

The Unimaginable Conversion of Paradise into Hell

Michael Gurevitz

Department of Plant Molecular Biology and Ecology
George S. Wise Faculty of Life Sciences, Tel Aviv University
Ramat Aviv 69978, Tel Aviv, Israel

PARADISE AND HELL

Our cognitive perception of 'Paradise' usually portrays an attractive heavenly garden, 'Eden', where Adam and Eve were created (ref. 1). Quite the opposite is our imaginary picture of 'Hell', a concept raised at early Christianity, describing an afterlife world of punishment in flames of those being evil or living in sin during their life time. Both imaginary pictures are shaped in our mind mostly by famous paintings and descriptions of religious preachers threatening their 'sheep' during prayers or other religious rituals (refs. 2,3). So, engraved in human minds are these imaginations that upon visiting a fascinating place (e.g., seashore with Palm trees and a nearby forest, colorful flowers and a small water stream), people tend to call it 'Paradise-like', whereas a dry volcanic place with bubbly lava, no grass and poisonous vapors resembles Hell. These two cognitive concepts are common to people of all religions and ethnic origin due likely to thousands of years of conviction, mostly by sanctified mediators (e.g., Priests, Imams, Rabbis). Astoundingly, religious people tend to consider Paradise and Hell in a simplistic, almost realistic way, and are therefore worried about their afterlife destination. Free-minded people, however, consider Paradise and Hell as conceptual metaphors, part of the 'reward and punishment' discernment. The Paradise metaphor applies to a wonderful place that meets our dreams, whereas the Hell metaphor describes torture, pain, and despair. From a historic viewpoint, prior to the overpopulation of Earth and pressurized industrial control over human life, many terrestrial natural regions could be considered Paradise-like areas. However, as humanity populated almost every terrestrial nich, destroyed forests, contaminated the environment, exterminated many speci, overused most resources, and fought over control and dissemination of primitive ideas and beliefs, most Paradise-like places have disappeared while fears, bloodshed, destruction, despair (Hell-like reality) have prevailed and became a daily reality (ref. 4). Interestingly, although the metaphoric perception of Paradise and Hell sounds better to rational people, the simplistic belief in these afterlife worlds by a large portion of humanity is intriguing, raising uncertainties about the 'advanced level of their cognition'.

ADVANCEMENT OF HUMAN COGNITION IS LIMITED BY RELIGIOUS CONCEPTIONS AND PREJUDICE IDEAS

Despite the high self-esteem of humanity, there is a clear contradiction between the cognition level of technologically-oriented minds (e.g., scientists, physicians) and that of religious prejudiced minds, who ignore proven facts about the creation and age of Earth, as well as the evolutionary process that raised *Homo sapiens*. This vast difference in cognitive perception and leaning of so many people on mythic, irrational legends arose due likely to spiritual needs and fears of death and the unknown. Not only that such a difference in cognitive perception limits the practical as well as spiritual development of humanity, it provokes disputes, hatred,

and aggression that distract our mind from the upcoming global risks. Unfortunately, a large portion of humanity, particularly the religious fraction, is either apathic or skeptic about these dangers and so they ignore warnings like that of Stephen Hawking, who suggested prior to his passing away to expedite the scientific research aiming to develop means for intergalactic travel to evacuate humanity to another life-supporting planet. The religious sector believes that 'God' would save them in times of need, a belief, that could be tolerated much earlier in human history, but not in the 21st century.

EXPECTATIONS

Although planet Earth is expected to last millions of years, the probability of a cosmic catastrophe (e.g., hit by a large asteroid; detrimental irradiation wave; shift from orbit; some damage to the Moon; a black hole effect), or some environmental disaster (e.g., gigantic Volcanic eruption; ice melting and flood), or a human-evoked tragedy (e.g., nuclear world war; incurable microbial pandemic; extreme alterations in climax) may surprise us much earlier (ref. 4). To minimize such global dangers, rational people are expected to actively reduce the risk factors (e.g., remove from chair ignorant leaders whose personal and national aspirations endanger the world; minimize the contamination of the environment; reduce the green-house effect; stop developing risky biological warfare). Since very little was done thus far, humanity is clearly stepping toward self-destruction (refs. 5,6). Under such increasing pressures, it is time to consider (a) the suggestion of leading scientists to expedite the search for another life-supporting planet enabling evacuation of humanity from the deteriorating Earth; (b) take immediate measures to minimize the religious influence on our life and unite all nations in a common project aiming at preservation of our species as well as protect nature. The irrational belief of the religious sector that some divine power ('God') would save humanity in times of need is obviously 'utter nonsense' and so the only way of minimizing the dangers to humanity must get rid of all nuclear reservoirs; abort all efforts to create vicious micro organismic weapons; prevent the industrial spills leading to climax changes and greenhouse effect; and stop all environmental contaminations, while repairing damaged habitats, mainly forests and sea plankton required for photosynthesis. In addition, all advanced physical efforts that may risk our existence, like exploring the interaction of matter with anti-matter should stop before a possible provocation by mistake of a disastrous outcome. The energy requirements should instead be compensated by natural resources like sunlight, wind, sea-waves, waterfalls, heat gradients or other safer means. All military disputes must cease and the arms race between superpowers eliminated. Notably, fulfillment of all these conditions do not guaranty secure future for humanity, but still may provide ample time to figure out ways of colonizing other life-supporting planets (following S. Hawking suggestion). Evidently, we should give up some unrealistic aspirations and understand that the 'experiment' (if any) of developing a clever, highly cognitive super species (*Homo sapiens*), within a relatively short galactic period, was unsuccessful.

IS THERE HOPE?

Clearly, as humanity advances technologically, its negative influences on Earth intensify. Since people cannot settle down their endless fights over territories, resources, power and religion (ref. 5), and despite the progress in various aspects of life, the survival prospects of humanity are seemingly at descent, not to mention the possibility of a putative cosmic catastrophe (ref. 6). Rather than establishing a firm set of international rules to limit the human-directed

destruction of Earth, most attention is still being focused on daily needs, over-exploitation of natural resources, continuous contamination of the environment, development of means for mass destruction (refs. 4,7) accompanying loss of important ethical values (*homo homini lupus*). Ignorant, quite primitive (even insane), leaders keep their power and control over suffering populations, while threatening the rest of the world (ref. 8) and offering an insecure reality and future. Within this messy situation, the continued religious control over approximately half of the world population, just pours oil on the growing flame. The public conviction about 'Paradise' and 'Hell' is just one example of the irrelevance of the religious conviction. In using Axel Munthe's last sentence in his book 'The story of San Michele', I allow myself to declare that it would be a shocking surprise to find myself after death in either 'Paradise' or 'Hell'. Furthermore, if we consider the rise of humanity as an experimental exercise planned by either 'God' or some extraterrestrial civilization (refs. 9,10), the upcoming results of this experiment do not seem promising (ref. 11), and so the concepts of 'Paradise' and 'Hell' might remain a temporary memory or completely disappear from the galactic history.

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