

THE DOG WHO WENT TO HEAVEN



Yudhishtira was a great king. And he was also a great and good man. He loved people and he loved animals. His heart was full of love for all.

One day Yudhishtira heard some news that made him very sad. Sri Krishna, the great teacher, was dead.

‘Krishna was my friend,’ said Yudhishtira sadly, ‘he always helped me and gave me good advice. His words were full of wisdom. If Krishna is dead, then I cannot live. If Krishna has gone to heaven, then I, too, shall go to heaven.’

So Yudhishtira set out on the long and difficult road to heaven. With him went his four brothers, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva, and also Draupadi, for Draupadi was the wife of all five brothers.

Yudhishtira had a dog, and where Yudhishtira went, the dog went too. So now, on the road to heaven, the dog followed Yudhishtira.

‘Go home,’ said Yudhishtira to his dog. ‘You cannot come with us. We are going to long, long way and the road is rough. You will feel tired. Go home.’

The dog stood still, and looked at Yudhishtira, but he did not go back. Yudhishtira turned and walked on, and the dog followed behind him.

The road was indeed rough, winding ever upwards through the mountains. How cold it was! Now everything around them was white with snow. Even the air seemed to be freezing. One by one, Yudhishtira’s brothers and Draupadi collapsed by the roadside, and there they died. But Yudhishtira did not stop. He walked on and on, and the dog followed behind him.

Yudhishtira and the dog went on, over hill and dale, through snow and ice, climbing higher and higher, till they reached the foot of Mount Meru. High

above them, at the top of Mount Meru, lay the city of Brahma, and there flowed the Ganga, making a circle round the city. Yudhishtira and the dog could hear bells ringing in the hilly city above them, and as they listened to the bells, heavenly flowers came floating down upon their heads.

Suddenly, with a bright flash and clap of thunder, there was Indra, the king of Heaven, standing in his chariot before them.

‘I have come to take you to heaven, Yudhishtira,’ cried Indra. ‘Come, get into my chariot. You are the only person I have ever allowed to enter heaven without your human body. Get into the chariot!’

‘But where are my brothers and where is my queen?’ Yudhishtira asked. ‘They died on the way, and I had to leave them behind. Where are they? I cannot go to heaven without them.’

‘They are already there, in heaven,’ replied Indra. ‘You need not worry about them. They are waiting for you.’

‘And Krishna?’ asked Yudhishtira, anxiously, ‘Krishna is there in heaven too, isn’t he?’

‘yes, he is,’ Indra assured him with a smile. ‘All those you love are there, waiting for you.’

‘If that is so,’ said Yudhishtira, happily, ‘then I will go with you.’

Then Yudhishtira looked down at his dog and said, ‘Get into the chariot, child.’

‘What?’ cried Indra. ‘A dog? A dog in my chariot? A dog in heaven? Oh, no! There are no dogs in heaven! You will get into the chariot, and you will leave your dog behind!’

‘That I cannot do,’ Yudhishtira replied, ‘On this terrible journey, this rough road through snow and ice, he has been my faithful friend and companion. My brothers died. One by one they left me. My queen, too, died and left me. But this dog never left me. He does not speak, but his eyes speak; and I know his love for me. How can I leave him behind?’

‘Are you mad?’ cried Indra. ‘You can go to heaven in your body because you are great and good, but there is no place in heaven for men with dogs. This dog has to be left behind.’

‘I shall not go to heaven without him,’ Yudhishtira replied firmly. ‘He depends on me, and as long as I live I shall look after him. I shall do what is right, and to abandon him now would not be right. I shall not leave him behind; even to please you, Indra.’

‘Now, think for moment,’ said Indra. ‘He is a dog; he kills and eats other animals, doesn’t he? Is that not sinful? He is a wicked dog, and he will go to hell. Yes, you will go to heaven, but he will go to hell!’

‘I shall not go to heaven without him,’ Yudhishtira said again.

‘Well, now,’ said Indra, thoughtfully, ‘you can’t take him to heaven with you, but if you like you can go to hell instead of him.’

‘Agreed!’ cried Yudhishtira. ‘Let the dog go to heaven. I shall go to hell.’

As Yudhishtira said these words, the dog suddenly changed his form. He was Dharma, the one who always does what is right.

‘Oh, great king.’ Dharma said to Yudhishthira, ‘you are indeed an unselfish man. You love people, and you love animals. Your heart is full of love for all.’