

HEAVEN—A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Heaven, a place filled with exquisite wonder and grandeur, has been studied, analyzed, and described extensively by clergy in every religion, as well as philosophers throughout civilization. As this paper illustrates, the location, physical appearance, inhabitants, entrance criteria, and activities in Heaven vary from religion to religion, with some similarities between all the major religions, in Sikhi (Sikhism) by contrast, Heaven is mentioned as a metaphor in reference to other religions, but, emphasized as a Supreme Bliss, realized during our time here on Earth.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the religious clergy, religious scholars, philosophers, poets, and artists have repeatedly expressed the godliness as exquisite wonders of heaven. At the same time it is emphatically stressed about the hardship for living creatures to even hope for such an ‘Ultimate’ destination. Heaven, according to The Columbia Encyclopedia: Sixth edition. 2000, is a blissful upper realm or state entered after death; in Western Monotheistic religions it is the place where the just see GOD face to face (sometimes called the beatific vision). In Judaism, heaven is pictured as the abode of GOD to which he ultimately welcomes the righteous and faithful. Many Christians believe that after the general resurrection the body of a Christian will be glorified and reunited with the soul in heaven. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that before entering heaven many souls must pass through purgatory to be made ready. Much of the conventional imagery of Christian heaven, e.g. golden streets, is based on the Book of Revelations. In Islam, the Qu’ran describes heaven in graphically idyllic terms, replete with fleshy delights; but Islam also has a strong mystical tradition which places these heavenly delights in the context of the ecstatic awareness of GOD. In Zoroastrianism, the souls must pass over the Bridge of the Requiter, which widens to allow easy passage for the good, who enters a kingdom of joy and light. In both Buddhism, Hinduism, existence is considered cyclical, making the rewards and pleasures of a heaven a desirable but contemporary experience; the higher objective is often conceived as a release from any form of rebirth, whether in heaven or on earth [2].

The doctrine of Gurbani (Sikh Scriptures) [1] expresses a direct relationship between human and God. It questions the existence of heaven, its physical characteristics, inhabitants and the activities in heaven. In Sikhi (Sikhism), realization of the ‘Truth’ via accomplishment

of “*Turiya*” during life is the ultimate bliss.

To understand heaven in a global perspective with the analytic criteria of Nanakian Philosophy forms the basic objectives of this paper.

1. Location of heaven,
2. Physical appearance of heaven,
3. Inhabitants of heaven,
4. Selection criteria for entrance into heaven and finally
5. What are the activities in heaven?

1. LOCATIONS OF HEAVEN

The concept of heaven as an imaginary place has evolved with the progressive evolution of mankind. The various religions have capitalized on the wonderful grand design of heaven created by the clergy, philosophers, artists and poets. The concept of successive stages of heaven is nowhere explicitly articulated in the Old Testament, for the expression “heaven of heavens” (Deut. 10:14; cf I kings 8:27; Ps. 48:4) [3] is probably no more than an ordinary Hebrew superlative. In the Pseudep (Test. Levi 3; Slavonic Enoch), however, one indeed encounters the notion of seven heavens which later on became the commonplace of Jewish and Arabic folklore. (cf. Talmud, Hag. 12a; and Koran Sura 22:4). In the New Testament, on the other hand, only three strata appear to be recognized (II Cor. 12:2). This alternative likewise also appears in rabbinic sources, while in ancient Mesopotamia myth of Etana there are only three stages, in the uppermost of which dwells the Supreme God, Anu.

In traditional Hindu Cosmology, three realms exist:

Lokas—Heaven, the Earth, and the netherworlds (including Sky and the underworlds). These are further

supplemented by fourteen additional realms, seven of which are above the Earth (Heavens) and seven of them or in some instances multiples of seven, such as twenty one: are below the earth. In the third century BCE, with the rise of Hinduism proper, quite a different worldview had occurred to dominate the Indian scene, based fundamentally on the religious ideas of Upanishads.

According to Islamic faith, fourteen different Spheres (*Tabuks*), include seven heavens and seven underworlds. The reference to these fourteen *Tabuks* or *Lokas* is also given in Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS), the Sikh Scripture, as metaphors by Guru Nanak, when he wrote:

ਚਉਦਸ ਭਵਣ ਪਾਤਾਲ ਸਮਾਏ॥
ਖੰਡ ਬੁਹਮੰਡ ਰਹਿਆ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਇ॥

The God pervades in fourteen Lokas or Tabuks as much as His existence is comprehended in other parts of His creation.
AGGS, M 1, p 840.

