

CONCEPTS OF HEAVEN AND HELL IN WORLD RELIGIONS

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ABSTRACT

The subject of heaven and hell is a prevalent topic all over the world in all religions, used to control their followers. It makes it pertinent to review the subject in detail scientifically and logically, and according to Gurbani. I will be discussing it with an open mind and rigorous honesty.

1. Heaven and Hell in Sikhism

My discussion on Sikhism is based on the information given in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1], the only authenticated source. The terms 'Heaven' and 'Hell' have been used metaphorically in the AGGS to emphasize in becoming a better human being by understanding the Word (Sabd Guru) in the company of holy people. It is the mental poise achieved by deliberating and reflecting on it in daily life. While living, one should aim to realize the mental equipoise and tranquility vibrating everywhere (Mother Nature) in the universe and in every living being. Living according to God's Will (Laws of Nature) and singing its virtues during the earthly life is living in heaven. Guru Nanak describes this state as the last step in *Jap* as spiritual progress is made by active action on the part of the individual to practice and live truthfully, which has been further explained in his following hymns:

ਗਲੀ ਭਿਸਤਿ* ਨ ਜਾਈਐ ਛੁਟੈ ਸਚੁ ਕਮਾਇ ॥

One does not get a passage to heaven by mere talking, it is achieved by practice of Truth (truthful life).*

AGGS, M 1, p 141 [1].

* Heaven is a metaphoric expression for 'Living like in heaven'.

Guru Nanak further stresses that self ego is the reason for the state of the individual consciousness to project it either way.

ਗਗਨੰਤਰਿ ਵਾਸਿਆ ਗੁਣ ਪਰਗਾਸਿਆ ਗੁਣ ਮਹਿ ਗਿਆਨ ਧਿਆਨੰ ॥

When one pays attention to wisdom, then the wisdom is enshrined (in mind), this is the state of dwelling in heaven.

AGGS, M 1, p 635.

ਕਰਣੀ ਬਾਝਹੁ ਭਿਸਤਿ ਨ ਪਾਇ ॥

Without the conducting good actions (karmas), heaven-like living is not attained.

AGGS, M 1, p 952.

ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁਆ ਖਿਨੁ ਊਭਿ ਪਇਆਲੀ ਜਬ ਲਗਿ ਸਬਦ ਨ ਜਾਨੇ ॥

This mind wonders around, at one moment it is like in heaven and at other in hell. It will continue to happen so until realize the philosophy in the Sabd (of Guru Nanak)

AGGS, M 1, p 1345.

Guru Nanak in all the above hymns explains that salvation is achieved by performing good deeds; the only way to reach the Theo-philosophical heaven otherwise the mental state is equivalent to living in hell.

Guru Arjan further explains the basic principles about heaven and hell in Nanakian Philosophy in his own Bani that reciting and understanding the Naam in the presence of the Holy Company (*Sadh Sangat*) is the way to salvation (heaven).

ਮੁਕਤਿ ਬੈਕੁੰਠ ਸਾਧ ਕੀ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਜਨ ਪਾਇਓ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਧਾਮ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 682.

Salvation and heaven are found in the company of noble people that means one (humble servant) finds living place free from troubles.

ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਧਾਮ has been used metaphorically to represent heaven-like place where there is no ਵਿਕਾਰ (vices / troubles) but it is not any place where God lives since in Nanakian Philosophy God does not live at any certain place but pervades everywhere.

Ignoring the development of Godly instincts and suffering by indulging in animal instincts are living like in hell. In Nanakian Philosophy there is no place called heaven or hell where people are destined to go after they leave the world. Others believe that God created Eternal Heaven for the comfort of faithful (Muslims) or people with higher social status (Hindus) or those saved by Christ (Christians) after their death; they also believe in hell where all non-believers or the low caste persons

who ignore Its commandments will suffer forever. Sikhism does not believe in castes here or after death. An individual who considers every one equal is religious.

