

If you ever wondered where you going after death, just look at the pictures.

- PUNISHMENT IN 28 NARAKA HELLS - An account of punishment for sinful living entities

Naraka (Sanskrit: नरक) meaning Hell, is a place of punishment for sinful living entities, where sinners are punished and tormented after death.

In many scriptures we find details about various hells and sufferings therein. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam Purāṇa describes different hells called Naraka. Naraka, as a whole, is known by many names conveying that it is the realm of Yama called Yamaloka or Mṛtyuloka – the realm of Death.

Naraka-Loka - the hellish planets

Naraka or Naraka-loka is also the abode of Yama, the god of Death. After death, the messengers of Yama called Yamadūtas bring all beings to the court of Yamarāja, where he weighs the virtues and the vices of the living beings and accordingly passes the appropriate judgement.

Yama-rāja, as Lord of Justice, is also called Dharma-rāja. Yama sends the virtuous to Svarga-loka, the heavenly planets, to enjoy the luxuries of paradise. He also assesses the vices of the sinful and accords judgement, assigning them to appropriate hells as punishment commensurate with the severity and nature of their sins.

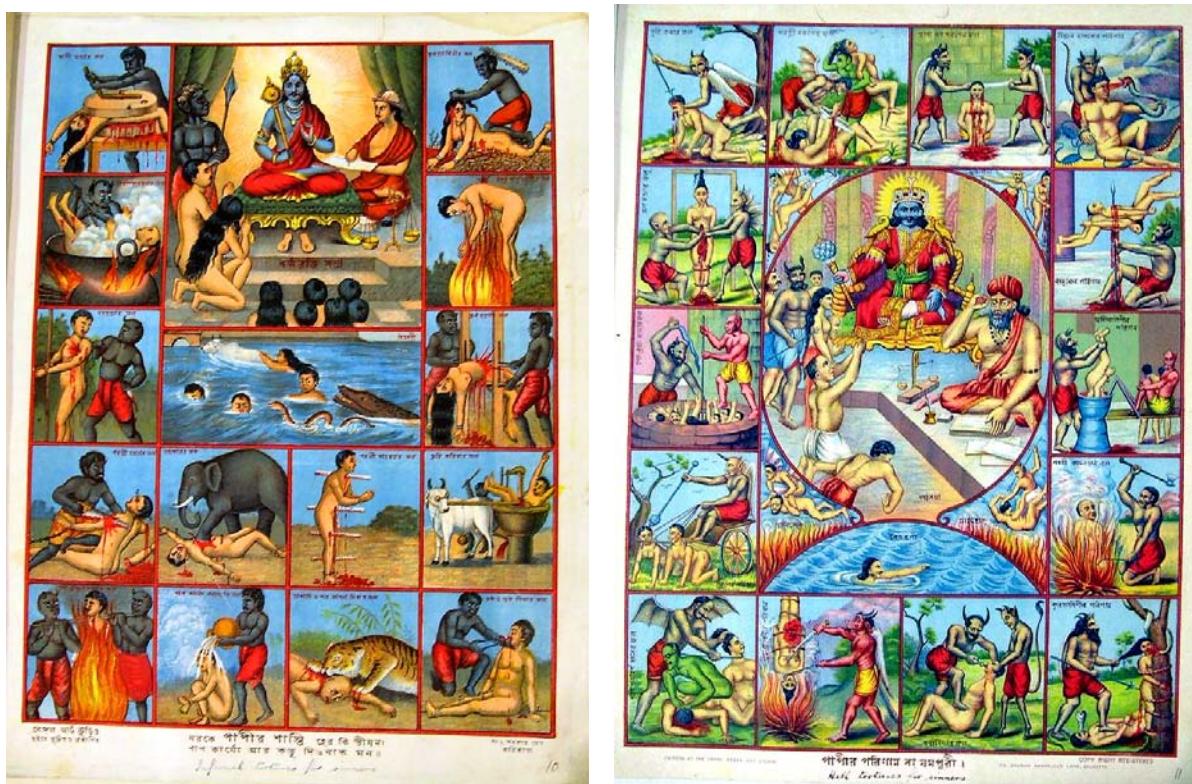


The hellish planets are ruled by Yamarāja, the son of the sun-god. He resides in Pitṛloka with his personal assistants, performing his duty according to the rules and regulations laid down by the Supreme Lord. At the time of death, when the heart stops beating, the living entity, namely the soul, along with the subtle material body consisting of mind, intelligence and false ego, is dragged out by the subtle creatures, the Yamadūtas, the servants of the lord of death, from his gross material body consisting of earth, water, fire, air and ether.