In Nanakian Philosophy, there are hardly any fundamentals that direct the adherents of Sikhi to desire heaven, although some of the Sikh clergy, influenced by Vedantic ideology, has been promoting beliefs about heaven and hell similar to Hinduism. Nothing can affirm the belief of non-existence of heaven and hell in Sikhi more than the fact written by Guru Arjan, when he condemned existence of any Lokas in the Sabd below:

ਹੋਮ ਜਗ ਤੀਰਥ ਕੀਏ ਬਿਚਿ ਹਉਮੈ ਬਧੇ ਬਿਕਾਰ॥
ਨਰਕ ਸੁਰਗ ਦੇਇ ਭੁੰਚਨਾ ਹੋਇ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਅਵਤਾਰ॥੨॥
ਸਿਵ ਪੁਰੀ ਬੁਹਮ ਇੰਦ੍ਰ ਪੁਰੀ ਨਿਹਚਲੁ ਕੋ ਥਾਉ ਨਾਹਿ॥
ਬਿਨ ਹਰਿ ਸੇਵਾ ਸੁਖੁ ਨਹੀ ਹੋ ਸਾਕਤ ਆਵਹਿ ਜਾਹਿ॥੩॥

Making burnt offerings, sacrificial feasts and pilgrimages to sacred shrines in Egotism, but, only increase corruption. One is subjected to both heaven and hell being entangled in the vicious cycle of Maya again and again. The realms of Shiva, Brahma and Indra are not any permanent places. Without serving the Lord with righteous deeds, there is no happiness at all. The faithless cynic constantly is in and out of vicious entanglements.
AGGS. M 5, p214.

The heaven is supposedly a place for beatific vision in attendance of the God where one is at complete peace and the Ultimate Eternal Bliss.

But, according to Guru Arjan as explained in the Sabd earlier, there is no such place as heaven and this has been questioned by Bhagat Kabir as well. In the following Sabd Bahgat Kabir, illustrated the state of clergy pouring

wondrous visions of heaven both in Hinduism and Islam:

ਜੋ ਜਨ ਪਰਮਿਤਿ ਪਰਮਨੁ ਜਾਨਾ ॥
ਬਾਤਨ ਹੀ ਬੈਕੁੰਠ ਸਮਾਨਾ ॥੧॥
ਨਾ ਜਾਨਾ ਬੈਕੁੰਠ ਕਹਾ ਹੀ ॥
ਜਾਨੁ ਜਾਨੁ ਸਭਿ ਕਹਹਿ ਤਹਾ ਹੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
ਕਹਨ ਕਹਾਵਨ ਨਹ ਪਤੀਅਈ ਹੈ ॥
ਤਉ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ਜਾ ਤੇ ਹਉਮੈ ਜਈ ਹੈ ॥੨॥
ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਮਨਿ ਬੈਕੁੰਠ ਕੀ ਆਸ ॥
ਤਬ ਲਗੁ ਹੋਇ ਨਹੀ ਚਰਨ ਨਿਵਾਸੁ ॥੩॥
ਕਹੁ ਕਬੀਰ ਇਹ ਕਹੀਐ ਕਾਹਿ ॥
ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੈ ਆਹਿ ॥੪॥੧੦॥

One who claims to know the God, that is beyond measure and beyond thought; by mere words, he plans to enter heaven. 1.

One does not know where heaven is, But, everyone claims to know heaven and plans to go there. 1. Pause. By mere talk, the mind is not appeased. The mind is only appeased, when egotism is conquered. 2. As long as the mind is filled with the desire for heaven, one does not dwell at the God's Feet. 3.

Says Kabir:

Unto whom should I tell this? The Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, is heaven. 4. 10.

AGGS. Kabir, p 325.

From the above references it becomes clear that in Nanakian Philosophy heaven or hell do not hold any special significant place. The words heaven and hell in Nanakian Philosophy has been applied only as a metaphor and not in identification of any other religious view. The only recommendation to find peace of mind and the Ultimate bliss is to realize the Truth, do the righteous deeds helping humanity and living in harmony with His creation. In the company of such like minded people, one can find Supreme Bliss.

2. PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF HEAVEN

Aristotle declared that all (polytheistic) religions united in placing the abode of the gods in the most elevated place in the universe. Such regions were, in classical times, considered as closed to ordinary mortals. The Islands of the Blessed, sometimes identified with Elysium, were reached only by heroes, demigods, and favorites of the gods. The heaven of later polytheistic religions was conceived of as a place where mortals might continue the pleasures of earthly life, as in the Valhalla of the Germans and Scandinavians and the happy hunting ground of the Native North Americans.

There are as many descriptions of Heaven as there are religions in the world and it can further be multiplied by the number of clergy, philosophers, and poets talking

about it and the artists depicting it on their canvases. Commonly, everyone raises their hands towards the sky whenever the word “Heaven” is mentioned, because of the inherent affiliation of heaven with powers higher up—the Almighty.

In the Bible, the word ‘Heaven’ is used in two senses:

- (a) In the larger sense, it denotes the upper part of cosmic ocean, which envelops the earth. Thus, it is conceived as made of water and indeed in Akkadian and Arabic the cognate words are used by metonymy to mean “rain.”, and
- (b) In the narrower sense ‘Heaven’ denotes the immediate ceiling or canopy of the earth (i.e. the sky), as a septum stretched across the cosmic ocean to prevent its water from overflowing. This septum is portrayed in different religions as follows:
 1. Heaven as a metal strip – Hebrew (Gen. 1:6-8; Pss. 19:1; 150:1; Dan. 12:3)
 2. Heaven as a curtain (ISA. 40:22; Ps. 104:2; Rig Veda VIII.6.5; Egyptian book of the Dead. Ch.85)
 3. Heaven as a garment (Iranian Zend Avesta. Yasht. 13:3; Yasna 30.5; *burummu*; cf. *In Ezek. 27:24*)
 4. The windows of heaven (Gen. 7:11; 8:2; II Kings 7:2, 19; Isa. 24:18; Mal. 3:10)
 5. The bottles of heaven (Job 38:37, a Turkish expression—“It Rains,” Rig Veda V.83. 7-8)
 6. The promptuaries of heaven (Ps. 135:7; Jer. 10:13; 51:16; Enoch 18:1; II Esd. 4:5, the hail, Job 38:22 and darkness, Isa. 45:3)
 7. The stages of heaven (Deut. 10:14; cf. I Kings 8:27; Ps.48:4; Test. Levi 3; almud, Hag. 12; Koran Sura 22:4; II Cor. 12:2)
 8. The pillars of heaven (Job 26:11; cf. Milton, *Paradise Regained*, book IV, line 455: “the pillar’s frame of heaven”; *Comus*, line 597: “the pillar’d firmament.

In Nanakian Philosophy, the physical appearance of heaven is depicted in the creation itself and among the people who are singing the praises of Naam, and performing righteous deeds for the service of humanity. Guru Arjan compared heavenly paradise, nether regions of the underworld essentially the whole universe and concluded that all these were engrossed in the same entanglements of Maya. He further recommended that only a rare person, who is blessed with God’s grace, comes to understand this logic and realizes the Truth:

ਸੁਰਗ ਮਿਰਤ ਪਇਆਲ ਭੂ ਮੰਡਲ ਸਗਲ ਬਿਆਪੇ ਮਾਇ ॥
ਜੀਅ ਉਧਾਰਨ ਸਭ ਕੁਲ ਤਾਰਨ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇ ॥੨॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨੁ ਗਾਈਐ ਪਾਈਐ ਸਰਬ ਨਿਧਾਨਾ ॥
ਕਰਿ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਜਿਸੁ ਦੇਇ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਬਿਰਲੇ ਕਾਹੂ ਜਾਨਾ ॥੩॥੨੧॥

Paradise, the earth, the nether regions of the underworld, and the globe of the world - all are engrossed in Maya. To save your soul, and liberate all your ancestors, meditate on the Name of the Lord, Har, Har. 2. O Nanak, singing the Naam, the Name of the Immaculate Lord, all treasures are obtained. Only that rare person, whom the Lord blesses with His Grace, comes to know this. 3.3. 21. AGGS, M5, p 576.