Sikh Gurus deny that beyond this earth, somewhere else in the universe, there existed any particular places known as either heaven, with the earthly kind of comforts like air-conditioned bungalows, free flow of wine, women, meats, and slaves etc or a hell with drums of burning oil to which our souls were headed. The reason most of us believe in religion is that after death we want to get admission to heaven and are frightened of being thrown into hell. The goal of human life is not qualifying for admission in a non-existent heaven or being scared of a mythological hell but to become a better God-fearing person. Hell and heaven are right here. Loss of contact with one's conscience, the sense of justice, truth, and fair play is hell, while being one with God is heaven. A person is judged by his deeds and not by his beliefs. God is nobody's private inheritance; nobody can claim a franchise on It. The followers of the major world religions claim: "My religion is the only true faith; people believing in any other faith will go to hell. Conversion of non-members to my faith will 'save' them. Sikhism is not missionary religion and does not want to convert any one and does not disrespect any other religion.

However, Sikhism is a modern religion for the modern humanity of the Modern Science Age. The heaven and hell explained in the Bani of Guru Nanak is further explained by Guru Arjan specifically that there is no special heaven even for various gods:

ਸਿਵ ਪੁਰੀ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਇੰਦ੍ਰ ਪੁਰੀ ਨਿਹਚਲੁ ਕੋ ਥਾਉ ਨਾਹਿ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 214.

There are no such places called heaven for Shiva or heaven for Indra (for their enjoyments).

ਹਕੁ ਹਲਾਲੁ ਬਖੋਰਹੁ ਖਾਣਾ ॥

ਦਿਲ ਦਰੀਆਉ ਧੋਵਹੁ ਮੈਲਾਣਾ ॥

ਪੀਰੁ ਪਛਾਣੈ ਭਿਸਤੀ ਸੋਈ ਅਜਰਾਈਲੁ ਨ ਦੇਜ ਠਰਾ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1084.

Eating of honestly acquired food is Halal (pure food) for you.

Wash your vices and make your heart open like a river.

Once one realizes his Pir (Guru) will be living like in heaven then the so-called Izrail will not throw that one in Hell.

Heaven and Hell according to Bhagat Bani in the AGGS

Bhagat Kabir describes heaven and hell in the AGGS as follows:

ਰੋਜਾ ਧਰੈ ਨਿਵਾਜ ਗੁਜਾਰੈ ਕਲਮਾ ਭਿਸਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਈ ,

ਆਪੁ ਜਨਾਇ ਅਵਰ ਕਉ ਜਾਨੈ ਤਬ ਹੋਇ ਭਿਸਤ ਸਰੀਕੀ ॥

AGGS, Kabir, p 480.

Keeping your fasts, reciting your prayers, and reading the Kalma, the Islamic creed, cannot take one to heaven until one understands oneself and others as well, then one can become a partner of living like in heaven.

Bhagat Kabir lived until last years of his life in Benaras (Varanasi), where alone in the estimation of Hindus deliverance may be obtained. Those who died in Maghar town have no hope of ultimate beatitude. To beat this superstition and using common sense, Kabir moved to Maghar and died there:

ਜਉ ਤਨੁ ਕਾਸੀ ਤਜਹਿ ਕਬੀਰਾ ਰਮਈਐ ਕਹਾ ਨਿਹੋਰਾ ॥

ਕਹਤੁ ਕਬੀਰੁ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਰੇ ਲੋਈ ਭਰਮਿ ਨ ਭੂਲਹੁ ਕੋਈ ॥

ਕਿਆ ਕਾਸੀ ਕਿਆ ਉਖਰੁ ਮਗਹਰੁ ਰਾਮੁ ਰਿਦੈ ਜਉ ਹੋਈ ॥

If Kabir were to leave his body at Benares, and so liberate himself, what obligation would he have to the Lord?

Says Kabir: *Listen, O people - do not be deluded by doubt.*

What is the difference between Benares and the barren land of Maghar, if the Lord is within one's heart?

AGGS, Kabir, p 692.

