

Nine Tattvas (Principles)

Pravin K. Shah

Jain Study Center of North Carolina

The nine tattvas, or principles, are the single most important subject of Jain philosophy. It deals with the karma theory of Jainism, which provides the basis for the path of liberation. Without the proper knowledge of this subject, a person can not progress spiritually. The proper understanding of this subject brings about right faith (samyak-darshana), right knowledge (samyak-jnana), and right conduct in an individual.

Nine Tattvas (Principles):

1. Jiva - soul or living being (Consciousness)
2. Ajiva - non-living substances
3. Asrava - cause of the influx of karma
4. Bandha - bondage of karma
5. Punya* - virtue
6. Papa* - sin
7. Samvara - arrest of the influx of karma
8. Nirjara - exhaustion of the accumulated karma
9. Moksha - total liberation from karma

* Punya and Papa are the diverse results of Asrava and Bandh. Some exponents of Jains do not treat them as separate tattvas. According to them, there are only seven principles instead of nine.

1. Jiva (soul) Substance:

Jiva or Soul is the only substance, which in pure state possesses infinite knowledge, vision, power, and bliss. The pure soul is a liberated soul. The worldly soul is covered by karma particles. The karma subdues the natural qualities of the soul. The qualities of the impure soul are as follows:

- Limited Knowledge, Vision, Power, and Bliss
- Possesses a body (plants, hellish, animal, human, or angel)
- Wanders into the cycle of life and death
- Suffers from birth, death, pain, and pleasure

The ultimate goal of human life is to remove all karma particles, which are attached to the soul. Then the soul will become pure and liberated.

2. Ajiva (Non-living) Substances:

Except soul, everything else in the entire universe is non-living substance. The non-living substances are classified into five categories.

- Matter - Pudgal

- Space - Aakas
- Medium of motion - Dharmastikay
- Medium of rest - Adharmastikay
- Time - Kaal or Samay

Out of five categories, only matter substance possesses body, color, and senses. Karma is one of the categories of matter. It is known as karmic matter (karma pudgala). Karma particles are of very fine matter not perceptible to the senses. The entire universe is filled with such karmic matter.

Every living being is covered by karmic matter from the beginning of time. It is the karmic matter that keeps the soul away from realization of its true nature. It is due to karma one feels pleasure and pain, reincarnates in the different form of life, acquires certain types of physical body, and the duration of life.

3. Asrava (Cause of the influx of karma):

Asrava is the cause, which leads to the influx of good and evil karma which lead to the bondage of the soul.

Asrava may be described as attraction in the soul toward sense objects. The following are causes of Asrava or influx of good and evil karma:

- Mithyatva - ignorance
- Avirati - lack of self restraint
- Pramada* - unawareness or unmindfulness
- Kasaya - passions like anger, conceit, deceit, and lust
- Yoga - activities of mind, speech, and body

* Some Jain literatures mention only four causes of Asrava. They include Pramad in the category of Kasaya.

4. Bandha (Bondage of karma):

Bandha is the attachment of karmic matter (karma pudgala) to the soul. The soul has had this karmic matter bondage from eternity because of its own ignorance. This karmic body is known as the karmana body or causal body or karma.

Karmic matter is a particular type of matter which is attracted to the soul because of soul's ignorance, lack of self restraint, passions, unmindfulness, activities of body, mind, and speech.

The soul, which is covered by karmic matter, continues acquiring new karma from the universe and exhausting old karma into the universe through the above mentioned actions at every moment.

Because of this continual process of acquiring and exhausting karma particles, the soul has to pass through the cycles of births and deaths, and experiencing pleasure and pain. So under normal circumstances the soul can not attain freedom from karma, and hence liberation.

When karma attaches to the soul, its bondage to the soul is explained in the following four forms:

- Prakriti bandha - Type of karma
- Sthiti bandha - Duration of attachment of karma
- Anubhava bandha - Intensity of attachment of karma
- Pradesa bandha - Quantity of karma

Prakriti Bandha:

When karmic matter attaches to the soul, it will obscure soul's essential nature of; perfect knowledge, perfect vision, bliss, perfect power, eternal existence, non-corporeal, and equanimity. The different types of karma obscures different quality or attributes of soul. This is known as Prakriti bandha.