3. INHABITANTS OF HEAVEN

The religious clergy is constantly harping on the promises that person who lives a godly life on earth is bound to have admission in heaven. There is never ending social and religious expectations combined and balanced in various ways to produce a variety of heavens with a certain emphasis on the Divine and/or a clear preference for the human in each heaven. The two concepts do not necessarily depend on the sophistication of those presenting the imaginary heavens (clergy vs lay people), or regional theological preferences (western vs eastern). Each of the two views takes on a variety of historical forms and has its own history.

Philo of Alexandria (ca 20 BCE—45 BCE) [4] created a unique synthesis of Platonic philosophy that paved the way for later Christian thinkers. According to Philo, death restored the soul to its original, pure pre-birth state. Since, the soul belongs to the spiritual world; life in body becomes nothing but a brief, often unfortunate episode. While many human souls lose their way in the labyrinth of the material world, the true philosopher’s soul survives bodily death and assumes “a higher existence immortal and incorporeal.” In addition the soul seems to be asexual—neither male nor female. In heaven the soul joins other incorporeal inhabitants of the Divine world, the angels. In certain cases it advances even higher and lives in the world of Ideas. If it moves even higher it can live with the deity itself. Interestingly, Philo’s philosophy is shared by other religious beliefs as well.

In Nanakian Philosophy, the Gurmukhs are guided by the Sikh Gurus to live in Supreme Bliss (heaven) during their life on earth while sharing the praise of the Naam that many gods even yearn to recite, and living the Truth. Guru Arjan elaborates that when the Gurmukh follows the perfect Guru (Gurbani in AGGS), the philosopher’s stone, the touch of which reveals the God to one here on earth. Guru Arjan extended this philosophy that even myriads of heavens do not equal God’s Naam:

ਕਈ ਬੈਕੁੰਠ ਨਾਹੀ ਲਵੈ ਲਾਗੇ॥ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਬਪੁਤੀ ਭੀ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਿਆਗੇ॥
ਏਕੰਕਾਰੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਪਾਈਐ ਹਉ ਬਲਿ ਬਲਿ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸਾਇਣਾ॥੮॥

For a Gurmukh even myriads of heavens do not come close, that the spiritually wise one even forsakes the Mukti

(liberation). *One attains the Universal Creator through the True Guru, and sacrifices oneself to the blessed vision of the Divine.*

AGGS, M5, p 1077.

It is obvious from above referenced Sabd that every person blessed by the God's Grace has the opportunity to realize the Supreme Bliss and enjoy heavenly wonders in this life.

4. SELECTION CRITERIA FOR ENTERANCE INTO HEAVEN

The idea of bodily resurrection first appeared in the teachings of the Iranian prophet, Zoroaster (ca. 1400 BCE) [5]. His firm convictions about the soul after death included the belief that following death, the soul will be judged depending upon the mortal's life. The soul will then be either rewarded for righteous living and sent to heaven or be punished and sent to a rather unpleasant place, Hell. Such criteria of judgment can be found almost in every religion. Complete happiness, according to Zoroaster required more than the eternal existence of the soul rested upon the reunion of the body and soul, not in heavenly paradise, but here on earth.

Zoroaster expected a general resurrection of the dead, a universal Divine judgment, and an eventual cleansing of the earth. Thus restored to its original perfection and beauty, the world would then serve as the True and Eternal Kingdom of Ahura Mazda, the Creator mainly attributed to the similar fundamentals of final judgment, crossing the bridge and getting in the beatific vision of the Ultimate Divine. The tradition for burial of the dead is awaiting resurrection on the judgment day and meeting with the Creator.

The emphasis on good deeds and giving in charities along with the recital of the God's Name is prevalent in eastern religions. In Hinduism, the predominant Vedantic belief is that only high castes join the incorporeal inhabitants of the Divine world in Heaven. The exalted souls supposedly move even higher and join the company of the Ultimate deity, e.g. souls of Rama, Krishna, and Buddha have merged in God itself. If the judged soul does not qualify for ascendance into higher realms, then it is possible that the soul is to descend back into the material world, as a human or in the lower life forms suitable to his/her previous karma; thus getting into the cycle of reincarnation.

