

BLIND FAITH ACCORDING TO THE JAINAS: THE YAMA CASE

Jean-Pierre Osier

ante matiḥ, sā gatiḥ

According to this pan-Indian¹ maxim, there is a connexion between the last thought or thoughts of the dying and their fate in the next life. Hence, it is necessary to help the dying during this essential moment. Ritualising death is the best way to reach this aim. Ritual death is an option only for one who has made up his mind without hurry, if his certain death is near. Suicide determined by emotions, such as excessive arrogance, anger, love or fear,² is not sanctioned by the rite, because it involves blind attachment and haste. The deceived lover, for instance, who takes the decision to hang himself,³ to throw himself from a rock or to drown himself into a river, shows only that he is a fool (*bāla*), and dies the death of a fool (*bāla-marāṇa*). In this kind of “deliberate” death or suicide there is no room for ritual, because there is no, or very little, room for reflection and conscience. Yet, when disease or similar circumstances give death the appearance of inevitability, and when this is not only established by the dying, but confirmed by his *guru*, the choice of dying according to a ritual may seem rational (*pañḍita-marāṇa*). This is the case in the Jaina ritual eradication (Skt. *saṃlekhanā*) of karmic particles at the end of life.

In the context of this ritual, death is not awaited passively. Fasting unto death is an activity. By taking his vows again, by progressively reducing food and drink, the future dead plays an active part in his own process of dying. Moreover, his activity involves the religious group to which he belongs. He does not die alone, away from human society, but near his *guru*, in a place which reminds him of his belonging to a Jaina community. However, despite the fact that the ritual death is backed by the religious group or by some of its mendicant or lay members, the man who is fasting to death is in some way, *alone*, busy with his own thoughts.

Loneliness or solitariness (*ekatva*) is familiar to the Jainas. They know that social and even family bounds do not ameliorate the helpless situation (*aśaraṇa*) of anybody dying—the

¹ Kane 1977 V: 972f. quotes for instance Buddhist and Hindu texts.

² Kane 1977 II: 924, n. 2130 quotes Parāśara 4.1-2.

³ See the case of the ugly Nandisena who is refused three times by his uncle's daughters. *Vasudevahiṇḍi*, p. 115.

second topic of the twelve *anuprekṣās*, or reflexions.⁴ But loneliness when dying is seen as peculiar and very dangerous. At every moment, before the last, a dying person can become prey of a bad thought, a regret, which the Digambaras call a *nidāna*. For instance, if a very pious layman who is just about to die by fasting remembers his wife's beauty and dies, he will be born again not as a god, a man, or a *siddha*, but as a lustful frog.⁵ Such is the power of the last thought!

Of course *nidāna* is linked to *karman*, and as such seems to have an absolute mechanical inevitability.⁶ In fact, this inevitability is never absolute, because an embodied *jīva* is neither a product of mere defilement, nor of mere purity, but rather of a mixture of both. Which tendency will dominate the *jīva* during its life, and especially at the last moment, is an open question, which implies choice and education. Therefore, the Jainas can balance the weight of *nidāna* with a counterpoise. Since the *nidāna* produces its effect only on a man or a woman who pays exclusive attention to his own whims, the *guru* can draw this attention to pious thoughts. A *guru* who assists the dying reminds him of glorious models of religious behaviour so that he will not think of his situation in any other ways. Mere loneliness of the dying would not be a fatal state, but the result of a bad "choice": responding to *nidāna* rather than identifying with the exemplary patterns of religious conduct which are given by the *guru*.

These ideal patterns are not a free invention of the *guru*. They are informed by special works of the canonical or post-canonical literature. Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras have composed texts which will help the dying to fix his last thoughts. The *Autobiography* of Ganeś Prasād Varṇī (1874-1961), written in Hindī at the beginning of the last century, is a good example.⁷ The writer relates the *samādhi*, or meditated death of a religious woman, Bāījī who, in the final phase of her death fast, asks for hearing classical works about right faith.⁸ The Śvetāmbara canonical *Paiṅṇayas* contain many texts with concerning this point.⁹ The Digambara *Bhagavatī Ārādhanā* of Śivārya (circa second century A.D.) also serves as a handbook for helping the *guru* advising the dying in their last hour. In this latter work, one finds not only reminders of principles and rules, but also examples of exemplary behaviour. The former are presented in abstract, while the latter appear to be concrete, because they are

⁴ TS 9.7.