Prakriti bandha is classified into eight categories, according to the particular attribute of the soul that it obscures.

1. **Mohniya karma**

It generates delusion in the soul in regard to its own true nature. The soul identifies itself with other external substances and relationships.

2. **Jnana-varaniya karma**

It covers the soul's power of perfect knowledge.

3. **Darasna-varaniya karma**

It covers the soul's power of perfect visions.

4. **Antaraya karma**

It obstructs the natural quality or energy of the soul such as charity and will power. This prevents the soul from attaining liberation. It also prevents a living being from doing something good and enjoyable.

5. **Vedniya karma**

It obscures the blissful nature of the soul, and thereby produces pleasure and pain.

6. **Nama karma**

It obscures the non-corporeal existence of the soul, and produces the body with its limitations, qualities, faculties, etc.

7. **Gotra karma**

It obscures the soul's characteristics of equanimity, and determines the caste, family, social standing, and personality.

8. **Ayu karma**

It determines the span of life in one birth, thus obscuring soul's nature of eternal existence.

Ghati karma and Aghati karmas:

The above eight karmas are also categorized into two groups, known as ghati karma which subdues the qualities of the soul, and aghati karma which relates to physical body of the living beings.

Ghati Karmas

Jnana-varaniya, Darasna-varaniya, Mohaniya, and Antaraya karmas are called ghati karmas (dangerous karmas) because they obscure the true nature of the soul, which is, perfect knowledge, power, vision and bliss.

Aghati Karmas

Ayu, Nama, Gotra, and Vedniya karmas are called aghati karmas. They do not obscure the original nature of the soul. However, they associate with the physical body of the soul.

When a person destroys all of his ghati karmas, he attains keval-jnana. At that time he is known as Arihant or Tirthankar. However, he continues to live his human life until all his aghati karmas are destroyed. He attains liberation only after his death, at which time all of his aghati karmas are destroyed.

Some Arihants establish the religious four fold order of Monks, Nuns, Sravaka, (male layperson), and Sravika (female layperson). These Arihants are called Tirthankaras. Other Arihantas who do not establish religious order but remain as a part of the existing order are known as ordinary Kevali. After nirvana (death) Arihantas become Siddhas.

All Siddhas are unique individuals, but they all possess perfect knowledge, vision, power, and bliss. Hence from the qualities and attributes point of view all Siddhas are same.

Sthiti Bandha

When karmic matter attaches to the soul it remains attached to the soul for a certain duration before it produces the result. The duration of the attachment is determined according to the intensity or dullness of the soul's passions or actions when the karma is being attached to the soul. After producing the result, karma will separate from the soul.

Anubhava Bandha or Rasa Bandha

What fruits the karmic matter will produce are determined at the time of attachment by varying degrees of soul's passions.

Pradesa Bandha

The intensity or dullness of the soul's action determines the quantum of karmic matter that is drawn towards the soul for attachment.

5. Punya (Virtue)

The influx of karmic matter due to good activities of the mind, body, and speech with the potential of producing pleasant sensations is called punya or virtue. Activities such as offering food, drink, shelter, purifying thought, physical and mental happiness result in producing punya karma.

6. Pap (Sin)

The influx of karmic matter due to evil activities of the mind, body, and speech with the potential of producing unpleasant sensations is called papa or sin. Activities such as violence, untruth, theft, unchastity, attachment to objects, anger, conceit, deceit, lust result in producing papa karma.

7. Samvara - Arrest of Karma

The method that stops fresh karma from attaching into the soul is called samvara. This process is a reverse process of asrava. It can be accomplished by constant practice of:

- Right belief
- Observance of vows
- Awareness
- Passionlessness
- Peacefulness of vibratory activities

Jain literature explains 57 practical ways, a person can stop the influx of karma.