Hell is made of a higher dimensional or subtle material energy. It is the subtle part of this material universe, which is invisible to the ordinary gross human eye, just like the mind, ghosts, angels, fairies are of a finer substance than gross matter—solid matter, liquidity, radiant energy, gas, ether.

The god of Death, Yama, employs Yama-dūtas (messengers of Yama), who bring sinful living entities to Yama for judgement. The Yamadūtas punish and torment evil souls on the orders of their master Yamarāja. Generally, all living beings, go to Yama's abode upon death where they are judged. Living entities who are lower than human beings (animals) are not punishable, for under the laws of material nature they are automatically evolving.

Human beings, who are advanced in consciousness, are responsible, but not all of them are punishable. Those engaged in advanced pious activities are beyond punishment. Only those who engage in sinful activities are punishable. However, very virtuous beings and saintly people, who have fully dedicated their life's to god, are taken directly to Svarga-loka (heavenly planets). People dying in holy places like Kurukshetra are also described as avoiding Yama. Those who get moksha (salvation) also escape from the clutches of yama-dūtas.



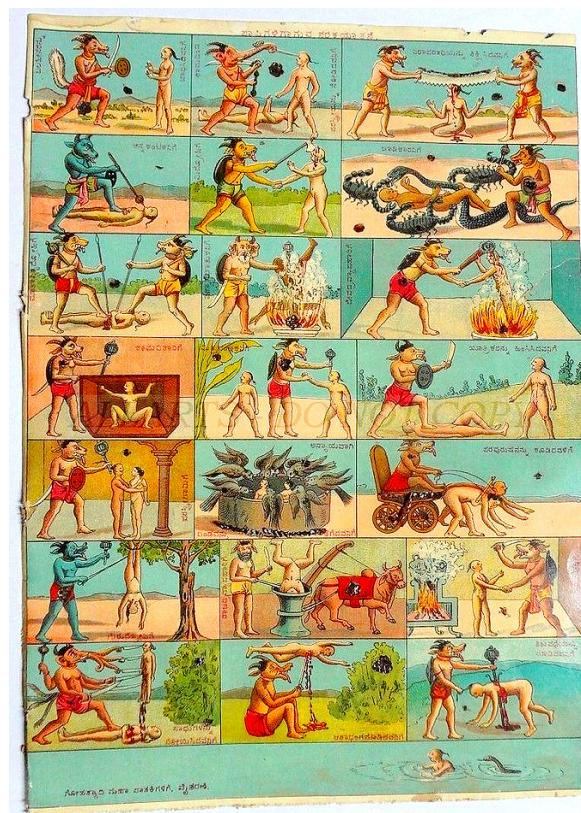
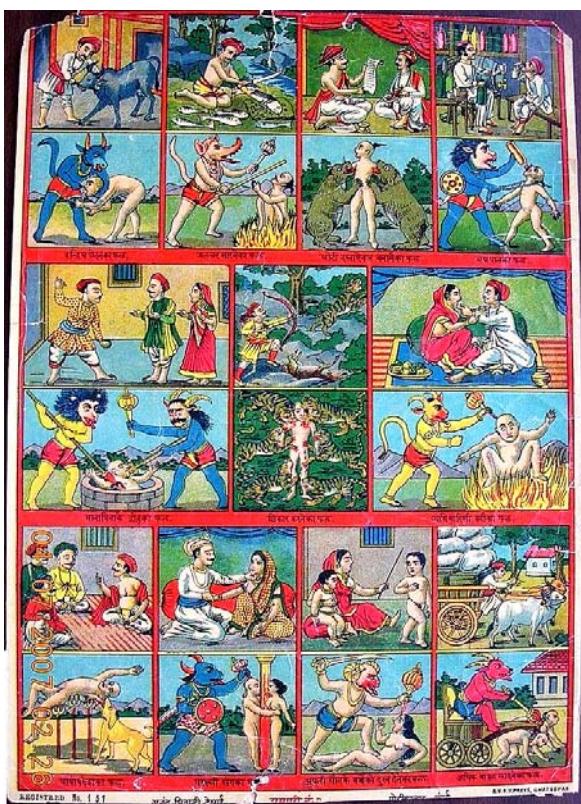
The subtle body of the soul going to hell is at the time of death, covered with a body suitable for punishment—yātanā-deha (subtle body) ([Bhāgavatam 3.30.20](#)), having the same shape as the previous gross body. If the suffering of some hell is too much, he seems to die, but the yātanā-deha (subtle body) can not die, because it is made of the subtle element: mind, intelligence, false ego.

