

"One who enjoys peace in the Company of the Holy, even for an instant, obtains millions of heavenly paradises." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.1208)

HEAVEN IN THE AFTERLIFE

Once our time on Earth is complete and it is our time to depart then our soul rises through the 5 spiritual realms to meet God in its formless state (Nirankar). The Guru is the boat which carries people across the earthly plane.

"The Boat of the True Guru is the Name of the Lord. How can we climb on board? One who walks in harmony with the True Guru's Will comes to sit in this Boat. Blessed, blessed are those very fortunate ones, O Nanak, who are united with the Lord through the True Guru." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.40)

"Remembering Him in meditation, the door of liberation is found. You shall go to heaven, and not return to this earth." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.971)

IS HELL ALSO A PHYSICAL PLACE?

The physical hell in Sikhism is the reincarnation and the samsara cycle. Our karma keeps us locked to the Earth plane through this eternal cycle of life. This is why Sikhism is geared at releasing us from this physical hell by changing our state of mind and enjoining us to perform good deeds and meditation.

"O Nanak, forgetting the Naam, he is reincarnated into heaven and hell." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.298)

"He is caught and thrown into the most horrible hell, the well of pain and suffering." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.309)

"You shall not see the 8.4 million types of hell; sing His Glorious Praises and remain saturated with loving devotion" (Guru Granth Sahib, p.1072)

"Without meditative remembrance, they come and then go, and are cast into the hellish womb of reincarnation." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.1030)

"The faithless cynic has to endure 8.4 million hellish incarnations." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.1028)

It would be worth noting here that the mention of

womb refers to all places where life is generated including mother Earth. Hell does not label the female gender as bad, but it simply refers to the reincarnation cycle.

"He saves us from the hellish pit of the womb, and carries us across the terrifying world-ocean." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.210)

"The Lord dwells in both the lower and higher worlds. Leaving the earth, the soul ascends to the heavens; then, the lower and higher join together, and peace is obtained. ||25||" (Guru Granth Sahib, p.341)

CONCLUSION

Sikhs do not desire heaven or hell and only desire to be close to God. This is most beautifully expressed in the quote below by Rabi'a:

*"If I adore You out of fear of Hell, burn me in Hell!
If I adore you out of desire for Paradise,
Lock me out of Paradise.
But if I adore you for Yourself alone,
Do not deny to me Your eternal beauty."*

Heaven is where the lords saints abide and where His praises are sung. Heaven is not exclusive for any specific religious group but it can not be accessed through simple beliefs. Actions speak louder than words and this holds true in both the spiritual and material worlds.

Hell Is Real?

INTRODUCTION

Hell is real? What about heaven? Heaven and hell form an important belief in the Abrahamic family of religions including Islam and Christianity. Heaven is generally thought of as an exclusive place of eternal life which is granted to people with specific beliefs e.g. only to Christians who profess their belief in Jesus or only to Muslims who believe in Prophet Mohammad. Hell is generally regarded as an eternal place of damnation, where people are sent based on their actions in their life. This essay looks at the Sikh perspective on this concept.

HEAVEN AND HELL AS A STATE OF MIND

Sikhism firstly looks at heaven and hell as a state of consciousness. Whenever we remain attached to God we reside in Heaven and whenever we let the 5 thieves (lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride) rule our life then we reside in hell. With regards to heaven, the Guru Granth Sahib says:

"In the cave of intuitive wisdom I sit, absorbed in the silent trance of the Primal Void. I have obtained my seat in the heavens. ||1||" (Guru Granth Sahib, p.97)

"One moment, this mind is in the heavens, and the next, it is in the nether regions; the Guru brings the wandering mind back to one-pointedness." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.443)

"Wherever You keep me, is heaven. You are the Cherisher of all." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.106)

Maya and the 5 thieves pull our nature down to "hell". The Guru Granth Sahib says:

"The mortal has fallen into the deep dark pit of household attachment; it is a horrible, dark hell." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.1223)

"O sexual desire, you lead the mortals to hell; you make them wander in reincarnation through countless species." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.1358)

"Slandering the Saints, one falls into hell." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.279)

GAINING DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF HEAVEN

Sikhism is a spiritual lifestyle which includes early morning meditation, earning an honest living, devot-

ing time to charity, honesty, humility and compassion, vegetarianism, avoiding alcohol and tobacco etc. So it is living this spiritual lifestyle which gives us the knowledge and first hand experience of heaven.

"By mere talk, people do not earn passage to Heaven. Salvation comes only from the practice of Truth." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.141)

"Make good deeds the soil, and let the Word of the Shabad be the seed; irrigate it continually with the water of Truth. Become such a farmer, and faith will sprout. This brings knowledge of heaven and hell, you fool! ||1||" (Guru Granth Sahib, p.24)

"When He placed His hand upon Your forehead, then the celestial nectar began to rain down in torrents; the gods and human beings, heavenly heralds and sages were drenched in its fragrance." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.1391)

"Without the karma of good actions, heaven is not attained." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.952)

"One who speaks lies shall fall into hell and burn." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.142)

"The Guru's Word saves one from falling into hell." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.177)

"Everything is obtained: the heavens, liberation and deliverance, if one sings the Lord's Glories, even for an instant." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.290)

But God's creation is infinite and our experience of heaven and divinity will only be a scratch on the surface.

"Your limits are not known to any of the beings in the heavens, in this world, or in the nether regions of the underworld. ||1||" (Guru Granth Sahib, p.71)

SIKHS TRANSCEND BOTH HEAVEN AND HELL

The spiritual masters have taught that desire for heaven or fear of hell is not the path of the saints or the correct method of salvation. Sikhs transcend even the concept of heaven and hell and only desire to be close to God. In this way Sikhs create eternal peace both in this world through their selfless ser-

vice to humanity and love for God and remain in eternal peace hereafter.

"What is hell, and what is heaven? The Saints reject them both." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.969)

"Don't wish for a home in heaven, and don't be afraid to live in hell. Whatever will be will be, so don't get your hopes up in your mind. ||1||Sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord, from whom the most excellent treasure is obtained" (Guru Granth Sahib, p.337)

"Greed, emotional attachment to Maya, possessiveness, the service of evil, pleasure and pain - those who are not touched by these, are the very embodiment of the Divine Lord. ||1||Heaven and hell, ambrosial nectar and poison, gold and copper - these are all alike to them. Praise and slander are all the same to them, as are greed and attachment. ||2||They are not bound by pleasure and pain - know that they are truly wise. O Nanak, recognize those mortal beings as liberated, who live this way of life. ||3||7||" (Guru Granth Sahib, p.220)

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Sikhs in their spiritual assemblies create heavens on Earth. This is why the Sadh Sangat (holy congregation) is given so much importance as a catalyst for spiritual evolution.

"The city of heaven is where the Saints dwell. They enshrine the Lotus Feet of God within their hearts." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.742)

"Liberation and heaven are found in the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy; his humble servant finds the home of the Lord." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.682)

"That place is heaven, where the Kirtan of the Lord's Praises are sung. You Yourself instill faith into us." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.749)

"Hell and disease do not afflict one who joins the Company of the Lord's humble servants, O Nanak; the Lord attaches him to the hem of His robe." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.531)

"Keep me near You, O Merciful Lord God - that is heaven for me." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.1161)