Bhagat Kabir further states that for a man of God, heaven is the place in Holy congregation, where the Name and praises of Lord are sung:

ਸਭੁ ਕੋਈ ਚਲਨ ਕਹਤ ਹੈ ਉਹਾਂ, ਨਾ ਜਾਨਉ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੁ ਹੈ ਕਹਾਂ ॥

ਆਪ ਆਪ ਕਾ ਮਰਮੁ ਨ ਜਾਨਾਂ, ਬਾਤਨ ਹੀ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੁ ਬਖਾਨਾਂ ॥

ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਮਨ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੁ ਕੀ ਆਸ, ਤਬ ਲਗੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਚਰਨ ਨਿਵਾਸ ॥

ਖਾਈ ਕੋਟੁ ਨ ਪਰਲ ਪਗਾਰਾ, ਨਾ ਜਾਨਉ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੁ ਦੁਆਰਾ ॥

ਕਹਿ ਕਮੀਰ ਅਬ ਕਹੀਐ ਕਾਹਿ, ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੈ ਆਹਿ ॥

AGGS, Kabir, p 1161.

Everyone wishes (speaks) to go to heaven but I do not even know where heaven is.

One who has not understood the self but explains (talks) about heaven as if he knows about it.

As long as one hopes for heaven, cannot pay any attention to understand God.

I don't know where the entrance of their heaven is, how is it protected like a fort with how high and thick wall and how deep is the moat around it?

Kabir says: Now what more can I say except that only the company of noble people is like living in heaven.

2. Heaven and Hell in Hinduism

Heaven and hell is considered in Hinduism as follows:

Deva Loka; is the heaven where only pure souls go.

Patala; is hell.

Pitri Loka; is the after death world of ancestors, who live

continuously.

Mythological story in Mahabharata (compiled by the Brahmin sage Vyasa) tells that heaven is the place of Hindu God VISHNU located on Mount Meru. It is entirely made of gold. Its circumference is 80,000 miles. All buildings are made of jewels. Vishnu is seated on white lotus and Lakshmi sits on the right hand. The fragrance from her body spreads to 800 miles.

Brahma's heaven: called Braham-puri is 800 X 400 X 40 miles high. It contains all the excellences of heaven. All the beings created on earth are found there. The world of Brahma extends over 10,000 yojanas (one yojana is 4 miles) on the Mahameru Mountain as described in Devi Bhagavata. There are 8 cities in this heaven, each of which measures 2,500 square yojanas in extent. In the center of Mahameru is Brahma's city Manovati.

Indra's heaven: Indra is the king of gods. His heaven is called Amaravati located east of the Manovati (city of Brahma). Amaravati conveys the idea of an eternal city

3. Heaven and Hell in Christianity

In Christianity and in Old Testament metaphorically speaking, heaven is the transcendent dwelling-place of the living God.

The Christian belief in the existence of heaven as a reward for the righteous, and hell as a place of punishment for the unrepentant is rooted in the abstract principles:

- a) Do not store treasures on earth but in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves do not steal. (Matthew 6:19-20.)
- b) Fear not of them who are not able to kill the soul but fear who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28.)

However, the biblical metaphor makes it clear that God does not identify himself with heaven, nor can he be contained in it (cf. 1 Kgs 8:27); and this is true, even though in some passages of the First Book of the Maccabees "Heaven" is simply one of God's Names (1 Mc 3:18, 19, 50, 60; 4:24, 55).

The depiction of heaven as the transcendent dwelling-place of the living God is joined with that of the place to which believers, through grace, can also ascend, as we see in the Old Testament accounts of Enoch (cf. Gn 5:24) and Elijah (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11). Thus heaven becomes an image of life in God. In this sense Jesus speaks of a "reward in heaven" (Mt 5:12) and urges people to "lay up for you treasures in heaven" (ibid. 6:20; cf. 19:21). The New Testament amplifies the idea of heaven in relation to the mystery of Christ. To show that the

Redeemer's sacrifice acquires perfect and definitive value, the Letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus "passed through the heavens" (Heb 4:14), and "entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself" (ibid. 9:24). Since the Father loves believers in a special way, they are raised with Christ and made citizens of heaven.

