

# **I Am: The Lord's Divine Presence with Us**

by the Rev. Frederick M. Chapin

*And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).*

One of the most basic of human needs is to feel worthwhile. Our lives would become unbearable if we felt that there was nothing we could accomplish. We need to be assured that we can make a difference. The more we recognize how we can benefit others, the more we will value ourselves and the services we can provide.

Many people who are in a state of depression feel as if their lives are of no value. It is not clear to them how they can positively affect others. They see more of their negative faults than of their good opportunities and abilities. For example, some elderly people today feel a sense of isolation and low self-worth. They are not able to do the things they once could do, so they don't see anything they can offer. We can easily see that the more we recognize what our abilities are, and whom we can have a positive influence upon, the more appreciation and enjoyment we will have about ourselves and the services we are able to perform.

The Lord intends for every person to feel a sense of self-worth. We need the assurance that we can make a positive contribution to our neighbor, country, the church, and even the Lord's kingdom in the heavens. We are to have confidence that the Lord has created us with unique gifts to support the efforts of others and add to the effectiveness of the Lord's church upon the earth. In short, all of us can do wonderful things for other people.

Our reading from Exodus about the Lord's call to Moses gives us teachings on how the Lord makes an individual call to each one of us. And the more we are faithful to that call, the more we are able to display the love and wisdom that exist in heaven. When we are able to display heavenly states in our lives, we will appreciate what the Lord has enabled us to do.

The story begins with Moses watching the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro. One day Moses saw a bush burning with fire but not being consumed. He soon recognized that this was the Lord's doing and had to take his shoes off his feet because he was standing upon holy ground. The Lord then revealed to Moses that he was to go to Egypt and lead the Israelites to the promised land. This seemed like an impossible task for Moses to accomplish. To assure Moses that he could do these things, the Lord spoke the words of our text: "I AM has sent me to you." We know that Moses did eventually lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and he guided them to the promised land.

Like Moses, when we first hear what we are to do, we may have doubts about our ability to carry it out. We may feel unqualified to perform the task that the Lord has set out before us. Quite often, when we are confronted with an occasion to do something good, we fear taking a risk to do that good. We convince ourselves that we are hopelessly trapped in the results of our previous failures, with no hope of emerging out of them. Like Moses, we risk remaining stuck—watching sheep because of the murder he had committed in Egypt—and then Israel would forever remain in slavery.

Nevertheless, the Lord gives us the same words that He gave to Moses: I AM is with you. When the Lord referred to Himself as the I AM, He was alluding to His Divinity. He was telling Moses that His full infinite power would be with him as he set out upon his task. And the Lord gives us the same assurance. If we make the effort to take advantage of the opportunities for performing good services, the Lord will be with us in His full Divinity. His infinite love and wisdom will be present with us as we use our unique gifts.

The Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church clearly teach that the Lord is present in every detail of creation. This means that the Lord is *personally* present with each one of us. If all of a sudden you were the only person alive upon the earth, the Lord would not be any closer to you then, than He is right now. The Lord is fully aware of our individual concerns and challenges. Yet, for the most part, we are not consciously aware of the Lord's presence at every moment. This is so that we are in freedom which allows us to enjoy the life the Lord is providing for us. However, the Lord is always intimately aware of our state and of how we can be of use to His kingdom. He regards each of us for what we can provide in making heaven more wonderful, more perfect, and more effective. While we are upon the earth, the Lord works in us so that we are able to manifest heaven and further establish heavenly principles here. And He unceasingly provides what we need to accomplish our task, which is so precious in His sight.

Yet just having the Lord's unceasing love and wisdom present with us does not automatically mean we will accomplish our God-given task. We must also cooperate with Him. The Heavenly Doctrines teach that we cooperate with the Lord when our lives are in order. And we have the proper loves and priorities established in our lives when we simply comply with the teachings from the Word. So, as we obey the Word and remove disorders in our lives that disagree with what the Word teaches, our lives are becoming more and more established in Divine order. This produces a living conjunction with the Lord. And the more our lives are in order, the stronger that bond with the Lord. Then we can accomplish and enjoy the calling that the Lord is leading us into. And then we can escape from the consequences of our past evils and journey toward a state of freedom in the Lord's kingdom.

There are three things to be aware of if we are to be motivated by confidence that the Lord's power is with us. First, we must recognize that it is the Divinity of the Lord that allows good services to be done. Just as Moses was powerless, of himself, to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt, so we, too, are powerless to perform services that truly accomplish good and bring heaven to earth without the Lord.

