



Becoming Soul: Seven Steps to Heaven

El Alma

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In the spiritual novel Becoming Soul, a woman's experiences with family and motherhood foster her connection to the divine.

In El Alma's spiritual novel *Becoming Soul*, a parable is used to suggest means of personal development.

A beautiful soul makes plans to spend another lifetime on Earth, all in order to "vanquish existing self-condemning thoughts." Other souls tell it that it will have the chance to gain wisdom through its new life. It is born as Asina, who struggles after being abandoned by her mother; learns about what it means to find a home; and seeks the wisdom of a goddess to learn her purpose.

Asina and her family live through the emotional circumstances of giving birth, losing a child, and struggling for financial independence and security in a new land. Still, Asina's existence is hopeful; she sees the world as infused by God, and those around her believe that they are protected by guardian angels. Over a period of many years, Asina learns how hard it is to keep a family together in a hostile world, and finds that little is constant; life comes to seem like a temporary break from true peace and divine connection.

The book's brief introduction names seven steps that souls must complete before they ascend to higher levels of enlightenment. These include becoming comfortable with silence, finding hope, and experiencing suffering; some tie into biblical examples, as of Jesus asking why he was forsaken while being crucified. In organization, the story's parts are made to reflect these steps, which are echoed in Asina's experiences, as when she answers her suffering by learning to "replace worldly perceptions for His truths that are beyond human comprehension."

The narration is spare. An omniscient narrator describes each moment of Asina's life, as with her childhood pain, which follows her mother becoming ill and sending her away. However, while Asina's pain is named, specifics around it are not, including the particulars of her mother's illness. Because important details are mentioned only in brief, they are often easy to miss, leading to gaps in the narration.

The book is best understood as an allegory for Jesus's own spiritual transformation, as he moved from his birth to his death by crucifixion, and then found his ultimate home with God. Its own characters are developed in service of this, only explored in terms of their emotions and the lessons they learn; in the end, Asina's story comes to seem as if it could take place anywhere, or nowhere at all.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (April 22, 2021)

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