

New Spiritual Days Dawning

By Rev. Ted Klein

January 20, 2002

Bible Reading

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
But the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.

Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
Your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
Because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah.

All those from Sheba shall come,
bearing gold and frankincense,
and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.

All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you,
the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;

They shall be acceptable on my altar,
and I will adorn my glorious temple.

Who are these that fly like a cloud,
and like doves to their windows?

For the coastlands shall wait for me,
the ships of Tarshish first,

To bring your children from far away,
their silver and gold with them,

For the name of the Lord your God,
and for the Holy One of Israel,

Because he has endowed you with splendor.

(Isaiah 60:1–3)

Reading from Swedenborg

At the beginning of our lives, in our early childhood, we are in a state of calm. But as the years go by and we grow up, we leave that peaceful state behind. We give ourselves over to worldly concerns and the resulting anxieties caused by the desires of selfish and materialistic love, and by the false ideas that spring from them.

Something similar happens with the new life in us when we are being spiritually reborn. At first we are in a state of serenity. But as we move into our new life, we head into a state that is not serene. The evil and false things we had adopted earlier now emerge and show themselves. They harass us severely and persistently, causing us to go through temptations and trials from the devil's crew—who keep trying to destroy our new way of life.

Despite all this, we are at peace in our deepest levels. If it were not for the presence of that peace deep within us, we would not put up any struggle at all—for in all our conflicts we look toward a state of peace as our goal. If we did not have that end in view, we would never have the strength and power to fight. This is also what enables us to overcome. Since this is our goal, we do enter a state of peace once the conflict of temptation is past. It is like the season of spring that follows autumn and winter, or like the time of dawn that follows evening and night. *(Arcana Coelestia #3696)*

Sermon

What does it mean for new spiritual days to dawn with us? The image of dawn suggests a spiritual beginning: the emergence of something new and needed in our spiritual journeying. Each new spiritual beginning is portrayed by the dawn of a new day. The dawn in nature mirrors and corresponds with the spiritual dawns within and among people. What is dawning for you? What can your part be in working with God and others in the coming of new spiritual days?

The lighting of candles is part of many religious ceremonies. A lighted candle is an image of God coming to us, and of our opening to the continuing presence of God. A lighted candle suggests the dawning of a new day and the coming of light. Isaiah speaks of a new day dawning, the power of the Lord shining brightly, light coming to darkness, and nations and kings coming to the light of the people's dawning day. We know that God continually seeks to bring all to the light; and we can ask ourselves how we can best prepare for and respond to the light. We also remember the saying of Jesus, "I am the light for the world" *(John 8:12)*.

Suppose we are in a spiritual situation that resembles late afternoon, evening, or night. We may feel much in need of a new spiritual dawn. The prophet Hosea wrote that the Lord's coming is "as certain as the morning sun" *(Hosea 6:3)*. We can trust that new spiritual days will dawn, and seek to work with God and others to receive new spiritual days and grow in them.

Think of a situation when you were hard at work on a project. Perhaps you felt stuck and saw no way of going forward. You decided to take a break from the project and return to it later. This putting aside

could be compared with a time of night. Later, you returned to the project rejuvenated, energized, and with insights for going forward. This could be compared with dawn.

One of my favorite things to do is to take a walk at the time of dawn. The light begins; there is brightening on one side of the sky. Light comes to more and more parts of the sky. Colors keep changing and increase in their variety and beauty. With the coming of light, more and more can be clearly seen. During the dawns of spring and summer, there are many fresh smells, and the sounds of many birds. The dawning of each new day resembles the dawning of other days, but is also unique and different in many ways. There is both constancy and newness.

Consider the changes that come with spring. There is increasing warmth and light; the emergence of new plants; the coming of buds and their unfolding into leaves; a vast variety of flowers; and much more. Spring, like dawn, provides images of God coming to us, and of our receiving and responding to God's presence.

