

Rational Perception

Based on Studies In Jainism: Reader 2, Lesson 8

In the first aphorism of TATTVAARTH SUTRA, Acharya Umasvati delineates the path to salvation in the following words:

SAMYAK DARSHAN JNNAAN CHAARITRAANI MOKSHA MAARGAH

Rational perception, rational knowledge and rational conduct together constitute the path to liberation.

This concept is a unique feature of Jainism. The path to salvation is the combination of rational perception, knowledge and conduct. Further, rational perception has to be adopted first. Once rational perception is achieved, then comes rational knowledge followed by rational conduct. Jainism emphasizes that conduct without proper knowledge is of not much avail and knowledge without rational perception is inadequate.

Acharya Umasvati and other Jain acharyas did not say that prayer and worship of God or Siddhas (supreme souls) or chanting or meditation or any rituals constitute the path to salvation. Worship, penance, meditation, etc., do have their place but the first step is rationalism (SAMYAKTVA).

There is considerable misconception about the meaning of the Sanskrit words SAMYAKTVA and SAMYAK DARSHAN. Most of the time SAMYAK DARSHAN is equated with right faith or, at best, right belief which is then defined as the belief in whatever is written in the Jain scriptures and other Jain religious books, and whatever is preached by the scholars and monks. However, the literal meaning of the Sanskrit word SAMYAK is right, proper, reasonable, sensible, rational, and DARSHAN, in this context, means perception. Thus equating SAMYAK DARSHAN with right faith or belief is improper.

Acharya Umasvati defines rational perception (SAMYAK DARSHAN) as:

TATTVAARTHASHRADDHANAM SAMYAK DARSHANAM

Belief in reality is rational perception. The literal meaning of the word TATTVAARTHA is things ascertained as they are. Therefore, belief in things as we perceive them without any preconceived notion is rational

perception.

How can one achieve rational perception?

Acharya Umasvati states:

TANNISARGAAT ADHIGAMAATVA

Rational perception is achieved through intuition or through acquisition of reasoned knowledge. It should be noted that reasoned knowledge entails logical thinking. In simple words, it means that when one gives up all preconceived ideas, studies the scriptures and other books, listens to discourses of learned people, involves in logical thinking and then accepts what seems to be reasonable according to one's own experience and observation, one attains rational perception. As soon as one adopts rational perception, one's knowledge becomes rational knowledge. The conduct based on rational perception and knowledge is rational conduct. Obviously, indulging in any spiritual activity without properly understanding its significance and meaning is irrational.

It should be noted that SAMYAK DARSHAN is an ancient concept in Indian culture and religion. In MANUSMRITI, it is written:

SAMYAK DARSHAN SAMPANNAH KARMABHIRNANIBHADHYATE
DARSHANEN VIHEENASTU SAMSAAR PRATIPADHYATE

A person who has acquired rational perception
does not acquire bondage of karma,
while those who do not have a proper perception
remain engrossed in this mundane world.

Rational perception is a valuable and essential attribute of a living being. In DARSHAN PRABHRIT, Acharya Kundkund states:

DANSAN BHATTA BHATTA DANSANBHATTASSA NATTHI NIVVAANAM
SIJJHANTI CHARİYABHATTA DANSAN BHATTA NA SIJJHANTI

People whose perception is deluded are indeed pitiable.
Such people do not attain salvation.
People with poor conduct can reform themselves,
but there is no hope for people with deluded perception.

People with deluded perception blindly accept the written and spoken word on faith, without logical thinking. They accept ideas that do not

conform to their observation and experience. They may indulge in superstition. They believe in the supernatural and in superhuman powers. They indulge in rituals without understanding their significance or meaning. Jainism says that all religious activities are meant for spiritual progress but those who have blind faith perform worship and do prayers with a desire of material progress. They worship materials rather than the attributes of supreme human beings (ARAHANTAS) and supreme souls (SIDDHAS). They even worship demigods for favors. We should remember that according to Jainism, God does not dispense favors and He does not punish us for our undesirable actions. Thus according to Jainism worshipping God or Bhagvaan Mahaveer with a desire of favorable consequences is irrational. However, there are those who believe in the concept of God as Creator, Protector and Destroyer of the world. Some believe that God dispenses favors or punishment for our good or bad deeds. It is perfectly logical for them to pray to God for favors.

In an article entitled 'SAMYAK DARSHAN' published in the journal JNNAANODAYA of October 1950, Siddhaantaacharya Pandit Phool Chandra Jain writes:

We feel sorry to note that thoughtful reasoning has been replaced by blind acceptance of tradition. We have forgotten the fact that the person having rational perception is a supreme thinker. It is true that one who has rational perception is ready to accept authenticity of the teachings of omniscient JIN on the basis of the concept

NAANYATHAAVAADINO JINAH

meaning that omniscient JIN do not express what is contrary to truth. Nevertheless, he cannot blindly accept each and everything in the name of the omniscient. In the Jain tradition, logic, experience and scriptures, have been considered most important. As far as scriptures are concerned, the older scriptures are considered more authentic than the later scriptures. A person having rational perception applies his attribute of unflinching (steadfast) belief in the authenticity TEERTHANKARS' word. However, this does not mean that he accepts the authenticity of all that has been written so far in the name of TEERTHANKARS.