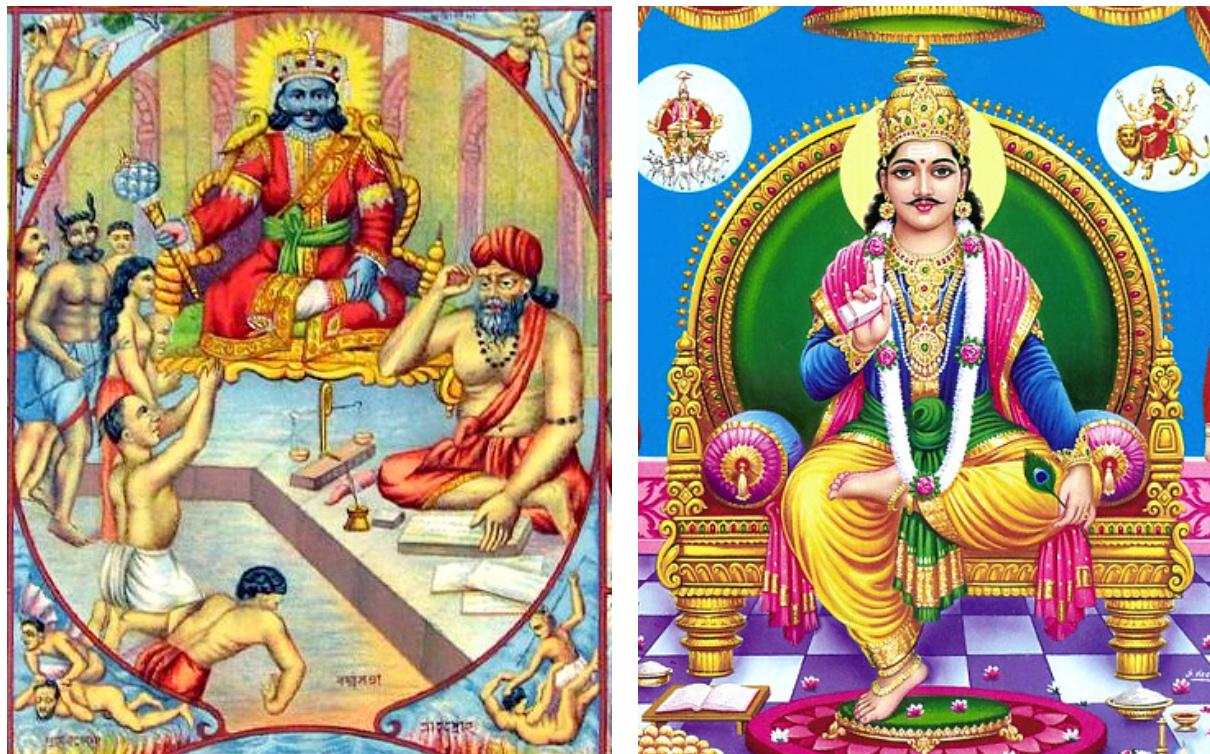
Every living entity is covered by a subtle and gross body. The subtle body is the covering of mind, ego, intelligence and consciousness. It is said in the scriptures that the constables of Yamarāja cover the subtle body of the culprit and take him to the abode of Yamarāja to be punished in a way that he is able to tolerate. He does not die from this punishment because if he died, then who would suffer the punishment? It is not the business of the constables of Yamarāja to put one to death. In fact, it is not possible to kill a living entity because factually he is eternal; he simply has to suffer the consequences of his activities of sense gratification.

While in the material world, if the person commits many sins, the subtle body will look very sinful, and the person will be forced to go to the different hells. **At the time of death the gross body will be separated from the subtle body.** When the Yama-dūtas drag the soul and his impure subtle body, out of the temporary gross body, onto the road to hell, the suffering already begins, according to the degree of committed sins.

As a criminal is arrested for punishment by the constables of the state, a person engaged in criminal sense gratification is similarly arrested by the Yamadūtas, who bind him by the neck with strong rope and cover his subtle body so that he may undergo severe punishment.

