

## Sallekhan / Santhar

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It is an eternal law that a living being, who is born in this world has to stop eating, drinking at some point of time before dying. No one can change this law. The death can be accidental, or due to natural calamities, illness, or old age. One can also die prematurely due to the activation of inauspicious *karmas* (*papa karma*). An example in Jain story literature is of Manak, eight year old son of Srutakevali Sayyambhava<sup>1</sup>. However Sayyambhava could guess the approaching death of his young son. So he prepared his son in the last six months of his life to practice *Sallekhan* and achieve the pious and peaceful death as well. Since death is inevitable, Jain philosophy has laid out a scientific process or way of preparing one for death. This process is called *Sallekhan* or the Art of pious and peaceful death. Perhaps Jain philosophy is unique which not only details the code of conduct of leading a pious and peaceful life but also the code of conduct for such death as well.

#### What is *Sallekhan* ?

उपसर्गे दुर्भिक्षे जरसि रूजायां च निः प्रतीकारे।

धर्माय तनु-विमोचनमाहुः सल्लेखनामार्याः।।<sup>2</sup>

The most excellent of men describes the giving up of the body on the arrival of the unavoidable calamity, distress, saneness and disease with a view to increase of spiritual merit is *Sallekhan* .

To systematically (as prescribed in religious texts) terminate /end life, when it becomes difficult to survive due to calamities (caused by nature, celestial or sub-human or hellish beings), famine (causing non availability of edible foods), old age and sickness is called *Sallekhan* . Here the word systematically (as prescribed in religious texts) is extremely important to make it a unique contribution of Jainism. The person intending to practice *Sallekhan* should be of sound disposition (mentally alert and balanced), practices self restraint, not stressed due to any worldly problems or expectation of worldly benefits (even like going to heaven or generating merit for family or friends), understands and believes in the nature of soul and its transmigration, is healthy and free from worldly responsibilities and had been practicing self restraint.

Justice T. K. Tukol said "Sallekhan is facing death (by an ascetic or a house-holder) voluntarily when he is nearing his end and when normal life does not allow the person to perform religious duties due to old age, incurable disease, severe famine etc after subjugation of all passions and abandonment of all worldly attachments, by observance of austerities gradually abstaining from food and water, and by simultaneous meditation on the real nature of the self until the soul parts from the body"<sup>3</sup>.

In Jainism, the ultimate purpose of practicing *Sallekhan* is to gradually thin or reduce the passions (anger, arrogance, deceit and greed) and their sources so that the end (soul leaving the body for next existence) is peaceful and pious. This is so as the status of next life (auspicious or inauspicious or liberation) depends to a large extent on the status of thoughts/ activities induced on soul through mind of the dying person. Practicing *Sallekhan* is voluntary and needs permission to practice from the guru, family and other members of the society if needed.

Philosophically, *Sallekhan* (*sa lekhan*, *santh r*, *sa ny sa*, *sam dhi*, *nirup dhi* and *v riyamara a* are all synonyms of *Sallekhan*) is a process of achieving *sa vara* (stoppage of new karmas) and annihilating the bonded karmas when the person approaches death. To achieve this by meditating on the self, one has to reduce the intake of food and drinks from external sources and activities of body (i.e. stay put at one place) and speech as well. Further the practitioner of *Sallekhan* should be free from the following flaws:<sup>4</sup>

- Freedom from the desire to live longer
- Freedom from the desire to die quickly
- Fear of any type
- Reminiscence of friends or family
- Freedom from re-enjoyment of past things/acts.

Practice of *Sallekhan* towards the end of life is *Sam dhimara a*.

### **What is not *Sallekhan* ?**

To end her/ his life, one can also attempt suicide when s/he feels distressed and is not able to cope with worldly pressures (health, poverty, family, social or job related problems etc.) of some type. These types of death or suicide represent the extreme cases of violence and are

highly frowned upon in Jainism and by the society at large. The arguments against such an act are committing violence (acts performed with the soul tainted with passions) on the dying person and the family or friends who are left behind. Such a person is highly stressed, loses balance of mind, unable to cope up to expectations due to his/her limitations and/or involved in undesirable activities. So the decision to commit suicide is taken by him either without proper permission of a guru/family and either for worldly gain or escaping from worldly responsibilities. Similarly others can kill a person due to many acts like terrorism, jealousy, revenge, accidents etc.

Hence death caused in above manners is not *Sallekhan* .