⁵ Nāgadeva 1948: 18-26; French translation by Balbir and Osier 2004: 86-91.

⁶ Pūjyapāda speaks of the *samsāre paribhraman jīvaḥ karma-yantra-preritaḥ* (*Sarvārthasiddhi* § 801).

⁷ Varṇī 1977: 310-317.

⁸ The list encompasses: *Mūla Nāṭakasamayāsāra*, *Śāntisamādhimaraṇa*, *Anuprekṣā*, *Ratnakaraṇḍaśrāvākācāra* by Samantabhadra, *Daśadhādharmā*, *Dvadaśānuprekṣā* by Kārttikeya, *Samādhimaraṇa* (Varṇī 1977: 313).

⁹ Cf. von Kamptz 1929.

narrated in form of stories. Yet, in the *Bhagavatī Arādhana* these stories are only alluded to. A personal name, some particulars, etc., are mentioned, but without further elaboration. Fortunately, these rather terse verses inspired the creation of extensive collections of stories, which develop the matter indicated in the verses. The 13th century Digambara author Prabhācandra, in his *Kathākośa*, quotes some verses of the *Bhagavatī Arādhana* and elaborates their plots in shorter or longer narratives. Ninety stories were composed in such a manner.

Despite their great number, the stories deal with only one main topic. That is, illustration of the advantages of right faith, or orthodoxy, and explanation of the disadvantages of wrong faith, or heterodoxy. It would be interesting to know more details about their use in real life situations. Of particular interest are situations where specific narratives are chosen by the *guru* to help the dying in his final struggle. If specific principles of selection were known, we could get a more precise image of the Jain ritual of dying. The choice of a particular story cannot be arbitrary, but must be informed by (a) the *guru*'s personal knowledge of his disciple, and (b) the special rules or vows he follows. Of course, autobiographies such as G. P. Vārṇī's can give some details on the first point. But reading the fasting unto death of Bāijī, one cannot fail to be surprised by the "generality" of the depiction of her behaviour. She appears to be an embodiment of the ideal pattern of *saṃlekhanā* rather than an individual with idiosyncratic features, even if her compassion for her spiritual son Vārṇī is very touching and reveals very personal features. However, despite being rather formulaic rather than autobiographical or even biographical, there are some works that offer precious information about the normalized choice of narrative materials under these special circumstances.

The *Bhagavatī Arādhana* was commented upon by Āśādhara in his *Mūlārādhana-darpaṇa* (BKK, Introduction, pp. 56f.). One could have expected that Āśādhara's commentaries deal with the narrative material mentioned in the verses. But unfortunately, this hope is groundless. In the Introduction to his edition of Hariṣeṇa's *Bṛhatkathākośa*, a collection of versified stories (931-32), A.N. Upadhye underlines this point: "Between the two [i.e., Aparājita and Āśādhara], it is only Āśādhara that gives a few remarks, here and there, on these gāthās. This neglect on their part indicates that either they were indifferent to this aspect of the contents or by their time the Kathākośas were so usual that they did not like to repeat them in their commentaries".¹⁰ A good fortune compensates for this "neglect". At the end of his treatise for laypeople, entitled *Sāgāradharmāmṛta*, Āśādhara mentions some stories which the *guru* murmurs into the dying individual's ears to help him in the final phase of his life. He mentions twelve personal names, and sketches particular features which should

¹⁰ BKK, Introduction, p. 58.

be able to support the disciple. The simple mentioning of names would not have been sufficient for interesting research on the ideal mental dispositions of the dying, because some of the characters, such as Śreṇika, the Pāṇḍavas, and so on, appear in many stories. Yet, the available sketches of the personalities behind the names ward off this danger. They allow the reader to refer to the *Kathākośa* of Prabhācandra, where he will find many details on the characters mentioned by Āśādhara, and in this way, enable him to understand which special feature Āśādhara chooses and exalts in one or other particular context.

