

*On Life and Liberation*  
*Essays on Jain Practices and Philosophy*

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## PREFACE

These essays evolved as an attempt to understand the practices and philosophy of Jainism. The goal of the followers of any religion is to achieve the ultimate state as defined by their religion. For example, for a Christian or a Muslim, it is to go to heaven, for a Hindu to merge with the Supreme Brahman and for a Jain to attain moksha. Each religion has its own practices and philosophy rooted in a time and place of its origin and/or development to achieve that ultimate state. However, natural process of change along with changes in language and human understanding can leave many aspects of religion incomprehensible. Then it becomes a dogma and repeated from generation to generation. Any attempt to seek new interpretation is assiduously rejected in the name of the authority of the scriptures. These articles take a fresh look at old concepts from a non-traditional point of view. They were written to help me understand some of these practices and philosophical points. Slightly different versions of two of these articles also appeared in the *Jain Digest*, a publication of Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA).

I would like to thank the members of Jain Study Center of North Carolina, Raleigh NC for rekindling my interest in Jainism and providing a forum for interesting discussions. In particular, to Dr. Sampat Jain and Mr. Pravinbhai Shah for many discussions in last four years over various aspects of Jainism, and Mrs. Sumitra Jain for setting an example by practice of varshitap that led to the writing of the first article on upvaas.

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# *The Meaning of Upvaas*





## *The meaning of Upvaas<sup>1</sup>*

Jainism puts a great deal of emphasis on tapascharya (penance) to overcome karma in order to attain Moksha (liberation). Jain scriptures describe 12 types of tapascharyas; six external and six internal. The six external tapascharyas are upvaas, unodari, vrittisamkshepa, rasaparityaga, samlinata, and kayaklesa; six internal tapascharyas are prayascita, vinaya, vaiyavrita, swadhyaya, dhyana and kayotsarga. Upvaas is the first external tapa and is understood as abstaining from food for a specified period of time. It is a very common method of penance in Jain religion. It is considered as one of the most important method to cleanse the body. However, if we look at the word *upvaas* etymologically, there is no relation between the word and its common connotation of fasting. Then what does the word upvaas means? To understand it, let's first look at the word etymological. The word upvaas is made of two parts: *up* and *vaas*. *Up* means higher or upwards and *vaas* means to stay or live, i.e., *upvaas* means to stay upward or stay at a higher level. To fully understand the real meaning and importance of upvaas, we need to understand what is meant by living or staying upward? To fully understand its true meaning, we need to understand upvaas at various levels, i.e., at physical, sensual and mental levels, keeping in mind that the purpose of all tapascharya is to lead to the realization that body and soul are separate.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article appeared in *Jain Digest*, Spring 2005

The physical level of upvaas is most easily understood. It means fasting, i.e., abstaining from taking food. Every time we take food, the bodily machinery is activated to digest the food, extract the juices useful for the functioning of the body and discard the rest. Each full meal takes nearly four hours to process completely. Thus, three meals per day keeps the body machinery engaged for nearly 12 hours. It is suggested that one should not meditate within 2-3 hours of taking a heavy meal because the body is heavy and mind is body centered. We also know that mental tendencies are strongly affected by the quality of food we take. Pure and wholesome food generates satvic (calm and quiet) quality of the mind, hot and spicy food generates the rajasic (restlessness) quality and, overcooked, old and rotten food generates the tamasic (dullness) quality of the mind. As long as qualities are present, one needs to reduce the rajasic and tamasic qualities and increase satvic qualities. However, one has to go beyond all three qualities to fully comprehend the nature of the soul because the soul is beyond all the qualities. When one does upvaas, the intake of food is absent and we reduce all three qualities in ourselves. Thus, by doing fast, the bodily vibrations and influence of three qualities are reduced and body becomes calm. This is an important first step in progressing toward our spiritual upliftment, especially when the mind is still untrained, intimately connected with the body and senses are in control of our lives.

As the physical upvaas is going on, one should direct attention towards the sensual level. We have five sense faculties of seeing, hearing, smelling, touch and speaking. The next level of upvaas requires control and regulation of these five faculties. They all have powerful influence on our mind. If we hear gossip all the time, our thoughts would naturally follow them. If we see some pleasing object, our mind starts to dwell on it. Upvaas of these faculties means not engaging them in objects for mere

sense gratification. In our daily lives, while it is not possible to shut ourselves from the rest of the world, we can certainly reduce interactions. That means dwelling on things no longer than necessary. If we hear something, we should immediately evaluate whether it is worth remembering and if it's not then discard it right away. The longer a thought, an idea or an image remains in the mind, greater is its chance of remaining with us for a long time, whether it has any value or not. Immediate resolve is the best option. Of course, it is easier said than done. If we hear words in our praise, we tend to linger around in the hope that there may be more. On the other hand, if we hear criticism of our behavior, we either speak to defend ourselves or walk-off angrily and complain later. In both the cases, there is no sensual upvaas; we are feeding our senses.

