

Ahimsa Perspective from Jain Scriptures

Saurabha Dalal

We all know Ahimsa is a timeless and far-reaching concept. It can be applied to essentially every aspect of our lives. I'd like to get started with a few excerpts from Jain texts and scriptures. I hope this will reinforce the correlation between our religious philosophy and the practice of Ahimsa in our daily lives.

Let me quote the first perspective from our first canonical (Agam) text Acharang Sootra, stanza 1.6.55. It says,

"Some kill living beings for sacrificial purposes, some kill for their skins, some kill for their flesh, some for the blood, heart, liver, fat, feathers, or teeth, some with specific reasons, some without reason, some out of fear (defense).

"He who is disinclined from killing the smallest living beings knows what suffering is because he who knows his own happiness and pains, knows others' too, and he who knows others' feelings knows his own feelings. This is the way one must compare himself with others. He who has obtained this knowledge would not wish to live at the expense of other living beings."

My next excerpt is from the Pratikraman text, Lesson 7, First Minor Vow, Non-violence:

In reference to this vow to restrain from violence towards any creature, there are five acts or deeds, which should be known and avoided. They are:

Tying animals where it could hurt them, or putting them in cages where there is no freedom,

Beating them with sticks or by any other means

Piercing their nose, ear, or amputating limbs or any part of the body

Making them carry heavy load

Depriving them of food and shelter

If I have indulged in any of the above acts, then may all my such sins be dissolved. TASSA MICHCHHAMI DUKKADAM. (I seek forgiveness for all of it.)

My last excerpt is from the Pratikraman text, Lesson 13, Seventh Vow, Number of Articles and Trades - 1st paragraph, and 15 specified trades:

The second supporting vow is to put restrictions to the amount and number of articles which can be used and re-used, and which trades should be avoided.

When will that auspicious day come in my life, when I can take this vow to restrict the number of towels, napkins, garments, tooth brushes, oils, lotions, pastes, cosmetics, ornaments, incenses, beverages, sweets, variety of grains, ghee, oil, milk, curds, green vegetables, fruits, number of

items in diet, flowers, quantity of water, etc?

I also desire that I be able to restrict the number of vehicles, footwear, beds, mattresses, animate things such as fruits with seeds, unboiled water, etc.

There are fifteen specified trades, which should be known and avoided. They are:

Trades in which furnaces are used

Trades in which trees are cut

Trades in fermented goods, such as liquor are used

Trades in earning by way of renting animals, birds, etc.

Trades involving excavations and explosions

Trades in ivory, bones, horns, fur, etc.

Trades in manufacturing or the processes concerned with crushing

Trades in lard, honey, meat, fat, etc.

Trades in sealing wax, etc.

Trades in poisonous and toxic substances, such as opium, and pesticides

Trades in which animals, birds, fish, etc. are tortured or killed

Trades in which animals, birds, etc. are amputated,

Trades in which fires are set in forests, fields, etc.

Trades in which lakes, wells, ponds, etc. are dried up

Trades in which wicked men, prostitutes, or call girls are supported.

If I have indulged in any of the above fifteen specified trades, then may all my such sins be dissolved. TASSA MICHCHAMI DUKKADAM. (I seek forgiveness for all of it.)

The Jain scriptures resound with insightful information. The ones chosen here merely indicate the body of the literature and texts. Please explore them on your own providing your thoughts and interpretations as well.