



THE DISTILLED ESSENCE OF NON-VIOLENCE

(A translation of Ahimsa Darshan)

by

Upadhyaya Amar Muni





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FOREWORD

By Acharya Sri Chandana Ji

Venerable Gurudev Upadhyaya Amar Muni has left behind a legacy. A legacy of life values, of transformational thoughts and of simplified religiosity. His literary contribution is immense; spanning the study of Jain Agamas as well as other religions and philosophies.

Gurudev was blessed with the exceptional capacity to re-look and re-assess all that he saw and read. This enriched his discourses with practical tips as well as spiritual insights. His intuition and compassion made him a true seer and Guru.

With his holistic understanding of life, he offered suggestions and solutions for personal, social and national evolution. With each suggestion, he brought people closer to spirituality.

“Ahimsa Darshan” is one such literary masterpiece which reflects his astute insights as well as spiritual sadhana. It is a compelling book, as well as necessary in today’s strife filled times. The manner in which he offers an interpretation and explanation of what is written in the sacred texts is path-breaking in itself.

Non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy and non-possessiveness constitute Dharma (the real path). These five are to be adopted as the Smaller Vows of the layperson’s religious endeavours and the Greater Vows of that of the monk’s path. Violence and possessiveness have to be given up so that non-violence and non-possessiveness may be embraced as a way of life. But such an object-focussed definition of religion coupled with pressure to incorporate that into life has made religion impractical. When these ideals cannot be incorporated from within one’s inner being, then religion remains at a superficial level.





According to Mahavira, violence does not arise from the act itself; rather, it is the violent thought which is the root of bondage. When compassion rises forth and one is filled with gratitude, then Mahavira's path of non-violence shines forth.

Ahimsa is an elusive subject for violence is incorporated in the very matrix of existence. According to Jainism, even the basic act of breathing harms the micro-organisms in the universe. Then how can one even think of a non-violent life? Is it at all possible to be completely non-violent? Gurudev dwells on this topic intuitively and offers us a wealth of explanation and analysis. His explanation of objective versus subjective violence, physical versus mental violence, and gross versus subtle violence opens a debate in the mind of the reader. Gradually, as the pages turn, the seeker comes to understand how one must strive to be non-violent, and even when violence cannot be avoided, how one can avoid karmic bondage. This is the path breaking tenet of this book.

The Great Saint of Virayatan, Amar Muniji, expounded three tenets for a good and pure life – Service, Education and Sadhana. The first tenet of service was to fulfil the aim of embracing a life of non-violence by developing a healthy, clean life system. This would give us a life of non-violence.

The second tenet of education was to constructing one's spiritual intelligence and support towards such an act in the life of others as well.

The third tenet of sadhana was based on right distribution of acquired wealth by detachment. Here the value of non-possessiveness is incorporated in the sadhana of life.

Gurudev Amar Muniji's book "Ahimsa Darshan" is a path-breaking work. It is a beacon of light in today's world. I am sure this book will be a guide for doubts and dilemmas in life.

My blessings and gratitude to the members of Sugal & Damani group for their dedication in bringing out this book. This





is a welcome addition to the spiritual literature of Jain community. Thanks and congratulations to Dr. Pratibha Jain for yet another brilliant translation of Gurudev's works. Our thanks also go to Mrs. Radhika Mohan for her efficient editing.

Acharya Chandana

Veerayatan

Rajgriha

24th September 2016







PUBLISHERS' NOTE

“Ahimsa Darshan” is the need of the hour. Today, when we receive news of violence day in and day out, this book comes forth to offer us solace and solutions. It makes Ahimsa a practical and true way of life. I am sure this English translation of Gurudev Upadhyaya Amar Muni’s literary work will benefit laypersons and scholars alike. I am therefore grateful to Sugal & Damani for taking on the responsibility of publishing this noteworthy work.

Indian thought and philosophy has always stressed that among all forms of existence, this human life is considered the most sacred. To succeed here is to be successful everywhere. To lose here is to be a loser everywhere. This world is a mirror of your present life and determines your future existence.

As Gurudev explains in the book, human life is like standing at a crossroad. One path leads to heaven and liberation, while the other path leads to hellish existence. The third path leads to tiryanch which means a life of animal or birds. The fourth path leads to the celebrated human life. You have to decide which path you wish to adopt.

The crossroads stretch in four directions, it is up to you which path you choose to take. If as a human being, you decide to walk the path of truth and non-violence, then you will find happiness here and here-after, and you will also bring happiness into the life of others.

It is important to avoid the path of negative actions and negative thoughts and instead lead a life of peace and happiness. Walking on the path of truth and non-violence is like walking the path of divine light. This light will never fade or dim, nor will it ever be shrouded by darkness.

I am grateful to Acharya Chandanaji for recognizing the need for an English version of “Ahimsa Darshan”, and for her encouragement and blessings for the same.





I extend my appreciation to Dr. Pratibha Jain for undertaking the translation of the original text with such sincerity and dedication. Thanks also to Mrs. Radhika Mohan for editing the manuscript, for the encouragement and support for the publication. I thank Mr. T.R. Daga, Secretary, Veerayatan and Directors of Sugal & Damani, G.N. Damani, P.B. Chheda, R.N. Damani, Prasanchand Jain, Vinodh Kumar, Nitesh, Rajen Chheda, Kishore Ajmera, Pramod, Mitul, Pratheek

We hope that the message of the great saint through this work will reach far and wide and be successful in dispelling the gloom of greed and terrorism from every heart and replace it with faith and serenity.

N. SUGALCHAND JAIN

24th September 2016





A WORD FROM THE TRANSLATOR

Once again, the joy was mine as I poured over pages and pages of profound thoughts on the power of non-violence. Gurudev Upadhyaya Amar Muni's writing is informative, intuitive, religious and spiritual. Translating his literary masterpiece "Ahimsa Darshan" from Hindi to English was a pleasure-filled task that cannot be described in words.

I am indeed grateful to Shri Sugalchand Jain, Chairman Emeritus, Sugal & Damani, for giving me yet another opportunity of working with the literature of one of the greatest saints of the Jaina religion, Upadhyaya Amar Muniji. I have already had the pleasure of translating his 'Aparigraha Darshan' and "Samayika Sutra." Each book is a unique experience, unparalleled in itself. In "Ahimsa Darshan", he takes us through the maze of concepts surrounding violence and non-violence. And by the time we reach the end of the book, the maze transforms into practical answers. Furthermore, the constant churning of thoughts which invariably accompanies the process of translation is a reward in itself.

My profound thanks to Radhika Mohan for her meticulous editing; my mentor and father, Shri Dulichand Jain for his inspiration; and my husband Mahendar Chordia for being a pillar of support.

I pray and hope that the great saint's message of non-violence has been captured in its profound purity during the elusive process of translation.

Pratibha Jain
15th September 2016







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INTRODUCTION

Ahimsa – The Sacred Stream of Life

When we look at the world around us, we see an endless flurry of activities. Everyone is busy: be it human beings or other creatures. Flocks of birds flutter around in search of grains. Humans brave sunshine and rain, to work in mines, fields or industry.

What is the reason for all these activities?

What are we searching for?

Is it for comfort in life and peace of mind?

Every person wants to have more comforts than others and aspires to be richer than his neighbour. Remaining dissatisfied and self-centred, he continues to exploit others! In other words, he keeps on committing violence towards others – even if the violence is inflicted through speech or thought rather than action.

Can he then find peace and happiness?

No, the formula for peace and happiness can never be found through violence. The use of violence can only initiate opposition, lead to a chain-reaction of breeding hatred which in turn will lead to more violence. To attain peace and happiness we need to accept and embrace non-violence in mind, body and speech.

This is the distilled essence of ahimsa.

This is the reason why the greatest of thinkers searched for ahimsa and propounded it as the prime principle for leading a happy and peaceful life. The loftiest peak of human evolution and human thought is that of ahimsa. Whether it is bliss experienced





in this world or beyond, the foundation of a blissful life is ahimsa. In the evolution from individual to family, family to society, society to nation, and nation to universal brotherhood, it is the purest feeling of ahimsa which is at play.

An evaluation of the lofty ideals of human civilization can be done by understanding ahimsa. In this world torn by violence and destruction, where the power-hungry and intolerant dominate through blind selfishness, ahimsa stands out like an oasis in a desert. It is the realm where humans can heave a sigh of relief and breathe free. The serene gaze of ahimsa is very important to view oneself and others on the same platform. Without ahimsa, man can neither recognize himself nor another.

Ahimsa is an intrinsic part of every world religion, but what is the true essence of ahimsa?

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# Chapter 1

## The Essence of Ahimsa

### The emergence of ahimsa:

When we study the life of primeval man, hunting wild animals for meat and wearing their skin to cover the body was the way of life. Man had no value for the life of other creatures. His life was a question of survival. He was unaware of the fact that all other creatures are the same as us, that they experience happiness and sorrow just like us, desire to be free of sorrows just as we do, and that they also aspire for happiness.

History tells us that even before the Rishi culture, the Jaina culture propounded this knowledge to humanity at large. The Dashavaikalika Sutra, Churni 1, states: “O man! Just as you have attained this human birth to travel through life in a joyous and peaceful manner, so also all the creatures of this universe aspire a life of peace and joy. Just as you do not wish to harm yourself, do not harm another. Just as you do not want any sorrow or pain for yourself, so also, all other creatures do not wish sorrow or pain for their own life.” Here, one is propelled to think: Can we not choose a life of mutual benefit and peace? Why should we choose to live in a manner that harms another? We have options before us. We can satisfy hunger with grains instead of meat? We can cover and protect the body with clothes made from cotton instead of animal skin. We always have a more evolved choice before us if we just stop to think.

The history of human evolution reiterates this great principle of ahimsa time and again. This message of Bhagwan Rishabhdeva, the first proponent of Jaina culture, brought humaneness into our lives.





## **Ahimsa - the pillar of all values:**

To say that ahimsa is the greatest contribution of Jainism to the world culture would not be an exaggeration. Ahimsa is the first principle in the evolution of Jainism. It has also been embraced by other religions and cultures. In its various forms such as compassion, love and tolerance, it has become the life-breath of Indian culture. As mentioned in Dashavaikalika Sutra, Churni 1: “In the all-pervasive spirit of non-violence, other vows of truth, non-stealing, non-possessiveness and celibacy are naturally included.”

In every sadhana of Jainism, however small or large, the music of ahimsa is in the background. It is the first vow in the construction of one’s spiritual life, be it a householder or a monk. The difference is that the householder observes it in a limited manner as a smaller vow, while the monk observes it more strictly and as a greater vow. Both have to embrace the vow of ahimsa. Its primacy stays unquestioned.

Although each of the vows is lofty in its range and application, yet you can clearly see how ahimsa forms the base for each of these. If there is ahimsa, then truth will sustain, so will non-stealing, non-possessiveness and celibacy. All the vows, austerities, renunciations and restraints in our life necessarily require the principle of ahimsa. The greatest of austerities will not bear fruit without a non-violent spirit. Ahimsa is the foundation on which the highest of principles can be erected. Where there is ahimsa, other life qualities such as compassion, truth, forgiveness and kindness will sustain. Without ahimsa, everything will crumble.

## **Austerities without self-mortification:**

From ancient times till present day, many aspirants undertake austerities to exert control over the body and senses. Self-mortification is considered by many aspirants as a religious practice, but let us examine it. Think about this: How can the body, mind and senses, which we have acquired by infinite merit,





be deemed as sinful? The body and senses are only an instrument. One can use them for the purpose of pious or sinful deeds. They can give rise to merit or demerit. But merit and demerit do not exist in the body or the senses. They reside in the right and wrong tendencies in man's mind.

Hence we don't need to annihilate the body and senses, instead, we must nurture them to reach our goal. Jainism does not consider the aimless exercise of the body and senses as religion! Inflicting pain upon oneself or another are both forms of violence. Rather, it is the purification of mind which forms the core of religion.

Apart from the body and mind, speech forms the third aspect of our existence. Let us examine its relation to ahimsa.

### **Truth enlivened with ahimsa:**

Bhagwan Mahavira has stated that truth is God – “tam sacham khu bhagavam.” But he also says that one must speak truth in a manner which is not hurtful. There are many who are so fanatical about speaking the truth that they do not even stop to consider the consequences. They do not check whether their speech will benefit or harm the family, society or nation!

One must speak, but with wisdom. Only then their speech becomes golden. It then benefits not only the self but others as well.

Mahavira addressed his disciples and explained to them that as seekers of truth, they must always practice truthful speech, but never ever speak words that cause any harm. For instance, imagine that a hunter appears before you in a forest and demands to know which way the animals have gone? What if some bandits were chasing a group of nuns or innocent passengers and ask of you the direction they have gone in? What should one reply? Mahavira says that one can remain silent in such a situation. But what if by remaining silent, the problem is not averted? Then, he says, one must seek to protect rather than speak the truth.





The Acharanga Sutra states that if an untruth is uttered to protect the life of another, then it is not considered as a sin. Such an untruth gains value since it is steeped in ahimsa. Until the river of truth does not flow through our thoughts, words and action, life cannot become pious and pure. Mahavira clearly stated that one must allow the truth of thought to enter into the speech and allow the truth of speech to enter one's life on earth. Only then human life will become innocent and child-like.

### **Ahimsa - the great river of compassion:**

When the great Ganges flows with its colossal currents, it nurtures the green grass on the banks and lush foliage begins to dance in the forests.

But when does this happen?

It happens when the flow of water reaches there! Even though we can't see the expanse of the flowing waters, we know that the droplets of water seep into the earth, flow towards the trees to nourish them allowing them to grow tall and majestic.

If the river dries up, how will the greenery continue to remain? It will dry up and vanish. The beauty of nature will disappear from our lives. So also, if the great river of kindness continues to flow within our hearts and nurtures our body and speech, then other vows will simply integrate themselves in our lives.

The followers of non-violence and kindness have a heart filled with pure emotion and thus become a storehouse of compassion for all creatures. Such people will not harm others nor can they bear to tolerate violence between others. Every word of theirs flows like sweet nectar. A bitter hurtful truth can never intrude upon their thoughts or words. When you find poison in water, it is apparent that there is a lack of nectar in the source of that fountain. Those who practice non-violence look upon all as equal. They treat the rich and the poor with the same untainted spirit of compassion. The spring of ahimsa gently flows in their body, drenching both the mind and speech.





### **Impossibility of ahimsa without restraint:**

Bhagwan Mahavira stated, “Exercise restraint on your hands and do not give them the liberty to do inappropriate actions. You must have complete authority and control over your hands. When these hands go out of control and move towards misdeeds, they then become an instrument in the destruction of the self and others. If you allow them to remain unrestrained, then they will develop thorns which will cause violence all around. The boat of your life will be swept away by the sea of misery and this rare and priceless human life will become meaningless.” Ahimsa has to be integrated in the body, mind and speech. The seeker who embraces the vow of non-violence in his body, mind and speech is a true spiritual aspirant. If his thoughts are infused with violence and he pretends otherwise in his actions, then this duality will tear him apart.

### **The sacred stream of our inner life:**

This vast human existence has always seen a curious mix of the pious and the law-breakers. The Ramas and Ravanans do not come from elsewhere, but are born from within us. As explained by the great seers of India, if this soul, which has been a demon in the form of Ravana from time immemorial, has to be transformed into a human being or a celestial being, then bathe it in the serene waters of ahimsa and allow it to heal the inner impurities.

If there is pride, it will get washed away with these waters. So also, the perversions of delusion, greed and attachment which contaminate the mind and heart will be cleansed.

Often man is trapped in the false belief that he has to seek solutions to his problems outside, and not from within. He wanders everywhere seeking answers. He does not apply medicine on the spot where he is hurt, but elsewhere. If you have hurt your hands but apply medicine on your legs, how will you find relief? If you have a headache but apply sandalwood paste on your palms, how will you be healed? So also, if you have soiled your hands but choose to only wash your feet, how will your hands become clean?





Where does the grime of perversions such as lust, pride and greed stick upon us? If that dirt sticks to our body, then it can be washed away in the holy waters of any pilgrimage, or even by taking a dip in a pond or river nearby. Jainism states that if the grime sticks to the soul, then why waste time wandering in the pilgrimage centres around the world? The loftiest pilgrimage is our own soul.

It is in our soul that the sacred streams of love and non-violence flow! Jainism is a highly spiritual philosophy which propounds that the human being can evolve only in his humaneness. When a person aspires for his own well-being and wants redemption for himself, where should he go to achieve this? Jainism answers, saying that one has to stay right here, and not go outside to any holy river or lofty peaks. For self-enhancement, for self-purification and to awaken the divine within one's own being, there is no need to travel even an inch. Wherever you are, awaken your humaneness in that very spot and redeem your own soul. Emancipation is a state within your own being.

### **Bathing in the inner sacred stream:**

Jainism sees the sacred stream as flowing within the individual. It is flowing within us through the three channels of our mind, speech and action. But we have to make an effort to swim in this stream. Even if we bathe in thousands of pilgrimage spots, it will not yield any results until one takes the inner dip. By taking a dip in the nectar like stream of your inner life, you will be elevated from the status of soul to super soul, and from human to divine.

So how does one find this inner spot? Can it be found by sitting at a street corner or by wandering in the forests? No, it can only be found within. The purification of sadhana is within us and the purification of grime is also within us. The greatest and mightiest of venerable Gods is sitting within us in the form of our divine soul. The rest of the Gods can be found at other places, but our own divine soul is present within us. Until we start worshipping it and start cleaning the inner sins, the outer Gods cannot benefit us in any way.





We need to start feeling the presence of the inner sacred stream. The Ganges of non-violence and truth flows in every nerve of our being. Take any of the world religions – be it Jainism, Hinduism or Buddhism, they may have other differences but they all believe in non-violence. They all propound that non-violence is the path to attain salvation and eternal joy.

When a river flows, then greenery starts spreading on the banks and when the river dries up, the greenery in the surrounding areas dries up too. So also when the stream of non-violence continues to flow through our body, mind and speech, then other life values such as truth, non-stealing and celibacy will also flower and unfold. But if the stream of non-violence dries up, then all of these will also dry up.

