

Seven Addictions (SAPTA VYASAN)¹

By Kshullak Sanmatisagar

In general, renouncing/eschewing addictions is a prerequisite to the practice of any religion. This is especially true in the case of Jainism, because **addictions prevent an individual from understanding reality** as Jainism teaches that rational perception and rational knowledge of the aspects of reality coupled with rational conduct is essential for achieving contentment and peace in life, the fruits of religious pursuit.

What are addictions?

In a nutshell, addictions comprise immoral and objectionable tendencies and actions. In NEETIVAAKYAAMRIT, Acharya Somadev defines addiction as deportment that defiles the character of an individual and leads him/her away from the path of well-being. Indeed, addictions are immoral deeds in which an individual indulges on account of sensual yearning and habits. **An individual, who suffers from any kind of addiction, loses sight of religion, humanity, scholarship, prestige and truth.**

Perceptive scholarly monks have emphasized avoiding addictions along with adopting immaculate rational perception, free from various blemishes and reinforced with eight features (ANGAS).² Even those who are not inclined to practice any virtues (VRAT) are advised to stay away from addictions because an addict indulges in undesirable conduct and deviates from his goal. But renunciation of addictions is imperative for individuals who are interested in practicing virtues such as nonviolence, truth and non-possessiveness. Without renouncing addictions, one cannot eschew sensual gratification and material pursuit.

Kinds of addictions:

It is not possible to provide a list of addictions, because an addiction is any activity that impairs the peace and happiness in life, damages the physical and mental health of the individual, and vitiates his/her status in society. Addictions thrive and aggravate involuntarily, even without external means of sustenance. Addictions constitute an obscure blemish

¹ Based on NAVANEET, Part 1, a series of lectures delivered at Shri Syaadvad Shikshan Shivir (educational camp) by Kshullak Sanmatisagar, compiled by Jinendra Kumar, in 1980 at Sonagir, UP, India.

² For details, please see Studies In Jainism: Reader 2, pages 67-69.

on culture, religion and community. Thus it is rather difficult to establish the kinds or number of addictions. Indeed there are a large number of addictions. Nevertheless, for the sake of illustration, seven common addictions have been described in the Jain religious literature. These are gambling, consuming non-vegetarian foods, alcohol consumption, prostitution, hunting, stealing and adultery. Each of these addictions includes other addictions, which also involve similar undesirable mental and physical activities. For example, consumption of alcoholic beverages may include use of illicit drugs and other intoxicating substances.

Gambling:

Gambling impedes intellect by clouding the ability to think rationally. The individual's knowledge is impaired and his/her character is corrupted. Consequently, the person loses respect of family, friends and society. Even the winners in this endeavor suffer shame, destitution and disgrace. The stories of Yudhishtir and King Nal illustrate the undesirable consequences of gambling. Yudhishtir who has been portrayed as Dharmaraj - the righteous one, because of his gambling addiction, wagered his wife Draupadi and was banished to forest along with his brothers. While gambling, King Nal lost his kingdom in gambling to King Rituparna who ordered him to perform the menial job of working in the stable.

Consuming non-vegetarian foods:

Scientific research has shown that meat is not natural food of man. Our teeth and digestive system are different from those of carnivore animals. Further, non-vegetarian food involves killing innocent, acquiescent and helpless animals, which entails extreme intentional violence. Production of non-vegetarian food requires considerable natural resources and thus it is harmful to the environment. Non-vegetarian food is unhealthy; it may lead to disease. All of us have experienced that our physical and mental health depends on the kind of food we ingest. It said that our mentality is related to the food we eat (JAISA KHAAVE ANNA, VAISA HOVE MANN). Further, it is observed that ingesting meat leads to unseemly disposition in many individuals. In general, non-vegetarians are prone to easily lose temper, and indulge in physical and mental violence. In YOGASAR, the estimable acharya writes:³

³ MAANSAASVAADANALUBDHASYA DEHINO HINAM PRATI:
HANTUM PRAVARTATE BUDDHIH SHAKUNTA IVA DURDHIYAH ::

An individual, who becomes addicted to non-vegetarian food, assumes the intellect and traits of cruel animals that survive by killing other animals.

Alcohol consumption:

Use of alcohol and of illicit drugs have similar impacts on the lives of individuals, the only difference is of degree. Alcoholic drinks are produced by the fermentation of grapes and other substances. This process involves innumerable living organisms. Thus production of alcohol entails considerable violence. Moreover, the intellect of individuals consuming alcohol and other intoxicating substances becomes clouded. Thus they lose the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, friends and enemies, and, their mates and total strangers. Further, alcohol is addictive. When an individual realizes the ill effects of alcohol on the self and his family, it is often too late for him/her to give up drinking or the use of illicit drugs. The symptoms of withdrawal are difficult to bear. Thus it is best not to indulge in drinking or using any narcotics. Smoking cigarettes is also addictive and harmful to one's health. We should refrain from all such activities.

Another undesirable trait is addiction to food. Just like addiction to alcohol and drugs, it has an adverse effect on our lives. Individuals become addicted to some foods or just food in general. Their focus becomes 'live to eat' rather than 'eat to live'. This addiction is injurious to health and should be avoided conscientiously.

Prostitution:

Prostitution is an addiction that brings shame, fear of being caught, worries of undesirable consequences and deep concern for degradation of status in society. In addition to mental anguish, one is prone to contracting various diseases. Those who indulge in prostitution also suffer serious monetary consequences. In spite of these problems, illicit pursuit of sensual pleasures constitutes a difficult addiction to shed. The end result of such a lifestyle is utmost misery and contempt of society. Prostitution perpetuates one of the most heinous crimes known to mankind – compelling a woman to sell her body to others for sensual gratification. Anyone who visits a prostitute is aiding and abetting this.

Hunting:

A hunter harasses and kills innocent and helpless animals for the sake of excitement, thrill and sense of accomplishment. The hunter does not

realize the pain and suffering of the animals. The defenseless animals have feelings and emotions. The animals do not want to die and show anguish and desperation. The hunter is thrilled to watch this. He/she does not think that cruelty is involved in his actions. He becomes accustomed and addicted to this so-called 'sport'. Evidently, those who believe in the virtue of nonviolence should refrain from hunting.

Stealing:

Stealing involves taking money and material possessions belonging to others. People work hard to earn money and accumulate possessions. They are deeply hurt if someone steals their belongings. Thus stealing involves violence of others' feelings. Further, the thief has sinister thoughts and feelings. He/she has fear of being caught and punished. This is self-directed violence. Some other aspects of stealing include: profiteering, bribery, cheating on taxes by circumventing the laws of the land, and using more than one's fair share of natural resources.

Adultery:

Individuals addicted to illicit pursuit of sensual pleasures lose their senses and become intimately involved with persons other than their spouses. Such exploits produce deep scars on personal character, family and society. Premarital and extramarital relationships lead to serious problems, mental as well as physical. However, it is a serious addiction and renouncing it is difficult. The best course is not to indulge in such activities when one comes of age.

The seven addictions described above impair the character, personality and social status of individuals. An individual loses his/her personal freedom and becomes a slave to his/her addictions. Evidently, addictions impede one's spiritual progress - peace of mind and genuine happiness.