In the Śrīmad Bhāgavata ([5.26.6](#)) Śrīla Prabhupada describes: “**One should not think Yamarāja is a fictitious or mythological character; he has his own abode, Pitṛloka, of which he is the king.** Agnostics may not believe in hell, but Śukadeva Gosvāmī affirms the existence of the Naraka planets, which lie between the Garbhodaka Ocean and Pātālaloka. Yamarāja is appointed by the Supreme Personality of Godhead to see that the human beings who violate His rules and regulations get punished accordingly, so that they will not repeat the mistake and do not violate His rules and regulations again”. In science there is the law of cause and effect. This is also for all of one’s actions called karma; they will also all have an effect or reaction. Thus there must be a Supreme Judge, administering this law of cause and effect.





Yamaraja is aided by his minister Chitragupta, who maintains a record of all good and evil actions of every living being. Yama-dūtas are also assigned the job of executing the punishments on sinners in the various hells.

THE ROAD TO HELL - the way to Yamas abode



Sometimes a dying man entrusts the family affairs to either his son or some relative, saying, “**I am going**. Please look after the family.” **He does not know where he is going**, but even at the time of death he is anxious about material family affairs.

At death, he sees the messengers of the lord of death come before him, their eyes full of wrath, and in great fear he passes stool and urine. ([sb/3/30/19](#))

At the time of death the Yamadūtas become the custodians of those persons who have strongly gratified their senses. They take charge of the dying man and take him to the planet where Yamarāja resides. The conditions there are described in the following verses.

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The process of punishment is explained in the Caitanya-caritāmṛta. Formerly the king’s men would take a criminal in a boat in the middle of the river. They would dunk him by grasping a bunch of his hair and thrusting him completely underwater, and when he was almost suffocated, the king’s constables would take him out of the water and allow him to breathe for some time, and then they would again dunk him in the water to suffocate. This sort of punishment is inflicted upon the forgotten soul by Yamarāja, as will be described in the following verses.

While carried by the constables of Yamarāja, he is overwhelmed and trembles in their hands. **While passing on the road he is bitten by dogs, and he can remember the sinful activities of his life. He is thus terribly distressed.** ([b/3/30/21](#))

It appears from this verse that while passing from this planet to the planet of Yamarāja, the culprit arrested by Yamarāja's constables meets many dogs, which bark and bite just to remind him of his criminal activities of sense gratification. It is said in Bhagavad-gītā that one becomes almost blind and is bereft of all sense when he is infuriated by the desire for sense gratification. He forgets everything. Kāmais tais tair hṛta jñānāḥ [Bg. 7.20]. One is bereft of all intelligence when he is too attracted by sense gratification, and he forgets that he has to suffer the consequences also. Here the chance for recounting his activities of sense gratification is given by the dogs engaged by Yamarāja. While we live in the gross body, such activities of sense gratification are encouraged even by modern government regulations. In every state all over the world, such activities are encouraged by the government in the form of birth control. Women are supplied pills, and they are allowed to go to a clinical laboratory to get assistance for abortions. This is going on as a result of sense gratification. Actually sex life is meant for begetting a good child, but because people have no control over the senses and there is no institution to train them to control the senses, the poor fellows fall victim to the criminal offenses of sense gratification, and they are punished after death as described in these pages of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Under the scorching sun, the criminal has to pass through roads of hot sand with forest fires on both sides. He is whipped on the back by the constables because of his inability to walk, and he is afflicted by hunger and thirst, but unfortunately there is no drinking water, no shelter and no place for rest on the road. While passing on that road to the abode of Yamarāja, he falls down in fatigue, and sometimes he becomes unconscious, but he is forced to rise again. In this way he is very quickly brought to the presence of Yamarāja. Thus he has to pass ninety-nine thousand yojanas within two or three moments, and then he is at once engaged in the torturous punishment which he is destined to suffer.

One yojana is calculated to be eight miles, and he has to pass along a road which is therefore as much as 792,000 miles. Such a long distance is passed over within a few moments only. The subtle body is covered by the constables so that the living entity can pass such a long distance quickly and at the same time tolerate the suffering. This covering, although material, is of such fine elements that material scientists cannot discover what the coverings are made of. To pass 792,000 miles within a few moments seems wonderful to the modern space travelers. They have so far traveled at a speed of 18,000 miles per hour, but here we see that a criminal passes 792,000 miles within a few seconds only, although the process is not spiritual but material.