One example: Yama

a. *Sāgāradharmāmṛta* 8.81:

“Devoting himself to duties such as personal study and so on, thanks to the bits [=fragments] of three verses he composed himself, Yama, despite his lack of experience due to the reproaches he did to a *muni*, acquired the seven magical powers.”¹¹

This rather enigmatic verse appears in the context of the depiction of personal study, or *svādhyāya*, one of the six obligatory daily duties (*karman*) of householders according to the Digambaras.¹² Memorizing the sacred texts, and understanding their meaning is the aim of *svādhyāya*. Laity as well as mendicants cannot improve themselves without being perfectly conscious both of their faults and of the way to perfection. At the time of death, memory of the sacred texts is important. The tradition clearly explains the fruits of *svādhyāya* after death, and destroys any doubts on this point. However, the relationship between the principle and the narrative content of verse 81 remains obscure.

In the *Bhagavatī Ārādhana*, one finds a verse quite similar to Āśādhara’s:

“If king Yama escaped from death thanks to a *śloka* fragment, and became a good ascetic, how much more [one will achieve] thanks to [remembering] the *sūtra* told by the Jina”¹³

¹¹ *khaṇḍa-slokais tribhiḥ kurvan | svādhyāyādi svayaṃ-kṛtaiḥ || muni-nindāpta-maugdhyo’pi | yamaḥ saptaraddhibhūr abhūt ||*.

¹² Williams 1963: 237.

¹³ *Bhagavatī Ārādhana* 771: *jaidā khaṇḍa-silogeṇa Jamo maraṇādu pheḍido rāyā | patto ya susāmaṇṇaṃ kiṃ puṇa jīṇa-utta-sutteṇa ||*

The context is the same: without knowledge, that is to say, knowledge of the tradition, religious deeds are blind and fruitless. Here too, however, the behaviour of Yama is enigmatic. The reader knows only that the “*śloka* fragment” does not belong to the Jaina scriptures or tradition, and must be considered as secular. A wonderful conclusion: a king can obtain important religious results by quite non-religious means! How is this alchemic operation possible?

Fortunately, the auto-commentary of *Sāgāradharmāmṛta* VIII.81 gives the fragments of the *ślokas* Yama himself composed:

“You cannot make your mind up, donkey, you looked for barley: don’t eat it!”¹⁴

“Why the fruit would be elsewhere: let bring it to me from here: she is asleep (*niddiyā*) in the hole!”¹⁵

“Do not be afraid of us, the thing you have to be afraid of is manifestly far away!”¹⁶

The reader’s fortune is in fact very short-lived. These verses have a mere mnemonic form, and otherwise look like riddles which cannot be solved without knowing other elements of the story. Prabhācandra’s *Kathākośa*¹⁷ and Hariṣeṇa’s *Bṛhatkathākośa*¹⁸ give the whole stories in which these enigmatic verses appear.

b. *Kathākośa* 24 begins by quoting verse 771 of the *Bhagavatī Ārādhānā* and offers the story as an explanation of its meaning: *asya kathā*. According to this tale, Yama was a king who had a son: Gardabha, a daughter: Koṇikā, five hundred sons from other queens, and a minister, Dīrgha. According to a prediction, Koṇikā’s husband would become king of the whole world. Yama hid her in a cave. Yama, who knew all the treatises (*sarvaśāstrajñā*), met a Jaina *muni* and insolently offended him. As a consequence, Yama immediately lost his mental power (*buddhi*). Brought back to reality, he gave up being king, passed his kingdom to Gardabha, and became a *muni*, together with his 500 sons. But Yama still remained quite unable to learn even (*mātra*) the *Pañca Namaskāra*. His *guru* rebuked him, and with his

¹⁴ Critical edition, p. 341: *kaṭṭasi puṇa ṅikkhevasi re gadahā javaṃ patthesi khādiduṃ* ||

¹⁵ *aṇṇattha kiṃ phalo vahatu me itthaṃ niddiyā chiḍḍe* ||

¹⁶ *amhādo ṇathi bhayaṃ dihādo dīsae bhayaṃ tumha* ||

¹⁷ KK 24.

