

WHAT JAINISM OFFERS TO THE WORLD

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We live in a world of social inequalities, economic difficulties, multifarious diseases, over-population and atomic bombs. Can Jainism offer any solution for the above problems? Yes. It can and it does offer. But one has to follow and apply its teachings in actual practice as an earnest patient would follow the prescriptions of his doctor.

Social inequalities : It is really regrettable that even in the civilised countries of Europe, prejudice due to colour, race, or nationality still continues to exist and keep the people divided amongst themselves. Experience teaches that colour or racial arrogance cannot continue to exist long. Humanity has to be told again and again that the entire human race is but one family irrespective of differences due to colour, race or nationality. "All humanity is one", is one of the fundamental teachings that Jainism offers.

Economic difficulties : Whatever might be the economic conditions obtaining in other countries, the economic position in India is still far from satisfactory. Indians are still starving. Thousands of men, women and children are found suffering from heat and cold, completely exposed to changing conditions of weather without proper shelter and sufficient clothing. The Haves must come to the rescue and protection of the Have-nots. Jainism enjoins that everyman must put a limit to the acquisition of property and then entirely devote his time for public good. People engaged in independent professions such as lawyers, doctors, merchants, engineers etc. must retire when they reach the limits fixed for them and thus give room for others to earn. *Dig-vrata* and *Desá-vrata*, limiting one's activities, within certain prescribed directions and within certain boundaries in a country and abstaining from the use of things got from beyond the limits or sending things to such places, also contribute in a way to mitigate economic difficulties. It is expected of every well-to-do person to give *abhaya-dāna*, the gift of fearlessness to all those who are afflicted with fear as to, "What shall we eat, where shall we stay, and with what shall we cover ourselves?" The sacred books say that on the day when the Blessed Lord Bhagavān Mahāvīra renounced the world, He distributed His great wealth among the needy and the indigent. The Bhūdāna and the Sampattidāna movements launched and conducted by

Acharya Vinoba Bhave go a long way to solve the economic difficulties. "Live and let live", is the formula offered by Jainism. *Kṣemaṁ sarva-prajānām*, 'may all people be happy', is the daily prayer of the Jains.

Diseases : It is the opinion of the common people that in proportion to advancement of civilization and the new methods of living, the number of diseases also has increased. No doubt scientific research has eliminated the threat of death from infectious diseases. But still there are instances of cases which baffle even expert medical men. And the treatment of some of the diseases is so costly that it is beyond the reach of the common man. *Auśadha-dāna*, gift of medicine, is one of the charities, which a Jain householder is asked to give in order to provide relief to the sick.

Over-population : The rapid growth of population is a great problem for the leaders of all nations. In India, too, the population has considerably increased during the last decade. Several devices are suggested and advices given to check the growth. Birth-control clinics have been started in many places and the people are advised to use appliances. But any attempt to go against Nature is not only injurious to health but also sinful. Therefore, Jainism advises the practice of celibacy (*Brahmacarya*) as the only non-injurious method to control birth. It helps men and women to keep their bodies healthy and strong and makes them pure and edifying.

Atom Bombs : With the advancement of scientific research, many marvellous things have been invented for the convenience, comfort and enjoyment of man. The use of steam and electricity, telegraph and telephone and improved methods of printing have revolutionised modern life. Through radio and television, man sitting at his desk can hear the voices of people at distant places and see visions of events happening far away from him. Science has contributed to the development of industry and agriculture on a very large scale. Automobiles, steamships and aeroplanes enable the speedy movement of men and goods. Time and distance have been conquered. But side by side with the application of his scientific knowledge for beneficial purposes, man has discovered horrible weapons of destruction also.

Prof. M. Oliphant, Director of Physical Laboratories, Australian National University, in his lecture on "Science and Mankind", recently delivered at the University of Madras, said, "At the present time we face a crisis in the use of science which is of far greater immediate importance

and which must be surmounted if our present civilization is to endure. This is the threat of war which has been for mankind a sort of undulant fever of increasing malevolence which now threatens his very existence. Man stands on the brink of a precipice of his own devising.

"If world war should come again it is certain that most that we value will be destroyed, hundreds of millions will die and the surface of the earth be so despoiled that a recovery may take a million years.

"The banning of weapons of mass destruction offers no solution, for any nation facing defeat abandons all scruples and uses every weapon which could decimate the enemy. Excuses can always be found for the use of any diabolical weapon in retaliation".

The world itself looks as though it is on the verge of complete destruction. Man with the help of his scientific knowledge has rolled the globe and placed it on the jaws of death. In the light of this situation, what is the solution that Jainism can offer to avoid war and establish permanent peace? Jainism has been teaching that soul or *ātman* is the only precious thing in the whole world. Nothing is comparable to it. The scientist himself who has discovered so many wonderful things was able to do so only because of his own soul which is, in other words, his knowledge. The Jaina conception of soul and knowledge being identical is analogous to Einstein's theory of matter and energy being equivalent, which is again the teaching of Jaina metaphysics. Where there is knowledge there is soul; and where there is soul there is knowledge. The unique nature of soul and all its wonderful qualities have been taught to the world by the great teachers. Lord Mahāvīra emphasized the supreme value of soul as a thing which must be protected and developed at any cost. Man should not only care for the welfare and advancement of his soul but also help the souls of all sentient beings by giving them protection and by helping them to march on the path of salvation. He who loses his soul loses everything. Jesus Christ who came five centuries later than Mahāvīra also drew the attention of mankind to the value and importance of *ātman* or soul. "What shall it profit a man", he asks, "if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" The pious Christians who live in America, Russia and other countries where the deadly weapons are being manufactured may as well ask their own countrymen, "What shall we gain if we get supremacy of the earth and lose our own souls?" Unfortunately there will be no getting the supremacy of the earth also, since the atom bombs

will destroy everything.

In order to establish peace in the world the importance of soul and the necessity for the practice of *Ahimsā* should be taught throughout the world in every village and town. Man must be made to become conscious of the supreme value of his soul and the utter uselessness of the result of inventing and using of the atom bombs.

Nowadays people seem to think that religion is of no use in modern life, and that it cannot play any part in shaping the character of the people. In reply we can only say in the words of Joseph Gaer, "Those who have lived among the Jainas find them a very kindly people, and better men because of their religion."