Neither the life of a householder will remain nor that of a monk. If all of these religions have to flower and spread their fragrance in our lives, then ahimsa must be allowed to flow undisturbed through the channels of body, mind and speech.

Is ahimsa only the path to awakening spirituality or does it have a much wider spiritual connotation?

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## Chapter 2

### The Spiritual Foundation of Ahimsa

There are two aspects of human life – one is that of the body and the other is the soul. Those who have studied the science of the body explain that the heart is the centre which gives life to the entire body. But those who are self-realized explain that there is a soul within the body which illuminates the heart, intelligence and the mind.

The soul is a glowing pillar found within the network of muscles and bones. It is a subtle consciousness in which love and compassion reside and also the true form of the human being. If the stream of love and compassion did not flow in the heart of human beings, the joy of familial bonding and society would have splintered long ago.

The heart is also the seat of patriotism, brotherhood and universal love. The profound thoughts of Rama, Krishna, Mahavira and Buddha have emerged from the fountainhead of eternal love; the sweet waters of affection from the pond of the heart and soul.

#### **The religion of the heart:**

Is ahimsa the religion of the bones or muscles? No, it is a religion of the heart. The heart is the centre of all human emotions. Ahimsa is the universal form of the unfettered stream of love and affection which flows from one's heart. Love, compassion and sympathy are the various streams of ahimsa. The words may be different, but the emotions behind all of these remain the same.

Indian scriptures are a storehouse of words because they are filled with emotions. Hundreds of words have been used to





express the same emotion in these scriptures. Like the different facets of a diamond, each emotion has myriad aspects. At times, one aspect is highlighted and at other times, another.

One form of love has been given the name of ‘mother’ and yet another name for love is ‘father’. So also, husband, wife, brother and sister are all different manifestations of the same emotion: love. Behind all of this, the tenderness of human heart can be seen. This tenderness is known as non-violence, compassion and kindness.

When the soul awakens from slumber, and the veils of hatred and animosity fall away, the hard rock of ego is shattered and the spring of love bursts forth. It is only then that non-violence and compassion can shine through.

O human being, wherever you may be, however you may be, but the love in your heart must flow ceaselessly. Let not this sacred stream dry up. If affection does not remain within you, then nothing else will remain. A flower has the beauty of colour and form as long as the element of water is contained in it. So also, the attraction within you will remain as long as the stream of kindness flows within you, allows you to think of the pain and difficulties in another’s life as your own, and treat another’s life as your own.

If there is no sensitivity in the heart, how can humaneness reside in it? After all, what is the difference between a human being and a demon? When the demon assumes a human form it is his thoughts, feelings and behaviour that differentiates him from a saint. Our great seers have always said that it is not enough to have the body of a human being. One must also have the heart of a human being.

As a human, it is important to have a sympathetic concern towards the well-being of others along with intelligence, feelings and compassion. Apart from these qualities, the human vision plays an important role in the open-minded choices you make which determine your behaviour towards society, neighbours, birds, animals and other creatures.





### **Spread the stream of love:**

Epics narrate tales about how Rishi Bhagirath with his unflinching tapasya, brought the Ganges back to earth. Every individual in this world can be a Bhagirath, for each one has the power to unleash the Ganges of love and compassion. This river flows from the human heart. Great and enlightened souls like Buddha, Mahavira, Rama, Krishna and Jesus spread this very stream of love.

Spreading this stream of love depends on how far you are willing to go. Does the Ganges of your heart stop with yourself, or with your family? There are many who do not even care about their neighbours. There are others who are willing to make animal sacrifices in the name of superstitions!

The question is, should we restrict our heart? If our heart has the capacity for universal love, then why should we allow our selfishness and narrow-mindedness to rule over it? In India even monkeys, bulls and elephants have been elevated to the status of Gods, then why shouldn't we allow ourselves to include all living creatures in our heart?

### **The vision of non-duality:**

Mahavira said that we must treat all other creatures as we treat our very souls. We must love all others as we love our own selves. The Advaita vision of Shankaracharya also breaks the divide between me and not-me. To see oneself in the universe and the universe in one's own self is the highest vision of life. Only when the divide is erased will the heart and soul open to a universal vision and allow an individual to rise above selfishness, pettiness and animosity. As Mahavira said, "I belong to all and all belong to me."

### **Vegetarianism and non-violence:**

Magnificent mansions can only be built on firm foundations. Similarly, to infuse young minds with compassion it is necessary to inculcate love in their hearts for animals, birds and the environment. Killing animals for our own pleasure desensitizes





children. If they are told that it is alright to butcher animals and cook meat for consumption, then we are sowing the seeds of violence in young hearts. If they learn to believe that eating meat is alright, then it becomes a licence to use leather and fur.

Violence breeds further violence. When these children grow up, they will extend their childhood conditioning to the next generation. To inculcate values of compassion in their hearts, we must begin at a tender age. It is imperative to teach them to love and respect all animals, and offer them shelter and protection.

### **Shutting down slaughter houses:**

We have faced centuries of slavery but are finally independent today. We must reconstruct society on the basis of our sacred divinity and spiritual thoughts. If we still go on constructing large slaughter houses, then how will we nurture the feelings of compassion and non-violence? It is a strange paradox that people are averse to wearing blood stained clothes, but they are content to line their stomach with the blood and meat of dead animals.

Let each one of us resolve to oppose the slaughter of innocent creatures. Each one of us should wish for the well-being of humanity at large and pray for fearlessness in the entire universe. The Bhagavad Gita says that one must live fearlessly and bestow fearlessness upon others. Live joyously yourself and allow others to live with joy as well. In fact, not just the human beings, even the animals have the right to live with freedom and without fear. An important principle of Jainism is, “Live and let live.”

### **Nothing on this Earth is a waste:**

There are many who state that we have no choice but to kill animals so that the limitation of food grains is solved and that there will be enough meat available for consumption. There are others who state that animals that are not useful to us any more can be killed. What kind of reasoning is this? Can cruelty be sanctioned by this argument?

Actually, there is no object in this universe which is a waste. A clever physician can transform poison into nectar. When poison





is not considered as worthless, then how can another creature be considered worthless? If we don't know how to use available resources, who should we blame other than ourselves?

There is an interesting fable from Bhagwan Mahavira's era. Jivaka, the physician, studied at Takshashila. After he completed his studies, his guru put him through a test before permitting him to start working as a physician. He instructed Jivaka to search in all the four directions for up to a certain distance and bring back an object which could not be used as a medicine.

Jivaka set upon the task and searched diligently, but could not find any substance or herb devoid of medicinal properties. He returned to his guru and said, "I could not find any such thing. Even a stone, dung and stick have their benefits. Forgive me for returning empty handed." Hearing his reply, his guru was overjoyed, much to Jivaka's surprise.

The guru embraced the young student and said, "Son! Now you can go wherever you wish. Your education is complete. You have grasped the essence of medicinal science. Whatever challenges come your way, you will be successful. In this vast universe, every plant and every substance has the power to heal. The challenge before any seeker of medicine is to understand the healing power. Now that you have grasped the mantra of healing, you can go and face life."

When the universe is full of resources, and there is not an object which can be discarded as useless, then the argument in favour of allowing violence and non-vegetarianism because of depleting resources holds no ground. The seekers of truth should collectively end this destructive game of animosity and violence and put together a constructive and peaceful programme for life. If this is not done, we will not survive for long.

We have to move our gaze inwards and fill our hearts with pure love. Affection is that string that unites hearts and allows humanity to sustain in a holistic manner. Let us understand this aspect of our soul and embark on a fresh lease of life.

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## Chapter 3

### Ahimsa in Attitude

Much has been written about ahimsa and yet, it remains a concept that has been widely misunderstood. There is a subtle psychological reason behind this which will explain its elusive and subtle nature.

#### **The soul of ahimsa:**

Ahimsa is not merely a set of do's and don'ts in external behaviour, it is also a subtle part of the inner consciousness. But unfortunately that subtle form of ahimsa is becoming dimmer by the day, and it has acquired a shallow intellectual status. Consequently, the energy and soul of ahimsa is gradually evaporating. When the energy of a principle comes to an end, then that lifeless principle cannot lend glory to life. It cannot find the true solutions to life's problems, rather, it becomes a problem in itself. Is this what has happened with ahimsa as well?

For centuries, we have been eulogizing ahimsa as a great religion, a lofty principle, the highest truth of life and the basis for security in political life! For thousands of years, generation after generation, we have been venerating the principle of ahimsa. The question is – what is the result of all these efforts?

Why have we not been able to create a non-violent society?

There can be only two answers to this question. That the principle of ahimsa is merely an intellectual exercise for us! As though it is a non-material concept which has no relevance to real life! Or else, there could be another option: that ahimsa is in





itself a live pulsating truth, beneficial to humanity, but we have not known it in the real sense. Sometimes the long winding road of time lends dullness to the finest principles. Perhaps that could be the case!

### **Ahimsa's relationship to the heart:**

Actually, ahimsa has a real connection with the heart of human beings, not with the mind. Ahimsa is not related to logical arguments or fixed beliefs which are devoid of wisdom. It has a deep relationship with the inner life and with spiritual experience.

Our life is the canvas of ahimsa. When a tree is uprooted from the earth, then it cannot remain green or tall any more. So also, how can we nurture or keep it alive when we have uprooted it so harshly?

This is why today ahimsa has become limited in a miniscule framework of external behaviour. And thus the life-breath of ahimsa has been brutally murdered. If we want to infuse life into ahimsa once again, then we need to free it from its narrow framework of pretence, and place it once again in the subtle experience of life and well within the depths of the heart.

### **Sustaining ahimsa with one's attitude:**

Our attitude is formed by two things: what we progress towards as well as what we refrain from; i.e., progress and abstention. Both together refer to being alert and conscious. This is what creates our mental vibrations. When these vibrations are all-encompassing and beneficial, ahimsa appears in the form of external behaviour which is reflected in our progress (pravritti) as well as what we refrain from (nivritti).

Most religious and philosophical systems do not correlate ahimsa with rules and abstentions of practical life, but connect it with the basic and pure attitude of the mind. This is the seed of ahimsa. The seers and sages shed light on this seed of ahimsa and not on the flowers, stems and fruits. The rules and regulations of ahimsa may change according to time, place and context, but the





basic principle does not change.

Unfortunately, social administrators of the middle ages, whether they were religious or political, did not grasp ahimsa in its subtle originality. In the external drama of rules and abstentions, they have diluted ahimsa by coming up with simplistic solutions to existing problems. But the problem of violence cannot be solved this way. It keeps appearing in new forms and continues to harm various aspects of human existence.

If we can grasp the fundamental form of ahimsa, we can help to create a non-violent society which rests on an internal attitude of pure non-violence. Eventually this universal principle of non-violence can become the greatest force for mankind.

### **Ahimsa without fear and greed:**

I have often heard people explain the core of ahimsa in these words, “Do not give trouble to anyone, do not kill another being, and do not become the cause of another’s sorrow and tears. If you cause hurt to another, then you will also suffer hurt; if you cause harm to another, then you will also be harmed; and if you bring tears into the eyes of another, then you will also shed tears.”

The problem with this view is that it is the possibility of one’s own sorrows that is at the forefront. Should we avoid causing harm to another in order to protect ourselves alone? By thinking in this manner, are we not subjecting ourselves to fear and anxiety? Are we not becoming prey to mental violence?

Man goes about killing enemies for more power and wealth, or defeat his competitors ruthlessly to reach the top. As soon as greed replaces fear, violence rears its ugly head once again. Greed scores here only because man does not give up violence from his inner intention or *vritti*. If ahimsa awakens in one’s intention, then no amount of fear or greed can tempt one into violence.

### **Ahimsa in intention:**

Those who are non-violent in their inner intention cannot hurt others or take away the life of another. When one inculcates non-





violence in one's inner intention, then the possibility of violence is gradually ruled out.

Becoming non-violent in one's intention ensures that such a person cannot commit violence, even if his reputation or life is at stake. Ahimsa becomes a natural way of life for him. He does not practice non-violence for attaining the reward of heaven after death, nor for the happiness and well-being of family and society, nor for establishing one's reputation.

A true lover of ahimsa does not subscribe to the principle that he must love his enemies too, for he has no enemies in this world. He does not say that by understanding ahimsa, we will love rather than hate, for he has nothing but love in his heart. This is ahimsa in intention, which is the eternal and all-pervasive form of ahimsa.

### **Ahimsa as faith and feeling:**

When there is ahimsa in one's attitude, then one will develop faith in ahimsa. Undoubtedly, the waves of non-violence, compassion and truth are flowing in our life, but until the faith in ahimsa and compassion is not awakened, we do not realize its true form.

A mother's heart swells with the waves of love and compassion for her son. Possibly the flow of non-violence is hidden in her heart, but we cannot call it dedication to non-violence. Her compassion stems from the attachment to her son and thus is limited to her periphery.

When a cat holds her kitten between her jaws and takes it away, she does it so tenderly that even a single tooth mark is not found on the kitten's body. But the same teeth inflict pain and bloodshed on a mouse. What is the difference? In one instance it is the maternal instinct while in the other it is the instinct to attack.

The question is: does this maternal instinct evolve into ahimsa in a cat or a lioness? Ahimsa is an ideal and a conscious vision. A cat or another animal do not have any vision of non-violence. Until ahimsa takes on the form of faith and belief, it cannot become an integral part of our life.





Hence, one should not get trapped in the external form of ahimsa. Rather, one must look at its core. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life, it pervades the whole being and does not apply only to isolated acts. Nurture the logic arising from the mind with the tender and simple emotions of the heart. Then the form of ahimsa which will flower will be true and eternal. As we will see in the coming pages, it will also become the strong foundation for universal peace.

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## Chapter 4

### Foundation of Universal Peace

Ahimsa as propounded by Bhagwan Mahavira is a spiritual and social religion of high order. It illuminates human life from within and without. He gave ahimsa the title of ‘bhagavati’ or goddess. Without resorting to any external pressure, fear or temptation, this Goddess Ahimsa gives a natural inner inspiration to regard all other creatures of this universe as similar to one’s own self and advocates treating them with friendship and brotherhood without any discrimination.

Just as one’s own life is dear to oneself, and each one cherishes his or her own well-being, so do all other creatures cherish their own life and comforts – such wisdom is the foundational sound of ahimsa. Ahimsa has the power to break the barriers of ‘me’ and ‘you’, self and other, self and not-self which are based on hatred and enmity.

#### **The foundation of Ahimsa:**

Are all of us one or are we different?

Should we focus on our oneness or be obsessed by our differences?

The believers of Ahimsa see unity in life as a whole and think of all beings as one. According to them, all souls are one, possess the same form and are similar to each other. Bhagwan Mahavira said – ‘ege aaya’ which means ‘soul is one’.

But what about differences, one may ask!

What about the fact that we come from different castes, lineages, societies and nations? What about the fact that men





and women are different? We need to understand how these differences come into play. Do they exist at the core of our being or are they imposed externally?

The seers have taught us time and again that in its pristine form, the soul is non-different. It is when we refuse to see this truth that we get trapped in struggle and war, in hatred and enmity. These external differences are created by the mind. At the core of ahimsa, these differences do not exist. What exists in ahimsa are two ideals – ‘universal citizen’ and ‘world glory’. The great seers who adopted the path of ahimsa have found the inner strength to visualize such ideals.

Ahimsa has the power to make these ideals a part of our everyday existence. Nothing else has the foundational strength to assimilate humanity which has been torn apart by such external differences. The foundation of the universal citizen and world glory rests in safeguarding the creative freedom and basic rights of every individual. This is possible only through ahimsa and nothing else.

Ahimsa gives birth to trust which is the foundation for mutual affection, love and co-operation in family, society and nation. Trust has the power to unite the human mind which has been shattered and dispersed by distrust. The sound of ahimsa is seen in the slogan ‘sangachdhvam, samvaddhvam’ which means to walk together, to talk together.

This ideal of ‘togetherness’ is the greatest mantra for binding humanity, for it has the power to uplift each one of us from ‘me’ to ‘we’. The message of ahimsa and its dictum is simple: By individual goodness, love and sacrifice, through serene and mutual consideration, we can solve not just simple societal and national problems, but extremely complex problems pertaining to caste, creed, culture and nation.

This simple solution will harmonize difference with non-difference, and diversity with unity. Taking this path will ensure that one human being understands and embraces another. This





will transform the dream of universal brotherhood and universal peace into reality.

### **The evolution of non-violence:**

In the history of evolution, man was ‘alone’ in the beginning. Like a wild animal, he was trapped within the boundaries of his individual happiness and sorrow. There were biological relationships, but not social. The feeling of parenthood or brotherliness was absent. One did not take on the responsibility when a neighbour was in a state of pain or suffering.

Why was it so in that era?

The answer lies in the fact that human consciousness was limited and not inclusive at the time. Then a time arrived when the human being stepped out of his narrow framework to think not just for himself, but for others as well. The flame of amity and positive thoughts emerged in his heart. He began to extend his co-operation and inculcated a sense of mutual responsibility. It was now that the family evolved.

As the family emerged, the relationships of mother-father, brother-sister and husband-wife came into being. As the human mind expanded with the emotions of these relationships, the roots of familial emotions embedded themselves deep within the human race. Thus, the emotional and social growth of man became interconnected. His life values took on a social consciousness. Love and kindness towards family became a broader form of non-violence. It is one of the many avatars of Ahimsa Bhagavati, or the goddess of non-violence.

### **The process of non-violence:**

Non-violence frees mankind from violence. Enmity, hatred, jealousy, conflict, negative resolves, verbal abuse, anger, pride, greed, exploitation and control within the individual and society, are all forms of violence. The human mind has been constantly injured by the constant attacks of such negativities.





