

VOW OF VOLUNTARY DEATH IN THE CONTEXT OF VICTORY OVER AFFLICTIONS AND CALAMITY

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Victory Over Afflictions and Calamity

Jaina Philosophy is the ideology of Lord Mahāvīra. In the centre of this philosophy, there is soul. Detaching the soul from Karma and to attain an absolutely passion free stage is the sole aim of practices for spiritual development. Ācārya Tulasī has said in his book Manonuśāsana "*Ātmaśuddhi sādhanam dharmah*".¹ **The first step to the purification of soul is right faith. Next there are right knowledge and right conduct.** The excellent stage of the co-ordination of the three is the attainment of freedom from passion, detachment. It has been said in the scriptures 'Tattvārtha Sūtra' "*Samyak darśana jñāna cāritrāṇi mokṣa margah*".² **Right faith, right knowledge and right conduct are the ways to salvation.** The scripture Āgamavāṇi says, "*Cāritam khalu dhammo*"³ right conduct is religion. Purification of soul is possible through conduct only. Victory over afflictions and calamity help in strengthening and ennobling character and conduct. Victory over afflictions means to bear with troubles and pains and afflictions with equanimity. It has been said, "*Pariśaharata iti Pariśaha* : what is borne with patience in victory over afflictions."⁴ Defining victory over afflictions Ācārya Umāswāti writes, "*Margācyavana nirjarātham pariśodhavyāḥ pariśahāḥ* : bearing with the pains of hunger, thirst etc. for the shedding of karma and for being drifted from the accepted path and conquering these pains is known as victory over afflictions. The word '*upasarga*' victory over calamities is also used for victory over afflictions. The two main parts of Lord Mahāvīra's concept of religion are non-violence

and forbearance. Bearing pain does not mean causing pain to body, mind and senses. It actually means to ensure the stability of observing the values like non-violence etc. Ācārya Kundakunda says—

"Suheṇa bhāvidam nānam, duhe jāde ṇinassadi.

Tamhā jahābalaṃ joī, appā dukkhehi bhavae."

The knowledge that is subjective to pleasure gets destroyed when pain or sorrow crops up. A yogi must, therefore, subject himself, so far as possible, to sorrow. For the success of spiritual practice, heat of the adversity of affliction too is necessary along with the breeze of favourable conditions. Affliction is not an obstacle, it is in fact of great help to a spiritual practitioner. Afflictions, when they crop up, must be borne with equanimity. Troubles caused by hellish beings, animals and plants, human beings and deities are known as calamities. Forbearing them with equanimity is known as victory over calamities. Calamities can be of various kinds. There are 22 calamities for a monk that he has to overcome. In the scriptures Uttarādhyayana,⁵ Saṃvāyāṅga⁶ and Tattvārtha Sūtra⁷ they are as given below :

1. **Hunger**—To bear with hunger with equanimity.
2. **Thirst**—To bear with thirst, with equanimity.
3. **cold**—To bear with cold and snow patiently.
4. **Heat**—To bear with heat with equanimity.
5. **Insect-bite**—To bear with the pain caused by the bite of insects like mosquitoes and other insects.
6. **Not having clothes**—Not to worry having no clothes or having a little clothing.
7. **Displeasure**—To bear with impatience against restraint.
8. **Woman**—Not to be tormented by sex on seeing a woman, is victory over the calamity of woman.

9. **Moving about**—Not to have attachment for a particular householder or a house and to move about from village to village.
10. **Voice of wild animal**—Not to be scared on hearing the sounds of wild beasts.
11. **Bed**—To bear with high or low, uncomfortable and uneven bed while sleeping.
12. **Reproach**—Not to reproach even at adverse remarks or bad behaviour.
13. **Killing**—Not to have any ill-feeling for the killer, killing with sharp weapons.
14. **Begging**—Not to feel humiliation while begging.
15. **Unprofitable**—To maintain equanimity even on not getting the desired object.
16. **Disease**—To maintain equanimity even when disease strikes the body.
17. **Touch of straw**—With equanimity to bear with the pain caused by sleeping on a bed of straw.
18. **Cleaning body**—Try not to remove perspiration or dust or mud that covers the body.
19. **Praise and blame**—To remain balanced in praise and blame.
20. **Knowledge**—To bear with the trouble with equanimity caused by ignorance.
21. **Faith**—One, whose faith is stable, gets victory over the affliction of faith.
22. **Intellect**—Not to get vain on having the gift of intellect is victory over intellect affliction.

