

## Dying with Equanimity

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### Abstract

This article explores the profound connection between a person's life and the manner of their death, emphasizing that equanimity at the final moment reflects a lifetime of spiritual cultivation and moral discipline. Drawing upon historical and religious figures, Mahatma Gandhi, Jesus Christ, Lord Buddha, and Yudhisthira, as well as exemplary ordinary individuals, the piece demonstrates how forgiveness, compassion, devotion, and moral integrity manifest most clearly at death. It also examines cultural practices such as Jain *samadhi maran*, highlighting that dying with awareness and detachment is a universal marker of spiritual accomplishment. The article invites readers to reflect on how a life well-lived is inseparable from the art of dying well.

### Keywords

Equanimity, Spirituality, Death, Gandhi, Buddha, Jesus, Jainism, Dharma, Compassion, Moral Discipline

### 1. Introduction

While society often celebrates great leaders and saints for their achievements, wisdom, and service, their final moments are rarely examined with equal attention. Yet, the manner in which a person dies can reveal the deepest truths of their character, spiritual maturity, and moral life. Even minor provocations can reveal instinctive reactions. Death is the ultimate test, when all pretenses fall away, and one's deepest habits, beliefs, and spiritual maturity rise to the surface. Religious and cultural practices, such as Jain *samadhi maran*, emphasize conscious, detached, and purposeful dying. This principle extends beyond extraordinary

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individuals. Even ordinary lives, like that of my grandfather, shows that mindful living, kindness, and equanimity prepare one to face death peacefully. This article examines such instances across traditions, showing that dying with equanimity is both a reflection of a life well-lived and a universal spiritual ideal.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholarly literature highlights the connection between life-long virtue and peaceful dying. Sogyal Rinpoche (1992) notes that death reveals the mind's habitual tendencies: agitated emotions prevent a serene passing, while cultivated inner peace enables equanimity. Jain texts, Buddhist scriptures, and Christian narratives consistently emphasize the moral and spiritual preparation required for death (Jaini, 1979; Walshe, 1995; The Holy Bible, Luke 23:34). Recent studies in death education and mindfulness further support the idea that intentional cultivation of compassion, forgiveness, and detachment contributes to the quality of dying (Shourie, 2020).



## 3. Methodology

This study employs a **comparative, qualitative approach**, drawing on historical, religious, and contemporary sources. Exemplary individuals were selected based on documented accounts of their final moments, emphasizing cross-cultural representation. Personal observation and family narratives (e.g., the author's grandfather) are included to demonstrate how ordinary lives can also exemplify equanimity.

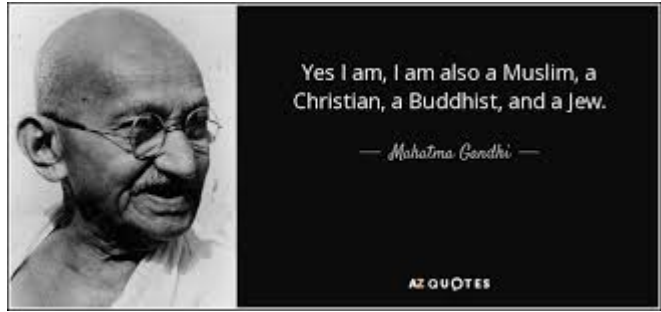
## 4. Gandhi: Devotion and Forgiveness

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, leader of India's freedom movement, provides a profound example of dying with equanimity. As Gandhi often said, the *Bhagavad Gita* nourished him more than mother's milk. From early childhood, Gandhi chanted the name of God internally

and dedicated all his actions to serving others, and hence to the service of God. As Gandhi stated when asked if he was a Hindu,

*“Yes, I am, I am also a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist, and a Jew.”*

Known as *Mahatma* (honored soul), Gandhi dedicated his life to humanity,



pioneering the philosophy of non-violence that inspired figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. in their pursuit of civil rights. However, Gandhi believed that despite all his work, he was not worthy of the title “Mahatma”. Twelve hours before his assassination, he remarked: *“If someone fires a bullet at me and I die without a groan and with God’s name on my lips, then you should tell the world that there was a real Mahatma.”* On 30 January 1948, when assassinated at point-blank range with three bullets, he uttered God’s name twice as he fell. This act was not incidental but the culmination of a lifetime of devotion and discipline. Through Mahatma Gandhi Ji’s example we see that it is not just one’s actions during the entire lifetime, it is also one’s demeanor during death that justifies the title of a Saint.

In remembering only God while being shot, he let go of anger toward the assassin and fear of the future. His mind remained steadfast in devotion to God. This is no ordinary feat and his death is a testament to how his entire life was indeed a spiritual pursuit purifying himself in thoughts, words, and actions. Gandhi Ji’s death demonstrated that he embodied forgiveness and compassion. His death reflected Krishna’s teaching: *“And whoever, at the end of his life, quits his body remembering Me alone at once attains My nature”* (Bhagavad Gita 8.5).

## 5. Jesus Christ: Compassion in Crucifixion

Jesus Christ, while crucified, didn't pray to be saved, but for the forgiveness of those who harmed him: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34).

It is his selflessness and compassion that one should aspire to imbibe their entire lifetime.

## 6. Buddha: Equanimity Amid Pain

Even a person as great as Buddha faced calumny as his teachings began to spread. Not a stranger, but his first cousin Devadutta, began considering Buddha his enemy. When Buddha was 72, Devadutta incited a man to stab Buddha to death. Upon encountering his assassin, Buddha saw through this plan, gently came closer, and forgave that person. Taking matters into his own hand, Devadutta even tried to push a huge boulder on Buddha. However, the rock got caught between two mountain peaks and only a splinter hurt Buddha's foot. Having endured a few more unsuccessful assassination attempts and false accusations with compassion and equanimity, Buddha has begun feeling the pangs of his aging.



