

## THE TRANSITION—WIDOWHOOD AND WIDOWER-HOOD BY JULIE CONARON

In the majority of cases, a married couple on this earth will be “separated” at some point in their lives: few people leave this earth at the same time as their spouse. The spouse remaining becomes a widow or widower. This can happen early in the marriage, when there are still young children, through accident, tragedy or illness, or after many years.

The Writings explain that there is a reason why some people live a long time on this earth and others for just a short time (*Spiritual Experiences* 5002). The Lord knows how long anyone will live, whether they will die in infancy or live to a ripe old age, and how they will live, and He provides for it. Why some people die young and others do not depends on several factors (*Spiritual Experiences* 5003):

1. Their use in this world to others here
2. Their use while here to spirits and angels
3. Their uses to themselves in this world, e.g. do they still need to be let into their evils to prevent their damnation?
4. Their eternal uses.

It is still hard to appreciate these concepts when one has “lost” one’s beloved spouse, but it does present a picture of the Lord always providing for people’s eternal welfare. No matter what happens, whether it is a tragedy like 9/11 or an old person passing away in their sleep, the Lord foresees and provides for people’s eternal uses, which is what is important. He also provides for the grieving friends and family: they will ultimately benefit from the loved one’s presence in the spiritual world, and will enhance everyone’s eternal use. As we have seen above, death is just a passage from one world to the next (*Heaven and Hell* 445), with the next world feeling more like home than this one.

In the world of spirits, people progress more rapidly in their spiritual journey than they can here (Odhner, *Spirits and Men*, p.309); they can be shown more graphically the source of their temptations. While generally relatives, friends and married partners help each other in their regeneration, they can be a block to the other's progress (Odhner, p.310). Separation by death can help both of them, as long as the one transitioning has made their essential life choices.

In spite of the excellent eternal reasons for someone to cross over, there is often a sad, grieving spouse remaining in this world. *Conjugal Love* 325 states that the state of a widow is more grievous than that of a widower. At first glance, some of the reasons listed appear obsolete. In eighteenth century Sweden, a woman may not have been able to provide "the necessaries of life," which is not so true in the twenty-first century western culture. From external observation, it often appears that the widower seems more distressed, since he no longer has a wife to nurture him or provide him with feminine comforts.

However, the other reasons listed in this passage make it clear that the Writings are discussing the internal states of a widow. These are that she does not have the masculine judgment to turn to, nor does she have his interior wisdom or prudence, but, most importantly, she has no one receiving "the love she has as a woman; thus she is in a state alien to the state innate in her, and entered into by marriage" (*Conjugal Love* 325, Rogers' translation). Good needs truth to manage things, protect and counsel it. Many of the reasons given by widows for their loneliness match what the Writings teach about widows: there is no-one to help her decide, keep her ideas balanced, but mostly she has no-one to love. For those widows who enter the state early in life, there are often young children for her to nurture, but it is also a challenge dealing with a young family, the financial

difficulties of losing the breadwinner, and being the only parent in this world.

If the spouse in this world is feeling grief and loss, is the spouse in the spiritual world feeling it also? Odhner thinks there must be some distress, but they live in a world that constantly reassures them that all who share in a love are present with one another, and that the Lord is caring for all (p.319).

The spiritual meaning of a widow in the Word is “one who is in good and not in truth” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 764). In that situation, the good is without protection, which is how many widows feel. Another passage states that a widow signifies one “who is in the affection for good, and from that desires truth.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 1121). This refers to both men and women in the internal sense who are without protection against evil and falsity, but it does illustrate some of the causes of the bereft feelings experienced by widows and widowers.

Widows and widowers must face their future in this world without their partner physically present. The departed spouse will initially be in the world of spirits, where they are for a shorter or longer time depending on their states, the purpose being for their examination and preparation. *Heaven and Hell* 426 says that no one stays longer than thirty years, but this was written prior to the last judgment, when many people were there for a long time. *Apocalypse Revealed* 866, written after the last judgment, shortens the time to twenty years, suggesting the stay in the world of spirits began to be of shorter duration. Some widows and widowers are concerned that if they remain here more than twenty or thirty years their spouses cannot be their conjugal partners. However, heaven is a state, not a place, the “place” being an appearance based on the states of the spirits who live there. So the spouse in the spiritual world could well become an angel in heaven without severing the bonds to his or her partner on this earth, especially since the partner on earth can

also “be in heaven” as to their interiors (Odhner, p.312).

