

THE JAIN APPROACH TO SELF-REALIZATION

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Introduction:

Self-Realization may be defined as the direct, immediate, first hand communication of the devotee with the Divine, whence the conscious connection of the soul is suspended from the activities of the body, sense, speech, breathing and mind. It is always associated with immense, super-sensuous, supra-normal, ineffable, experiential bliss, usually resulting in total inner sublime transformation of the person concerned.

It heralds an era of unprecedented clarity of a new enlightened vision bestowing immediate, medium term and long term beatitude on the individual. It has been considered the most important, unparalleled and sublime achievement of the soul; granting him an ineffaceable guarantee for the complete emancipation from the transmigratory mundane existence⁽¹⁾, as is stated in *Yogasara* / 107:

જે સિદ્ધયા ને સિદ્ધશે, સિદ્ધ થતાં ભગવાન,
તે આતમદર્શન થકી, એમ જાણ નિર્ભરિંત ॥

General Considerations:

Self-Realization is the common aim of the spiritual aspirants all over the world. The path to Self-Realization has been depicted more or less on similar lines among all the Indo-Aryan religious traditions.

- The Yogic school of Philosophy propounded by Maharshi Patanjali, systematically describes eight steps to Self-Realization which are well known in the form of *Yama, Niyama, Aasana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharna, Dhyana* and *Samadhi*.
- In the 6th chapter of Shrimad Bhagavad-Gita, *Atmasamyamayoga*, we find a brief and lucid exposition of the control of the mind and senses with acquisition of self-control leading to equanimity.

- In the *Upanishadic* literature, we find the famous trio of *Shravana*, *Manana* and *Nididhyasana*.
- In Buddhism also, we find the trio of *Pragna*, *Sheel* and *Samadhi*.
- The Christian and Sufi saints who climbed to the top of the ladder of mystic experience⁽²⁾, reached the transcendental state of meditation in which Self-Realization is accomplished.

THE JAINOLOGICAL APPROACH

In the Jain tradition, the path of Self-Realization is accomplished by a synergistic and balanced combination of enlightened faith, enlightened knowledge and enlightened conduct (three jewels) which leads to inner purification and unfolds inherent potentialities like humility, forgiveness, forbearance, truthfulness, contentment and so forth.

The chief means to accomplish this noblest task will be considered under the following four main headings:

- I. ***Satsanga* (Holy Association)**
- II. ***Swadhyaya* (Scriptural Studies)**
- III. ***Virtuosity* (Spiritual Growth)**
- IV. ***Meditation***

I. *Satsanga* (Holy Association)

Appropriate, intentional and planned association is one such activity of life that always produces its impact on the participants; hence the saying "Man is influenced by the company he keeps". The association with holy saints and enlightened scholars with visionary knowledge and pious conduct is the main source of drawing sublime inspiration for purifying the aspirant and to enhance the piety of his overall personality. He learns not only from their sermons but from their day to day activities which are surcharged with divinity. The unique and extraordinary benefits which *Satsanga* bestows upon the aspirant have been very aptly, clearly and authentically depicted in modern Jain literature by *Shrimad Rajchandra*^(3, 4), the spiritual guide of Mahatma Gandhi.

The great saint-philosopher, *Shri Shankaracarya* describes the fruits of *Satsanga* as follows:

सत्संगत्वे निःसंगत्वं,
निःसंगत्वे निर्मोहत्वं ।
निर्मोहत्वे निश्चलचित्तं,
निश्चलचित्ते जीवन्मुक्तिः ॥

During the practice of this holy association, the following points should be observed scrupulously for a successful outcome:

- (i) **Timings:** The aspirant must regularly attend *Satsanga*, say initially twice a week, and then gradually increasing it to daily sessions. Furthermore, he should also periodically spend a few days in a pilgrimage center or a monastery (*Ashrama*) as a preparatory state for the forthcoming period of intensive spiritual discipline (*Sadhana*).
- (ii) **Alertness:** The aspirant should visit the *Satsanga* with due devotion and attention, give up the dogmas and be really humble with the highest degree of reverence for the teacher. He should carry out the teacher's instructions unreservedly for progressive self-improvement. During these sessions, he should preferably take notes so that the grasp of the subject becomes firm and clear.
- (iii) **Patience and perseverance:** In the initial stages of *Satsanga*, the mind does not take interest in such gatherings, but with gradual training it concentrates on the sermon.
- (iv) **Priority:** In early stages, involvement in routine worldly activities apparently prevents aspirant from devoting enough time for *Sadhana*. When priority is given to this holy association and ordinary worldly affairs are subordinated to it, enough time becomes available.
- (v) **Zealous search:** During the pursuit of this holy association, the aspirant should make a genuine and zealous search for a truly enlightened preceptor⁽⁵⁾. If he is fortunate enough to get such a great master with true vision, **and is able to act scrupulously in consonance with his instructions**, he will not only grasp the basic tenets of spiritual truths within a few months, but will also be able to achieve an aggressive and unprecendental progress in the path of salvation^(6, 7, 8).