How can we best prepare ourselves for dawns, springs, or new spiritual days in our lives? We cannot, by our own efforts, make a new spiritual day dawn. Yet being ready for a spiritual dawning is different from passively waiting. We can work on being ready and open to receive a spiritual dawning, and to participate with God and others in it.

Cycles of the year and of day and night picture and correspond with cycles in a person's life of charity, regeneration, and the spiritual growth of relationships and communities. It is not that God is absent and then enters. God is continually present and moving with each person, relationship, community, and group. God comes as a dawn when God's effort is received and welcomed, and people respond individually or collectively. Swedenborg speaks of various ways this is true. There is a first coming of God as an entry point into regeneration and a life of charity; there are comings of God again and again in such a life; and there are also key turning points when a person drifts from or finds it hard to remain in that life, and then returns to it with God's help.

At the beginning of our entry into regeneration, there is a first coming of God, or first receiving of God. Swedenborg describes this as the dawn of something that continues throughout our life in this world. In such a life:

People, as to their understanding, begin to be enlightened in spiritual things and to increase in wisdom; and as they receive wisdom from the Lord, so they progress through morning into day. The day continues with them until old age, even until death; and after death they are raised up into heaven by the Lord. There, although they may have died as elderly people, they return to the morning of their life. And then to eternity they advance in the wisdom to which they were first introduced in the material world. (*True Christian Religion* #766)

With such a life on earth there are still spiritual cycles much like spring, summer, fall, and winter, and like morning, noon, evening, and twilight. These cycles continue in heaven and contribute to the growth of individuals, heavenly communities, and heaven as a whole. These repeated cycles relate to Swedenborg's account of the Lord rising every day, and even every moment, with those who are regenerating:

Since in the proper sense "morning" means the Lord, the Lord's advent, and thus the approach of the Lord's realm, it is evident what it also symbolizes: namely, the rise of a new church (for this is the Lord's

realm on earth), and this both on a large scale and on a small scale—and even in the smallest events. On a large scale, it happens when any church on earth is being raised up anew. On a small scale, it happens when a person is being regenerated and made new—for then the Lord’s realm is arising in the person, and the person is becoming a church. And in the smallest events, it happens whenever the good of love and faith is working in a person; for this is the Lord’s coming. (*Arcana Coelestia* #2405.7)

We can think of a life of charity and service to others and a life of regeneration (or rebirth) as bound together in a life that has a series of spiritual dawns and new days: God coming again and again. One part of such a life is what Swedenborg describes as temptations, testings, or conflicting pulls, which call for looking to God, resisting evils, and turning to what is good. As a person comes through temptation with God’s help, it is like spring following winter, or dawn following night.

The spiritual dawns following temptations seem to be vital turning points. With some of these a person may for a time be stuck, or even off the spiritual path altogether, but then return to it in a new dawn. Imagine a person on a path of regeneration who goes through a difficult illness. Along with the physical pain and inability to function comes an erosion of the person’s devotion to God and service to others. The person, with help from God, may realize this. Then, in what is like a dawn following night, the person could look to God, envision ways of serving others even before being physically able to do much, and become energized and rejuvenated.

The cycles and events in nature portray and correspond with God nurturing a needed life direction—as in the coming of spring, the sun bringing warmth, and the rain bringing water. The growth of a tree, flower, or animal portrays the rebirth that comes through living a life of charity. Nature is a guide in its portrayal of God and spiritual life, and in its constancy and creativity—which picture the constancy and creativity of God.

Let us especially lift up one image: the brightening sky at the coming of dawn. Let us be ready for the spiritual dawn. Amen.

Prayer

Creator God, you have given us many hope-filled images of the dawning of new spiritual days in the twin Bibles of scripture and nature. As we go through our own dark nights of the soul, we thank you for encouraging us with images of comfort and renewal; of new spiritual light and warmth coming just when we think our darkness will last forever. Be with us, O God, as we prepare ourselves for the new spiritual dawns that you have in store for us; and open our souls to your renewed warmth and light. Amen.

Rev. Ted Klein