As Odhner professes, people do indeed “have a foothold” in the community of heaven into which they will come fully after death, as well as other communities while they are still on this earth and growing (p.313). They are present there as to their inner person (Odhner, p.314). As people do their spiritual work, their spirits move through the world of spirits from community to community. Many eternal partners may be residing spiritually in the same community of heaven even while they are both on earth.

Death cannot really move anyone away from or beyond their loved ones spiritually as spirits are not limited by space and time. The spirits of loved ones remain together. The loved ones in the spiritual world remember their loved ones on this earth: they do not need their external memories for this (Odhner, p.315). Loved ones “find” each other in the other world, through their spheres.

The relationship between married partners is different than that between people and their associate spirits. Associate spirits do not know they are with people (*Heaven and Hell* 292), although the angels do (*Arcana Coelestia* 5862). The angels watch over people in this earth. Odhner goes on to say that angels watch over people on this earth, they perceive, see and observe their states (p.317), but just how aware of the people personally is not known.

The relationship between spouses, when one has transitioned, is quite different from that of people and their associate spirits. The spouses in the spiritual world have an actual impact on the spouse in this world’s states, and vice versa (Odhner, p.319). The spouse in the natural world is not conscious of this, as consciousness would interfere with their spiritual freedom (*Divine Providence* 134). Hugo Lj. Odhner, while discussing the way attendant spirits with people change as their states change,

states “A striking exception to this rule is suggested in the teaching that death does not separate conjugal partners” (Odhner p.51-52). He then goes on to quote the famous (amongst the widowed) passage, “[T]he two are not actually separated by the death of one; for the spirit of the deceased continues to dwell with the spirit of the one not yet deceased, and this until the death of the other, at which time they come together again and are reunited, loving each other even more tenderly than before, because they are in the spiritual world” (*Conjugal Love* 321, Rogers’ translation).

The whole passage actually deals with remarriage, discussing the reasons why many conjugal partners do not remarry, and if they do, it is usually for reasons outside of conjugal love.

Another passage speaks of the adjunction of conjugal partners calling it a “spiritual dwelling together, which occurs in the case of married partners who love each other tenderly, however separated they may be in body...It is apparent from this that conjugal love joins two souls and minds into one” (*Conjugal Love* 158, Rogers translation).

Many widows and widowers have two important questions: 1. What exactly is this “dwelling together” and how is it manifest? 2. How do the married partners left in this world deal with the trauma of separation?

Rev. Grant H. Odhner (p.393-396) suggests some answers to these questions. He notes that love is eternal and does not end with death (p.393). Good loves cannot grieve and feel angry forever. The new widow or widower takes pleasure in the things that delighted their spouses in quite a new way. The bereaved becomes aware of the presence of the departed in some of the decisions they make; they like to do the things their partners loved (p.393). The old natural issues become separated, and the spouses on this earth can see the deeper loves in a new way: there is a clarification and a new feeling about the departed

spouse. This “new” relationship with the spouse and the re-establishment of their loves’ deeper delights helps ease the grief and enables them to live anew (p.394). They will resume their full relationship with the spouse when they leave this earth, but in the meantime, the relationship is not lost. The very body of each has taken form in response to the other’s spirit (p.395).

How does the world view the love between two people after death? In one book, heaven is declared the home of true lovers (Houts, p.373). The Guggenheims found that 67% of widows have had contact with their deceased spouses (p.12-13), so this phenomenon of feeling connected to the spouse is not only with new church couples. Here are just some of the experiences from outside literature:

- A man in the spiritual world prepares for his wife (Houts, p.63).
- A widow is reassured that her husband will be there waiting for her when she comes, that he would still be who he was, and they would be reunited (Guggenheim, p.59).
- Another widow had told her spouse to communicate with her before he died, and he often used to buy her roses. One day she smells a bouquet of roses in her office: she knows he is communicating with her (Guggenheim, p.63-64).
- One widow had felt controlled by her husband when he was in this world, and he had refused to let her run a daycare in their home. After his death she did open that daycare, and the day she did, she smelled (his) coffee, which to her said he did not want to control her anymore (Guggenheim, p.64-65).

