

Is the Description of Heaven Possible? Why the River of Honey and Wine?

How Can the Description of Heaven Be Possible for Someone Who Has Never Experienced It?

Heaven is one of those subjects surrounded by questions and ambiguity, especially concerning its blessings—because none of us have seen it or experienced its rewards firsthand. The key question is: Is the description of Heaven possible?

There is always uncertainty about the unknown, and we naturally have more doubts about things we have not personally seen or heard. In such cases, the most effective way to introduce the unknown is by using familiar references.

Consider, for example, the term “Camel-Cow-Leopard” used in some ancient stories to describe a giraffe. A giraffe has a neck and legs like a camel, horns and a tail like a cow, and skin like that of a leopard. For people in earlier times, the best way to introduce such an unfamiliar creature was to describe it in terms of animals they already knew.

Now, imagine trying to describe the world to a fetus. How likely is it that a fetus—living for months in a dark, confined space—could comprehend the blessings of this world? How would we explain worldly foods to a fetus nourished only by blood?

We humans are like fetuses in the womb of this world. So it is natural that we face questions and limitations when trying to comprehend or depict the next stage of life. One of the recurring doubts is: Why is Heaven depicted with material blessings? If the hereafter offers the same types of blessings we have here, why strive to attain

it? There are places in this world that already resemble the description of Heaven. So what pleasure is left in entering Heaven if we already experience such things here? Are these limitations part of the reason behind the way selected for the description of Heaven and the hereafter?

In this lesson, we will explore the differences between the world and the hereafter, and aim to understand the most effective way the description of Heaven and the hereafter for those who have not yet understood them, while addressing common doubts and misconceptions.

The Relationship Between the Differences of This World and the Hereafter and the Description of Heaven

According to the Law of Proportion, the relationship between this world and the afterlife is like the relationship between the womb and the world. A fetus cannot comprehend the world, since it is unimaginably larger than the womb. Until the fetus is born, he cannot understand the scale, complexity, or quality of the blessings that await him in the world. Similarly, just as a fetus cannot imagine life outside the womb, we cannot fully grasp the hereafter or the blessings of Heaven while we remain in this world. The eternal world and its rewards are vastly greater than anything we know here and we may not understand them before living there.

The world and the hereafter are very different. This world and its perfections are so lesser before the next world, to the point that it is described as nothing but play and amusement [1] in comparison to a vast Kingdom [2]! The hereafter is described in the Quran as vast as the heavens and the earth [3]. Can we truly imagine such

magnitude within the limits of our current existence? Not easily—but to some extent, yes.

Familiarity makes understanding easier. God depicts the blessings of Heaven using examples from material things we have experienced—water, milk, wine, honey, trees, and gardens. He also briefly refers to spiritual blessings like nearness to God, praise, knowledge, fellowship with the righteous, and divine satisfaction.

It is natural that material blessings draw more attention because they are what we know and are compatible with. But that does not mean we are incompatible with spiritual blessings. Even in this world, we are made of both the body and the soul. But it is easier for us to grasp what is tangible and visible.

The Reason for the Description of Heaven through Material Blessings

According to the Quran, the hereafter contains both physical and spiritual dimensions. In that scene, humans will be present with both the body and the soul, and naturally, they should be immersed in divine blessings in both aspects. Doubts and misconception often arise due to ignorance about the true nature of something or from deliberately or unknowingly ignoring reality. To address such doubts, we must first understand their roots. Many of the questions about Heaven are centered around its material depictions. To resolve this, we need to consider why material imagery is used.

Imagine telling a child: “If you behave well, I will arrange a good marriage for you.” The child will likely be uninterested because they cannot yet grasp what that

promise means. You need to offer a reward that fits their current understanding, something they can relate to emotionally and cognitively.

The same principle applies to the description of Heaven. According to the Law of Proportion and the mathematical system of creation, the difference in scale between this world and the next is immense. Everything in the hereafter is exponentially greater. If we were told the unfiltered truth about Heaven, we would not be able to comprehend it. So God uses familiar material examples to help us form a conceptual bridge.

