

PEACE THROUGH DIALOGUE – A JAINA PERSPECTIVE

- Dr. Jayanti Lal Jain

“Don’t miss or misinterpret but verify trueness of what I tell”

- Acharya Kundakunda, Samayasara, verse 5

The word ‘dialogue’ means – talk, discussion, discourse, communication, exchange of ideas, information flow etc. Dialogue is, therefore, the non-violent way of resolving issues. Exchange of information brings out the different perspectives and facilitates better understanding of other’s perspective. Every object is complete in itself and no object is incomplete by itself. However, incomplete knowledge of objects leads to misplaced faith and conduct – thus vitiating peace. How far a blind man walking alone in the land of darkness can go? He will hit several blocks. Not to have dialogue is like walking in the land of darkness. Dialogue helps in narrowing down areas of conflicts and promotes peace.

1. Conflicting properties - The Universe consists of matters having conflicting properties. The properties and forms of matters may look alike or completely opposite to one another and yet describe the same substance (*Amritchandracharya’s commentary on Samayasara, Verse, 247*). The logic is to be applied to all the substances in the Universe such as soul, atom, space, time, medium of movement and rest. Reality is thus multifaceted. This is the infallible concept of Jaina Philosophy used in proving the nature of any substance. Properties are infinite and our understanding of them is very little. In order to reduce divergence in understanding of reality between speakers and listeners, writers and readers etc., dialogues are needed. Consider following illustrations: **a.** Conflicting properties of water – such as hot and cold **b.** The same man may be both father and son depending on relation **c.** A medicine can cure or kill a person. **d.** Milk is sweet but when it turns into curd, it becomes sour **e.** Gold is yellow in colour but many objects have yellow colour. Yellowness cannot entirely describe what is gold, **f.** Delhi can be in South, North, East and West for a person located in Kashmir, Tamilnadu, Punjab and Bengal respectively. Delhi is where it is. The distance to Delhi differs depending on where one stands/lives. In such cases, conflicts lead to nowhere, dialogue solves them all.

2. Necessity of Dialogue – Dialogue is necessary due to complexities in understanding. Study of any object/concept requires (a) reading or listening to words (b) questioning where necessary (c) to think again and again on what has been told/said on the questions and answers, (d) remembering and acquiring the ability to communicate correctly and (e) teaching or preaching the subject to others (*Tattavartha sutra, Chapter 9, 25*). Words are incapable of describing an object in its entirety. Consider the following: **1.** The knower first attempts to describe an object partially and conveys the nature of a matter partially through **words** to the listener. **2.** The listener converts the words into his **ideas/images** about the matter and grasps separate meanings of different words and in parts. **3.** If someone is to read the description of an object in words and attempts to draw a picture, it may not be the same but quite **different**. **4.** If we listen or tell the words only according to one’s belief or imagination and refuse to heed the other’s point of view, this only leads to biased or partial view contrary to the truth. **5.** The listener goes **beyond words** and converts his understanding of separate parts/properties into an indivisible whole to know the truth. True knowledge is like a mirror, it reflects instantaneously the matter as it is and in its most natural manner. **6.** Timeless, inseparable and unchangeable characteristics of a matter are known as properties and the description of such properties represents intrinsic or **real point of view**. **7.** A particular property assumes or displays changeable and momentary characteristics. These are known as forms of the object and the description of such forms represents empirical, practical or **ephemeral point of view**. **8.** Understanding an object with its many properties and

forms collectively and as an indivisible whole is known as '**anekantawada**' or 'multifaceted reality concept'. **9.** Mere idea of the object developed through illustrations or description following the principle of '**anekantawada**' is also **indirect knowledge**. **10.** A matter and its knowledge are **indivisible** and thus complete understanding is required for resolving all conflicts. These ten processes are very complicated and hence people adopt dogmatic positions leading to a lot of controversies, beliefs, conflicts, etc. and thus dialogue is necessary for resolving conflicts.

3.Process of Dialogue - Jain scriptures are divided into 12 parts (*anga*). The 5th part is described in terms of dialogue. Gautam had dialogue with Lord Mahavir and asked 60000 questions and their answers are given in this part. Dialogue helps in knowing the consequences of the past, present and future relating to gain or loss, victory or defeat, happiness or unhappiness, life and death, worldly life or moksha etc. In the 10th '*Anga*', process of dialogue is dealt with in accordance with the type of questions raised. Among many other things, it says dialogue can take four forms - **a.** telling similar events in the **stories** of great persons, **b.** the structure of **universe** and its operations, **c.** following of a **code of conduct** and **d.** narration of **principles** involved (*Virsenacharya, Dhavala, Book 1, P.105-107*). In the process of dialogue, one has to deal with **1.** one-sided or incomplete/partial view of the problem involved **2.** the problem of taking sides with any particular point of view **3.** views relating to permanent or transient/apparent/empirical nature of the object and **4.** good or bad consequence of actions. If these issues are tackled in the process of dialogue, conflicts can be resolved.