A widow saw her young husband, who had died of a brain tumor. He was peaceful and reassuring, and let her know he would be watching over her (Guggenheim, p.95).

- A man’s wife appeared to him. She was beautiful and not sick anymore. He did not know why she came, but just “having had a marvelous, unbelievable relationship with a wife for more than

fifty years, that's a good enough reason!" (Guggenheim, p.98)

- Reassurances from a husband in the spiritual world come to his wife to tell her their daughter would be fine. She fell apart after her dad died and became alcoholic, but she did indeed recover (Guggenheim, p.102).
- There are many instances of non-verbal communication (Guggenheim, p.173). One involved a man who lost all his loved ones in a tragic car accident: his wife, in-laws, and all his eight children. He fell apart, and tried to kill himself several times. During the final attempt, all his family appeared to him. They said nothing, but reassured him all was well with them. He returned to his physical body, vowed to live again and tell as many people as would be willing to listen about the life after death before he himself goes there (Kubler-Ross (2), p.57-58).

The author also spoke to people who told about widows' experiences outside the New Church:

One English woman was widowed when her husband was killed in World War II. She felt he had visited her after he died. She did believe in a life after death, but was not particularly religious.

- A New Church widow's sister-in-law was the daughter of parents who were both Christians, but of different sects. For various reasons, the woman's husband had divorced her and remarried. Not long afterwards he died. This woman obviously still loved her ex-husband because she was so glad to find out from her New Church sister-in-law that she would meet him after death. It helped confirm her belief in a life after death, and that she would see her husband again.
- Five months after her husband died a widow was sitting on the couch around Christmastime feeling tearful, lonely and despondent, watching TV for company. Out of the corner of both eyes, one after another, she saw a flicker of light. Her attention was drawn away from the TV to see from where the light came

—she saw nothing. Almost immediately afterwards, she had the feeling of someone standing by her side, and slightly behind her. At the same time, she smelled a fragrance, which startled her, and made her turn around to see who was there. There was no one physically present, but the smell was that of her husband's aftershave. It lasted but a minute and was gone. As she recounts "It was too real to be imagined (her emphasis)." She found herself sobbing, and when she has remembered it since it has made her cry.

- She went on to say she felt as if this wonderful man was trying to make sure she was doing alright and comforting her. She explained in their lives together he was always trying to make her laugh when she was sad or upset, and in her mind she felt this was one of those experiences.

There are many stages in widows and widowers adjusting to their new life. Early on is the new grief, the wishing to turn back the clock, which may be accompanied by guilt: "maybe if I'd done more for him/her, they'd still be here," etc. The loss is profound, no matter at what age, but sometimes appears to be worse when the bereaved is younger because of the years of "separation" they anticipate.

"The days drag, but the years fly by," as one widow remarked, a symptom of the state many experience where time becomes warped. As the newly bereaved rebuild their lives and adjust to their new states, some of the pain eases. One widow of 11 years said that, although the intensely painful feeling does ease, there is always "a hole."

As a new use or uses takes the place of being a natural wife or husband, some of the intensity of the grief abates. For new church widows and widowers the strong belief in a life after death with their spouses eases some of the pain of physical loss, and this is true for those outside the church who have a strong faith in a life after death, especially when they believe they will be reunited with their spouses.

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## **HIGHLIGHTING THE WORD**

**FRED ELPHICK**

When you have a look at the Swedenborg Society's new edition of Searle's Index, you will see at the back hundreds of references from all over the Writings to the book of Job, the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. Yet one of the stumbling blocks for newcomers is the idea that Swedenborg excluded several books in the Old Testament and a whole chunk of the New. However, as the above references show, he did not.

What Swedenborg did was to show that while all the books that make up the Bible are useful to the church, there are particular ones that have an undreamed of inner power and glory. The Lord Himself revealed this spiritual sense to him, coming in the "clouds" of heaven—the clouds being the literal meaning of the books that carry that inward glory.

Take a Bible and in the Contents, highlight all the books from Genesis to Judges, Samuel and Kings, the Psalms, and Isaiah to Malachi. You have got most of the Old Testament, with the last