

AFTER DEATH HEAVEN OR HELL ?

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ABSTRACT

What is death? What happens after death? Will one go to heaven or hell? These are the questions, which have been discussed in every religion and are also a common talk among people. The followers of all religions and faiths claim that one can reach heaven only through their religion. Nevertheless, every one is trying to find an easy path to reach heaven after death. The question is: Is there any heaven or hell?

INTRODUCTION

For centuries man has looked to the sky and asked profound questions: Where is heaven and how do we get there? People are performing various types of religious rites, recite Holy Scriptures, repeat various Names of God whole night for reservation of a seat in heaven. After death a number of mantras or verses are read from the religious books to pray so that the soul of that person goes to heaven. Some people have martyred themselves committing heinous acts of terrorism to get a seat in heaven.

In India people recite various mantras and verses from various religious books; follow certain *Sants*, *Sadhus*, *Tantriks*, *Pirs*, etc.; and visit various religious places and bathe their bodies in *sarovars* (sacred water tanks) and sacred rivers to get a seat reserved in heaven after death. Besides, the relatives of a dead person further perform various types of *Yaga*, *Paths*, mantras, etc. and pray to God to grant him/her a seat in heaven or *Sach Khand*.

Is heaven simply a myth or is it a real place?

DISCUSSION

I have gone through many articles on 'Heaven and Hell'. In most of these articles every religion has discussed their concept of 'Heaven and Hell' and emphasizes that it is only their religion through which one can reach heaven. In other articles some authors have discussed the concepts of almost all major religions of the world but do not include the concept of 'Heaven and Hell' in Sikhism. For examples:

1. The following review of Peter Novak's work, *Can Science Reconcile The "Reincarnation" and "Heaven/Hell" Hypotheses?*, by Bill Lanning, PhD, Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Butler College, Andover,

Kansas indicates that Novak has searched about the concepts of 'Heaven and Hell' in almost all religions even including the remotest ones but nothing from Sikhism:

"Peter Novak began a serious search into the sacred writings of various world religions (past and present), Freudian and Jungian psychology, Swedenborgianism, near death experiences, past-life regressions, contemporary science, and the recent discoveries at Nag Hammadi and an increased understanding of Christian Gnosticism. After he collected and sifted extensive data from these studies, his theory of the division of consciousness emerged ... taking additional cues from the Native American ni and nagi, the Egyptian Ba and Ka, and the ancient Chinese hun and p'o concepts, [and] what he believes to be a 'division' understanding in ancient Zoroastrianism, classical Greek, Swedenborg's visions, [and] various philosophers and psychologists.... Novak not only writes from the heart but also from extensive research into areas not normally conquered by lay people or a non-academician student of religion. Though his research emerged as a result of personal experiences, his scholarship is evident as he interprets data from an eclectic, widely varied wealth of information. His book is an exhaustive compilation of the thoughts of many upon the timeless questions of life and death." (<http://www.asa3.org/archive/asa/199806/0128.html>) (June 11, 1998.)

2. Similarly, Barbra Walters has talked about the heaven and how to reach there with theologians of most of the major religions and also atheists and scientists. When I watched on Tuesday, December 20, 2005 (9:00-11:00 pm. ET) a show on the ABC Television Network Barbara Walters' Special, *Heaven -- Where Is It? How Do We Get There?* I noticed that she has missed to talk

to any Hindu and Sikh theologian on this issue. I have summarized the interviews with various theologians conducted by Barbara Walters based on her show and the news [3] as follows:

- Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of the Roman Catholic Church of Washington DC says the purpose of life *"is to come to the end of your life at peace with the lord so that you may find an eternal happiness in heaven...This life is not what we're made for. We're made for heaven. We're made for the future."*
- Rabbi Neil Gilman from New York Jewish Theological Seminary said: *"The purpose of life is to live a decent life... and that you do it for its own sake, not for getting a reward."*
- Comedian Jackie Mason (Rabbi) said: *"There is a tremendous emphasis in our tradition about what you do with yourself in your lifetime here on earth."*
- Baptist - Reverend Calvin Butts, Pastor of New York's famed Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem said: He has seen heaven, told Walters that heaven is *"eternal joy and happiness because you are at one with God."*
- Buddhist - Dalai Lama said: The purpose of life is to be happy, and that you can accomplish that by *"warm heartedness."* He said heaven *"is best place to further develop the spiritual practice... for Buddhist the final goal is not just to reach there, but to become Buddha. [It's] not the end,"* and further told that you can come back as an animal: *"If someone do very bad, badly... kill or steal... could be born in an animal body."*
- Richard Gere said: *"I don't think necessarily heaven and hell happen in some other life. I think it's right now."*
- Evangelical - The promise of heaven plays a central role in the lives of the National Association of Evangelicals President Pastor Ted Haggard's followers, believing if you are not a born again Christian, you have no assurance of going to heaven. *"Jesus Christ guarantees eternal life to anybody that'll follow him... The purpose of life is to glorify God and go to heaven... 'cause heaven is our home."*
- Ellen Johnson, President of the American Atheists Society said: *"No, heaven doesn't exist, hell doesn't exist. We weren't alive before we were born and we're not going to exist after we die. I'm not happy about the fact that that's the end of life, but I can accept that and make my life more fulfilling now, because this is the only chance I have."*
- Islamic scholar Feisal Abdul Rauf said: There is sex in heaven: *"The real life is the next life... and based upon how we live this life, it determines where we shall be in the next. We are told we will be in comfortable homes, reclining on silk couches... so*

