

THE UNIQUENESS OF JAIN SPIRITUALITY

Prof. Ramjee Singh

Emeritus Fellow

Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur (INDIA)

When we look to this universe, many questions come to us.. who created and who sustains it ? Where do we stand in this great structure and who governs our destinies.. some outside force like God or is there any other set of rules called Fate ? The most simplistic explanation is to rest with the concept of God, who is at once regarded not only the creator, preserver and destroyer but also all perfect i.e., omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent etc. Connected with such magestic concept of God, there is the doctrine of God's grace. The redemption of every individual lies in offering sincere repentance and prayers to be relieved of the sin. Those who are somewhat sophisticated in their explanation attribute the sustenance and control of our destinies to some outside divine force and so on.

The *Jainas* need no such hypothesis. It conceived an autonomous universe and an autonomous self. When we transcend the limits of ordinary biological man, we come in contact with our pure personality which is called self (*Atman* or *Jiva*). This, is the experience of pure spirituality or pure experience. This is the absolute concrete truth. *Jainism* conceives the whole universe as a great cosmic mechanism with its own structure and functions and also with its own

"self-propelling force". It does not look outside but looks within and finds the truth that man is the master of his own destinies. All our pleasures and pains are result of our own actions, called *karma*. Our saviours or enemies are not outside us.

But there is no caprice or irrationality in the universe of *karma*. The Law of *Karma* works in the moral field just as the law of causation which works in the field of physical phenomenon. This law of moral causation is autonomous and independent and also supreme. Hence the *Jainas* do not need a Creator God or a Dispensor of fruits of one's action. It has faith in the capacity of the spirit in man.. the spiritual creative force called the *Atman*. It can achieve the four-fold infinities.. infinite faith, infinite knowledge, infinite power and infinite bliss (*ananta-chatustaya*). Thus the individual self is raised to an infinite temporal and spiritual hight. We can see raising the self to the status of the Supreme also in the Upanisadic-Vedantic philosophy of That Thou Art (*Tat tvam asi*). When the Self is raised to the status of the supreme itself, he does not need anybody's grace. Hence salvation of the self is not the gift of any capricious being but it is the direct result of our earnest effort and self-discipline.

However, it will be unjust to designate Jainism as an atheist discipline. For this, we must distinguish between naive atheism and philosophical atheism. The former is the cult of materialism and the rejection of the reality of the spirit or self. In this sense Jainism cannot be branded as atheism. The philosophical atheism rejects the concept of a creator God. In this context, we know that even some of the most important orthodox vedic systems like the *Sakhya*, the *Mimamsakas* and even the *Advait Vedanata* denied the existence of God. Even in the *Vaisesika* and *Nyaya* system, God does not seem to be an integral part. But nevertheless, they believe in the spiritual order of the universe. Similarly, although *Jainism* does not accept the existence of a Creator God, it has firm faith in the spirituality of self. By recognising both the self (*Jiva*) and matter (*Pudgala*) as two-fold substances, *Jainism* steers clear of the two extremes of materialism and idealism. The problem of self is the most fundamental problem of *Jain* philosophy : Though this problem of self is not a new enterprise, the special points of the Jaina view consists in substantiating the notion of Self without blinking the loftist mystical heights on the one hand and without condemning the unabstracted experience as shree illusion on the other. The Self is an ontologically underived fact subsisting independently of anything else. The experience of knowing, feeling and willing immediately proves the existence of self. Everyone is conscious of onself. (*Sarvo hi atma astivama - Sankar-bhasya on*

