

Peaceful Death Is Not Suicide

By Justice T. K. Tukol

Adapted from the book 'SALLEKHANA Is Not Suicide',
published by L. D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad,
pages 16-17, 1976.

Since liberation of soul from the bondage of karma is the ideal to be realized, the various vows and austerities are intended to subserve this objective. The concepts related to the vow of peaceful death are as follows:

1. One of the basic tenets of Jainism is that the body is different from soul.
2. While the body is the result of one's own karma, the soul is pure and perfect, with its inherent attributes of absolute perception, absolute knowledge, absolute potential and absolute bliss. It is the karma that creates a veil and causes numerous limitations on the exercise of these qualities of pure soul, besides being the cause of birth and death.
3. The various vows prescribed by Jainism for observance in daily life are intended to purify the body and mind, and help the individual to lead a life full of contentment and peace. While fasting is intended to curb the cravings of the body, meditation and introspection are intended to assist the soul in its purification, elevation and realization. The body is the primary instrument that is required to be trained to meet the needs of the soul in its efforts to get rid of karma. But this is a task that has to be worked out all through life by devotion and austerities of various kinds.
4. When the body is likely to perish due to old age, incurable disease, calamity, etc., and a householder or monk is convinced that it is not possible to live much longer according to the tenets of religion and observe the five vows, he/she makes a determination to adopt the vow of peaceful death. The vow involves voluntary quitting of the body through planned fasting and meditation, because such a course is preferable to a life of irreligion, or pining and painful death.

5. The acceptance of the vow must be voluntary. The fruits of religious merit acquired all through life should not be allowed to fritter away just when the end is nearing.
6. Before accepting the vow of peaceful death, the monk or the householder must conscientiously determine whether he is nearing the end of life. The conquest of all passions and afflictions must precede subjection of body to any kind of austerity.
7. There should be complete detachment from all ties of affection and worldly attachments. The mind should be free from prejudice and ill-will towards anybody.
8. Supreme forgiveness towards everyone must govern the mind after having begged for forgiveness from others towards oneself.
9. The mind should be full of joy and equanimity.
10. The mind should not falter by any of the transgressions either by wishing for postponement of death or immediate end.

Peaceful death according to spiritual concepts is the victory of the soul over karma and consequential infirmities of mind and body, the necessary accompaniments of the worldly existence. It is an act of fulfillment and fitting culmination to a life of piety and religion.

* * * * *

Today, the social, religious and political leaders claim to be the angels of progress and peace. But they are trying to change other individuals, societies and nations for self-gratification. They engage in establishing the superiority of their own system disregarding how others think and feel. This is one of the causes of violence and strife between individuals, religions and nations. We Jains of today who are the followers of Bhagwaan Mahaveer, and, who are intelligent and educated individuals, should reform ourselves as Bhagwaan Mahaveer did. We should reform and refine our perception through reason and logical thinking. We should enhance our knowledge and understanding of reality through the principles of relativism and multiplicity of viewpoints. We should purify our conduct.

- From the article 'Culture of Nonviolence', pages 30-31