we're given the delights of sex, the delights of wine, the delights of food with all of their positive things without their negative aspects."

- Terrorists and Heaven - Jihad Jarrar, of Islamic Jihad, who is incarcerated in an Israeli prison for a failed suicide bombing, tells Walters that only Muslims will go to heaven and *"the reason I chose a martyrdom operation"* was to spend an eternity in paradise. He says he was taught that *"everything good is in the garden in paradise,"* and that *"the lord promised the martyr who lost his life and lost the world on earth, that he promised him these 72 women in paradise as honor, as respect for him."*

Walters has done a wonderful job to present how heaven is understood by various religions. I noticed that she has covered almost all the major religions but did not mention any view of Guru Nanak, the founder of one of the great living religions of the worlds. The reason of not presenting the views of Guru Nanak is due to the fact the Sikhs have failed to represent philosophy of Guru Nanak (Nanakian Philosophy) in an academic way to the humanity of the Science Age. Therefore, it remains ignored whenever any writer tries to compare philosophy of different religions of the world. Had we, the Sikhs, presented Nanakian Philosophy academically in its real perspective, I am sure the millions of people who watched the Walters' show would have appreciated the original and unique philosophy of Guru Nanak about heaven and hell.

Similarly Walters also missed to include the views of any Hindu theologian. When Walter's interview about the above show was published by Westcott [4] in Reader's Digest in India the deficiency of concept of 'Heaven' in Hinduism was met by Shanoo Bijlani [2] as an inset in the article of Westcott but the views of Sikhism again remained ignored by her also. This might be due to the fact that many Hindu and Sikh theologians consider that Sikhism follows the philosophy of Hinduism on this issue, 'Heaven and Hell'. The irony is that this issue, 'Heaven and Hell', has not been analyzed by the Sikh theologians on the basis of Nanakian Philosophy embodied in the Bani of Guru Nanak, which is incorporated in the AGGS. Let us discuss 'Heaven and Hell' according to Hinduism and Nanakian Philosophy.

'HEAVEN AND HELL' IN HINDUISM

According to Shanoo Bijlani [2] in Hinduism, unlike Christianity and Islam, heaven is not a final destination. It is a half way place where one enjoys oneself for a while before being reborn again on earth. The final aim is to attain *moksha*, freedom from transmigration.

She says that according to the *Maha Bhagvadam*, heaven has seven *lokas* (regions) – *bhu*, *bhuva*, *swarga*, *maha*, *tapa*, *jana* and *satya*. Each *loka* has its own special

character: In *satya loka*, only truth resides. In *swarga loka*, all sensual desires are fulfilled. Here you can enjoy exotic food, enchanting music, splendid homes, and lovely *apsaras* (beautiful damsels).

She further adds one goes to heaven only if one has done good deeds otherwise goes to *naraka* (hell). In hell one temporarily suffers, before being reborn, probably as a creature of a lower order.

From the above information of Bijlani [2] it appears the method to reach real heaven by the followers of Hinduism is much more difficult than the followers of other religions.

