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TO KNOW KUMBH, UNDERSTAND STRUGGLE BETWEEN HEAVEN & HELL

Humans of Earth get a great festival to celebrate, but the struggle between the occupants of heaven and hell continues unabated.

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Kumbh Mela

The legend of Kumbh revolves around the perennial struggle between the Devas and Danavas, the resident gods of heaven, and the lords of hell, respectively.

The two keep jostling for superiority, and the demons are ever eager of defeating the gods and occupying heaven.

Even when the two once unusually collaborate to churn the great ocean to procure the nectar of immortality, the partnership goes badly sour. One of the demons makes away with the pot (Kumbh) of nectar, and as he speeds through the universe to ditch his furious brethren chasing him, a few drops of ambrosia fall at four places on Earth. Since then, says the myth, the Kumbh is celebrated at those places.

Humans of Earth get a great festival to celebrate, but the struggle between the occupants of heaven and hell continues unabated. Demons remain both envious and desirous of heaven, forever frustrated in their attempts to conquer it. To know Kumbh, it is important to understand this struggle between heaven and hell.

So, heaven and hell are obviously not geographies.

What is holy? That which is unblemished, uncorrupted. We call the pristine as holy because there is something within us that demands cleanliness, that does not like filth, corruption and conditioning.

Something within us just does not agree with blemishes, bondages, ignorance and littleness. It wants absolute Truth and Freedom.

We want freedom, but live a life of bondage. However, amid our bondages, there stands the possibility of coming in contact with a situation, a person, a book, or an environment, which can remind us of our essentially liberated nature.

Association with something, someone, whose presence reminds you of your own internal Truth; whose presence is proof that if liberation is possible in one case, then it is possible for you as well.

This is what gives one the courage to dream of freedom. Otherwise, one is stuck. There are the

overpowering forces of physicality, home, family, work, society, education, economics. And there is that occasional, faint call from within, that gnawing feeling of discontent. One cannot escape anywhere else, and in the middle of his inevitable situations, one also does not feel satisfied. Stuck!

Many people take the easy way out: "Why talk of liberation? Why not just eat, sleep, drink and be merry? There is nothing more to life; don't even talk about it, it's dangerous."

They say so, because they feel hopelessly stuck. There is nothing around, which offers them any kind of help. And even if they try to rise a little, there are a thousand forces to pull them down.

Association with the holy offers a helping hand. It does not take you away to another world. It only helps you do what you have always wanted to do in this world. It helps you realise that your own deepest desire of freedom is attainable.

Heaven and hell are obviously for the mind. Heaven is a situation in which the mind gets what contents it deeply: a total relaxation that eludes our otherwise agitated and stressed life. Heaven is the company that relaxes you, and also gives you the courage to rebel for liberation, "I can be free! My deepest dreams were there to be realised!"

What is your deepest dream? Your deepest dream is to be free and contented. The world gives you a thousand miscellaneous desires that obfuscate this deep original dream. Heaven is where you see that this dream is realisable. You are struggling, labouring, somehow plodding along. You have given up all hope of freedom, and then, miraculously, the hope is rekindled. Heaven!

Correspondingly, there is hell: All that which convinces you that just this humdrum state of affairs is life. The company of forces that tell you not to fly too high, that compromise is the name of the game, that you must play safe and secure, that the world is a terrible place, that you must be afraid, that you are born to follow practices and patterns – the company of such voices is hell.

The world itself can be heaven. When is the world heaven? When for you the world is a gateway to the beyond. The beyond is not heaven, remember! Because beyond, there is no mind, and heaven and hell are in the mind.

Spirituality is the journey from hell to heaven, and then beyond into the absolute joy of liberation. The very thing that was craving for heaven, the very thing that was suffering, that very thing is to be peacefully retired. That is the climax of spirituality, and the essential calling of Kumbh.

Author, a spiritual teacher, is an IIT-D and IIM-A alumnus and a former civil servant


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