

THE IDEAL VISION OF MARRIAGE

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Excerpts from *Before Marriage and After Marriage*

There are a lot of pressures around us that make it hard to have a happy marriage. But there is one force in the world today which is creating anew the most beautiful love ever conceived by an infinitely loving God. The Word of the Lord's second advent, the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Church given through Emanuel Swedenborg, promises this love to all who know of it and seek it. Through His Word, the Lord can overcome all the other forces on earth and make innocent, tender, everlasting love a reality.

What we need to do is learn what our Lord has to say about conjugal love, teach it diligently to our children, and let the Lord's power go to work to build truly happy marriages. We need to learn about marriage in a way that touches our hearts with hope and touches our minds with a sense of vision. We have to see clearly the ideal of true marriage that will last to eternity.

In testimony to the ideal of true marriage love, read about two experiences Emanuel Swedenborg had when his spiritual eyes were opened. He wrote these down in one of the Heavenly Doctrines about conjugal (marriage) love. Read about these experiences below under the headings "*Conjugal Love 42*" and "*Conjugal Love 75*".

These two stories are about people who have been living in heaven for thousands of years. They are eternally young, they are beautiful (or handsome) beyond description, and they have been totally, completely in love for all that time.

It seems almost inconceivable, doesn't it—almost like a storybook tale, which isn't real. The simple fact is that this is what the Lord is offering us in the book *Conjugal Love*. He is saying that if we can dream of a perfect love, of a relationship which will bring us the highest happiness we could imagine, He can exceed our dreams, and offer us something even better.

Perhaps the wife described in *Conjugal Love 42* died an old woman. Maybe she had been beautiful on earth, maybe not. But in heaven she was so radiant when she looked at her husband that Swedenborg could hardly see her. Her beauty was because of the love she had for him, a love that thousands of years couldn't make old.

Are we willing to believe in this kind of love? Do we dare to believe that the Lord can build a heaven like that for us, so that our hearts can be softened, forever, by a love so tender for our married partner that our faces glow when we face him or her, and our voices are made more gentle when he or she is near? Because, if we are willing, then it is for this purpose that the Lord wrote the book *Conjugal Love*.

Notice a few points in these two spiritual experiences. In *Conjugal Love 42*, the married partners at first looked like one person. They are individuals—two separate people. But they love to think and feel as one. The passage describes their dress in great detail. In heaven the clothes people

wear correspond to their loves and thoughts, and therefore they tell those around them of the things that mean a lot to them. Note the comment about her beauty—“a beauty which no painter can imitate and portray in its form, there being no such sparkle in his colors.”

In both memorable relations It speaks of their oneness. When one spoke, he or she seemed to be speaking from the other as well. In *Conjugial Love 75*, Swedenborg looked at their faces and saw such a unity of spirit that he said to them, “You are one.” There is something of this wonderful harmony with people on earth who have been happily married for many years. They are two people, but they seem to be so united that their thoughts and feelings go forth as one—especially when they are together.

In *Conjugial Love 75*, note how the angel man described their oneness: He said two things. First, “Her life is in me and mine in her.” Second, “She is my heart and I her lungs.” The most important point here is that each of them has something without which the life of the other is incomplete. It is only when their lives are joined that they are truly happy.

Angel wives in heaven are incredibly beautiful, yet other husbands look at them without any unclean desire. Why? Because when an angel husband looks at another woman, his wife comes to mind, and he wants to think as she, his wife, would wish him to think. He chooses, in freedom, to be guided by his wife. That kind of choice is part of love.

These two stories illustrate four vital points about marriage:

1. It comes from the Lord, and the only way to have it is to follow Him. No one else could create such a beautiful and lasting state. And no one will have this love who does not “approach the Lord, love the truths of the church, and do its goods” (*Conjugial Love 70*).
2. It lasts forever. One of the great gifts of the New Church is the promise that marriage is eternal.
3. The Lord is restoring this love to mankind. It has been lost for thousands of years. Now, as He builds His New Church, He can give It to us once again.
4. You can learn about conjugial love only from the Heavenly Doctrine, and in books based on it. There are many happy marriages in the world. There is great kindness towards married partners among Christian peoples. But only in the Heavenly Doctrine will you find the description of love truly conjugial.

All of this is summarized in a promise given to the New Church: “After His advent, conjugial love will be raised up again by the Lord, such as it was with the ancient people; for this love is from the Lord alone and is with those who are made spiritual by Him through the Word” (*Conjugial Love 81*).