At age 80, one evening, while wandering for alms, he received rotten food. Despite knowing that it would cause him immense harm, he ate it. He endured the consequent sharp pains with calmness and without complaints. He then asks his closest follower, Ananda, to prepare a place for him to lie down in the lion posture (placing one foot on the other) between the two sal trees. He remained mindful and aware. He also asks Ananda to call the people nearby so that they may not be deprived of his last moments. A wanderer comes along and beseeches Buddha to teach him and accept him as a disciple. Despite his suffering, he taught the last disciple, because of his compassion for this wanderer. His last words were *"I declare to you: all conditioned things are of a nature to decay- strive on untiringly"*. His last words were also spoken for the benefit of the people. He then left his body in meditation. True to Buddha's teachings and the values he practiced himself throughout his life, every incident preceding Buddha's death is laden with overwhelming compassion for others.

## 7. Yudhisthira: Dharma and Compassion

At the end of the *Mahabharatha*, the five Pandava brothers (protagonists of the story) along with their wife set out to reach heaven. At the start of their journey, they were joined by a loyal dog. One by one, the group fell, leaving only Yudhisthira, the elder brother, to reach the gates of heaven. It is said



that he was assured that his family will ascend to heaven despite their fall. Yudhisthira then requested for the dog to accompany them to heaven. When refused, Yudhisthira said, *“In that case, I do not seek heaven. The dog was my faithful companion and I cannot abandon it”*. Hence, Yudhisthira showed qualities of infinite compassion, unwavering by material temptations of the heaven, qualities that he had practiced throughout life. Hence, during death, much like his entire life, he was just doing his moral duty or *Dharma*. As a twist, the dog was revealed to be the God of Dharma, and they all entered heaven. (Narasimhan, 1965).

## 8. Cultural Practices: Jain Samadhi Maran

Jain monks and nuns voluntarily undergo *samadhi maran*, facing death through fasting and meditation. Jains celebrate the deaths of monks and nuns through *Mrityu Mahotsava* (Festival of Death). Through this practice, our soul willingly leaves the body to be reincarnated in another body. This feat is a testimony that the Jain monks and nuns must have done severe internal and external penances and renunciations throughout life so that there is not even a momentary lapse of feeling any desire fuelled by attachment. Ultimately, this conquering of death with a profound sense of achievement leaves not tears but smiles on the faces of people who gather to watch these monks and nuns in their last moments. What more could one aspire for when dying?

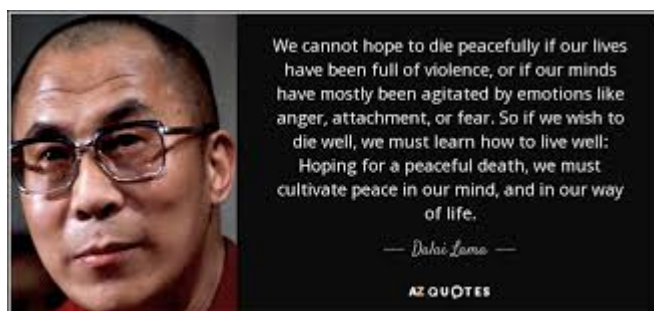


## 9. Personal Example

It is not just these extraordinary people close to Godhood who die, igniting a spark of inspiration among their followers. We also witness extraordinary deaths in seemingly ordinary people and then realize how lucky we must have been to have known and learned from them. One such person was my grandfather, V.P. Bhasin. He was a man of his word, a reservoir of kindness, and a constant seeker of knowledge. He had devoted all his actions to his family and the community. His unique nature of remaining calm and at the same time, full of joy, has taught us the precious lesson of never losing hope even in the most difficult of circumstances. One morning, my grandfather left alone for the holy city of Haridwar. He settled himself in a hotel at night, and the next morning, he ordered tea. When the server came, he had passed away, sitting perfectly still in his chair. His death showed how he chose to shed his body in a spiritually vibrant land, away from his loved ones, so that emotions and the need for clinging to life don't arise. Not only had he anticipated his death, but had also managed to pass away with grace. Further, since the entire family visited Haridwar for his last rituals, he ensured that everyone also got to be present in a holy land at least once in their lifetime.

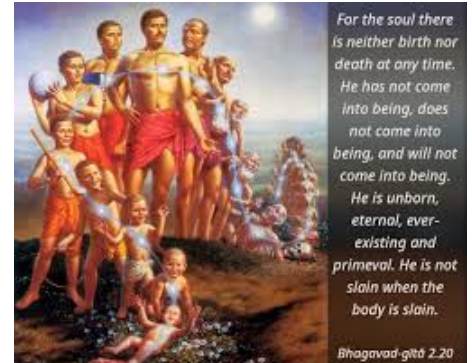
## 10. Discussion

Across traditions and circumstances, from Gandhi's assassination to Jain *samadhi maran*, equanimity emerges as the common thread linking a well-lived life to a well-lived death. The Dalai Lama notes: *"We cannot hope to die peacefully if our minds have been agitated by*



*emotions like anger, attachment, or fear... So if we wish to die well, we must cultivate peace in our mind, and in our way of life"* (Sogyal, 1992). Krishna tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*: *"For the*

*soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain” (2.20).* This eternal vision links lives and deaths across traditions, highlighting equanimity as the culmination of a virtuous life.



## 11. Conclusion

Dying with equanimity is not reserved for saints or religious figures. Through mindfulness, moral discipline, and compassion, ordinary lives can also reflect this ideal. Cross-cultural examples demonstrate that the art of dying well is inseparable from the art of living well. Cultivating virtues throughout life prepares the mind and heart to face death peacefully, leaving behind a legacy of inspiration.

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