Therefore Bhagwan Mahavira taught, “Conquer anger not by anger, but by forgiveness. Conquer pride not by pride, but by humility. Conquer ego not by ego, but by simplicity and innocence. Conquer greed not by greed, but by contentment and generosity.” Such noble conquests fall under the realm of non-violence. Non-violence is the eternal proclamation of victory of good over evil and light over darkness.

Anger can only fuel anger, not reduce it. Hatred can only fuel hatred, not erase it. The greater problem arose when instead of nipping negative emotions in the bud, man multiplied them by responding to anger with anger, enmity with enmity, and violence with violence. As a grave consequence of such reactions, wars were fought, and grave punishments such as capital punishment and life imprisonment came in next. Thousands, lakhs and millions have lost their lives but the problem continued to loom large.

### **The vision of non-violence:**

Bhagwan Mahavira stated, “Whether it is animosity, hatred, oppression or torture, whatever it may be, ultimately they all return to the doer. Do not delude yourself into thinking that evil will stay wherever you committed the evil act and will not return to you. The sound created in the well comes back in the form of an echo.”

He further explained that one must not think of oneself and the other as distinct or two. Consciousness is one. The one upon whom you inflict pain is none other than your own self. O ignorant man! When you trouble another, realize that you are troubling your own self.

“The one whom you wish to kill is you.

The one whom you wish to control is you.

The one whom you wish to torture is you.”

This non-dual vision of Bhagwan Mahavira is the foundation of non-violence. If one sees another as an alien, he cannot free





himself from inflicting pain upon the other. Only a universal non-dual vision of the ‘self’ can save a human being from injustice and tyranny.

The words of Bhagwan Mahavira once again remind us, “One must not inflict pain upon another, kill another, govern upon another unreasonably, neither treat him like a slave, nor deprive him of freedom, nor inflict torture in any manner, and nor create any kind of upheaval in his life.”

This great proclamation of ahimsa has the power to bridge the body and mind, between external self and inner self, between a person and others around him, and create behavioural compatibility. Not just between human beings, ahimsa has the power to bring about harmony with the universe as a whole.

So what is ahimsa? To create an identity with total consciousness of all living beings without any partiality or differences! In ahimsa there is place for brotherhood even with the lowliest of creatures.

Bhagwan Mahavira did not propound ahimsa only as an ideal, but he offered its validity by completely living it in his own life. He showed the perfect relevance of the principle and practice of ahimsa. His life was an epitome of the high ideal of ahimsa and its experiments. He did not nurture any hatred or animosity towards those who stood vehemently against him. Only the pure feeling of wellness emanated from his being towards one and all.

As he stated, “I have friendliness towards all the creatures of this universe and enmity towards none.”

Mahavira’s teaching of ahimsa steeped in friendliness reached such a pinnacle that the creatures of the forest co-existed in his presence. The lion and the deer, snake and mongoose sat in serene silence like brothers forgetting their enmity across generations. Neither did the powerful display violence nor did the weak show fear. Both displayed the same affection and friendly rapport.

Ancient storytellers told us that in the kingdom of Bhagwan Mahavira, the lion cub was fed by the female deer and the fawn





by the lioness. Here emerged the lofty and eternal truth of India's spirituality: once ahimsa is established, enmity of a lifetime comes to an end and even the most ferocious of creatures renounce animosity. The stream of non-violence and compassion flows through all.

### **The inner spirit of ahimsa:**

A human being is essentially a compassionate creature who is first blessed with a heart and then the mind. No wonder the term 'humane' emerges from 'human'. Just as mind is the ground of logic and reasoning, the heart is the temple of devotion, love and compassion. A human life rich in humaneness carries ahimsa in its core.

Ahimsa is that space which allows man to consider the soul of another as his own, and feel the pain of one and all as his own pain. In simple terms, he sees all souls as one. Without seeing any difference between creatures, he exercises equanimity towards all.

Verily, this is the sadhana of equanimity which is based on treating all other creatures as oneself. The essential inner spirit of ahimsa lies in the following: whatever behaviour we expect from others, we must treat them in the same way.

Bhagwan Mahavira established oneness of all the creatures in the universe by stating that all souls are the same. What this means is that all beings are drops of the same universal spirit, all are flowers and leaves of the same tree of consciousness. This universal vision which rests on the foundation of ahimsa can be practiced not as an ordinary sadhana but one of great inner strength and courage.

### **Ahimsa – the path of courage:**

To practice ahimsa is to move from smallness to largeness; it is a sadhana to attain universality of the soul. It nurtures the evolution of the soul in such a pervasive manner that it allows all the souls of the universe to be embraced within it, just as





rivers merge with the ocean, which embraces each of them with equanimity, without any attachment or aversion.

This conquest over attachment and aversion is the path of ahimsa, and the one who embraces such ahimsa is a true conqueror. The one who rules over others with a sword by instilling terror in their hearts and believes in subjugating others is not considered a conqueror. He is actually a coward.

Ahimsa does not teach us cowardice of any form, rather, it is an exercise in courage. Ahimsa does not ask us to suffer any form of injustice or torture in silence. Just as performing any form of injustice is a sin, so also tolerating any form of injustice is considered a grave sin. Whether the injustice is social, political or personal, the same principle applies.

One who does not have the strength to take an action against violence can neither protect himself, nor his family, nor the society or nation. To think that non-violence allows people to stay chained to the shackles of slavery is a misunderstanding. Such an act has no value in life whatsoever.

### **Science and non-violence:**

History shows us that whenever science has created weapons that destroy lives and man has used these weapons, cruelty has run rampant. The first and second world wars were the dreadful repercussions of this action. We have seen how such acts have exhausted the human mind which has eventually found peace only by adopting policies of mutual kindness and co-existence.

The League of Nations and the United Nations Organizations have made enormous efforts in this direction which consequently led to establishing peace. Several countries adopted the policy of non-violence.

Science may give us large quantities of weapons but we must not be ruled by these, rather, we must learn to control and manage them. They must only be used in a mindful and vigilant manner, and to usher in protection and security. It is extremely important to





establish the benefit of any object. Science can therefore become a friend of ahimsa and not its destroyer.

Thus we see that ahimsa is the simplest and best path for global peace. Universal brotherhood can only be established by embracing non-violence and not by adopting the destructive path of violence.

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Chapter 5

Is Ahimsa Impractical?

The principle of Ahimsa, its implication and its impact on life cannot be undermined. Most cultures and religions propound it as a way of life. Many great seers have spoken about it and lived their life by this very principle. However, we need to examine Ahimsa in today's context: is it a practical possibility or an impractical ideal? Let us proceed with some honest curiosity.

The past, present and future of ahimsa:

Ahimsa is the opposite of himsa or violence. By dictating that one must not commit violence, this term does not endorse violence, rather it opens up a vast spectrum of thoughts. Whether violence is physical, mental or related to action, and whether it pertains to the personal, familial, social, national or global aspect of our life, it is not recommended in any form.

Looking back, we can only imagine what a splendid breakthrough it must have been 2500 years ago, when Mahavira and Buddha re-established ahimsa as a reaction against the violence prevalent at that time! They brought about a transformation in the lives of dacoits and criminals by inspiring them with the value of ahimsa. Once again, ahimsa spread in a universal way echoing its message of kindness, love and compassion.

The question is – can we incorporate ahimsa into the journey of our life, as it is today? Ahimsa may be the right path to follow, but is it practical enough to be followed today? When something is good or right in concept, it also needs to be useful and practical in order to add value to our life. Ahimsa has an ethical dimension which is timeless, and through restraint, practice and discipline, it can become a way of life.





Choosing ahimsa in a violent atmosphere:

A micro analysis of violence and non-violence is seen in Jaina philosophy. In a broad sense, violence is ‘killing of life’. Here the term ‘life’ includes not just human beings, but also animals as well as small creatures and micro organisms. Innumerable organisms may not be visible to the naked eye, but they are alive and present in this world. Jainism frequently speaks of how we commit violence unknowingly through our actions such as eating, walking and travelling. Even though we may not intend to harm or kill any creature, we unknowingly do so all the time.

When it is obvious no person can escape from violence, then what do we hope to gain by speaking of practising non-violence?

Is non-violence an impractical ideal?

Can we become totally non-violent?

How can every individual, whether one is an ordinary mortal or a monk, embrace the path of non-violence?

Can non-violence become a way of life?

If you look into your heart, you will know that non-violence is a possibility in life. How can we cast grave doubt upon a principle that has been a part of our vocabulary for centuries, and whose successful experiments were seen in the lives of greats such as Mahavira, Buddha, great politicians and even Mahatma Gandhi!

Not just one or two, thousands of aspirants have found shelter under the serene umbrella of non-violence, millions have realized that ahimsa is not merely an ideal that belongs to the sky, it is a practicality that resides right here on earth. Those who have led their life by applying this principle in practice have not found it to be impractical at all. But there are others who have not lead a non-violent life, and argue to prove it as impractical! This indeed is the problem.





Impossibility of life without ahimsa:

In life going forward without ahimsa is unthinkable. If a person wants to proceed on the path of his life in a humane manner, if he wants to achieve his desired goals of becoming human and humane, then he cannot afford to live without ahimsa even for a moment.

When a true human being walks the earth, he does not scatter thorns in the path of another's life. He does not fulfil his selfish needs by exploiting another. He walks about spreading the message of happiness. Wherever he goes, he showers love. But when one spreads vibrations of hatred and animosity, then it is easy to recognize that he is consumed by negative thinking.

To explain with an analogy, the driver who drives his vehicle without harming another is considered as competent. He not only avoids the young and the old people in his path, he also avoids bushes and thorns. On the other hand, one who harms people recklessly with his driving will indeed be looked upon as a maniac who should not be let loose on the roads.

So also, life is a vehicle driven by the individual or the soul. One must drive the vehicle of one's life with caution and vigilance. One must protect oneself from the accidents of passion such as anger, pride, greed and delusion. Such a person not only takes care of himself but also of others around him.

Art of life in ahimsa:

There are two ways to walk the challenging path of life. One person avoids the thorny bushes and sharp stones. He chooses the shortcuts or by-lanes on the way. If his clothes get caught in the thorns, he gently disentangles them; if a thorn pricks him, he immediately removes it; if he is hurt by a sharp stone, he applies first aid, but he keeps on moving. Nothing can stop him from moving towards his goal.

Another person on that path allows every obstacle to distract him from his goal. He is troubled by the path, by the thorns, and





by the stones. He uproots every bush in his way, and breaks every stone. When will he ever reach his goal? Perhaps never!

If you wish to traverse the path of life, then do not get entangled with the obstacles that fall in your path. With patience and cleverness, avoid troubles without making a mountain out of a molehill. Protect yourself on both the sides as you walk.

Choosing peace:

Thus the first step of life is that of non-violence. The simple rules on this path are not to get entangled with anyone. If ever you get entangled because of the situation, then try to solve it with a peaceful mind. This is the inspired lifestyle of ahimsa.

On the other hand, the path of violence is such that if ever one gets entangled in it, he then resolves to destroy whomever he encounters on the path. Such a mind enslaves itself in the realm of violence.

A person can adopt any one of these two ways. To those who state that ahimsa is impractical, ask them to re-think! To protect oneself and another is the most practical thing to do! This is the path of ahimsa. It is the path of protection. The other path destroys oneself and others; how can it be considered as the right path?

The first thing is to define violence and non-violence in a precise manner. If this is not established, it is tough to establish or walk the right path. One must be mindful of one's own life and observe what happens to others by one's violent and non-violent acts! If one reflects with a healthy mind and steady intelligence, he will realize that he stays in the realm of non-violence much more than in that of violence.

If a small incident happens at home, do we drag the matter to court? When issues in the family are resolved, they are seldom resolved by the stick. Just as how the members of a family behave in a loving and courteous manner, why can't the same method be adopted towards society and the nation?

Those who walk the path of violence are likely to tire of it one





day. Those who cause bloodshed also search for peace in the end. Why is this so? Why should anyone reach it after the bloodshed of millions, why not adopt it right in the beginning? Wouldn't that be the ideal thing to do?

Ahimsa as practical life:

If one who considers non-violence as impractical and violence as practical takes a vow that he will only commit violence henceforth, can he survive even for a day? The vow of non-violence can be adopted and practiced throughout life, but the vow of violence cannot last even for a few minutes.

If we look at our own life, it is obvious that we follow the path of love and kindness 99% of the times, and adopt hatred and animosity only for 1%. This itself tells us that non-violence is not impractical. Not just this, the reality is that practical life is possible only by practicing non-violence. It protects and nurtures life whereas violence destroys it all.

Why embrace ahimsa:

Every creature in this universe, be it a human being or a celestial, or belonging to the animal or plant kingdom, whether it is a five-sensed creature or one-sensed, has one uppermost desire within themselves – the desire for happiness.

Bhagwan Mahavira has stated this desire for happiness by proclaiming, “All creatures of this universe desire happiness, and avoid sorrow and pain.”

Most religions in this world have evolved on this fundamental thought. The eternal glow of truth also shines from this. Ahimsa itself rests on this very principle. The sounds of kindness and compassion have emerged from this

Why should we not commit violence? The simple reason given by Bhagwan Mahavira is that violence leads to pain in the body and in the consciousness. His reply shows his sensitivity to the total consciousness of human beings and a psychological understanding. He said, “All creatures wish to live, and wish to





live happily. None want to die. It is a grave sin and cruelty to take away the life of another. Hence the nirgrantha monks stay away from violence.”

To this, some people argue that a person suffers due to his own karma, hence why should we be concerned with his state of happiness or sorrow? We should not commit violence towards another, we should protect ourselves from the sin of violence, this in itself is sufficient for us. This is one view.

When we dwell on Mahavira’s definition, we realize that for him the source of ahimsa was compassion. The thought of ahimsa emerged from empathy. “All creatures want to live and none wish to die; hence it is a grave sin to kill another,” he stated.

To harm someone is cruelty and an interference with his desire for life; this is a very subtle thought. Its depth cannot be measured without immersing oneself in the stream of ahimsa and finding oneness in universal consciousness.

To conclude, the thought of living with violence is undesirable for oneself and other creatures, whereas the thought of living with non-violence is the path of joy for oneself and all others.

Does ahimsa only translate as compassion or does it include discipline as well?

Let us explore the possibilities of different forms of ahimsa in the next pages.

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Chapter 6

Discipline with Compassion

To refrain from causing harm or inflicting pain upon others is the first aspect of ahimsa. But the greater glory of ahimsa is bringing happiness to others. Thus it is not merely the absence of violence but also creating the possibility of peace and joy. This is why kindness and compassion towards others is a large part of non-violence.

Given this framework of Ahimsa, the question arises whether discipline and restrictions can be included in non-violence? This is a question that looms large in any society. It is not a question that either the individual or society can escape from! But there is no simple answer to this.

What does Jainism say in this regard? We all know that it propounds compassion in a large manner, but what is its view about discipline and punishment?

There is no ahimsa in punishment, since one who is punished naturally feels the pain, and when one is pained, the punishment cannot be considered as an act of non-violence. According to Jainism, compassion is non-violence and impositions and punishments are considered as acts of violence. When there is no place for violence in Jainism, then there cannot be a place for punishment either. This is where another question emerges. If there is no place for punishment, then what is the role of an Acharya? The Acharya leads the sangha or congregation. He is the one who keeps a watch over what each person is doing and what method he is adopting. He watches over whether the seekers are treading the right path. He keeps an eye on any wrong-doings that may be committed by anyone. This sort of observation is his





responsibility. In turn, the group feel nurtured and protected by him.

Acharya – the compassionate cowherd:

To receive benevolence of the Acharya, the seekers must stay within their limits and follow the rules of discipline clearly. This is why the Acharya is given the title of a cowherd. Bhagwan Mahavira is in fact known as the great cowherd.

Just as a cowherd guides his cattle towards the forest and uses the stick to propel only the ones who are not moving as fast as the others, so also the Acharya reprimands the seeker only if he strays from the path or does not heed sound advice. He uses punishment only as a last resort and is compassionate at heart. A compassionate cowherd must use the stick only when necessary, such as when any of the cattle wanders into the neighbour's field.

According to Aachar Samhita, a monk must correct himself instantly. He must also instantly inform the Acharya about his wrong actions. However mindful one is, at the beginning stages, one is likely to commit some errors. Correcting them instantly and informing the Acharya is important.

Mindfulness:

In this context, Mahavira says that one must be mindful at all times. What is the reason that you choose to be asleep even whilst awake? In fact, even when you are externally asleep, you must remain internally awake.

A monk is in a mindful state while he is awake, but he is also mindful while he is asleep. He is vigilant while he is alone and also when he is in a crowd. He is vigilant in a town and also when he is dwelling in a forest.

The Dashavaikalika Sutra states: "In every situation, the monk has to tread this one fixed path. While alone or with others, while asleep or awake, while in a forest or a town, he must stay in this





same state of equanimity.” He is always on the path of progress, hence he must always be mindful. A true seeker does not map his life based on the presence or absence of his audience.

The cross of restraint:

Mirabai, the great devotee of Krishna said, “A seeker is always seated on the cross of restraint.” Whether one is a householder or monk, his rules and vows are like the edges of the cross. Here one cannot find a bed of roses to lie upon. A spiritual aspirant does not sleep mindlessly. He is awake every second. Every vow is for him a cross, and each of his vows, be it of truth or non-possession, is a bed of thorns for him.

Here, the story of Seth Sudarshan comes to mind. When he was taken to the gallows on false charges by queen Abhaya because he did not succumb to her temptations, he remained steadfast in meditation. Instead of weeping, his wife Manorama, also began to pray since she believed that her husband was innocent. As a result of their deep spirituality, the cross transformed into a throne and the celestials showered flower petals upon him. It is important to note that the throne appeared only when he ascended the cross. As seekers who have just begun on the path, do not expect a throne just because you have agreed to walk the path. For a shower of petals, the seeker has to become an embodiment of restraint and spiritual practices.

The important thing is that one must be aware of the stage of one’s journey. At the beginning of the journey, if one begins to think that he is already accomplished, then he is deluding himself. By being aware of the journey ahead, one stays vigilant and mindful.