To maintain equanimity in all these situations is known as victory over afflictions. Our resistance power increases when we bear with afflictions with equanimity. This resistance power weakens gradually the karmic body. In victory over afflictions, the activities of mind, body and speech become constant and stable. The stability of activities compels the group of karmas to be separated from the soul. As one gets equanimity, nutrition to the karmic body is stopped and the karmic particles begin to get separated from the soul. This process is known as dissociation. Restraint is accomplished by victory over calamities. Victory over calamities is the observance of restraint. **Restraint is a spiritual practice and stoppage is the result of it.** Victory over afflictions is a form of penance. **Penance is a spiritual practice and dissociation is the result of it.** **Lord Mahāvīra has regarded stoppage and dissociation as religion.** Both of them are helpful in the purification of the soul.

According to the scripture 'Ācārāṅga Niryuṅkti', victory over the lust for female sex and victory over cold fall under cold victories and the rest of the twenty victories fall under hot ones. If a spiritual practitioner builds aim of his life for victory over afflictions and calamities, he, by constant spiritual practice, can attain absolute passion free stage. Purification of the soul depends on purification of emotions. Purification of emotions is possible by having equanimity. Victories over afflictions and calamities bring one to the stage of equanimity. Not to have the feelings of attachment or aversion is equanimity. Delusion gives birth to attachment and aversion, these two give rise to karmas, karmas cause birth and death, these two cause sorrow and sorrow gives rise to attachment and malice. This cycle goes on with every worldly living being. Victory over afflictions weakens attachment and malice whereas victory over calamities weaken karmas. Victory over afflictions is the best medium to gain equanimity and equanimity in turn is the best medium to gain victory over the soul and self.

Vow of voluntary death

The word '*Sallekhanā*' is derived from two words—*sat*+*lekhanā*. The word '*sat*' means right, and the word '*lekhanā*' means, to take care. In the reference of '*sallekhanā*', the word '*lekhanā*' means to weaken one's body gradually, giving up all the activities of life. Giving up food gradually for seeking death by a monk or a votary, is known as '*sallekhanā vrata*' the vow of holy death. Jaina religion and philosophy, with all their characteristics, have been dynamic since time immemorial. Having various assumptions and principles, this doctrine reveals many stages of devotion from birth to death. The feelings of equanimity, fearlessness, detachment, non-delusion and non-possession are underlying this philosophy. Besides getting detached from the external world, when one gets detached from one's own body, then the method of ending one's life, weakening oneself by giving up food etc. is admitted in Jaina philosophy. Ending one's life this way is known as vow of holy/voluntary death. In Indian tradition it is known as absolute meditation. In Jaina philosophy not only the art of living but also the art of dying is taught. Vow of voluntary death is the art of dying. Voluntary death is a particular procedure by which the body is weakened gradually both externally and internally. It cannot be termed as committing suicide. Ending one's life on getting scared of the troubles and pains, and overcome by passions is suicide. In the case of holy death, the aim is self-purification and there is the consent of the spirit. Holy death is imbued with the emotions of devoting oneself to a pure end. In holy death, karmic body along with gross body is rendered weak. In this type of death, the aim is to render the passions powerless and to attain the stage of equanimity. This is a preparation for death. It may be said to be a scientific method of dying by one's own will. There is now force, no compulsion of any sort in it. In the case of suicide, there is the pressure of agony or passions. Committing suicide is an irrational decision taken on getting bored or tired of life. Vow of holy death is a decision taken willingly after deep thinking. When a monk or a votary

realizes that due to certain reasons the gross body has grown so weak that it is difficult to keep it alive, he, by his sheer will-power, takes to fasting and stops nurturing it. Holy death begins from this very point. This vow is the best example of victory over afflictions and calamities. While undergoing the pangs of death, the spiritual practitioner develops equanimity. He maintains perfect equanimity in this condition. This is the stage of victory over afflictions. Equanimity and victory over afflictions are the supplements of each other. They are the two sides of the same coin. Equanimity is the other name of victory over afflictions. In the same way holy death is the supplement of victory over afflictions. Both are the two sides of the same coin. Both of them enhance equanimity. Holy death is a penance. It may or may not be accepted or recognized at social level but in tradition it is known as an experiment of penance spiritual practice as it aims at living in moments of detachment. Performing penance, getting detached from the body and if death occurs at such a time, accepting it with equanimity is known as vow of voluntary death. It is neither a custom nor a mere show, nor can it be taken as suicide. In his last moment, the spiritual practitioner resorts to the vow of voluntary death and forsakes the body. This is holy death. It is the name of the method of detachment practised prior to death.