Brahma-Sutra, I.1.1). There is no proof that negates its existence because by negating it, we posit itself. *Sankara* using the dialectics says that the negator is the self. (*Ya eva nirakarta tadeva hi tasya svarupam; B.S. (S.B.) II.3.1.7*) Hence *Acharya Kundakunda* calls the existence of self as "a great objectivity". (*Pravachana Sara*, II.100). However, to the *Jainas*, self is neither merely an immutably principle as advocated by *Vedanta*, *Sankhya-Yoga* and the *Nyaya-Vaisesika*, nor merely a momentarily transmutable series of psychical status as in *Buddhism* but it is a synthesis of permanence and change. Hence the *Jainas* recognise the self from two viewpoints to make a synthesis. From the transcendental view, the self is the unadulterated state of existence and from the empirical view, there is self which has been in a state of transmigration and corruption since an indeterminable past leading to origination, decay and permanence. The empirical self is potentially transcendental. There is metaphysical identity between the two status of the same self but the difference is also undeniable in respect of the potential attributes. The relation between the empirical self and the transcendental one is identity-cum-difference. Apart from the rational arguments and testimonies of the saints and scriptures, we can bring into the opinions of modern scientists. James Jeans, Arthur Eddington, Sir Oliver Lodge, Lord Calvin etc. have found strong idealistic tendencies in modern physics. Some of the

scientists refute to accord consciousness as different from matter. They have found that without independent existence of consciousness, we cannot think of the embodied self. They do not regard consciousness merely as an epiphenomenon of matter, but regards as the medium of origination of consciousness.

Many problems of the present life such as the state of pleasure and pain from the period of incubation to the time of birth of a child can neither be attributed either to the child or to his or her parents. The child in mother's womb has no role to play towards his pleasures or pain. The parents cannot be attributed because how can an innocent child be made responsible for actions of his parents. On the other hand if we assume that the child enjoys or suffers without any cause or reason, is to accept irrationality. All these and many other such questions cannot be explained without the hypothesis of rebirth. And rebirth can only be explained when we admit the hypothesis of a permanent substance such as soul. Even the so-called agnostic Lord *Buddha* and modern German atheist thinker *Neitzche* admit of rebirth.

Jainism, therefore regards *Karma* as the matrix of the universe and the ground man of individual's destiny and the mould in which anything and everything takes shape. *Karma* is generally regarded as the principle of determination of individual's destiny, his well-being and suffering. There are three reasons : first, the problem of

individual happiness and suffering is not an isolated affair, because it is somehow related to the entire universe. The past *Karma* puts a world before the individual which brings appropriate pleasure and pain to him. In short, *Karma* determines both his heredity and environment. Secondly, even Time, Nature, Matter etc. are not outside the scope of *karma* and they are merely the different expressions of working of the universal law of *karma*. Thirdly, *karma* is the principle of determination of the world. The variation in matter and time can only be ascribed to *karma* if we are to avoid the erroneous philosophical theories of Temporalism, Naturalism, Determinism, Accidentalism, Materialism, Scepticism and Aguesticism etc.

In an important sense, science of *karma* has been described as the science of spirituality. Spirituality aims at unfolding the real nature of spirit or self. This is self-knowledge or self-realization. But to know the self if also to know that it is different from the non-self, with which it is in beginningless conjunction. *Karma* is the material basis of bondage and nescience of the soul. The beginningless relation between soul and non-soul is due to nescience (*mithyatva*) which is responsible for the worldly existence. This is determined by the nature, duration, intensity, and quantity of karmas. The self take matter in accordance with their non *karmas* because of self-possession (*Kasāya*). It is therefore clear that the science of *karma* is a necessary part of the science of spirituality. Unless we have

a thorough knowledge of the *karmas*, we cannot know about the true nature of spirit or self. The knowledge of karma removes the false notion of identity between the body and the self, and so on and this is nothing other than the science of spirituality.