In the common connotation of upvaas (i.e., fast), when we do upvaas we deny ourselves of food. If we take this a step further, we may set boundaries on or deny ourselves other physical objects such as clothes, car, house, property etc. However, at all these stages the connotation remains negative, we are denying ourselves something. To go any further, we need to change the connotation of the upvaas from negative to positive. That is what going upwards or staying upwards means. Then upvaas will have a positive and uplifting effect. Under that condition and when we understand the true meaning of upvaas our progress would be much faster. For example, take the case of aparigraha. Aparigraha is also an upvaas. By setting limits on our possessions or setting limits on our movement we are fasting, we are denying ourselves the things that we would otherwise be making use of. However, it is one thing to set boundaries on what we possess, it is another to set limits on our desires. Putting limits on desires is more important because if desires for objects are not there, one would not spend time and effort to acquire them. When desires are strong, one may lie,

steal or use violence to fulfill them but when desires and wants are under control, there would be less of the tendency to lie, steal or use violence. So, all the vratas of Jainism would automatically to some extent manifest in our daily lives without any additional efforts. One should, though, keep in mind that wants and desires need not be merely for material objects. They include desire for name and fame, respect, prestige, power etc. It could be desire of any kind. While putting a limit on the desires and needs is helpful, it is done in a negative sense and leads to suppression of desires, not the separation and freedom from desires. The upvaas in the positive sense is to be free of desires; to transcend the wants and desires. The physical and sensual fast begins the process of developing an understanding of separation between body and soul; however, this process cannot be completed till we go to the next level.

So the body is quiet and still and the senses are under some control, what do we do next? Is the upvaas complete? No, the mind is still free to roam and restless. The food of mind is thoughts; thoughts of passions and possessions. To keep mind still and calm, we have to stop feeding the mind with all sorts of thoughts. This is harder than the other two aspects of upvaas. While one can deny one food for a day or even weeks and may close eyes, ears and mouth for a few hours to prevent them from engaging in unnecessary activities and stay within prescribed physical boundaries of space, possessions and wealth, it is not easy to keep the mind free of thoughts even for a moment. While the physical and sensual upvaas can be attained independently, the mental upvaas cannot be achieved by first attaining some mastery over the other two. To attain mental upvaas, one has to learn to control the flow and direction of thoughts. At the beginning of the mental upvaas, one must mentally start disengaging oneself from the material world. Just as body is not fed the material food, the mind not be fed the

mental food. For this, one does not need to go to forest or lock one-self up in a room but one needs to reduce the actions and attachments of all sorts. Even if one has to perform actions, they should be performed with total detachment to the resulting fruits of the actions, following the principles outlined in Bhagavad Gita. An action so performed will not leave any impression on the mind and, therefore, will not bind any karma. While it is important to be aware of our actions and underlying motives and intentions at all times, it is even more so on the day of upvaas. If the motives are not pure, the effectiveness of upvaas will be reduced towards progress of the soul to realize its true self.

Once, one has attained some mastery over physical and sensual faculties, one can embark on the mental upvaas. Once the flow of thoughts is first controlled and then slowly stopped, the contemplation on the soul can begin. Contemplation on the soul is not a forced process like reading a book or working on a research problem where one is consciously thinking about it. Contemplation on the soul is possible only when the question about the nature of soul, its functions and its relationship with the material world arise naturally as one slowly detaches from the material world. One can consciously force the mind to think about all these questions but that would not lead to real understanding because these questions then would be answered by the mind that is still bound to the world, and therefore, the answers would be colored by the state of mind. The real answers are obtained when the question arises naturally and the answer is arrived at intuitively. That state can arise when the mind is free from all thoughts and in its purest state. When the mental upvaas is complete one is able to comprehend the meaning of such questions. It is easy to understand why our tirthankaras and other kevalis undertook such long upvaas before they attained the Keval-jnana. The purpose of their long

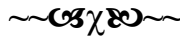
upvaas was not to mortify the body but conquer the mind. Once the mind is reigned in, the lower forms of upvaas do not make any difference. Whether they ate or not did not make any difference because the purpose of the physical upvaas had been served. What we have observed is only their physical upvaas in terms of how long they did not take the food but we also have to understand that during this process they developed tight leash on their senses. We have no way of observing their mental upvaas but their achievements should be enough to convince us that their mental upvaas was of the highest quality. It is important to realize that physical upvaas is only the first step, though a very important one.

