

ESSENCE AND SPIRIT
OF
JAINISM

CHITRABHANU

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The Immortal Song

- (1) *May the sacred stream of amity flow
forever in my heart,
May the universe prosper, such is my
cherished desire.*
- (2) *May my heart sing with ecstasy at the
sight of the virtuous.
And may my life be an offering at their
feet.*
- (3) *May my heart bleed at the sight of the
wretched, the cruel, the irreligious,
And may tears of compassion flow from
my eyes,*
- (4) *May I always be there to show the path
to the pathless wanderers of life,
Yet if they should not hearken to me, may
I bide in patience.*
- (5) *May the spirit of goodwill enter all our
hearts,
May we all sing in chorus the immortal
song of human concord.*

—Chitrabhanu



CHITRABHANU
(Munishree Chandraprabhsagarji)

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ESSENCE AND SPIRIT OF JAINISM

It is customary with us to commence our day and work with a brief prayer and I will do so now.

मैत्रीप्रमोदकारुण्यमाध्यस्थानि ।

सत्त्वगुणाधिकविलम्ब्यमानाविनयेषु ॥

*Maitree Pramoda Karunyamadhyasthyanee ।
Satvagunadhik-Klishyamana Vinayeshu ॥*

The prayer just recited is a prayer offered by the Jains. I have prayed that our conduct in life be guided by four principals—*Maitri*, i.e. Amity, *Pramoda*, i.e. Appreciation, *Karunya*, i.e. Compassion and *Madhyasthya*, i.e. Equanimity. Amity, Appreciation, Compassion and Equanimity.

I shall endeavour to explain these at a later stage in my discourse.

Today, man lives in a world which is full of strife and frustration. Commercial values keep gaining prominence. Men seem to be full of greed, envy and pride. Not only do we try to keep up with the Joneses but we try to reach out for their throats. There is a sense of isolation within human beings and hateinspiring ideologies keep gaining more ground. Our different faiths

have a common aim—to make us realise the essential brotherhood of man. In practice they make us more aware of the divisions among us.

Why have we all met here today from the four corners of the earth? Not to argue dogmatically over differences but to break the barriers of racialism and sectarianism—to learn something from one another, to see the same object from one another's point of view so that we can understand one another the better and help one another the better in solving our problems. The goal for each of us is the same, though the approach may be different. Argument will not take us any nearer the goal. I am here reminded of an incident which will bear out my point.

At an eye clinic where many patients were waiting for treatment, there were four who were blind. One of them inadvertently touched a window pane and importantly announced to the others, "This is a window pane—it is red, my son told me so."

Another cut him short, with the assertion that it was 'green' and cited with equal emphasis the authority of a brother. The other two contradicted them, each with a different colour and different authority, but

with the same querulousness and the same conviction. The storm in the tea cup was quelled by another patient who explained to them that the panes were multi-coloured, much to the amusement of everybody.

A trivial quarrel, no doubt, and perhaps a trivial incident to be related here. But I ask you, have not men of different religions argued with the same triviality, the same intolerance and the same vehemence, over the centuries? Each has the conviction that what he was told by someone who could see clearly must be true. One cannot blame him for his absolute faith in his mentor, but surely there was room for others to be true? And what is the result of this dogmatism? Chaos and conflict, discord and disillusion. You will all share my feelings when I say with the poet :

*And much it grieves my heart to think
What man has made of man,*

Jainism is not a sect or just one more conflicting ideology—it is a way of thinking and living.

The greatness of Jain philosophy lies in the fact that its teachings assure “the greatest happiness of the greatest number,” not only

of men, but of all living beings, under all circumstances.

Its philosophy is not essentially founded on any particular writing or external revelation, but on the unfoldment of spritual consciousness, which is the birthright of every soul. Mere words cannot give full expression to the truths of Jainism which must be felt and realised within.

The Jains are the advocates of the development of man in all aspects—physical, mental and spritual. Through knowledge and endeavour the individual develops and unfolds the potential within him.

The word Jain is derived from the generic term "Jina". A person who conquers his lower nature, i. e. passion, hatred and the like and brings into prominence the highest, and achieves the state of the supreme being is called a Jina. There have been several Jinas and there can be many more in the future. A Jina who is a guiding force to his followers, reviews principles of religion and regenerates the community, is called a "Tirthankara".