¹⁸ BKK 61.

permission he went alone (*ekākin*) to a *tīrtha*. There, he saw how some donkeys were led by their owner to a barley field, but suddenly refused to go further. This scene gave Yama the opportunity to compose his first half *śloka*:

“You draw and withdraw, Donkeys (*gaddahā*), you see barley: don’t eat it!”

Elsewhere he saw children playing with a staff of wood (*kāṣṭakoṇikā*). This staff fell into a hole. The children ran here and there to find it, and inspired Yama to recite his second half *śloka*:

“Why search elsewhere, the staff is buried here in a hole.“

At another time he saw a frightened frog going near a lotus-leaf in which a snake was hidden, and he pronounced his third half *śloka*:

“You don’t have to be afraid of me, be afraid manifestly of what is far (*dīrgha*).”

He turned these fragments into *svādhyāya* texts and went back to his former capital, where he stood in *kāyotsarga* posture.

Dīrgha, the new king, and Gardabha his minister came to kill him. But fear of killing a *muni* held Gardabha back from such a murder. Yama recited his first *śloka* which Gardabha understood as meaning that Yama had identified himself and his accomplice, Dīrgha. From the second half-verse, he drew the conclusion that the *muni* had come to his former capital to speak to his daughter Koṇikā. Hearing the third half, he thought that Dīrgha meant to kill him, and that the *muni* had come to warn him!

Gardabha and Dīrgha then became Jain laymen, and Yama improved his own status as a *muni*, and gained the seven magic powers or *ṛddhis*.

Interpretation

Despite its mention in the *Bhagavatī Ārādhanā*, *Kathākośa* and *Bṛhatkathākośa*, this story seems to have a very weak connection with the Jaina context. It seems to belong to a pan-Indian background without any sectarian colour. King Yama is *sarva-śāstra-jñāḥ*, as the three Brahmins of Viṣṇuśarma’s *Pañcatantra* 4.3 who are simultaneously *śāstra-pāram āgatāḥ*, and *buddhi-rahitāḥ*. The treatises, Yama is boasting of knowing, are probably about *vidyā* or *kalā*, and quite useless for one of lacking mental power. In fact, Yama has some *buddhi*, but not enough to understand his own situation in front of a *muni*. He is not quite as stupid as the three “learned” Brahmins who bring the dead lion back to life. His *buddhi* is blinded by his

arrogance (*garva*). His punishment will be his *buddhi*'s loss, not the loss of *sarva-śāstra-jñāna*.

There appears to be an important difference here, which distinguishes the tales of the *Pañcatantra* and *Kathākośa* 24. The former favours three unintelligent, but learned Brahmins, over an intelligent one, while the latter favours Sudharma, a man who is at the same time learned, intelligent, and stupid. If he was not clever, Sudharma could not deprive him of his cleverness! The assumption of natural mental powers, present in every human being, independent of learning, is a special Jaina feature. It is known as *uppattiyā buddhi*.¹⁹ The loss of it leads to relative stupidity (*mūḍhatā*). But this loss is not absolute. *Kathākośa* 24 refers to this point. Hardly has Yama done wrong, when, becoming sober (*nirmada*), he listens to the *dharma* and becomes a *muni*. This conversion involves *buddhi*, since Yama distinguishes at least, if confusedly, orthodox and heterodox behaviour. Without a very minute quantity of *buddhi*, such a conversion would be quite impossible. It is not the result of Sudharma's eloquence, but the result of a process internal to Yama. Some other features of this tale are specifically Jaina. Amongst them, mentioning of the *Pañca Namaskāra* and *svādhyāya*, and of course of the seven *ṛddhis*, which Yama obtains at the end of the story.

