

From Religious Books:

Rational Perception (SAMYAGDARSHAN) In Jain Tradition¹

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In this article, the scholarly sadhvi (nun), Dr. Subhasha has presented a comprehensive scriptural view of rational perception. - DCJ

Rational perception (SAMYAGDARSHAN) is the most consequential among the three jewels of Jainism, namely, rational perception, rational knowledge and rational conduct. Thus it is the first and foremost illustrious step toward the magnificent goal of liberation. The Sanskrit word SAMYAGDARSHAN is composed of two parts: SAMYAK that means 'just as it appears' or intrinsic; and DARSHAN that means perception or view. The word DARSHAN is also used for experience (ANUBHAV), interest (ABHIRUCHI) and conviction (SHRADDHA). Resolute conviction of the aspects of reality (TATTVAS) as ascertained through observation and discernment is defined as rational perception.² Accordingly, rational perception entails accepting aspects of reality or fundamentals (PADAARTHS, constituents of the universe) exactly as they exist and are observed.

Jain scriptures present the following four views of rational perception:

1. Conviction in the aspects of reality
2. Assertion of the intrinsic attributes of self
3. Discernment between self and external objects
4. Belief in and devotion to the estimable personality (DEV, TEERTHANKAR), scripture (SHASTRA) and teacher (GURU)

What is rational perception?

Aspects of reality imply fundamentals (PADAARTHS), entities, things and events. Rational perception entails a discerned and conscious belief in the innumerable constituents of the universe.³ In MOKSHAPAAHUD, it has been defined as interest and regard in the

¹ Abridged English adaptation of the article 'JAIN PARAMPARA MEN SAMYAGDARSHAN' published in the prestigious journal KUSUMANJALI of March-April 2008. We are greatly indebted to the editor-in-chief, Shri Ajeet Jain, for his kind permission to adapt the article.

² VASTUSVAROOPASYA YAH NISHCHITIH TADDARSHANAM:

³ TATTVAARTH SHRADDHAANAM SAMYAGDARSHANAM:

aspects of reality.⁴ According to NIYAMASAAR, rational perception arises from certitude in the omniscient KEVALI, scripture and reality.⁵ Therefore, rational perception is said to be conviction in facets of reality ascertained through realization of the self. According to SAMAYASAAR, rational perception entails the comprehension of nine fundamentals from the realistic viewpoint.⁶ BRIHADDRAVYASAMGRAH (couplet 41) states that conviction in the nine fundamentals (that include souls, matter, etc.) is rational perception. It is an intrinsic attribute of soul and it should be stable, pure and dispassionate. One has to have the belief that an omniscient realizes absolute truth.

In NAVATATTVAPRAKARAN, Acharya Hemachandra states that one who knows the nine fundamentals possesses rational perception. In case one does not comprehend reality on account of one's association with karma, belief in the teachings of omniscient eventually leads to rational perception. Thus rational perception comprises of belief in the six entities, nine fundamentals, five expansive entities (ASTIKAAYA) and seven aspects of reality as described by the omniscient.

According to UTTARAADHYAYAN SUTRA (couplet 28-15), understanding the nature of the nine fundamentals and veritably believing in their existence constitutes rational perception. In YOGASHASTRA, Acharya Hemachandra states that embracing genuine interest in the aspects of reality propagated by the omniscient is said to be rational perception.⁷ In sum, rational perception is conviction in the aspects of reality.

Seven aspects of reality (TATTVA) and nine fundamentals (PADAARTH):

In TATTVAARTH SUTRA, Acharya Umasvati has enunciated the following seven aspects of reality: Souls (JEEV, sentient entity), insentient entity (AJEEV), influx of karmic matter (AASRAV), bondage of karmas (BANDH), stoppage of influx of karmas (SAMVAR), shedding of karmas (NIRJARA) and salvation (MOKSHA). Nine fundamentals are

⁴ TACHCHARUI SAMMATTAM:

⁵ ATTAAGAMATAVHVHAANAM SADDAHANAADO HAVEI SAMMATTAM:

⁶ BHOODATTHENAABHIGADA JEEVAJEEVA YA PUNNAPAAM CHA :
AASAVASAMVARANIJARABANDHO MOKKHOO YA SAMMATTAM :13:

⁷ RUCHIRJINOKTATATVESHU SAMYAKSHRADHHAANA MUCHYETE : 1-19:

obtained by appending merit (PUNYA) and demerit (PAAP) to the seven aspects of reality.⁸ A brief discussion of nine fundamentals follows.