He is placed in the midst of burning pieces of wood, and his limbs are set on fire. In some cases he is made to eat his own flesh or have it eaten by others. His entrails are pulled out by the hounds and vultures of hell, even though he is still alive to see it, and he is subjected to torment by serpents, scorpions, gnats and other creatures that bite him. Next his limbs are lopped off and torn asunder by elephants. He is hurled down from hilltops, and he is also held captive either in water or in a cave. Men and women whose lives were built upon indulgence in illicit sex life are put

into many kinds of miserable conditions in the hells known as Tāmisra, Andha-tāmisra and Raurava. ([sb/3/30/25-28](#))

From this verse through the next three verses the description of punishment will be narrated. The first description is that the criminal has to eat his own flesh, burning with fire, or allow others like himself who are present there to eat. In the last great war, people in concentration camps sometimes ate their own stool, so there is no wonder that in the Yamasādana, the abode of Yamarāja, one who had a very enjoyable life eating others' flesh has to eat his own flesh.



From the human form to the body of hog

Sometimes unbelievers do not accept these statements of scripture regarding hell. They disregard such authorized descriptions. Lord Kapila therefore confirms them by saying that these hellish conditions are also visible on this planet. It is not that they are only on the planet where Yamarāja lives. On the planet of Yamarāja, the sinful man is given the chance to practice living in the hellish conditions which he will have to endure in the next life, and then he is given a chance to take birth on another planet to continue his hellish life. **For example, if a man is to be punished to remain in hell and eat stool and urine, then first of all he practices such habits on the planet of Yamarāja, and then he is given a particular type of body, that of a hog, so that he can eat stool and think that he is enjoying life.** It is stated previously that in any hellish condition, the conditioned soul thinks he is happy. Otherwise, it would not be possible for him to suffer hellish life.

After leaving this body, the man who maintained himself and his family members by sinful activities suffers a hellish life, and his relatives suffer also. ([sb/3/30/30](#))

The mistake of modern civilization is that man does not believe in the next life. But whether he believes or not, the next life is there, and one has to suffer if one does not lead a responsible life in terms of the injunctions of authoritative scriptures like the *Vedas* and *purāṇas*. Species lower than human beings are not responsible for their actions because they are made to act in a certain way, but in the developed life of human consciousness, if one is not responsible for his activities, then he is sure to get a hellish life, as described herein.

He goes alone to the darkest regions of hell after quitting the present body, and the money he acquired by envying other living entities is the passage money with which he leaves this world. ([sb/3/30/31](#))

When a man earns money by unfair means and maintains his family and himself with that money, the money is enjoyed by many members of the family, but he alone goes to hell. A person who enjoys life by earning money or by envying another's life, and who enjoys with family and friends, will have to enjoy alone the resultant sinful reactions accrued from such violent and illicit life. For example, if a man secures some money by killing someone and with that money maintains his family, those who enjoy the black money earned by him are also partially responsible and are also sent to hell, but he who is the leader is especially punished. The result of material enjoyment is that one takes with him the sinful reaction only, and not the money. The money he earned is left in this world, and he takes only the reaction.

In this world also, if a person acquires some money by murdering someone, the family is not hanged, although its members are sinfully contaminated. But the man who commits the murder and maintains his family is himself hanged as a murderer. The direct offender is more responsible for sinful activities than the indirect enjoyer. The great learned scholar Cāṇakya Pañḍita says, therefore, that whatever one has in his possession had better be spent for the cause of sat, or the Supreme Personality of Godhead, because one cannot take his possessions with him. They remain here, and they will be lost. Either we leave the money or the money leaves us, but we will be separated. The best use of money as long as it is within our possession is to spend it to acquire Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Thus, by the arrangement of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the maintainer of kinsmen is put into a hellish condition to suffer for his sinful activities, like a man who has lost his wealth. Therefore a person who is very eager to maintain his family and kinsmen simply by black methods certainly goes to the darkest region of hell, which is known as *Andha-tāmisra*.

