

*Our life*  
*in the context of*  
*Five Anuvrats and Anekantwad*

Kumarpal Desai

Shri Jaybhikkhu Sahitya Trust  
Ahmedabad (India)

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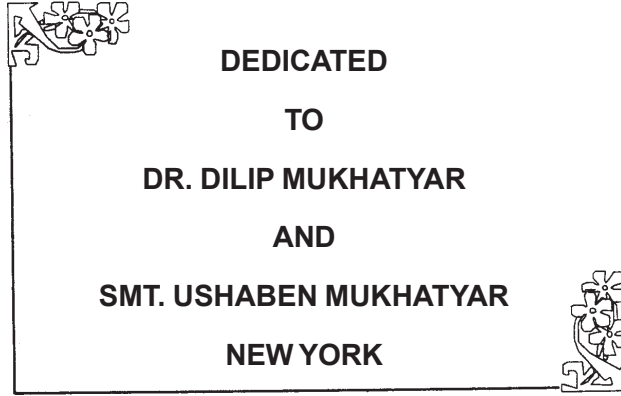


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## Our life in the context of Five Anuvrats and Anekantwad

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“ज्ञानं शरणं मम्, दर्शनं ऽ शरणं ऽ तारित्र शरणं ऽ  
तप संयमश्च शरणं, तगवान शरणो मम ऽमीर”

Albert Einstein remarked that the eternal mystery of the world is that it can be understood. True religion fastens to this element of being understood and creates a system of thought and action which leads to true harmony and bliss. And it is indeed so with Jainism.

Jainism is one of the oldest living religions of the world. The term Jaina means the devotee of Jinas (Spiritual Victors). Jinas are called so because they have won victory over passions of attachment, aversion, etc. that defile the soul. As a result, they have attained omniscience and supreme bliss. They are enlightened human teachers. They are also called Tirthankaras (Ford-makers). Here in the context, ford means tirthankara's words and teachings which help living beings to cross the ocean of misery or transmigratory existence. In every half-cycle of Time there flourish twenty-four Tirthankaras. The twenty-fourth Tirthankara of the present half-cycle of Time is Vardhamana, known as Mahavira.

In Jainism, the essence of religion lies in an intuitive apprehension of the purity of consciousness. According to Jainism, the love of truth is inherent in each self, but it requires spiritual exercise for its manifestation. Once this love of truth is manifested, it will lead the self to liberation sooner or later. The conduct of a person, in the Jain view, cannot be isolated from his way of life. For the true Jaina, Truth and Values are inseparable.

The values of Jain religion are based on five vows, and they are – non-violence, devotion to truth, non-stealing, celibacy and non-possession. The entire life style of the Jain Shravak and the Jain Sadhu is born out of these vows and the foremost is non-violence.

Ahimsa, non-violence, has been at the heart of Jainism. Ahimsa is one of the basic virtues. No where else in other religious traditions has this basic virtue been so scientifically and thoroughly integrated with the main doctrine. Jainism is the only tradition which has consistently allowed this tenet to soak into the very essentials of its teachings and practices. This singular, uncompromising emphasis on Ahimsa is the special and exclusive feature of Jainism. In Jainism, Ahimsa is not mere human sympathy; it is empathy, the urge to identify oneself completely with other persons, other living beings, with the whole universe.

Bhagwan Mahavir said, “If you kill someone, it is yourself you kill. If you overpower someone, it is yourself you overpower. If you torment some one, it is yourself you torment. If you harm someone, it is yourself you harm.” A wise man knows this and so he does not kill, nor does he overpower or torment anyone. The heart of Jainism is non-violence.

This concept of Ahimsa, non-violence, has evolved from logical thinking and from experience. It has an almost empirical basis. It has emerged from the doctrine of the equality of all souls. Everyone wants to live, nobody likes to die. Violence enters first in thought, it then manifests itself in speech and then in deeds. That is why they say that war is born in the minds of men. The search for ahimsa is centred in Anekantavada, the philosophy which accommodates a multiplicity of points-of-view and of perspectives.