Form of Dying

Different Ācāryas have given different opinions regarding 'Dying', the meaning of all of which is 'Death'. Death is the nature of all living beings.⁸ The Hindi word '*marāṇa*' has been derived from the basic word '*mṛ*'⁹ which means forsaking life.¹⁰ The words '*marāṇa*', '*viḡama*', '*vināśa*' and '*viḡariṇāma*', all have the same meaning.¹¹ It has got one more meaning—a kind of poison.¹² Regarding '*marāṇa*' it has been said in Jaina philosophy, "cessation (destruction) of age prior to the rise of the age other than the present one is death."¹³ Separation of the matter known as '*anubhuyamāna āyu*' from the soul is death.

In the scripture '*Dhawalā*' the age-determining karma has been said to be the cause of death.¹⁴ Destruction of the age received from vitality, of the senses and of the forces of mind, body and speech on the combination of a particular cause is death.¹⁵ We get two forms of death—one, death as we come across in our daily lives, another, dying every moment (weakening of age every moment is also a sort of death).¹⁶ Hence we come to know that the soul's getting separated from the body is death. When the body receives another mode (body), forsaking the previous one, this forsaking is known as death. In the *Gītā*,¹⁷ death has been termed as 'akīrti' disgrace. Ill-repute of a good man is as good as his death. The condition of one who has lost all his glory, respect and prestige is worse than death. Regarding soul, it has been said, "As one leaves his old and torn clothes, and puts on new ones, in the same way, the soul leaves the old body and gets new body."¹⁸ Leaving the old body by the soul is nothing else but death. There is a reference of seven kinds of fear¹⁹ in Jaina philosophy. One of them is the fear of death. Thus, all living beings are mortal is an universal fact.

Kinds and sub-kinds of death.

Holy death is closely connected with victory over afflictions and calamities. In the same way holy death is inter-connected with dying, as it is a vow that is observed methodically by the spiritual practitioner. Five²⁰ out of seventeen kinds²¹ of death as recognized in the scripture *Bhagawatī Ārādhana* are being referred here :

1. Immature death,
2. Fools/unenlightened death,
3. Partially religious death,
4. Religious death,
5. Enlightened death.

1. Immature death

This world is a vast sea in which living beings have been moving in all the four kinds of life since time immemorial, because of ignorance. The first step in the stages of soul is false attitude stage of spiritual development, faith deluding karma is the karma that give expansion to the worldly affairs. One, who does not have the right attitude, is said to be a false believer.²² For the rise of the soul, view has to be made right first of all. The living being who has got all the five in-fluxes—falsehood, non-abstinence, carelessness, passion and activity—is at the first spiritual stage. The death of such a living being is known as immature death.²³ The world looks like as you view it. If one wants to look at a beautiful world, one will have to make his view right, one will have to develop right views. When one's outlook is not positive, there is no end to one's rounds of births and deaths. Such a living being actually gets immature death again and again. Such a death is also known as death caused by ignorance.

2. Fool's death/unlightened death

Purification of soul starts when the attitude is positive. This is the first step towards self-development. This process is, known as 'Unprecedented degree of purity'. At this stage, soul gets such a precious jewel that has never been got before. This precious gem is—**Right Faith**. One, who once attains this right faith, certainly deserves emancipation and someday will certainly attain it. This fourth stage of spiritual development is known as non-abstained, right faith. At this stage, falsehood of soul ceases, but ignorance to some extent still remains. At this fourth stage, there are four influxes—non-abstinence, carelessness, passion and activity. The living being, attaining this stage, realizes right faith but stills craves for the worldly pleasures. The death g is known as 'fool's unenlightened death'.²⁴

3. Partially religious death

As one proceeds towards detachment and spiritual practice, one takes some vows. Observance of vow is spiritual practice that ends in stoppage. This is the fifth stage of spiritual development and the being attaining this stage is known as a votary. He is also known as vow-votary. This stage of development is known as partial abstinence right faith stage of spiritual development. At this stage, both vow and non-vow go together. That is why it is known—as vow—cum non-vow (*vrataṁ vratī*). At this stage there is absence of falsehood and partial presence of non-abstinence. Three influxes—carelessness, passion and activity are there. The death of such a being is known as partially religious death.²⁵ It implies partial presence of ignorance. There being both ignorance and knowledge in it, both conduct and faith in the form of abstinence from partial ignorance and gross violence are present. This death, accepted voluntarily, occurs to a living being having abstained-cum non-abstained conduct.