'HEAVEN AND HELL' IN NANKIAN PHILOSOPHY

Guru Nanak first poses a question where does one come from and where will one go? Then he answers that one comes under the Laws of Nature and goes away in nature under the Laws of Nature:

ਜਾਤੋ ਜਾਇ ਕਹਾ ਤੇ ਆਵੈ ॥ ਕਹ ਉਪਜੈ ਕਹ ਜਾਇ ਸਮਾਵੈ ॥
ਕਿਉ ਬਾਧਿਓ ਕਿਉ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਪਾਵੈ ॥ ਕਿਉ ਅਭਿਨਾਸੀ ਸਹਜਿ ਸਮਾਵੈ ॥੧॥
ਨਾਮੁ ਰਿਦੈ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਮੁਖਿ ਨਾਮੁ
ਨਰਹਰ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਰਹਰ ਨਿਹਕਾਮੁ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
ਸਹਜੇ ਆਵੈ ਸਹਜੇ* ਜਾਇ ॥ ਮਨ ਤੇ ਉਪਜੈ ਮਨ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਇ ॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮੁਕਤੋ ਬੰਧੁ ਨ ਪਾਇ ॥ ਸਬਦੁ ਬੀਚਾਰਿ ਛੁਟੈ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਇ ॥੨॥
ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ੫-੧੫੨ [1].

*How can we know where did we come from?
Where did we originate, and where will we go or merge into?
How are we bound, and how are we liberated?
How do we merge with Indestructible Entity with ease? 1.
The Naam (comprehension of God) in the heart is the elixir (Amrit) of life,
The Naam is God, and God is free from any desire. 1.
Pause.
Under the Laws of Nature one comes (is born) and under the same laws one goes away (die).
Consciousness arises in the mind (with neurons in the brain) and is destroyed in the brain.
Through the comprehension of wisdom (philosophy) in the Sabd (Nanakian Philosophy) the Guru-oriented is liberated and does not fall into any bondage. 2.
AGGS, M 1, p 152 [1].*

Guru Nanak further mentions in his Bani that the treatment given to the body after death does not make any difference since it is not known where one will go after death:

ਇਕ ਦਝਹਿ ਇਕ ਦਬੀਅਹਿ ਇਕਨਾ ਕੁਤੇ ਖਾਹਿ ॥
ਇਕਿ ਪਾਣੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਉਸਟੀਅਹਿ ਇਕਿ ਭੀ ਫਿਰਿ ਹਸਣਿ ਪਾਹਿ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਏਵ ਨ ਜਾਪਈ ਕਿਥੈ ਜਾਇ ਸਮਾਹਿ ॥ ੨ ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ੫-੬੪੮.

Nanak Says:

"After death some are burnt, some are buried and some are left to be eaten by dogs (and vultures).

Some are thrown in water while others are thrown in dried well.

(Whatever may the method of disposal) There is no evidence where one (so-called soul) goes after death."

AGGS, M 1, p 648.

Guru Nanak also emphasizes that one should not think that one will get the reward in the other world after death. It is here in this world one gets the benefit/punishment depending upon one's deeds:

ਮਤੁ ਕੋ ਜਾਣੇ ਜਾਇ ਅਗੈ ਪਾਇਸੀ ॥

ਜੇਹੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਇ ਤੇਹਾ ਹੋਇਸੀ ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ੭੨੯.

Nanak Says:

"One must not understand that the benefit of karmas of the current life is rewarded in the next world.

It is here in this world 'what you sow so shall you reap.'

AGGS, M 1, p 729-730.

Based on the above principles of Nanakian Philosophy Guru Arjan summarizes the purpose of life as follows:

ਆਗਾਹਾ ਕੂ ਤ੍ਰਾਧਿ ਪਿਛਾ ਫੇਰਿ ਨ ਮੁਹਡੜਾ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਸਿਝਿ ਇਵੇਹਾ ਵਾਰ ਬਹੁਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਵੀ ਜਨਮੜਾ ॥੧॥
ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੫, ੫ ੧੦੯੬.

Nanak says:

"Think about the future, look not on the past.

Make the present life a great success,

Because there is no birth again."

AGGS, M 5, P 1096.

Finally, I would like to pose here the same question, which I have been asking to many theologians of various religions including Sikhism, wherever I get a chance:

Why are the two great families of religions (Semitic and Eastern religions) are at loggerheads over the question of 'Life after Death' although both believe that there is one God and the whole humanity is Its creation?

CONCLUSIONS

- The concept of heaven and hell is widely accepted in almost every religion, faith and cults.
- Almost every faith claims that only the followers of their faith can go to heaven.
- It appears that it is a very difficult path in Hinduism to reach heaven whereas in others it is very simple,

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just having a belief in that faith and accepting its prophet as the savior will lead to heaven.

- For atheists and scientists there is no heaven and hell.
- In Nanakian Philosophy heaven and hell are not known. One is born and dies under the Laws of Nature. The benefit/punishment of good and bad deeds is rewarded in this life not in any other life in any other world.
- The final message in Nanakian Philosophy is to get best use of this life since there is no other life after.
- It appears that scientists, atheists, and rationalists have same views as given in Nanakian Philosophy.

REFERENCES

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