



## ART OF DYING (LETTING GO)

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### ABSTRACT :

The meaning of Sanskrit word *Dwij* (द्विज) is twice born. It means that one who has born twice (द्वि = Twice, ज = Born). If the first is the physical birth through mother's womb then, the second is when one realizes one's purpose to have been born and endeavours to value 'death' (brevity of life). Just as a bird takes its birth first as an egg and secondly while hatching out. A hatching chick has to work hard for hours or even days to break through the shells. Certain temperature is required in the form of external help and certain level of efforts is required on the part of a baby bird. Similarly, a new born child passes through the birth canal. A human being must pass through the process of 'hatching-struggle'. One must die during this struggle in order that one may be reborn and attain redemption and enlightenment. In Sufism, it is said "Die before you die". A seed would need to die so that it may become a tree. Art of dying means art of letting go or art of surrendering, dying by surrendering. One must learn the art of dying so that one may experience the spirit of 'fulfilment'. In this research paper, the researcher aims at discussing this very 'art of dying', its process, attitudes and understanding required and the realization involved in learning the art of dying.

**KEYWORDS :** attain redemption and enlightenment , surrendering.

### INTRODUCTION

Nobody actually knows what happens after death because nobody comes back to say what really happens. Like Lokayata, Ajit Keshakambali says

"A human being is built up of four elements. When he dies the earthly in him returns and relapses to the earth, the fluid to the water, the heat to the fire, the wind to the air, and his faculties pass into space. The four bearers, on the bier as a fifth, take his dead body away; till they reach the burning ground, men utter forth eulogies, but there his bones are bleached, and his offerings end in ashes."<sup>i</sup>

It is said in Hinduism that our body is made up of five elements (*PanchMahabhoot!*) However, the Lokayatas do not believe in the fifth one Ether (*Akash*). They don't believe in reincarnation or rebirth. Nothing remains after death. This is a horrible picture and it may make one nihilistic. One day, one must encounter this finality of death. The researcher does not wish to discuss this physical death in which nothing remains. By death, the researcher means death of 'False Personality, 'Imaginary Picture' 'Jungle of many 'I's. Death becomes the birth of awakening and new beginning. Tolstoy's mouthpiece 'Levin' in Anna Karenina was in search of meaning and purpose of life. He had obsession with death too. He realized that he must struggle to live a better, a far better, life. However, the very thought of death makes him nihilistic. He says "I am working, I want to do something, and I had forgotten that it will all end in Death!"<sup>ii</sup> Levin sees Death as the ultimate problem and it cannot be solved while living. He has not yet been able to complete his search for meaning and purpose of life and the problem of death baffles him greatly. He tells Oblonsky that one

passes one's life finding distraction in hunting or in work, merely not to think of death. It appears that the purpose of whatever we do in life is to distract us from death. No one is ready to talk about it and nobody is ready to prepare for. At one point, during his struggle to understand the death, Levin feels that it is a good job distracting oneself and focussing on enjoying life rather than wasting time brooding over death. This is the standpoint of the mass. He thinks, "While I don't completely agree, I love Oblonsky's confidence, vigour, and determination to enjoy life and live in present"<sup>iii</sup> In his Commentary Magazine article, "The Moral Urgency of Anna Karenina", Gray Saul Morson suggests that when Levin finds faith and contentment in the everyday at the end of the novel, Tolstoy expresses his own belief that the everyday act of living a good life is more important than philosophizing about abstract intellectual topics or politics:

"In his daily work, Levin comes to appreciate the importance of the ordinary and prosaic. If one lives rightly moment by moment, and trusts that daily practice has its own wisdom, then the questions troubling Levin are not exactly answered, but they disappear."<sup>iv</sup>

One can have the similar understanding but like Levin, one has to pass through a long psychological struggle to awaken it. In fact, Levin's struggle is the struggle of all those who wish to lead a better life, fulfilling in every sense, the life in which everything is achieved which is worth achieving. For such fulfilling life, as Mohammad says, one must be a spiritual warrior who has no outside enemy, the warrior who is ready for the inner war just to carve one's own meaning and purpose of life and death for oneself. Levin finds a sense of spiritual tranquillity at the end of his struggle when he appreciates the magic in 'simply existing'. This requires art of dying:

"I was looking for miracles, regretting that I had not seen a miracle that might convince me. But here is a miracle, the sole miracle possible, existing continuously, surrounding me on all sides, and I didn't notice it!...I have discovered nothing. I have only recognized what I already knew....I have been freed from falsity, I have found the Master."<sup>v</sup>

This magic of simply existing and the living rightly moment to moment can happen only when one holds the view that one's life is offering from pure heart. Whatever one does, one does as offering from pure heart. After all, what does actually death take away from one? one's body, name and possessions. One can escape death with one's sacrifice and fool it. When death comes to you, she has nothing to take away from you because you have lead your life with "inner emptiness". In Indian tradition, it is called *Jalkamalvat*. It simply means that letting go of anything that gets in your way of choosing freedom. Such a person leads a life of complete detachment. It is said in Sufisim that Sufi is one who possess nothing and is possessed by nothing. In Mesoamerican tradition, *Quetzalcoatl* says,

"There is only one way to escape death. You must become an offering; from a pure heart, you must transcend death and fool it with your sacrifice. Only this way may you become gods."<sup>vi</sup>

Our life is in a state of constant state of flux. Living in the world but not of it is not meant to banish us from enjoying the material life (when one realizes one's true self, no duality like material and spiritual exists). Actually, it reminds us that there is already abiding happiness and perfection in simply being present, awake and alive. Mansur Al-Hallaj emphasises this point well when he says,

"The key to detachment is to realize nothing in this world belongs to us. Detachment is not that you should own nothing; it's that nothing should own you"<sup>vii</sup>