Confession of wrongdoings allows an aspirant to purify himself constantly, and he then becomes worthy of compassion and forgiveness from his guru, from his Acharya. If the Acharya has the power to be compassionate, he also has the power to punish. The sangha has given him this power and responsibility.





Punishment with compassion:

The question becomes even more focused – is punishment a form of violence and if it is, then how can an Acharya be expected to inflict it? A monk must stay away from acts of violence. But if we look at punishments and restrictions as forms of non-violence, then the Acharya can be the giver of punishment. It is then an act of justice on his part.

A punishment imposed by an Acharya is not done with feelings of aversion or anger. When an Acharya imposes a punishment in keeping with scriptural dictums, his mind is filled with ahimsa only. Waves of kindness and well-being flow from his heart towards the other person, and he performs these actions only to speed up the seeker's spiritual progress.

When a mother gives a child his bath, he resists it, and even shouts and cries. He does not understand why he is being subject to this annoying action! But the mother knows her reasons for doing it. She is impelled only by his well-being and grooming and does not respond to his resistance. She continues to give him the bath, lovingly and firmly.

There is a description in the scriptures that while imposing punishment upon another monk, an Acharya must have a serene and loving heart like that of a mother, and not the cruel heart of a revengeful enemy. If the receiver of the punishment is wise, he will realize that the punishment is being imposed for his own well-being and that there is no feeling of enmity whatsoever. He realizes that even though the Acharya has assumed a strict role for his own well-being, yet even this strictness is the result of nothing but pure compassion. By understanding this, he is able to take responsibility for his wrongdoing without indulging in any negative emotions whatsoever.

Balancing punishment and compassion:

In an ethical rule, punishment is a medium and not the goal. Punishment must not be imposed in an unthinking manner. It should be contained within kindness. In any society, till differences





in thoughts among people remain, punishment cannot be erased. But if acts of kindness and feelings of compassion follow the punishment, then a person's heart will be transformed.

Thus, we have to conclude that even discipline and punishment, when imposed mindfully, are not acts of violence. Jainism states that every sentence has to be seen within its context. It may seem that compassion and discipline are words with very different meanings, yet an in-depth understanding will reveal that they have the same aim and the same goal. A punishment imposed by an Acharya for the well-being of the seeker is but a form of compassion.

Now consider a child who is unwell. The physician asks him to refrain from eating sweets. But the mother's heart melts and she sneaks a sweet or two to him. She is aware that this will harm the child further. Then can it be considered an act of love and kindness?

Hence compassion and punishment have to be understood within their context. There are no singular definitions of these words. Sometimes punishment takes the form of compassion and at other times, compassion may take the form of punishment. We have to understand these acts through the intention of the person and whether he has exercised discrimination in arriving at a wise decision.

Let us now consider the situation of the ruler of a country. The enemy king has attacked the kingdom and indulges in wanton plunder, whilst torturing the citizens. So what should the king do to protect his country and countrymen? Should he adopt the path of compassion and allow his subjects to surrender or to be killed? Or should he protect the kingdom by fighting the enemy with weapons and bravery?

Jainism clearly states that in such circumstances, it is not violence but revolting against injustice which is the primary duty. Protecting one's subjects is the foremost goal of a ruler. He must not attack peaceful neighbouring kingdoms or try to conquer or usurp them. But if an enemy enters his kingdom with cruel intent,





then he cannot avoid the battle. But he must take care to protect his subjects as well as himself. As a layperson, while embracing the vow of non-violence, he is bound by such exemptions from the very beginning. In other words, attacking in self defence is not considered as an act of violence.

Four-fold violence:

The Jaina Acharyas have reflected deeply on the subject of violence. In defining violence, they have arrived at a four-fold classification:

Intentional violence (sankalpi himsa): To attack someone with the intention to harm or hurt is known as sankalpi himsa.

Domestic violence (arambhi himsa): This refers to violence that is committed while performing daily activities such as cooking and cleaning.

Occupational violence (udyogi himsa): This refers to violence that is committed due to one's occupation such as farming and agriculture, industries or trading.

Violence in self-defence (virodhi himsa): This refers to acts committed in protecting one's country and for establishing peace, such as when a nation is attacked by another. At that time, the use of weapons is involved.

The question before us is – among these four forms of violence, which ones should a layperson refrain from? Practically, what is possible?

The answer to this is that first of all, consider the intention of the person. As long as one does not have the intention to harm another, one is permitted to commit actions which may involve the last three forms of violence.

The reason for this is that a householder cannot refrain from domestic violence because one needs to perform activities such as cooking, cleaning and washing up as part of routine domestic life.

The same is true of occupational violence. Laypersons need





to work for a living and many occupations involve acts where violence cannot be avoided.

So also, a shravaka cannot abstain from virodhi himsa since it is one's duty to protect oneself, one's family, community and nation. These are important responsibilities which he must fulfil at all cost.

From the above explanation, we arrive at the conclusion that while abstaining from gross violence, a shravaka will abstain from intentional violence. He will not attack another with the intention of harm, he will not attack an innocent person in the name of religion and he will not commit any such acts of violence.

When a soldier uses a weapon not with the primary intention of harming but to protect himself and his countrymen, it is possible that he may kill another or get killed in the process.

There are many who have not understood this subtle analysis of ahimsa and have criticized Jainism. A serious understanding of ahimsa according to Jainism will dispel any such views. Unfortunately, Jains themselves have not understood ahimsa in its true spirit and may have unintentionally contributed to such negative views.

Was the war of Ramayana legitimate:

When Ravana abducted Sita, taking her to his kingdom of Lanka and cast his evil gaze upon her, Rama waged war against him. According to the rules of Indian warfare, before beginning the battle, peace treatises were sent with Angad. Ravana refused to compromise and refused to return Sita. Rama pondered over the decision of war since war meant destruction of innocent lives of hundreds of people. War is bound to kill many, leaving behind widows and grieving mothers.

What is Jainism's answer to this dilemma? If it is truly a life-nurturing religion, then what is its solution in such heart-wrenching moments. It is true that war will cause havoc and destruction, but Rama's duty was also to protect his subjects. It





was not just a question of one Sita, it was the matter of providing safety to the women of the country. How will other women feel safe if Ravana is allowed to get away with kidnapping Sita? It will be the beginning of injustice, violence and rape in the country, and no one will feel safe anymore.

In the Jaina Ramayana, there is a mention that Ravana sent a message to Rama that if you allow Sita to remain with me, I will send you thousands of young beautiful girls in her place. But Rama was not interested in the gratification of his desires. He was determined to retaliate against cruelty and injustice. He knew that his duty lay in protecting his wife's honour. So even though he fought with Ravana, the war was not his goal. His real goal was performing the right action. Therefore he told Ravana that he does not aspire for wealth or property or a harem of women. All he wanted was that Ravana respectfully returns Sita. Thus Jainism does not stop Rama from the war. In fact, it gives the right to householders to impose an appropriate punishment upon the sinner.

Was Krishna a proponent of non-violence:

I have heard many people say that Krishna instigated the battle of Mahabharata. They say that he is the one who motivated the battle in which thousands lost their lives. They also allege that the sound of his conch echoed the insane laughter of destruction. Some also claim that it is because he is so powerful that he is worshipped as God.

But my views are otherwise. According to me, Krishna's actions can be well integrated with Jaina wisdom. When you walk on his path, you are on the Jaina path itself. To avert the battle of Mahabharata, he sent a mediator to Duryodhana. When Duryodhana did not relent, Krishna himself went as a messenger of peace.

When he reached Duryodhana's court, he gave a very powerful speech which has been translated in several languages and is considered significant by one and all. He said that I do not





wish that a river of blood should flow. I do not want youngsters to waste their strength unnecessarily or lose the respect of the elders. I do not want thousands of mothers, sisters and wives to lead a tragic life henceforth. Krishna beseeched Duryodhana to understand and move away from this destructive path. He even agreed to ask the Pandavas to be content with merely five villages in exchange for their huge kingdom.

The Krishna who begged Duryodhana to stop the war – is he a messiah of violence or non-violence? He tried to stop the violence of war. How large-hearted he must have been to just accept five villages on behalf of the powerful Pandavas! And finally, the decision of war was based not on the need to fight, but to fight against injustice and cruelty.

Thus, Jainism gives every Shravaka the right and responsibility to fight against injustice, and to impose punishment upon those who commit wrongdoings. At that time, the Shravaka must not operate with animosity and revenge, rather, he must operate from a sense of responsibility and justice. If he thinks of the prosperity and well-being of his enemy as well as his own family and society, then his thoughts will be steeped in non-violence. This is the beautiful art of living for a non-violent layperson.

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Chapter 7

War, Punishment and Ahimsa

All religions and philosophies are interested in the relation between life and the universe. The instinct to preserve one's life exists in every sentient creature. It is not just the happy beings who aspire to live; even the unhappy beings crave to stay alive. Life is dear to all.

No sentient being in this world is devoid of love and affection. The feelings of love, compassion and amity exist as a natural force within us. This natural affection which is found towards oneself and others is nothing but ahimsa. Ahimsa is that fundamental truth which finds an existence in every sentient being.

Ahimsa is best understood not as a principle of not harming, but as a principle of caring. Its manifestation may be more in some or less in others depending on the circumstances, but it pervades throughout the sentient world. Its supreme presence has been seen from time immemorial and will continue till eternity.

Often, we forget the very purpose of principles. They are gifts given to us to enrich our lives. They are neither to be looked upon as a burden nor as an imposition. The purpose of our life is not to protect these gifts, rather, we must examine how they can become the means to making our lives a joyful experience.

Ahimsa – a question:

Today, questions regarding ahimsa are looming larger than ever before. Its power to offer peaceful solutions cannot be ignored any more. Those who have wisdom and clarity see ahimsa as a solution in every aspect of life; whether it is pertaining to the individual, family, society or nation. In this destructive age of





nuclear weapons, ahimsa is a beacon of light and hope for human life. Whenever the clouds of pessimism and negativity spread over the world, we have seen two options emerge before us – war or peace!

Where does the true solution reside? Is it in war or in peace?

This is not as simple a choice as it may seem.

Can ahimsa truly protect a nation? Can ahimsa be a favourable response to war and terrorism?

Ahimsa as an ideal:

As soon as we start speaking about ahimsa, the first question that arises is: Is ahimsa a practical principle and is it relevant in today's life? Ideals are lofty in themselves, but without a relevant context, they only cause disillusionment in human society. There is no denying that human beings must be guided by ideals and principles, but whether one can remain true to an ideal depends upon one's ethical strength and circumstances.

A few noble souls may choose to sacrifice their life for the lofty ideal of ahimsa without expecting anything in return. But whether the majority will follow this path, seems doubtful. Can we expect this of the entire society and nation? No, it is not a justified expectation. Individuals who make up a society or nation are bound to have differences in their points of view.

In trying times, most people seek protection for themselves and their loved ones. They are willing to go to any length to ensure that protection. Not all have the capacity to respond to violence with non-violence.

Ideals and principles first make an entry into an individual's life, and through that possibly find a gradual entry into society and then the nation. History has shown us that when revenge and war stand on one side, ahimsa finds its place on the opposite side. Whether it is revenge or non-violence that is chosen, depends upon the national spirit and prevalent circumstances.





Punishment and ahimsa:

A question that is slightly more complex within the framework of ahimsa is that of punishment. How should a criminal be treated? How should he be punished for trespassing established moral dictums for fulfilling his own immoral selfish wants? Can pain inflicted on a wrongdoer be termed as just?

Whoever is punished will undergo physical and mental pain. Inflicting pain upon another is considered as violence, and yet, if he is not punished, then crime and injustice will receive encouragement. It will lead to an increase in criminal activities in society, filling the lives of the public at large with greater danger and insecurity.

What solution does the philosophy of ahimsa offer in such a situation?

Verily, the philosophy of ahimsa is the philosophy of inner transformation. It believes not in attack, but in reformation and reconstruction. Pouring kindness, compassion, generosity and forgiveness into the sea of life's experiences is the true essence of ahimsa.

Ahimsa believes in bringing about a transformation through a psychological transformation in the criminal by nurturing feelings of affection and sympathy in his heart. It is far more important to erase the reasons for the crime than annihilate the criminal, since crime is a mental disease which can be cured only by the means of love, affection and friendliness.¹

Bhagwan Mahavira taught, "Do not hate even the worst among sinners. Learn to differentiate between the sin and the sinner. A wrongdoing will always remain wrong. It cannot become an act of goodness ever." The context and circumstances can transform a sinner into a good human being. The truth is that no soul is evil within its core.

¹ *Recognizing this psychological ground of ahimsa as a strategic move in the present age, the Indian government has given it an important place. The Baal Sudhar Kendra, Vanita Vikas mandal, and Kaidiyon Ke Sudhaar are some of the efforts being made by the government in this direction.*





Truth is hidden amidst untruth and light amidst darkness. The godly or divine light is luminous in everyone – whether they are good or bad. This light is also present in a criminal, but it is suppressed or hidden. Our endeavour must be such that this light manifests itself so that society can rid itself of the darkness of criminal tendencies.

You cannot transform a criminal by subjecting him to heartless cruelties, punishments or by imprisoning him. Very often he returns from prison with an even greater feeling of revenge within his heart. His bitterness increases and he may even rebel and revolt against society.

What is hanging by death other than legal murder? Capital punishment is the most inappropriate of all punishments. The reason being that a person may stop committing crime out of fear, yet the deep rooted impulse of crime may not leave him. Moreover, there are times when true justice does not take place and for no reason, an innocent person may also become a victim of capital punishment. The sinner escapes and the innocent is killed.

The philosophy of ahimsa is against such rules of punishments. It believes that even while punishing a sinner, a non-violent viewpoint must be exercised. Understanding him as a person who is mentally unstable, he must be treated psychologically, so that he can become a civilized and cultured citizen, and a useful member of society.

We need to adopt a constructive approach. Each one has goodness within, but this is often suppressed or underdeveloped due to personal and societal circumstances. Hence the learned members of the legal community need to find evolved, civilized and cultured psychological means of punishment so that the dormant goodness in criminals is awakened and they can become useful to society.

Ahimsa as a corrective measure:

The philosophy of ahimsa says even when imposing





punishment upon hardcore criminals, it must be done in as non-violent a way as is possible.

Even physical punishment must be meted out with mindfulness and not in a callous manner. Just as a mother sometimes beats her child in order to restrain him, yet her motherhood does not turn cruel and continues to remain gentle.

Ahimsa as taught by Mahavira is based on these feelings of caring and mindfulness. It completely believes in the refinement of the human spirit until the very end. It's ideal is – follow the path of ahimsa to whatever extent possible. If you cannot adopt non-violence completely, choose the path of minimal violence without any violent feelings, but with the intention of stopping the massive flow of violence in the future. Thus the divine spirit of non-violence should be safeguarded even in violence.

To put up with violence or to bear torture is cowardice; it is not ahimsa. Ahimsa does not snatch away the human right of dealing with violence. It does not stop someone from responding to violence in a meaningful manner. Even while responding, one must not forsake goodwill towards another. Love and forgiveness are great powers to make use of and are indeed a blessing in life.

War and ahimsa:

Many think that ahimsa is cowardice; and it destroys a person's bravery, courage and capacity for self-protection. But this assumption is not true. To put together the right means in self-defence is not against Jaina religion, but the accumulation of greater weapons and increased warfare is sure to propel violence and defeat the very existence of ahimsa.

For the past few years, there has been a movement towards limiting artillery and weapons – a policy propagated by the Jain Tirthankaras more than thousands of years ago. What is being implemented as a law today was earlier taught in the form of discourses. Mahavira had initiated many great kings who had taken a vow not to hoard more artillery than necessary for the nation's protection.





The Jain Tirthankaras never supported war in any form. There are many other religious leaders who propagate war as a means to attain heaven or as the highest form of bravery, but the Tirthankaras have been staunch in their views against war. The great texts such as Prashna Vyakarana and the Bhagavati Sutra offer explanations on why war should never be considered a favourable option.

Ajatshatru Kunik, ruler of Magadha, was a great disciple of Bhagwan Mahavira. He took his first morsel of food or water every morning only after he received news about Mahavira's well-being. When he waged a war against Vaishali, Mahavira did not support his decision at all and in fact, told him that such a decision would only incur him the wrath of hell. Mahavira's words upset Ajatshatru a great deal and also angered him, but Mahavira remained firm. Universal welfare and progress can happen only by the Gangetic nectar of non-violence and peace, and not by igniting the flames of violence.

Can ahimsa transform hearts:

We need to reflect on whether it is possible to change the heart of another person by ahimsa or any such spiritual feeling. If the opponent's heart is full of tamasic negative energy and obsessive selfishness, how can it be changed suddenly? Only one who is willing to evolve can be transformed by the affection, brotherliness, goodwill and divine intervention of non-violence.

Does a hungry lion distinguish between a pious and non-pious personality standing before him? Queen Padmini and thousands of brave women sacrificed their lives by jumping into fire to protect their sanctity. Thousands have sacrificed their lives for the freedom movement. The question remains, how can we transform the hearts of the torturers? Pain inflicted on others can never be a source of pleasure.

If Mahavira could not stop Kunik from waging war and Buddha could not erase the animosity between kingdoms, then as mere mortals, how can we think that transforming hearts is possible? What form of ahimsa can achieve this? How can





ahimsa become such a large-hearted response for revenge that it eventually erases the very existence of hatred and animosity?

Bhagwan Mahavira did not propound ahimsa as an ideal or principle on emotional grounds. Rather, he explained that the reason for embracing ahimsa should be logical and powerful. His philosophy of ahimsa aims at the betterment of an individual and society. He laid stress on truth and refining human character and behaviour to achieve knowledge of the self. Ahimsa is considered the pillar of social and religious harmony.

Ahimsa in principle and practice:

Ahimsa is a spiritual energy which emphasizes upon oneness with the universe. It is a path leading to sacrificing oneself selflessly. Many have sacrificed their lives for preserving ahimsa. But it is never done for materialistic gain. For ahimsa and materialism have no connection with each other.