Jainism has a special interest in the philosophy of *karma*. While other system of Indian philosophy generally limit themselves to the two-fold or three-fold divisions of *karmas* -- (a) Those which have not yet begun to bear fruits (*anārbdha*); (b) Those which have already begun to bear fruits like the present body (*ārabdha*). The former (*anārbdha*) again can be subdivided into two classes according as it has been accumulated from past lives (*sanchita* or *prāktana*) or is being gathered in this life (*sanchiyamana*); or *vartamāna* or *āgamī*). However the Jainas go much deeper and present an eightfold classification of *karma* spreading into 148 subdivisions. According to the law of *karma*, first a man attains the fruits of actions in accordance with the moral quality of those actions; secondly, the attainment of the fruits concerned is an automatic process. The law of *karma* is not itself a force, but a general statement based on facts that all actions of all kinds are followed by their appropriate effects and that the sequence between actions and their effects is invariable and inviolable. Like all laws of nature including the law of gravitation or law of natural causation, it is grounded on empirical facts, uncontradicted experience.

We are born into a world governed by the law of causation including the moral law of causation called *karma*. There is no caprice of a step-motherly nature and her blind, mechanical forces. In the life of man as a spiritual being, we find three phases or aspects namely desire, thought and will. The character of a man is the accumulated effect of his thoughts as expressed in deeds. Just as it is the case with a man's thoughts and desire so it is his will and acts. We are effects of the infinite past, that the child is ushered into the world, not as something flashing from the hands of nature but he has the burden of an infinite past, for good or evil he comes to work out his own past deeds. We, and we, and none else, are responsible for what we suffer. We are the effects, and we are the causes. Each one of us is the matter or his own fate thus the law of *Karma* knocks on the head at once all doctrines of predestination and fate. Those.... that also believe in the existence of God and the Law of *Karma* admit the law of *karma* as autonomous that works independently of the will of God. They hold that the origin and order of the world may be explained by the law of *karma* without the supposition of a creator God. But it does not militate against that doctrine of free will in man. They bind us in a sense no doubt but that is just in the same sense in which old habits of action put certain limitations on our present actions. Just as it is quite possible, though difficult for us to uproot old habits of action, so it is

possible to alter and avert the consequences of our past deeds through spiritual *sadhana*.

The law of *Karma* in its different aspects may be regarded as the law of conservation of moral values, merits and demerits of actions. Nothing befalls a man except as the result of his own actions and nothing merited by a man by his actions is lost unto him. As 'religion' is said to be 'faith in the conservation of value' (Harold Hoffding. The Philosophy of Religion, p.6-12), the law of *Karma* may be defined as faith in an eternal moral order that inspires hope and confidence in many and makes him the master of his own destiny. The human will stands beyond all circumstances. Before it, the strong, gigantic, infinite will and freedom in man, all the powers, even of nature, must bow down succumb and become its servants.

Not only the modern man in the search of a soul, the first requisite for any philosophical adventure is the recognition of the idea of the Self. This is the spiritual basis of our ethical life which can be traced in the endeavour of man to find out ways and means by which he could become happy. Hence, Alexis Carrel has dwelt upon the "Science of Man" in his famous book 'Man, the Unknown'. The Jainas subscribe to the doctrine of constitutional freedom of the soul and its potential four fold infinities meaning thereby that the soul is intrinsically pure and innately perfect. But the soul and *Karma* stand to each other

in the relation of beginningless conjunction. The soul by its commerce with the outer world become literally penetrated with the particles of subject matter. The *Karmic-matter* mixes with the soul as milk mixes with water. Thus formless *Karma* is affected by the *Karma* with form as consciousness is affected by drink or medicine. Logically, the cause is non-different from the effect. The effect is physical- Hence the cause (*Karma*) has indeed a physical form. But unless karma is associated with the *Jiva* (Soul) it cannot produce any effect because *karma* is only an instrumental cause; it is the soul which is the essential cause of all experiences. This explains the theory of the soul as the possessor of *Karma*. A question may arise as to why the conscious soul is associated with unconscious matter ? The Jainas reply that the *Karma* is a substantive force or matter in a subtle form, which fills all cosmic space. It is due to *Karma* that the soul acquires the conditions of nescience or ignorance. The relation between soul and non-soul is beginningless, and is due to nescience or *avidyā*, which is responsible for worldly existence or bondage The soul takes matter in accordance with its own *Karmas* and Passions. This is our bondage, the causes of which are delusion, lack of control, inadvertence, passions, and vibrations.