In addition to the direct company of the masters as mentioned above, other sources of holy association include idol-sight, idol-prayer, idol-worship, and scripture-worship. Among various forms of such devotional practices, the ritual known as *Pooja* is very inspiring, joyful and popular. It has been rightly acclaimed as a very useful, interesting and purifying daily routine by many aspirants in most parts of the world. It has also been enjoined as a daily ritual

for the householder by the great spiritual masters⁽⁹⁾. It has scores of varieties and is enthusiastically performed in the temples by all sections of the society alike - the young, the old, the men and the women. It may take the form of listening, performing, offering, reciting, bowing, decorating the idols, lighting of the lamps, etc.

II. Swadhyaya (Scriptural Studies)

This includes acquisition of true knowledge of Godhood through appropriate scriptural studies. The Jain method of *Sadhana* gives supreme importance to acquisition of knowledge⁽¹⁰⁾. It has been recommended for both the householders as well as ascetics as a part and parcel of their daily religious practice.

For the householders, the study is accomplished by daily and regular listening of the sermons⁽⁹⁾, as well as by undertaking methodical study at individual level, usually under the guidance of spiritual preceptor. Although all the four main groups of scriptures⁽¹¹⁾ are recommended for studies, the learning of the seven main metaphysical principles⁽¹²⁾, namely, the soul, the matter, influx of *karma*, bondage, stoppage, gradual shedding and liberation should be undertaken with special scrutiny as this encompasses the fundamental tenets of Jainism. The perfect meaning of the above principles should also be well grasped so that the knowledge acquired can be put in day to day practice in the form of:

1. Elements to know (*Gneya*)
2. Elements to discard (*Heya*)
3. Elements to acquire (*Upadeya*)

By implementing this practice scrupulously, enlightened vision dawns, the three jewels are achieved and spiritual progress is enhanced.

For ascetics, the scriptural study is of paramount importance both qualitatively and quantitatively leading to the state of perfect enlightenment (omniscience)^(13,14). *Kundakundacarya*, indicates in *Gatha* 232 of *Pravacansara* as follows:

श्रामण्य ज्यां ऐकाग्र्य, ने ऐकाग्र्य वस्तुनिश्चये ।
निश्चय बने आगम थकी, आगम प्रवर्तन मुख्य छे ॥

Five main categories of scriptural studies have been enjoined in *Tattvarthasutra* IX / 25 as follows:

वाचनापृच्छनानुप्रेक्षास्नायधर्मोपदेशाः ॥

- (i) Reading includes studying the scriptures individually or in a group, with a view to enhance the horizon of our spiritual learning.
- (ii) Questioning is meant for clearing concepts as well as to reinforce our faith in the knowledge acquired.
- (iii) Reflection includes contemplation regarding the nature of basic elements of universe with a view to enhance dispassion.
- (iv) Recitation includes clearly pronouncing the scriptural texts with a view to enhance our devotion for the Divinity.
- (v) Preaching is a practice to narrate the acquired knowledge before the audience for the benefits of all concerned.

With the systematic, well guided and patient practice of the above forms of scriptural studies under an enlightened preceptor, the right knowledge grows profusely, faith increases in divine sermons, and one becomes firmly established on the path to spiritual progress.

III. Virtuosity (Spiritual Growth)

A sound footing of a truly spiritual life is not possible without a fair degree of virtuosity. Just as a tall building requires a firm foundation and admission to the medical school requires a high ranking, so also optimum virtuosity bestows upon us the required worthiness for advanced spiritual growth.

Even though we know that certain virtues like selflessness and humility do develop in the life of aspirant with the above practices, acquisition of a still higher degree of virtuosity is required for the dawning of true spiritual wisdom. With a view to achieve this, a dual synergistic combination of negation as well as affirmation with appropriate "Don'ts" and "Do's" is implemented as described below.