Ahimsa is the supreme religion, this is the truth. But often war becomes necessary to protect the society and nation from the cruel and selfish intent of powerful rulers. Sometimes it becomes inevitable and cannot be avoided just as Rama and Krishna could not stop the wars of Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The frameworks for personal decisions sometimes differ from that of social and national frameworks. War and ahimsa are tricky issues and have no simple, straightforward answer. The main reason for this is the gap between our ideals and behaviour.

The challenge before us is, how do we bridge this gap?

Discrimination – a virtue of ahimsa:

The most important thing to understand in the context of war and ahimsa is that all wars are not fought for the same reasons. Those wars that are fought to gain possession over another kingdom, for blowing the trumpet of one's ego, or for any selfish gains, are all irreligious wars, or wars for adharma. Such wars, based on violence alone, eventually lead the individual, society and nation to doom and destruction.





On the other hand, those wars that are fought to protect the needy and the helpless, to fight injustice and terrorism, are not irreligious wars. Wars which are fought against injustice and to offer protection to one's subjects no doubt increase external violence, but the serene stream of ahimsa also flows through them. Ideally force should be avoided, but if war becomes inevitable, then its cause should be just, its aim should be peace and its method should be lawful.

The question of violence and non-violence is not as primary as the question of discrimination (viveka) and non-discrimination (aviveka). Where there is no discrimination, acts of non-violence can give rise to violence. And when the positive quality of discrimination exists, then non-violence can be seen in violent actions as well.

Hence over and above all else, the wisdom to decide on what one should do as well as what one should refrain from doing, based on space, time and situation is considered as the primary aspect of religion. Ahimsa is all about awakening the mind and being able to distinguish right from wrong.

If one does not know how to discriminate, then even non-violence can result in violence. On the other hand, the power of discrimination can give birth to non-violence within violence. This is why discrimination is considered the mother of religion. It has the power to identify appropriate from inappropriate behaviour based on time, space and circumstances.

Ahimsa can be interpreted in several ways: as a virtue, tenet, state of mind, a practice or even a parameter to evaluate actions or even a philosophy. Let us now look at the real test of ahimsa.

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Chapter 8

The Acid Test of Ahimsa

If you study, think and reflect on any religion, whether it is Jainism or any other, it will become clear that the pulse or life breath of most religions is ahimsa.

Core of religion is ahimsa:

Just as the heart is considered the seat of life, ahimsa is considered as the core of any religion. The Agamas, which are Jaina scriptural texts, state that a body qualifies as being alive as long as the heart is beating. However strong and large one's body may be, it stays alive only until the heart is beating. When the heartbeat is strong, the blood flows through the body, and one is said to be in good health. So also, however lofty a religion may be, however intense its practices may be, however severe its austerities may be, unless it is steeped in ahimsa, it cannot qualify as a true religion.

To qualify as a religion the fountain of kindness and compassion has to flow towards all creatures: big and small. When it shows compassion towards those in pain and suffering, only then can its practices, austerities, values and principles qualify as religion. If ahimsa is removed from its sphere, then that religion is akin to a corpse. Ahimsa has to exist at the very root of any religion. It may exist in a lesser or greater measure, but as long as it is there, the religion will sustain itself.

Awareness of ahimsa will lead to treating the lives of all living beings with as much respect and consideration that we extend towards our own life. Just as we have the right to live, so does another. True ahimsa is only visible when the great mantra of 'live





and let live' resonates in every being and when hearts beat along with and for each other. Where true ahimsa is found, religion will exist. In the absence of ahimsa, religion will perish. This is that great truth which led Bhagwan Mahavira to define ahimsa as a Goddess (Prashna Vyakarana Sutra – Samvar dvaar).

Glimpse of Goddess Ahimsa:

It is not without sound reason that ahimsa has been given the significant title of a Goddess. Verily, ahimsa is godliness, it is venerable, and it is the centre for devotion. It is worthy of the same devotion that a devotee feels for his God.

You may ask – how can one encounter God? The answer is simple– when you embrace ahimsa or non-violence, you will have a vision of God. If you do not embrace ahimsa, if you turn your face away from ahimsa, then how can you find God?

The greatest God is residing within you, but the veil of perversions and passions eclipses it from sight. The soul, which is the greatest God, is present within our body. Unfortunately, it is invariably shrouded by the veil of violence. If you wish to encounter this God, then you will have to remove this dark veil. The extent to which you can remove this veil will become the extent to which you can encounter the soul. This is the way to attain a glimpse of God. When a spiritual seeker cannot adopt ahimsa in its totality, he must still endeavour to remove the veil of violence to the best of his ability.

You do not have to wander anywhere else to worship Goddess Ahimsa. You do not need to allot any special time to do so. She can be worshipped anywhere and anytime, either at home or at your work place. She can be venerated in every breath of your life and during any activity. It would be ideal to learn how to measure your mental tendencies and your actions on the scale of ahimsa. One must develop such a deep and intense attitude towards ahimsa which can escalate consciousness of the mind within oneself.





Ahimsa is the Supreme Being:

Acharya Samantabhadra, a great Jaina thinker, always spoke from the depths of his intuition. When asked about the soul, he reflected poignantly – Who is that Supreme Being? Who is the supreme soul? Where is it? What is its form? Thereafter he replied to his own intuitive questions thus – “For the creatures of this world, for the ordinary people, and even for the extraordinary seekers, for all of them, ahimsa is that supreme being.” Where there is no worship and observance of ahimsa, even worshipping God has no truth in it and can only be considered an illusion

By stating that Ahimsa is God, it becomes infinite,
because God is infinite.

How can something which can perish, ever be elevated
to the status of God?

How can something which can be curtailed or limited be
considered as God?

The soul has infinite qualities. To become God, each of those qualities have to be infinite. The three important qualities of the soul are knowledge, vision and conduct. When the quality of knowledge becomes infinite and endless, then one becomes God. So also, when the conduct of a being reaches an infinite state, when the vision and valour reach infinity, then the aspirant attains the form of God. This is the form of ahimsa which we need to embrace. It is not an easy task to comprehend this vast and deep ocean of ahimsa, but it surely adds meaning to life.

Even though the self-realized beings are aware of ahimsa in its totality, they are unable to express it in words. Innumerable Tirthankaras have taken birth in this universe, yet these enlightened men have not been able to find a holistic description of ahimsa. Then how can an ordinary mortal undertake this task? It is not possible for a layperson to even have a glimpse of Goddess Ahimsa. The scriptures often refer to and talk of ahimsa, yet it remains elusive like the tip of an iceberg.





First vision of ahimsa:

If you wish to understand the divine form of lofty ahimsa, then it is important for you to decide whether you wish to become a human being or a demon? When an individual has to choose between humanism and demonism, it is ahimsa that presents itself at that moment. From time immemorial, man has strayed from the right path of humanity and has been floundering on the wrong path of violence and barbarianism. So much so, he does not even connect with his own self any more. Having committed such negative deeds, he gradually moves towards his next life, to the form of a lower organism – perhaps the one-sensed creature – where he is unable to protect himself altogether.

Wandering about in the worldly cycle, which life-form has he not experienced? In this boundless universe, he has experienced every state and every life-form many a times. Yet, he is not addressing that one and only question – does he want humanism or demonism? When the soul finally confronts the question of what it aspires to become, ahimsa appears before it and says – “If you wish to become a human being, then embrace me, emulate me, worship me and dedicate your life to me.”

To fit your life into the ideal mould of humanity, you have to realize that an individual cannot be considered human without ahimsa. The soul has embraced this perishable body many a times and then left it behind. But however many times you may have adopted the body of a human being, it does not mean that you may have had a true glimpse of ahimsa. The lamp of ahimsa glows in the human mind only when he is ready to look at another’s life as his own. When he experiences the pain, joy, sorrows and desires of another to be like his own, then the stream of love and compassion flows through him.

Hence the melodious sounds of Indian culture have often been resonating thus: O human being! Your joy does not reside in your own enjoyments and fulfilling your own desires, but is hidden in the happiness of others. In their fulfilment, you will find your own. What is the purpose of the wealth, strength and intelligence





that you possess? What is the purpose of your knowledge and understanding? Are they just for your own happiness and comfort? Even an animal employs its strength and intelligence to protect itself and fulfil its needs. Then how are you any different?

The true joy of a human being resides not in indulging in one's own pleasures but in the pleasure of others. Whatever he has achieved is not just for himself, but for his people. When one devotes oneself to another conscious being, the happiness and bliss which is experienced is the first glimpse of Goddess Ahimsa. It comes from the path of humanity. When such humanness arises within an individual, his inner negativity begins to dissipate. As he proceeds on this path, all the pettiness within him gets erased. His inner being moves towards a vast infinity.

You may have heard the name of Satishchandra Vidyabhusan, the famous Bengali scholar! A visitor arrived at his house to meet his mother who was known for her generous and kind nature. When she came before the visitor, he could not stop staring at her hands. When asked, he replied, "I am filled with astonishment to see brass bangles rather than gold and diamond ornaments adorning the wrists of the mother of such a renowned person. This does not befit you."

The mother replied seriously, "Son! The beauty of these hands resides in offering wealth and grains to the sons of Bengal during times of famine. Service is the true wealth of these hands. Gold and silver cannot bestow beauty upon any pair of hands." This is one form of selfless humanity. The true Goddess is one who offers her ornaments to quell the hunger of those in need, and who finds happiness in the happiness of others. In Indian culture, this offering has evolved in the form of compassion and charity.

Compassion is the inborn instinct of the human being. It is unfortunate that the vastness of compassion has shrunk considerably today. The meaning of compassion and kindness does not lie in merely protecting a few creatures or forcing a few slaughter houses to shut down. Compassion towards animals is surely a form of ahimsa, but it is far more than that. This is only





the beginning. Its area is much larger than that. We have to proceed with a more encompassing viewpoint. We must spread our inner compassion to the family and society around us. We must employ our comforts and facilities for the well-being of those around us.

Offering one's services towards society transforms it into a universal offering. When a person allows the waves of his personal life to lap distant boundaries of social life, he becomes one with society. The extent to which he contributes and attempts to unify his happiness with that of others, his own life will be enriched and expand accordingly. He will then break the narrow circle of individualism and enter the expansive circle of social and universal welfare. Only then can divinity manifest itself in our being and transform into godliness.

Ahimsa as pervasive happiness:

To measure the extent to which the divinity of ahimsa has awakened within, you don't have to go far. The barometer to measure this is with you. Just imagine, your family which is before you consists of old parents, siblings and other relatives, some of whom are in pain and some unwell. There are some who are not in a position to earn or work hard. The responsibility of this family rests upon you. You are tired of taking care of all of them. You almost wish that your ailing parents will pass away and you grudge the help you have to extend to your siblings. You wish to do more for your own children than for your nephews and nieces.

If you find it difficult to fulfil your duties with your own family, how are you going to take care of society and nation? If you cannot share your comforts with your own family, how will you expand your heart towards universal well-being?

All of this makes me wonder about how genuine is the human being's search for God? Most people put in so much effort in their search for God – are they simply fooling themselves? Are they living under an illusion? Can we really find God by chanting along with the rosary innumerable times? Will divinity awaken within us through our austerities? Until we free ourselves of diverse and





contrary thoughts, develop the tendency to look upon others as we look upon our own self, until we learn to share with others and till we learn to adopt the path of compassion and worship Goddess Ahimsa, the soul cannot elevate itself to the level of paramatma, or the super soul.

Experience of universal consciousness:

Becoming aware of universal consciousness is the highest form of Goddess Ahimsa. This requires breaking away from the shackles of ‘me’ and ‘mine’ and embracing another. The ideal of ‘vasudhaiva kutumbakam’ which means – ‘The world is one family’ should become the aim of existence. When that begins to happen, then the chains holding you back will fall away. Such people have rich empathy in their hearts. On seeing another in pain, they become instantly proactive, they do not mull over notions of mine and yours. Another’s home is like my own. Another society is like my own. The same empathy extends to the nation and then to the world at large.

The love such people radiate is all-pervasive and serene. It is untainted by selfishness. They are unlike the politicians of today who are not concerned about the growth of their state as much as of their own financial growth. Whether the citizens get pure milk or fresh water does not concern them as long as the Ganges of wealth flows in their house. Discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and geography is the knife that has plunged the heart of humanity today.

Imagine you are passing by a place and come across a child crying in pain. Your heart melts and as you stretch your arms to carry him, someone calls out from behind: Wait! Don’t touch him, he is an untouchable, a shudra. So what happens next? A dim flame of non-violence and compassion arises within you, but is prematurely doused by the first wind of casteism. You sacrifice the path of compassion for casteism and begin to think – How can I carry this child? How can I touch a person from an untouchable caste? What you need to decide is whether his caste is lower or have your thoughts fallen lower than that?





Body or soul:

It is the same pure soul that resides in all bodies; higher or lower, human or animal. Then why should we discriminate? When you start thinking about whether the body belongs to a doctor or a sweeper, then it is obvious that you are not viewing things with a soulful gaze. Everyone's body has the same muscle, bone and veins. Do you assume that a Brahmin's body will consist of gold, while a shudra's body will be made of dust? Until you do not realize or are not moved by the divine consciousness that exists within you, your vision will have duality.

To erase your dual vision, you need to stop viewing a person through his social or caste distinctions. Only then will compassion arise. For if compassion does not arise in your heart for a human being, how will it arise for helpless animals and birds? In the Indian culture, there are instances where a snake is fed milk and birds are given grains. India is a country where festivals are celebrated for animals and birds as well; snakes are fed milk during Nagapanchami, while cows and calves are worshipped during Gopashtami.

Only when love for the family extends itself to include society, nation and other creatures, will the stream of compassion flow unfettered. Then ahimsa will reside in its pristine form. Only then will confusion and troubles dissipate. For whenever a person is surrounded by difficulties, ahimsa as taught by Mahavira has the power to illuminate his path, protect him and steer him away from troubles.

The test of ahimsa:

The Dasavaikalika Sutra states: "Think of all beings as your own soul." This is the definition, commentary and the great test of ahimsa. On the day and the moment when a person gives himself the right to live and naturally gives the same right to others, when the instinct to care for others arises from within, when he looks upon all others as his own self, when such equanimity arises within him, when he finds the wisdom to see that there is no





fundamental difference between him and others, when he realizes that whatever is dear to him is dear to others too, then it becomes evident that there is ahimsa within him.

When a person fails to see that what hurts him can hurt others too, then ahimsa is said to be lacking in him. The presence of Goddess Ahimsa within a person fills him with empathy for those who are in pain.

Thus the true test of ahimsa is one's own soul. Look within your own soul to decide if ahimsa is a religion or sin? If someone tries to abuse your parents or siblings, if someone abuses or attacks you, or tries to steal your wealth, then will you still believe that ahimsa is the only way and the only religion? What will be the feelings within you at that time?

In such a situation, you don't need the scriptures to help you decide whether ahimsa is a virtue or a sin! Look within your soul and you will know the answer. Scholarly research is not needed for this, just introspection will suffice! Beyond arguments and logic, when a person becomes engrossed in the self, and begins to live his life by his own self-realization, he will then begin to experience religiosity in ahimsa.

There are many who look upon theft and abuse as their way of life. What can transform their thoughts? One who has not experienced any sorrow or seen any troubles, one who has not wept at seeing others in pain, how can he understand what is ahimsa and what is virtue? Only when a person has gone through the fire of pain, the test of his character takes place. He then has an opportunity to shine like gold after being tested in fire. He then clearly understands which actions are virtuous and non-violent!

Does religion save or kill:

If a person is travelling with cash and jewels through a dense forest and suddenly encounters a dacoit, what would he do? He would offer all his possessions and beg that his life be spared. But the dacoit has no qualms about taking someone's life. He says, "This is what I do for a living. This is my goal and my dharma. It





is what my family and my teachers have taught me.” He does not think his actions as sinful. Imagine that another passer-by comes by and sees the incident. He interrupts the dacoit and says, “What are you doing? You cannot kill him.” When the dacoit says that to kill is my dharma, the saviour says. “To save is my dharma. My teachers and my religion have instilled in me that I must protect another even by forsaking my own life.”

In this struggle of killing versus saving, what is the true parameter of religion? Does true merit lie in preserving life or taking away life? Is religion in violence or non-violence? One who wields the sword believes in violence while one who obstructs the sword believes in non-violence. Ask the person who is being attacked and he will tell you about it. This is the test of the soul. Its answer can only be found from within.

The wise ones say that we must listen to the deep secret of religion as well as listen to all the religions of the world. Listen to what they have to say. By listening to other religion, you are not abandoning your own. Try and understand other religions along with your own. Then you will see that the core of all religions is the same. All religions propound the values of kindness, humility and courage. All religions state that what is not conducive to your soul cannot be conducive to others.

Those things that upset you such as abuse, insult, harming another or inflicting pain, are shunned by all religions. All religions advise not to do unto others what you do not desire for yourself. This is the greatest essence of all religions and the greatest of ahimsa. True religion is that which helps an individual to go beyond the ego and to merge himself in humanity and universal love. This light of love spreads and glows in every corner, illuminating the universe.

Selfishness obstructs ahimsa:

Why do the parameters of ahimsa escape the rapist and the dacoit? All kinds of new struggles are emerging in the world today – pertaining to caste, creed, community, family, religion





and language. They are taking on inhuman and scary forms. Why are they unaffected by the values of ahimsa? The reason for this is just one – the narrow circumference of selfishness. This thorny fence is so dense that a person is ready to destroy all others for his own gain. He is a slave to wealth, luxuries, comforts and enjoyment. Oblivious of how he is affecting those around him, he lives for himself and makes his world smaller and smaller.

Today, man has become a slave to his own selfishness. He is unable to look beyond his own desires. Whenever he thinks, he thinks only for himself. Wherever he looks, he looks only for himself. He is concerned by his own hunger and thirst. He is oblivious of what another wants.