4. Religious death

The death of a being who has accepted it voluntarily and who has reached the sixth and seventh stages of spiritual development, is known as religious death. The being, whose erudition makes no distinction between one scholar and the other, is said to be a learned one, and the death of such a being, who has made a vow of voluntary death, is known as religious death. Such type of death occurs to monks who mould their conduct in accordance with the norms of scriptures or of the spiritual authorities. It has been said in the scripture Bhagavatī Ārādhana that there are three kinds of religious death²⁶—

- (i) Prādopagamana.
- (ii) Abandonment of food.
- (iii) Fast unto death.

(i) Prāadopagamana death

Moving on one's feet and taking shelter at a suitable place, moving out of the order, is known as '*Prāadopagamana*'. Death, occurring to a being who moves on his own feet and seeks shelter at a proper place is known as *prāadopagamana* death. The dying monk neither attends to himself nor causes others to serve or nurse him. He troubles no one. One, who is reduced to a skeleton, goes for this type of death. The word '*parāda*' means renunciation. Hence '*Prāadopagamana*' is regarded as a kind of death occurring to monks.

(ii) Abandonment of food

The word '*bhakta*' means something that is used or taken and '*pratijñā*' means renunciation. That, in which food is abandoned, is known as '*bhakta pratijñā*' (abandonment of food). Food is abandoned in two ways—

- (a) Abandonment of food with thinking (instantly).
- (b) Abandonment of food without thinking.

If death seems inevitable all of a sudden and unexpectedly, food is abandoned instantly. Food is abandoned after giving much thought in accordance with the instructions of the enlightened, and the forty syllables.²⁷ Such as gender etc.

(iii) Fast unto death (*iṃgiṇī maraṇa*)

The death of this type means the death that is opted in accordance with one's own will and intention. The word '*iṃgiṇī*' means a hint. The monk, desirous of this type of death, moves out of the order and seeks shelter in a cave or a lonely place. He lives alone. He takes care of himself,

but does not cause others to attend him. No other monk accompanies him. He is his own saviour and he himself takes care of him.

5. Enlightened death

At the highest stage of right knowledge, right faith, right conduct and right penance, a being gets religious—religious death. When a being touches the twelfth stage of spiritual development, he gets totally detached and all his passions are destroyed. At this stage, all the in-fluxes—falsehood, non-abstinence, carelessness and passions get totally vanished. At the thirteenth stage, only the activity influx remains. Hence the being, at this stage, is known as an omniscient with activity. When the being reaches the fourteenth stage, which is the supreme stage of self-purification, the influx of activity too is destroyed and the being attains emancipation. The death of such a pure soul is known as religious—religious death. If a living being takes to the ladder of destruction on reaching the eighth stage, he gets emancipation. But at this stage, if he takes to subsidential ladder, he comes down and may stop to the first stage of spiritual development (false faith stage) attaining the eleventh stage (subsided delusion). Religious-religious death is the best kind of death.²⁸

Thus we see that victory over afflictions and calamities are the main sources of restraint spiritual practice. They give forth equanimity. Hence they are the supplements to the vow of voluntary death. This vow gets strengthened when this victory over afflictions and calamities is strengthened. Unfortunately the present age is an age of gross ignorance. Man is dazzled by materialism. Because of ignorance, inhuman evils like immorality, disturbances, obduracy, terrorism, the attitude of possession and insensitivity are spreading everywhere. Because of these evils, environment is being polluted. It is being exploited without thinking of the consequences. Nature never forgives anyone. It takes its revenge in the form of incurable

diseases, earth quakes, drought, plethora of rain, famine and scarcity of water and so on. If we want to develop the human values like unity of mankind, good conduct, fraternity, peace, sensitivity and morality etc., we will have to adopt the principle of victory over afflictions and calamities. This principle brings about a control over desires and enhances the feelings of detachment, renunciation and friendship. Getting victory over afflictions is the surest means of human welfare. By the constant practice of these victories, one may attain the last best stage of life i.e. voluntary and holy death.

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