Once the body is quiet and the mind is calm, the mind can engage in the contemplation on the soul. A person is ready to ask the necessary questions such as what is the nature of the soul, why I am here, how I came to be here, the nature of the material world, its relation with the soul, etc? Here, the real upvaas has begun. The mind is detached from the lower material world, turned upward; it is residing in the higher consciousness and ready to comprehend the true nature of the soul. The knowledge and insight gained during such time is the real knowledge. While the physical upvaas may last for a day, a few days or even longer, the real upvaas will only be observed when the mind is contemplating on the soul, however, brief that period may be. While the physical upvaas is evolutionary, the mental upvaas is revolutionary. It leads to a revolutionary change in the state of mind. Ordinarily, the mind is too restless and attached to physical objects and, thus, unable to comprehend subtle principles. However, the mental upvaas removes these attachments, frees the mind of its self-set boundaries and sets oneself up on the path to realize true potentialities of the soul. Now the mind is staying upwards, in the state where questions of mundane life have become

irrelevant. Mind is keen and able to explore the mysteries of the soul, comprehend its nature and its relation with this world. At this point, our very existence is questioned. These very fundamental and essential questions can be asked in earnest and their true nature can be understood only when mind is free of thoughts and in its purest state. The mind must go beyond its current boundaries to develop the capabilities to comprehend the nature of the soul and, eventually, this revolutionary process will lead to the ultimate demise of the mind itself when Keval-jnana is attained.

Thus, when upvaas is performed in its proper spirit at physical, sensual and mental levels, it has all the ingredients that can lead one to the final destination of the human life. Upvaas, as long as it remains at mundane level, encourages us to set boundaries on our conduct; however, once we lift ourselves up and stay there, it removes all boundaries and brings us face to face with our true self.

ना देह को दूषित करो  
इन इन्द्रियों को समेट लो  
मन की मादकता छोड़ कर  
मन मुक्तिपथ से जोड़ दो







*The Time of Liberation*



## ***The Time of Liberation<sup>2</sup>***

In Jain literature, it is stated that a soul can attain liberation only during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ara (sub-period) of any half time cycle. In other four aras, a soul can prepare but cannot attain liberation. It is implicitly assumed here that the concept of a single time be applied to all souls in a linear, universal and absolute fashion. Jains also assert that there is no Supreme God. A soul attains the liberation purely by its self-efforts by working out its karma and there is no external agency that can prevent it. This raises a serious question: if a soul has exhausted/worked out all its karmas, let's say in the 5<sup>th</sup> ara in the Bharat-kshetra, then why is it not allowed to attain Moksha and, more importantly, who prevents it? This seems to put at odds the concepts of self-effort (purushartha) and a single absolute time. Both of them cannot be true simultaneously. One way to resolve this apparent contradiction is by understanding time from a slightly different point of view.

Time denotes change or movement either on a physical or mental level. If the world were to freeze at this very moment in its every aspect, time would lose its meaning. For a liberated soul (siddha), there is no time in the ordinary sense because there is no change in its state. While we are experiencing the passage of time in terms of flow of thoughts or motion of objects, the siddhas do not experience the passage of time in the same sense since they are in a state that experiences no change, i.e., a siddha soul is a perfect soul. Therefore, the time that we

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<sup>2</sup> An earlier version of this article appeared in *Jain Digest*, Winter 2006

experience is different than the time a liberated soul experiences even at this very moment. That means there is more than one kind of time.

Till the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the western culture, time was considered a single, absolute and linear quantity. However, we have already come to accept that the flow of time is not absolute but relative, as described by Einstein's theory of relativity. This, of course, relates to the external time that applies to everyone uniformly and can be measured by external means such as motion of stars and planets or atomic vibrations. The external time can be made to change differently for different persons if they travel with different speeds. Though, at this point, we do not have the technology to achieve such speeds that can make a perceptible difference in human life time, its possibility in future cannot be denied. Modern science has also identified biological and psychological times that are different for different individuals. On the other hand, in Indian thoughts, time has always been considered as relative and nonlinear (e.g., see Yoga Vasistha). A very good example to explain this aspect of time is the dream state. In a dream lasting a few minutes, a person can have a lifetime of experiences. How much time has really passed for him? From the point of view of physical aging, he is only a few minutes older but from the point of view of change in his understanding, he has gained the experience of a lifetime. Furthermore, if we have a particularly painful or joyous experience, we tend to relive it over-and-over. The number of repetitions and their intensities depends upon the intensity of the original experience. Even though the incident that caused the experience physically occurred only once, mentally we revisit it many times and may even experience the physical symptoms of it from time to time before it completely vanishes from our consciousness; i.e., we relive the same time again-and again. For example, those who go through a

