

The Bahá'í Faith rejects the idea of heaven and hell as actual places. It views afterlife as involving progress through a series of spiritual realms, termed the Abhá ("Most Glorious") Kingdom. Depictions of the Abhá Kingdom are metaphorical, not literal, because the next life is a mystery that can not be adequately described. In the next world human beings remain in the human station—they can not progress to the station of, for example, a Manifestation of God—but in the human station they progress infinitely. The Abhá Kingdom possesses a spiritual hierarchy of stations, as the following passage from the Long Obligatory Prayer suggests: "I testify unto that whereunto have testified all created things, and the Concourse on High, and the inmates of the all-highest Paradise, and beyond them the Tongue of Grandeur itself from the all-glorious horizon. . ." (Bahá'í Prayers, 2d United States edition, 13). Bahá'u'lláh mentions a similar set of levels to the Abhá Kingdom in His mystical work, *The Seven Valleys*: "Others have called these the worlds of the Heavenly Court (Láhút), of the Empyrean Heaven (Jabarút), of the Kingdom of Angels (Malakút), and of the mortal world (Násút)" (*The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, 25). Here Bahá'u'lláh is quoting Súfí ideas.

The Bahá'í Faith usually defines the concepts of heaven and hell as "restricted to this world" (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 282) and "conditions within our own beings" (Shoghi Effendi, *High Endeavors*, 48). In other words, heaven and hell represent the state of the soul in its progress toward, or remoteness from, God, and its degree of obedience to divine law.

The Bahá'í scriptures also use heaven and hell as symbols and literary devices; these uses constitute the great majority of occasions where the words "heaven" and "hell" appear in the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'u'lláh notes that "in every instance, He hath given the term 'heaven' a special meaning" (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 68). Among the common uses are the following:

1. A literary device of contrast. This involves contrasting the word "heaven" with one of its opposites, such as: "make mention of Me on My earth, that in my heaven I may remember thee" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 43); "Creator of earth and heaven" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, 58); "satanic conduct can not be turned into heavenly behavior" (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 39); "all the keys of heaven God hath chosen to place on My right hand, and all the keys to hell on My left" (the Báb, quoted in *Promised Day is Come*, 43).
2. A symbol denoting the "loftiness and exaltation" of something (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 66): hence "the heaven of the religion of God" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 40); "enter the heaven of communion with Me" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian no. 8); "he. . . hasteneth to the heaven of inner significance" (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, 12); "the foundations of idle fancies have trembled, and the heaven of vain imaginings hath been cleft asunder" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 119); "the heaven of statesmanship is made luminous and resplendent by the brightness of the light of these blessed words"

(Bahá' u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá' u'lláh, 166).

3. As part of a term referring to the Manifestation of God: "Birds of Heaven" (Bahá' u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, 211, 254; Tablets of Bahá' u'lláh, 261); the "melody of the dove of heaven" (Bahá' u'lláh, Hidden Words, Persian no. 8); ". . . that they may recognize Him Who is the Day-Star of Thy Revelation, the Dawning-Place of Thy signs, the heaven of Thy manifestation" (Bahá' u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá' u'lláh, 114).

4. As part of a symbol of revelation or the source of revelation. The term "Maid of Heaven" is the most common example of this usage (Bahá' u'lláh, Gleanings, 91; Tablets of Bahá' u'lláh, 251). "Heaven of divine Revelation" also occurs (Bahá' u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, 44).

5. As a symbol or part of a term referring to God: "neither [man nor woman] is superior to the other in the eyes of heaven" (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, 162); "raise your suppliant hands to the heaven of the one God" (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, Secret of Divine Civilization, 2).

6. Rarely, as a metaphor for the Abhá Kingdom: ". . . the Supreme Concourse, the angels of heaven and the dwellers of the Kingdom of El-Abhá" (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, 527).

7. Occasionally the term is used literally: "we are waves of one sea, grass of the same meadow, stars in the same heaven" (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, 174); "the heaven which doth not exist at all, for it is but space" (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, 168).

The term hell is used much more rarely in the Bahá'í scriptures than the term "heaven," and possesses a similar range of symbolic meanings. Use of "hell" as a contrast to the term "heaven" or some other positive idea is most common; for example "they hasten forward to hell fire, and mistake it for light" (Bahá' u'lláh, Gleanings, 42). Just as "heaven" is occasionally used to symbolize the Abhá Kingdom, "hell" is occasionally used as a symbol for this world: "In truth, [upon death] from hell it [the soul] reaches a paradise of delights" (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, 327). "Hell" is also used to symbolize evil: "shun the manifestations of the people of hell" (ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, 431).

Bibliography. An excellent article on "heaven and hell" can be found in Mircea Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987). James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1911) has an excellent and lengthy article on "Cosmogony and Cosmology." Both of these articles were used as the source of information on the religions other than the Bahá'í Faith.

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