

Heaven is Here, Now! Are You?

by Nicholas de Castella

Heaven is here, now. If you do not agree with this it may be because you are not 'here' to experience it.

Many religions teach that after we die we will have the opportunity to experience an imaginary place of happiness and bliss called heaven, that is if we've been good enough in this life. But what if this assumption is not true? What if heaven is available to us now? If it is, then how do we find it?

Our lives usually fall far short of experiences we would call 'heavenly'. We live in a culture that suffers from gross amounts of stress, anxiety and unhappiness. If we could raise our level of enjoyment and experience a little more lightheartedness, then is it fair to say that this is a step closer to heaven? I think so. Furthermore, if we continue to lift our level of happiness, peace and love we would continue to move towards an authentic 'heavenly' experience here on earth.

Believing that heaven is something elsewhere is one of the major reasons why we don't experience it here and now.

Looking for something better, somewhere else, means that we do not experience life as it actually is. Instead we engage the thinking mind which seeks, searches, analyses, compares and evaluates. The thinking mind is always one step removed from life. An experience rises in response to stimuli received through our senses. The thinking mind performs its tasks by interpreting this information. Its basis is this interpretation on comparisons to memories of past similar experiences. The interpretation is not the experience. The impression generated is now abstracted: filtered, distorted and removed from the actual experience.

The over active thinking mind is a product of avoiding deeper connection to feelings associated with our actual experience. We live in a culture that encourages us to suppress our emotions and disconnect from our feelings. Consequently we have over emphasised the thinking mind and neglected the feeling mind. Whilst our great technological advances are largely thanks to the power of the thinking mind, it is our lack of feeling connection that has led to the situation where human desolation poses the greatest threat to the survival of the planet. It appears that there is a desperate need for each of us to develop balance between our thinking minds and our feelings.

The more we live in the thinking mind the more distant we become from the actual, earthly experience of being alive. We lose touch with what is real and what is not. As we become more firmly entrenched in the thinking mind we lose touch with reality as it is. We create and live in worlds that are predominately mind generated fantasies. Feelings that are not acknowledged generate rogue thoughts that are based not on reality but on our assumptions, interpretations and other illusionary scenarios. These rogue thoughts give rise to emotions that have no currency in reality. We spend an inordinate amount of time and energy lost in a sea of mind generated emotions and consumed in drama generated by thoughts that are not real, not related to the present

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experience. The drama forms a smoke screen to the genuine feelings that lie within. The more distant we are from the experience of being alive the less we are connected to the depth of beauty and wonder that is available to us in each and every moment.

Heaven is here now, but we are not. We miss the experience of what is actually happening here and now because we are looking for 'something else'. We reject this experience because our attitude is that this can't be 'it' (the ultimate, heavenly experience). We reject the experience by invalidating it, wishing it were different and by trying to get away from it. The resistance to what is happening and the struggle to free ourselves from whatever is rising within us causes us to get more tightly tangled in the net of suffering. Resisting the natural unfolding of life creates pain. This is the root cause of suffering.

The full experience of the truth of this current moment is only available to those who are fully present. Being fully present means being intimately aware of the thoughts we are thinking, the emotions we are feeling and the sensations that are arising in our bodies moment to moment.

But how many of us can honestly say that we are that in touch with our feelings and our bodies? We spend a lot of time and energy disconnecting from our feelings and avoiding going deeper into the experience that is available to us in this moment. We keep our attention focused on the things outside of us, on our 'problems' (very few of which are actually happening in this moment). We keep busy so that we don't have to stop and feel what is happening inside us. We sedate and numb our bodies out of full aliveness by the food we eat and the drugs we take: fats, sugars, tea, coffee, alcohol... We avoid being intimate with ourselves by chatting with others about issues that reveal nothing about our experience in the moment. Serving only as distractions from going deeper into relationship with ourselves and each other.

What feelings lie dormant under our frenzied search for something else?

We live on the run from what we imagine lies within us. We are afraid of what would happen if we exposed what lies within. Our anger may raise its head and lead to our being seen and rejected as a cold perpetrator. Our fear could leave us looking weak, pathetic and inadequate. Our depth of grief threatens to consume us should we drop into its abyss. We fear the embarrassment and vulnerability of exposing the emptiness, loneliness and confusion about who we are and where we are going. The thinking mind was once our saviour but now has become our cage. To attempt to think our way out of the cage only reinforces the bars.

All our fears, until actually experienced, are no more than imagination! So powerful is this illusion that every day I meet people who use these horrific ideas to convince themselves to stay in suffering, still hoping their intellect will save them and settling for what they've got (or rather what they haven't got). They would rather endure the suffering deep inside in some dull and distant place, than risking exposing themselves to the truth.