Moksa or liberation is the total deliverance of the soul from the *Karmic-veil* or *Karmic-matter*. Influx of *Karmic-matter* into the soul is caused by the

actions of the body, speech and mind. Hence what is necessary precondition of liberation is not only stoppage of the fresh-flow of karmic matter but also dissipation of the old one through austerities. Then only the soul experiences eternal bliss. However, there is a dilemma : If *Moksa* or liberation is the product of spiritual *sadhana*, it is non-eternal and if it is not such a product, it is either constitutional or inherent or at least impossible of attainment. Even the Jaina doctrine of constitutional freedom of the soul and the four infinities present a difficulty. If the self is inherently good and perfect, how can *karma* be associated with the soul ? If *karma* is said to be cause of bondage and bondage the cause of *karma*. Then there is the fallacy of circularity and also regressus ad infinitum. If the *karma* is beginningless, then now can the soul be essentially perfect ? Thus all the doctrines of means of liberation become quite meaningless. Hence, logic will force the *Jainas* to make a distinction between the manifest and unmanifest Liberation is not the attainment of what is already attained but manifestation of what was latent in the soul. In this sense, liberation in *Jainism* is not something new but a rediscovery of man himself through self-realisation. True happiness lies within.

The soul has, no doubt, inherent capacity for emancipation but this capacity remains dormant unless it gets an opportunity for expression, through some

spiritual exertion through fourteen stages of spiritual evolution. Here mysticism and metaphysics co-mingle.

We can broadly classify these 14 stages of spiritual advancement under the following heads :-

- (1) *Dark period of Self prior to its awakening.*
- (2) *Awakening of the self and fall from awakening.*
- (3) *Purgation.*
- (4) *Illumination.*
- (5) *Dark period post-illumination and*
- (6) *Transcendental life.*

The dark period of self prior to awakening is a period of discontent and disquiet, due to deluding *Karma*. This is *Mithyātvā* which is responsible for turning our perspective to such an illegitimate direction that in effect there ensures perverted belief or non-belief in ultimate values. It is also corruption of knowledge and conduct as well. The plight of self is like an eclipsed moon or completely clouded sky. It is a stage of spiritual slumber with the peculiarity that the self itself is not cognisant of its drowsy state. It aims at moral-intellectual and spiritual conversion. Mere intellectual enlightenment is not enough. So also mere moral life is not enough. What is required is tripple transformation in mental, moral as well as spiritual life. Intellectual attainments and moral achievements are unequivocally

fraught with social utility, but morality pervaded with spiritualism can alone lead us to the transcendental heights. Right Faith (*Samyagdarsana*) is origination of spiritual conversion or awakening of the self (*Aviratsamyagdrsti Gunasthān*), which is sometime consequent upon the instruction of those who have realised the divine within themselves or on the path of realisation through instruction from the spiritual teacher (*Sad-Guru*) - *Arahanta* (Bodily liberated), *Siddha* (Disembodied liberated), *Acharya* (Spiritual Initiator), *Upadhyaya* (Teacher) and *Sadhus* (Saints). There are types of spiritual conversion and there are requisites of mystic's journey after spiritual conversion. Then at the stage of purgation, the aspirant achieves a mental attitude of self-denial and self-control. Scriptural study is also necessary to develop right knowledge. Then devotion is also required which implies the sublime affection, circumscribed by immaculacy of thought and emotion towards the divinity-realised souls. Then there are 16 kinds of reflection as the embodiment of knowledge, action and devotion. After purgation, there are higher stages of advancement with the rise of Samjvalana and nine sub-types of passion in such a mild form that it cannot generate *Pramada* in the constitution of the Self. Onward 7th stage to the 12th stage of Spiritual Development are meditational stages or the stages of illumination and ecstasy. The spiritual aspirant who possesses the fresh fruits of contemplation may encounter his

