

The Sadhu's Blessings

A Story from 'Vedic Stories from Ancient India'

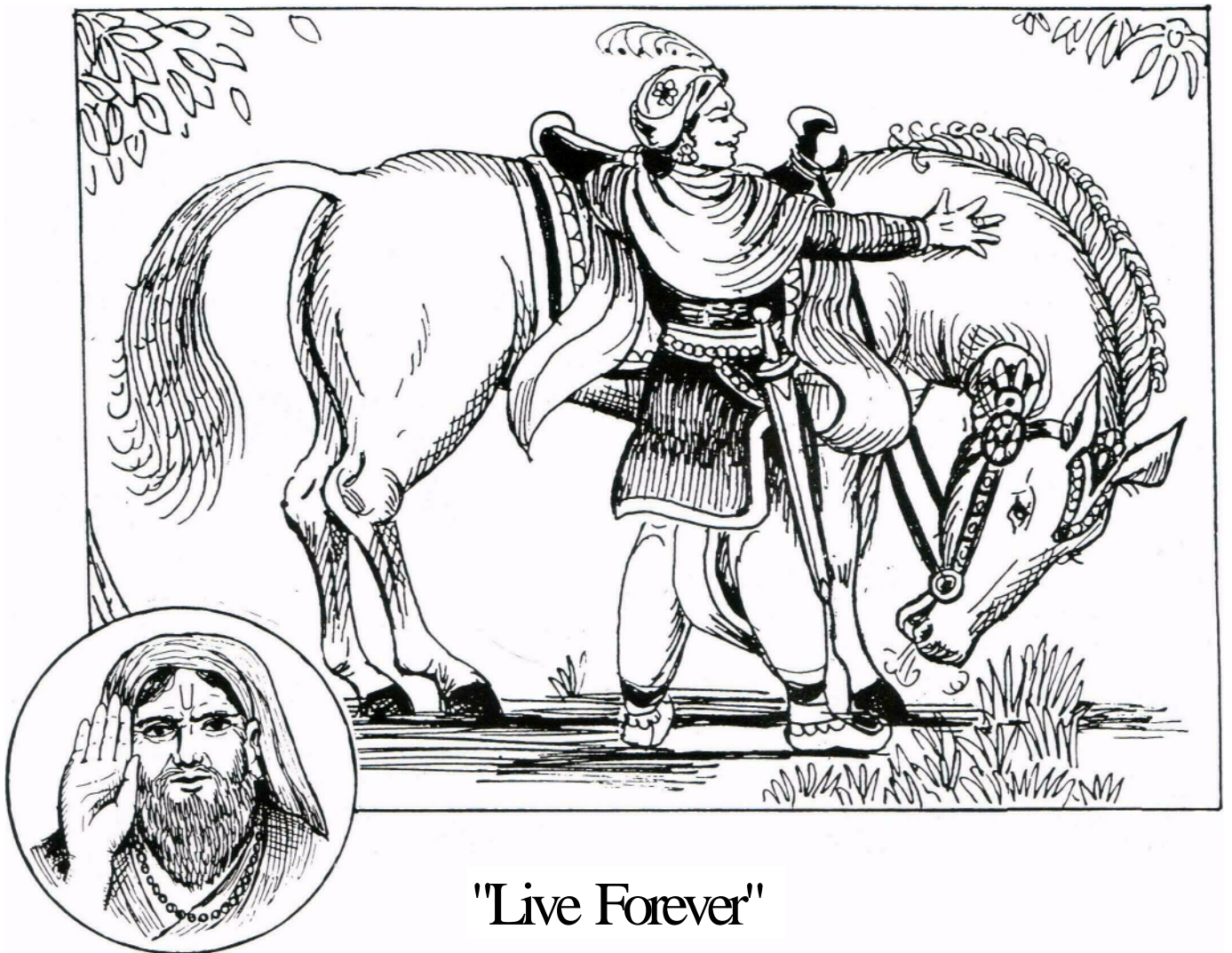
This story is an example of one that can be effectively used to explore Hindu concepts, specifically the notions of the atman (true self), karma and reincarnation.

A sadhu (saintly person) and his disciple were passing through a city. "Let us see whether we can make our journey a learning experience," he said to his disciple. By chance, the Prince of the kingdom was mounting his fine white stallion just as they were walking by.

