

ॐ ह्रीं श्रीपार्ष्वनाथाय नमः
Aum Hriṃ ŚrīPārśvanāthāya Namaḥ
Jay Jinendra

मृत्यु महोत्सव

MRTYU MAHOTSAVA

A Celebration of Death

Sanskrit text with English translation

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Introduction

There are many who teach the art of living. But the Jain religion teaches us the art of dying. Many religions claim to know the absolute truth, and that their god is supreme. But Jainism makes no such claims and promotes instead, the idea of *anekāntavāda*, or the multiplicity of reality. Jainism recognises that there are very many people in this world and their perception of the truth is varied. Not all of them may agree on any one topic. Some people blame this on lack of faith in the true religion (which happens to be the one that they follow). But Jainism sees mankind's inability to come to a common understanding of reality as the natural outcome of the vastness of reality, the impossibility of expressing this in words and the fact that each person has different levels of knowledge and perception, experience and understanding.

Death is one of the imponderables that one invariably encounters. Often, death is perceived as the final act in one's life. A tumultuous parting of ways of consciousness (the soul) with the mortal coil where the soul remains behind like a lamp of light, carrying with it memories of love, passion, understanding, knowledge and perception. Jainism believes that consciousness can never be extinguished. Death is merely an exchange of the corporeal self. A comma in the chain of existence which is eternally free of full stops.

In these circumstances, Jainism does not see death as the cessation of existence, merely as change from one physical form to another. Jainism goes so far as to advocate voluntary death when faced with death because of extreme old age, critical illness or some extraordinary mishap, as this would be better than dying with tears and regret. Jainism holds that it is better to

relinquish the old and critically ill body and seek spiritual advancement through a nuanced voluntary death, rather than drag on hoping against hope to live another day. This text explains the Jain concept of a nuanced, well-considered passionless death and why one should prefer such an end to dying in a hospital with several tubes poking into one's body. We Jains call this controlled voluntary death *sallekhanā*, which is vastly different from the impassioned and irrational desire to commit suicide, which is impelled by an irrepressible desire to end one's life, even when one is physically fit in order to escape unpalatable circumstances.

The purpose of this work is to make available the meaning, relevance and teleological underpinnings of *sallekhanā*.

We regret that we are not aware of the identity of the original writer of this concise work in Sanskrit. But whosoever he/she may be, he/she has left behind a beautiful text which gives solace and guidance to all.

~ Manish Modi

मृत्युमार्गे प्रवृत्तस्य वीतराग ददातु मे
समाधिबोधौ पाथेयं यावन् मुक्तिपुरी पुरः |१|

*mṛtyumārge pravṛttasya vītarāga dadātu me
samādhībodhau pātheyaṃ yāvan muktipurī puraḥ*

I have begun my journey on the path of voluntary death.
May the supremely detached ones provision me for my journey
With profound meditation and enlightenment
Until I reach my destination - liberation.

कृमीजाल समाकीर्णे जर्जरे देहपञ्जरे
भज्यमाने न भेतव्यं यतस्त्वं ज्ञानविग्रहः |२|

*kṛmījālasamākīrṇe jarjare dehapañjare
bhajyamāne na bhētavyaṃ yatastvaṃ jñānavigrahaḥ*

O soul,
This frail body is infested with worms.
Do not fear its destruction
For you are the embodiment of knowledge.
(And distinct from the body).

जानिन् भयं भवेत् कस्मात् प्राप्ते मृत्युमहोत्सवे
स्वरूपस्थो पुरं याति देही देहान्तरस्थिति ।३।

*jñānin bhayaṃ bhavet kasmāt prāpte mṛtyumahotsave
svarūpastho puram yāti dehī dehāntarasthiti*

O soul,
Why fear death?
For the wise, death is a celebration.
You will retain your identity
Even when the body is exchanged for another.

