

A New Age View of Hell

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"I don't believe in hell" said the lady.

"I think hell is in this world"!

"Well, of course I agree", I said. "there certainly is hell in this world. But it is caused by hellish people, isn't it"?

She nodded.

"Well, if these hellish people don't change their characters when they die, there is going to be hell in the other life too! And I suspect that it's going to be much worse there than here because (according to my philosophy) we are going to be much less inhibited and more truly ourselves after death than we are here on earth".

"Oh, that's not what I meant"! she exclaimed "What I can't believe is that a loving God would condemn his own children to eternal punishment merely on account of evils committed during the brief period of life here on earth".

"Heavens no"! I cried. "Surely no one believes that nowadays! It's the old immature idea: like when a child eats too many cream cakes and feels sick and his mother says, "That's to punish you for being greedy"! Of course it isn't a punishment; the child's internal misery is the direct result of a disorderly condition, not a punishment".

Let's get this straight. Hell is not a kind of Nazi Concentrate Camp. In fact it is not primarily a "place" at all, except in so far as everyone has to live somewhere and people of a similar nature tend to congregate together. But it is really a state of mind - the attitude of utterly selfish people. They defy God and hate the neighbour. They are cunning, merciless, self important, cruel, quarrelsome, sexually perverted. Such people take delight in making others suffer; and if they had uncontrolled freedom they would end by destroying the universe. (You see this operation on earth in a small way by senseless vandalism.) Therefore in the spiritual world such people, the inhabitants of hell, need a certain amount of external discipline, for their own sakes as well as other people's, like needing the police force on earth. Such discipline will probably be regarded by the victims as punishment, but it isn't really, because it ceases the instant its protective aims are achieved. However, imagine the agonized frustration of our being allowed to commit all the mischief you long to do!

There are many different kinds of hells; HOT hells, like the tropics, created by hot tempered inhabitants; COLD hells, like the arctic, created by those whose disposition is icy cold; hells like the Sahara Desert; hells like jungles with rotting trees and stinking pools full of crocodiles all in harmony with the states of mind of the inhabitants. And the folk there will feel perfectly at home where they are, because indeed they themselves have unconsciously produced their own surroundings by a kind of psychic projection.

As I have said, nobody is compelled to go to hell. In fact, hell is illegal from start to finish. If there is a barbed wire fence surrounding hell, it is to keep people out, not to imprison them. But the evil spirits will climb in, despite every obstacle; for they are only happy when they are in a situation where they can bicker and nag and womanize and make maybe other people suffer. Of course they will suffer a bit themselves, living in such a vicious and dangerous community; and this will enable them to experience self righteous indignation as part of the game!

Domestic dogs, for all their attractiveness in other respects, are rather like that. We had an Alsatian who jumped a 5 foot fence to exchange courtesies with another big dog whom he had never seen before. They went at it, tooth and claw, snarling and barking with glorious excitement, until both dogs succeeded somehow in burying their bloody fangs in the other's throat! - a symbolic representation, I thought of the rapturous joys of hell.

Other symbols of hell might include any institution that appeals to the lowest in human nature: gladiatorial combats and "throwing Christians to the lions" in ancient Rome; brothels, sex shops and X rated films today; casinos in Las Vegas; cock fighting in the Philippines; drug peddling; professional boxing and wrestling can you name some others? Put all these together in one place and add some other sordid attractions which are specially applicable to the spiritual or psychic level, and you have a fairly good idea of hell. And people come crowding in!

How about the eternity of hell? "Surely an all powerful and all loving God would succeed in closing down hell eventually"? This is the view of the Universalist sect who believe that all men, and even the devils themselves, will ultimately be saved. And this world view certainly has its appeal! But I remind myself that ETERNITY has nothing to do with our idea of time. Time is for this world only, a kind of moving belt for the manufacture of angels.

Eternity is outside it and beyond it and has only to do with state. A thousand years of earth time might be sensed by angels or devils as a brief "NOW"; whereas a few moments of earth time might cover a complicated succession of states in the life of an inhabitant of the spiritual world.(We get an illustration of this in dreams.) Someone could have been in hell since the early days of the Roman Empire without being conscious of any passage of time whatsoever - it would depend entirely on the various states he had experienced since his physical death. There is, in the spiritual world, "succession", but no fixed or measurable "time".

Again, nobody is forced to remain in hell. Quite the contrary, there is a strong propaganda to get them all out! Heaven has a large "WELCOME" sign over it, and if a single evil spirit repents and chooses to move up into heaven, there is rejoicing among the angels - as Jesus said. Some evil spirits perhaps do this; but in practice, apparently, most of those who have once made their bed in hell, insist on staying there. For them, heaven would be intolerable and it would be against the Divine Love to drive them into it. They would gasp for breath, like fish taken out of water into thin air.

