



## ISJS NEWSLETTER

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### SPEAK UP

#### YODO IN THE AGE OF YOLO

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In this postmodern<sup>1</sup> world, majority of Gen Z<sup>2</sup> lives by the motto of YOLO<sup>3</sup>, chasing unending consumption and momentary thrills. The overwhelming focus on living life to the fullest and displaying it makes thoughts of mortality seem like a distant fantasy. One can only speculate, by a slippery slope, the trajectory of Gen Alpha<sup>4</sup>. John Green rightly stated, ‘the only certainty life offers us is death’, yet ironically, we focus on all uncertainties of life instead of this only certainty i.e. the death/mortality. However, there is a miniscule fraction of global population, particularly the *Jains*, who prioritize the understanding of mortality with extreme clarity and focus on attainment of peaceful death.

At the heart of *Jain* teachings lies a belief in rebirth and karma, teaching us that the actions we take in this life shape our path in the next. With over 84 lakh species of life to be born into, including realms like *Nigod*<sup>5</sup>, *Narak*, *Swarga*, *Tiryancha*<sup>6</sup>, or even as a human, life is seen as an

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<sup>1</sup> Postmodernism is a belief that challenges old ways of thinking, embracing diversity, questioning authority, and valuing individual experiences and perspectives.

<sup>2</sup> Gen Z refers to the generation born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s. Gen Z is digitally adept, socially conscious, but criticized for shorter attention spans, lack of focus, and over-reliance on technology.

<sup>3</sup> YOLO, ‘You Only Live Once’, promotes living in the present, embracing new experiences, and taking risks. Positively, it encourages seizing opportunities; negatively, it can lead to impulsive decisions and disregard for consequences.

<sup>4</sup> Gen Alpha refers to the generation born from the mid-2010s onwards. They're expected to be tech-savvy and globally connected but might face challenges with screen addiction and mental health.

<sup>5</sup> *Nigod* refers to one of the realms or states of existence within the cycle of reincarnation. It is considered the lowest form of existence, characterized by extreme suffering and minimal consciousness.

<sup>6</sup> *Tiryancha* refers to the various species of animals, insects, or other non-human beings. Beings in this realm are believed to possess limited consciousness and awareness, and they experience various forms of suffering.



eternal cycle of existence. Yet, human birth is considered a special opportunity, a chance to strive for liberation – *Moksha*. While emphasizing on the mortal nature of the human body, *Jain Cannons* classify death into as many as 48 types. It teaches us to distinguish between the soul and the body, reminding us of the impermanence of material existence. This understanding is embodied in the practice of *Bhed Vigyan*<sup>7</sup> the science of distinction between body and the soul, which encourages us to look beyond the surface and connect with the eternal essence within. With the help of *Bhed Vigyan*, a devout Jain can undertake *Sallekhana*<sup>8</sup>, an ancient Jain practice aimed at emaciating passions of body, detaching from the body by voluntary gradual fasting and increasing deep meditation as a preparation for eventual death with equanimity. *Sallekhana* is typically followed by *Santhara*<sup>9</sup> wherein the individual faces the death with equanimity and peace while laying on a bed of hay. This process of *Sallekhana* and *Santhara* is so sacred that it bars the individual undergoing it from harboring a desire to live, a desire to die, fearing distress or hardship, reminiscing about friends and relatives, and intending to attain happiness in the next life. Through *Sallekhana* and *Santhara*, an individual attains *Samadhimarana*<sup>10</sup>.

In light of this *Jain* philosophy, I attempt to introduce a concept: ‘You Only Die Once’ (YODO). With YODO, the focus shifts from the mortal body to the immortal soul, emphasizing the importance of living a life of purpose and spiritual growth. Although there may be many rebirths and deaths ahead of us but the life of a ‘human being’ is not so easy to achieve. If we are to make the best of this life from a spiritual perspective, we must cultivate a mindset of YODO so that we live an equanimous life leading to the death with equanimity. YODO aligns perfectly with the teachings of Jainism, especially the practices *Sallekhana-Santhara-Samadhimaran*.

To fully embody the ethos of YODO within Jainism, individuals can follow seven essential steps. Firstly, embracing *ahimsa* promotes compassion and harmony by refraining from harming any living being. Secondly, practicing *aparigraha* fosters contentment and freedom from attachment to material possessions. Thirdly, engaging in self-reflection through meditation and self-study cultivates inner peace and self-awareness. Fourthly, fostering equanimity enables individuals to

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<sup>7</sup> *Bhed Vigyan* refers to the understanding or knowledge of the difference between the soul (atma) and the body (physical form). It teaches that the soul, which is eternal and pure, is distinct from the body, which is temporary and material. This concept emphasizes that our true essence lies within our soul, and by recognizing this distinction, we can detach ourselves from worldly desires and attachments. By understanding "Bhed Vigyan," individuals can focus on spiritual growth and strive towards liberation (moksha) from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

<sup>8</sup> *Sallekhana* is a preparatory penance in Jainism which involves increasing deep meditation and decreasing passions/afflictions with gradual decrease in the intake of food.

<sup>9</sup> *Santhara*, is a transitory phase from *Sallekhana* to *Samadhimaran*, involves voluntary fasting unto death by devout Jains, embracing equanimity and peace while facing death on a bed of hay.

<sup>10</sup> *Samadhimarana* refers to embracing death with equanimity and peace through voluntary meditation unto death, achieving serene absorption in the final transition.



maintain balance amidst life's challenges, recognizing the impermanent nature of worldly experiences. Fifthly, embracing *seva* encourages selfless service and compassion towards others, contributing to the well-being of the community. Sixthly, learning *Bhed Vigyan*, the science of distinction between body and soul, fosters a deeper understanding of the self and the universe. Lastly, aiming to undergo *Sallekhana-Santhara-Samadhimaran* signifies a commitment to preparing for a peaceful and purposeful death, in alignment with Jain teachings.

To put it precisely, amidst the pervasive culture of YOLO, the concept of YODO can be a profound reminder of life's ultimate truth: death. Jain philosophy, with its emphasis on understanding mortality and achieving a peaceful death, offers invaluable insights for navigating the complexities of modern life. By embracing the principles of YODO and practicing *Sallekhana-Santhara-Samadhimaran*, individuals can cultivate mindfulness, purpose, and inner harmony. In a world plagued by stress and unending desires, the wisdom of Jainism serves as a beacon of hope, encouraging us to live more consciously and cherish each moment. By acknowledging the inevitability of death and embracing the essence of existence, we can lead lives filled with greater purpose, meaning, and enrichment for ourselves and the world around us.

