

The Story of Samson and Our Spiritual Rebirth

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“Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.”
(Judges 14:14)

Samson’s riddle, which he put forth to his Philistine companions on the eve of his marriage to the Philistine woman of Timnath, contains in summary the whole spiritual meaning of his dramatic life as it relates to a person’s regeneration. Interiorly it illustrates how the ferocious attacks of evil and falsity can be met and rent asunder by the power of Divine truth entrusted by the Lord to our care and for our regeneration. A transformation is effected. In place of temptation there comes perception, or food for the soul, and from the very strength of the evil that would have destroyed us there is charity or sweetness of life anew.

In general Samson represents the letter of the Word and its supreme power over evil and falsity. He takes on this representation because of his long, uncut hair. Hair is the last and ultimate outgrowth of the external skin, and as such it is the final termination of the life of the body. Similarly, the letter of the Word is the ultimate or outmost termination of all degrees of revealed truth. The Word exists, and has from the beginning, because the Lord wills that people be saved. Salvation, because it is an eternal reception of the Lord’s love, is possible only where a state of conjunction exists. And conjunction is possible because the Lord has accommodated His infinite love and wisdom so that they may be received by a finite person as if they were his own. In the Word, which is the only medium of conjunction between God and person, we actually find the whole of the Divine so accommodated that it may be received by finite minds (see *Apocalypse Explained* 918:11; *Arcana Coelestia* 1461, 1489, 1496, 1542, 1661).

There are many degrees whereby truth is accommodated, as many as there are planes of human life. The celestial angels receive the Lord’s revelation in its highest form—in celestial or inmost appearances of truth. To the spiritual angels these forms of truth are further accommodated and adapted to their spiritual state. Again, natural angels receive a further adaptation of the truth. The form of their revelation consists of appearances of truth adapted to their natural state. Yet within these natural appearances dwells the spiritual sense, and within this is the celestial, and inmost is the Divine of the Lord, which is the very essence of the Word itself.

As Divine truth descends through the heavens, it is successively clothed with forms which adapt or accommodate it for reception by angels and people, so that all may be conjoined to the Lord by an eternal reception of His Divine love.

The final resting place or outmost termination of the Word is in its literal statements, particularly in the Old and New Testaments, wherein Divine truth is accommodated for reception by natural and sensual people on earth. In the literal sense of the Word, Divine truth is in its fullness and power not because of the literal form itself, but because into it are gathered all degrees of revelation. Power is *in* the ultimate, but not *from* it. When a little child reads the Word with affection, the whole of the heavens benefit—each angel receives and delights in the particular sense directed to his state. Yet the child knows nothing of this. He is unaware that myriads of angels worship the Lord when he reads the Word, communicating to him as much of their affection as he can receive.

This conjunction with the Lord through the heavens not only applies to little children but to all

people on earth who will read the Word with affection and humility. The Word of God has power in a person's life not because of its literal form, but because of the angels who depend on human reading of it for their perception, and who share with people the power of their love to the Lord.

The communion of angels and humans is a very real thing. All our loves and affections come from the spiritual world, either through heaven or hell, depending upon the thoughts we entertain and rationally confirm. Thought brings presence or association, and continued association communicates affection, which in time conjoins or makes one. To entertain selfish and worldly thoughts is to associate with evil spirits who love such things and who desire nothing more than to share and thus insinuate with us their love of evil. Continued association with such spirits will bring about an eternal communion or sharing of their love, which will result in our damnation.

But the Word of God is given so that people may enter into a communion with angels and so through the heavens be conjoined to the Lord. When we read the Word in a state of holiness, and our thoughts and rational judgments are guided by its truth, then we summon the inhabitants of heaven, and, according to our state, receive the power of their affection by which we are conjoined to the Lord.

Samson, judge and mightiest hero of Israel, pictures most powerfully the office of Divine truth in human life. In the spiritual sense Samson can be likened to the Word in a person whom the Lord is regenerating. His abundant hair and source of strength are like the growing concept of truth in the natural mind. The Philistines are his enemies. They represent the power of faith alone—truths loved for the sake of self and the world rather than for the sake of good. They wish to make Samson their servant—that is, they want to induce the person who is being regenerated to delight merely in knowledges of truth, so that faith becomes an intellectual pastime. This kind of faith (often called “historical faith”) can be serviceable for a time, but eventually it must be destroyed by a person taking the initiative for himself.

Thus Samson, early in life, went down to Philistia and fell in love with a daughter of that land. This symbolizes the conjunction of truth with an external affection in the natural mind—an affection which, because of its proprial nature, obscures truth rather than enlightening it (see *Arcana Coelestia* 4855). Any learned truth that does not look to good is in danger of being perverted and becoming falsity. Nevertheless, this first affection with which truth can be conjoined in the natural mind is indeed of an external and somewhat selfish quality, but without it—without an affection of learning for the sake of one's own honor, reputation and gain—a person would never acquire the doctrines that he will one day love for their own sake, that is, for the sake of the good of life. So the first good produced by truth is called mediate good.