Soul:

Soul, the sentient entity, is cognizant. Its attribute is capacity to know and perceive (CHAITANYA). In TATTVAARTH SUTRA, Acharya Umasvati states:

UPAYOGO LAKSHANAM |2-8|

The defining characteristic of soul is consciousness (UPAYOGA) - cognitive operation or capability to know and perceive. Consciousness involves perception and knowledge. Thus soul is edified with perception and knowledge. These are its intrinsic attributes. Without perception and knowledge, the soul would be inert. Acharya Kundkond stated: 'NAANAM APPA', soul is embodiment of knowledge. Both, UTTARAADHYAYAN and BHAGAVATI SUTRA, have described soul as a sentient entity - an entity that possesses consciousness.

Cognizance (CHETANA) is of two kinds: spiritual (JNAAN) cognizance and mundane (AJNAAN) cognizance. The latter is of two kinds: cognizance due to karma (KARMA CHETANA) and cognizance due to fruition of karma (KARMAFAL CHETANA). Accordingly, souls are divided into three categories: pure (SHUDDHA), impure (ASHUDDHA) and transitive (MISHRA). Souls that dwell in their intrinsic attributes of absolute perception and absolute knowledge are pure souls. These supreme souls (PARAMAATMA) are in the thirteenth and fourteenth stages of spiritual development.⁹ At the other end of the spectrum are the impure souls (BAHIRAATMA), whose innate perception and knowledge are totally eclipsed by thoughts of worldly pursuits. Such souls are in the bottom three stages of spiritual development. In the middle, from fourth to twelfth stages of spiritual development, lie the mixed souls, which are in pursuit of spiritualism. They are called transitive (ANTARAATMA). Obviously, impure and transitive souls are under the influence of karmas, while karmas have little impact on the supreme souls. A pristine soul, having absolute knowledge and perception, is the supreme entity of the universe. It is our ideal - the object of spiritual pursuit.

⁸ Spiritualism focuses on the lives of worldly souls. The nine fundamentals comprise this aspect of the universe. - DCJ

⁹ For details, please see 'Stages of Spiritual Development; Studies In Jainism: Reader 2, pages 60-64.

There are two classes of souls in the universe: liberated souls who have freed themselves from the bondage of karmas, and worldly souls who are going through cycles of birth and death on account of their association with karmas. The four states of existence of worldly souls are celestial (DEV), infernal (NAARAKI), animal (TIRYANCH) and human (MANUSHYA).

BHAGAVATI SUTRA states that soul is uncreated, everlasting, indelible, permanent and eternal. BHAGVAD GITA also describes soul in similar terms. Both, Jain and Vedic philosophies agree on these attributes of the soul.

Insentient entity:

An insentient entity does not have the capacity to know and perceive. It does not have consciousness. Although, the word insentient is opposite of sentient, it implies more than just absence of soul. Insentient entities include the four expansive inanimate entities of matter (including energy, PUDGAL), principle of motion (DHARM), principle of rest (ADHARM) and space (AAKAASH), and time (KAAL). As the names imply, principles of motion and rest are responsible for the state of motion and rest of various objects and living beings. Space accommodates all entities. Time is responsible for the sequence of events and modifications of entities. Lastly, some important functions of matter and energy are formation of bodies of worldly beings, respiration, speech, mental activity, etc. Material objects also assist in generating feelings of pleasure and pain, and, in the birth and death of living beings.

UTTARAADHYAYAN SUTRA (couplet 28-12), states that sound, darkness, luster, light, shade and sunshine are characteristics of matter. The four intrinsic attributes of matter are: touch, taste, color and smell.

Merit (PUNYA):

Meritorious thoughts and feelings, speech and actions cause the influx of good karmas. These constitute merit. Conscientiousness in activities such as eating, drinking, housing, sleeping, clothing, thinking, speaking and reverencing embodies auspicious inclination - abstract karma. However, meritorious karma is not desirable in each and every

instance. Meritorious karma is desirable in some instances and it is an impediment in others. In the preliminary stages of spiritual pursuit, it is valuable, while it is advisable to renounce it as one approaches the apex of spiritualism. But dismissing it in the earlier stages is like prematurely jumping off the ship when the shore comes in view. Scriptures relate that only human beings are capable of freeing themselves from the bondage of karma. Birth as a human being or as a TEERTHANKAR is a consequence of auspicious karma. Thus auspicious karma is essential for spiritual progress. However, if an individual continues to indulge in auspicious thought activity and acquire auspicious karmas even after reaching a certain stage of spiritual development, then meritorious karmas may impede his progress. UTTARAADHYAYAN SUTRA (couplets 4-3 and 13-10) states that a worldly soul has to suffer the consequences of its inauspicious and auspicious karmas. Thus fruition of meritorious karma may retard one's spiritual progress.