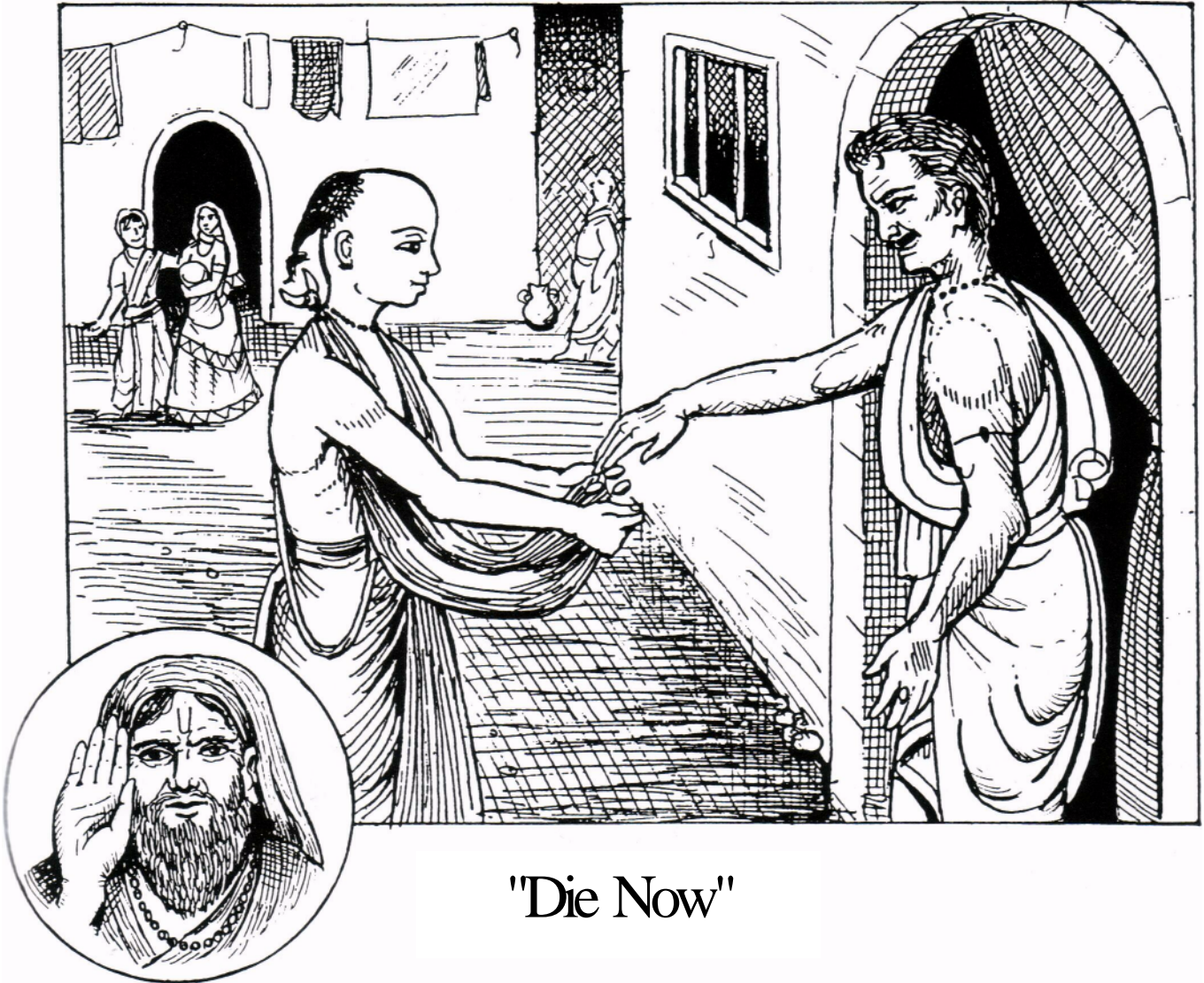
"Greetings holy man," the prince called out. "Please give me your blessings."

Raising his palm, the sadhu replied, "May you live forever."

The prince galloped off, and the sadhu's disciple enquired, "Why did you bless him to live forever, master?"



"Live Forever"



"Die Now"