Second, if we are to have the discipline and ability to perform services that help other people and bring heaven to the earth, we must be able to face reality. When we accept truth, then we are dealing with reality. New Church doctrine teaches us this most fundamental reality: all things are from the Lord. The more we sincerely confess this and cooperate with it, the more we are able to face and respond to what is real. And the more we are able to face reality and not try to hide from it or cover it up, the better we are equipped to help others and provide services for them. Heaven is a state where we function in what is real. On the other hand, hell is a state where we fantasize to indulge in selfish desires or intentionally delude ourselves that a disorder is not really present. Facing reality prevents us from going through denial. Loving truth allows us to enjoy reality. The

more we are content with what is real, the more we will find contentment with our lives on earth and with what we will do in heaven.

Third, we must realize that it is the Lord who establishes the church. It was the Lord who led Israel out of Egypt. He accomplished it *through* Moses, but it was done from His power. Likewise, when we are able to display heavenly loves for others, the church is being established *by* the Lord *through* us. The good that we do is really the Lord's work. We can make the church on earth more effective by obeying the Lord's commandments. However, He is the One making the church more prominent upon the earth. The Heavenly Doctrines are clear that the Lord does not *need* the help of people or angels to bring good and peace upon the earth. However, He uses us so that we can find delight and fulfillment in this awesome work.

For example, only the Lord can make our married partner happy and useful, but He works *through* us toward these ends. The Lord can guide our children to eternal life without our assistance, but He works through us to instruct each child in what is right and holy. The same is true of our friends, fellow workers, and others we come in contact with. The Lord has allowed each of us to have an integral part in bringing heavenly loves and truths to the world so that we can find heavenly contentment and peace in what He is accomplishing on the earth. Whenever we do something good and honorable from a desire to obey the Lord, the Lord is conjoined to that good and can use it to bring heaven to the earth.

So, when we receive the Lord, we can do marvelous things. When He guides our lives, we can "cast the mountains into the sea." With His leading we can develop a clear awareness of what is right and wrong, and we will have the discipline and the strength to cast away barriers to heaven. Also, we will have a sense of the Lord's power being present with us. If we continue to look to the Lord when we are confronted with attacks from the hells, our eyes will be opened from within and we will see that we are always under the Lord's protection and, with Him, we have the power to achieve great spiritual victories. We will be like Elisha's servant, who saw a host of fiery chariots surrounding and protecting him when a band of Syrian raiders was about to attack.

For us to accomplish our calling, we must allow the Lord to establish a conscience of good in us, a conviction that we want true principles to be accomplished within us and through us. And because the Lord is not limited to natural properties, He can be with us, with His full and infinite Divinity, in the minutest details of our lives. We can rejoice in the knowledge that when we are conjoined with the Lord, we have a role in, we are a part of, the most valuable and wonderful work in the world. We can rejoice in our opportunities to make the Lord's church more visible upon the earth. We can do wonderful things in His name. For the Lord calls each one of us to Him, saying "I AM" and I will be with you.

*Amen.*

Lessons: Exodus 3:1-14, John 8:48-59, *Arcana Coelestia* 6880

*I AM WHO I AM. That this signifies the Being and Coming-forth of all things in the universe is evident from the fact that "I am" is Being, and because He alone is Being, it is said in the nominative case. That it is twice said "I AM," that is, "I AM who I AM," is because the one signifies Being and the other Coming-forth; thus the one signifies the Divine Itself, which is called the "Father," and the other the Divine Human, which is called the "Son"; for the Divine Human comes forth from the Divine Itself. But when the Lord as to the Human also was made the Divine Being (Esse) or Jehovah, then the Divine truth, which proceeds from the Lord's Divine Human, is the Divine Coming-forth from the Divine Being. From this it can be seen that the Divine Being cannot communicate Itself to anyone except through the Divine Coming-forth; that is, the Divine Itself cannot communicate Itself except through the Divine Human, and the Divine Human cannot communicate itself except through the Divine truth, which is the Holy of the Spirit: this is meant by its being said that all things were made by the Word (John 1:3). It appears to man as if the Divine truth were not such that anything can come forth by means of it; for it is believed that it is like a voice, which being uttered with the lips, is dissipated. But it is altogether otherwise: the Divine truth proceeding from the Lord is the veriest reality, and such a reality that all things have come forth from it, and all things subsist from it; for whatever proceeds from the Lord is the veriest reality in the universe; and such is the Divine truth, which is called the "Word," through which all things were made.*

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