In Jain philosophy Ahimsa is said to be the supreme religion and himsa is considered to be source of all evil and of all miseries.

Today when the whole world is involved in widespread violence, it will have to heed to the principle of non-violence with sincerity, devotion and respect more than what was shown to it in the past. Violence at the individual level and also at the level of the whole universe is increasing day by day in one form or the other. From every six rupees collected by way of tax from the starving millions, atleast one rupee is being spent on the army and on armaments and what one gets in return is fear, terror and insecurity. The same super powers which have created these weapons of destruction have now to enter into mutual treaties to eliminate them. Countries which on one hand are talking of peace are preparing for war on the other. Ahimsa or non-violence is not a supreme precept, it is more a way of life which gives shape to humanity and to human beings. The most ancient Jain scripture 'Acharang Sootra' says, “Not to kill or harm or destroy any animal, living species or being is the purest, permanent and most eternal religion.” The very first chapter



of this ancient scripture details the causes and instruments of violence. The essence of Mahavir Swami's thoughts on Ahimsa can be gauged from his following words –

“You are the one whom you want to strike, you are the one on whom you wish to establish your command, you are the one which is in anguish, you are the one whom you want to kill. That is why a wise person never strikes anyone, never controls others, never causes any anguish to others.”

Ahimsa is the very foundation of the Jain religion. The Jain religion has given great prominence to it and has given a considerable thought to it. Ahimsa as a principle has evolved out of the feeling of equality for all beings. All beings crave to live. No one likes to die. All desire happiness. No one desires pain or sorrow. Even the thought of violence results in violent acts. That is why the Jain religion considers violence or non-violence in the context of the one who indulges in it. Wherever there is negligence, there shall always be violence. False words and wrong action are also examples of violence. To harm anyone or to indulge in corruption is also violence.

The seed of violence is first sown in thought and then is reflected in words and action. That is why it is said, “war is born in the hearts of men”. Acharya Umaswati says, परस्परोग्रहणीत्वानाम् ‘*Parasparopgraho Jivanam*’ which means that each living being lives because of the mutual cooperation among the beings. The concept of Ahimsa enunciated by Lord Mahavir is very comprehensive and embraces all beings in it. It believes in the unity of life. It treats every living being with utmost equality and respects it the same way. If there is cruelty against animals, there can as well be cruelty against human beings. Cruelty is not

merely a form of external act, it is a part of one's evil thinking. One who is cruel will demonstrate and practice cruelty against every being – may it be human beings or animals or even insects. Man has become so cruel and crude that even when he wants to testfire his gun, he would kill someone without any hesitation or remorse. Man today emulates animals in respect of cruelty. This is the age of physical strength – nay, animal strength. In the US, once a father scolded his son for some wrong doing. The son suddenly retorted by saying, “I will shoot you.” Thus in every aspect of his life – may it be eating, newspapers, films, T.V., books – there is violence. In such a situation, the feeling of non-violence will guide the world in the right direction in which humanity should go in future. One who has compassion in his heart will show compassion to every being. Mahavir Swami expresses the significance of non-violence in the following stanza–

तुंग न मंदराओ आगासओ विसालयं नत्थि ।  
तत्तत्तयंमि णसु, धम्म अस्सिा समं नत्थि ॥

(Nothing is higher than the Meru mountain; nothing is vaster than the sky. Similarly, there is no better religion than Ahimsa).

Mahavir's concept of non-violence appealed to Mahatma Gandhi after two thousand five hundred years and he applied it to all walks of life. In 1946 he stood unarmed with compassion in his heart before a furious mob which was carrying lethal weapons. The mob had to bow down before this half-naked Fakir. Non-violence had won, violence was defeated. Lord Mountbatten had then said, “What we could not accomplish by dispatching a full army brigade was accomplished single handedly by this one man, thereby saving the entire eastern side of the country from

complete annihilation. One remembers Prof. S. R. Bhatt's statement in which he had said, "The seed of the thought that was sown some two thousand five hundred years ago was reaped by Gandhi (The Thought of Ahimsa). As if there was an invisible traffic between Mahavir and Gandhi."

