

My Mental Awakening

Introduction: *Here is a very interesting passage from a book by a very interesting woman named Helen Keller. She was born perfectly healthy in 1880, but became very ill at the age of 19 months. Although she survived, Helen Keller was left totally blind and deaf. In this book, she writes of her life and the path out of the isolation which she experienced when she could no longer hear or see. Luckily, most of us will never have to experience this, so it is interesting to read what it would be like. But ALL of us are born blind and deaf to the world of the spirit and all of us will be lead out of this isolation into the world of spiritual sight and hearing as we grow in this world and in the next. We can read about Helen Keller's experiences and know that on a spiritual level we will all have this wonderful experience of beginning to know things that are not apparent to our natural senses.*

Helen Keller writes: For nearly six years I had no concepts whatever of nature or mind or death or God. I literally thought with my body. Without a single exception my memories of that time are tactile.

I know I was impelled like an animal to seek food and warmth. I remember crying, but not the grief that caused the tears; I kicked, and because I recall it physically, I know I was angry. I imitated those about me when I made signs for things I wanted to eat, or helped to find eggs in my mother's farmyard. But there is not one spark of emotion or rational thought in these distinct yet corporeal memories.

I was like an unconscious clod of earth. There was nothing in me except the instinct to eat and drink and sleep. My days were a blank without past, present, or future, without hope or anticipation, without interest or joy.

It was not night—it was not day
But vacancy absorbing space,
And fixedness, without a place:
There were no stars—no earth—no time—
No check—no change—no good—no crime.

Then suddenly, I knew not how or where or when, my brain felt the impact of another mind, and I awoke to language, to knowledge, to love, to the usual concepts of nature, good, and evil. I was actually lifted from nothingness to human life.

My teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, had been with me nearly a month, and she had taught me the names of a number of objects. She put them into my hand, spelled their names on her fingers and helped me to form the letters; but I had not the faintest idea what I was doing. I do not know what I thought. I have only a tactile memory of my fingers going through those motions and changing from one position to another.

(From *Light in My Darkness* by Helen Keller, published by the Swedenborg Foundation in 1994. Contact them at 320 N. Church Street, West Chester PA 19380 or info@swedenborg.com.)

One day she handed me a cup and spelled the word. Then she poured some liquid into the cup and formed the letters w-a-t-e-r. She says I looked puzzled and persisted in confusing the two words, spelling cup for water and water for cup. Finally I became angry because Miss Sullivan kept repeating the words over and over again.

In despair she led me out to the ivy-covered pumphouse and made me hold the cup under the spout while she pumped. With her other hand she spelled w-a-t-e-r emphatically. I stood still, my whole body's attention fixed on the motions of her fingers as the cool stream flowed over my hand. All at once there was a strange stir within me—a misty consciousness, a sense of something remembered. It was as if I had come back to life after being dead!

I understood that what my teacher was doing with her fingers meant that the cold something that was rushing over my hand was water, and that it was possible for me to communicate with other people by these hand signs.

It was a wonderful day, never to be forgotten. Thoughts that ran forward and backward came to me quickly— thoughts that seemed to start in my brain and spread all over me. Now I see it was my mental awakening. I think it was an experience somewhat in the nature of a revelation. I showed immediately in many ways that a great change had taken place in me. I wanted to learn the name of every object I touched, and before night I had mastered thirty words. Nothingness was blotted out! I felt joyous, strong, equal to my limitations! Delicious sensations rippled through me, and sweet, strange things that were locked up in my heart began to sing.

When the sun of consciousness first shone upon me, behold a miracle! The stock of my young life that had perished, now steeped in the waters of knowledge, grew again, budded again, was sweet again with the blossoms of childhood. Down in the depths of my being I cried, "It is good to be alive!" I held out two trembling hands to life, and in vain would silence impose dumbness upon me henceforth.

That first revelation was worth all those years I had spent in dark, soundless imprisonment. That word "water" dropped into my mind like the sun in a frozen winter world.

The world to which I awoke was still mysterious; but there were hope and love and God in it, and nothing else mattered. Is it not possible that our entrance into heaven may be like this experience of mine?