### **Types of death/ mara a**

- B la mara a: Death of a laity/ordinary person suffering pains.
- B la Pa ita mara a: Death of a laity observing *Sallekhan* .
- Pa ita mara a: Death of a monk observing *Sallekhan* .
- Pa ita Pa ita mara a: Nirv a or death of a Jina (no more death after this death) observing *Sallekhan* .

### **Types of *Sallekhan***

Three types depending on serving the needs of the practitioner, namely:

- *Bhaktapraty khy na*: Giving up accepting food. Can be for entire life or for a specific time period. The practitioner allows others to serve him during this type.
- *I gimara a*: The practitioner serves his needs himself and does not let others serve him. Is for some duration or for entire life and practiced by ascetics of high order. Not possible to practice in the present time era due to physical characteristics.
- *Prayopagamana*: The practitioner neither serves his needs himself nor allows others to serve him. Is for entire life and practiced by ascetics of high order as the ascetic leaves the congregation to go to a solitude place and practice Sam dhimara a. Not possible to practice in the present time era due to physical characteristics.

### **When to start practicing *Sallekhan* ?**

Answering this question, c r ga S tra<sup>5</sup> gives four reasons to start practice of *Sallekhan*

- a. When the body becomes extremely weak due to austerities or eating non-nutritive food.
- b. In ailing condition.
- c. When one become incapable of performing the essential religious and worldly duties.
- d. When one becoming incapable of performing normal activities like sitting and standing.

The maximum period for duration of practicing *Sallekhan* is a maximum of 12 years and minimum is *antarmuhurata* (less than 48 minutes). Since *Sallekhan* cannot be practiced instantly, one needs a fairly long period to acclimatize oneself with the process and maintain equanimity all through. The minimum age of the practitioner, as evident from Manak is eight years. The upper age limit depends on the attitude and physical wellness of the practitioner.

### **Process of practicing *Sallekhan* ?**

When an ascetic or a layperson realizes that now it is gradually becoming impossible for him/her to sustain the body for his essential (ascetic) duties, he should gradually reduce his food intake through austerities to reduce his/her passions. After reducing passions s/he should acquire mental serenity. Becoming thin by leveling both sides, body and passion, like a plank of wood, that ascetic/lay person should make himself/herself stale (free of agitations of body and mind) and prepare to embrace meditational death<sup>6</sup>. Steps involved are:

- The practitioner should first seek permission of guru and family to practice. The *carya* in the Jaina sect is the responsible authority who decides when and under which situations one should be allowed for such a great vow. In the absence of a *carya* and in very special cases, the permission can be sought in front a Jina image in a temple.
- The practitioner should develop equanimity towards hot and cold weather/ things before starting the practice.
- Giving up enmity, friendship and possessions, in sweet voice, s/he should seek forgiveness from others (friends/foes/servants etc) and also forgive all.
- Free from deceitfulness, s/he should reminiscence and criticizes all past sins committed so far.
- Accept major vows for life.
- S/he should stay busy happily in reading /contemplating on the scriptures.

- S/he should accept a place and seat (bed /floor for lying down or a seat to sit) and restrict movements to that place only.
- Gradually reduce intake of food- like solids to liquids (milk, water, juices etc) to just warm water
- Reciting navak ra mantra, s/he should leave physical body peacefully.

The above practice is same for ascetics as well as votary (vrati r vakas).

For ordinary persons, it can be limited to giving up solid food only by observing austerities like fasting for two days, three days, four days, five days, one day, *yambila* (eating once in a day food cooked with a single ingredients and without any salt or other condiments), etc. At the same time s/he should pacify passions like anger, conceit and deceit in order to achieve psychic *Sallekhan* . Besides this s/he should also focus his/her attention on soul by stabilizing the attitudes and activities related to body, speech and mind. In this process the aspirant should become slim/thin from both ends i.e. body and passions- like a plank of wood made smooth on both sides<sup>7</sup>.

### **Role of persons assisting the practitioner**

Like in palliative care, the medical doctor, nurses and other members in hospital or family members and servants at home are involved in assisting the dying person achieve a peaceful death. For practice of *Sallekhan* , the guru is the first person, who needs to be well qualified to understand the past record of practicing self restraint and capabilities of the practitioner as well as the prescription (duration and type etc). His wrong decision can seriously impact the whole process as well as produce negative results as well. Then we have the medical doctors who declare whether a disease is curable or not. Here the doctors have to weigh the pros and cons of the disease vis- vis the time and money involved and the results thereafter affecting his quality of life and capability to pursue what the practitioner wishes to do in his remaining life. The family members are the key persons affected as they not only are instrumental in the successful practice of *Sallekhan* by the practitioner but also are greatly affected by the person not accepting *Sallekhan* . *Sallekhan* is thus the optimum solution to meet the aspirations of all persons involved, lest one is covertly influenced by financial or other consideration.