horrifying experience can still feel the goose bumps just thinking about it as they experienced at the time of actual occurrence of the act. If the time can be equated to a straight thread in the western thought then in the Indian thought it is like a thread with curves and loops. For each jiva we can define two different time: at the physical level an external/universal time and at the mental level an internal/personal time. The internal time relates to the state of mind of the jiva and we may say that fluctuation in the state of mind of a jiva is its internal time. The more a mind is agitated and restless, the slower the jiva is evolving towards liberation. So, if the mind can be made to evolve at a rate that is different than the passage of external time, then one can evolve at a rate slower or faster than the external time. In this context, the external time can be defined as the collective fluctuations in the minds of all jivas in the universe. As long as there is even one jiva experiencing these fluctuations, the external time will exist.

In general, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> aras may correspond to an external time when a critical mass of people, conditions and/or ideas come together to make liberation more probable. Even on the material level, this is true. Industrial revolution of 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and the recent information technology revolution are just two examples of such events. However, the following example may be more illustrative of our dilemma. Traditionally, mangoes have been available only during the months of May-June. If a thousand years ago someone in India said that mangoes are available only in the months of May-June, then before coming to any broader conclusions we have to keep in mind that it was said within certain context. First, we need to remember that it was said in the context of India where May and June are the months of summer that is harvesting season for mangoes. If we go to Australia, that is the time of winter there and we will not get a harvest of mangoes there. Second, it must

have proper soil. Mango trees do not grow in every type of soil. If the soil contains a lot of sand then mangoes cannot grow there either even if it is summer months of May-June. Third, it takes a few years after planting the seeds and giving proper care to the plant that one can obtain the fruits. That means trees that are only a year or two old will not bear fruits. Similarly, one can list all other requirements. However, with the advent of technology, now-a-days mangos are available throughout the year. In future, we may be able to grow mango throughout the year and even in cold climates if, e.g., we can build big enough greenhouses. We may, probably, be able to build only a few greenhouses big enough to grow mangoes in cold climates but the possibility cannot be completely excluded. We already get mangoes that are grown in Mexico and other South American countries. It means, with proper resources and efforts, it is possible to create appropriate conditions to grow mangoes even where those conditions did not exist previously.

Therefore, to attain liberation one needs the right kind of conditions, efforts and resources. For this purpose, all the necessary resources exist within one-self; however, efforts are needed to prepare the conditions and use them in a proper fashion. It is not necessary for a person to wait to bring about a revolution in his life until the society as a whole has evolved to a similar level. A person may hasten his own evolution by various means such as prayer, worship, charity, fasting, meditation etc. In that case, he can progress faster than the universal time, i.e., the rest of the world, and arrive at his own liberation at anytime. Whether he is born in the 1<sup>st</sup> ara or 6<sup>th</sup> ara of the external time, by his own effort, he can be in his personal 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> ara and thus attain liberation. It does not depend so much what the universal time is but the qualities that are characteristic of these aras that make it possible for people to attain liberation. It's not easy in any period to attain Moksha.

The amount of effort needed will depend upon the current state of the jiva. The necessary qualities by themselves are always present but a person has to uncover and expand them. For example, the capacity for affection is ever present in all jiva but how and where one allows it to be manifested depends on the individual. Even a very cruel person is filled with affection for his own child though he may fail to extend that same feeling to another child. On the other hand, a saint extends his sense of affection to all equally. No quality that is needed for liberation can be destroyed or created. Perfection and purity are intrinsic qualities of a soul. These qualities are only temporarily hidden until a jiva is ready to uncover them either by the process of natural evolution or by its concerted efforts. Even in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ara not everyone attained liberation because even though the conditions were right, not all of them put the necessary efforts or had the opportunity to do so due to being at various stages in their eternal journey.

In this respect, even the names of various aras are also very instructive. The first two aras, sukham-sukham and sukham, are period of only pleasure and happiness. When a jiva is enjoying life, the thoughts of Moksha are usually far from the mind. Such unalloyed and long lasting joy can generally be had only in heaven. Therefore, these two time periods may also correspond to a jiva's stay in various heavens. Similarly, during the last two aras of dukham and dukham-dukham, a jiva is full of sorrow and hardship and mostly dealing with immediate needs. Such extreme conditions of prolonged suffering generally exist only in various hells. At that time again, the thoughts of Moksha are far from the mind. When the jiva is going through a life where happiness and sorrow come like a wave (the middle two aras of sukham-dukham and dukham-sukham, a general state of jiva in human and tiriyanca life forms), the jiva is beset by conflicting thoughts. He is perplexed