Adinath who dates back to the beginning of the world was the first Tirthankara and

founder of Jain religion according to Jain philosophy. Today in the twentieth century we live in the era of Bhagwan Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and the last Tirthankara. Bhagwan Mahavira was born in 598 B. C. in modern Bihar, lived upto the age of seventy-two years and attained *Moksha*, i. e. salvation, in 526 B.C. He revived the Jain philosophy about 2500 years ago. Since that time Bhagwan Mahavira has been the spiritual guide of the Jains.

Even now about four million Jains of India practise the preachings of Bhagwan Mahavira and it is the duty of their mentors to guide them in practising it in its spirit in this rapidly changing world. "What then, is the essence, the spirit of Jainism?" —you may ask.

Jainism, viewed as a whole, rests on the four pillars which are *Ahimsa*, i. e. Nonviolence, *Anekantwad*, i. e. Theory of Relativity, *Aparigraha*, i. e. Nonacquisition and *Karma*, i. e. Deeds or Action.

Nonviolence, Theory of Relativity, Non-acquisition and Deeds or Action.

Ahimsa

Bhagwan Mahavira has said :

सर्वे जीवा वि इच्छन्ति जीविउं न मरिज्जिउं

Sarve Jeeva Vi Ichhanti Jeeviu N Marijjium

The instinct of self-preservation is universal. Every animate being clings to life and fears death.

The universe is not for man alone, it is a field of evolution for all living beings. Live and let live is the motto of Jainism. Life is sacred, not only irrespective of caste, colour, creed or nationality, but it is sacred to all living beings—at all levels—right down to the tiny ant or the humble worm.

There is not an inch of space in the Universe where there are not innumerable, minute living beings. The entire Universe is full of living beings.

A man cannot even sit quietly and breathe without killing and harming life around him.

Then the question will arise—How can a man live in this world without taking life and thereby committing violence? Life at this rate will become impossible.

An answer is given in the *Dasavaikalika Sutra* as follows :

जयं चरे जयं चिट्ठे.....

Jayam Chare Jayam Chitthe

“Carry out all your activities but with great care.” It demands constant vigilance. Where an action is performed with due care not to hurt anyone, no violence is committed. The emphasis has been laid on the word “Care.”

As long as man lives as a member of society, besides what he owes a great deal to the society in which he has to live.

Man in his desire to continue his life, so that he may do the highest good while living here, is obliged to destroy life; but the fewer and the lower forms of life he destroys, the less harmful *karmas* or deeds he generates. This leads to strict vegetarianism.

The doctrine of *Ahimsa* is not merely a matter of profession, but of constant, scrupulous practice to every Jain.

The practice to *Ahimsa* is both an individual and a collective virtue. The principle of *Ahimsa* has great potential significance,

because it is basic in concept and universal in its moral principles.

Ahimsa, though a negative term, is full of positive meaning, from an act of simple kindness to a comprehensive outlook of universal fraternity.

A great Jain scholar of the 10th century, Acharya Hemachandra, said in the *Yogashastra* :

आत्मवत् सर्वभूतेषु सुखदुःखे प्रियाप्रिये ।
चित्तयन्नात्मनोऽनिष्टां हिंसामन्यस्य नाचरेत् ॥

Atmavat Sarwabhooteshu SukhaDukhe Priyapriye!
Chintayannatmno-nistham Hinsamanysaya
Nacharet !!

“In happiness or suffering, in joy or grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self. We should therefore, refrain from inflicting upon others such injury as would appear undesirable to us, if inflicted upon ourselves.”

Ahimsa, i.e. Nonviolence in Jainism is not only physical nonviolence but it is non-violence also of speech and thought.

One can harm others by harsh speech or even by uncharitable thoughts and therefore this is also violence and has to be abjured.

The practice of nonviolence does not merely stop at the devotee's himself following the principles of nonviolence but it goes further in as much as, no violence shall be commissioned or consented to, by an honest devotee of nonviolence.

Having explained the principle of nonviolence we now turn to *Anekantwad*, i.e. Theory of Relativity.

Gunratna Suri, the commentator of a Jain work on "Comparative Philosophy" says :

"Although the various schools of philosophy, through sectarian bigotry, differ from and contradict one another, still there are certain aspects of truth in them which would harmonize if they were joined into an organic whole."

The age-old saying of a coin having two sides is well known to this congregation. Jainism, however, makes this as one of its basic principles. It requires that any object, situation or controversy should be looked at from all aspects.