This principle of Ahimsa will have to be adopted in practice by human beings. The Jain religion and philosophy steadfastly emphasise the integrity and totality of life. It has a holistic view towards life. It is a religion that teaches assimilation and not division. Hence a member of the family and an employee of the shop – both must be treated on par. Today the man in the temple and the man elsewhere have become two separate entities, different from each other. That is why to integrate the two separate personalities into a single, undivided one, we will have to inculcate the spirit of Ahimsa among the people the world over.

If Ahimsa saves ants, small and big ones, it should not kill man. Otherwise it would be paradoxical. It would not be acceptable that one who treats the members of the family with affection does not do so in the profession. A woman who is a kind mother at home cannot be thought to be cruel outside. The practice of Ahimsa should not be limited to the walls of the home, it should be allowed to spread far and wide covering all walks of our life. It should be accompanied by love and compassion for all. Bhagwan Mahavir and Chandkaushik extended it to cover even the most poisonous snakes who are always ready to strike and bite even without any provocation.

Violence is directly related to the craze for accumulation and possession, so that in the world of tomorrow exploitation and corruption would manifest

themselves as new forms of violence. To obtain benefits by exploiting the poor, the weak, the downtrodden, the helpless is not only a manifestation of social injustice but it is one form of violence and deceit. Non-violence presupposes the coexistence of different religions, philosophies, thoughts and minds in peace with each other. That is why Santbalji has said, 'It is the Jain religion which has given to the world such precious gifts as non-violent culture and the thought of peaceful coexistence.' The world today and the one that would follow need such thoughts and feelings. Jonathan Swift at one place writes, 'We have just enough religions to make us hate but not enough to make us love one another.' If we accept the feelings expressed in this statement by this great writer, we can cross all hurdles that are created by religious fundamentalism, religious intolerance etc. and can safely reach the objective of 'Religious fellowship'. As terrorism in various forms is spreading its tentacles all around, the world can still be saved with the help of the cult of non-violence. It is from this cult of non-violence that the fragrance of truth, celibacy, non-possessiveness and non-stealing can be spread. We should not forget that the foundation of all this was actually laid by Mahavir Swami centuries before.

The Jain philosophy and thinking on diet has its roots in the practice of non-violence. Diet is closely connected with our mind and its processes. Our food habits have a great impact on our mind and thought, that is why we are asked to keep a vigilant eye on it. It has thrown significant light on the benefits of fasting and on simple food habits. Their importance has now been accepted even in the sphere

of health and physical fitness. Nature cure is the first step in that direction. Even Ayurved acknowledges its importance. In the Jain religion, there is a common practice of fasting for days together at a time. Even in the West, patients are made to fast for 90 days at a stretch to cure them of certain diseases. Dr. Kerington opines, “Fasting gives inner strength to the heart. If one wants the heart to be strong, the best way to achieve it is by fasting, for, on the one hand it gives rest to the heart and on the other it purifies the blood without any medicines.” Further, fasting also reduces the extent of evil designs, desires and inclinations.

Jain religion also glorifies the cult of vegetarianism. These days vegetarianism is spreading fast in the West and it has been adopted by many artists, actors and the likes on a large scale. Vegetarianism is the corner stone of the Jain religion.

Today when heart diseases, blood pressure and such other dreaded things are fast spreading, vegetarianism can be of great help. It is necessary to examine dietetics afresh from the scientific point of view. In the ancient times it was based on spiritual thinking, now it is based on experiments as is the case with all natural sciences.

Experiments can be repeated and adopted by each other, while experiences cannot be. Today in the US, the doctors advise taking food before sunset. This has been mentioned in our ancient scriptures. The movement of the atom, the origin of language, communication through the oral media – all were considered then. The system and practice of meditation and contemplation of the ancient

times could cure physical and mental diseases of man. The experiments based on ‘Prekshadhyan’ are the best examples of it. For peace to the mind ‘Pachhakhan’, for high level meditation ‘Kausagga’, for introspection ‘Pratikramana’, for inner purification ‘Paryushan’, for bravery and gallantry the feeling of forbearance – it is only when these are practiced in the world that we can get a vibrant man tomorrow. When Henry Thoreau, the American thinker, held a man by his hand, the latter started crying. Because the touch of the hand was felt by the other as a piece of dead wood, lifeless.