One has to make a firm resolve to eradicate anger, greed, arrogance, deceit, passion, envy, slander, and so forth with a concurrent effort to develop such virtues as forgiveness, contentment, straightforwardness, dispassion, patience etc. One of the easier ways to develop such affirmative virtues is to undertake an intensive practice of each virtue in turn for a specific period of time and to maintain a regular record of one's day to day activities in the form of a spiritual diary. Such record will reflect immediately any flaws which may creep in the aspirant's life and are remedied accordingly.

Depending upon the age, stage, inclination and enthusiasm of the aspirant, an exhaustive, scientific and subtle program of advanced virtue promotion and

virtue imbibation in its appropriate, logical and chronological order has been described in the Jain ethical code as follows:

- (i) Renouncing the seven major addictions like gambling, hunting, stealing and so forth, has been enjoined in *Samayasara Nataka*, XII / 26 as follows:

जूवा आमिष मदिरा दारी, आखेटक चोरी पर नारी।
एई सात व्यसन दुःखदाई, दुरितमूल दुर्गति के जाई ॥

- (ii) Acquiring eight basic requisites in the form of *Mool Gunas* encompassing practice of small vows and a vegetarian way of life⁽¹⁵⁾.
- (iii) Thirty five virtues of the follower of the righteous path such as honestly earned wealth, eulogy for the virtuous etc. should be adopted by the aspirant⁽¹⁶⁾.
- (iv) The twelve partial household vows to consolidate and protect the virtues mentioned above with a view to have a good control over the eighteen sinful activities and wantonness of the senses and the mind⁽¹⁷⁾, are recommended in *Ratnakarand Shravakacara* / 51 as follows:

गृहीजनो का विकल चरित भी त्रिविध बताया जिनवरने,
अणुव्रत, गुणव्रत, शिक्षाव्रत, यो नाम पुकारा गणधरने।
रहा पांचधा अणुव्रत भी वह, गुणव्रत भी वह त्रिविध रहा,
शिक्षाव्रत यह रहा चतुर्विध, रुचिसे पालो सुबुध अहा ॥

- (v) The eleven stages of increasing renunciation by the enlightened aspirant⁽¹⁸⁾.
- (vi) Twenty-seven or twenty-eight fundamental virtues of ascetics⁽¹⁹⁾.

With the implementation of the above methods, the virtuosity and the resultant worthiness of the aspirant is considerably enhanced leading to the following beneficial sequence of maturity of learning in the process of Self-Realization.

Information → Knowledge → Wisdom → Self-Realization

What we learn by initial reading of religious books is information. Understanding the meaning of the same, makes it knowledge. When we

practice the acquired knowledge through proper discrimination, by accepting the truthful and rejecting the falsehood, it becomes wisdom. When the wisdom becomes profound and condensed, a state of magnanimous equanimity develops, gradually leading to Self-Realization.

IV. Meditation

In the Jainological method of spiritual betterment, meditation has been accepted universally as a supreme instrument to attain salvation. Consequently, among the twelve types of austerity⁽²⁰⁾, it has been considered of the highest value for the aspirant's progress. The last *Tirthankara* of the Jain tradition, Lord Mahāvira, practiced the states of advanced meditation for a period of twelve and a half years with unique self-control and attained omniscience and consequently, has been accepted by all the world historians, as one of the greatest champions of meditation.

When properly practiced, this is the most important step leading to rapid attainment of self-control and quietude of mind. If one is able to purify his mind and concentrate it intensely on the true and absolute nature of one's own Self, real equanimity dawns resulting in Self-Realization.

With increasing worthiness acquired by the above practices, the aspirant should also bear the following important points in his mind during the practice of meditation.

- i) **Place and Posture:** These should preferably be such that they are conducive to quietude and steadiness of the mind. Such places may be worship-room, temple, monastery, pilgrimage center or more secluded places. The posture should be steady and such as not to produce any tension in any part of the body. In addition to the classical postures like *Padmasana*, *Ardhapadmasana*, *Sukhasana* and *Siddhasana*, the Jain tradition has developed a unique technique of meditating even in an upright posture (*Kayotsarga*)⁽²¹⁾.
- ii) **Work and Food:** Both of these should be moderate. Too much eating or too much physical exertion has a detrimental effect on meditational success^(22, 23).
- iii) **Regularity and Continuity:** As success in the path of meditation is a long-drawn process, ups and downs are often experienced, and hence, regularity in practice and continuity in efforts will minimize such ups and downs and infuse enthusiasm in the aspirant for acquiring serenity and quietude of the mind during the periods of the meditation. Repeated remembrances of Godhood, other worshipful personalities, objects, and one's true Self during the daily routine is very helpful. Recitation of the

Namaskara Mantra with remembrance of five worshipful personalities is quite popular in Jain tradition and has found a wide application among most aspirants⁽²⁴⁾. An incessant attitude of advanced non-attachment round the clock has been recommended in *Samadhi Shatak/50*.