If an individual, a community or a nation allows its vision to be narrowed by turning

a deaf ear to the opinions of others, it is definitely heading for self-destruction.

Jainism promises to reconcile all the conflicting schools, not by inducing any of them necessarily to abandon their favourite standpoints but by proving to them that the standpoints of all others are tenable. They may be representative of some aspect of truth which can, with some modification, be represented. The Integrity of Truth consists in this very variety of all its aspects.

This philosophy makes the Jain, catholic in his outlook and ever ready to understand the nature of other systems of theology.

This brings us to the third pillar of Jainism—*Aparigraha*—Nonacquisition.

Has it not been said, "It is easy to free oneself from iron chains but not from the attachments of the heart?"

What are these "attachments of the heart?" Things that you desire so much that you spend all your energy in acquiring them and when you have acquired them, you get so attached to them that their loss would render your life most unhappy. The principle of nonacquisition teaches us not to give too

much importance to acquiring worldly things—a house, a car, all kinds of comfort, and not to value them so much that their loss would mean the end of the world for us. Every man needs things to make life comfortable. Jainism does not enjoin a layman to renounce everything—that is only for the *Sadhu*, the ascetic. But Jainism does enjoin that even a layman should set a certain limit to his desires—his wants—so that he does not keep on acquiring and accumulating and in the process denying others of their needs.

The ideal is to cut his requirements to the bare minimum.

This nonacquisition or nonpossession should extend even to attachments to human beings—to our dear ones. It would be unnatural for a parent not to love the child, but there should be no possessiveness about this love. It is this possessiveness that is called attachment, and one should try not to be bound by it.

How strange is the mind of man! It does not appreciate what it has and hankers after what it has not. Neglecting the light of the soul that burns within it, how long will it grope in the darkness of the world without chasing shadows that ever elude him?

Let me cite here how a *Muni* was given a practical lesson in this matter of what pangs possession leads to, by a number of stray dogs. The *Muni*, engrossed in his philosophical thoughts of acquisition and renunciation, was passing through a street. He was suddenly disturbed by the savage barking of dogs.

He saw that a dozen dogs were chasing one dog who was running away with a bone in his mouth. Soon they caught up with him and mauled him. Bleeding from the wounds, the dog dropped the bone and left in peace. No sooner had he dropped the bone than another picked it up, and he, too, met with the same fate; and so the chase for the bone and the consequent punishment went on.

Contemplating on this ugly incident, the *Muni* realised the truth. So long as the dog clung to the bone, he had to bleed for it; the moment he gave it up he was left in peace.

“Did not man bleed mentally and spiritually to gratify his lust of for acquisition and would he not attain serenity if he renounced it?” thought the *Muni*.

It is only human to desire, but the noblest desire for man should be to attain a state of

“Desirelessness” —when he can accept things as they come to him, and can look on indifferently when they leave him.

This ancient principle of limited possession is extremely significant and valuable in the context of the economic conditions prevailing in the world today. The object is to secure equitable distribution and economic stability for society. A social order based upon this principle of limited possession will certainly prevent unnecessary accumulation of wealth and its inseparable counterpart, poverty and wretchedness. It will lay the foundation of a welfare society —a modern term.

The principle of *Aparigraha* can guide every individual, society or nation in its positive efforts to enhance the happiness of mankind in general.

After having dealt with nonviolence, Theory of Relativity, Nonacquisition, we now come to the last pillar on which Jainism rests.

“The Law of Karma” i.e. Deeds or Action

Destiny is shaped by deeds done during the previous birth as well as deeds done during this life. We enjoy the fruits of those good deeds now, during our present life. But we should be careful not to fritter away or misuse these fruits—rather we should think of moulding our destiny for the next incarnation, ever progressing in our spiritual evolution. It is easy to waste these fruits; so much more difficult to utilise them in shaping our future destiny.

Jainism explains joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity, and differentiation in physical, mental and spiritual abilities through the theory of *Karma*. It explains the problem of inequality and apparent injustice of the world.

Karma denotes that substance which we continually absorb as the result of our bodily and mental activity. We produce *karma* through all our daily activities. Different kinds of activity produce different kinds of *karma* which may ripen either immediately or after some time, or even in one or another of our subsequent existences.

And yet, Jain philosophy does not view the soul as hopelessly condemned to act and

react upon the consequences of its earlier deeds, as if it were like an automatic machine, and to be beyond all responsibility for its moral attitude and action. On the contrary, it clearly states that the individual is gifted with a certain amount of freedom of will. It emphatically declares that the soul is invested with the freedom to exercise its own resolution.

