



Hell or Heaven - A State of Mind

By: Ajay Sheth



Ajay Sheth is a Trustee of the Quest Foundation and publisher/editor of the Ma Swami Prerna magazine. He has dedicated his life to serving others and making a positive impact in the world. But what truly sets Ajay apart is his commitment to being a practitioner of Effortless Awareness. He has mastered the art of living in the present moment, letting go of ego and conditioning, and embracing life with an open heart and mind. Through his Effortless Awareness practice, Ajay has cultivated a profound sense of inner peace, compassion, and wisdom. He radiates a warm and loving energy, touching the lives of all those around him. As he continues on his journey of self-discovery and service, Ajay inspires others to embrace their path of effortless awareness, reminding us that being a true human being means living a life of authenticity, love, and freedom.

As a child growing up in a deeply religious and culturally rich environment, I was taught vivid tales of Nark (hell) and Swarg (heaven). These concepts were not mere metaphors—they were painted as actual, physical destinations awaiting us after death. Hell, I was told, lay somewhere deep beneath the earth, where souls endured unspeakable torment. Heaven, in contrast, floated high above the clouds, where eternal joy, pleasure, and divine company awaited the righteous. These teachings were well-intentioned, but for me, they evoked a cocktail of fear, guilt, and confusion.

As life progressed, these early beliefs took root in my consciousness. Struggles came early: illness, financial instability, and a childhood that left me emotionally fragile. I longed for an escape, for a sense of safety and happiness. I became obsessed with the idea that material success - particularly wealth - was the gateway to peace. I convinced myself that if I could just become financially secure, everything else would fall into place. So I chased money relentlessly, believing it to be my ticket out of suffering.

For a while, the external indicators suggested I was succeeding. My financial condition improved, comforts increased, and from the outside, my life appeared enviable. But on the inside, I felt increasingly empty. Despite the possessions I had accumulated, the joy I had envisioned never arrived. Instead, I found myself isolated, stressed, and disconnected from those around me. I had everything I thought I needed, yet I felt more miserable than ever.

A Shift in Perspective

Everything began to change about fifteen years ago when I met my spiritual guide; my MaSwami. She introduced me to a radically different way of seeing life.

One of the first things she told me shook me to my core: *“Hell and heaven are not just the places we go*

after death. They are states of consciousness we inhabit right now while living.”

At first, it sounded like a philosophical abstraction. But over time, I began to understand the depth of this truth. She explained that our inner state - our thoughts, emotions, and reactions - defines the reality we experience. Pain, pleasure, despair, or joy. These are not imposed from the outside but arise from within. This perspective shattered the foundation of fear upon which I had built my understanding of life. I realized that it was important for me to create a heaven for myself while I was still alive.

The Nature of Hell and Heaven on Earth

I learned that hell is what we live through when we are consumed by anger, fear, resentment, or anxiety. Heaven, on the other hand, is what we experience when we are rooted in peace, love, contentment, and mindfulness. This simple but profound understanding transformed my entire worldview. My relationships began to shift. I became less reactive, more introspective, and more present in each moment. My inner world, once chaotic and conflicted, began to settle into a state of quiet calm. I stopped trying to control everything around me and started focusing on how I responded to life.

From Chaos to Calm: Personal Lessons

Let me share two real examples from my life that illustrate how our state of mind defines our reality.

In my younger days, I had a notoriously short temper. One memory that stands out is a dinner outing with friends. These were supposed to be joyous evenings, moments to unwind and enjoy companionship. But if the food was delayed, if the table wasn't to my liking, or if the waiter seemed inattentive, I would erupt in irritation. My mood soured the entire experience, not just for me but for everyone at the table. What should have been a lighthearted evening turned into a shared



discomfort. Looking back, I realize it wasn't the restaurant, the food, or the service that was the problem—it was my own mindset.

Another deeply personal experience involves my family. In my mid-thirties, I was overly emotional and hypersensitive. Even small disagreements or perceived slights from family members would upset me disproportionately. At both formal and informal gatherings, I found myself becoming agitated and confrontational. Initially, my family tolerated my behavior out of affection, but over time, it became exhausting for them. Slowly, they started distancing themselves from me. What should have been warm, affectionate gatherings turned into strained and bitter affairs. I felt alienated and unloved, which only deepened my resentment. It was truly a hellish emotional experience—ironically, in a setting meant for love and connection.

Eventually, I realized the futility of my behavior. With time, reflection, and spiritual guidance, I began the process of change. Today, I look forward to family gatherings with genuine excitement. I'm no longer the source of tension; instead, I try to be a source of joy and support. I feel welcomed, and I can sense that my presence is appreciated. The transformation didn't require anyone else to change—it required me to change. Hell turned into heaven, not through circumstance, but through awareness and intention.

Our Inner World Shapes Our Outer Experience

Through these experiences, I've come to understand a powerful truth: our internal landscape dictates the nature of our external experiences. When we dwell in fear, resentment, or self-pity, we create a version of hell that colors everything we see. Similarly, when we cultivate gratitude, empathy, and peace, we build a heaven that radiates outward into our relationships, our work, and our daily lives. Hell is what we live through every time we let negative emotions rule us. Likewise, heaven is present in moments of stillness, in acts of kindness, in shared laughter, and in a mind that has learned to let go.

The Power of Mindfulness

One of the tools that has helped me the most in this transformation is mindfulness. Learning to stay present, to observe my thoughts and emotions without being swept away by them, has been revolutionary. It has made me more resilient and more appreciative of life's simple joys. Whether it's a cup of tea, a walk in the morning sun, or a deep conversation with a friend - these small moments have become rich with meaning.

Fulfillment, I've realized, doesn't come from changing the world around us. It comes from changing how we relate to it.

The Daily Choice

Each day, we face a choice. We can live in fear, judgment, and negativity - or we can choose compassion, patience, and joy. No one can make this choice for us. The external world may not always cooperate, but we can always decide how we respond to it.

When we choose to see beauty in imperfection, to find growth in discomfort, and to remain grounded in the present, we step into heaven - right here, right now.

A Glimpse Into Both Worlds

Picture this: a room filled with chaos, impatience, and harsh words. People are in a hurry, empathy is absent, and everyone feels unseen. This is not some abstract version of hell - it's a mental atmosphere we've all created or inhabited at some point.

Now, imagine another room. It may be the same space, the same people, but this time the energy is different. There is patience in the air, laughter, gentle communication, and mutual respect. The physical surroundings haven't changed, but the emotional climate has. That is heaven - accessible not in the afterlife, but in the now.

Creating Heaven on Earth

We can't control every situation, but we can choose how we engage with it. By living with intention - by practicing mindfulness, choosing kindness, and embracing impermanence - we transform not only ourselves but the world around us.

In Conclusion..

Hell and heaven are states of mind we enter through the attitudes we nurture and the choices we make. Our thoughts shape our emotions, our emotions shape our behaviors, and our behaviors ultimately shape our lives.

As the great sage Ramana Maharshi once said:
"The only hell is the one we create for ourselves, and the only heaven is the one we create for ourselves."

Each moment gives us a fresh opportunity. Choose wisely. Heaven is already within reach!!