Demerit (PAAP):

Despicable thoughts and feelings, speech and actions cause the influx of undesirable karmas. These constitute demerit. Activities involving violence, untruth, stealing, sensual indulgence, possessiveness, anger, pride, intrigue, greed, attachment, aversion, squabbling, false accusation, squealing, unwanted criticism, interest in sensual gratification, disregard for self-control, deceptive maneuver and delusional viewpoint are objectionable.¹⁰ These offensive deeds may seem to be innocent and gratifying, but their ultimate consequences are extremely painful. Such a conduct leaves an indelible sordid mark on the soul and so demerit should be avoided at all cost.

Influx of karmic matter (AASRAV):

Influx of karmas is acquisition of karmic matter by soul. There are two kinds of karmas, abstract (BHAAV) and tangible (DRAVYA). Indeed activities of body, speech and mind (YOGA) constitute abstract karmas.¹¹ These activities are of five kinds: irrational (AYATHAARTH - delusional, unrealistic, fictitious) viewpoint, disregard for virtues,

¹⁰ JAIN TATTVA PRAKASH by Amolak Rishi, Shri Amol Jain Jnaanaalaya, Dhuliya, 1998, page 352.

¹¹ TATTVAARTH SUTRA, chapter 6, aphorisms 1-2.

indolence (due to intoxication, sensual pursuit, anguish, slumber or indecent narratives), passions of anger, pride, deceit and greed, and various activities of body, speech and mind.

Bondage of karmas (BANDH):

Worldly souls indulge in activities of body, speech and mind on account of passions of anger, pride, intrigue and greed. This leads to influx of karmic particles, which become associated with soul. This process is bondage of karma. The four aspects of bondage, as described in the scriptures, are: nature (PRAKRITI), duration (STHITI), intensity of fruition (ANUBHAAG) and quantity (PRADESH).

The cardinal reason of karmic bondage is irrationalism - blind faith and convictions contrary to common sense. Improper thoughts and actions cause the bondage of demeritorious karmas such as the infernal state of existence and altruistic thoughts and actions bring about meritorious karmas like the heavenly state of existence. All worldly souls cherish high position and lavish means of comfort, and despise lowly miserable existence. Thus all living beings indulge in attachment (RAAG) and aversion (DVESH). These emotions cause the influx and bondage of various karmas. Certain karmas obscure the intrinsic attributes, such as knowledge and perception. These are called soul-influencing (GHAATTEEYA) karmas. Other karmas do not influence the soul directly. These are non-soul-influencing (AGHAATTEEYA) karmas. They influence one's physique, status, life-span and feelings of well-being of a worldly being. All soul-influencing karmas are undesirable. Non-soul-influencing karmas that bring good physique, high status and comfort are considered favorable. Non-soul-influencing karmas that cause physical pain and agony are unfavorable. Indeed attachment and aversion in karmas and their consequences is irrational because, in the ultimate analysis, all karmas are undesirable. Irrationalism and delusion are the root cause of karmic bondage and so they are responsible for the suffering of worldly beings.

Stoppage of influx of karmas (SAMVAR):

Self-control entails restraining the activities of sense organs. It calls for a balanced state of mind, ameliorated speech and physical activities. Evidently, this is the means to achieve stoppage of karmic influx. Spiritual advancement depends on cleansing one's thought activity, i.e., eliminating abstract karma, and stoppage of the influx of

karma particles - stopping tangible karmas. There are five channels to achieve stoppage of karmas: rationalism (SAMYAKTVA), virtuous conduct (VIRATI), diligent initiative (APRAMAAD), minimal passions (AKASHAAYA) and propitious activities of body, speech and mind (YOGA).

It should be pointed out that propitious thoughts and feelings cause the influx of meritorious karmas that perpetuate our worldly existence. Consequently, only those who renounce both demerit and merit experience genuine spiritualism. Only they accomplish stoppage of karmic influx and attain genuine happiness. Discerning, righteous and insightful beings having auspicious inclination engage in meritorious endeavor and concentrate on the innate nature of the soul. Eventually, they renounce both impure (ASHUBH) as well as pure (SHUBH) activities and attain pristine (SHUDDHA) state of mind – free from all thoughts and emotions, and focused on the intrinsic attributes of the soul. This brings about stoppage of all karma, meritorious and demeritorious, which is the bridge to ultimate salvation.