by the constantly changing circumstances of life and unable to find reasons for such changes in its immediate environment and actions, starts wondering about the purpose of life. These explorations begin when we are unable to explain the circumstances of our lives by simplistic arguments and immediate events. At this point, we are forced to distance ourselves a little bit from our circumstance and that is when the questions about life and death, and reason for such events arise. During a human life, almost every individual whether an ordinary human or a Mahavir or Buddha goes through these periods of happiness and sorrow; however, each person goes through these periods at different times. Even if two persons have exactly the same material conditions, their mental attitude may be quite different. For example, two persons win a lottery and share the prize equally. First person is happy that he has won a good sum of money. However, the other person is unhappy that he did not win the whole prize and had to share the prize with another person. The same external condition did not produce the same effect on two different persons, i.e., they are at different personal time even though being at the same external time. Therefore, while the universal time cycle, in general, is applicable to the entire universe as a whole, a similar individual cycle applies to each jiva. The individual cycle may or may not match with the universal cycle.

Another question that needs answer here is, if liberation were to be attained only in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ara of the universal time then who sits at the gates of Moksha to prevent the entry of a perfect and completely purified soul in the siddhaloka? If the passage of time were to be so absolute and if the Moksha can be attained only during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ara, then there has to be some entity which keeps track of the passage of time and allows a soul to enter Moksha during that period only and keeps the gates closed at all other times even if a qualified soul reaches its

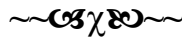


gates. If it is by design that one can attain Moksha only during a certain period of universal time, then there has to be a designer who works beyond the confines of self-effort, a concept that certainly is anathematic to the very principles of Jainism. In Jainism, we believe that liberation is attained purely by self-effort; there is no Supreme Lord and his grace to hasten the entry of a soul in the Moksha or his displeasure to prevent it. We may assign this role to universal time itself, but it is an ajiva and, therefore, cannot initiate an action without the help of a jiva. Even if it could, then external time itself will become the external controlling authority that can influence the process of liberation of a jiva and, thus, undermine the supremacy of the self-effort. It is like going from here to New York. One can reach there by plane, car, train, foot or any other means. Each journey will take different amount of time but when you reach New York, it is there and there is no one to stop you from entering the city. All one needs to get there is the will and the necessary resources and effort. One may, of course, decide not to take a direct route but follow a more scenic but convoluted path. In that case, he may arrive in New York at still another time yet enter the city at will. The time of arrival just depends upon the mode of transportation and the path chosen. The only way a person would not be able to enter the city is if some external authority decides to forbid the person's entry into the city.

Therefore, the concept of absolute and single time for everyone with the availability of the Moksha only during a certain period, and the idea that liberation is attained purely by self-efforts (purushartha) are contrary to each other. One way to reconcile this apparent contradiction is to realize that time is not absolute and single but relative and plural. Each individual is subjected to two different times, one is external and the other is internal. He can follow his own time and progress at his own

pace with his own time or he can follow the universal time and progress with the rest of the world. For liberation, we need certain qualities that one may uncover at any time irrespective of universal time. When those qualities are fully uncovered in a person, that is the right time for him to try to attain liberation, he has reached his personal 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> ara and can proceed with utmost efforts to succeed. The external/universal time governs our day-to-day life in our interaction with the rest of the world. We do not have any control over the passage of external time and it is the same for all. The internal/personal time can move faster, slower or at pace with the external time with one fundamental difference that we have the ability to control its passage if we can learn how to do it and put in the necessary efforts. Attaining Moksha is not an easy task by any means at any time; however, it is not forbidden either at any time.

समय-समय के फेर में  
क्यों करते हो देर  
जब मुक्ति की प्यास उमड़ती  
वही समय है श्रेष्ठ



## *The Six Substances*



## *The Six Substances*

In Jain scriptures, six substances (dravya) have been defined that pervade the whole universe. They are jiva (soul), ajiva, dharma, adharma, akash (space) and kal (time). Space is further subdivided in to two parts: lok-akash and alok-akash. Alok-akash is infinite and empty and there is no jiva, ajiva, dharma, adharma or kal there. These exist only in lok-akash. The shape of the lok-akash is that of a human being standing akimbo. The lower part of the lok-akash is occupied by various hells and the upper part by the various heavens with the top most section being the siddhaloka, the abode of the siddhas. It is the goal of every jiva to ascend to the siddhaloka from where there is no return to the lower worlds of heavens and hells. This is the description of the world as described in jain scriptures. It is interpreted as the outer world where the humans and tiryanchas reside in the madhya-lok, the infernal beings and some demi-gods in various hells and various devas in different heavens. A jiva can go from one loka to another only by first fulfilling all the four aghatiya karma of the current birth while the ghatiya karma go along with the soul. Ajiva forms the body of the jiva in different worlds. Dharma is the medium of motion and adharma is the medium of rest. Kal is that which distinguishes between the motion and the rest and effects changes. Space allows the jiva and ajiva to take various shapes and sizes, and where they can either move or rest. An example of dharma and adharma is given as follows: when a person is walking in heat in the mid-day sun, he tends to walk faster and so the heat of the sun is the medium of motion, i.e., dharma. When the same person sees the cool shade of a tree, he stops

