

Twelve Bhavna (Reflections or Thoughts)

Pravin K. Shah

Jain Study Center of North Carolina

Jain religion puts a significant emphasis on the thought process of a human being. A person's behavior and his actions are the reflection of his internal thoughts, day in and day out. It is not the action but intention behind the action results in the accumulation of Karma. Hence, one should be very careful about his thoughts, how he thinks, and the subject matter of his thought.

To make room for pure thoughts, and to drive out the evil ones, Jainism recommends to reflect or meditate the following twelve thoughts or Bhavnas.

The twelve Bhavnas described here are the subject matters of one's meditation, and how to occupy one's mind with useful, religious, beneficial, peaceful, harmless, spiritually advancing, karma preventing thoughts. They cover a wide field of teachings of Jainism. They are designed to serve as aids to spiritual progress, produce detachment, and lead the aspirants from the realm of desire to the path of renunciation. They are reflections upon the fundamental facts of life, intended to develop purity of thought and sincerity in the practice of religion.

The reflections are also called Anuprekshas, longings, thoughts, aspirations, or Bhavnas.

1. Anitya Bhavna - Impermanence of the world
2. Asarana Bhavna - No one provides protection
3. Samsara Bhavna - No permanent relationship in universe
4. Ekatva Bhavna - Solitude of the soul
5. Anyatva Bhavna - Separateness
6. Asuci Bhavna - Impureness of the body
7. Asrava Bhavna - Influx of karma
8. Samvara Bhavna - Stoppage of influx of karma
9. Nirjara Bhavna - Shedding of karma
10. Loka Bhavna - Transitory of universe
11. Bodhi-durlabha Bhavna - Unattainability of right faith, knowledge, and conduct
12. Dharma Bhavna - Unattainability of true preceptor, scriptures, and religion

1. Anitya Bhavna - Impermanence of the world

Under this reflection, one thinks that in this world every thing such as life, youth, wealth, and property are transient or subject to alteration. Nothing in the universe is permanent, even though the whole universe is permanent or constant. Spiritual values are therefore worth striving for as soul's ultimate freedom and stability. This will help to break all worldly attachments.

2. Asarana Bhavna - No one provides protection

Under this reflection, one thinks that he is helpless against death, old age, and disease. The only way he can conquer death and disease is by destroying all his karma. The soul (person) is his own savior, and to achieve

the total freedom and enlightenment, one takes refuge to the true path of the religion and to the five benevolent personalities. They are Arihanta, Siddha, Acharya, Upadhyay and Sadhus or monks. The refuge to others is due to delusion, and must be avoided.

3. Samsara Bhavna - No permanent relationship in universe

Under this reflection, one thinks that the soul transmigrates from one life to the other and takes a birth in a human, animal, hellish, or heavenly body. The continual cycle of birth, life, and death is full of pain and miseries. He has not yet ended this cycle. There are no permanent worldly relations like father, mother, friend, and foe. It is we who establish these relations and live accordingly.

This kind of thought will help minimize or stop any attachments to other living beings, or objects. The soul must achieve ultimate freedom from it, which is liberation or Moksha.

4. Ekatva Bhavna - Solitude of the soul

Under this reflection, one thinks that the soul is solitaire, and lonely in existence. The soul assumes birth alone, and departs alone from this world. The soul is responsible for its own actions and karmas. The soul will enjoy the fruits, and suffer the bad consequences of its own action alone. Such thoughts will stimulate his efforts to get rid of karmas by his own initiative and will lead religious life.

5. Anyatva Bhavna - Separateness

Under this reflection, one thinks that one's own soul is separate from any other objects or living beings of the world. Even his physical body is also not his. At the time of death, soul leaves the body behind. The body is matter, while the soul is all consciousness.

The soul therefore should not develop attachment for worldly objects, other living beings, or to his physical body. He should not allow himself to be controlled by desires, greed, and urges of his own physical body.

6. Asuci Bhavna - Impureness of the body

Under this reflection, one thinks about the constituent element of one's body. It is made of impure things like blood, bones, flesh, etc. It also generates impure things like perspiration, urine, and stool.

The soul, which resides within the body, remains unattached to the body. The soul is alone, pure, and liberated. The body ultimately becomes nonexistent, but the soul is eternal.

Therefore emotional attachments to the body is useless.

7. Asrava Bhavna - Influx of karma

Under this reflection, one thinks about karma streaming into the soul. Every time he enjoys or suffers through his five senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing), he accumulates more karma. This thought will make him more careful, and will try to stop the influx of karmas.

8. Samvara Bhavna - Stoppage of influx of karma

Under this reflection, one thinks about stopping evil thoughts, and becomes absorbed in achieving spiritual

knowledge and meditation. This prevents the influx of karma.

9. Nirjara Bhavna - Shedding of karma

Under this reflection, one thinks about the evil consequences of karma, and striving to destroy the previously acquired karma by austerity and meditation.

10. Loka Bhavna - Transitory of universe

Under this reflection, one thinks about the real nature of this universe. Judging from the standpoint of substance, it is eternal but from the standpoint of modification it is transitory.

Thus all objects of the world come into existence and perish. This thought makes him understand the true nature of reality, which is necessary for right knowledge and faith.

11. Bodhi-durlabha Bhavna - Unattainability of right faith, knowledge, and conduct

Under this reflection, one thinks that it is very difficult for the transmigrating soul to acquire right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct in this world. Therefore, when one has the opportunity to be a religious person, take the advantage of it to develop right religious talent. This thought will strengthen one's effort to attain right faith and knowledge, and live accordingly.

12. Dharma Bhavna - Unattainability of true preceptor, scriptures, and religion

Under this reflection, one thinks that the true preceptor (teacher), religious scriptures, and religion are excellent shelters in this world full of agony. All other things lead to misery and suffering.

Four Bhavnas or Virtues

Besides the twelve Bhavnas described above Jainism has laid great importance on the following four Bhavnas or virtues.

- Amity, love, and friendship - Maitri
- Appreciation, respect and joy - Pramoda
- Compassion - Karuna
- Equanimity and tolerance- Madhyastha