सुदत्तं प्राप्यते यस्मात् दृश्यते पूर्वसूतमैः
भुज्यते स्वर्भवं सौख्यं मृत्युभीतिं त्यजेत् शनैः ।४।

*sudattaṃ prāpyate yasmāt drśyate pūrvasūttamaiḥ
bhujyate svarbhavaṃ saukhyaṃ mṛtyubhītiṃ tyajet śanaiḥ*

O soul,
Give up the fear of death!
It is evident from the scriptures that,
Your own conduct is responsible
For the happiness you attain.

आगर्भाद् दुःखसन्तप्तः प्रक्षिप्तो देहपञ्जरे
नात्मा विमुच्यते न्येन मृत्युभूमिपतिं विना ।५।

*āgarbhād duḥkhasantaptaḥ prakṣipto dehapañjare
nātmā vimucyate nyena mṛtyubhūmipatiṃ vinā*

O soul,
Since the time of conception,
You have been scorched by sorrows.
You are imprisoned by this body.
Only the king named death can set you free.

सर्वदुःखप्रदं पिण्डं दूरीकृत्यात्मदर्शिभिः
मृत्युमित्रप्रसादेन प्राप्यन्ते सुखसम्पदः ।६।

*sarvaduḥkhaḥpradaṃ piṇḍaṃ dūrīkṛtyātmadarśibhiḥ
mṛtyumitraprasādena prāpyante suhasampadaḥ*

O soul,
This body is the root of all sorrow.
Thanks to the friend called death,
Those who perceive the true self,
Rid themselves of the body
And attain the wealth of bliss.

मृत्युकल्पद्रुमे प्राप्ते येनात्मार्थो न साधितः
निमग््नो जन्मजम्बाले स पश्चात् किं करिष्यति ।७।

*mṛtyukalpadrume prāpte yenātmārtho na sādhitah
nimagno janmajambāle sa paścāt kiṃ kariṣyati*

O soul,
Those who do not pursue the path of spiritual perfection,
Even when faced with the wish-fulfilling tree called death,
What will they do when confronted
By the quagmire of transmigration?

जीर्णं देहादिकं सर्वं नूतनं जायते यतः
स मृत्युः किम् न मोदाय सतां सातोत्थितिर्यथा ।८।

*jīrṇaṃ dehādikaṃ sarvaṃ nūtaṇaṃ jāyate yataḥ
sa mṛtyuḥ kim na modāya satāṃ sātothitiryathā*

O soul,
When death causes the worn out, aged body
To be exchanged for a brand new one,
Then why not rejoice at death,
Especially since death is instrumental
In the salvation of saints?

सुखं दुःखं सदा वेत्ति देहस्थश्च स्वयं व्रजेत्
मृत्युर्भीतिस्तदा कस्य जायते परमार्थतः ।९।

*sukhaṃ duḥkhaṃ sadā vetti dehasthaśca svayaṃ vrajet
mṛtyubhītistadā kasya jāyate paramārthataḥ*

O soul,
When you are shackled to the body,

You have to constantly suffer pleasure and pain.
You even take another birth on your own.
So why fear death?

संसारसक्तचित्तानां मृत्युभीतिर्भवेत् नृणां
मोदायते पुनः सोऽपि ज्ञानवैराग्यवासिनां ।१०।

*samsārāsaktacittānāṃ mṛtyubhītirbhavet nṛṇāṃ
modāyate punaḥ so'pi jñānavairāgyavāsīnāṃ*

O soul,
Death terrifies those
Who are enmeshed in the world.
But delights those
Who are wise and free from worldly desires.

पुराधीशो यदा याति सुकृतस्य बुभुत्सया
तदासौ वार्यते केन प्रपञ्चैः पञ्चभौतिकैः ।११।

*purādhiśo yadā yāti sukṛtasya bubhutsayā
tadā'sau vāryate kena prapañcaiḥ pañcabhautikaiḥ*

O soul,
When lifespan determining *karmas* cause you to leave the body,
Then how can anything hold you back?
So do not concern yourself with the five elements, etc.

मृत्युकाले सतां दुःखं प्रभवेत् व्याधिसम्भवं
देहमोहविनाशाय मन्ये शिवसुखाय च ।१२।

*mṛtyukāle satāṃ duḥkhaṃ prabhavet vyādhisambhavaṃ
dehamohavināsāya manye śivasukhāya ca*

O soul,
Sorrow and disease afflict saints at the time of death
In order to annihilate their attachment for the body
And help them attain eternal bliss.