How long can life sustain like this? Until a person does not come out of the prison of his own desires and wants and does not break the walls of his selfishness, he cannot find peace nor spread peace. Neither will his family find any happiness nor the society he lives in. Till he becomes sensitive to the needs of others, there is no hope of any reconciliation and the battles of selfishness will continue to plague mankind.

Imprisoning the father:

You may have heard about the life of King Shrenik. He was a great ruler in Indian history more than 2500 years ago. The boundaries of his kingdom were said to be as large as his own heart. His subjects were happy and peaceful under his rule. He was the prime disciple of Bhagwan Mahavira and was always willing to stake his life at his teacher's lotus feet.

This story is about his son Kunik, also known as Ajatshatru Kunik. When he was born, his mother abandoned him out of fear of the undesirable craving that arose during her pregnancy. Imagine how hard-hearted she must have become to abandon her own baby! Such was the dread that arose within her because of her craving. She could foresee calamity and troubles all around her because of her child. As soon as the child was born, she handed him to the maid, ordering her to abandon him somewhere far away.





King Shrenik, on the other hand, displayed an exemplary attitude. He lovingly picked up the child from the heap of garbage he was thrown upon and brought him back to the palace. Upon seeing a wound on the baby's finger, he sucked the finger in order to heal it. He reprimanded Queen Chelna and asked her to take care of the baby without any fear. This incident shows the glory of fatherhood as being even greater than motherhood.

Time ticks by and circumstances change. Kunik grew up to become an ambitious young man and began to covet the throne. He thought, "My father has become old but he does not wish to give up the throne. I am young and have my desires and ambitions. If I do not enjoy this kingdom in my youth, how will I enjoy it in my old age? If I do not usurp other kingdoms in my youth, how will I have the energy to do so when my body becomes old and feeble? I do not know when my old father will die so I can sit on the throne!"

Look at the cunning thoughts that run in the mind of Kunik? He viewed the throne as a seat of pleasure rather than a mantle of responsibility. He wanted to gain power at any cost. He did not think of his subjects or his country, but only of his own pleasures and his insatiable hunger for power.

Most of our ancient kings had lofty ideals. They did not consider themselves as the lord of wealth and kingdom but as one who was appointed to serve the subjects. The king's life and energy were devoted to the country and he sat on the throne for the protection and prosperity of his subjects. He did not build his life on their hopes and riches. Rather, he sacrificed his all for them. A king who lived for himself rather than his countrymen was considered as a demon and not as a king.

Kunik who was blinded by his ambitions, did not care about his father's age or the happiness of his mother. His selfishness crossed all limits of sanity. He bribed his ten brothers, corrupted their minds, and along with them, dethroned his own father throwing him into the prison leaving him to live like a caged animal.





History is testimony to the fact that whenever one is caught in the web of desires, the preciousness of life is lost. When one thinks of ‘me’ rather than ‘we’, then the Kuniks, Kansas and the Duryodhanas are born to darken the pages of history. One who is trapped within himself, caught in the web of his stubborn selfishness, and considers his own comforts as primary, will ignore the preciousness of another person’s life. He rushes through life like a drunken driver.

Each person is moving ahead on the vehicle of life. The purpose of a vehicle is not to keep it safely locked in the garage, but in driving it on the roads towards your destination. So also, we cannot lock our mind and not allow the inflow of thoughts, rather, we can guide the thoughts in the right direction to reach our goal or destination. Jain Acharyas state that there is no restriction in driving the vehicle of your life, whether you are a monk or a householder. But it is important to remain vigilant whilst driving so that you may avoid causing harm to anyone unknowingly. Inflicting harm knowingly is an unforgiveable sin.

Employing vigilance in life:

Once Ganadhara Gautama asked Bhagwan Mahavira, “O Lord! Show us a path which is devoid of sin. Life is sinful; even the simplest of activities lead to sin and bondage. Show us the right path.”

Some naive philosophers have tried to argue this question in the following manner: If walking contains sin, then continue to stand. If standing contains sin, then take a seat. If sitting contains sin, then lie down and sleep. If sinful activities still continue, then embrace the vow of silence, stay quiet, and give up all activities such as eating and drinking as well.

Is this the meaning of life? Nothing like this can ever be a solution offered by Jainism. Bhagwan Mahavira has never stated that if sitting contains sin, then one must stand. And so on and so forth. The religion of the Tirthankaras does not propound that one must refrain from sinful activity on one side and commit another.





What Jainism says is this: O human being, live your life to the fullest, whether it is for fifty or hundred years. But just keep one thing in mind – perform every activity with vigilance. While walking, employ vigilance and discrimination, and the same goes for other activities. This is how you must eat, this is how you must sleep, and this is how you must live. Then you will not be bound by sinful karma.

When you function without employing vigilance, then you will start getting bound. By vigilance, you cultivate the art of discrimination which is the true test of ahimsa. Where there is discrimination, ahimsa resides. Where one does not employ discrimination, ahimsa cannot survive. And if one employs discrimination and yet some violence is committed unknowingly, then that action is not considered as a violent activity. One is not bound by the violence incurred in such actions.

Viveka or discrimination leads to an inner knowledge and an awakening at a deeper level. It can be gained and practiced through the power of reasoning. Gradually, it becomes an intuitive understanding and capacity to distinguish the right from the wrong. Then one can stay steadfast on the right path.

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Chapter 9

The Parameter of Ahimsa

Patanjali has offered a yardstick to simplify the complex aspects of ahimsa: “All others will cease to feel hostility in the presence of one who is firmly established in ahimsa.”

Attackers versus attacked:

There is an important question to consider regarding the evolution of creatures in the context of violence and non-violence. Until the definitions of violence and non-violence do not become clear, we cannot become free of erroneous perceptions.

There are countless types of creatures in this universe and each of these types can be sub-divided further. The categorization of creatures as one-sensed, two-sensed etc is done on the basis of their bodily structure as well as on the development of their consciousness. As the number of senses in a creature increase, their consciousness also reaches a higher state.

A hierarchy is attributed to living creatures. The creatures with one sense are known as hinsya, which means those who are the victims. Then there are those who cause the attack, known as hinsak, or aggressors. Even these aggressors are not of the same form. They do not commit violence of the same form. In some, the feelings of violence and anger may be extremely strong, while others may express a milder form of violence.

Futher analysis of aggressors and victims:

The next question would be: How do we categorize the forms of violence? All violence does not fall into the same slot. Some argue that violence is violence, be it eating vegetables or





consuming meat. But this is not true. If it is said that some violence is considered as greater than others, then what is the basis for this difference? By what measure can violence be classified as small or large?

Does it depend on the number of creatures that are attacked?

Does it follow the dictum that the larger the number, the greater the violence?

Is it based on whether the attacked have a large body or a minute subtle body?

Or does it depend on whether the violent feelings in the aggressor are mild or strong? What is the right way to measure of violence?

Some people say – “Even the minute creatures, whose bodies are only made up of the elements of earth, water, fire, air and vegetation have life. They also have the right to live. In the language of compassion, they may be voiceless but they still have an existence. Is it because they cannot raise a voice that their right to live is not recognized? Is value attached only to the life of the larger creatures from the two-sensed to the five-sensed?

This would imply that violence towards those who are voiceless and helpless, lacking in capacity and unable to protect themselves, can be considered as lesser violence. Whilst violence over those endowed with five senses, those who can express and are capable of defending themselves, is greater violence. But this principle has no sound basis. All creatures are equal, whether one-sensed or five-sensed.

The basis of violence is harming any living creature, be it small or large! Perhaps it is these thoughts that gave rise to the philosophy of a new sect, the Bishnoi tribe in Rajasthan. They believe harming the environment is akin to harming yourself.

If we accept the argument that all creatures should be considered as equal, it would imply that violence towards any of





them would have the same implication and should be considered as violence. But then the question arises, why are some actions considered more violent than others?

If the answer to the above question lies in quantification, it would mean that when more creatures are killed, it would be considered as greater violence, than if lesser number of creatures were killed. By accepting this, one has to resort to counting numbers. Instead of answering the question, this justification will only give rise to further dilemma.

For instance, a beggar knocks on your door step asking for a glass of water. If you offer him water, it may save his life. But if one begins to count, then a problem arises. A glass of water contains countless microscopic creatures in each drop, so if you offer him water, then you would have saved one life, but many more lives would have been extinguished. So to save one life, is it fair to sacrifice several lives?

Can such an act be considered as religious? This only justifies the fact that in order to save the life of one who is capable, it is alright to sacrifice several lives of those who are helpless and cannot protect themselves. Can this be considered fair? How does Jainism respond to such an argument? Can such a viewpoint ever be considered as a Jaina viewpoint?

Does Jainism believe in such senseless counting to measure violence and non-violence? No, it does not. When you study ancient Jaina scriptures, you will understand that Jainism does not count lives as much as it counts the intention and thought. It does not measure violence with the external gross scale of numbers. It measures the extent of violence on and through the subtle scale of feelings.

The view of the Hastitapas:

In ancient times, hermits known as Hastitapas performed rigorous austerities and undertook severe fasts. They believed that if they ate the fruits of the forest, then the innumerable micro-organisms residing in the fruits would be killed. So also,





by consuming grains, innumerable micro-organisms that resided in the grains would die. This would lead to a great amount of violence. Hence, they concluded that instead of killing so many micro-organisms, why not kill just one large animal, such as an elephant, and feed on its meat for months together? On the day they broke the fast, known as paarna, they would kill one elephant and consume its meat. They mistakenly believed that by doing so, they were committing lesser violence.

Bhagwan Mahavira disputed such arguments and shed light on violence through sensitivity and feeling. He did not subscribe to the theory that the larger the quantity of organisms that are killed, the greater the violence. When one harms one-sensed organisms such as plant-life, the feeling in the mind of the person who is uprooting the plants is not that of violence. He is not consumed by animosity, jealousy or destruction. However, when a five-sensed organism is killed such as any animal, then the situation is different. This creature can move, and when one tries to kill him, he attempts to escape, defend himself and becomes restless. At the time, the attacker has to resort to aggression and violence or he won't be able to kill. Such violent feelings do not pervade the heart when one-sensed organisms are being killed.

Our feelings cannot remain the same while committing violence towards one-sensed or five-sensed creatures. As the feelings become sharper, the violence will also become sharper. Even between one-sensed and two-sensed creatures, the feelings are more pronounced while committing violence towards the latter. Hence the extent of violence is greater. This sequence indicates that violence towards three-sensed is more than two-sensed, towards four-sensed is more than three-sensed, and towards five-sensed is more than four-sensed creatures. Among living beings, violence is far greater when committed towards human beings rather than other life-forms.

Sharp and mild feelings:

It is important to understand how the aggressor's feelings become sharper when he commits an act of violence. The





contention being that the more evolved beings experience greater pain. In one-sensed to five-sensed creatures, the experience of sorrow becomes respectively more heightened.

Sorrow is an emotional feeling, connected with consciousness. The more evolved the consciousness is in a being, the greater is his capacity to experience pain. Since two-sensed creatures are more evolved than one-sensed creatures, their capacity to experience pain is greater.

When the capacity for pain is more, then the feelings of sorrow (arta dhyana or mournful contemplation) and anger (raudra dhyana or wrathful contemplation) also become sharper when the creature tries to protect itself or indulge in a counter-attack.

Consequently, even the person who is attacking will experience cruelty and aggression. The greater effort a creature takes to protect itself, the greater effort has to be taken by the aggressor in killing it. Thus a five-sensed creature cannot be killed without experiencing intense feelings of violence.

Hence killing five-sensed creatures is considered a greater form of violence. In the Jaina scriptures such as Bhagavati Sutra and Aupapatika Sutra, violence towards five-sensed creatures is stated as one of the prime reasons for going to hellish regions, whereas violence towards one-sensed creatures is not.

The Jaina religion proclaims that all creatures cannot be measured by the same yardstick or by the view-point that all creatures are equal. Hence it is not true that violence towards creatures is equal irrespective of who they are. It is incorrect to assume that killing one creature leads to lesser violence than killing many creatures.

Jainism does not have a linear view on the matter. This was a self-created belief by the Hastitapasas which was strongly refuted by Bhagwan Mahavira. It is unfortunate that this same refutation is being considered by some as a Jaina view today. Hence an objective analysis of this idea will shed more clarity on this topic.

To illustrate this further, if the Hastitapasas are correct in





their view on violence, then imagine the plight of a monk who visits a home for alms. The householder has two vessels in the kitchen, one with cooked cucumber, and another with cooked fish. Assuming the situation is conducive and all the rules for taking alms have been followed, what should the monk do?

If he considers all creatures as equal, then there should be no difference between cooked cucumber and cooked fish. The Hastitapasas believed that there is no difference in the pain experienced by a one-sensed creature or a five-sensed creature. But is this true in the practical sense? If all beings are the same, does it mean that their bodies are identical? Is there no difference in drinking a glass of water or a glass of human blood? So where does the difference lie?

Neminath – epitome of compassion:

There is a poignant incident in the life of Bhagwan Neminath, the 22nd Tirthankara of Jainism. In his younger days, he was not interested in getting married, but his family cajoled him and he gave his consent for marriage. Before the wedding, he was pampered and given a ceremonial bath with 108 pots of water. Exquisite garlands were woven with a variety of flowers for the special occasion.

Neminath was aware that every petal of a flower and every drop of water contained innumerable germs which would have got harmed during the process. However he remained quiet and did not protest. The wedding procession, which had started in Dwarka, soon reached the kingdom of Ugrasena, with Neminath reaching the wedding house seated in his decorated chariot.

It was then that he heard the distressed cries of birds and animals kept in a cage. When he enquired about the distressing sounds, his charioteer replied that the creatures had been collected and caged for the wedding feast. As soon as Neminath heard the words of the charioteer, his heart was flooded with kindness and compassion.

He reflected thus, “On the one hand, there is pomp and





splendour, and people are dancing with joy, while on the other hand, the butchers are ready to kill these innocent creatures.” Instantly, he asked the charioteer to set the creatures free. As the charioteer fulfilled the task, Neminath gifted all his priceless wedding jewels to the charioteer.

Resolving never to marry, he announced his decision to walk on the path of renunciation and austerity. As he freed the animals from bondage, so he hoped to free his soul from bondage, and as he evolved over the years, he went on to become a Tirthankara.

For the Yadavas, this incident was a moment of awakening. Prior to this, they had not paid much attention to the concept of ahimsa. This incident taught them an important lesson, creating awareness amongst the clan that violence was being conducted under the pretence of celebrations and festivities. It made them aware of the fact that they had been inhuman and barbaric all this while.

The high ideal which Bhagwan Neminath placed before society by renouncing marriage and embracing renunciation has become a glorious landmark in Jaina history. What is apparent is that he accepted the violence upon one-sensed creatures for his bath, but refused to accept the violence inflicted upon five-sensed creatures trapped in the cage.

This clearly implies that the wave of compassion which arose in his heart seeing the pain of five-sensed birds and animals was far more heightened than what he had felt for the one-sensed creatures. The former experienced greater pain and expressed it by wailing. Even though the five-sensed creatures were much lesser in number, yet their experience was more heightened and evoked compassion in the heart of others.

Finally, the question before us is: Is a person who chops greens with a knife committing the same extent of violence as another, butchering a goat? The answer is: Not at all. The primary centre to differentiate between violence and non-violence is the human feeling. Hence these feelings of compassion have to be put through a soul test. Those who pass this test will not entertain the





philosophy of the Hastitapasas.

Jainism does not allow us to measure violence by counting creatures. In fact, Mahavira has opposed this view. He firmly believed that as the seeker reflects upon the true form of non-violence, he will find that it encompasses other concepts related to compassion and charity.

The aim of ahimsa is to live a life without causing harm or suffering to any living being. To understand the true form of ahimsa, the seeker has to understand the evolution of sentient creatures: their body, senses and consciousness. It is only then that the sharpness or mildness of feelings experienced by the offender can be clearly understood.

The philosophy of ahimsa is rooted in the simple belief that hurting or harming people, animals or the environment is unnecessary to achieve any constructive outcome.

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Chapter 10

The Three Vehicles of Ahimsa

The various paths of religion are all, in essence, the paths of ahimsa.

Different religions are essentially different forms of ahimsa. It pervades through the various dictums with regard to conduct just as water pervades every wave of the ocean. Be it truth, be it non-stealing, be it celibacy, or non-possessiveness, ahimsa is integral to each one of them.

Whilst scaling meteoric heights in life, one can never leave ahimsa behind. It is impossible to lose ahimsa and continue to tread the path of truth. Nor can non-possessiveness exist without ahimsa. The melodious strains of ahimsa echo everywhere.

What we need to consider is that when a person integrates violence or non-violence in his life, in what forms do they exist? When we understand this well, then the pure form of ahimsa will naturally present itself before us.

Body and soul:

To understand things with clarity, we must consider the presence of the body as well as the soul. Which of these is responsible for the karmic bondages which are formed? Do karma happen because of the body or the soul? The activity which exists in our life, which is known as yoga in the scriptures, is responsible for the karmic bondage. This activity does not occur only in the body or only in the soul. It occurs in both simultaneously because of the intense relationship between the two.





Are the vibrations flowing through life – both positive and negative – caused by the soul? If the soul can form karmic bondage without the body, then karmic bondage must occur even in the state of liberation where the body ceases to exist. For what is liberation but freedom from the body! It is a state where only the soul exists. But there is no karmic bondage in the state of liberation. Hence it is evident that the soul does not form karmic bondage by itself.

Karmic bondage is formed by the union of the body and soul. Only when the two are united can karmic bondage take place. But when the two are separated, i.e., when the gross and the subtle bodies are separated from the soul, then karmic bondage comes to an end. Thus karmic bondage is dependent upon the union of the body and soul.

The analogy of alcohol can explain the above point clearly. Is the effect of alcohol dependent upon the alcohol or upon the person who drinks it? It is the coming together of both that causes intoxication. When the soul becomes non-relational and pure, then there is no activity or vibration in it any more. This is known as ‘yoga nirodh’ which means cessation of all mental fluctuations. It is then that karmic bondage also ceases to exist.