Shedding of karmas (NIRJARA):

Shedding of karmas implies gradually dissociating of karmas from the soul. Shedding of karmas is attained through penance.¹² There are six types of external penance and six types of internal penance.¹³

Salvation (MOKSHA):

When a worldly soul reaches the stage of spiritual development in which there is non-existence of the causes of bondage of karmas and simultaneously shedding of all karmic matter is accomplished, the soul attains salvation.¹⁴

A discussion of the four views of rational perception follows.

1. Conviction in the aspects of reality

(YATHAARTH SHRADDHAAN):

Conviction entails genuine enduring interest. Rational perception is a spirited interest in ascertaining the fundamentals of the universe

¹² TATTVAARTH SUTRA, chapter 9, aphorism 3.

¹³ DASHAVAIIKAALIK SUTRA; TATTVAARTH SUTRA, chapter 9, aphorisms 19-20.

¹⁴ TATTVAARTH SUTRA, chapter 10, aphorisms 2-3; UTTARAADHYAYAN SUTRA, chapter 28, couplets 35-36; DASHAVAIIKAALIK SUTRA, chapter 3, couplet 15.

without any prejudice. From a realistic viewpoint, rational perception entails acquiring the knowledge of essential elements of the universe as they relate to spiritual progress, renouncing the nonessential aspects, and adopting those aspects, which are helpful in achieving one's ultimate goal. Such spirited conviction in aspects of reality is difficult to achieve, says UTTARAADHYAYAN SUTRA (couplet 3-9). A deep conviction and enduring interest lead to knowledge.

To develop proper attitude, one should meditate on the aspects of reality, seek the fellowship of insightful individuals and avoid association with irrational persons.¹⁵ The path edified by VEETARAAG, one who is beyond attachment and aversion, is illustrious, while individuals who foster prejudice are misleading. This premise is an integral ingredient of rationalism.

Acharya Kundkond states:¹⁶ Conviction in things ascertained as they are, without any perverse motive, is rational perception; knowledge free from doubt, perversity and vacillation is rational knowledge.

One should avoid unrealistic or biased viewpoint. There is no room for vacillation, blemish or shallowness in rationalism.

2. Assertion of the intrinsic attributes of self (SVAROOP NISHCHITI):

Sometimes, an individual attains interest and regard for aspects of reality and path to spiritual progress. It is a rare phenomenon in life, because in most instances, though people know the proper path, they deviate from it. Worldly souls experience considerable suffering through the cycles of birth and death. On rare occasions, an individual attains an inimitable purity of thoughts (APOORVAKARAN) and he/she has minimal attachment and aversion, which constitute obstructions in realizing the aspects of reality. The individual cultivates an enduring conviction regarding the intrinsic attributes of soul and attains rational perception. Note that this is closely related to conviction in the aspects of reality.

¹⁵ UTTARAADHYAYAN SUTRA, chapter 28, couplet 28.

¹⁶ NIYAMASAAR, couplet 51.

3. Discernment between self and the external objects:

The above definitions of rational perception can be expressed in yet other words. Aspects of reality imply that self (each individual soul) is totally different from the insentient entities of the universe. Salvation entails shedding all bonds of karmas that are inanimate. Such enduring belief amounts to rational perception.

4. Belief in and devotion to estimable personality (DEV), scripture (SHASTRA) and teacher (GURU):

An individual having rational perception holds DEV, SHASTRA and GURU in high esteem.¹⁷ [Omniscient victor (JIN), one who has conquered all passions, and who is beyond attachment and aversion is called DEV. Scriptures that present aspects of reality are called SHASTRA. Sages who are engaged in self-realization and who preach the path to spiritual uplift by setting an example are GURUS.]

Eminence of conviction in aspects of reality:

Rationalism is an ultimate quality. It alleviates worldly suffering. In view of reality of worldly existence, when an individual realizes that soul is different from his/her body and other objects, and that pleasure and pain merely influence the physical being and not the soul, he/she begins to focus on the inner self. The individual renounces attachment and aversion, and adopts rational conduct. UTTARAADHYAYAN SUTRA (couplet 28-30) states that rational knowledge follows rational perception, and rational conduct follows rational knowledge. Evidently, rational perception is the foremost virtue.

¹⁷ This is experiential (VYAVAHAR) rational perception as opposed to realistic (NISHCHAYA) rational perception that is conviction in things ascertained as they are.

- DCJ