

## How Jainism Relates To Modern Science<sup>1</sup> (Rationalism In Practice)

*by Duli Chandra Jain*

Religion is the science of living. There are two aspects of religion, the basic teachings and their practice. The Jain religion is individualistic. This means that we try to understand the basic teachings of our religion such as nonviolence (AHIMSA), truth, limiting one's desires and possessions (APARIGRAH) and understanding other's viewpoint (ANEKAANT). We discern the rationale behind these teachings and then design a practical system so that we can get the most out of our lives.

Almost every Jain knows the fundamental principle of Jainism - rationalism (SAMYAKTVA), which distinguishes the Jain religion from some other religions. However, as far as the religious practices are concerned, most of us are following the cat-under-the-basket story. A cat was jumping and running all over the place during a marriage ceremony. So the pandit who was performing the ceremony asked the maternal uncle of the bride to put the cat under a basket. From then on every pandit performing a marriage ceremony in that town had to get a cat put under a basket by the maternal uncle of the bride. This is what we Jains are doing to some extent as far as rituals are concerned. However, Jainism teaches us to be rational. Rationalism (SAMYAKTVA) that includes rational perception (SAMYAK DARSHAN), rational knowledge (SAMYAK JNAAN), rational conduct (SAMYAK CHAARITRA) and multiplicity of viewpoints (ANEKAANT) constitute the foundation of the Jain religion. Thus in performing any religious rite, we have to decipher the spiritual basis for our activities; we have to look for the rationale for keeping the cat under the basket when we indulge in any religious activity.

The rational perception, rational knowledge and rational conduct, collectively known as the three jewels of Jainism (RATNATRAYA), can be compared to the scientific process. Scientific process consists of the following three steps:

1. Making observations without any prejudice or preconceived notions.
2. Formulating a theory that is consistent with the existing structure of scientific knowledge, to explain the observed facts.
3. Performing further experiments to test and extrapolate the theory.

For centuries, modern science has progressed following the scientific process. If any theory proves to be inadequate or inconsistent in view of further experimentation or more recent knowledge, it is modified and/or replaced by a new theory. This process continues.

In Jainism, rational perception corresponds to making observations with an

unbiased viewpoint. Rational knowledge entails discerning and accepting what seems to be rational.<sup>2</sup> In this process, one has to bear in mind the basic teachings of religion such as nonviolence, truth, non-possessiveness and multiplicity of viewpoints. Further experimentation, which is the third step of the scientific process, corresponds to rational conduct. It entails the adoption of a proper lifestyle, conforming to one's rational perception and rational knowledge.

My own view of religion and its practice has changed over the years. When I was in elementary school, I learned to accept everything that is written in Jain scriptural texts and everything that is preached by scholars and monks. This was in the name of SAMYAK DARSHAN, which was commonly interpreted as right faith. In the summer of 1980 when I visited India, I asked quite a few Jain scholars about SAMYAK DARSHAN. I asked the question: Does SAMYAK DARSHAN imply that I should accept all that is written in TATTVAARTH SUTRA and reject what is described in the Gita only because I am a Jain by birth? Alternatively, should I study TATTVAARTH SUTRA, the Gita, the Bible, the Koran, modern science, economics, environmental science, biology and so on and so forth, and then accept what is rational? Most answers were enshrouded in the jargon of scriptures and they did not satisfy me. However, one scholar quoted from Acharya Haribhadra:<sup>3</sup>

PAKSHAPAATO NA ME VEERE NA DWESHAH KAPILAADISHU |

YUKTIMAD VACHANAM YASYA TASYA GRAAHYAM PARIGRAHA ||

I do not possess any prejudice or preconception for Mahaveer,

nor do I harbor any aversion towards other philosophers such as Kapil;

one whose concepts of the universe seem to be logical;

his precepts deserve recognition and acceptance.

A few days later, I had the welcome opportunity of meeting Pandit Phool Chandra Siddhantacharya. I asked him the same question. He said that there are four steps necessary for attaining SAMYAK DARSHAN as described by Amrit Chandracharya in the exposition of Kundkund's SAMAYASAAR. These are:

1. The evidence of teacher (Guru's SAAKSHI)
2. The evidence of scriptures (AGAM's SAAKSHI)
3. The strength of logic (TARKA BAL)
4. Experience (ANUBHOOTI)

In plain words, this means that we listen to the learned people and study the scriptures of various religions. We examine all that we learn with a rational viewpoint, in the light of our experiences. This is rationalism (SAMYAKTVA). We should go through this process in taking each and every step in our lives. For example, in school we were taught the importance of self-help. My friend Vimalji had also learned this concept. One day I was surprised to see that Vimalji, who was a sensible, idealistic and rational person, was having his underwear washed by a washerman. Out of curiosity, I questioned his action and said, "What about the virtue of self-help?" He said, "Do you want me to take away the poor washerman's livelihood?" It is this kind of insightful thinking that is needed in choosing a proper lifestyle.

The way we live is our conduct (CHAARITRA) and if we are rational in choosing our lifestyle, it is rational conduct (SAMYAK CHAARITRA). Rational conduct is the practice of religion in the truest sense. Our practice of religion - rational conduct, should conform to our environment - substrata (DRAVYA), which includes our physical beings, family and other persons; place (KSHETRA), our geographic location, house, climatic conditions, etc.; times (KAAL), including the state of science and technology; and experience (BHAAV state of mind). For example, one who has diabetes should avoid sugar and one who has heart condition should avoid rich food. This is part of rational conduct. Obviously, one has to study lot more than religious books to adopt rational conduct - to adopt a suitable lifestyle. Our lifestyle should be such that we remain healthy, physically as well as mentally. It is said

SHAREERAMAADHYAM KHALU DHARMAAADHANAM.

Our bodies are the first and foremost mediums for the practice of religion.

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### **A Rational Outlook Towards Life<sup>4</sup>**

Ethics is a way of life that involves mutual respect and cooperation and balancing your personal interests with those of others. This requires the values of justice, human welfare and rights combined with sound judgment and the courage of your convictions. Every day you choose to do one thing over another. Sometimes you need to choose a course that may be unclear, uncomfortable and unpopular. You may pay a price for that decision. Some may admire you, while others may think you are foolish. It is the sum of moral decisions you make and the actions you take that is the measure of the kind of person you are. - Dr. Arthur Dobrin

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