

Heaven and hell

[Life](#), [Death](#)



Yudhishtira said: O grandsire, O thou that are possessed of great wisdom and conversant with all the scriptures. I desire to know those excellent ordinances in consequence of which mortal creatures have to travel through their rounds of rebirth. What is that conduct by following which, O king, men succeed in attaining to high Heaven, and what is that conduct by which one sinks in Hell? When abandoning the dead body that is as inert as a piece of wood or clod of earth, people proceed to the other world, what are those that follow them thither? Bhishma said: Here comes the illustrious Vrihaspati of great intelligence! Do thou ask his blessed self. The subject is an eternal mystery. None else is capable of explaining the matter. There is no speaker like Vrihaspati. Yudhishtira, approaching the illustrious Vrihaspati, asked him the question in proper form, desirous of knowing the truth. Yudhishtira said: O illustrious one, thou are conversant with all duties and all the scriptures, Do thou tell me what is truly the friend of mortal creatures? Is the father, or mother, or son, or preceptor, or kinsmen, or relatives, or those called friends, that may be said to truly constitute the friend of the mortal creature? One goes to the next world, leaving one's dead body that is like a piece of wood or a clod of earth. Who is it that follows him thither? Vrihaspati said: One is born alone, O king, and one dies alone; one crosses alone the difficulties one meets with, and one alone encounters whatever misery falls to one's lot. One has really no companion in these acts. The father, the mother, the brother, the son, the preceptor, kinsmen, relatives, and friends, leaving the dead body as if it were a piece of wood or a clod of earth, after having mourned for only a moment, all turn away from it and proceed to their own concerns. Only righteousness follows the body that is thus

abandoned by them all. Hence, it is plain, that Righteousness is the only friend and that Righteousness only should be sought by all. One endued with righteousness would attain to that high end which is constituted by heaven. If endued with unrighteousness, he goes to hell. Hence, the man of intelligence should always seek to acquire religious merit through wealth won by lawful means. Piety is the one only friend which creatures have in the world hereafter. Let by cupidity, or stupefaction, or compassion, or fear, one destitute of much knowledge is seen to do improper acts, his judgement thus stupefied by cupidity. [Note: One that is not possessed of much learning is liable to do improper acts. These acts are all done for another, viz., one's body and the senses and not oneself. The Sanskrit word para here is, the Not-self.] Piety, wealth and pleasure, - these three constitute the fruit of life. One should acquire these three by means of being free from impropriety and sin. Yudhishtira said: I have carefully heard the words spoken by thy illustrious self, -these words that are fraught with righteousness, and that are highly beneficial. I wish now to know of the existence of the body (after death). The dead body of man becomes subtile and unmanifest. It becomes invisible. How is it possible for piety to follow it? Vrihaspati said: Earth, Wind, Space, Water, Light, Mind, Yama (the king of the dead), Understanding, the Soul, as also Day and Night, all together behold as witness the merits (and demerits) of all living creatures. With these, Righteousness follows the creatures (when dead). [Note: When these leave the body, they are accompanied by Righteousness.] When the body becomes bereft of life, skin, bones, flesh, the vital seed, and blood, O thou of great intelligence, leave it at same time. Endued with merit (and demerit) Jiva (Individual soul), after

the destruction of this body, attains to another. After the attainment by Jiva of that body, the presiding deities of the five elements once more behold as witness all his acts good and bad. What else do thou wish to hear? If endued with righteousness, Jiva enjoys happiness. What other topic, belonging to this or that world, shall I discourse upon? Yudhishtira said: Thy illustrious self has explained how Righteousness follows Jiva. I desire to know how the vital seed is originated? Vrihaspati said: The food that these deities, O king, who dwell in the body, viz., Earth, Wind, Space, Water, Light, and Mind eat, gratifies them. When those five elements become gratified, O monarch, with Mind numbering as their sixth, their vital seed then becomes generated, O thou of cleansed soul! When an act of union takes place between male and female, the vital seed flows out and causes conception. I have thus explained to thee what thou hast asked. What else do you wish to hear? Yudhishtira said: Thou hast, O illustrious one, said how conception takes place. Do thou explain how the Jiva (individual soul) that takes birth grows (by becoming possessed of body)? Vrihaspati said: As soon as Jiva enters the vital seed, he becomes overwhelmed by the elements already mentioned. When Jiva becomes disunited therewith, he is said to attain to the other end (viz., death). Endued as Jiva becomes with all those elements, he attains, in consequence thereof, a body. The deities that preside over those elements behold as witness all his acts, good and bad. What else do you wish to hear? Yudhishtira said: Leaving off skin and bone and flesh, and becoming destitute of all those elements, in what does Jiva reside, O illustrious one, for enjoying and enduring happiness and misery? Vrihaspati said: Endued with all his acts, the Jiva quickly enters the vital seed, and utilizing the functional

flow of women, takes birth in time, O Bharata. After birth, the Jiva receives woe and death from the messengers of Yama (god of death). Indeed, misery and painful round of rebirth are his inheritance. Endued with life, O king, the Jiva in this world, from the moment of his birth, enjoys and endures his own previous acts, depending upon righteousness (and its reverse). If the Jiva, according to the best of his power, follows righteousness from the day of his birth, he then succeeds in enjoying, when reborn, happiness without interruption.