

From Religious Books:

Rationalism (SAMYAKTVA)¹

by Dr. Padmanabh Jaini

Rationalism is the key to spiritual uplift - happiness and peace of mind and ultimate salvation. In the present article, the eminent scholar, Dr. Jaini, presents an insightful view of rationalism based on the Jain scriptures. - D. C. J.

Introduction

The significance of rational perception (SAMYAK DARSHAN) in the life of a soul is second only to that of attaining the status of JIN (conqueror of passions) itself. So great is the purity generated by this flash of insight (perception) that enormous numbers of bound karmas are driven out of the soul altogether, while future karmic influx is severely limited in both quantity and intensity. Thus it is said that a soul that retains its rational perception at the time of death will not fall into the hells or the lower animals state of existence (GATIs). Even more important, it ... constitutes an absolute guarantee of eventual liberation.

Inception of Rational Perception

During rational perception itself, all perception-deluding (DARSHAN MOHANEYYA) karmas are suppressed. Thus it would appear that the level of insight attained at this time is identical for all souls. But the specific results that this insight will generate for a given soul are not fixed; they depend upon the type, number and intensity of karmas, which remained in that soul at the moment of suppression, as well as upon the precise length of time that the insight was maintained. The first experience of rational perception brings the soul to the fourth stage of spiritual development (GUNASTHAAN), the state called vowless rational (AVIRAT SAMYAK DRISHTI). This state is not permanent; nevertheless, even its temporary attainment heralds the soul's irreversible entry onto the path that leads to salvation (MOKSHA).

Jains believe that the first experience of delusion-free insight must be the result of suppression (UPASHAM) rather than elimination (KSHAYA) of the karmic forces. After a brief period the 'suppressed' perception-deluding karmas will surface (UDAYA) and the soul will fall back to the state of delusion (MITHYAATVA), with its accompanying bondage of incessant (ANANTAANUBANDHI) passions. As this fall occurs, there may be a short pause at the third stage of spiritual development called mixed (MISHRA, partially rational), in which insight is no longer clear but the passions have not yet reasserted themselves. Just below this stage is the second stage, called indifferent (SAASAADAN). Though SAASAADAN is no longer than a single instant in duration, it marks the point at which the incessant passions rise up and

overpower the soul once more. This having occurred, the return to irrational (MITHYAATVA) stage of spiritual development is complete.

It should be stressed that this 'return' by no means erases the effects of the rational perception. The deluding karmas still dominate the soul, but they have been so weakened that further true insight can be generated much more easily than the first one was. These insights will be of greater duration, and will involve not only the suppression but also the actual elimination of certain perception-deluding karmas and the incessant passions; thus they are characterized as elimination-cum-suppression (KSHAAYOPASHAMIK). Some perception-deluding karmas remain active (are neither suppressed nor eliminated) during such experiences, but they are unable to overcome the soul's awareness of reality; they function only to produce certain faults or imperfections (DOSHA), which makes the true perception somewhat unstable.

Imperfect as they may be, insights of the elimination-cum-suppression type nevertheless form the basis for the disciplines of the fifth (partial vow), sixth (imperfect vow) and seventh (perfect vow) stages of spiritual development. Such insights will eventually lead, moreover, to an insight so pure that it obliterates (KSHAYA) the total mass of the perception-deluding karmas as well as the total mass of the incessant passions, thus making it impossible for the soul to ever again fall below the fourth stage of spiritual development. This is the elimination-based (KSHAAYIK) rational perception. Such insight will be followed within no more than four lifetimes (and perhaps in that very life, should a JIN be present) by the attainment of salvation. Thus even the most brief initial experience of rational perception is enormously significant in the spiritual progress of the soul; indeed, it is said that only one who has undergone such an experience should be called 'Jain' (follower of JIN), for only he has truly entered upon the path that the JINs have followed.

The Signs of Awakening

Suppression or elimination of karmas by the soul is purely internal functions, which cannot be perceived either by the person in whom they occur or by others (save the omniscient JIN). It may well be asked, then, whether there exist any outward signs that identify one who has experienced rational perception. We should perhaps expect certain fruits of this attainment, observable through changes of attitude, thought process, social behavior, and so forth. Jains have been very concerned with this issue, setting forth in great detail the 'new' characteristics of an individual transformed by true insight. Such externally evident characteristics are called manifest rationalism (DRAVYA SAMYAKTVA), as opposed to internal (BHAAVA) rationalism, which they are supposed to reflect. The fact of their presence does not in itself prove that one has attained rational perception; it is said, however, that any being who has experienced true insight will thereafter be endowed with all of them.

A: The Attitudes

The first major feature of manifest rationalism pertains to a person's attitude towards himself. Previously, he had identified his being with the external signs of life - the body, mental states, possessions; thus he had been in the state known as ordinary or extrovert soul (BAHIRAATMA), seeing the self in externals dominated by the consciousness, which is aware only of the results of karma (KARMA-PHALA-CHETNA). He had also dwelt constantly on activities (KARMA-CHETNA), thinking 'I have done this', 'I am doing this now', 'I will do this'. This orientation depends on the false notion that one can be the agent (KARTA) of change in other beings; hence there is constant (and futile) effort to manipulate the thought and behavior of others, accompanied by a failure to work towards the only kind of change that is possible: self-transformation.

