

The Science of Upanishads – Part 29: What is Moksha? Is Attaining Moksha The Same As Going To Heaven (Swarga)?

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The simple answer is NO! The word *Moksha* is derived from the Sanskrit root word मुच्, which means liberate. **Moksha is liberation from the cycle of birth and death (Samsara).** It is the collapse of the individual Atman with the Brahman, the ultimate Reality of this Universe, **from where there is no return. Heaven, on the other hand, is a transitory place for righteous souls** who have performed good deeds in their lives **but are not yet ready to attain moksha.** **Heaven is a paradise of pleasure,** where most of the Hindu Devatas (Devas) reside along with the king of Devas, Indra, and beatified mortals. According to Upanishads, there are many other Lokas (abodes) besides Swarga Loka (Heaven) and Bhoo Loka (Earth), including but not limited to Mahar Loka, Jana Loka, Tapa Loka, Atala Loka, Satya Loka, etc. **Since heavenly abodes are also tied to the cycle of birth and death, any dweller of Heaven or Hell will again be recycled to one of the Lokas, which may or may not be Bhoo Loka (Earth), and in a different or same form as dictated by one's karma along with "Maya" i.e. the illusion of Samsara. This cycle is broken only by self-realization by the Jivatma, which is called Moksha.** Brahman is the only one who has neither the beginning (birth) nor the end (death). It is the state of eternal Truth, Conscience, and Bliss (Sachhidananda). One of the great insights of the Upanishads is that Atman and Brahman are made of the same material. When a person achieves Moksha or liberation, Atman returns to Brahman, to the source, like a drop of water returning to the ocean.

Likewise, bad deeds (Dushkarma) lead one to Hell (Narak) after death. Rigveda (4:5:4) describes going to Narak as follows: "May the bounteous divine fire consume them with fiercely glowing sharp jaws of flames, who disregard the commandments and steadfast laws of most venerable and sagacious Lord."

If mere good deeds do not qualify one to attain Moksha, how is it achieved then? There are many ways according to the Upanishads: Meditation, Introspection and Knowledge that "behind all forms and veils, the subjective and the objective are one, and that we are all part of the Whole". In general, the Upanishads agree on the idea that men are naturally ignorant about the ultimate identity between Atman, the self within, and the Brahman. **One of the goals of meditation is to achieve this identification with Brahman, and abandon the ignorance that arises from the identification with the illusory or quasi-illusory nature of the common sense world.**

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