underneath to take rest, so tree becomes the medium of rest and, thus, adharma.

At present, there is a great difference between the world as described above by the Jain cosmology and what we know from the present day science. Existence of a soul cannot be proven by the present day science; however, its existence will be accepted here. The shape of the universe and the substance of dharma and adharma are either at odds with the present day science or cannot be ascertained. Only pudgal and kal are the two substances that can be easily identified in our day-to-day life. Even time (kal) does not have an exact correspondence since from physical, psychological and biological points of view different times have been recognized by the modern science (for discussion on Time, see previous article). In this article, in keeping with the jain spirit of anekantavada, the three substances, namely akash, dharma and adharma, are discussed from a non-traditional point of view. However, this is not an attempt to reconcile differences between the modern science and Jain worldview.

First, let us see, if the shape and the divisions of lok-akash, can be understood in any way other than the prevailing view. We will take our cue from the shape of the lok-akash itself. Lok-akash is described as a human being standing akimbo, i.e., with its two hands resting at its hips. Let us assume that this lok-akash is nothing but the human body itself. This analogy is not new. It has been stated in tantra as well as in jain texts that macrocosm and microcosm are of the same form. That means what exists externally also exists within. Using this analogy, the plane of hips (at the base of the spine) divides the body into two parts, the lower part of the body corresponding to various hells and the upper part corresponding to various heavens with the top of the head being the sidhhaloka, the

abode of the sidhhas. Looking from this point of view, this description of body has a lot of similarity with the division of body as described in Tantra. According to the Tantra, there are seven main psychic centers in the body, called chakras, located along the human spine. The name, location and the characteristics associated with each of these chakras are as follows: Mooladhar at the base of the spine is associated with the material possessions, Swadhithana near the genitals is associated with the passions and reproduction, Manipur near the navel is associated with desire for food and other personal needs and wants, Anahata near the heart is associated with emotions, Vishudhha at the throat is associated with knowledge and intellect, Ajna between the eyebrows is associated with the spirituality and the Sahastrahar at the top of the head signifies complete freedom. These seven are the main charkas; however, many more centers are alluded to in tantra scriptures. Each center controls certain human qualities, the lower charkas control base qualities and the higher charkas control more subtle qualities. For example, the mooladhar chakra controls the tendencies of material possessions and, therefore, by purifying this chakra, one will be able to overcome the desire for material possessions that will result in Aparigrah. Similarly, if vishuddha chakra is purified then one is able to let go of the ego due to the knowledge and intellect that will help overcome Jnana-varniya karma and lead to the dawn of Samyak Jnana (right knowledge). As these tendencies are reduced and dropped, a jiva stops suffering from the associated karma (i.e., associated karma drop off) and starts ascending the ladder of heavens. He experiences the joys of heavens even in this very life. More subtle a tendency, more difficult it is to overcome it and as a result higher level of heaven one experiences once it is overcome. Furthermore, those who have advanced far in meditation have described experiencing a vastness and emptiness pervading all around in a state of deep samadhi, a state very akin to the

description of Alok-akash. In tantra, it is said that the prana flows through other than the nadis passing through the spine in the lower life forms. Therefore, a jiva has to first attain the human form, and even then, it can attain liberation only when the prana starts to flow through the sushumna, something that is not possible in other life-forms.

If one looks at the description of Madhya-loka, it is divided into various concentric circles with alternate dvip (island) and sea with jambu-dvip in the center. Jambu-dvip itself is divided in seven different continent separated by six mountains and each continent is further subdivided into six section by smaller mountains and two rivers. Of the seven continents, Videha (or Maha-videha) is in the middle with Mt. Meru at the center of the Jambu-dvip. Of the other six continents, Bharat-kshetra is in south and Airavat in north each of which are divided in six khandas. Only those jiva who are born in Arya-khanda in southern part of Bharat-kshetra or of Airavat-kshetra and Videha-kshetra can attain Moksha. Other kshetras are called Mlechha-kshetra and jiva born in those kshetra cannot go directly to Moksha. This is a broad description of the Madhyaloka though many details have been ignored here.