When Samson first entered the land of the Philistines to make arrangements with them for his bride, he was attacked by a young lion. When Divine truth first enters the natural mind, the powers of evil and falsity are aroused. Like a mighty lion, they roar their hatred and contempt against the Divine. The power of truth when separated from good is thus turned against the Lord. So during the Lord's temptations in the wilderness, the devil quoted Scripture, trying to induce the Lord to obey him. With patience and strength, however, the Lord Himself used the letter of the Word to devastate and make impotent the devil's attack. So Samson rent the lion as if it were a lamb, demonstrating the power of truth rightly used, and its effortless destruction of evil wherever there is genuine faith in the Lord.

In time a swarm of bees built a nest in the carcass of the lion and filled it with wild honey. On a subsequent journey to Timnath to celebrate the nuptials of his forthcoming wedding, Samson discovered the honey, tasted its sweetness and was refreshed. At the wedding feast he posed a riddle

to his Philistine companions concerning this unusual event of which he alone knew: “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet” (Judges 14:14).

The dead lion no longer possessed its terrible power. The devourer or destroyer of spiritual life, the eater representing evil and falsity in the natural mind, was put to death. This is accomplished in a person by the shunning of evils as sins, for when a person compels himself to shun evils because they are sins against the Lord, a miraculous change takes place called regeneration. The influx of hell is exchanged for the influx of heaven. The quality of one’s mental strength is changed from the ravenous to the peaceful, which is food for the soul. The power of the mind is also redirected from selfishness to charity. When good affections express themselves in external acts, the strength of a person’s character becomes sweet and spiritually palatable. Honey, therefore, represents a new state of charity or mutual love (see *Apocalypse Explained* 611:18). “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet” (Judges 14:14).

Regeneration does not destroy a person’s natural mind, nor does it deprive him of anything that causes him to be human. It merely takes away evil by changing or bending the quality of his affections from evil to good. So we read in the prophet Isaiah, “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well” (1:16, 19).

When we are engaged in the battles of temptation, it seems to us that if we give up our natural desires we will lose everything that makes life worthwhile. But when we lay down our evil tendencies we find that we have not really lost anything. Our affections remain, but they have been cleansed, purified, sweetened, by the heavenly spirit of charity. Our natural affections, which prior to regeneration were strong against our salvation, when purified become the new sweetness of regenerate life. But this sweetness cannot be ours until we allow the Samson of Divine truth to enter into us and slay the lion of proprial (selfish) passion. Temptations are attacks upon our good loves by the forces of evil.

Samson’s relationship with the Philistines became a series of contests, successively more severe. With each encounter his great strength proved victorious, that is, until he fell in love with the Philistine woman Delilah, who represents the subtlest of our affections of truth. This is an evil affection: to use truth to confirm what is opposite of truth, the idea that we can save ourselves. It utilizes our inmost inclinations to justify selfishness and obstruct the process of self-examination. That a person is the unknowing victim of these desires is seen in the fact that Delilah and her Philistine cohorts attacked Samson and cut his hair while he slept. Then his strength departed and his eyes were gouged out and he was imprisoned and made to grind corn.

So it is with a person in last and inmost temptations of regenerate life. It appears as if truth has been taken away, and with it the very power to do good. The person despairs of his state. His doubts overwhelm him; his spiritual eyes are blind to perceptions he once enjoyed; he feels himself to be the servant of sin. He believes that the Lord has abandoned him. All purpose has gone out of his life.

In his deep despair, when the forces of evil are confident of their victory and would sport with their victim, the person of the church begins to feel, once again, the near presence of the Lord. The strength of truth slowly returns as he gropes in his blindness for the way that leads to its right application. A little child leads him—that is, the remains of innocence, implanted long ago, direct the regenerating person to the very house of his enemies—to the temple of Dagon, which is hypocrisy and conceit. There, in the midst of his unseen foes, he receives the full force of their mockery and contempt for truth. His hands, still guided by the innocence of remains, take hold of the two central

supports of evil—the loves of self and the world. Lifting his head in prayerful acknowledgment of the Lord as the source of all good and truth, the person bows himself with all the might that God effects through the as-of-self. So Samson prayed, “O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once...” (Judges 16:28).

With the destruction of the temple, the illusion of self-life is broken. Samson and the lords of the Philistines lie buried beneath the rubble. Indeed, “the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life” (Judges 16:30). But the angels do not know what we mean by death and burial. When such things are mentioned in the Word, they think of resurrection—of the beginning of eternal life. To lay down one’s natural life while destroying spiritual enemies is really to take up eternal life in the service of the Lord. For “Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). May it be said of all those who seek the overthrow of the proprium or selfish will through the medium of the Lord’s Word, “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet” (Judges 14:14).

Amen.

Lessons: Judges chapters 13-16 (portions); *Apocalypse Explained* 1086