The Jain religion prescribes four things to attain superior status of being and to be full of vitality – charity, chastity, penance and love.

“माणुस्सं खु सु दुल्ल□”

An ancient rule says, ‘Oh man ! How difficult it is to be human !’ Man is not born, he is to be awakened from within. After the birth of a child, the next birth is that of man.

The anti-apartheid American leader Martin Luther King dreamt of the day when man is known not by the colour of his skin but by the strength of his character. To quote him verbatim, 'Not by the colour of the skin, but by the content of his character.' The Jain religion gives no cognisance to the colour or the creed of man.

“न वि मुंडिण समणो न ओंकरेण तणो ।  
न मुणि रण्णवासेणं, कुसयीरेण ण तावसो ॥”

Man is known not by the accident of his birth but by his actions and character. A man does not become a Brahmin merely by recitation of ‘OMKAR’, nor does he become a



saint by merely residing in the forest. One does not become a Jain sadhu merely by shaving one's head clean. The Jain religion says, one can become a brahmin by the observance of celibacy; one can become a saint by the dint of his knowledge and a Jain Sadhu by observing equality with all. In its Namaskarmantra, it does not salute an individual, but it salutes the Teerthankars – those who have the qualities of a teacher, a Guru. Bhagwan Mahavir says, 'You will get salvation not by taking refuge or shelter under me, but by taking refuge under the religion.' Today the world is full of pollution. The destruction of trees on a massive scale has led the world to severe drought conditions. While a large number of living species have already been destroyed and extinct and while a few others are on way to annihilation, it is necessary to pay attention to what the Jain religion says. The Jain monks do not eat green or fresh vegetables on particular days. This shows how the Jain monks are deeply wedded to ecological balance.

Truth has been given a significant and a unique place in the Jain philosophy. It enjoys the second most important position as a vow. The Prashna Vyakaran says, 'Truth is God.' The Acharang says, 'One who stands solidly for truth in his life will conquer even death.' This is experienced by man within himself. The entire life of Mahavir is a testimony of his rich experiences. He tells his disciples that they need not consider him the most knowledgeable person in the world. Anyone who accomplishes his objectives can attain the highest position of knowledge. Even Bhagwan Mahavir himself had attained the highest position after he had passed through a cycle of 27 lives and also twelve and half years of penance.

What more can be said of a person who has been so much wedded to truth ? Even fire cannot burn him, nor can waterpools drown him.

The Jain philosophy has extensively thought of truth and righteousness in human life. 'What I pronounce is the truth' has never been its approach. When one takes such an extreme, sectarian and rigid attitude, it is transformed into one kind of violence. It has a broad-based attitude in which it is conceded that there can be an element of truth even in what others have to say. Ultimately, truth is relative. What you visualise as truth may carry your own conviction. Similarly, what others visualise as truth may be allowed to carry their convictions. Such a broad-based approach carries with its equality, tolerance, synthesis and the feeling of coexistence. It reflects a consistent and on going effort in search of truth.

Another great vow is the vow of non-stealing. Man should abandon all kinds of stealing. We should not take anything that is not given to us. Nor should we help anyone take what is not given to him.

The fourth great vow is that of celibacy. Bhagwan Mahavir added this great vow to the four of Parshvanath's and established its distinct importance. He said that all physical and mental miseries of the world are caused by the thirst for sensual pleasures. For all sensual pleasures are ultimately harmful.