The existence of hell then, is in fact evidence of the love and mercy and courtesy of the Lord God. He respects the freedom of all His children, even when they turn their backs on Him and do stupid and cruel things. (Note that the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son did not prevent his son from going into the far country; he even financed the journey!

Gospel of Luke: 15) God never compels anyone to be good. Unselfishness produced under compulsion would not be true unselfishness but only a kind of hypocrisy; and if there is one thing we cannot be in the spiritual world it is hypocritical. Once there, we become what we really are inside; and if hell is inside us it quickly comes to the surface and takes over. But note this: God is just as fully present with the lowest devil in hell as He is with the highest angel in heaven. ("If I make my bed in hell, lo, God is there"! Psalm : 139) The difference is that the angels gladly receive Him into their conscious lives and try to become one with Him, whereas the devils reject Him and shake their fists at Him in defiance.

During this article I have generally referred to the evil spirits in hell as them. Always it is someone else, never you or I. "We are the good ones, they are the bad". Yet in fact every one of us has some hellish qualities or tendencies fouling our natures. Better to shun them NOW and let the Lord remove them, because if we wait until after our death, we may find that we then no longer want Him to do so. We shall shout at the angels who have come to lead us to heaven, "TO HELL WITH US! WE ARE O.K. FOR GOD'S SAKE, LEAVE US ALONE"!

Now what are we going to do about Hell?

The following extracts are from Swedenborg's "Heaven and Hell". The numbers refer to paragraphs.

470. Our Nature after Death Depends on the Kind of Life We Led in the World

Any Christian knows from the Word that our life is still with us after death, since it says in many places that we will be judged according to our deeds and works and rewarded accordingly. Further, anyone who thinks on the basis of what is good and from real truth cannot help but see that people who live well enter

heaven and people who live evil lives enter hell. However, people who are intent on evil do not want to believe that their state after death depends on their life in the world. They think rather, especially when their health begins to fail, that heaven is granted to all on the basis of mercy alone no matter how people have lived, and that this depends on a faith that they keep separate from life.

302. If we believed the way things really are, that everything good comes from God and everything evil from hell, then we would not take credit for the good within us or blame for the evil. Whenever we thought or did anything good, we would focus on the Lord, and any evil that flowed in we would throw back into the hell it came from. But since we do not believe in any inflow from heaven or from hell and therefore believe that everything we think and intend is in us and from us, we make the evil our own and defile the good with our feeling that we deserve it.

560. Picture a community made up of people like this, all totally in love with themselves, not caring about others unless they are allies, and you will see that their love is no different from that of thieves for each other. To the extent that they are acting in concert, they embrace each other and call each other friends; but once they stop cooperating, once anyone resists their control, they attack and butcher each other. If their deeper natures - their minds - are probed, it will be clear that they are full of virulent hatred for each other, that at heart they ridicule anything fair and honest and even ridicule the Deity, tossing it aside as worthless.

481.5 There is no way that people who are engaged in carnal love can live in heaven's warmth, because heaven's warmth is heavenly love. They can live in hell's warmth, though, which is a love of cruelty toward people who do not support them. The pleasures of this love are contempt for others, hostility, hatred, and vengeance. When they are absorbed in these they are in their very life, with no knowledge whatever of what it means to do good for others out of sheer goodness and for the sake of the good itself. All they know is how to do good out of malice and for the sake of malice.

548. When we arrive in the other life, we are first taken up by angels who do everything for us and also tell us about the Lord, heaven, and angelic life and offer us lessons in what is good and true. However, if we as spirits are the kind of people who have been familiar with things like this in the world but have denied or rejected them at heart, then after some conversation we want to get away from them and try to leave. When the angels notice this, they leave us. After spending some time with various other people, we eventually take up with people who are devoted to similar evils (see above, [445-452](#)). When this happens, we are turning away from the Lord and turning our faces toward the hell we were united to in the world, where people live who are engaged in a similar love of evil.

We can see from this that the Lord is leading every spirit toward himself through angels and through an inflow from heaven, but that spirits who are absorbed in evil resist strenuously and virtually tear themselves away from the Lord. They are drawn by their evil - by hell, that is - as though it were a rope; and because they are drawn and want to follow because of their love of evil, it follows that they freely cast themselves into hell.

530. What follows will make it possible to see that it is not all that hard to lead a heaven-bound life.

Who can't lead a civic and moral life? After all, we are introduced to it in infancy and know it from living in the world. We do in fact lead this kind of life whether we are evil or good, since no one wants to be called dishonest or unfair. Almost everyone practices honesty and fairness outwardly, even to the point of seeming genuinely honest and fair, or seeming to act from genuine honesty and fairness. Spiritual people have to live in much the same way and can do so just as easily as natural people, the difference being that spiritual people believe in the Divine Being and act honestly and fairly not just because it follows civil and moral laws but also because it follows divine laws.