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## Introduction to Jain Tattva

Letter 1

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Dr. (Mrs.)-Ujwala D. Shah  
157/9 Nirmala Niwas  
Sion (E), Mumbai 400 022  
Tel. 4073581.

Dear Reena &amp; Mona,

Blessings &amp; Best Wishes.

Reena, you got married and left your maternal home and entered into a totally different role of a housewife. While Mona when you left to join the hostel for higher studies at first, I was worried about your basic needs regarding your meals and the adjustment to the new environment.

But now what I am more concerned about is that you will be meeting people from all walks of life, with different ideologies and religious beliefs and what will be their impact on you ?

In such a critical situation, I feel it very essential to explain to you about the exact nature of True religion i.e. *Sanatan Dharma* ( सनातन धर्म ).

Right from your childhood you have listened to and practised certain principles and rituals from the elders of the house and have inherited the basic religious culture ( संस्कार ).

And while interacting with other people of different beliefs, misbeliefs, conviction of various other religions you will start wondering which is the true and proper religion.

Therefore now it is the time when we should critically examine the principles of Jain philosophy and have our faith confirmed in them.

I hope these writings which is the result of our study, will benefit you and many others who have the urge to know the true principles of Jainism.

Initially one should know exactly the true nature of God. Is it a supernatural power ? Is it a Super human being? To know this one should understand some basic things.

So first we will try to understand what is *Atma* आत्मा or soul – as it is normally called.

*Atma* is synonymous with *Jeev* or soul. To be very specific, *Atma* is usually referred to one's own soul and *Jeev* is a general term for every soul/any soul.

All living beings like yourself, myself and all beings who have ability to know, in other words, those who possess the attribute of knowledge,



and as a result of which they can decide what is right and wrong, experience pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow are *Atma*.

For instance, when one says 'I don't understand' or 'I understand', the one who acknowledges this understanding or not understanding is the knower and this knower is the *Atma*. When this *Atma* is in conjunction with the body, this conjunction is called Living Being सजीव. Even biologist call it a Living Being and not only as *Jeev* or Life.

This *Atma* has the power of knowing and cognising ( चैतन्य ) as against the body which does not possess such characteristic of knowing or cognising. It cannot experience pleasure and pain.

This conjunction of soul and body is for a limited duration. When this time bound conjunction or union is over, in common words we call it death. The important thing to note here is though the union of soul and body has ended, neither the soul nor the body ceases to exist.

Because the soul continues to exist, and comes in contact with some other body. And the body from which the soul has been separated still continues to exist in the form of matter. Traditionally this new union of body and soul is called Birth. And this duration from Birth to Death is lifespan ( आयुष्य ) i.e. *Bhav* ( भव ). When it is in human form we call it Human Manifestation मनुष्य पर्याय or मनुष्य भव.

Here one has to understand that this manifestation or modification i.e. *Paryay* पर्याय of the soul in human form or any other embodied form is not the true manifestation of the soul. Instead it is a union of the matter ( in the form of a body शरीर ) and the soul ( जीव ). The characteristics of this union are different from the characteristics of the soul in its pure form. This soul in the union has the quality and ability to know, to believe and to experience.

This soul which has above qualities while in conjunction with the body thinks that this union is its real existence and all the characteristics and qualities of this union are his own qualities.

Therefore this soul does not realise that in fact it has own separate existence and characteristics which are different than those of the Human form ( body + soul ). You see that even though soul in this form thinks so, in reality it does not lose its characteristic of existence.

Due to such wrong beliefs or misconceptions its knowledge also becomes erroneous. And its conduct and behaviour also becomes the same. In short its belief, its knowledge and conduct all are on the wrong path. It is exactly what the Jain scriptures describe as *Mithya-Darshan* मिथ्यादर्शन, *Mithya Dnyan* मिथ्याज्ञान and *Mithya-Charitra* मिथ्याचारित्र ( false belief, false knowledge and false conduct ). And as an outcome of this,

minute *Karmic* atoms ( कर्म ) get attracted and attached ( bonded ) to the soul. I will explain to you this *Karma* theory later.

Because of wrong thinking that the union of body and soul is one's real self, each one has this misconception that this body is 'me' or 'myself'. He thinks, 'if my body is tall I am tall; if it is fair, I am fair; if it is sick, I am sick. When the body and soul are united, I am born; when they separate I am dead'. When bodily comforts are present, 'I am happy'.

Therefore he tries to acquire material things and possessions which he thinks are necessary for his so called happiness. And then he strives and struggles day and night to earn money for acquiring these material things. Well, this is another subject different from our present discussion.

Since you both are students of science, I will give you an example from chemistry. Students of science and those who are intellectuals understand this subject of philosophical principles easily. And then they become more and more interested in it.

Jainism is in fact, science of substances, i.e. *Dravya* द्रव्य or knowledge of true nature of existence of various substances. We study matter in physics. But according to Jain philosophy matter is only one of the six substances. Soul is another one of those six substances. Our Jain philosophy explains in details the true nature of this 'soul'. And thereafter it tells you as to how to experience one's own soul in the pure form.

Once one realises that soul substance is in fact his/her identity, any intellectual person would be eager to know the true nature of the soul in its original/pure form. The anxiety and enthusiasm of knowing the true nature of soul i.e. one's own self can be compared to the happiness of a boy who is brought up in an orphanage, suddenly meets his parents.