Hell is the State of Those who Reject God

At the General Audience of Wednesday, 28 July 1999, the Holy Father reflected on hell as the definitive rejection of God (Pope in Vatican). In his catechesis, the Pope said that care should be taken to interpret correctly the images of hell in Sacred Scripture, and explained "hell is the ultimate consequence of sin itself... Rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy".

Purgatory is a Place Necessary for Cleansing and Purification

In the Catholic view, people who repented sinful activity, but have not yet been completely purified are sent here to be purged and eventually enter into heaven.

Before we enter into full communion with God, every trace of sin within us must be eliminated and every imperfection in our soul must be corrected

At the General Audience of Wednesday, 4 August 1999, following his catecheses on heaven and hell, the Holy Father reflected on Purgatory (Pope in Vatican). He explained that physical integrity is necessary to enter into perfect communion with God therefore "the term purgatory does not indicate a place, but a condition of existence", where Christ "removes ... the remnants of imperfection".

4. Heaven and Hell in Islam

Islam teaches that, on the Day of Judgment, (Known only to Allah) each human will be held accountable for every thing he/she has done, said, made, intended, and thought during the course of earthly life. Each person's record will be judged by Allah, and according to the person's good or evil deeds, the individual will be sent either to Paradise or hell.

There is no doubt that evil doers who are engulfed in sins are the companions of hell fire where they will live forever. As for righteously striving believers, they will be among the people of Paradise wherein they will live forever. (The Qur'an, Surah 2:81-82.)

Hell/Dozakh: Muslims have categorized hell into seven divisions and souls are sent to different hells according to their actions. The punishment of disbelief in Allah is

laid out in terrifying detail in the Qur'an in a variety of hells, e.g. being chained and consumed with fire etc.

1. *Johunum*: The purgatory hell.
2. *Laza*: Blazing fire.
3. *Al-Hutamah*: An intense fire.
4. *Saerr*: A flaming fire.
5. *Saqar*: A scorching fire.
6. *Al-Jahim*: A huge hot fire.
7. *Hawayah*: A bottomless pit.

Bahista/Heaven:

The paradise of Muslims described in Qur'an is a place that gives pleasure through each of the senses. The faithful meets the young beautiful damsels there known as *houris* or *Apsaras*. They are presented as a reward to the heroes fallen in the battle. Its inhabitants shall have fruit which they consider the best and also the flesh of fowl that they desire.

"Who do good works and believe in Him, will be offered

gardens, rivers, and pure companions"
-----Ref Qur'an, Surah IV-57 and 70-35

Whabism and radicals in peace loving Islam have hijacked this sentence from Qur'an.

CONCLUSIONS

According to my understanding of Gurbani hell and heaven are right here depending upon the life one is living. Once you are on the spiritual path and veil of illusion is lifted by Divine Knowledge and with eradication of doubt and duality, it is a life in heaven otherwise it is hell.

REFERENCES

1. AGGS = Aad Guru Granth Sahib. 1983 (reprint). Publishers: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. (M = Mahla, i.e., succession number of the Sikh Gurus to the House of Nanak, M is replaced with the Name of Bhagat/ Bhatt for their Bani, p = Page of the AGGS)

CANADADAY

Sikh Children's Prayer

Dr Teja Singh, Edmonton, Alberta

**Canada, the country of our hopes,
And the land of beautiful dreams;**

**In the glow of your true sunshine,
Bright and rich our future seems!**

**Canada, the country we adopted,
As sweet home of our own;**

**May we live in peace and harmony,
And be famous and well-known!**

**Let us children all remember,
The rich and proud, our heritage;**

**Heroic deeds of love and service,
Fill Sikh history's every page.**

**Grant us strength, almighty Father,
Bless us all, strong and free;**

**Let the wisdom of great Gurus
Always a guiding star to be!**