Conjugal Love 42

One morning.... I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of a trumpet, saying, “We have perceived, and now see, that you are meditating on conjugal love. Moreover, we know that so far no one on earth knows what true conjugal love is in its origin or in its essence, and yet it is important for them to know. Therefore it has pleased the Lord to open the heavens to you, that the inner faculties of your mind may receive an influx of illuminating light and thus perception. Among us...our heavenly delights come principally from conjugal love. Consequently, by permission granted us, we will send a married couple down to you, in order that you may see.”

And suddenly, then, a carriage appeared, coming down from the highest or third heaven, in which I saw a single angel. But as it drew near, I saw that it held two. The carriage shone before my eyes in the distance like a diamond, and harnessed to it were young horses as white as snow. And the couple sitting in the carriage held in their hands a pair of turtledoves....

So they came, and behold, it was a husband and his wife. And they said, “We are married. We have lived a blessed life in heaven from the earliest time, which you call the golden age, remaining forever in the same flower of youth that you see us in today.”

I looked at the two of them closely, because I perceived that they represented conjugal love in their life and in their adornment—in their life as shown in their faces, and in their adornment as shown in the garments they wore. For all angels are affections of love in human form. The essential, dominant affection shines out from their faces, and they are given clothing on the basis of their affection and in accordance with it. Consequently, in heaven they say that everyone is clothed in his own affection.

The husband appeared to be between adolescence and early manhood in age. From his eyes flashed a light sparkling with the wisdom of love. His face seemed to be inmosty radiant with this light, and because of the radiance from within, outwardly his skin virtually shone. As a result, his whole facial appearance was singularly one of dazzling good looks.

He was dressed in a full-length robe, and under the robe he wore a blue-colored garment, which was tied about the waist with a golden girdle bearing three precious stones, two of them sapphires, one on each side, and a garnet in the middle. His stockings were of shining linen, into which had been woven threads of silver; and his shoes were made entirely of silk. This was the representational form that conjugal love took in the case of the husband.

In the case of the wife, however, it took the following form. I saw her face, and did not see it. I saw it as the very essence of beauty, and did not see it because the beauty was beyond expression. For there was in her face the bright glow of a blazing light, like the light possessed by angels in the third heaven, and this light dimmed my vision, so that I was simply stupefied by it.

Noticing this, the wife spoke to me, saying, “What do you see?”

I answered, “I see only conjugal love and a picture of it. But I see and do not see.”

At this she turned at an angle away from her husband, and then I could look more intently. Her eyes flashed with the light of her heaven, which is blazing, as I said, and so takes its quality from the love of wisdom. For wives in the third heaven love their husbands on account of their husbands' wisdom and in response to it, and the husbands love their wives on account of and in response to that love directed towards them, and so they are united.

The wife had her beauty as a result of this, such beauty that no artist could reproduce it or portray it in its true form, for a flashing of light like that is not possible in the painter's colors, nor is such loveliness expressible in his art.

Her hair was attractively arranged in a style to match her beauty, with jewels in the form of flowers inserted into it. She had a necklace of garnets, from which hung a rosette of peridots. And she had bracelets of pearls. She was dressed in a scarlet gown, and under it a purple bodice fastened in front with rubies. But what surprised me, the colors kept changing depending on which way she was facing in relation to her husband, and their sparkle also kept changing accordingly, being now more, now less—more when they faced each other, and less when she faced away at an angle.

When I had seen these things, they spoke with me again. And when the husband spoke, he spoke as though he spoke at the same time on behalf of his wife, and when the wife spoke, she spoke as though she spoke at the same time on behalf of her husband. For such was the union of their minds, from which comes their speech. It was then that I heard as well the way conjugal love sounds, how it was inwardly together with, and also the result of, the delights of a state of peace and innocence.

Finally they said, "They are calling us back. We have to go."

They then appeared to be again riding in a carriage, as before, and they were borne off along a road stretching out between flower gardens, from whose beds rose olive trees and trees full of oranges. And as they drew near their heaven, young women came to meet them and welcome them and take them in.

Conjugal Love 75

When I was once meditating on conjugal love, my mind was seized with a desire to know what that love was like among the people who lived in the golden age.... And because I knew that all those people who lived well in those ages are now in heaven, I prayed to the Lord to be allowed to speak with them and be instructed.