Acting under its own free will, it can break the heaviest fetters of this *Karma*. It implies, that to a considerable extent, by positive application of one's own free will, the soul is indeed the lord of its own fate.

Good deeds that spring from love, compassion, charity, hospitality and selfless service secure the basis of happiness, whereas bad or undesirable deeds will sow the seeds of future sorrow.

Life existed before this birth and will continue to do so after death. It is here, on this shore, and will be there, on the opposite shore, too. In between is the flow of birth and death. Because of *karma* and attachments the soul has to revolve in the cycle of birth and death.

Bhagwan Mahavira while explaining the true nature of the soul said :

“The nature of the soul is like that of a hollow gourd, i. e. it keeps afloat. But when this hollow gourd is given several coats of clay, then, even though its inherent capacity is to keep afloat, it will sink.

Similarly, a soul coated with violence, falsehood, dishonesty, intemperance, anger, pride, hypocrisy and greed becomes heavy; despite its original virtue to keep afloat, it sinks to the bottom.

But when the layers on the gourd peel off one after another, it will gradually recover its natural tendency to keep afloat. So, too the soul. Were it to get rid of the eight vices by acquiring eight corresponding virtues—nonviolence, truth, honesty, temperance, forgiveness, modesty, sincerity and generosity, it could unburden itself and regain its natural virtues of lightness and volatitity.”

Having explained the four pillars of Jain philosophy I shall now get back to the prayer in which I have asked our conduct to be guided by Amity, Appreciation, Compassion and Equanimity.

By Amity we mean attainment of a mentality which would want to be friendly with and bear goodwill towards one and all.

Just as the dry bed of a lake is criss-crossed with a myriad crack because it is devoid of fresh water, similarly a religion that is not sweetened with the milk of human kindness is soon weakened by the cracks of internal dissensions.

Mere austerity may shrivel up a man's nature. Even as he does penance and practises renunciation, his heart must be full of love.

What supports this wide world? Surely not the much-trumpeted deeds of the blustering heroes but the silent sacrifice of the humble servers of humanity—little deeds of amity as the one you will hear about presently.

A young Brahmin trudging along the way was startled by a scream of terror. A Harijan girl—an outcaste—was bitten by a cobra. Failing to get anything to check the venom from spreading through the blood stream, he snapped the holy thread with his penknife, tied it tightly round the foot and saved her life.

A cry of sacrilege was raised by the orthodox. Could anything be more sacrilegious than the holy thread being tied around the foot of an untouchable?

The answer given by the youth was very brief, but to the point. What could be more humane than the saving of a human life with a holy thread?

A humanitarian approach to life is holier than the mere wearing of a holy thread. Religion has to be practical and not theoretical. It should pulsate with life.

The aim of religion is to establish peace and harmony both at home and in society. Love and tolerance alone can promote concord at home and elsewhere.

The spirit of Amity, if understood well, can bridge the gulf between one religion and another as between one nation and another.

Appreciation and Compassion are in a way two other aspects of Amity.

Appreciation: In this world we come across those who are better than we are in many different ways. Too often do we see the sad spectacle of men filled with envy for those who are more fortunate than themselves. Our prayer teaches us that we should learn to appreciate those who are better, admire them if they are worthier than we are, whether they are of the same religion, race or country or not. If this is practised, much of the envy and jealousy we find in this world would be removed.

Compassion : Compassion should govern our attitude towards those who are less fortunate than we are. It should extend to the erring and even to the criminal.

After all, when Jainism believes that living beings often suffer because of their past misdeeds, does it not behove a true Jain to extend compassion rather than criticism to one who pays for his misdeeds of the past ?

Equanimity is more of an introspective virtue. It governs our attitude towards ourselves, irrespective of the world around us. We achieve a certain balance of mind that remains unruffled in spite of the vicissitudes of life. Whether the world treats us well or ill, whether we reap a reward for our good deeds or not, whether the pathless wanderers pay heed or not to the path we try to show them, we should maintain a serenity of the mind that is bound to bring contentment in its wake.

When a tiny pebble is dropped into the still waters of a pool, soon it is filled with ripples. It is in the very nature of water to break into ripples. But when the pool is frozen, even if you drop a handful of pebbles in it, there is hardly any disturbance in its smooth, hard surface.

