

## Jain Path to Liberation

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The ultimate purpose of all life and activity in Jainism is to realize the free and blissful state of our true being. True philosophy should result in removing all bondages (karmas) in the process of purifying the soul.

The central theme of Jainism considers religion as a science of ethical practice. The conduct of the present life should be aimed to attain total freedom from which there is no return to the birth and death cycle. Every soul can attain liberation and supreme spiritual state by realizing its intrinsic purity and perfection.

Jainism lays down a definitive course of practical moral discipline, contemplation of the highest truth, and reorientation of life in light of these for attaining ultimate reality or truth.

The principle features of Jainism are:

- Religious tolerance
- Ethical purity
- Harmony between self and one's environment
- Spiritual contentment

Jainism prescribes a path to liberation (Moksha), consists of the following trinity (ratna-traya):

- Right perception - samyak darsana
- Right knowledge - samyak jnana
- Right conduct - samyak charitra

Right perception creates an awareness of reality or truth, right knowledge impels the person to proper action, and proper conduct leads him to the attainment of the total freedom. They must coexist in a person if one is to make any progress on the path of liberation.

### Right Perception (Samyak Darsana):

The first step in the process of self-realization is to discard superstitious beliefs and to adopt a rational attitude in life.

Right perception consists in seeing the true nature of every substances of the universe. Jainism advocates that one should first try to know, comprehend, and understand the nature of reality, one's own self, religious goal, and the path. One should analyze it, examine it, test it, verify it, and then, if satisfied, be convinced of its truth and efficacy.

From the practical point of view, perception in the nature of the reality means to have a total faith in the preachings of Tirthankars (Arihantas or Jain Gods), and their scriptures known as agams.

### Right Knowledge (Samyak Jnana):

Right perception or faith makes us realize the reality of life, and the seriousness of our purpose in life.

Right knowledge is the true, correct, proper, and relevant knowledge of the reality. To understand reality, one should know the constituent elements of universe and their relationship.

From the practical point of view, right knowledge means the proper knowledge of the six universal substances and nine principles or tattvas.

Six Universal Substances are:

Soul, matter, motion, rest, space, and time

Nine Tattvas are:

soul, matter, asrava, bandh, punya, papa, samvara, nirjara, and moksha

Philosophically, the knowledge of reality is known as the theory of non-absolutism (Anekantvada) and calls for an attitude of openness. Our limitations of knowledge dictate a style of relativity. The style of Syadvada allows no room for assertions. This Jain theory of knowledge, incorporating the two principles of non-absolutism and relativity, has made an esteemed contribution toward liberalizing the mind of human being.

Right knowledge makes us examine in detail the matter brought into the mind by right perception or conviction. Both are mental processes.

Right knowledge must be free from three main defects: doubt, delusion, and indefiniteness.

## **Right Conduct (Samyak Charitrya):**

Proper, correct, appropriate, and truly natural conduct of the living being (soul) is known as right conduct.

The main purpose for a human being is to free himself from attachment (raga) and aversion (dvesha). That is to be free from all impure activities of thought, word, and deed. This will attain the state of perfect equanimity.

For practical purposes, right conduct comprises ethical codes, rules, and disciplines, which a human being is required to pursue for the ultimate freedom.

This resolves into taking the five great vows of an ascetic or five limited vows of householder.

- Non-violence - Ahimsa
- Truth - Satya
- Non-stealing - Achaurya
- Chastity - Brahmacharya
- Non-possession/Non-attachment - Aparigraha

Right faith and right knowledge are required for right conduct, and all are interdependent.

Jains dedicate themselves to proper conduct through vows and subvows. Vows are at the heart of Jain morality and are undertaken with a full knowledge of their nature and a determination to carry them through.

The trinity is necessary for a successful life. This threefold discipline helps us realize our own intrinsic purity. The trinity must be cultivated collectively to ensure liberation. Individually, they are incomplete and

insufficient because they are mutually dependent. In isolation, perception, knowledge or conduct causes conflicts or tensions and vitiates the environment. Collectively, the three jewels produce harmony, contentment, and blissfulness with the progressive march of the soul to higher planes.

An individual, in his conduct can be guided by the examples of five benevolent personalities (panch parameshthi). They are:

- Supreme human beings - Arihants
- Pure or perfect souls - Siddhas
- Master teachers - Acharyas
- Scholarly monks - Upadhyayas
- Ascetics (monks) - Sadhus

Arihantas are human beings who have realized perfect vision, knowledge, power, and bliss. They have preached the religion principles, philosophy of life, and the path of liberation. At the end of their human life they will be totally liberated and will become siddhas.

Siddhas are souls that are completely free from karmic bondage and have attained liberation. They are bodyless and live in Moksha at the top of the universe (lokakash).

Both arihantas and siddhas are the Gods of Jain religions. At present in the absence of arihantas, ascetics (acharyas, upadhyayas, and sadhus) provide the spiritual guidance.