

Finding Heaven Here

John C. Robinson, Ph.D., D.Min.

A Preview of Heaven on Earth

One day soon you will have an experience of Heaven on Earth. Perhaps this has happened already, but you didn't notice, you looked away or you've forgotten. Reading this book and using the exercises it provides might trigger an experience or make you aware of your past experiences of Heaven on Earth.

If you are not sure what experiencing Heaven on Earth might look or feel like, simply imagine your mind's incessant chatter falling silent and your awareness expanding, thus allowing you to discover a radiantly beautiful, exquisitely detailed, and utterly enchanting wonderland – imminently holy and infinitely precious – everywhere around you. Astonished, you examine one seemingly familiar thing after another, surprised to find each one transformed before your eyes into the most beautiful creation you have ever seen. Wonder and awe accompany you everywhere, and the world keeps growing more beautiful and extraordinary the longer you stay in this state of awareness.

"My God," you whisper, "This is amazing. It feels like I've just entered Heaven on Earth." (Indeed you have.)

Slowly and incredulously, it dawns on you that the whole universe has become alive, awake, and aware. A conscious Presence enfolds you – soft as sunlight, gentle, intimate, loving – and all your desperate everyday dramas evaporate in its peace. You realize, too, that this Presence creates and imbues all things – animate and inanimate alike – with its own life and consciousness: you, me, animals, trees, cities, homes, the Earth and the sky. With this knowing, you notice all things pulsing and vibrating with divine energy. People shine with the splendor of angels and Heaven's light transfigures reality right before your eyes. You understand that this omnipresent sacred consciousness – the answer to all problems, all questions, and all struggles – makes everything Heaven on Earth.

Rejoicing in the goodness, creativity, and love surging through Creation, doubts about purpose and worth vanish. You do not have to be good enough here; instead, Heaven on Earth invites you to explore the infinite possibilities of divine life.

And in Heaven on Earth, you discover that no place other than Heaven exists. Heaven on Earth lies here, wherever you are, right now, always full and always enough. Feelings of relief, gratitude, and joy nearly sweep you off your feet. You realize this is where you were meant to live — in Heaven on Earth. You are finally home.

Heaven on Earth awaits each of us. You've experienced it before, lived there in the past. Do you remember? Actually, you've never left Heaven on Earth; you've just forgotten how to see it. To do so, you need only to quiet your mind, heighten your awareness, and see the world anew in God's Presence. Come, let's go there together...

The Story of Creation

“...this is it. This is Eden.”
Joseph Campbell (Mythologist)

“Every prayer was fulfilled, every possible desire for the whole world consummated; for His Kingdom had come and I had beheld it with my very eyes.”
Katharine Trevelyn (Mystic)

“On our notion of heaven may well rest the measure of the rest of our entire spiritual life.”
Joan Chittister (Benedictine Sister, Author)

Introduction

Although the idea of Heaven on Earth seems as farfetched as Heaven itself, in actuality this “place” lies as close as sun sparkling on water on a pond outside your window, the gently moving branches of the trees in your yard or the sound of children laughing in the next room. From famous saints to everyday mystics, people from every religion and era have described Heaven on Earth from their own experience of it and you, too, can learn to see it.

The father’s kingdom is spread out upon the earth and people do not see it.
Jesus (Christianity)

You might wonder where one finds Heaven on Earth. Is it hidden away in some long-forgotten valley, as portrayed in tales of Shangri-La? Does one have to climb to the top of the highest peak to see it? No, but the best way to answer this question comes not from geography but from allegory. You see, Heaven on Earth arrives through a change of consciousness – a paradigm shift, if you will. It does not exist simply as a physical location. Allegories are the kind of stories that symbolize such transformation. In fact, the Judeo-Christian creation story provides a particularly good allegory for our purposes. Therefore, to help you understand where Heaven on Earth exists, I’d like to share with you a creative retelling of that story as a way of explaining the origin, nature and eventual disappearance of Heaven on Earth. The story goes like this:

This world is not the antechamber: it is the palace itself.
Levin Faitel (Judaism)

The Story of Creation

In the beginning, only Divinity existed as a realm unto itself: pure consciousness and potentiality. Wishing to know itself in a new way, the Divine burst forth in a fiery expansion of light and matter evolving the entire cosmos from its own essence. The Divine became the Universe and, in an act of infinite love and generosity, gave birth to a holy place called Earth. Divinity suffused everything with its own unique and unfolding nature (sea, rocks, plants, animals, weather, seasons). Thus Creation became a second divine realm – the physical world as a manifestation of Divinity.

Heaven is here on earth, and earth is there in Heaven.
Thich Nhat Hanh (Buddhism)

Among all the creatures that evolved from the Divine, one developed the unique capacity to think abstractly, to form concepts about the world and even to reflect on its own existence and relationship to the sacred. This creature was a part of Divinity becoming conscious of itself and of the Universe – a wondrous epiphany. Thus, the human species came into being. In time, the human capacity for thought produced many marvelous inventions, including religion, agriculture, literature, architecture, science, engineering, medicine, and technology – a divinely inspired explosion of human creativity.