Having gone through all the miserable, hellish conditions and having passed in a regular order through the lowest forms of animal life prior to human birth, and having thus been purged of his sins, one is reborn again as a human being on this earth. Just as a prisoner, who has undergone troublesome prison life, is set free again, the person who has always engaged in impious and mischievous activities is put into hellish conditions, and when he has undergone different hellish lives,

namely those of lower animals like cats, dogs and hogs, by the gradual process of evolution he again comes back as a human being. ([sb/3/30/34](#))

It can be concluded that if someone is not willing to enter into hellish life, as in Tāmisra or Andha-tāmisra, then he must take to the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which is the first-class yoga system, because even if one is unable to attain complete Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this life, he is guaranteed at least to take his next birth in a human family. He cannot be sent into a hellish condition. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the purest life, and it protects all human beings from gliding down to hell to take birth in a family of dogs or hogs.

BUDDHIST HELL

Wat Tung Yu is a minor temple in Chiang Mai, with a captivating mural on the wall of the main wihaan showing the terrors which sinful people will be subjected to in hell, and the delights of the faithful in heaven.





HELLS OF JAINISM

The Jain religion believes in Naraka (Sanskrit: नरक) as the realm of existence characterized by great suffering. Naraka is usually translated into English as "hell" or "purgatory". However, Naraka differs from the hells of Christian religions as souls are not sent to Naraka as the result of a divine judgment, but due to their bad Karma accumulated. Furthermore, the length of a being's stay in a Naraka is not eternal, though it is usually very long—measured in billions of years. A sinful being is sent into a Naraka hell as a direct result of his or her previous karma (actions of body, speech and mind), and resides there for a finite length of time until his karma has achieved its full result. After punishment in Naraka and his karma cleared up, he may be reborn in one of the higher worlds, or on earth, as the result of an earlier karma that had not yet ripened.

In Hell beings experience a life span of innumerable years and are not easily killed even though they endure great torture. Even if they are killed they immediately manifest a new subtle body and are then repeatedly tortured and killed. The subtle body of beings can not die, because it has no physical form composed of matter, but will still experience all pain inflicted upon him.

This is described as thus: "They are not reduced to ashes there, and they do not die of their enormous pains; undergoing this punishment, the miserable men suffer for their misdeeds. And there in the place, where there is constant shivering, they resort to a large burning fire; but they find no relief in that place of torture; the tormentors torture them still. There is heard everywhere the noise of painfully uttered cries even as in the street of a town. Those whose bad Karma takes effect (viz. the punishers), violently torment again and again those whose bad Karma takes effect also (viz. the punished)."



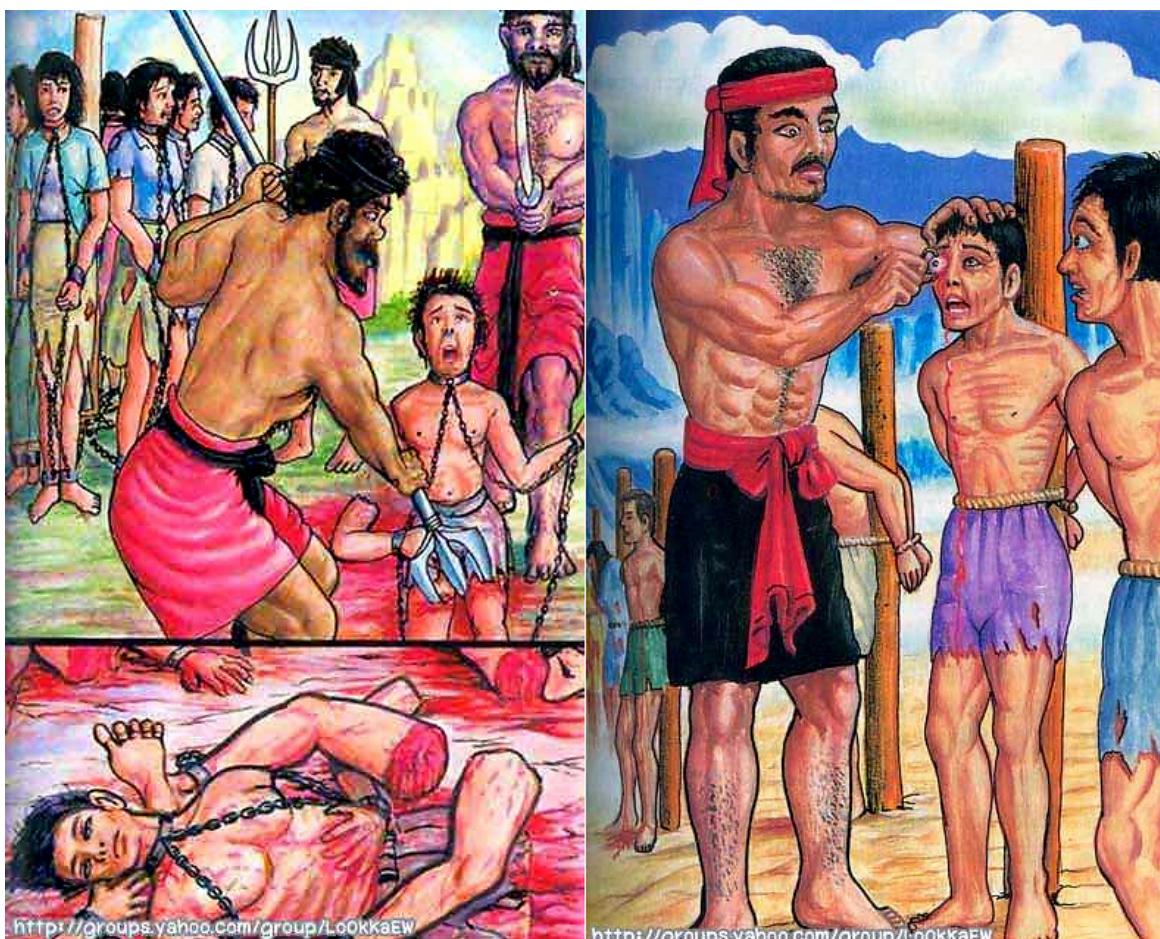
According to Jain scripture, Tattvarthasutra, following are the causes for birth in hell:

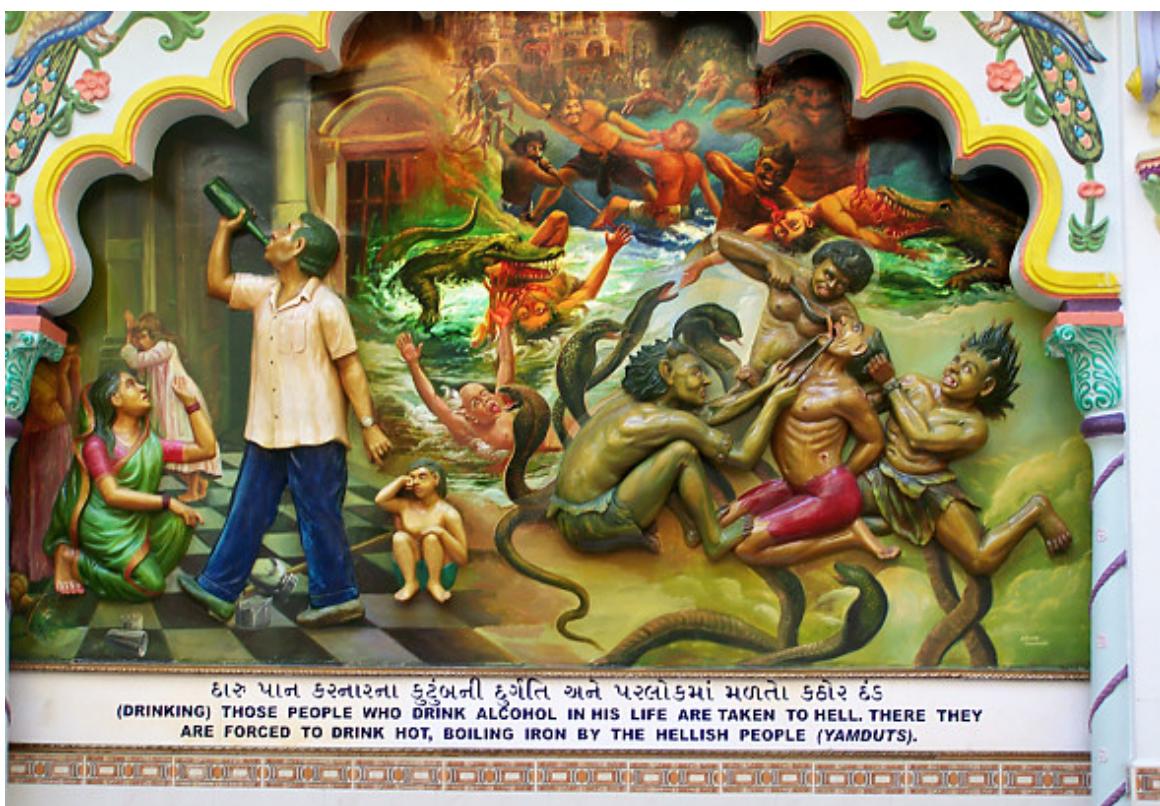
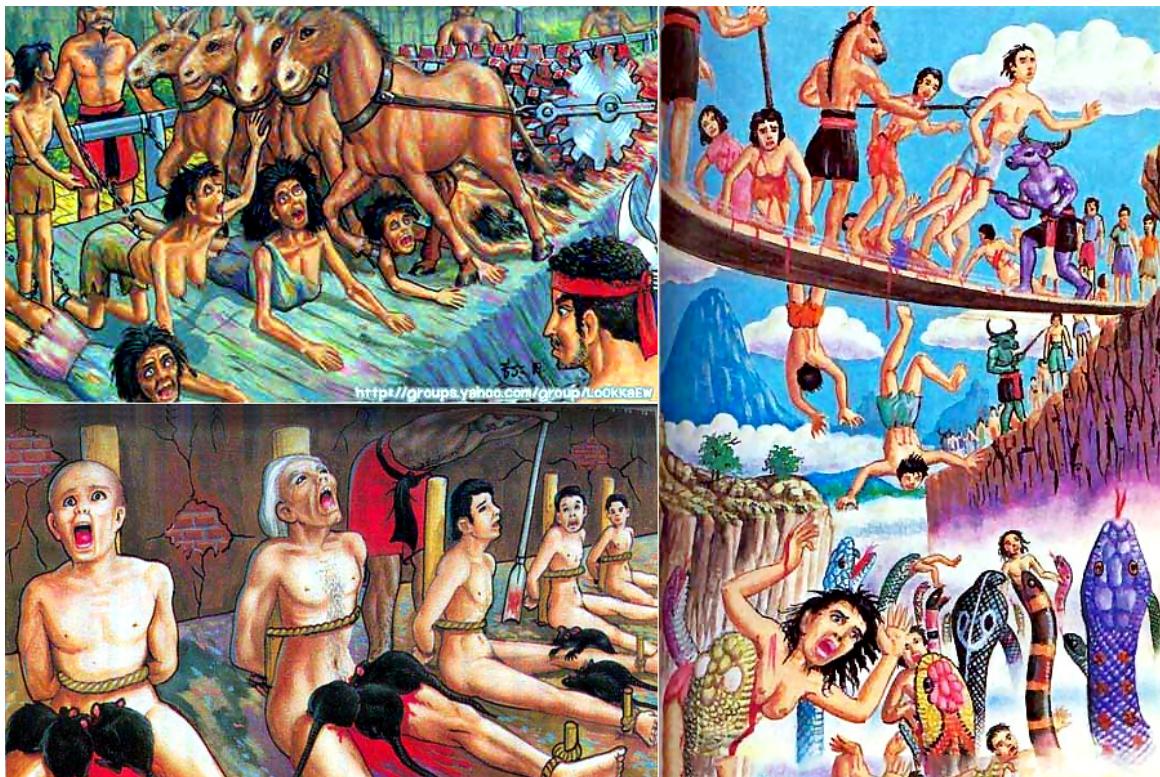
1. Killing or causing pain with intense passion.
2. Excessive attachment to things and worldly pleasure with constantly indulging in cruel and violent acts.
3. Vowless and unrestrained life.

Sudharma Swami: "What is the punishment in the hells? Knowing it, O sage, tell it me who do not know it! How do sinners go to hell?"

Mahavira: "I shall describe the truly insupportable pains where there is distress and (the punishment of) evil deeds. Those cruel sinners who, from a desire of (worldly) life, commit bad deeds, will sink into the dreadful hell which is full of dense darkness and great suffering. He who always kills movable and immovable beings for the sake of his own comfort, who injures them, who takes what is not freely given, who does not learn what is to be practised (viz. control). The impudent sinner, who injures many beings without relenting will go to hell; at the end of his life he will sink to the (place of) darkness; head downwards he comes to the place of torture. The prisoners in hell lose their senses from fright, and do not know in what direction to run. Going to a place like a burning heap of coals on fire, and being burnt they cry horribly; they remain there long, shrieking aloud."

HELLS OF THAILAND





India Temple Mural