

Death in Jainism

The ultimate aim of every Jain is to be free from bodily bondage (of *karma*) and be a free pure soul (*jiva*), which would eliminate the cycle of death and rebirth (*sansār*). Caught in *sansar*, the soul forgets its real nature and its effort to search for the truth is obscured by the passions.

For Jains, the Law which regulates the action of Karma – ‘As you sow, so you shall reap’, is based upon the principle of cause and effect. Jains believe that one’s thoughts and feelings determine what happens to one’s life and in the future.

Omniscients who have absolute perception and knowledge have stated that baser emotions such as anger, greed and revenge cause influx of karma and bondage of material karmas. "Drier," more dispassionate souls are not so easily polluted by negative karma, whereas karmic matter is more easily attracted to souls that are "moist" with desires.

Equanimity in all actions through mind, speech and body is the key to prevention of further karmic influx and human beings have the greatest capacity to shed karma through austerities. As the karmas are shed, the soul gets purer. Purification of the soul leads to self-realisation.

The Omniscient Jina have described the 3 jewels – enlightened (*samyag*) world-view (*darśana*, faith in reality), enlightened knowledge (*jñāna*) and enlightened conduct (*caritra*). These three **together** constitute the path to liberation – analogy to a ladder for climbing

Samyag-darśana-jñāna-cāritrāṇi-mokṣamārgaḥ

Tattvartha.Sutra. 1.1

Acquire perfect knowledge of the Law! why do you not study it? It is difficult to obtain instruction in it after this life. The days (that are gone by) will never return, nor is it easy a second time to obtain human birth.

Sutrakritanga Bk1,Lecture 2, 1.1

Birth is attended by death, youth by decay and fortune by misfortune. Thus everything in this world is momentary.

(Kartikeyanupreksa, 5)

Like a dew drop on the tip of kusha-grass, the life of a human being is also momentary. Hence Oh! Gautama, be mindful all the while.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra 10.2

Jains believe in rationalism and realism; birth and death are part of worldly existence. Jaina tradition teaches not only the art of living but also the art of dying. Therefore depending on one’s capacity and resources, one should make a sensible effort to attain a peaceful death.

Scriptural references Jain scriptures detail the destiny of the soul after death and the causes of physical death.

The causes are classified as :

- Death because of old age or degeneration;
- Death with desires;
- The fool’s death
- The prudent person’s death;
- A mixed death (ie one who is only partially disciplined)
- Holy death
- Omniscient death -The highest state

The Prakirnaka is a collection of ten short texts containing both ceremonial hymns and descriptions of the rituals to be used in preparation for a holy death. (See Jaini, P.S. The Jain Path of purification p. 76-77)

When a layman, or an ascetic, is faced with death under certain circumstances, the vow of *Sallekhana* is prescribed. Its main objective is to make thin the passions that disturb equanimous state of the soul.

Jainism believes that consciousness can never be extinguished (Jiva is eternal) and death is merely an exchange of the corporeal self. A comma in the chain of existence which is eternally free of full stops. Final separation of the pure soul from the body, is ***moksha***

Jaina canonical literature and its explanatory literature of latter times divides death into two main categories-

**“Santime ya duve thana akkhaya maranatiya
Akama-marana ceva Sakama-maranam taha “**

Uttaradhyayana Sutra 5.2

Voluntary death (*Sakāma-marana*) – With due appreciation of its inevitability, with due consideration of utility of life and, hence, without fear of death is the enlightened death (*Panditamarana*).