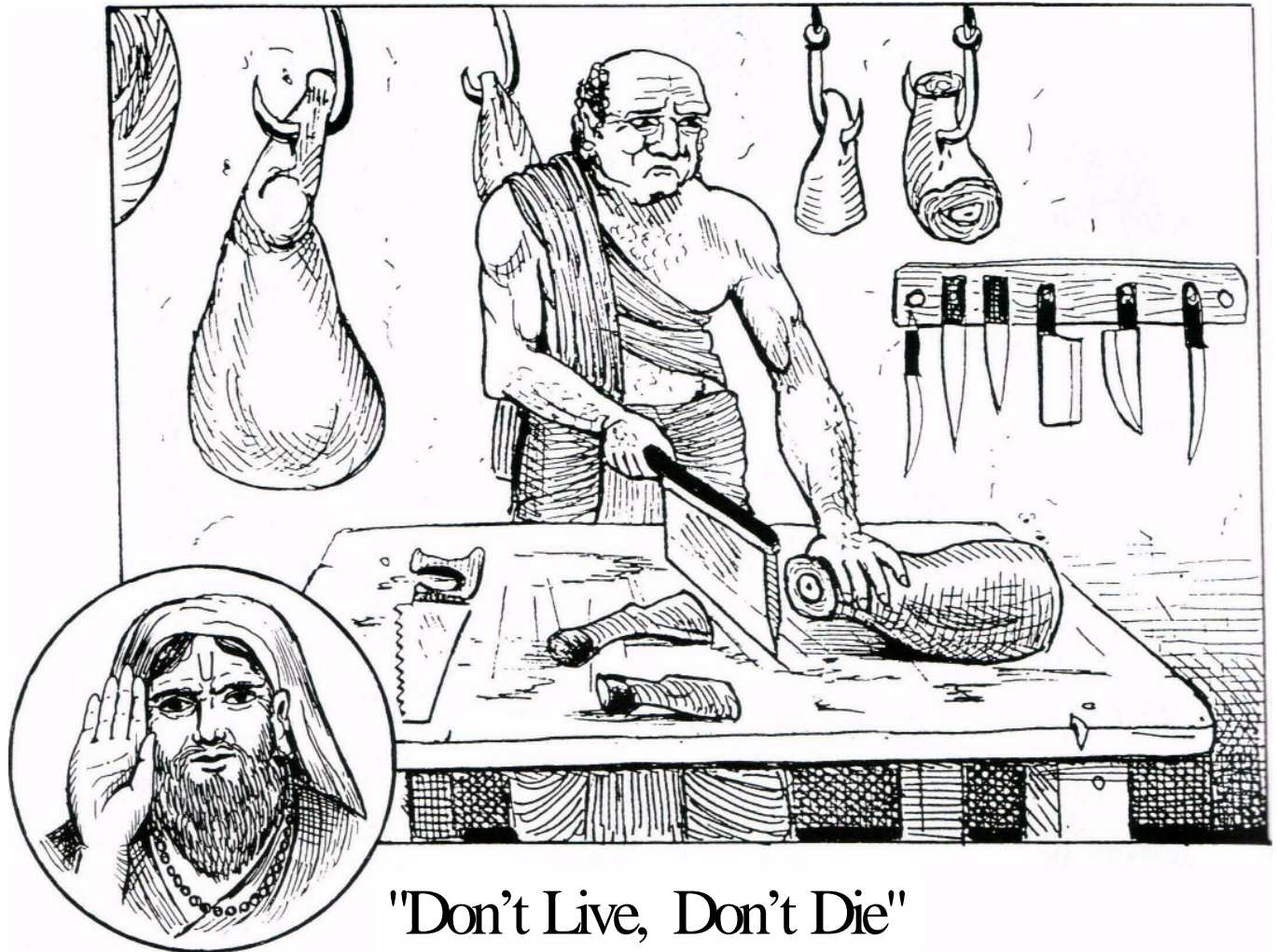
The sadhu answered, "He is now enjoying a life of sense pleasure. However, he hunts animals for sport, so when he dies he'll suffer for this error. So it's best for him to live forever and stay as he is now."

Later they saw a young student of spiritual science, a brahmachari, dressed in saffron cloth, collecting alms for his teacher. When he saw the sadhu he touched his hands together and offered him respect.

In reply the sadhu said, "May you die immediately." Again the disciple queried, "Why did you curse him to die?" The sadhu laughed. "That was not a curse, but a blessing. At present he is pure and sinless. However, if he continues to live his future is uncertain."

"Why is that?" the disciple asked.

"Because there is always the danger of falling into worldly ways. But if he dies right now, he will certainly be promoted to the higher worlds."



"Don't Live, Don't Die"

As they approached the market place the disciple had to hold his nose. The air was filled with a sickly smell of death coming from the corpses of skinned animals, cut into pieces and hung on hooks in front of the butcher's shop.

A red-faced man, the shop owner, called out to the sadhu, "Hello! Any blessings for me today?"

Once again the sadhu raised his palm. "Yes. I bless you that you neither live nor die."

The butcher scratched his head and muttered, "What a strange blessing."