At the same time, however, something strange began to happen: Human beings became so fascinated with their concepts about the world that they began to mistake their concepts for the world itself. In other words, people increasingly saw only what they thought. Soon names, ideas, beliefs, and stories constructed a third and separate mental realm – the World of Man, and the sacred ground of Creation gradually disappeared from consciousness. Worse, entranced by the power of concepts, people began to view the natural world as simply a source of wealth or raw materials, a place to be conquered, controlled, used, and discarded. They stopped listening to the voices of Creation – such as the disappearing species, the shattered ecosystems and the displaced indigenous peoples – that spoke instead of damage, degradation and suffering.

***This is the Kingdom of Heaven.
Ramana Maharshi (Hinduism)***

Now at the center of humankind's third realm was the idea of self, a concept that became both a blessing and a curse. On the positive side, the self-concept allowed individuals to look within and discover much about their psychological and spiritual nature. On the negative side, however, the self-concept simply became too important. Humans became obsessed with this idea and soon everyone worried about the worth, goodness, beauty, power, wealth, and importance of the personal self. Tragically, this self-centeredness spawned ever-increasing competition, conflict and even warfare.

Living in the complicated World of Man, people increasingly betrayed and then forgot their divine nature and homeland, and this forgetting created a fourth and final realm: Darkness. It became a murky hidden space filled with the pain, anger and grief accumulated by each new generation of children told to deny their divinity and believe instead that only the World of Man mattered. Those who felt this inner pain usually believed it was a sign of weakness and tried to overcome it by constantly improving their self-concept, or, if that failed, by finding ways to medicate the hurt into numbness. Some even pictured this Darkness to be far away in a horrible underworld called Hell. In either case, few wanted to visit this seemingly grim and gloomy landscape, not realizing that it was the World of Man, not Darkness, which had become increasingly grim and gloomy. Their tragic lack of understanding about this realm caused them to miss its precious gifts and opportunities. Yet, people's original divinity had not ceased to exist; this amazing, but greatly underutilized, source of healing and creativity simply lay hidden in Darkness.

***If on earth there be a paradise of bliss, it is this, it is this, it is this.
Firdausi (Sufism/Islam)***

With diminishing joy, people in the World of Man concluded that they had been expelled from Creation. Some viewed this expulsion as divine punishment for their pursuit of knowledge, no longer remembering that humans had lost interest in the direct perception of Creation in the first place. Entranced by the power of the intellect and the grandiosity of the self, they had forgotten how to see the divine realm. Because they no longer witnessed or believed in Creation here on Earth, people erroneously imagined that both the Creator and the sacred world had relocated somewhere else, far away, in a place they called Heaven. That realm, they assumed, existed beyond this physical life.

Seduced by the imagined possibilities of self-importance, people decided that by acquiring enough wealth, power, fame, or perfection they still could find a substitute Heaven on Earth. As the World of Man grew ever more powerful, so did the forces of selfishness, greed, narcissism, and grandiosity.

As time went on, people occasionally would catch glimpses of the original world – for after all, Creation had never left and seeing it was still possible – but most, enmeshed in the World of Man, disbelieved their eyes and hurried on to the next problem, self-improvement project or grand activity. A few rare individuals, however, stopped to look more closely and realized that Heaven existed not just in the future but here, now, on Earth as well. More importantly, they discovered that whenever they sensed Divinity's Presence Heaven on Earth appeared all around them – in their gardens, families, and communities; Heaven was just another name for Creation. Some of these people became great mystics, prophets, or social activists. Others just lived in simple happiness or service. In either case, for these few the World of Man and its underlying Darkness had become transparent, allowing them to see the radiance of eternity.

There is another heaven and earth beyond the world of men.
Li Po (Taoism)

Sadly, the vast majority of people in the world still failed to see Heaven on Earth and instead continued under the spell of destructive and erroneous beliefs. As a result, exploitation of nature and war between peoples continued, bringing the human species to the edge of extinction. The most desperate believed that only the apocalyptic end of the world itself would bring Heaven on Earth. Few understood that the future of humankind depended on all people finding and sharing Heaven on Earth right here, right now.

This revised creation story symbolizes humankind's journey away from the first-hand experience of Heaven on Earth as Creation itself to our current global crisis. This allegory also hints at how tremendously important it is for us to make the journey home to Heaven on Earth. In fact, survival in this fragile garden called Earth depends upon it.

© 2009 John C. Robinson

John Robinson holds doctorates in clinical psychology and ministry and is an ordained interfaith minister, author, and mystic. He has taught extensively at men's gatherings, professional conferences, hospitals, churches and retreat centers and is the author of three previous books on the interface of psychology and spirituality. His new book, *Finding Heaven Here* (O-Books, 1/09) has been endorsed by Andrew Harvey, Mathew Fox, Jeremy Taylor, Malidoma Some, and John Mabry. Dr. Robinson lives on an island in the Puget Sound of Washington State. You can learn more about his work at: www.johnrobinson.org.