The fifth great vow is of non-possession. Possession is the source of evil. Possession is not only the acquisition or accumulation of things but also temptation for and attachment to things. No wonder C. Rajgopalachari wrote,

“Restraint is the mark of Indian Culture.” This sense of possession is the source of all the five evils viz. violence, untruthfulness, stealing, sensual pleasure and attachment. Today we see that the chief cause of the boundless miseries of the present world is man’s uncontrolled desire to possess. Man believes that possession brings happiness. But in fact possession is the cause of miseries and bondage. Possession enslaves man to external things. As the bee sucks honey from the flower without destroying it, so the welfare seeking man should do the least possible harm to another in his worldly life. Thus, expounding the five great vows Bhagwan Mahavir says, “As the wind blows across flaming fire, so ideal people observing these vows will pass through the *Samsara* (transmigratory existence) and attain eternal joy.” Lord Mahavir has said that wants and desires have no end and only the sky is the limit for them.

When one looks at things from different angles and when one locates an element of truth in everything, it leads one to ‘Anekant’ i.e. many sided or many faceted approach. Not that ‘what I say is the only and the ultimate truth’; but ‘what in truth is mine’ is the correct approach one should not be rigid and dogmatic towards one’s own approach but one should also be generous enough to concede that what others perceive may also have an element of truth. Thus, the philosophy of ‘Anekant’ perceives an all sided view and is based on equality, tolerance, assimilation and co-existence. It is the right approach for reaching the truth. ‘Anekant’ approaches everything relatively and tries to find the truth in every situation. In the life of Bhagwan Mahavir, many instances can be found where ‘what is truth is mine’ has been accepted. He had even persuaded Gautam,

his most learned colleague to apologise to Shravak Anand.

During Mahavir’s time, there were many controversies and many opinions expressed. Everyone tried to dispute the opinions of others so that one can prove that what one says is the only truth. But, Bhagwan Mahavir showed the path – accommodation of others’ views rather than to refute others’ views. He appealed to disciples to become ‘Anekanti’ in place of ‘Ekanti’. Only when you will do this, that you will be able to perceive truth in its most clear and beautiful form. In this way he tried to fight the war that was waged between various opposing opinions, ideologies and one’s own understandings. To bring home the truth behind what he was saying, he gave the illustration of the seven blind men who were trying to know what an elephant was like. It is only when human beings adopt ‘Anekant’ that half the sorrows of life would disappear. Vinobaji considers the concept of ‘Anekant’ as Mahavir’s greatest gift to the world.

Albert Einstein discovered the theory of relativity applicable to the physical world while Bhagwan Mahavir propounded relativity in our everyday life 2500 years ago. Acharya Jinbhadra explains the concept of ‘Anekant’ in the following words – “the disputes and contradictions remains intact between different opinions as long as one does not look to the truth through assimilation and coordination. The disputes between various opinions is the product of one’s own faults and weaknesses.”

Nowadays people seem to think that religion has little importance in modern life, and that it cannot play any significant part in shaping the character of the people. To

this, we could say in the words of Joseph Gear, “Those who have lived among the Jainas find them very kindly people, and better people because of their religion.”

We should unite at this crucial juncture of world history and make efforts to save humanity from extinction. It is essential that we try our best to revitalize our religious and moral principles and unite to ensure peace and harmony. Jainism preaches amity towards all beings, compassion for the miserable and detachment towards possessions.

In order to discourage violence, Bhagwan Mahavir proclaimed that the entire human race is one. एक्का मणुस्साई। At a time when communalism, hatred, violence and terrorism have become rampant in contemporary times, this preaching of Bhagwan Mahavir should be our true ideal. Indeed, we have many ideals before us but it is time to practise them.

If a world religion of this order is to emerge, I have no hesitation in saying that most of the tenets of Jainism will always find a proud of place in it. The Greeks used to say, “Call no man happy until he be dead.” Whereas Jainism on the other hand, claims : “Call every man happy who lives his life following truthfully the principles of Jainism.”

The message of Jainism has even a greater relevance today. By following this path, it will be possible for us to make a meaningful use of the wonderful inventions of science and technology and make them truly blissful and create global society free from hunger and hate – at peace with itself and with its environment. Thus there will be a heaven on this earth. What more does a human being want ?