The mind reacts to circumstances by breaking into ripples of disturbance—one would say it is but natural. Perhaps; but is it inevitable? When the mind is trained to resist stoically all outward disturbances, it will acquire a calm that nothing can ruffle.

I hope I have succeeded in making it clear that these four principles, put in action, guarantee the highest degree of happiness and peace, within the whole brotherhood of all living beings. I wish they would be universally adopted and followed for the benefit of all living beings.

This, then, is the basis of Jain philosophy in a nutshell.

It is a philosophy which can be practised by a follower of any religion.

It is indeed very difficult to distil the elusive essence of religion so as to use it in your daily life, but he alone is truly religious who carries out the precepts of his religion in all his dealings with the world.

We have spoken at some length trying to explain to each other, the fundamental principles of our religions and now the essential elements in all are very similar.

Coming to the problems that face us, they, too, are essentially the same—the menace

of destructive weapons of war—the malaise of racialism—the problem of economic imbalance—the unrest among our youth.

After having discussed *Ahimsa*—non-violence—what is left for me to add about missiles or bombs? If the killing of a worm is an act of cruelty to a Jain, it would be superfluous to talk about the atrocity of wiping out the human race! So too, we have already covered the ground for the malaise of racialism. If we recognise the fact that the soul is the same, whatever outward form it may be given, where, then is the reason for racial prejudices? In *Aparigraha*—Non-acquisition—lies the solution for the unequal distribution of the wealth. There need not be any 'ism' about it. Jainism is not like any of the modern 'isms.' Bhagwan Mahavira gave us the antidote to unequal distribution of wealth in His Doctrine of *Aparigraha*—Nonacquisition, 2500 years ago.

The last problem—Youth Unrest—calls for a more detailed analysis. I will endeavour to show how we may deal with it.

What is the Relevance of Religion to Modern Youth?

Is not modern youth justified in demanding why so many crimes have been committed

in the name of Religion? He has read in his history books, lurid accounts of persecution and atrocities by religious fanatics in all parts of the world. He is fully conscious that it is might, and not right, that rules the world. He sees the truthful and the just belaboured by the selfish and the unscrupulous and no gods rush down to their rescue in their heavenly chariots as one is told in legends. How can he then believe that "God is in His heaven—all's right with the world?" He sees for himself that all's wrong with the world and he doubts whether there is a God in heaven or anywhere and if He exists, whether He is as Omnipotent as they make Him out to be.

Jain philosophy, with its theory of *karma* can explain to him that sufferings—of an individual or a nation or a race—are the result of misdeeds of the past, that there is a casual relationship between the woes of this life and the evil done during an earlier incarnation, and so he cannot maintain that there is no justice in the world. As for religious persecutions that fill him with revulsion, the tolerance and broad mindedness that Jain philosophy emphasises, might persuade him to modify his outlook on religion. Amity and Appreciation would not be incomprehensible to him, for youth is not

wicked. He has turned a sceptic, a cynic, even an atheist, but he is not wicked. If approached with sympathy and understanding, he will respond to the treatment we give him. Think of the stress and strain of modern life. The speed, the noise, the hectic bustle of today has robbed the young man of the opportunity to move in life with measured strides. The machine has taken the place of hands. The bubbling, creative energy of youth was formerly channelised into constructive crafts, be it spinning, weaving, pottery, metal-work, wood-work, carving today, that energy is turned into destructive channels.

In what way can religion help to divert this flow of energy once again into constructive channels? The simplifying of religion may do it. Stripped of rituals, prejudices, superstitions, even separated from the noble but complicated philosophy, that is the bed-rock of religion—the simple essence of religion—Friendliness, Sympathy, Tolerance, Justice—these youth will understand, and will not reject summarily as “humbug” or “hocus-pocus,” or “beyond my little head.”

If homes and teaching institutions would sow the seeds of religion as suggested here, emphasising particularly the oneness of all

religions, we may be reasonably optimistic that this early initiation to religion will bear fruit in good time.

The aim of all religions and philosophies is to seek the freedom of man from the bonds of ignorance and blind faith, from the meshes of prejudices and superstitions and rituals. Religion means freedom.. Only when man rid_s himself of his mundane bonds he frees himself from the bonds of *karma*. Just as gold attains its pristine purity only when the dross is separated from it, so, too, the soul, only after it has shed all Desires and *karma*, will attain a state of blissful tranquillity and immortality.