4. Universal Application - Dialogue has universal application for all conflicts and is relevant for all fields of life like philosophy, psychology, religions, physics, medicines, chemistry, economics, political science, society, family, wars, terrorism, business deals, negotiations, disputes, individuals and so on. There are different schools of thought in each of these disciplines and there are several examples where conflicts are resolved through dialogue. **a.** Once a person appreciates and comprehends the truth through dialogue, none of the philosophy, principles or beliefs or religions would appear to be absolutely false. Every belief has an **element of truth** provided one goes beyond words and captures the intention of the statement. None has absolutely false beliefs like donkey's horns or flowers blossoming in the sky as these do not exist (*Samantabhadra, Suayambhu Stotra, verse 23*). A glass of water does not mean that glass is made of water but it refers to the glass which contains water. Thus, every statement is partially true. The concept of multifaceted reality focuses on the whole truth. **b.** There is absolutely no scope for **communalism**. The conflict seems to exist in words and not in matter. Conflicting properties or forms co-exist in the matter and the matter cannot be dismembered. A matter cannot be false (partial), its understanding may be false (partial). Thus, it is based on the real nature of the substance itself and not on the policy of **compromise or cowardice**. **c.** 'Little knowledge is dangerous thing' is a proverb known to all and applies in all fields of knowledge. Little knowledge often leads to one-sidedness, dogmatism, belligerence, conflict, violence, sins, insistence on a given point of view, imaginary fears, etc. This disturbs peace of individuals and society. Only when people acquire **complete knowledge** of various facets of a substance, there will be peace, tolerance, friendship, kindness, non-violence, fearlessness etc. **d.** In familiar objects such as gold, water, etc., there are no difficulties of comprehension irrespective of words used to describe these. However, when objects are subtle, invisible and difficult to understand, one focuses too much attention on words and does not **go beyond** them and hence comprehension is lost; **e.** In terms of implications for **religious philosophy**, questions such as whether a soul is independent or dependent, one or many, timeless or perishable, changes or remains the same over a period of time, etc., will be resolved. From the view point of matter, soul is independent one, timeless and remains the same over time and from the view point of forms, it is dependent, takes many forms and thus changeable over time.

5. Limitations of Dialogue - Dialogues fail when strong biases persist. There was an ant living in a sugarcane field and the other one at salt field. Both had dispute about the taste and decided to have a dialogue. The former invited the latter at sugarcane field and

asked to taste. But the latter had taken a piece of salt in mouth as it did not believe the former, so when tasted sugar, there was no difference in taste between salt and sugar. Further, dialogue should not be for dialogue's sake. It should be taken as seriously as between patient and doctor, student and teacher etc. Such dialogues only lead to logical conclusion of peace. When Indradeva raised certain questions to Gautam, who was a great scholar of Vedas, the latter felt the necessity to have dialogue with Mahaveer and ultimately became his first disciple.

In **sum**, through use of this omnipotent tool of dialogue, many of our mundane as well as eternal questions of existence and apparent contradictions can be solved, It paves the way for peace, achievement of moksha and ultimate happiness (*Kundakundacharya, Pravachansar, verse 274-5*) when the seeker of truth, understands well the dialogue of Arihant. In "*Samosaran*", the conference of Universe, "*Arihant*" resolves all issues of the Universe for all beings of all times through dialogue.

About Dr. Jayanti Lal Jain: Dr. Jain currently serves as Director, Center of Philosophical Sciences, Mangalayatan University at Aligarh, India. He is a very learned Jain scholar giving daily Pravachans, covering multiple aspects of Jain studies, delivering key note speeches for many Jain programs or special auspicious events for the last 25 years. Dr. Jain holds Ph. D in Economics from Oklahoma State University, USA and Ph. D in Jainology from University of Madras, Chennai. He was Professor Emeritus at Department of Jainology, University of Madras. He worked at Indian Bank, Chennai as Chief Economic Advisor/ General Manager. Dr Jain has published many articles on Jain Philosophy and on Economics, Banking and Finance. His books on 'Pure Soul and its Infinite Treasure', 'Acharya Kundakund and Jain Philosophy' have been published by University of Madras. He has delivered many special lectures in India and abroad and has considerable teaching experience.