

# Thinking of Hell

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I was given the concept of hell and heaven in my early childhood. According to Hindu Code of Conduct, one should practice non-violence, speak truth, shouldn't steal, practice fidelity, be forgiving, be

compassionate, maintain honesty, eat and drink in moderation, and uphold the ethic of purity in mind, body and speech. Those who follow those conducts would go to heaven and others will go to hell.

That was a tall order. I knew from an early age that I was destined to go to hell as I didn't follow all the dictums all the time. I used to live in fear knowing the tortures subjected to people living in hell. The sinners in hell are made to run around in unbearable heat and dropped down exhausted in a boiling pot. They are stung with nails and are tortured with hunger and thirst. Their body is constantly pricked and pierced by needles. They are bitten by serpents, thrashed on genital space with hot rods, flogged and pierced with sharp objects. They are also thrown in polluted well with excreta, urine, blood, phlegm where they are subjected to biting by poisonous insects and animals. Sinners are made to drink hot liquid molten lava; are roasted in inverted positions with hands and legs tied over fire. There are more but this should be enough to put fear in the bravest of hearts.

The solace is that there is not a single holy book in Hinduism. Many of the scriptures even contradict each other. According to the Vedas, a collection of Hindu texts, all beings are souls and thus eternal in nature. One's body temporarily houses the soul. After one die, the soul is reincarnated, taking birth in another physical body or form. Soul passes from one life to the next. The ultimate goal of soul is to break the cycle of rebirths and become one with God also called salvation.

In the Vedas, and in particular, in the Rig Veda the concepts of heaven and hell are mostly abstract than physical. They are more spiritual states of being than actual tangible worlds. In Rig Veda only one hell is mentioned. It is a dark place but no mention of torture or suffering is there. This

is in contrast to the common Hindu view that is more influenced by the subsets of the Vedas (Known as Puranas). Moreover, everything that I mentioned so far were written by human beings in ancient times. God himself didn't write those words. I had a teacher in middle school, Mr. Choube. I considered him quite knowledgeable about religion. He told me that there were no heaven or hell. We get the fruits of our karma right here on earth.

Bhagwat Gita, probably, the most revered book in Hinduism doesn't describe types of tortures given in hell. All it says that heaven and hell are temporary abode of souls. However, in the Gita, Krishna says, "You have a right to perform all of your duties and responsibilities but are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Do what you are entitled to but do not expect anything in return for your acts. It may be because of fear but I tend to believe in this. Who, after all, wants to go to hell? Not me!