

Section B

Starting Assumptions

This process of life change and spiritual transformation is based on the Judeo-Christian scriptures as explained in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. As such, it makes a number of starting assumptions, as follows:

1. The BNL process is the same thing as scriptural repentance.

This process of life change and spiritual transformation is the same thing as the Judeo-Christian process of *repentance*. In Judaic scripture, the word *repent* means to make changes in your life for the better, with an emphasis on outward *behavior*. In Christian scripture, the word *repent* means the same thing, with an emphasis on changing your *mind*, i.e., what you *think* and *intend*. And in Latin (the language in which Emanuel Swedenborg wrote) the word *repent* emphasizes sorrow, remorse, or grief of conscience, all of which imply a change of *heart*, *desire*, and *will*. Repentance is therefore a holistic, universal process of life change and spiritual transformation which, when understood and practiced, can impact your life for good on every level of your being—from outside in, and inside out. The process you're now exploring *is* this holistic, universal process of repentance.

2. God exists.

This process assumes that there is a God (one God) who is Lord of the universe. That God is perfect (divine) love, perfect wisdom, and perfect life, all existing within the person of God. This means that God is fully visible, approachable, and capable of human interaction, connection, and relationship with all people throughout the world—regardless of what religion or life philosophy they embrace, and regardless of what culture or background they're from. *Anyone* who has genuine goodness and truth present in him- or herself experiences some level of relationship with this one God, because God *is* the goodness and truth present within that person.

In addition, God is known by many names and titles in Judeo-Christian scripture. One title that appears throughout is *Lord*. Therefore, within this process, the title *Lord* is used interchangeably with *God* to refer to this one perfect, divine person.

3. God is loving, wise, and forgiving.

This process assumes that the Lord God is loving and wise—He is *love* and He is *wisdom* perfectly balanced in *life*. Because God *is* love, He is only capable of mercy, compassion, and kindness toward all people. When we are caught up in harmful habits of life, or destructive patterns of thinking and intending, He doesn't accuse us, blame us, impute negative motives to us, or seek revenge. Instead, His attitude is one of forgiveness: He looks past our weaknesses and helps us make changes for the better. As we work on making those changes a way is opened, and He enters, touching our hearts, minds, and lives with genuine goodness from within. In this way God's love, wisdom, and forgiveness become active, effective, and fully realized in us.

4. There are four universal kinds (or levels) of love.

This process assumes that there are four kinds (or levels) of love that all people experience: love of God, love of our neighbor (wanting what's best for people and treating them well), love of worldly pleasures and material things (also known as love of the world), and love of ourselves (also known as love of self or self-love—a love of caring for ourselves and our dependants, now and for the future). All four of these universal kinds of love are useful and important, and when they're kept in their created order and priority within us, they help perfect us as human beings. They are kept in their created order and priority when love of God is in the lead and valued above the others; love of our neighbor is next and is valued as second most important; love of the world comes next; and finally, love of self.

This process also assumes that any time love for worldly pleasures or material things becomes *more important* to us than loving God or people (or we might say, any time love of the world becomes *insubordinate* to love of God or love of our neighbor) we start to become materialistic, stingy, and greedy. And any time love for ourselves becomes *more important* to us than loving God or people (that is, any time love of self becomes *insubordinate* to love of God or love of people) we start to become self-focused, self-serving, and selfish.

Therefore, we are spiritually and emotionally healthiest when these four kinds of love are kept in their created order and priority within us.

5. Angels and hellish spirits exist. We are regularly influenced by them.

This process assumes that there is a life after death, a heaven and a hell, and that angels and hellish (“evil”) spirits exist. It also assumes that we are influenced moment to moment by them. We do not generate or manufacture any of the warm feelings or loving desires we experience. Instead, these things enter our hearts from God, in part filtered through angels who are with us. Likewise, we do not generate or manufacture any of the selfish feelings or greedy desires we experience. Instead, these things enter our hearts from hellish spirits who are nearby. Feelings and desires that come to us via angels inspire us to keep the four kinds of love mentioned above in their created order and priority. Feelings and desires that come to us from evil spirits do the opposite: They encourage us to *invert* the order of the four kinds of love and *reverse* their priority.

One of the freeing implications of these concepts is that any time we experience harmful or destructive feelings or desires, together with the destructive impulses, thoughts, and intentions they inspire, we are not guilty, responsible, or at fault for the fact that these things have shown up in us. The fact that they've shown up simply presents us with options and choices. What matters is what we *do* with these things once they've shown up. In this way, the presence of God, angels, and evil spirits provides a balanced context in which we freely choose how we will live our lives and what we will ultimately become.¹

¹ See the first footnote on the BNL Step 2.2 worksheet for a helpful qualifier.

6. Each of us experiences a will for good and a will for evil.

This process assumes that each of us experiences a will for good and also a will for what is harmful and destructive (evil). On one hand we have a loving, heavenly will (also known as conscience) which wants to do what is right and desires what is best for others. On the other hand, we have a selfish, destructive will that is opposed to God and wants what is harmful, destructive, and bad. (This will for good and will for evil are referred to in Judeo-Christian scripture as *heart of stone/heart of flesh*. They're also known in certain faith traditions as *old will/new will, old self/new self, one's own will* and a *God-given will for good, also heavenly will/hellish will*.)

This process also assumes that our heavenly will/conscience is a spiritual storehouse that gathers in all the good tendencies, helpful inclinations, and wholesome desires that come to us from God. Likewise, our hellish/selfish will is a spiritual dumping ground which contains all the hurtful desires, destructive tendencies, materialistic cravings, and selfish impulses that come to us from evil spirits.

One of the practical implications of these concepts is that any time hellish spirits stir up the contents of our old will, or incite us to new forms of badness, we don't have to change those spirits for the better, improve the quality of what they excite in us or dump into our minds, or improve the quality of our selfish will. All we have to do is be aware of the desires, ways of thinking, and modes of behavior those spirits inspire. Then, with God's help and power, we steer clear of them, choosing instead to think, will, and act from the conscience/heavenly will that the Lord builds in us over time. Doing these things, and making these choices, is what this process of life change and spiritual transformation is all about.

These are some of the starting assumptions on which this process of life change and spiritual transformation rests. You are now invited to go through the process yourself, to discover what value it may hold for your life.

Good wishes in this spiritual practice.