The vehicles of violence:

Any act of violence is essentially committed by three kinds of Yoga, i.e., mode or means of body, mind and speech. These are the three vehicles of violence leading to bodily violence, mental violence and verbal violence respectively.

Each of these forms of violence is further sub-divided into three categories, as in action committed by oneself, getting it done by another, or even by affirming a person who commits it. The same three possibilities also exist for mental and verbal violence.

Thus violence can be committed in nine ways:

- Committing bodily violence by oneself
- Getting another person to commit bodily violence





- Affirming a person who commits bodily violence.
- Committing mental violence by oneself
- Getting another person to commit mental violence
- Affirming a person who commits mental violence.
- Committing verbal violence by oneself
- Getting another person to commit verbal violence
- Affirming a person who commits verbal violence.

With spiritual practices, the gross body can be stopped from sinful deeds, the speech can be moved away from untruth, and the mind can be removed from negative resolves. In this way, wrongdoings of body, mind and speech can be put to an end.

Just as there are nine forms of violence, there are nine forms of non-violence.

The vow of non-violence is a very important aspect of Jainism. But there is a difference in the extent to which it is prescribed for monks and for the householders.

The monks are required to abstain from all nine forms of violence, but more lenient rules are prescribed for the householder. The reason for this is that a householder cannot perform his worldly activities in a completely non-violent fashion. Hence the scriptures prescribe that he must abstain from committing violent activities or getting another person to commit violence. However, the rules are lenient in the third instance, i.e., in affirming a person who commits violence.

Action and abstinence:

The vehicle of life requires both qualities – it should be able to speed ahead as well as stop when the need arises. The aspirant must wisely decide when to press the accelerator and when to put his foot on the brake. He must perform the necessary actions with his body, mind and speech, as well as control their activities when required. Any action committed, knowingly or unknowingly, is bound to have karmic repercussions.





As long as there is breath in the body, there will be activity. Human life cannot be devoid of activity since it is vibrant and alive, not an inert object. Even if the actions of body and speech are controlled forcibly, the mind can seldom be controlled. It is its own ruler. It remains active with a thousand ideas and thoughts. How can it be stopped? The aspirant has to consciously build his capacity to such an extent that he should be able to divert and channel his thoughts in the right direction.

In the Indian tradition, there are guidelines for how one should conduct one's life. Detailed examples are given for how one should sit, stand, walk and sleep. If a person is walking on a narrow path and encounters a young lad before him, he must step aside to make way for the boy. If a man encounters a woman on the path, he must step aside and allow her to go ahead. So also, the young must give way to elders. And the householders must make way for monks. A monk, however, makes way for a labourer carrying a load. It is all a matter of discretion and wisdom.

What does all this imply? That we must cultivate the capacity to move ahead as well as stop or divert our actions and thoughts as required. A spiritual seeker must remain vigilant at all times. All the actions in our life – eating, sleeping, walking, and working – encompass action as well as prevention. With these insights, it becomes easier to dwell on the implications of committing violent acts by oneself, through another or affirming the violent acts of others.

Violence is defined more by the desire, motives and consequences to the self rather than by the act itself. Hence it is intention which becomes the deciding factor and not the external act itself.

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## Chapter 11

### Ahimsa – Action and Restraint

*“Love all so that you do not wish to kill any.”*

– *Gautam Buddha*

Ahimsa is an ethical concept common to most religions. The understanding and implementation of Ahimsa in Jainism is more radical and comprehensive when compared to other religions.

#### **Positive and negative aspects:**

Essentially, there are two aspects of ahimsa – positive and negative. By positive we refer to action – what one must do. The negative aspect refers what one must refrain from, such as not harming or hurting anyone. The positive aspect refers to what we must do, such as service to the needy and maintaining peace and amity with all creatures. If we look at only one of these aspects, then our understanding of ahimsa will be incomplete.

The Prashna Vyakarana Sutra, one of the Jaina Agamas, elucidates sixty synonyms of ahimsa. Some of these, such as daya or kindness, raksha or protection, abhaya or fearlessness, refer to the positive or action-oriented aspect of ahimsa. Without this proactive aspect, the negative aspect of restraint has neither value nor existence. Hence the manner in which an aspirant’s conduct has been explained gives equal importance to both aspects: action and restraint.

Conduct is neither singularly action-oriented nor restraint-oriented. In this connection, it has been stated that refraining from negative actions, wrong resolves and ignoble behaviour as well as movement towards positive action and rightful behaviour is





charitra, or conduct. The aspirant must practice restraint on one side and action on the other. This is the complete insight into restraint and pro-activity.

If we practice positivity in our thoughts, words and deeds, then we are incorporating both, action and restraint in our life. Whilst riding a horse, the rider would like to gallop full speed but he also exercises control over the reins. As long as he needs to cover a distance, he allows the horse to move ahead. However, when he needs to halt, he exercises control to stop the horse. Thus he incorporates both action and restraint.

A simple question: would you ever travel in a vehicle that has the power to speed ahead but cannot be stopped? Suppose the accelerator works but not the brake? No, you will never take such a risk. Then why not follow the same in all aspects of life? The movement of life should neither be reckless and careless nor should it be inactive and dull. The same principle becomes the dual aspect of ahimsa.

### **Indifference versus proactivity:**

Ahimsa paramo dharmah...

Ahimsa is the essential religious duty prescribed for everyone. The aim is to prevent the accumulation of harmful karma. Does the practice of religion make one narrow-minded or selfish? Are there exceptions to the rule? If someone is in trouble, should you help them, if it involves action that you would refrain from otherwise?

As a practice, Jaina monks do not step into rivers, lakes or any water body. Suppose three monks are walking on the river side and one of them accidentally slips into the river. The second monk immediately jumps in to save him from drowning. But the third monk stands by the river in an aloof manner.

His justification being: "It is not my fault that he has fallen into the river. So why should I get involved? If I step into the water, I will disturb or hurt the fish, micro-organisms and other





creatures in the river. By doing so, I will commit acts of violence. Why should I harm several creatures to save one life?"

How does one determine what is right and what is wrong? The question is, which of the two monks will benefit spiritually? Can we consider the third monk, who stayed detached, a greater monk? Or is the second monk, who jumped and saved the first monk from drowning, a true practitioner of ahimsa?

In this context, Bhagwan Mahavira has clearly stated that in such circumstances, a monk must save the other monk who is in trouble. He must not hesitate to offer help even if it is a nun. But he must not remain aloof. Thus we clearly see that according to Jainism, duty is accorded a higher status than non-violence in both its inner subtle as well as gross physical forms.

When we stay away from helping another, we stifle a certain impulse within us – the impulse to help and nurture, thereby crushing our instinctive compassion. By doing so, we ourselves are causing self-inflicted violence to our own soul. It is crucial to protect ourselves from inflicting this self-violence.

Violence is defined more by the intentions, desire, duty and consequences to the self rather than by the act itself. It is apparent that the monk who jumped into the river to save the other did not do so with an intention to harm the creatures of the river. His sole intention was to save the other monk.

Jainism may attach great importance to detachment, but it has definitely not prescribed staying detached in all circumstances. Did the saviour monk earn merit or demerit by his actions? Did he fall into greater bondage of karma? Or did he shed his karma by this kind action?

Undoubtedly the saviour monk committed some acts of violence, but the important question is – what did his actions lead to? Is this the path of merit, demerit or is it karmic shedding? Remember, when empathy arises within a person and he becomes overwhelmed with pure compassion, he sheds innumerable karma.





When such a situation arises, positive resolves fill our life. There is a distinction between voluntarily harming another versus harming someone involuntarily. There is also a clear distinction between an action and an incident. An event may happen on its own without our causing it.

It is in such situations that our intentions speak louder than our action leading to subsequent consequences. Every action we commit, whether knowingly or unknowingly, is bound to have karmic repercussions.

### **Cleanliness and non-violence:**

Cleanliness is next to godliness. Before a Jain sit down for prayers, one is required to clean the place with a small soft woollen mop known as 'punjani'. This practice is known as 'pramarjan'. The Jain monks gently sweep the space before them with this punjani before taking every step as they walk. The idea is to clear any insects or micro-organisms present so as not to crush them while sitting or walking.

So also, the Jain monks inspect the bare, minimum articles they keep with them, twice a day for the same reason. This is known as 'pratilekhan'. However, there are some questions that arise. When a monk sweeps a place with his punjani, even though he may do it gently, at that time, organisms may be moved, dragged, and disturbed by the very action of sweeping. They may even experience pain. Hence, by this action, is he not accumulating karma?

The answer lies in understanding that we must take into consideration not just the present action, but also future consequences. We must learn to look at the larger picture. Most of the times, we just look at the present actions. We don't consider the consequences. So we think of the violence committed if we clean a space now. But what happens if we choose not to clean it? What will be the consequences?

As dust and dirt accumulate, the organisms in that space are bound to multiply. Spiders, ants and even micro-organisms





invisible to the naked eye, tend to breed in neglected spaces. If not cleaned, the space could become a breeding ground for organisms. When you conduct any activity in that place, like walking or sitting, you could end up inflicting violence upon these organisms and you will be guilty of committing greater violence.

Thus by keeping a place clean, you are not just curtailing violence at present, but you will also prevent greater acts of violence in the future. Wisdom lies in avoiding violence in the future and not allowing organisms to multiply. Thus, Jainism concludes that one must first employ discrimination, maintain cleanliness and hygiene, and not allow organisms to multiply. Only then you can protect yourself from committing avoidable violence.

### **A different view-point:**

The main principle of Jainism is to examine everything from different perspectives. For instance, why do you clean your house? So that it looks attractive and presentable. This is an aesthetic view-point. Another view-point is that by maintaining cleanliness, you prevent organisms from multiplying, and thus avoid becoming involved in unnecessary violence.

Furthermore, one must ensure that the articles employed in cleaning, such as a broom or mop, are made of gentler material. If you encounter any creature while cleaning, or if it gets entangled in the broom, you must gently and carefully set it aside. Thus if you employ discrimination and thought while cleaning the place, as well as consider any possibilities about future violence, then you are getting steeped in your religiosity, as well as begin to shed your karmic baggage.

### **Discrimination and non-violence:**

In all spheres of life, if one proceeds with discrimination and wisdom, then one is will inevitably tread the path of non-violence. There are many who are careless in whatever they do. For instance, one house-wife may leave food uncovered in the





kitchen, without any concern about flies falling into the water or the ants that may crowd a dish. Another house-wife is careful and keeps everything well covered and clean. She does it to protect the food.

So far, so good, but imagine if she employed greater wisdom! Suppose she were to keep the place clean to avoid committing violence or harm to other organisms. What is the difference? When she does it to protect food she has carefully cooked, she is guided by attachment towards the objects as well as a kind of narrow selfishness. She is not looking beyond herself or her family. But if she understood the parameters of violence, then she will practice kindness and compassion for all creatures.

The difference in the two thoughts and intentions will lead to difference in consequences. Where there is attachment and selfishness, there is karmic bondage. Where there is compassion and kindness, then the karmic bondage starts reducing. One leads to the path of delusion and the other to the right path. Now when you can do a particular task with compassion and selflessness, why would you succumb to selfish narrow-mindedness? Why would you fall from the lofty peaks of sadhana?

If things are kept in a careless and disorganized manner, then not only will flies and ants fall into the food and experience pain, but the food will also spoil, get contaminated and become a breeding ground for innumerable organisms. Thus, a little carelessness can give rise to a great degree of violence. Mindfulness, on the other hand, helps us to shed our karmic baggage. This is why Jainism propounds a shift in one's perspective.

A small change or shift in perspective can lead to a greater change in life. This change in perspective can be applied anywhere and by anybody: whether one is a householder or a monk, whether one is in a religious place or at home. While performing any action, if a religious perspective is adopted, then one will surely move on the path of liberation. Hence someone who leads is leading a life of discrimination, is constantly shedding karma every moment.

So also, one must speak when there is a need for it. This does





not mean that one must stay silent at all other times, but restraint in speech is mandatory. Whilst speaking, you must be sensitive to whether your speech is hurting or harming another. Is your speech benefitting someone or not? Thus, if one practices restraint in speech, then rest assured that one is shedding one's karma.

The same principle applies during walking. One must walk with vigilance and when required. This does not mean that one must be chained at other times. Jainism propounds that walking with discrimination leads to purity in actions pertaining to movement. This applies to monks as well as to laypersons. Just like a monk, even a layperson sheds his karma by employing discrimination in all kinds of movement.

Thus, you can protect the items pertaining to your daily routine as well as enjoy the nectar of non-violence. You can and should integrate ahimsa in an active manner in every sphere of life – be it mundane or profound. Wherever you are and whenever you are moving ahead in life, add the resolve of ahimsa to it. This will bring a fresh dimension and renew your life with divine energy as well as lighten your karmic burden.

If any action is not accompanied with the vision of ahimsa, then it will be considered as an act of violence, whether actual violence is taking place or not. We must practice enriching every aspect of our life with a non-violent perspective.

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## Chapter 12

### Ahimsa – The Core of Restraint

Ahimsa is a vast and pervasive concept. It forms the fundamental principle and cornerstone of the ethics and doctrine of Jainism. Ahimsa is central to Jain philosophy and appears in diverse forms throughout Jain doctrines, with its many aspects, interpretations and forms.

Not causing harm to another is one aspect of ahimsa – it is Jainism’s primary aspect based on what one must refrain from. But the gentle stream of ahimsa does not end here. It begins by telling us what we should not do, but gushes ahead providing guidelines and regulations on what we ought to do. It is in this positive prescription that ahimsa becomes truly meaningful.

Thus, on the one hand, ahimsa as advocated by Mahavira teaches us about service, kindness, compassion and forgiveness towards all beings, about helping those in need, healing those in pain, and offering them appropriate help and co-operation. It emphasizes living in accordance with one’s lot and also lays stress on caring for the less fortunate and under-privileged.

And yet, on the other hand, the same ahimsa teaches us not to cause trouble, pain or harm to another and not to inflict abuse on another, whether it is mental, physical or verbal. Ahimsa fosters amity and abhors enmity or aversion towards others. It also emphasizes on avoiding the use of wrong, hurtful or harsh speech, and advocates restraint from negative thoughts.

Thus, you can see that Bhagwan Mahavira’s explanation of ahimsa is neither solely oriented towards restraint nor towards action. Most people think of the term ‘ahimsa’ only in its restraining form, as in what one ought not to do. For instance, we





ought not to lie, steal, abuse or cause harm to another. All these are considered forms of violence, which destroy the purity of the soul.

As one evolves further and becomes sensitive to the inner divine world, the next lot of realizations dawn – ahimsa transforms into abstinence from anger, pride, greed and delusion. Thus, we only hear the sounds of restraints, and of negations and refusals. There are many who are guided only by restraints, but there is much more to ahimsa than what appears as restraints.

### **The underlying core of restraint:**

It is true that Bhagwan Mahavira has presented the highest ideal of restraint. The glorious canvas of restraint is visible in each and every teaching and in every reflection of his. But a clear vision and inner sensitivity will reveal the true meaningfulness of the sutras of restraints. What are the primary thoughts behind the sounds of restraint? Unless we understand all of this, we cannot reach the core of restraint.

Bhagwan Mahavira did not veer towards extremism or rely on one-sided theories. He balanced all the movements of life with his principle of *anekanta*, which states that reality is multi-dimensional. Restraint and action are two facets of life. Restraint creates the background for action, guiding and motivating action towards its goal. These teachings have evolved from the study of the human mind and teachings of restraint have appeared prior to action.

It is good that mankind is heading towards the evolution of the social consciousness and people are becoming proactive for social causes. But Bhagwan Mahavira asked us to reflect upon one question, “Is your action based on restraint or not? You are giving charity and helping the needy, but if on the other hand, you are also involved in the vicious circle of exploitation, then does your charity have any meaning?”

To overcome one’s own indiscreet desires and wanting to play a role in social evolution is the first religious tenet of Jainism. To





cleanse one's personal life, one has to first refrain from wrong deeds. When restraint occurs, life naturally becomes pure and serene, and the inner self is purified. It is only then that man's intentions or thoughts will be filled with universal goodwill for the betterment of humanity.

This is the core of restraint in Jainism, i.e., restraint in personal life and proactivity in social life. To relinquish the desire for an object is restraint. To offer an object to another with love is proactivity. Those who serve society and community must stay away from selfishness and personal conflicts. This is the first lesson of Jaina ethics and the essence of the Jaina path of restraint.

### **The boundaries of proactivity:**

Action also has its own limitations. It is good to help others, but that help should be based on the right ideals. One must not transgress right conduct, which is essentially knowing the wrong from the right and choosing to walk on the right path in life. The short story below, illustrates this principle clearly.

There is an incident in the life of Kabir, the great poet from the Bhakti period. One day some guests arrived at his house. There was nothing to serve them. He asked his wife to make some arrangements for the guests. His wife, Loi, came up with an idea. She said, "There is a young man who has been expressing his interest in me. I have not encouraged him until now, rather, I have reprimanded him. But if you suggest, I can ask him to help us now." Kabir agreed since he did not want the guests to remain hungry. Loi went to the young man who readily offered his help. She left with a promise to return and meet him soon. With this, the guests were attended to. When they left, it was time to fulfil the promise to the young man. Kabir himself accompanied his wife to meet the young man. Such was his integrity towards fulfilling his promise. The young man was astonished and deeply touched. He came to his senses and treated Loi with respect due to a mother and bid her farewell.

The question remains – What if the young man had not come to his senses?





This incident is a great example of service, but Bhagwan Mahavira's philosophy does not justify it. It recognizes service and sacrifice, but does not subscribe to staking one's character or goodness in the name of service which cannot benefit family or society in the long run. Whatever service is done keeping one's conduct and life as pure as possible, is considered true service and the right action. Such proactivity is the first rung on the golden ladder of social evolution.

### **Proactivity towards ahimsa:**

When you offer food to the hungry, water to the thirsty and are compassionate towards all, only then will your actions lead to punya or merit. When you give happiness and peace to the heart of the person whom you have helped, you also experience peace and satisfaction within your own heart.