ज्ञानिनो मृततुल्याय मृत्युस्तापकरोऽपि सन्

आमकुम्भस्य लोकेऽस्मिन् भवेत् पाकविधिर्यथा ।१३।

*jñānino'mṛtatulyāya mṛtyustāpakaro'pi san
āmakumbhasya loke'smin bhavet pākavidhiryathā*

O soul,
The anguish caused by death
Is like ambrosia for the learned ones.
Because it is well known
That an earthen pitcher has to bear the heat
Before it may be used for cooking.

यत् फलं प्राप्यते सद्भि व्रतायासविडम्बनात्
तत् फलं सुखसाध्यं स्यात् मृत्युकाले समाधिना ।१४।

*yat phalaṃ prāpyate sadbhi vratāyāsaviḍambanāt
tat phalaṃ sukhasādhyam syāt mṛtyukāle samādhinā*

O soul,
Upon venturing forth on the path of voluntary death,
You will comfortably attain the spiritual wellness
Which would, otherwise,
Only be attained
By ascetics through extreme penance.

अनार्तः शान्तिमान् मर्त्यो न तिर्यङ्ग् नापि नारकः
धर्मध्यानी सदा मुक्तो मर्त्यो नित्यं महेश्वरः ।१५।

*anārtaḥ śāntimān martyo na tiryāṅg nāpi nāraḥ
dharmadhyānī sadā mukto martyo nityam mahēśvaraḥ*

O soul,
One without saturnine meditation dies peacefully.
And is reborn as a human being,
Not as a sub-human or a hellish being.
One who has pious meditation is always free
And, upon dying, is sure to attain the great wealth of liberation.

तप्तस्य तपसश्चापि पालितस्य व्रतस्य च
पथितस्य श्रुतस्यापि फलं मृत्युः समाधिना ।१६।

*taptasya tapasaścāpi pālitasya vratasya ca
pathitasya śrutasyāpi phalaṃ mṛtyuḥ samādhinā*

O soul,
Those who practise penance,
Follow the vows and study the scriptures
Attain serene, peaceful voluntary death.

अतिपरिचितेष्ववज्ञा नवे भवेत् प्रीतिरिति हि जनवादः
चिरतरशरीरनाशे नवतरलाभे च किं भीरुः |१७|

*atipariciteṣvavajñā nave bhavet prītiriti hi janavādah
ciratarāśarīranāśe navataralābhe ca kiṃ bhīruḥ*

O soul,
It is well known
That familiarity breeds contempt, and
That one is fascinated by novelty.
When the older body is destroyed,
You will get a new one.
So why fear death?

Epilogue

स्वर्गादेत्य पवित्र निर्मल कुले सस्मर्यमाना जनैः
दत्त्वा भक्तिविधायिनां बहुविधं वाङ्छानुरूपं धनं
भुक्त्वा भोगमहर्निशं परकृतं शित्वा क्षणे मण्डले
पात्रावेशविसर्जनामिव मृतुं सन्तो लभन्ते स्वतः |१८|

*svargādetya pavitra nirmala kule sasmaryamānā janaiḥ
datvā bhaktividhāyināṃ bahavidhaṃ vāñchānurūpaṃ dhanam
bhuktvā bhogamaharnīśam parakṛtaṃ śitvā kṣaṇam maṇḍale
pātrāveśavisarjanāmiva mṛtuṃ santo labhante svataḥ*

O soul,
The pious ones descend from heaven,
Take birth in families with pure conduct
and are worshipped.
They never lack for wealth, and
*Indulge in sensual delectation day and night.
This is how they spend a short time on earth.
At the end, just as actors shed one persona to don another,
They shed this body and attain liberation.

~ Manish Modi

* The Jain religion does not promote sensual indulgence or any behaviour that increases the soul's attachment to the body, to other people and worldly objects. What the epilogue says is that even those who indulge in temporal delectation can attain liberation provided they take up the path of asceticism and shed all attachment.