The main difficulty for the interpretation of this Jaina story lies in understanding the relationship between the *śloka* fragments and Yama's religious progress. At first sight, this episode looks ridiculous. How could a "muni", unable of learning by heart a simple praise like the *Pañca Namaskāra*, compose for himself *svādhyāya* texts? Calling them *svādhyāya* seems improper, if not sacrilegious. The term *svādhyāya* should apply only to the words of a Jina, not to an amateur's fancies. The first step of *svādhyāya* is *vācanā*, reciting of the sacred texts.²⁰ The verses composed by Yama are not really poetical, and express only verbally the contents of their author's immediate perception. Neither does the parts they play later give them enhanced meaning. The *Pañca Namaskāra* in itself is of religious value,²¹ and reciting fragments of *ślokas* takes on a special meaning, without Yama and Gardabha knowing it, as if both of them "were led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of their intention".²² However, there is no room here for a providential or Hegelian trick, which would work behind the back of the actors. To the conclusion of the story, the relationship of the *śloka* halves is quite irrelevant, and yet, in addition to the fact that their recitation saves Yama

¹⁹ Balbir 1993: 158-196 renders into French this term by „intelligence innée ou esprit d'à propos“.

²⁰ Williams 1963: 237, quoting Schubring 1935: 267.

²¹ KK 25; or *Sāgāradharmāmṛta* VIII, 78: *sa ṇamo aharantāṇam ity uccāraṇa-tatparaḥ| gopaḥ su-darśanī-bhūya subhagāhvah śivaṇ gataḥ||*.

²² Smith 1964: 400.

from death, these as it were non-doctrinal verses must contain clear information provoking the *muni*'s spiritual progress.

One can find an interesting clue in the parallel version of Hariṣeṇa. Rendering into Sanskrit the second half of the *śloka*, instead of reading *niddiyā*, asleep, he reads *mandabuddhi-samāyuktā*, that is “O you, *slow-witted*”, cease to run everywhere, and so on.²³ This understanding is very interesting. Hariṣeṇa expressly confirms the first step of Yama on the path to spiritual self-realisation. He had lost his *buddhi*, as he could not even learn the *Pañca Namaskāra*, his *guru* had sent him away. But now he is able to understand the slow-wittedness of children looking for their lost toy, *koṇikā*. His new understanding represents a reactivation of his lost *buddhi*, which was only slumbering. He has not become a *paṇḍita*, but he is now able to become an authentic *muni*.

Such is the last word of the story. Yama improves his qualities as a *muni*, and obtains the seven *ṛddhis*. The former result is mentioned in *Bhagavatī Ārādhana* 771, but the latter only in *Kathākośa* and *Bṛhatkathākośa*.²⁴ In his auto-commentary,²⁵ Āśādhara gives information on this Digambara traditional list of seven items. It encompasses *buddhi*, *tapas*, *vikriyā*, *auśadhi*, *rasa*, *bala* and *akṣīṇā*. Some of these are magic powers, which, according to Schubring (2000 § 181: 316), can be considered as a Jain concession to popular belief. Yet, the first two terms (mental power and asceticism) are quite different. The first one, *buddhi*, is of special interest in the context of the Yama case. It means not only the above mentioned reactivation of his lost memory power, but something more. If, according to Schubring, it cannot be the access to the highest stage of meditation (*śukla-dhyāna*), it has probably some relationship with some wonderful improvement of *buddhi* such as *koṭṭha-buddhi*. By this term²⁶ *buddhi* is compared to a granary, which can contain seeds (*bīya*) and veils (*paḍa*). When acquiring this kind of *buddhi*, some people are able to conceive the principles of the sciences, and to develop them to their final conclusion. The lack of such a *buddhi* was the main mark of the *muni* Yama. Was he not unable to learn even the seed, the *Pañca Namaskāra* formula, and to develop it? This requirement of *buddhi*, not spectacular magic power, gave him the real means of a true spiritual improvement.