The art of dying lies in realizing this nothingness. Mansur Al-Hallaj further says, "Between me and you, there is only me. Take away the me, so only You remain,"<sup>viii</sup> Death is one way to see one's nothingness and by learning the art of dying one finds other ways to understand this before death occurs. It is said in *Asthavakra Gita*, "one who has finally learned that it is in the nature of objects to come and go without ceasing, rests in detachment and is no longer subject to suffering"<sup>ix</sup>. It reminds me of wonderful words of David Suzuki, a Canadian academic, science broadcaster and environmental activist. He says "we are in a giant car heading towards a wall and everyone is arguing about where they are going to sit"<sup>x</sup>. It appears that most of the time we find that our life is made up of such situations in which we find ourselves

always arguing about where we are going to sit and we do not know that this situation is going towards a decree of nullity. Death bluntly tells us that wasting time is a heinous crime.

Art of dying lies in 'Nothing to gain and nothing to lose' spirit. By gaining one does not gain and by losing one does not lose if one knows the art. Witness is witnessing impartially. Rumi rightly says, "Die in love and stay alive forever"<sup>xi</sup>. When the "I" dies in love, God stays alive forever. For Rilke, Death is a best friend and Yes-sayer:

"Death is our friend precisely because it brings us into absolute and passionate presence. Life always says Yes and No simultaneously. Death is the true Yes-sayer. It stands before eternity and says only: Yes."<sup>xii</sup>

"Death is the most charitable form of life."<sup>xiii</sup>

Life is made up of "yes and "No", imaginary world and real world but death says only yes and we don't have any option here. She is a friend and charitable because she gives us great wisdom. She teaches us that you have lead your life on charity (in spiritual sense, one comes empty handed from nothingness and it is here that one receives help and love) now it is time to surrender and giving everything. Rumi rightly says, "Death seems like setting but it is a rising."<sup>xiv</sup> Rumi here may not refer to the physical death which is the destiny of everyone. He appears to talk about art of dying. The moment of surrender is rising and it is not setting. Rumi further says, "Death what makes you realize so many beauties of life. It is in death that we find the true life."<sup>xv</sup>

In Jainism, Soul is eternal and never dies. The function of matter (*puḍgala*) is to contribute to pleasure, suffering, life and death of living beings. According to *Tattvartha Sutra*, there are 17 different types of death out of which *Akama Marana* & *Sakama Marana* are considered important. *Akama Marana* refers to the one who leads a life of attachment and identification with all worldly things and doesn't wish to die at all. He is afraid of death. He leads his life in such a way as he is to stay here permanently. But, he has to die helplessly. This person is ignorant to the art of dying. *Sakama Marana* refers to that person who is not at all afraid of death and he is ready to accept death willingly. He knows the finality of death very well. It is a natural process. This *Sakama Marana* may also be further divided into four types. These are *Samadhi Marana*, *Anasana*, *Santharo* and *Sallekhana*. Jain Philosophy has given us two tools to learn the Art of Dying. These are *Samyak Gyan* and *Samyak Darshan*.<sup>xvi</sup>

Dying is an art. Paradoxically, it teaches us to live with better everyday spirit. We should learn the art of killing our own imaginary pictures, our false personality based on our experiences and social environment. All our images, beliefs, imaginary selves, fantasy of our self that creates a self-image are unreal and misleading. We are more than our 'thought'. All the 'I's are imaginary. We are strongly identified with this unconscious default program mechanism of mind. We all have our subjective and imaginary perceptions about our world and what we feel. We all are bound in our fixed mechanism of stimulus responses. Our false personality gets trapped in this maze of falsity and we feel that this is the only world we have. If we lose them we will lose who we are. In art of dying, we try to make minimum use of first person singular pronouns. We intentionally try to strip away all the layers that we ourselves have constructed. This reminds me of Rabiya:

Ironic, but one of the most intimate acts of our body is death.

So beautiful appeared my death – knowing who then I would kiss, I died a thousand times before I died.

'Die before you die,' said the Prophet  
Muhammad.

Have wings that feared ever touched the Sun?  
I was born when all I once feared – I could love.<sup>xvii</sup>

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Like Rabia, one must be prepared and intentionally ready to die thousand times or many more till the art of dying is fully mastered. The more we die the more beauties of life open up to embrace us. What dies is unreal and what remains is beyond words to explain... the eternal.

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<sup>i</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajita\\_Kesakambali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajita_Kesakambali)

<sup>ii</sup><https://livingliterarily.wordpress.com/2015/08/13/anna-karenina-and-levins-quest-for-meaning/>

<sup>iii</sup> ibid

<sup>iv</sup> ibid

<sup>v</sup> ibid

<sup>vi</sup><https://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec>

<sup>vii</sup>[http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/249276.Mansur\\_al\\_Hallaj](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/249276.Mansur_al_Hallaj)

<sup>viii</sup> ibid

<sup>ix</sup> <https://realizatin.org/p/ashtavakra-gita/richards.ashtaakra-gita.html>

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/156426-we-re-in-a-giant-car-heading-towards-a-brick-wall>

<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/die-in-love-rumi/m-lite>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/4111977-death-is-our-friend-precisely-because-it-brings-us-into>

<sup>xiii</sup> ibid

<sup>xiv</sup>[http://consolation.com/2005/04/ghazal\\_911.html](http://consolation.com/2005/04/ghazal_911.html)

<sup>xv</sup> <https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/die-in-love-rumi/m-lite>

<sup>xvi</sup> [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death\\_in\\_jainism](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_in_jainism)

<sup>xvii</sup> <http://www.potseers.org/spiritual-and-devotional-poets/contemp/love-poems-from-god-/rabia/1-2-2/index.html>