- 5 Samitis Carefulness
- 3 Guptis Preservation
- 10 Yati Dharma Religious Virtues
- 12 Bhavna Reflections or Thoughts
- 22 Parishaha Subduing of Suffering
- 5 Charitra Conduct

57 Total

Five Samitis (Carefulness):

- Samitis purify the actions
 - Irya Samiti Proper care in walking
 - Bhasha Samiti Proper care in speaking
 - Eshna Samiti Proper care in begging
 - Adana Nikshepa Samiti Proper care in taking and keeping
- Utsarga Samiti Proper care in disposing waste
- Three Guptis (Preservations)
- Guptis prohibits sinful activities
 - Mano Gupti Proper control over Mind
 - Vachan Gupti Proper control over Speech
 - Kaya Gupti Proper control over Body

Ten Religious Virtues

- Kshama Forbearance, Forgiveness
- Mardava Modesty, Humility
- Aarjava Straightforwardness, Candor
- Saucha Contentment
- Satya Truthfulness
- Samyam Self-restraint, Control of Senses
- Tapa Austerity, Penance
- Tyaga Renunciation
- Akinchanya Non-attachment
- Brahmacharya Celibacy, Chastity

Twelve Reflections (Thoughts, Bhavna, or Anupreksha):

- Anitya Bhavna: Impermanence of the world
- Asarana Bhavna: No one provides protection
- Samsara Bhavna: No permanent relationships in the universe
- Ekatva Bhavna: Solitude of the soul
- Anyatva Bhavna: Separateness
- Asuci Bhavna: Impurity of the body
- Asrava Bhavna: Influx of karma
- Samvara Bhavna: Stoppage of influx of karma
- Nirjara Bhavna: Shedding of karma
- Loka Bhavna: Transitoriness of the universe
- Bodhi-durlabha Bhavna: Unattainability of the right faith, knowledge, and conduct
- Dharma Bhavna: Unattainability of true preceptor, scriptures, and religion

Reflections on Universal Friendship (additional reflections):

- Maitri Amity
- Pramoda Appreciation
- Karuna Compassion
- Madhyastha Equanimity

8. Nirjara - exhaustion of the attached karma

The attached karma exhaust themselves by producing their results when it is time for them to do so. At that time new karma attach to the soul.

Unless the attached karma are exhausted before they start producing the results, it becomes difficult for the soul to be free.

Therefore, it is necessary to exhaust all karmas before their maturity. This is done by rigorous austerities and penance. This process is called nirjara.

There are twelve types of nirjara defined in the Jain scriptures. They are divided into two groups; external nirjara which disciplines the human body against passions and desires and internal nirjara which purifies the soul. The internal nirjara is the true austerities because it exhausts the attached karma before their maturity from the soul.

External Nirjara:

- Anasan
Complete abstinence of eating any food and drinking liquid for certain time
- Alpahara or Unodary
Reduction in the quantity of food one normally eats
- Ichhanirodha or Vritti_sankshep
Limiting the number of food items to eat and material things for use
- Rasatyaga
- Complete abstinence of eating or drinking juicy and tasty foods such as honey, alcohol, butter, milk, tea, sweets, juice etc. (no attachments to the taste of the foods)
- Kayaklesa
Live and travel on a bare foot in a severe heat and cold whether condition. Remove hair with the hand.
- Samlinata
Sitting in a lonely place in due postures with senses and mind withdrawn inwardly.

Internal Nirjara:

- Prayaschita
- Repentance for the breach of vows for spiritual purification
- Vinaya
- Politeness (appropriate behavior) towards teachers and elders
- Vaiyavrata
- Rendering selfless service to the suffering and deserving
- Svadhyaya
- Studying and listening of religious scriptures
- Dhyana

- Religious meditation
- Kayotsarg or Bhutsarga

The ultimate internal austerity, where the activities of body, speech and mind are withdrawn. The body is fixed without movement, the speech is fixed by means of silence, and the mind is fixed by means of sublime meditation. This nirjara destroys all karmas.

9. Moksha:

Moksha is the liberation of the soul after complete exhaustion or elimination of all karmas.

A liberated soul regains totally its original attributes of perfect knowledge, vision, power, and bliss. It climbs to the top of Lokakas and remains there forever in its blissful and unconditional existence.

It never returns again into the cycles of birth, life, and death.

This state of the soul is the liberated or perfect state, and this is called "Nirvana."