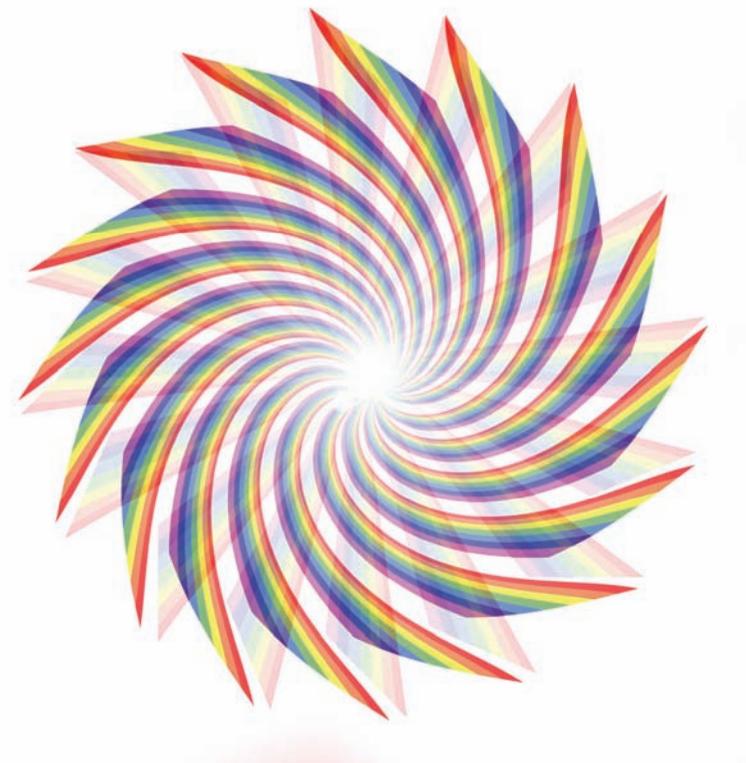


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Putting these thoughts on 'eternal' and 'life' together a picture emerges of what is meant by 'eternal life' – it is an inner spiritual state when our love for others and our ability to receive love from others develops and grows in wonderful ways. And this development, started whilst we are in this world, continues on and on in the spiritual world. The beauty of this vision of heavenly eternal life is that it involves our continual spiritual growth as we put our love for others into action to meet their needs. This eternal life is God given because it reflects the way God loves us.

We are not victims of ageing, sickness and death. These are part of scenery, not the seer, who is immune to any form of change. This seer is the spirit, the expression of eternal being. **Deepak Chopra**

From infancy to the end of life, and afterwards to eternity, a person's state of life is continually changing.
Emanuel Swedenborg



Eternal Life

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Eternal Life

The idea of eternal life seems unbelievable and absurd. After all day to day life in this world can be frustrating, difficult, lonely and sometimes unbearable – what if this went on forever?

But what is ‘eternal life’ and does it imply eternal rest?

Strangely I think we need to start by considering what the word ‘life’ means. Now in everyday conversation ‘life’ is what happens all around us as we go about our day to day tasks. People sometimes use the expression “get a life” when they feel the person they are talking to doesn’t seem to do much with their lives. John Lennon said: “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans”.

Life certainly involves all the practical things of daily living but is this really what life is all about? Surely, what makes life most rewarding and complete is the experience of loving others and being loved. And what makes it most unrewarding and empty is the feeling of being unloved and of being unable to love. Real life is about love and you can see that most easily and clearly in the loving care of a mother for her new baby. Deep down life is all about love – indeed all you need is love, because life is love.

Now come back to our everyday idea of life and we can see that one of its characteristics is the need or desire to grow in some way. We might experience the need to develop or grow in our career or to improve the house we live in or to have a larger family or to learn something new. Even the government has a desire for the country to grow economically. So it is not surprising that the deeper, more real life that is all about love also needs to develop and grow. Our ability to express our love for others and our ability to receive openly the love that others give to us both need to develop and grow and move away from the self-centred state we start with.

(Continued on page 3)

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But now let’s look at the concept of ‘eternal’.

What dominates our practical day to day living is time. So much of what we do is determined by the time of the day or the length of time we have available for a particular task. We measure the time very carefully with clocks and watches and we complain if buses or trains do not follow their timetables. When asked to do something we might say: “I haven’t got time for that”. With all this emphasis on time it is not surprising that we have great difficulty in coming to terms with concepts such as ‘eternal’ or ‘eternity’. Our first reaction is to think that ‘eternal’ refers to never ending time. When we think this way ‘eternal life’ conjures up a picture of a life after death of unbearable monotony that goes on unchanged for ever and ever! But to get away from this time dependent concept of ‘eternal’ we need to get in touch with our own experiences of ‘timelessness’ in this life.

Reflect on the occasions when you have been bored with nothing to do or undertaking a task in which you have no real interest or just watching the clock waiting for the time to go – doesn’t time drag! Or think about the week before a special holiday. The days seem to go slowly by as you wait for your holiday to start but once you begin your holiday the days seem to rush by! Or think about those occasions when you are engrossed in doing something you love or are simply being with someone you love. Our sense then is that time doesn’t matter. You see, our sense of time depends on how we feel or the state we are in. Be in a happy and contented state and without you realising it, time has rushed by. But be in a sad and disgruntled state and time drags by very slowly.

We can begin to see from this that our deeper inner spiritual life, the life that continues after death, does not experience time but rather, experiences changes in state or being. ‘Eternal’ can then be seen as not meaning an infinite development of time but rather an infinite development of state or being.

(Continued on page 4)