One who is constantly careful in his deportment is like the lily in the pond, untarnished by mud.
(Pravachansāra, 3/18)

Involuntary death (*Akāma-marana*) – In a state of ignorance without any appreciation of its inevitability and with binding attachment to life in disregard of its utility or otherwise and consequent fear of death is ignorant death (*Bālamarana*- the fool's death). This kind of death has occurred since times immemorial and will continue to do so. There are 12 types of involuntary death. (U.S. Chapter 5)

All Indian religions consider the last moments of a person's life to be of utmost importance in determining the condition of his subsequent incarnation. Jainas, in addition have emphasized the importance of control over the life-to-life transition far more, more than any other school, the process depends completely upon the aspirant himself. In a universal prayer used at the end of a daily ritual of attaining equanimity (*samāyika*), he expresses the following wish:

Dukkakkhavo kammakkhavo

Cessation of sorrow, cessation of karmas

Samahimaranam ya bohilāho ya

Death while in meditation, the attainment of enlightenment

Mama hou jagadabandhava Jinavarā

O holy Jina! Friend of the entire universe, let these be mine

Tava caranasaranena

For I have taken refuge at your feet.

(Nityanaimittika-pathāvali)

By dying in meditation he is able to choose the precise circumstances of his end. The point is to meet death with all of one's faculties functioning properly and in a complete state of awareness. This procedure of seeking death in a holy manner is called 'sallekhana', although strongly recommended for mendicants but also forms an important goal for numerous laymen.

Samādhi-marana is legitimately attained by gradual fasting, carried out in strict accord with ritual prescription and in most cases under the close supervision of its mendicant teachers. The Law books list four situations in which *sallekhana* can be performed:

1. An unavoidable calamity that makes keeping one's vows impossible
2. A great famine, during which there is no way to obtain acceptable food
3. Old age, defined by the onset of such problems as blindness, inability to walk without help or senility, any of which make one likely to fall away from his vows
4. A terminal illness from which death is imminent.

Ratnakarandasravakacara

A comprehensive analysis of *Sallekhana* is found in the above text by Samantabhadra, "prior to the adoption of the vow one should give up all love, hatred and attachment to possessions, with a pure mind, and obtain forgiveness of one's relations while also forgiving them oneself. One should give up grief, fear, anguish, attachment and keep oneself engaged in meditation. Then he should give up gradually food, then liquid and even water. During the observance of the vow one should not commit any of the transgressions:

Yearning to live, yearning to die, fear of death, reminiscence of friends and longing for superior future"

A fundamental question whether *Sallekhana* is to be described as a form of suicide, and as such unjustifiable, has been raised by some. However, a better understanding of the Jaina concept of *Sallekhana* would reveal that it is not a form of suicide.

If we examine the situation giving rise to suicide, and intentions and psychology of the persons committing suicide and the other practicing *Sallekhana*, the distinction between the two becomes clear. There is nothing common between the two, except physical death. In the case of suicide, death is brought about by objectionable means, harmful to individual and society. When a person commits suicide following characteristics are present:

1. Ambivalence, or a **desire to die** which simultaneously creates a conflict in the mind.
2. A feeling of **hopelessness** with inability to handle the problem on hand.
3. Physical or psychological feelings of exhaustion, **frustration**, or both.
4. There is presence of **anxiety, tension, depression, anger or guilt**.
5. Mental disorder and perverted attitudes.
6. The situation causing agitation seems to be unavoidable.
7. Feeling of fear or any **passion** leading to loss of interest in life.

Sutrakritanga Bk 1, Lecture 2, Chapter 1

SECOND LECTURE ₁,

CALLED

THE DESTRUCTION OF KARMAN.

FIRST CHAPTER.

(Rishabha said to his sons):

Acquire perfect knowledge of the Law! why do you not study it? It is difficult to obtain instruction in it after this life. The days (that are gone by) will never return, nor is it easy a second time to obtain human birth. (1)

See, young and old men, even children in the mother's womb die. As a hawk catches a quail, so (life) will end when its time is spent ₂. (2)

(A man) may suffer for the sake of his parents; he will not easily obtain happiness after this life. A pious man should consider these causes of danger and cease to act. (3)

For in this world living beings suffer individually for their deeds; for the deed they have done themselves, they obtain (punishment), and will not get over it before they have felt it. (4)

Even gods, Gandharvas, Râkshasas, and Asuras; animals who live on earth, and snakes; kings, common people, merchants, and Brâhmanas: they all must leave their rank and suffer. (5)

Notwithstanding their pleasures and relations, all men must suffer in due time the fruit of their works; as a cocoa-nut detaching itself from its stalk (falls down), so (life) will end when its time is spent. (6)

Even a very learned or virtuous man, or a Brâhmana or an ascetic, will be severely punished for his deed when he is given to actions of deceit ₁. (7)

See, those who search for the knowledge of truth, but who do not cross the Samsâra, talk only about the highest good (without reaching it).