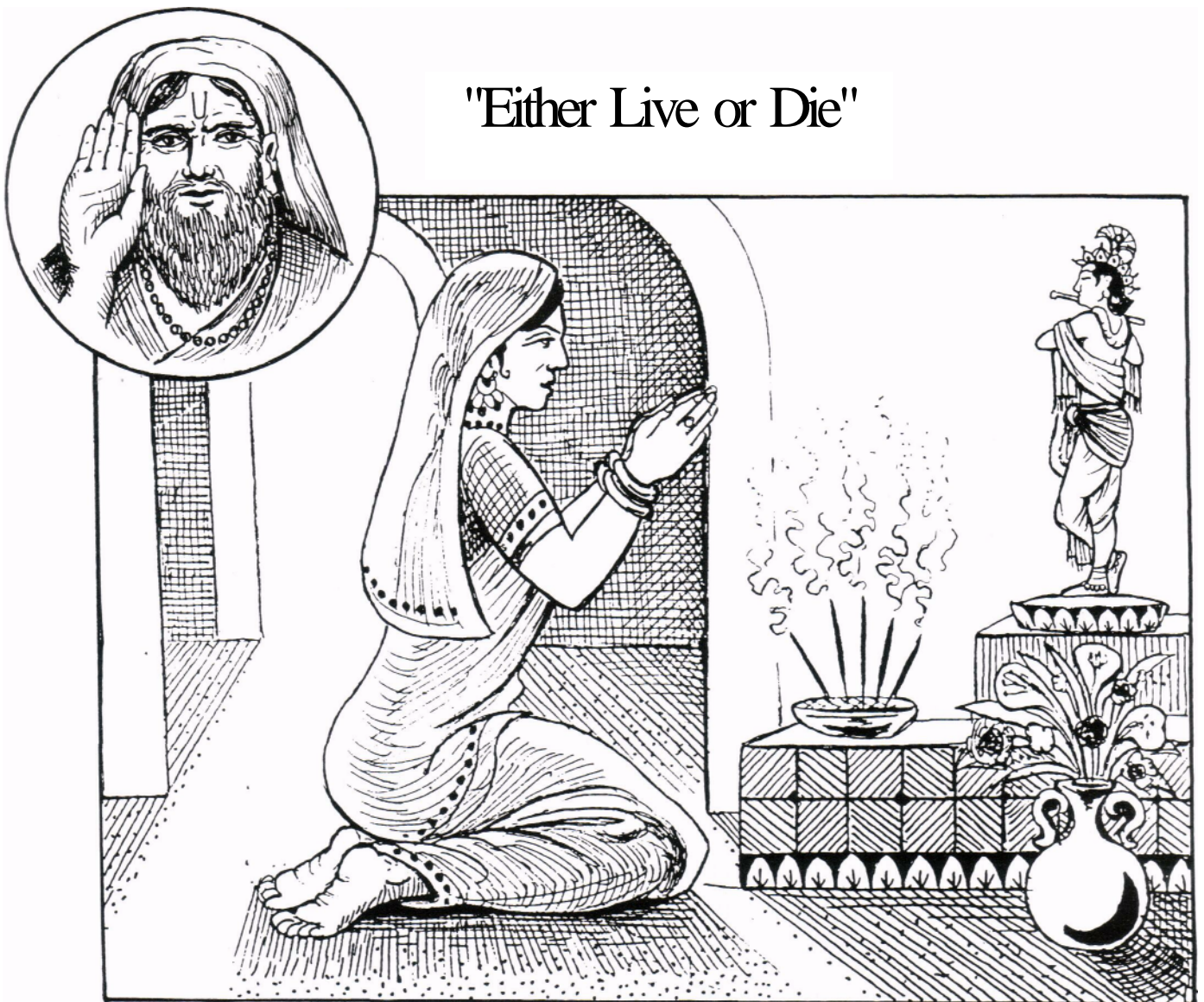
After they left the market place the disciple enquired, "What did you mean by that greeting?"

"Don't you think the butcher is in a hellish condition right now?" the sadhu asked. His disciple nodded.

"He has killed so many innocent animals that he will surely go to hell for many thousands of years," the sadhu explained. "So he will suffer if he lives or if he dies."

Next they passed a temple entrance where a devotee was offering her heartfelt prayers to the Supreme Lord. She did not even notice the sadhu approaching. But he called out, "May you live or may you die."

"Let me guess why you said that," ventured the disciple. "Constantly remembering God, a devotee is always happy. Therefore it makes no difference to her whether she lives or dies. She will go on remembering God in this life and in the next." Smiling, the sadhu replied, "You are learning well."



"Either Live or Die"