Good deeds, considered in almost every religion, are logical worship of both man and God. Service through work for the benefit of humanity is recommended as

the only right knowledge. Ecstasy that is not the fruit of true labor is considered superstition. Mere thinking of God and Godly actions is impersonal, tolling bells and telling of beads is nothing but mockery of the Eternal Truth.

Guru Arjan affirmed these requirements for Gurmukh to find Eternal Bliss on Earth in the following verse:

ਸੰਤ ਜਨਹੁ ਸੁਣਿ ਭਾਈਹੋ ਛੁਟਨੁ ਸਾਚੈ ਨਾਇ ॥
 ਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਚਰਣ ਸਰੇਵਣੇ ਤੀਰਥ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਨਾਉ ॥
 ਆਗੈ ਦਰਗਹਿ ਮੰਨੀਅਹਿ ਮਿਲੈ ਨਿਥਾਵੇ ਬਾਉ ॥੧॥
 ਭਾਈ ਰੇ ਸਾਚੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸੇਵ ॥
 ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਤੁਠੈ ਪਾਈਐ ਪੂਰਨ ਅਲਖ ਅਭੇਵ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
 ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਵਿਟਹੁ ਵਾਰਿਆ ਜਿਨਿ ਦਿਤਾ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਉ ॥
 ਅਨਦਿਨੁ ਸਚੁ ਸਲਾਹਣਾ ਸਚੇ ਕੇ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਉ ॥
 ਸਚੁ ਖਾਣਾ ਸਚੁ ਪੈਨਣਾ ਸਚੇ ਸਚਾ ਨਾਉ ॥੨॥
 ਸਾਸਿ ਗਿਰਾਸਿ ਨ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਸਫਲੁ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਆਪਿ ॥
 ਗੁਰ ਜੇਵਡੁ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਦਿਸਈ ਆਠ ਪਹਰ ਤਿਸੁ ਜਾਪਿ ॥
 ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰੇ ਤਾ ਪਾਈਐ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਗੁਣਤਾਸਿ ॥੩॥
 ਗੁਰੁ ਪਰਮੇਸਰੁ ਏਕੁ ਹੈ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਰਹਿਆ ਸਮਾਇ ॥
 ਜਿਨ ਕਉ ਪੂਰਬਿ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਸੇਈ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇ ॥
 ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰ ਸਰਣਗਤੀ ਮਰੈ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਇ ॥੪॥੩੦॥੧੦੦॥

O Saints, O Siblings of Destiny, listen: release comes only through the True Name. Worship in humility. Let the Name of the God be your sacred shrine of pilgrimage. Hereafter, you shall be honored in the Court of the God; there, even the homeless find a home. 1. O Siblings of Destiny, service to the True Guru alone is True. When the True Guru is pleased, we obtain the Perfect, Unseen, and Unknowable God. 1 Pause. I am a sacrifice to the True Guru, who has bestowed the True Name. Night and day, I praise the True One; I sing the Glorious Praises of the True One. True is the food, and true are the clothes, of those who chant the True Name of the True One. 2. With each breath and morsel of food, do not forget the Guru, the Embodiment of Fulfillment. None is seen to be as great as the Guru. Meditate on God twenty-four hours a day. As God casts Glance of Grace, we obtain the True Name, the Treasure of Excellence. 3. The Guru and the Transcendent God are one and the same, pervading and permeating amongst all. Those who have such pre-ordained destiny, meditate on the Naam. Nanak seeks the Sanctuary of the Guru, who does not die, or born again. 4.30.100.

AGGS, M 5, p. 52.

Throughout Gurbani the word heaven has been commonly applied as metaphor in reference to the implied documentations in Vedic and Islamic religious literatures. The emphasis has been on praising the Name

of the God and performing righteous deeds in service of humanity. Guru Nanak stressed the practice of Truth in personal dealings and everyday life much as in preaching about God and heaven. For most of the clergy merely talking about heaven full of wondrous rewards and hell as painful punishment, thus creating fear among the congregations. Guru Nanak, while having discussions with the dominant religious leaders of the 15th and 16th century, explained very clearly that to realize the Supreme Bliss, one has to earn the grace by living the Truth. One cannot just experience the realization of the Supreme Bliss by mere talking about it:

ਗਲੀ ਭਿਸਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਈਐ ਛੁਟੈ ਸਚੁ ਕਮਾਇ॥

By mere talk, people do not earn passage to heaven. Salvation comes only from living the Truth.
AGGS, M 1, p 141.