outright purification, and expend a swing-back into darkness. This divides the first mystic life (illuminative way) to the second mystic life (transcendental life), where the shombering and unawakened soul, after passing through the stages of spiritual conversion, moral and intellectual preparation, arrives at a sublime destination by ascending the rungs of meditational ladder. Now by virtue of his metamorphoses into transcendental self neither abandons nor adopts anything, but rests in eternal peace and tranquility. The self which was once swayed by perversion, non-abstinence, spiritual inertia and other types of passions and quasi-passions refuses to be deflected by them. It is an example of divine life on earth. Potentiality has been turned into actuality. The discrepancy between belief and living has vanished. It is the final consumation of spiritual life (*Sayoga Kevali Gunasthana*). The next and the final stage is that of disembodied liberated stage (*Ayogi Kevali Gunasthan*), where the soul annuals even the vibratory activities. At both these stages, the Self is called *Arahanta* having seven kinds differing in certain outward circumstances. The *Arahanta* is the ideal saint, the supreme spiritual teacher and the divinity-realised soul, and established in truth in all direction. He is freed from anger, pride, deceit, greed, attachment, hatred, delusion, animal existence and pain. He has a life of super-moralism but not a a-moralism. He is the overplus surpassing all that can be clearly understood and

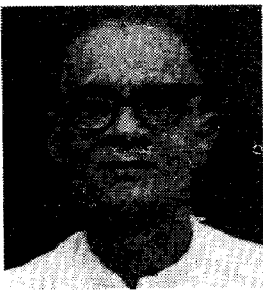
appraised. In eternal divinity, there is no devotional control of breath, no object of meditation, no mystical diagram, no miraculous spell, and no charmed circle.

However, the transcendental life par-excellence (*Siddhahood*) immediately follows the final emancipation and is in the disembodied state. This state of Self is beyond even *Gunasthanas*. It transcends the realm of cause and effect. It is without body, without resurrection, without contact of matter, he is neither masculine nor feminine nor neuter. Its essence is without form, there is no condition of the unconditioned. Hence it is the termination of the spiritual adventure.

Conclusion :

The uniqueness of *Jain* spirituality lies in more than one sense. It is integral as it combines the empirical with the transcendental, intellectual with devotional : faith with knowledge and conduct. Secondly, its supermoralism does not conflict with the highest virtuous life. Thus it reconciles the life of spirit with the life of Virtues, individual perfection with social goodness unlike the Platonic Contemplation

or Aristotle's Theories. In fact, *Jainism* treats life as a unity in which the empirical and the transcendental are not treated as watertight compartments. Even in the *Jain* enumeration and classification of cardinal virtues, we find mention of spiritual conversion, scriptural study, meditation and devotion also. It is not fair to criticise to say that the *Jaina* list does not include the other regarding virtues of benevolence, succour, and social service because in the comprehensive list provided by Professor R.D. Ranade there is threefold division of virtues - individual, social and spiritual, which are found in *Jain* scriptures also. The *Jain* Saints adheres to the observance of not only five great vows but is also an example of the dedication of his integral energies to the cessation and shedding of *Karmas* and subjugating 22 kinds of *Parisahas* and the practice of 12 kinds of austerities. Of the six kinds of internal austerities, *Dhyana* (meditation) is of supreme consideration. All the disciplinary practices form an integral constituent of right conduct. But the most important contribution of *Jainism* is to provide practical guidance for the attainment of transcendental life through *Gunasthanas*.



□ **Professor Dr. Ramjee Singh** is an eminent Educationalist, writer and thinker. Born on 20-12-1931 in Munger District, Bihar, Dr. Singh served as Head, Department of Gandhian thoughts in Bhagalpur University (1980-92). He also served as Vice-Chancellor, Jain Vishwa Bharati Institute, Ladnun from 1992-1994. He has written 38 books in Hindi and English. Associated with a number of Educational Bodies and Social Institutions.