How will you understand what is near you and what is beyond ₂? In the meanwhile you suffer for your deeds. (8)

He who walks about naked and lean, he who eats only once after a month, if he is filled with deceit, will be born an endless number of times. (9)

Man, cease from sins! For the life of men will come to an end ₁. Men who are drowned (in lust, as it were), and addicted to pleasure will, for want of control, be deluded ₂. (10)

Exert and control yourself! For it is not easy to walk on ways where there are minutely small animals. Follow the commandments which the Arhats have well proclaimed ₃. (11)

Heroes (of faith) who desist (from sins) and exert themselves aright, who subdue wrath, fear, &c., will never kill living beings; they desist from sins and are entirely happy. (12)

It is not myself alone who suffers, all creatures in the world suffer; this a wise man 4 should consider, and he should patiently bear (such calamities) as befall him, without giving way to his passions. (13)

As a wall covered with a plastering (of dried cowdung) 5 is by a shock made thin, so (a monk) should make his body lean by fasting, &c. He should abstain from slaughter of living beings. This is the Law proclaimed by the Sage. (14)

As a bird covered with dust removes the grey powder by shaking itself, so a worthy and austere Brâhmana 1, who does penance, annihilates his Karman. (15)

Young and old people claim a houseless Sramana as their own, though he begs according to the Law, observes the rules of conduct, and performs austerities. People will even cry themselves hoarse, but they will not captivate him. (16)

Whatever they will do to move his pity, however they will cry about their son, they will not captivate a worthy and virtuous monk or make him return to domestic life. (17)

Though they tempt him with pleasures, and though they should bind him and carry him home, if he does not care for a (worldly) life, they will not captivate him or make him return to domestic life. (18)

His father and mother, his children and wife who claim him, will admonish him: 'See, you are our supporter; care not for the next world in order to support us.' (19)

Some people are (foolishly) attached to others, and are thereby deluded; the unrighteous make them adopt unrighteousness, and they exult in their wickedness. (20)

Therefore a worthy and wise man should be careful, ceasing from sin and being entirely happy. The virtuous heroes of faith (have chosen) the great road, the right and certain path to perfection. (21)

He who has entered the road leading to the destruction (of Karman) 1, who controls his mind, speech, and body, who has given up his possessions and relations and all undertakings, should walk about subduing his senses. (22)

Uttaradhyayana Sutra

This is a sermon delivered by Mahâvîra to his disciple Indrabhûti, who belonged to the Gôtama Gôtra. In the commentary a lengthy legend is given how Gautama came to want this instruction

TENTH LECTURE 2.

THE LEAF OF THE TREE.

As the fallow leaf of the tree falls to the ground, when its days are gone, even so the life of men (will come to its close); Gautama, be careful all the while! (1)

As a dew-drop dangling on the top of a blade of Kusa-grass lasts but a short time, even so the life of men; Gautama, be careful all the while! (2)

As life is so fleet and existence so precarious, wipe off the sins you ever committed; Gautama, &c. (3)

A rare chance, in the long course of time, is human birth for a living being; hard are the consequences of actions; Gautama, &c. (4)

Thus the soul which suffers for its carelessness, is driven about in the Samsâra by its good and bad Karman; Gautama, &c. (15)

Though one be born as a man, it is a rare chance to become an Ârya; for many are the Dasyus and Mlêkkhas; Gautama, &c. (16)