Last but not least, this story illustrates the meaning of an enigmatic verse of the *Bhagavatī Ārādhana*, the last *pāda* of it being: *kiṃ puṇa jina-utta-sutteṇaṃ-*, i.e., moreover

²³ BKK 61,27: *ādhāvantaḥ pradhāvantaḥ saṃdhāvanto mataṃ mayāḥ manda-buddhi-samāyuktāś chidre paśyata koṇikāṃ||*

²⁴ BKK 61,58: *Yamayogī pariprāpya guru-sāmīpyam ādarāt | ghoram tapaś cakāredam vividha-rddhi-samanvitaḥ||*

²⁵ VIII,81.

²⁶ *Ibid.*; and *Aupapātika-sūtra* § 24.

the sūtra told by the Jina. By this argument, the thought goes one step further. It is more rhetorical than logical. The extension proceeds not from one restricted class to a wider one, as in inductive reasoning, but by way of comparison, the ground of it being mere perceptible facts: here reciting three halves of ślokas, there quoting one Jina's sūtra. Comparison is quite qualitative between the smaller and the bigger text. It has only a psychological value: reading this verse and that story, the reader perceives, simply by means of *buddhi*, the one good way to spiritual perfection (*ārādhanā*) which goes through right faith and orthodoxy.

Now back to the dying!

Now it is easier to understand the use of murmuring tales into the ears of the dying. From the previous analysis of Yama's story, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the psychology of the *guru* and his disciple. Both of them know the danger of *nidāna*. Both of them know that there is no time left to elaborate dogmatic explanations. There is time only to come back to the very beginning of the spiritual process by which a man becomes a layman or a monk. That is, to the moment when he *chooses* between right and wrong faith, between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The choice or realisation of right faith is called *samyag-darśana*. According to the Pūjyapāda's *Tattvārthasūtra* commentary,²⁷ this vision (*darśana*) is a peculiar one, because its only aim is the path to freedom. The best translation of this mental state is not 'right belief', because belief concerns indifferently everything, but 'Glaube' (H. Jacobi) or 'faith' (P.S. Jaini)²⁸ because *Glaube* or faith means that the person feels himself personally involved in his choice of a new life. According to Pūjyapāda, the individual experiences a deep transformation of his self (*ātma-pariṇāma*). For himself, this is quite a new step. So it was for Yama, who had faith without knowledge (he was unable to recite the *Namaskāra*). So it is for the dying, who this example reminds of his own potential progress up to *mokṣa*.

From the point of view of both the *guru* and the dying, there is something more in the verse. The *a fortiori* argument (*kiṃ punaḥ*) works as a powerful means of strengthening the will of the dying. He is not in the situation of Yama, because he is learned, and has a *guru*. Hence, if Yama succeeded with very insufficient means, how much easier will it be for him, who is better equipped. This is a *consolation* in his final *agony*.

²⁷ *Sarvārthasiddhi*, New Delhi, 1991, § 10 on TS 1.2.

²⁸ Jaini 1979: 150f.

Conclusion

One example does not permit general conclusions, but most tales alluded to in the final verses of Āśādhara's Book VIII point in the same direction: reminding the dying of the predominance of faith in this particular moment. With good reason, the formula of the threefold jewel (*traya ratna*) puts faith, knowledge and behaviour on the same level. Jainism is not only a philosophical doctrine, but a religion. As such, it includes an element quite irrational: faith, which rests upon *will* and understanding, not only upon mere understanding. Faith condenses or coagulates the big dogmatic developments of knowledge, it reduces them to a simple formula (e.g., the *Pañca Namaskāra*) and public profession which involves will and a deep change of the self, as underlined by Pūjyapāda. From this point of view, Jainism may be closer to other religions, such as Islam, which have faith as their main principle. Living, in Malwa, in the 13th century, could Āśādhara have been indifferent to this fact?

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