Let us first try to understand why one has to be born in Arya khanda to be able to attain Moksha. Arya means noble, therefore, an Arya khanda means a noble part. What is noble from the point of a jiva? Birth as a human being. Only from the human birth, a jiva can attain Moksha. What is the characteristic of a human body? Human beings are the only creatures with erect spine and the southern part (i.e., lowest part) of the spine is the seat of dormant kundalini at mooladhar chakra. Only jiva from Arya khanda are able to get to Moksha and not from other khanda or other continents refers to the idea that only human



body has the appropriate structure of a vertical spine. But getting human birth is not enough. In an ordinary human being, the kundalini shakti is in dormant state residing in the Mooladhar chakra. To start the spiritual journey of a jiva to attain the Moksha, the kundalini has to be awakened and then raised through all the six charkas to awaken them before reaching the sahastrahar at the top, i.e., siddhaloka. Therefore, a jiva has to be first born in an Arya khanda, i.e., bring its attention to Mooladhar, before it can begin the journey. The journey cannot begin from any other chakra (i.e., khanda) because unless the kundalini passes through each of the chakras, they remain dormant. In their dormant state, these charkas are associated with the negative aspects and lead a jiva to worldly enjoyments of their characteristic qualities as described earlier. Under these negative influences, a jiva's mind is too scattered (i.e., tangentially oriented) to lead to liberation. Therefore, until and unless one has some control over these negative tendencies they keep the jiva engrossed in the material world and, thus, the jiva is a Mleccha (unspiritual and barbaric). This process of purification can take many life times; however, once started the process can be picked up in successive human births from where it was left off. Similarly, the two rivers in each continent that nourish the land of six khanda are just the two nadis, ida and pingala in human body. As long as the breath flows through these two nadis, the negative tendencies of the six centers are nourished and the jiva is trapped in the worldly affairs.

Furthermore, it is stated that a Chakravarti is one who controls all these khanda. Let's keep in mind here that to be able to control and to conquer are two different things. To be able to control is to have enough strength to keep in check any disturbances though disturbances may arise from time-to-time. To conquer is to completely remove all the root causes of disturbances. A chakravarti is one who is able to control all

these khanda, i.e., has awakened the kundalini, pierced through and purified all the six chakras even though the awakening may be only temporary since disturbances are only suppressed not completely eliminated. The state of a chakravarti is not a permanent but only a temporary state of realization. It is also mentioned that only a chakravarti has the strength to open the two tunnels that run through the mountain that connect the southern and northern khandas of the Bharat kshetra. Furthermore, the chakravarti enters through one tunnel and comes out through the other tunnel. He does not come back through the same tunnel. This exactly describes a process of pranayama, called Nadishodhan pranayama, that one has to master to progress in meditation. In our ordinary life, we breathe in and out through the same nostril for certain duration, though it changes from time to time. To achieve mental equanimity to progress in meditation, one has to balance the flow of breath through both the nostrils so that mental disturbances can be reduced. Only when these mental disturbances are reduced to minimum does a jiva makes progress in its spiritual practice. So, these tunnels are nothing but the two nostrils and only that jiva can control the six khanda who has equilibrated the breath, i.e., breaths in a balanced way (breaths in from one nostril and breaths out from the other). Furthermore, the capital city of a Chakravarti is at Ayodhya. Ayodhya means a state of non-confrontation. A jiva who has control over the negative tendencies (i.e., awakened various charkas) has come to a state of non-confrontation and peace with the world and with itself. Such a state of jiva will lead to removal of raag and dvesh and practice of the pancha mahavrata of ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparigraha.

It is further stated that a jiva can attain liberation at any time if it is born in the Videha kshetra but not from any other kshetra. It is also said that there is always a kevali present in the

