

Jain Model of Learning Process

By Anop R. Vora, Rochester, NY

Jainism has stated repeatedly that knowledge is the key to spiritual growth because it has the most impact on our thought patterns, outlook and behavior. How do we acquire such knowledge? How can we reinforce it? How can we digest and internalize? Jain sages have outlined a 5 step process in response to these questions:

- Reading scriptural texts (Vaachana)
- Questioning (Prichchhana)
- Repetition (Parivartana)
- Pondering over (Anupreksha)
- Religious Teaching (Dharma Katha)

This is a simple yet very powerful learning model. It is the most important penance called "study of Scriptures (Swaadhyaya)". Unfortunately, most of us fail miserably in using it effectively. Let us understand it, examine the reasons for our failure and discuss the corrective actions:

Reading (Vaachana)

Most of us flunk right at the first step. How many of us take the time to study religious scriptures and articles on a daily basis? Very few. Most of us spend our adult lives in dealing with the worldly affairs and allocating very little time for spiritual reading. Many of us put it off until retirement. Even in retirement, we may not develop interest in reading unless we have cultivated the habit early on. Net result: In all probability, most of us will never realize, during our life times, the value of acres of diamonds treasured in the religious scriptures.

Irrespective of our age, we need to start spending at least 30 minutes every day reading something spiritual with full understanding. This means we need to read the material in the language with which we feel most comfortable. Once we develop this habit, we will be surprised at our progress. Nothing can beat daily effort on any issue no matter how small it is.

Questioning (Prichchhana)

Once we start reading any religious material with our heart in it, we will start asking questions. The mere process of asking questions suggests interest and curiosity on the part of the reader. We need to clear up our doubts through questions before we can expect our mind to accept the material.

Repetition (Parivartana)

Most Asian religions including the Jain religion have realized the importance of repetition in acquiring knowledge. Since we tend to forget fast, the more we review learning material, the more we will retain.

Pondering over (Anupreksha)

This is probably the most critical step in learning. The equivalent words in English are "Reflect", "Ponder", "Contemplate", "Digest", "Absorb" or "Crystallize" etc. Once we read any spiritual material, we need to think and rethink before it can become a part of our inner being. Most of have a tendency to jump from one book to another, from one article to the next without letting our minds absorb and internalize what was read. Until we internalize, we should not expect our thoughts and thus behavior to alter. anupreksha plays a crucial role not only in the learning process but also in the entire spiritual growth. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved without this important step.

Religious Teaching (Dharma Katha)

Teaching is the best way of learning! If we are asked to teach, we have to learn the material first ourselves before confronting the student body. It appears this step is also designed to reinforce the learning process.

The steps described are simple yet very few of us apply them completely. That is probably the reason why most of us don't grow much internally as we go through the journey of life. Even when we find the time to read religious material, we fail to recognize that that is only the first step in learning. Unless we follow through and use all steps, we will not change much and find our selves no better off, even after many many years of life experience. Now that we are aware of the important steps of learning and our pitfalls, shouldn't we employ a different strategy to accelerate our spiritual growth?