The description of Heaven for people in this world must involve familiar concepts. The realities of the hereafter are billions of times greater and more wondrous. Thus, symbolic examples—like trees, flowing rivers, rivers of honey, or fragrant musk—serve as accessible windows into a far more complex and elevated reality.

The Quran even uses the term “a description of Heaven” [4], indicating that these are not literal descriptions, but these examples are merely a shadow of the reality of Heaven and its blessings.

Doubts and Misconceptions About the River of Honey

One frequent doubt about Heaven concerns the River of Honey. Some people, claiming scientific reasoning, argue that due to honey’s thickness, it would require high temperatures and a sloped surface to flow. They go so far as to say that using such a stream would require climbing mountains and enduring heat—making Heaven sound more like hell!

Let us first consider why rivers are mentioned in the Quran. Four blessed rivers are described, each with perfect qualities [5]:

The River of Water that never changes taste or color and does not go stale.

The River of Milk that never spoils.

The River of Wine that brings only pleasure, not harm.

The River of pure, clear honey.

Everything has its own existential quality: The existential quality of water is to be tasteless, the quality of milk is for its taste not to change, the quality of drinks is to be delightful, and the quality of honey is its purity. This is while worldly water can become foul, milk can sour, wine causes intoxication, and honey is not always pure. This kind of the description of Heaven serves two purposes. On the one hand, since we are familiar with blessings like water, milk, wine, and honey, we can use them to form a mental image of Heaven. On the other hand, by highlighting the flawless and everlasting nature of these blessings in Heaven, we come to understand how they differ from the imperfect and fleeting pleasures of this world. The wine of Heaven, for example, is very different from the worldly one. While earthly wine leads to intoxication, hangovers, and loss of reason, the wine of Heaven brings consciousness, vitality, and spiritual delight.

As for the doubt and misconception about honey needing heat due to its flowing with difficulty, the answer is detectable in the Quran. The Quran repeatedly affirms that there is no hardship or suffering in Heaven. In *Surah Taha* (20:119), God says: "You will neither be thirsty in it, nor suffer from (the heat of) the sun." This verse alone negates the idea that high temperatures are required.

Furthermore, there are various interpretations and meanings regarding the rivers of Heaven. Some mystical interpretations view these rivers as sources of knowledge and wisdom, flowing in the hearts of the faithful. Just as a stream of water revives the dry earth, these rivers bring life to the hearts and souls of believers. Some people, in interpreting the existence of these rivers, say that the effects of a person's good and righteous deeds continue until the Day of Judgment and the hereafter, and their manifestation is the flowing rivers in Heaven. Perhaps one reason for the mention of honey is that it represents the highest example of sweetness in our world. This reference is, in a way, a metaphor for the sweetness of the blessings prepared in Heaven for its inhabitants.

In this lesson, we explored whether the description of Heaven is even possible for someone who has not seen or experienced it. We highlighted that doubts and misconceptions often stem from unfamiliarity. In these cases, using previous knowledge and existing information is the best way to introduce and describe the new subject.

We also used the analogy of the fetus in the womb. Just as a fetus cannot understand the blessings of the world until he is born, we too cannot comprehend the blessings of the hereafter until we enter it. The vastness and greatness of Heaven cannot be compared to worldly blessings. This immense difference limits our ability to fully depict it. One of the most important reasons for describing the hereafter and Heaven with material blessings is precisely this difficulty in comprehending the immensity of Heavenly blessings. The only way to describe Heaven to someone who has neither seen nor heard of it is by using what they are familiar with, namely, material blessings. However, this does not mean that Heaven

is purely material. There are also spiritual blessings, but we lack the capacity to fully comprehend them. Presenting Heavenly blessings in material terms is simply to clarify them for our limited minds.

If you have further insights on the challenges of the description of Heaven and the hereafter, we would be happy to hear your thoughts.

References

[1]. Quran 6:32

[2]. Ibid 76:20

[3]. Ibid 3:133

[4]. Ibid 13:35, 47:15

[5]. Ibid 47:15