5. THE ACTIVITIES IN HEAVEN

The human aspirations of desired wonderful life are expected to be transgressed into exalting activities in heaven. The characteristics of the inner world form the substance in heavenly activities, molded by thought and will. Most religions have fabricated possible activities happening in heaven, varying from just resting in peace to advancing ones skills, particularly in worshipping the Almighty, singing the psalms, *bhajans* or Sabds in company with other like minded saintly souls. All these activities supposedly enhance ones relationship with and towards God. The clergy and the people in general have composed such an interesting and intricate expression of heaven that it befuddles any intelligent mind to comprehend the scope of activities by the souls in guidance of the God. Interestingly, it is very mind boggling to learn from the clergy about the activities in heaven, when they start giving references from their holy scriptures.

There are many activities in heaven enlisted by as many clergy in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as from the preachers of eastern religions. According to verse 35 of Surah Al-Ra'd in Qu'ran, heaven is basically described as Garden of Eden or Paradise, for the righteous souls. Beneath it flow the wonderful silvery cool rivers. Trees of gold have perpetual fruits and the coolest shades. There are seven levels of heaven in Islam, the highest level is called *Firdaus*, where the prophets, the martyrs and the most truthful and pious people dwell.

In Judaism, concept of heaven "*olam haba*", the world to come was never described systematically as in Christianity and Islam. The Jewish writings refer to a "new earth" as the abode of humanity following the resurrection of the dead. Judaism does, however, have a

belief in Heaven, not as a future abode for "good souls", but as the "place" where God "resides". Jewish mysticism recognizes seven heavens also.

In Christianity, the general belief is that, since the resurrection of Christ, the souls of the just who are free from sin are admitted immediately after death into heaven, where their chief joy consists in an unclouded vision of God known as the beatific vision. Their bliss is eternal, but at the general resurrection their souls are to be reunited to their perfected, or glorified, bodies. Some Christians believe that, before entering heaven, souls first pass through a state of purification called purgatory.

In Hinduism, among the several heavens (*lokas*), the secret shrine containing the young waters, is reigned by the god Indra. According to Rig Veda, this is another realm, where the son of Vivasvat (*Yama*) reigns; and the wishful prayers to become immortal are constantly recited. The verse in Rig Veda stated:

Make me immortal in the realm, where movement is accordant to wish, in the third region, third heaven of heavens; where the worlds are resplendent. For Indra, flow thou on, Indu!

Make me immortal in that realm where all wishes and longings go, where spreads the Radiant One's region; where holy bliss is and happiness. For Indra flow thou on, Indu!

Make me immortal in that realm where beatitude, joy, cheers, and transports of delight abound; where the highest desires have been filled. For Indra, flow thou on, Indu!

Rig Veda 9.113.8-11.

In Gurbani, references to heaven and hell are mentioned only to be condemned for having no role in realization of the Truth via truthful living. According to Nanakian Philosophy, a Gursikh with the blessings of the God's grace is supposed to conquer the basic fundamentals (*Dharam, Arth, Kaam and Mokh*) and attain '*Turiya*', the state of Supreme Bliss. Guru AmarDas stated:

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਤੁਰੀਆ ਗੁਣੁ ਉਰਿ ਧਾਰੁ ॥੪॥

The Gurmukh enshrines the glory of the supreme state of celestial peace (Turiya). 4.

AGGS, M 3, p 1262.