I was about to give you an example from chemistry. We know that  $H_2O$  is a water molecule and it is a combination of ' $H_2$ ' and ' $O$ '. In this the characteristics of ' $O$ ' or Oxygen are different from the characteristics of water or ' $H_2O$ '. Therefore if we want to know the characteristics of Oxygen alone and at the same time want to separate it from ' $H_2O$ ', we have to first believe that it has different qualities and characteristics than that of water and that it can be separated from it ( water ). It has to be learned from chemistry teacher. We will have to learn and experiment the process which is needed to separate Oxygen from water. And only then we can get pure Oxygen very easily.

Similarly the characteristics and qualities of pure soul are different from the qualities of the conjunction of body + soul. An embodied soul



can achieve its separate eternal existence in its purest form. This is the ultimate or final Goal of each and every soul.

To achieve this status of separate pure eternal existence we have to take the guidance of those liberated souls who have already attained that liberated stage. Under their guidance we should study and know the characteristics and qualities of 'Pure Soul' substance.

Before discovering true nature of the soul we must firmly believe that we can attain that stage of eternal pure existence.

Thereafter by practising to concentrate on one's own 'pure self' one experiences and realises his own 'Self'. This realisation is known as *Samyak Dnyan* सम्यक् ज्ञान i.e. Real Right Knowledge. The firm belief about one's own self is known as *Samyak Darshan* सम्यक् दर्शन i.e. Real Right Belief.

When one concentrates on his own pure soul, he attains the condition of equanimity or passionless conduct, which is known as *Samyak Charitra* सम्यक् चरित्र i.e. Real Right Conduct. *Samyak Darshan*, *Samyak Dnyan* and *Samyak Charitra* all are manifested in same *Samay*.

When one attains this stage he is known as *Samyak Drishti* सम्यक् दृष्टि. Thereafter he always knows that he is different and separate from the body. Then he makes frequent attempts again and again to achieve (attain) this stage of self experience. Gradually he starts attaining higher spiritual stages.

As the spiritual experience becomes more frequent and of a longer duration he attains higher spiritual stages. And as a consequence of that he practices penance in his external behaviour, thereby achieving more and more spiritual purity. Eventually he attains the stages of *Vrati Shrivaka* व्रती श्रावक and *Muni* मुनि i.e. monk respectively.

But this still is a mixed stage of purity and impurity. Though he has complete Real Right Belief of purity of his own soul and also has experienced that status, he is still in the stage of being in conjunction with the body. But despite of being with the body he ceases to have affection for it and does not identify himself with the same.

Just as after engagement, a girl though staying at her father's place, starts losing the feeling of possessiveness towards her maternal home. Or when one decides to have his separate residence from the joint family and acquires a new house, even before he actually moves in the new house, the feeling of detachment of the former house creeps in him.

While the soul starts attaining this stage of self experience more frequently and for a longer duration each time, he reaches a stage where he is constantly in that condition for ever.

Here out of eight *Karmas* his four material *Karmas* are destroyed for ever. He attains omniscience or total knowledge *Sarvadnyata* (सर्वज्ञता) and is devoid of all passions i.e. *Kashaya* कषाय. This is known as *Veetaragata* वीतरागता. It is supreme piousness without any passions like hatred, love, anger, greed, piety, affection, sympathy etc. known as *Bhava Karma* भावकर्म.

Such souls who are still in conjunction with the body and have four remaining *Karmas* are known as *Arihant* or *Arahant* अरिहंत / अरहंत. Apart from destruction of four *Karmas* they have attained highest manifestations like omniscience, omnivision, eternal Bliss and omnipotence i.e. supreme strength.

They impart preachings of the right path to liberation i.e. salvation, the path through which they have experienced the true and pure form of 'Atma' and achieved liberation. They have achieved all the four manifestations mentioned above.

We had begun with the question, "What is 'God' or 'Ishwar'?" The answer is *Arihant* are the Gods or *Ishwar* in embodied form. After attaining the *Arihant* status the next stage of attainment is *Siddha Paramatma* सिद्ध परमात्मा. In simple words it can be described as "totally liberated pure soul". He is for ever liberated from the body. That is, he is free from cycle of birth and death.

His remaining four material *Karmas* are also destroyed and he is for ever liberated from all the *Karmas*. He does not get bonded by *Karmas* ever after. He has attained the 'Total Pure Soul' status. All the infinite *Gunas* or attributes are manifested to their fullest capacity, and the soul is totally liberated.

*Samyak Darshan* or Real Right Belief can be achieved in all the four phases the soul passes through. Phase i.e. *Gati* गति means a particular state of Being. In this cosmos living beings are found in four different forms i.e. phases. They are Humans, Animals, Heavenly Gods and Residents of Hell. So any living being in any phase out of these four can achieve *Samyak Darshan* or Real Right Belief. But attaining the status of *Muni*, *Arihant* and *Siddha* is possible only while one is in the male form of human phase.

Now that we have understood what is *Ishwar* we will find out what is its exact nature.

You may put forward any doubts or questions you have in your mind. I will try to answer the questions and clear your doubts as and when I am dealing with the topics or subjects to which they pertain.

With love.

Your Mom.