

# Sallekhanā

## The Jain Approach to Dignified Death

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**DK**  
PRINTWORLD  
Publishers of Indian Traditions

## Preface

THIS book arose from contemporary concerns regarding the end of life. Death is an inevitable fact of life. Jain preceptors have offered a system of fasting that makes the time before death an auspicious and pleasant experience, known as *sallekhanā*, *samādhi-maraṇa* or *santhārā*. This practice had been observed ever since Jainism was propagated by the founding *tīrthan̄karas*. The eighth Jain canon, the *Antakṛtdaśāṅga-sūtra*, describes this practice being observed even before Mahāvīra (sixth century BCE). Archaeological evidence at Śravaṇa Beḷgoḷā attests to this practice in the third century BCE as seen in the caves there of Emperor Candragupta Maurya and Śrutakevalī Bhadrabāhu.

In 2006, non-Jain lawyers approached the courts to ban the practice of fasting unto to death by equating it to suicide. In response, the International School for Jain Studies organized three international seminars on this practice, convening philosophers at the University of Madras, lawyers at National Law University, Delhi and medical practitioners at Teerthanker Mahaveer University Medical College at Moradabad to discuss this practice from their respective viewpoints.

Modern Western culture has regarded death to be an evil occurrence, and has, through medical technology, managed to prolong lifespan. Recently, there has been an interest in India in embracing the postponement of death. Ironically, the Western world affirms the legal right to suspend nutrition and hydration, and, in some instances, has legalized the hastening of death through medical means.

This book explores the Jain tradition of celebrating the final

fast as well as its emergence as “best practice” worldwide. We hope this book provides a context for understanding the age-old Indian tradition of the voluntary termination of life.

We are deeply grateful to the many people who helped with the launch of the conference and this book, starting with Uma Jain and Maureen Shannon-Chapple. At Loyola Marymount University, Jensen Martin was instrumental in copy editing the first versions of the chapters. At the International School for Jain Studies, Dr Navin Srivastav, Mr Sushil Jana and Ms Jyoti Pandey were instrumental in the launch of the conferences and the work required to prepare this book. Special thanks to Dr Shrinetra Pandey, Joint Director of International School for Jain Studies, who has been central to the preparation of the final editing of the book. We hope that readers find this work interesting and useful.

**Shugan C. Jain**  
**Christopher Key Chapple**

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