Alternatively our suffering can provide the motivation to challenge our tendency to flee and instead to turn and face the contracted self that lies within. Freedom lies in the exact opposite of what our fear tells us. Release from our contracted

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state of being lies in the acceptance, validation and open embrace of each experience as it is. As we begin to allow our real feelings to surface we often feel uncomfortable and frightened. As we get more experience with feeling the flow of energy through our bodies we gain confidence in allowing ourselves to let go of control and we develop capacities that make feeling and expressing emotion more comfortable and ultimately pleasurable.

One of the greatest commodities sold in our culture is the concept of 'getting ahead'. Everybody seems to be so consumed by the idea that heaven is in the future: If I only try harder or am a better man, woman, mother, father, husband, lover, worker.... then I'll be loved and happy. Finally I will get the cheese at the end of the tunnel. Well looking at the people in our nursing homes is not great inspiration for pursuing the idea that things are necessarily going to get better in the future.

So how do we make a start to freeing ourselves from the cage of our suffering? First we must recognise and feel the cage. For many the suffering has either become so much a part of 'normal' life that we don't question it or we have become so detached, distracted and numbed out of life that we can barely feel. Recognising the predicament we are in gives us the incentive to do something about it.

Secondly, we have to STOP. Stop running away from that which is uncomfortable, stop running towards what we think will alleviate our suffering and stop hoping that we can escape our body and our life by focusing on something other than this very present moment. Stop and be. Breathe deeply into the soft animal of our body, giving ourselves permission to be as we are, in this moment. Yes right now! Including any judgements that this is bad or wrong. Recognising comparisons to any other times or anyone else. Not trying to improve, be stronger, more open, more loving. Simply allowing ourselves to be as we are. When we do this we find we peace and things start to move. Not because we are making them change, but because life is always changing. When we get stuck it is because we are holding on or trying too hard to change and creating counter resistance.

Why don't we stay in heavenly-blissful states of awareness? Authentic ecstatic states of being occur when we are 'fully present' (Full Presence is when our consciousness is focused in the present moment and our feeling awareness is focused in our bodies). Being 'fully present' in our bodies triggers unprocessed emotional energy to be released. Most of us do not have the capacity to stay fully open and present to the full range and depth of emotion. Often fear of being out of control and our ego being annihilated arises. We tend to split off from fully feeling the energy and retreat into our thinking minds. Thus we lose touch with feeling deeply, and lose our connecting to the vibrantly alive experience that is 'Life'. This is why it is important to do emotional process work. The clearer we are of past emotional baggage, the more naturally and easily we dwell in the present moment.

It is said that in Hell, there are huge tables of delicious food. To eat you have to use chopsticks that are a meter long. Everyone there is starving to their bones. It is also said that in Heaven there are huge tables of delicious food. To eat you have to use chopsticks that are also a meter long. Yet in Heaven everyone is full and content. The difference is that in Heaven you feed the person on the other side of the table.

It is our attitude to life that affects the way an experience is felt. Believing this to be other than heaven amounts to saying 'this isn't it', or 'its not supposed to be this way'. This rejecting or invalidating our situation contorts our bodies (and our relationships) and causes our experience to become painful, thus destroying any chance of experiencing our

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lives as divine bliss.

Developing an attitude of gratitude affects our experience each moment. What we focus our attention on expands. Resentment and criticism focuses our attention on what we do not want and thus tends to create more of what we don't want in our lives. Gratitude, appreciation and praise focuses our attention on the things that we feel happy about and leads to the creation of enjoyable experiences and positive outcomes. In the words of John Gray: "When you want what you've got, you'll get what you want". When we come into the present moment there are always plenty of things to be grateful for. Stop now yourself and check it out. Look inside and around you now. What have you got in this moment that you could be grateful for? Look and see how richly blessed this moment is.

As you practise accepting and embracing the moment and celebrating each blessing that is available many wonderful things will happen for you. Firstly, you will begin to realise that you do in fact live in a bountiful and rich world. That there are many things in your life to be grateful for. Secondly, as you focus on the goodness in your life, it will expand. Things will get better and better, there will be more and more for you to celebrate and appreciate. Thirdly, as you begin to accept and validate your experiences you will see the perfection in them and in life here and now. Fourthly, you will find that within each experience is an opportunity. An Opportunity to get to know yourself more fully, to release suffering, to enrich your experience of being alive and to open your heart to the wealth of love and radiance that is your truthful, natural state of being. Finally, you will begin to raise the vibration of everyone else. In the words of Marianne Williamson: "As we let our own light shine we unconsciously give others permission to let their light shine also".

Life on Earth can be Heaven or Hell. Heaven being Rich, vibrant, radiant, beautiful, coursing with love. Heaven is not so much a place that we go to, its a place that we arrive at. A place we awaken to. It is here and now in this present moment. We have been in a trance. Lost in our minds, out of touch with the bodily pulse of life. Lost in the abstract mind, projecting into the future and replaying the past.

I invite you to experiment with this and see for yourself. Start affirming to yourself:

"This is as good as it gets. Heaven is Here, Now".

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