आत्मज्ञानात् परं कार्यं न बुद्धौ धारयेत् चिरम् ।
कुर्यात् अर्थवशात् किञ्चित् वाक्कायाभ्याम् अतत्परः ॥

iv) **Transcendental Meditation:** By regularly performing the above practices with an enlightened vision and arduous devotion, the aspirant has now overcome almost all the eight types of sorrowful and cruel thoughts⁽²⁵⁾. He now undertakes the following three special types of contemplations to reach the peak of his worthiness⁽²⁶⁾.

- (a) He deeply reflects over the twelve types of contemplations namely transitoriness, helplessness, loneliness, distinctness, impurity, influx, stoppage, dissociation, the universe, rarity of enlightenment and truth proclaimed by religion⁽²⁹⁾.
- (b) He also inculcates the four special attitudes as depicted in the first stanza of *Amitgati-Samayik-Path* which reads as follows:

सत्त्वेषु मैत्रीं गुणिषु प्रमोदं, क्लिष्टेषु जीवेषु कृपापरत्वं ।
माध्यस्थभावं विपरीतवृत्तौ, सदा ममात्मा विदधातु देव ॥

*"Oh Lord! grant me ever and anon affection towards all living beings,
joyful respect towards the virtuous ones;
compassion and sympathy for the afflicted ones,
and tolerance towards the perverted and the ill-behaved."*

- (c) Meditation of the *five worshipful personalities*⁽²⁷⁾ with deep reflection on their divine and superhuman virtues, has found a wide and justifiable popularity among the aspirants. As one scrupulously follows the glorious and divine virtues of the supreme personalities, his consciousness becomes highly sharpened so as to comprehend the subtlest virtues of the absolute Self⁽²⁸⁾.

v) **The Final Deep Dip:** The aspirant has now acquired full worthiness for

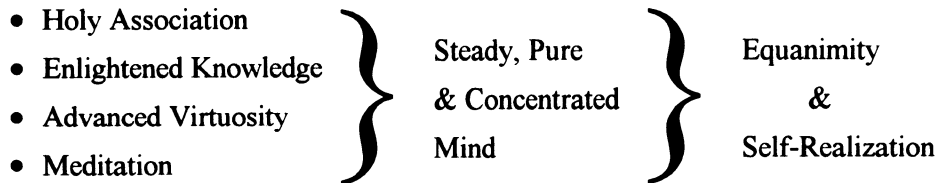
a final dip into the absolute Self. In his pursuit of advanced meditation, he is henceforth alert, and with a sharp discriminative understanding concentrates further on his absolute Self. In the process of this deep concentration, the body, the senses, the respirations and the thought-process, all are gradually discarded as non-Self. With utmost absorption in "Pure Knower" / "True I" , everything disappears at the conscious level except pure, ineffable bliss, and the supra-normal wisdom dawns as the knots of the delusion are destroyed and Self-Realization is accomplished. The relative plane of existence is felt like a dream, the unknown takes over the upper hand in all life-activities, which become surcharged with inner peace, constant awakening and spontaneous dispassion for all worldly objects. *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* prevails.

If such a state continues for some time⁽²⁹⁾, even the subtlest defilements of the soul are completely annihilated with attainment of omniscience, infinite bliss and immortality; heralding the fulfillment of the highest in the universe, the Self-Realization^(30, 31). As *Shrimad Rajchandra* states on page 565 (Letter 738):

चार कर्म घनघाती ते व्यवच्छेद ज्यां
भवना बीजतणो आत्यंतिक नाश जो।
सर्व भाव ज्ञाता द्रष्टा सह शुद्धता
कृतकृत्य प्रभु वीर्य अनंत प्रकाश जो ॥ अपूर्व०

Summary:

The process of Self-Realization can be depicted diagrammatically as shown below:



In conclusion, we can say therefore that Self-Realization is the supreme spiritual experience of life. It cannot be fully expressed through the medium of words, but can be successfully accomplished through a synergistic and balanced combination of holy association, enlightened knowledge, advanced virtuosity and true meditation.

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* Further information regarding these references may be obtained from Shrimad Rajchandra Adhyatmik Sadhana Kendra, Koba, Gujarat, India.