Then suddenly an angel stood beside me, and he said, "I have been sent by the Lord to be your guide and companion. First I will guide and accompany you to the people who lived in the first age or period, which is called golden...."

We crossed a great desert, and we came to a forest thick with trees of various kinds and dark on account of their density.... After we entered the forest, our eyes were opened, and here and there we saw olive trees entwined with vines, which had bunches of purplish-blue grapes hanging from them. Moreover, the olive trees were arranged in a continuous series of circles. Consequently we went around and around as each one came to view, until finally we saw a grove of tall cedars, with some eagles on their branches. Seeing them the angel said, "We are now on the mountain, not far from its summit."

We went on, and lo, beyond the grove, there was a circular field, where male and female lambs were grazing, which were forms representative of the state of innocence and peace of the people who dwelt on the mountain. We crossed this field, and suddenly tents appeared—tent after tent—reaching many thousands in number, in front and on each side, as far as the eye could see.

And the angel said, "...When these most ancient people lived in the world, they dwelled in tents. Therefore they also live in tents now. But let us turn our way southward—where the wiser ones among them are—to find someone to talk with."

As we went, I saw in the distance three boys and three girls sitting at the entrance of one of the tents. But when we drew near, they looked like men and women of average height. And the angel said, "All the inhabitants of this mountain appear at a distance like little children, because they are in a state of innocence, and early childhood is the way innocence appears."

Seeing us, the men hurried over to us and said, "Where are you from, and how did you get here? Your faces are different from the faces of our mountain."

But the angel answered and told them how we were able to pass through the forest and the reason for our coming. Hearing this, one of the three men invited us into his tent and led us inside. The man was dressed in a blue-colored robe and a tunic of very white wool. And his wife was dressed in a purple dress, with a blouse underneath of embroidered fine linen.

Then because I had in my thought the desire to learn about the marriages of the most ancient peoples, I looked by turns at the husband and wife, and I observed a seeming unity of their souls in their faces. So I said, "You two are one."

The man replied, “We are. Her life is in me, and my life is in her. We have two bodies, but one soul. The union between us is like the union of the two tabernacles in the breast which are called the heart and the lungs. She is my heart and I am her lungs. But since when we say heart here we mean love, and when we say lungs we mean wisdom, therefore she is the love of my wisdom, and I am the wisdom of her love. Therefore her love outwardly clothes my wisdom, and my wisdom is inwardly within her love. Consequently, as you have said, the unity of our souls appears in our faces.”

Then I asked, “If such is the union between you, are you able to look upon any other woman than your own?”

He replied, “I can, but because my wife is united to my soul, the two of us look together, and then not a trace of lust can enter. For when I look at other men’s wives, I look at them through the eyes of my wife, who is the only one I am in love with. And because she, as my wife, can perceive all my inclinations, she acts as an intermediary and directs my thoughts, taking away anything discordant and at the same time inspiring a coldness and horror towards anything unchaste. As a result it is impossible for us here to regard any of our companions’ wives with lust—as impossible as it would be to look at the light of our heaven from a state of infernal darkness. We have no mental concept among us, therefore, and not even any word in our speech for the temptations of libidinous love. He could not say free love, because the chastity of their heaven resisted it.”

My angel guide then said to me, “You hear, now, the speech of the angels of this heaven, that it is a speech of wisdom, because they speak in terms of causes.”

After this I looked around, and seeing that their tent appeared covered with gold, I asked why this was.

The man replied that it was due to the flaming light, which glittered like gold. “It shines and strikes the curtains of our tent,” he said, “whenever we are engaged in conversation on the subject of conjugal love. For the heat from our sun, which in its essence is love, then bares itself and tints the light, which in its essence is wisdom. It tints it with its own color, which is golden. This occurs because conjugal love in its origin is the interplay of wisdom and love, for man was born to be a form of wisdom, and woman to be a form of love for the wisdom in a man. From this come the delights of that interplay in conjugal love, and therefore between us and our wives.

“We here have seen, for thousands of years, that those delights become more excellent and exalted in abundance, degree and strength, according to the worship of the Lord Jehovih among us. That heavenly union or that heavenly marriage which exists between love and wisdom infuses itself as a result of that worship....”

...[T]he man hurried to his tent and returned with a pomegranate containing a number of seeds made of gold. He gave it to me and I took it away with me, as a memento to me that we had been with people who had lived in the golden age.

So then, after saying farewell, we departed and returned home.