videha kshetra. Let's try to understand what is Videha kshetra? Videha means separation from the body (vi + deha = without + body). Therefore, Videha kshetra is that kshetra (i.e., body) where jiva roams but does not always identifies itself with body. A jiva who has entered the Videha kshetra, i.e., has understood and realized the separation of body and soul, even though only briefly, has already taken a major step in the direction of achieving liberation. It has already understood the nature of karma, the process of asrava and bandha, and how to overcome and stop them. It has glimpsed the true nature of the soul that is all-knowing all-powerful and ever radiant even though it may be only momentary since disturbances are only suppressed not eliminated. However, suppression of these disturbances even for a moment means that various charkas were in relatively pure state during this time and their negative tendencies were not dominating. This understanding by the jiva is not just intellectual, it is *experiential*. This is a rebirth though not in an ordinary sense. It is a birth and awakening of a new consciousness for the jiva. Once a jiva has this experience, it has invoked the inner guru who is ever present since the inner guru is nothing but the soul in its purest form. A soul in its purest form is a Kevali. Therefore, once a jiva has realized the separation of body and soul even temporarily (i.e., born in the Videha kshetra), it has gained access to the inner Guru who is fully realized Supreme Soul itself (i.e., a kevali) that is ever present to provide the guidance on the journey to liberation. Here a contact with the inner guru has been established that the jiva can now utilize. Before the experience of the separation of body and soul, even though the pure soul was present, it was covered by the paudgalic material and, therefore, hidden. That jiva is now out of the clutches of external time and free to proceed towards its own liberation. Of course, it still has to make the necessary efforts but these are not controlled by external factors. We are mired in the process of death and birth

because of our extroverted tendencies and, as a consequence, unable to reach the Guru within. As long as we are looking for a guru outside, our progress depends upon external sources and we are controlled by the external time cycle. Once we reach the Guru within, the path to liberation is always open; the jiva is now born in the Videha kshetra.

Now, in this context, let's try to understand what is dharma and adharma. While it has been emphasized often that these two concepts are unique to Jain philosophy, very little is said about them. Given that these two are such essential parts of the Jain universe and modern science has yet to identify any substance that will match the characteristics of these two, their existence in the macroscopic universe remains a matter of faith. However, since we are here concerned with the microscopic rather than macroscopic, are there any qualities that can give us the clues to these two illusive substances in the microscopic world? For this, we need to understand who is traveling and what is the nature of its journey?

To answer this question, let's first ask ourselves who the real traveler is? Since, we are considering the universe as microcosm rather than macrocosm, we need to search the traveler within. The inner traveler is the jiva or the soul. The traveling of the body does not necessarily mean the journey of the jiva because the two journeys are different and not necessarily correlated. What kind of a journey does a jiva go through? While the jiva with its attached pudgal travels through the external space, the only journey worth considering for the jiva is its spiritual journey, i.e., its journey from its stage of bondage to its liberation. Even though the body and soul are bound together, the journey of the body is to go from one place to another in the external world; the journey of the soul is to go from the state of bondage to the state of liberation. In the state

of bondage, the jiva is stuck in the material world of wealth, possessions, passions etc. Due to false understanding, a jiva considers them as the real purpose of life, makes them its abode and remains engrossed in the material world. Therefore, quality of attachment is adharma; the cause that stops the journey of the soul towards its final destination (liberation) and invites it to rest. It should be kept in mind that an object of attachment is not adharma but it is the quality of attachment that itself is adharma because same object can evoke different responses from different people. In a more practical sense, we might say that attachment to anything other than one's own soul is adharma. On the other hand, those jivas who are not lured by material world move on. The qualities that lead a jiva to continue its journey towards liberation are non-attachment and dispassion. Non-attachment and dispassion are the results of overcoming various negative tendencies associated with different charkas. These charkas can be purified by activating the kundalini shakti as described earlier. The soul by itself is pure but due to the interaction with pudgal particles has become impure and bound. This boundedness results in body and mind. While the body is temporary and stays with a jiva for only a short duration from a few moments to may be millions of years (from the point of view of the journey of the jiva, even million years is but a short duration), the mind is always with it till it attains liberation. Thus, this journey of the jiva is nothing but the journey of the mind. If the mind is attached to the material world, then the jiva has come to rest. However, if the mind attains the quality of detached state then it continues to move towards its goal of liberation. Thus, attitude of attachment is adharma and detached attitude is dharma. They are one, cannot be divided and pervade the whole loka-akash, i.e., body. However, a jiva may show different amount of attachment or detachment towards various objects depending upon its accumulation of karmic particles. The different types of attachment (such as attachment to money,

relations, property, fame etc.) or different amount of attachment displayed by an individual or different individuals is not the property of attachment or detachment itself but the consequence of the amount and quality of pudgal material associated with the jiva. A greater association of karma results in greater attachment and lesser association of karma results in a lesser attachment.

Therefore, at different levels, the description of the universe, dharma and adharma as stated in the Jain texts tells us not only about the outer world but also gives us a roadmap for our spiritual practices to attain liberation. The Jain description of universe (if viewed at a microscopic level) re-enforces the concept of meditation and internal practices that one has to undertake to achieve liberation from the cycle of birth-and-death. In fact, it gives us precise instructions on the essential elements of how these practices need to be carried out.

धर्म-अधर्म संसार है  
जब तक तन में जीव  
जब दोनो में भेद हो  
फिर कैसी प्रीत-अप्रीत ?

