in them
 - On your hurt feelings
 - By whether you like them or not
 - On whether or not you have a good time with them
 - On whether they reach out to you
 - On whether they're generous to you or others
- Which of these criteria are useful ways to judge people? Which are not? Why?
- Suggest ways to think about other people that support the good part of each person.
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- Now imagine that you have just arrived in the world of spirits and are asking Ben Franklin what the spiritual world is like. How might you respond when asked about the community you came from?
- Does this describe the kind of heavenly community you want to live in?



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

Ideas for Journal Entries *(choose one)*

- Imagine that you are an angel guide. Outline a tour of the world of spirits that you would like to give a person who has recently arrived there. What would be the most amazing place you could show someone? Are there any places you would avoid going to, but might talk about?
- People who are prepared for heaven are given special clothing that reflects the beautiful state of their minds as they become angels. Design a heavenly gown or outfit that you might wish to be given as you enter heaven.

For Reflection

- How might you describe the world of spirits to a friend who has not heard about it before. What things might comfort your friend? Are there any things that might be disturbing?
- Reflect on your personal qualities. How are you using them to prepare for a life in heaven? Choose one quality (it could be something as simple as a lovely smile) and think about how you can use this gift to bring the Lord into your life.

Spiritual Task

By the Rev. Derek Elphick

What's in Your Suitcase?

"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...." Matthew 6:20

You've heard the phrase before but what are these "treasures" we're supposed to be storing up in heaven? Spiritual treasures are the spiritual values we put into practice and make a habit. Quite literally, we lay up treasures in heaven every time we act with sincerity, integrity, and honesty; whenever we make the effort to be kind, generous, and thoughtful toward others; whenever we use our talents and are useful to society.

Of course, in order to lay up treasures in heaven you need to **A.C.T**, that is, you need the right **A**ttitude, plenty of **C**ourage from the Lord, and an unshakable **T**rust in Him. So shun the negative, fearful, suspicious thoughts and feelings you may have, the "moth and rust" (evils) which destroy, and rest content knowing that you are laying up treasures in heaven.

Further Reading

PREPARATION FOR HEAVEN

by the Rev. Douglas Taylor

We know that when people wake up in the world of spirits and learn that they are spirits, they go through two stages there. At first everything is the same as in this world. They look, sound and feel the same. But in the second stage the real person is revealed. What we are really like underneath, what we secretly think and love, comes to view. If we have been evil in our minds; if we had hateful thoughts and feelings about people most of the time; if we were always acting selfishly but hid this while in the world, then in the second stage we will not be able to hide this any longer. Our real character is shown. It will no longer be possible for us to pretend. We will begin to speak and act what is in our mind. And it will become clear to the good spirits that we really belong in hell.

For an evil spirit like that there is no third stage in the world of spirits. There is no way of preparing for heaven, nor to belong there.

The Writings tell what happens if such a spirit tries to get into heaven. If people try to get into heaven and really do not belong there, they find that they can hardly breathe. They begin to feel sad, and to writhe and squirm. From other passages in the Heavenly Doctrine we learn that spirits who are not really fit for heaven feel like fish out of water. They gasp for breath. They feel most uncomfortable. They have not lived according to the laws of heaven, set forth in the Lord's Word.

We know this also from a parable in the New Testament. The earthly story was about a man who went to a wedding for the king's son. But to his surprise, he was not allowed to stay at the wedding feast because he was not wearing the right clothes. He was not wearing a wedding-garment. He was bound hand and foot by the servants on order of the king, and he was cast into outer darkness.

You may be surprised at that. We know how important it is to be nicely dressed when we to a wedding. But it may seem that no king would have someone thrown into outer darkness because he was not wearing the right clothes. But this story, being a parable, has deeper meaning. The wedding feast means heaven. Being allowed into the feast is like being allowed into heaven. The king is like the Lord. But what about the man who did not have a wedding-garment? What is he like?

He is like someone who knows how he should live, from the Lord's Word. But he has not lived right. There are two things that must be done. The first is to learn from the Word how we ought to live. The second is to do it. We must do these two things. They must be joined together—just like a wedding. Our learning and our living must be joined together, must be married together. If we do that, then it is like having a wedding-garment. We are prepared for heaven. If we don't have the wedding-garment, we cannot be allowed into

heaven. We are not ready for it. We would be most unhappy if we were allowed in. We would soon know we didn't belong there. And we would flee away.

People who find that they don't belong in heaven soon begin to forget all they ever learned about heaven. They forget all the things they had learned but not lived. Then they are completely "in the dark" about heaven and the Lord. This is what is meant by the man without a wedding-garment being cast into outer darkness. He really did that himself. It isn't that the *Lord* casts anyone into hell. We choose hell after we find we are not happy in heaven.

There is no third stage in the world of spirits for the evil. The third stage—which is preparation for heaven—is only for the good. "Preparation" means being taught about heaven. Some good spirits are well instructed about heaven when they arrive in the world of spirits. They learned about it on earth, so they do not stay there long. But most good spirits have some mistaken ideas. They need to be corrected. This is done in the third stage.

There are also spirits who are basically good. Yet they still have some bad habits. They are not fully ready for heaven until they have given up these bad habits. This, too, is done in the third stage of the world of spirits.

When the good spirits have been fully prepared, they are clothed in white garments. They are led out of their place of instruction and correction. Then a wonderful thing happens. They see a pathway that leads to heaven. They do not know at the time that the path leads to their own society in heaven. But the wonderful thing is that no one else sees that pathway—only the person who is supposed to walk along it. The good spirit walks along the path that leads upward to heaven and is greeted by the angel guard. He or she is led to his or her own society—his or her own group of people. They recognize the good spirit as if they had always been friends. And the newcomer also feels at home with them. This is the way the Lord prepares people for a home in heaven.

While on earth the Lord made this promise: "In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Lesson: John 14:2,3