Consciousness attuned only to actions or the results of actions generates perpetual continuation of the worldly (SAAMSAARIC) cycle. Upon the attainment of rational perception, the soul turns away from such concerns; it undergoes a deliberate and mindful orientation of attention, coming to focus upon nothing but its own nature (SVABHAAV). The body, the possessions, even the ever-changing psychological states (passions, anger, pride, self-pity, and so forth), are no longer identified with the self. The functioning of consciousness is now characterized as cognitive (JNAAN-CHETNA); here the individual dwells only upon the innate and pure qualities of soul, realizing that the self is not doing anything in the world beyond simply knowing it. Finally, his awareness of objects no longer generates a tendency to grasp or manipulate them; he remains in the state called introvert soul (ANTARAATMA), seeing the self within, thereby greatly increasing his mindfulness and pure awareness. This highly developed cognitive consciousness will enable him to undertake rational conduct (SAMYAK CHAARITRA) necessary to overcome ingrained negative tendencies, tendencies that have persisted from time immemorial. Thus he will attain eventually the state of constant self-awareness and purity called supreme (PARAMAATMA) state, the highest (liberated) self.

B: The Behavior

The profound changes in consciousness generated by attainment of rational perception are accompanied by equally significant transformations of an individual's behavior pattern. Having come to 'dwell in himself' (AATMAANUBHAV), he experiences extraordinary bliss (SUKH); this kind of bliss, although far removed from the supreme bliss of a JIN, is not contaminated by dependence upon the body or psychological states and thus reaches a level hardly imaginable to an ordinary person. The experience of such a state, coupled with the fact that gross forms of anger, pride, deceit and greed (the incessant passions) have been rendered inoperative, gives rise to a new quality called PRASHAM - serene status. One who is endowed with this quality shows great tranquility; he is invariably relaxed and 'at peace' with himself, never subject to fits of anger, devouring greed and other torments. Thus he becomes able to see

behind the veil of illusion that had previously obscured the true nature of worldly objects and events; he no longer perceives things as 'attractive' or 'desirable', but rather he penetrates to the fact that every aspect of life is transitory and mortal.

This realization has a tremendous impact; it fills him with extreme fervor (SAMVEG), an inner awakening that is expressed in the form of strong disenchantment with worldly things. He may at this point still lack the strength required for renunciation; nevertheless, he will never again be drawn to the world as he once was. Thus he leads a seemingly normal life, acting out ordinary social roles, but is subject to phenomenal internal currents, which must sooner or later bring him to some act of renunciation, either partial (householder's) vows or complete (mendicant's) vows.

The understanding of bondage that comes with true insight is followed by a strong feeling of identification with all beings, an awareness that they too suffer from such entrapment but some remain ignorant of their plight. Further grasped is the essential fact that all diversity among beings, though real, exists simply on the level of modes (PARYAAYAs); fundamentally every living being possesses a soul that may be capable of attaining omniscience. This awareness of the basic worth of living beings, and of one's kinship with them, generates a feeling of great compassion (ANUKAMPA) for others. Whereas the compassion felt by an ordinary man is tinged with pity or with attachment to its object, ANUKAMPA is free of such negative aspects; it develops purely from wisdom, from seeing the substance (DRAVYA) that underlies visible modes, and it fills the individual with an unselfish desire to help other souls towards liberation. If this urge to bring other mundane beings out of worldly existence is particularly strong and is cultivated, it may generate those auspicious karmas that later confer the status of TEERTHANKAR upon certain omniscients. When present to a more moderate degree, ANUKAMPA brings an end to exploitative and destructive behavior, for even the lowest animal is now seen as intrinsically worthwhile and thus inviolable.

Concluding Remarks

While every Indian doctrinal system stresses the importance of perception and reasoning in validating its position on a given issue, it is nevertheless true that certain fundamental problems - such as the nature of death, the possibility of salvation, the operational laws of the universe - are simply not subject to the direct or rational approach. Speculations concerning these problems must, if they are to be accepted, become objects of faith. According to the Jains, one who has not attained rational perception is likely to fall prey to nihilism or skepticism, refusing to believe in the existence of anything, which he has not seen with his own eyes, as it were. If he is prone to the desire for heaven or supernatural boons, on the other hand, he may develop a dogmatic, blind faith in theories propounded by one or another of the 'one-sided' (EKAANTAVAADI) religious systems. The experience of rational perception is said to save a person from

drifting into these wrong views.

While the Jains do not claim that rational perception brings answers to all the great mysteries of existence, they do hold that it develops an important quality called affirmation (AASTIKYA); this in turn becomes the basis for the 'educated belief' (SHRADDHA) of the Jain. Specifically, one who possesses AASTIKYA will manifest a firm belief in the reality of nine aspects of reality (TATTVAs): the sentient (JEEV), the insentient (AJEEV), karmic influx (AASHRAV), unwholesome karmas (PAAP), wholesome karmas (PUNYA), bondage (BANDH), stoppage of karmic influx (SAMVAR), dissociation of bound karmas (NIRJARA), and liberation (MOKSHA). Accepting these nine aspects of reality is the final mark of rational perception from experiential viewpoint (VYAVAHAR NAYA); thus we may understand the famous Jain aphorism (SUTRA) from Acharya Umaswati's TATTVAARTH SUTRA that says:

TATTVAARTH-SHRADDHAANAM SAMYAK-DARSHANAM | 1-2 |

Belief in reality, that is, substances ascertained as they are, is rational perception.

*Jain Study Circular
January 2007 Issue*