The Gurbani is replete with Sabds emphasizing about egotism being the dominant part of human sufferings. Burdened with ego, human mind is constantly poisoned with worldly entanglements and loses peace of mind. The various religions express for the soul after death to

cross the hellish conditions (purgatory) before reaching any heaven. Whereas Nanakian Philosophy provides for a Gurmukh the elixir of Sabd to comprehend the destructive nature of egotism and cross over this worldly terrifying ocean; and thus achieve Supreme Bliss during this life. Simply stated, one does not have to wait until death to cross over hellish conditions to arrive at an unknown place called heaven. The wonderful rewards of such status can be realized here on earth. Guru Amar Das wrote very clearly that one attains the supreme awareness in society of the saints (Sat Sangat):

ਤੂੰ ਗੁਣ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹੁ ਪਸਾਰਾ ਸਭ ਵਰਤੈ ਆਕਾਰੀ ॥
ਤੁਰੀਆ ਗੁਣੁ ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ ਪਾਈਐ ਨਦਰੀ ਪਾਰਿ ਉਤਾਰੀ ॥੨॥

Attachment to the three-phased show of Maya pervades all the created forms. In the Sat Sangat, the Society of the Saints, the state of supreme awareness is attained. The Merciful Lord carries us across. 2

AGGS, M..

Turiya is pure unitary consciousness, wherein awareness of the worldly entanglements and multiplicity of human sufferings are completely obliterated. The release of the human spirit from the vicious cycles of worldly entanglements and refining of individual lives through the development of state of '*Turiya*' leads to "Infinite Wisdom, peace and the Supreme Bliss." This state is believed to be the Supreme Bliss realized by the person alone and the society of similarly accomplished people creates an ambiance of 'heaven on earth.'

CONCLUSION

All religions believe in 'One God' and they have very divergent paths to approach the 'Supreme Bliss.' The people in general have to understand the ulterior motives of clergy talking about heaven and hell. Since God is prevalent and pervading every aspect of Its Creation, how could it be restricted to one particular place that is beyond anybody's knowledge? There is not enough vocabulary in words and not enough paper and ink in the entire creation that can describe the exact location, nature or activities of so called heaven or hell.

In Sikhism, while interpreting the last five stanzas of JAP (Commonly called as Jap Ji Sahib), clergy has often related with five stages (*dharm khand, gyan khund, saram khund, karam khund and Such Khund*) a person has to cross before reaching the final called "*Such Khand*", as heaven. But, when analyzed with the critical review of Nanakian Philosophy, it connotes altogether a different interpretation. The review of the 37th stanza of JAP will help to understand the essence of the Sabd:

ਸਚ ਖੰਡਿ ਵਸੈ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੁ ॥ ਕਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਵੇਖੈ ਨਦਰਿ ਨਿਹਾਲ ॥

ਤਿਥੈ ਖੰਡ ਮੰਡਲ ਵਰਭੰਡ ॥ ਜੇ ਕੋ ਕਥੈ ਤ ਅੰਤ ਨ ਅੰਤ ॥
ਤਿਥੈ ਲੋਅ ਲੋਅ ਆਕਾਰ ॥ ਜਿਵ ਜਿਵ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਤਿਵੈ ਤਿਵ ਕਾਰ ॥
ਵੇਖੈ ਵਿਗਸੈ ਕਰਿ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਥਨਾ ਕਰਤਾ ਸਾਰੁ ॥੩੭॥

In the realm of Truth, the Formless God abides. Having created the creation, God watches over it. By God's Glance of Grace, happiness is attained. There are planets, solar systems and galaxies. If one speaks of them, there is no limit, no end. There are worlds upon worlds of God's Creation. As the Laws of Universe command, so they exist. God watches over all, and contemplating the creation, God rejoices. O Nanak, to describe this is as hard as steel. 37.

AGGS, Jap 37, p 8.

Guru Nanak has explained about the creation and beyond with God pervading in each and every aspect of it, not having any particular planet or place known as heaven. He further recommended that by contemplating on Naam, living truthful life and performing righteous deeds, one achieves the "Ultimate Truth" in this life on earth.

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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).
2. Toon, P. 1988. Heaven and Hell, C. McDannell, Heaven (1988).
3. (Deut. 10:14; cf I kings 8:27; Ps. 48:4) "heaven of heavens".
4. The Works of Philo. Complete and Unabridged. Translated by Charles Duke Yonge, New Updated edition. (Hedrickson Publishers, 1995).
5. Zoroaster, 1400 BCE. The western religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism)

NANAK AS GURU

ਸਭ ਤੇ ਵਡਾ ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਜਿਨਿ ਕਲ ਰਾਖੀ ਮੇਰੀ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 750.

Guru Nanak is greatest of all (other so-called Sat Gurus), who protected my honor.