### **Impact on society**

*Sallekhan* can be answer to the numerous issues faced by the society in terms of medical expenses, social impact on family due to high costs and strains of palliative care involved. It is a fact that nobody wants to die, but practices like Euthanasia are the tools legalized in a number of countries to answer the rising costs of medical care and help the incurable persons end their life to minimize the agony of suffering. A model like *Sallekhan* , promoted and implemented with due care needs serious considerations.

तत्त्वार्थसत्र में भी कहा है कि श्रावक को सल्लेखना प्रीतिपर्वक धारण करनी<sup>1</sup> । सर्वार्थसिद्धि<sup>2</sup> में भी कई स्थलों पर सल्लेखना की चर्चा गहराई से की गई है कि सल्लेखना को आत्मघात की श्रेणी में रखना उचित नहीं है क्योंकि मरण तो हर व्या का होना है. चाहे संक्लेषित परिणाम से मरण<sup>3</sup> अथवा शांत परिणाम से मरण । जैनधर्म की मान्यता व अनुसार जो संक्लेषित परिणाम पर्वक मरण करता है उसे अगला जन्म अच्छा नहीं मिलता अर्थात् नरकादि नीच गति को प्राप्त होता । नीचे आचार्य अमरचन्द्र परुषा सिद्धयपाठ के माध्यम से हम जानेंगे कि सल्लेखना को आत्मघात कहना उचित नहीं है।

वे लिखते हैं कि अवश्यंभावी मरण के समय कषायों के कारण (राग-द्वेष कम करने से) प्राण त्याग होने पर भी आत्मघात नहीं होता है<sup>3</sup>।

आत्मघात का स्पष्टीकरण करते हुए लिखा है कि जो क्रोधादि कषायों के वश होकर श्वास-निरोध. जल . अग्नि. विष. शस्त्रादि से अपने प्राण का घात करता है. उसे आत्मघात कहते हैं<sup>4</sup>।

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<sup>1</sup> मारणातिकीं सल्लेखनां जोषिता॥ तत्त्वार्थसत्र 7/2

<sup>2</sup> सर्वार्थसिद्धि पेज 24

<sup>3</sup> मरगडेणवश्यं भाविनि, कषाय सल्लेखना तनू करण मा रागादिमन्तरेण व्याप्रियमाणस्य नात्मघातोऽस्ति॥ 77. परुषार्थ सिद्धयप

अतः सल्लेखना को आत्मघात की श्रेणी में रखने का अर्थ हुआ कि हम न तो आत्मघात ' स्वरूप को समझते हैं और न ही सल्लेखना के स्वरूप को भलीभाँति समझ पाए हैं।

### ***Sallekhan* as practice of Ahi s**

We have seen earlier that *Sallekhan* is aimed at reducing or annihilating passions which are the causes of pain to the soul. Similarly *Sallekhan* involves reducing pain of family members serving him/her. By reducing intake of food and not walking, talking, the practitioner further reduces violence caused to one sensed living beings associated with such acts. Hence it is a practice of ahi s .

### ***Sallekhan* as practice of Aparigraha**

Parigraha is classified as internal (passions, attachment etc.) and external like family and friends, money, land building jewelry etc. Practice of *Sallekhan* starts with freeing the practitioner from all external possessions. Thereafter the practitioner starts thinning his/her body and passions thereby reducing the internal possessions.

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<sup>4</sup> यो हि कषायाविष्टः. कंभक-जल-धमकेत-विषशस्त्रै

व्यपरोपयति प्राणान तस्य स्यात सत्यमात्मवधः॥ 78. परुषार्थ सिद्धय

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<sup>1</sup> Author of Das-Vaik lika S tra.

<sup>2</sup> RKS -5/1

<sup>3</sup> *Sallekhan is not suicide*, Justice T. K. Tukol, L. D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, 1976, p.7

<sup>4</sup> RKS VII.8

<sup>5</sup> c r ga S tra, Vimok a: Eight chapter, ed. Amar Muni, Padma Prakashan Delhi, p. 424

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 421

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 425