This is meritorious action, or punya.

What you do for your own happiness and comfort cannot generate any punya. Why is that so? Since these actions are inspired only by selfishness, and not by compassion they do not qualify as punya. When compassion arises for the betterment of society or mankind, then the subsequent actions leads to merit.

This is the core of Mahavira's vision of proactivity.

Every philosophical reflection of Mahavira establishes his vision for the larger good. At every stage, we encounter his universal vision. That ahimsa is true ahimsa when your heart is overwhelmed with compassion for another. That compassion is true compassion when the pain of another arouses empathy in your heart.

There are powerful incidents in the life of Mahavira which narrate how he dealt with compassion even with those who harmed him. He responded to violence with non-violence. He looked upon all creatures as his soul-brothers, whether they treated him with respect or disrespect.

When he was physically tortured by others during his





wanderings, he remained silent. He bore the pain with equanimity. But when he saw another creature being harmed, then his heart was filled with compassion and he stepped forward to protect them. Thus, we see that compassion paves the path for proactivity.

### **The essence of restraint and proactivity:**

The examples stated above reiterate that Jainism is a highly proactive religion. Those who believe that Jainism only stresses on restraint and restrictions, has no space for universal evolution and that it exhibits no sensitivity towards social causes, may need to revise their conclusion and beliefs.

Jainism has never refused the importance of social life, rather, it has only affirmed our social relationships. It has outlined the duties and responsibilities with regard to village life, city life, social life and nationalism and has also lucidly explained how these can be implemented in the correct manner.

To conclude, both restraint and proactivity have their own limitations and their own fields. We need to understand them in a realistic manner. In life, restraint has as much importance as action. Action without restraint is a baseless blind commotion; it does not contain within it a pure constructive ideal.

So also, restraint devoid of action is only dormant and disinterested individualism. When a person is trapped in his own happiness and sorrows, when he lives in the imaginary world of comforts and selfish dreams, then he will only develop a form of selfishness and attachment for personal comforts. This leads to attachment.

Attachment, whether it is towards religious life or social life, cannot benefit either the individual or the society as is clearly stated in Jaina philosophy. Restraint from thoughtless personal comforts and selfishness, and proactivity towards appropriate contextual social welfare will amount to refraining from personal enjoyment and moving towards universal welfare.

This is the essence of restraint and proactivity as expounded





by Bhagwan Mahavira. Both appear independent but are interdependent on each other. This is the true philosophy of life and constitutes the core practice of Jainism.

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CHAPTER 13

The Tripartite Stream of Ahimsa

During the time of Mahavira, 2500 years ago, the political scenario was one of turbulence. There were a number of neighbouring kingdoms, whose rulers eyed each other with suspicion and distrust, with good cause, because some of the rulers were ambitious and ruthless. Chandapradhyot, the ruler of Avanti, was one of them. He was a harsh and pitiless dictator who wanted to annexe more territory to his kingdom. He embarked on many attacks and battles against the other kingdoms. He was also given to indulging in sensual pleasures.

The other major Kingdom was Magadh. It was ruled by another ambitious ruler Prince Kunik. He had taken over the throne of Magadh after killing his father, the great Bimbisar. He was responsible for waging the terrible war against the Republic of Vaishali, where Bhagwan Mahavira was born, and in the process ravaging and destroying countless precious relics and treasures of South Eastern India.

We come to know from Jaina literature that Mahavira was greatly opposed to these wars. He was against blind patriotism and condemned it. He also openly challenged the prevailing belief that persons who died in wars and battles went to heaven.

Mahavira was born a kshatriya prince. However, he had always been opposed to waging of wars, which seemed to be the main interest amongst many rulers of that time.

Among his devotees there were many kings and their ministers. But this did not mean that he accepted their policies of violence. In fact, he did not cooperate with them whenever they thought or spoke of fighting with other rulers. He was steadfast





in his non-cooperation with such kings, and showed it clearly by not accepting any alms from palaces or venues where such kings stayed. He also forbade his monks from doing so. They were also disallowed from entering palaces without any specific reason.

The greatest and gravest problem that arose due to the various wars, was, that the common men and women were deprived from leading their normal personal and social lives. There were also frightening scenes, of animal and human sacrifices, that were carried, which terrified the human conscience. Bhagwan Mahavira persistently opposed the practice of yagnas. He proclaimed that animal sacrifices that were carried out during the yajnas, could never be considered as a Brahmanical deed. On the contrary, he said, it was a non-Aryan or a barbaric deed.

The three forms of ahimsa:

For peace and prosperity in life, Bhagwan Mahavira propounded ahimsa in three forms: 1) Equanimity, 2) Love, and 3) Service.

Consider every being as similar to your own soul, this was the first message of equanimity. Those who come into your proximity, do not oppose or contradict them. Consider every person as your brethren, and evolve your friendliness with him. This was the message of love.

The third proclamation of service formed the foundation for gentleness and bliss in social relationships. Mahavira stated, “Instead of worshipping me, offer your service to the old, sick and helpless.”

Hearing this, his disciple, Gautama raised a doubt, “Lord! How is this possible? How can your completely evolved divine consciousness be comparable with that of an ordinary person? How can you place serving him as higher than worshipping you?” Mahavira explained, “I consider service to the extremely ordinary being as service to me. With service, one can attain Tirthankarhood, which is the loftiest height of sadhana.” And





thus, Mahvira gave the dictum – “Service to humanity is service to the Jinas (enlightened beings).”

This tripartite stream of ahimsa can wash the sin of ego, sprinkle the sweetness of love and amity, and by nurturing the ground of service and mutual co-operation, it sows the seeds of holistic development.

The foundation of conflict:

Our life is divided into two peripheries: ‘self’ and ‘other’. We are all torn between the self and the other. Most of the times, human beings are concerned with the self; the journey of life is for the self. Man thinks that whatever exists in his life, is for his own self. He is primarily concerned only about his own welfare.

Apart from the self, there is also the ‘other’. This ‘other’ is distinct from him; a stranger. He has no interest in the ‘other’. For his own betterment, he does not hesitate sacrificing the other to any extent. He does not hesitate or feel guilty in warming his chill hands by lighting fire in the neighbour’s hut. This selfishness is the root of the conflict between the self and the other.

Most of our problems occur because of the collision between the self and the other.

The desire to accumulate is the root of all problems. For his own happiness, man tries to snatch the happiness of others. He thinks that by possessing what others have, he can become happy. What he does not realize is that by doing so, he is only nurturing his material self and not his soul. His body is not even his true self. It is just a hindrance in the evolution of the soul.

Except the soul, all else is but the ‘other’. If one endeavours to expand the experience of the ‘self’, then the self becomes pervasive. In the ‘other’, one begins to experience the self. It is here that conflict ends and ahimsa is born. Just as my own self is troubled by pain and anxiety, so also the ‘other’ is troubled by pain and anxiety.





Until man realizes the existence of life and consciousness in the 'other', his heart cannot be free from conflict. Unless the intention of exploiting the other does not end, the pure feeling of joy cannot arise. Those who wish to create obstacles in the lives of others and cause them anxiety, how will their own life be free of obstacles and anxiety?

Ahimsa does not only advocate the absence of violence, but it endorses the absence of the desire for violence. The only way to stay away from this violence is equanimity, or the ability to see all as equal.

Bhagwan Mahavira was once asked, "O Lord! We wish to free ourselves of sins, which path should we adopt?"

He replied, "One who sees all creatures soulfully, whose vision is full of equanimity, who sees complete consciousness in all, and one who shuts the gates of karmic influx and sin, such a person will have conquered his senses and is not bound by sin."

This is the true way of freeing oneself of all sins. There are many who say, "Let us please this particular deity. Let us offer sacrifice to this goddess. Let us offer some donation to the priests. This will free us of our sins."

I clearly see this as a way of deluding oneself. Neither can any divine power free you of your sins nor can any priests do so. Moreover, neither can God free man of his sins.

Man has an intense desire to commit sins and then to seek freedom from sins and his guilt. He sprinkles kerosene on himself, sets fire and then shouts – "Lord! Let me not get burnt." If he is fearful of getting burnt, why did he set fire in the first place? It is this need to escape from the consequences of sin that makes man go astray. He thinks – "I can commit a sin as long as I can seek forgiveness from God."

The seers of India do not condone this as the right way of thinking. This false belief in forgiveness has misled man. By praying for light, can darkness disappear? By worshipping with a lamp and by bowing before it, can it spread light in your abode?





To remove the darkness, you have to actually light the lamp. Only when the lamp of non-violence glows before violence, truth before untruth, and detachment before desire, will the inner darkness dissipate.

When one has a soulful gaze, then duality disappears. No one is a stranger any more. Then what is there to fear? Fear is always of the other, the unknown, the stranger. You are in this universe and if you can believe that there is no 'other', then what is there to fear? Bhagwan Mahavira has stated: "The soul is one." For the soul, there is no 'other'. This is the vision of complete and absolute consciousness. This is the feeling of non-duality.

It is important for this vision of non-duality and amity to evolve in human life. It becomes the basic foundation of our religiosity and non-violence.

Service and universal consciousness:

When a person divides himself into various units, then his consciousness becomes narrow and fragmented. As long as each drop is seen separately, it is a drop. But when it is mixed with a water body, it becomes an ocean. When the individual consciousness is united with universal consciousness, then it awakens the divine form.

I believe that the complete form of human consciousness, which is also universal consciousness, is verily the divine form. Worshipping and serving that universal consciousness is symbolic of worshipping the divine.

If a human being does not have the aspiration for mutual help, then how is he different from a stone? When you break a stone, does the stone lying nearby display any reaction? Does the stone express any sensitivity, kindness or empathy?

When the feelings of compassion and empathy arise within the heart, then the person is inspired to do service. Hence service is considered as the expansive vision of life. With service, human contact develops. Human life is transformed from smallness to expansiveness.





Life is not merely about existing. Even ants and insects exist in this world, meet their bodily needs, and try to protect themselves, but their life is limited to their own selves. If the human being is also caught in the narrow framework of his own happiness and sorrow, and is trapped in his body, then how is his life different from other creatures?

However, being born as a human being does not assure the development of human consciousness. There are many human beings who are so limited, insensitive and cruel that one cannot see any humaneness in them. Culture and environment play an important role in expanding one's consciousness. The culture which nurtures large-hearted resolves and ideals, becomes an inspiration for our consciousness to evolve further.

Service requires relinquishing of one's ego; one has to become humble and forgo comforts to take care of others. Service and ego as well as service and personal gratification cannot co-exist. For in service, one has to surrender oneself completely, where the notion of 'mine' does not exist.

Hence service is considered as supremely elusive, and is a mystery even for the yogis. Service is also considered as the greatest of austerities. Without conquering one's own desires, how can one serve another? It is only after one gives up greed and selfishness that one can take care of another.

Indian philosophy considers service to be loftier than heaven. The true aspirant wants neither heaven nor liberation. His only wish is to spend every moment of his life and every penny he has earned in serving the needy and alleviate the suffering of those in pain.

Non-divisibility in service:

Bhagwan Mahavira has stated that one who does not appropriately divide whatever he has received between his companions and those in need, cannot reach the abode of liberation. It is important to remember that this is samvibhaga, or fair distribution. This is not a favour that you are extending





towards a poor person. If a person shares his family property with his brother, then is this pity or service or donation? No, it is but one's right. It is fair distribution done with respect. Then where is the place for conflict or violence?

Thus, by immersing oneself in the sacred stream of ahimsa and its three forms – equanimity, love and service – an individual can elevate himself to the status of God. He is then worthy of worship and veneration by the entire universe.

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CHAPTER 14

Physical and Emotional Violence

Ordinarily, we think of violence as an act where someone suffers physical harm. This physical violence is what is usually considered as a punishable offence. Whatever violent thoughts may emerge in a person's mind, until he does not inflict bodily harm upon another, it is not considered as transgressing violence.

But a religious or philosophical view-point is primarily concerned with mental violence. This is what the next few pages will illustrate.

The great Tirthankaras and Jaina scholars have made a two-fold distinction of violence: 1) emotional violence (bhaav hinsa), and 2) physical violence (dravya hinsa). The former also refers to external violence and the latter to internal violence.

In emotional violence, there is a resolve or intent. When there is a resolve to kill, then feelings of attachment, hatred and aversion arise. Even if the actual physical act of violence does not take place, yet violence has occurred at an emotional or mental level. It is not only the physical act of violence, but even the mere thought which also leads to karmic bondage.

Emotional violence is comparatively a subtle form of violence. Physical violence, on the other hand, is the more gross form of violence.

Not all physical violence is accompanied by intent. For instance, one may accidentally commit violence, like harming a row of ants while walking. In this type of violence, the act of violence has surely taken place, but the instrument of violence is only the body without any association of the mind. This means





that the feelings of attachment and aversion are absent. Thus even though the act of violence has taken place externally, yet there is no internal or mental violence. The seers say that in such an instance, karmic bondage does not take place.

This leads us to the question: Does karmic bondage happen because of the body or the mind? The body is inert, it has neither thought nor resolve, and hence it does not have attachment and aversion. So on its own, the body cannot give rise to karmic bondage.

Just as a stone on the pathway may cause injury to creatures who stumble upon it, but the stone is not bound by karma. Similarly the inert body cannot be bound by karma. Actually, even the mind on its own cannot commit violence. It is only the mind entangled in attachment and aversion which becomes the perfect agent for violence.

It is in this context that Jainism speaks about mohaniya karma. Mohaniya means that which gives rise to attachment and delusion. Among all the karma, it is only the mohaniya karma which cause karmic bondage. The great seers who have conquered attachment and aversion do not get trapped in karmic bondage. Detachment is seen as release from desire and consequently from suffering.

In this context, Acharya Amritchandra has stated, “Verily, the presence of attachment and aversion within us is only violence.”

Let us also be aware of the great truth that no one has the power to kill another creature. Even the mighty Tirthankaras cannot give even an extra minute of life to any other creature beyond his ayushya or destined lifespan. Neither the powerful Chakravartis nor Indra can kill another creature even an instant before his destined lifespan.

You may well ask – If we cannot kill anyone before or after their predestined lifespan, then why should we worry about violence and non-violence? When you cannot kill anyone, then where is the question of violence? When you cannot save anyone, then where is the question of non-violence?





The answer lies in the fact that giving life to another or taking life is not in our hands. But what remains in our control is the resolve to kill or the resolve to protect. The stream of violence and non-violence flows from this source.

When a resolve to kill someone rises in the mind, when the resolve to harm someone and inflict pain on them rises in the mind, then the flames of violence begun to set the mind ablaze. Even if another person is not harmed, by merely thinking of violence and harming others, we have become violent and have committed violence.

On the other hand, when we resolve to protect someone out of kindness and compassion, when our heart is filled with the desire for happiness and peace for him, then the divine feeling of non-violence is born within us. Even if our endeavours do not help save a single creature, yet non-violence has awakened within us on its own.

Our compassion is our non-violence. The resolve not to kill another is one aspect of ahimsa. Until we do not understand the other aspect of ahimsa, the sadhana of ahimsa will not be complete. If not to kill is in itself the totality of ahimsa, then the wise seers would not have invented words such as kindness and compassion.

These feelings of kindness and compassion give rise to sublime feelings of peace and joy towards mankind which makes our hearts pure and serene. It is thus evident that bondage lies in attachment and aversion. Bondage lies in delusion. To take the life of another creature out of feelings of attachment and aversion is violence.

This clearly implies is that we consider ahimsa not as pertaining to objects, but to feelings. Detachment along with non violence becomes the supreme ideals of ahimsa. It is with this understanding that we come to realize that compassion is the prime duty of a human being towards fellow humans and nature.





Violence in thought:

The definition of emotional violence is now becoming clearer. When aversion arises within one's soul for another creature, if the resolve of untruth, theft or perversion arise, or when the passions of anger, pride, deceit or greed arise, these amount to violence. All of these make life impure and are considered as violence in thought.

Violence in thought is a self-destructive foe; it immediately destroys the one who commits violence. When anger rises in someone's mind and he is subjugated by that anger, he instantly decides to destroy the other person. As soon as the thought arises, emotional violence is committed. This may not always be accompanied by the actual act of violence. Perhaps circumstances may hamper his violent action or he may not feel strong enough to harm the other person. He now burns in the flame of revenge even though he cannot physically harm the other person. Take the instance of a child who is being teased by his friends. In frustration, he fills his hands with slush to throw on the others but they run away and escape. Now whether he is able to throw the slush on them or not, his own hands are sullied. Such negative resolves and negative thoughts towards others fills one's mind with slush, contaminates his inner self and destroys the qualities of the soul.

Anger destroys forgiveness, pride destroys humility, deceit destroys simplicity, and greed destroys contentment. When the resolve for untruth rises, the fragrance of truth disappears. Thus when any negativity arises within a person, it always destroys something positive.

Look at a matchstick. When it is rubbed, it gets ignited. Burning in that flame, it now sets flame to the grass and bushes nearby. Even if it is not able to destroy them fully, it certainly destroys itself.

The great saint, Nami, has stated, "However many external battles have been fought in life, however much blood-shed has occurred, yet none of them led to the right path. The real fight





is with the inner passions and perversions.” The lofty qualities which ensure eternal conquest reside nowhere, but within. Hence, an individual must fight with himself alone. Fighting with oneself implies fighting with one’s own perversions and violent tendencies. Verily, the creator of physical violence is this inner mental violence.

Violence in action:

So far, we have reflected on violence caused through thoughts and inner resolves. But when one inflicts bodily harm on another by weapons or by brute force, or even manages to end the life of another, it is considered as physical violence. Negative thoughts within the mind fall within the realm of emotional violence, but the incidents that arise as a result of bodily violence fall within the realm of physical violence.

We have grown up giving greater importance to physical violence. It is a punishable form of offence. A person may have violent thoughts towards another person, but unless he inflicts physical harm on another, he is not considered as a criminal.

Thus, we can conclude that the philosophical view-point considers emotional violence as primary while a common view-point considers physical violence as primary.

Four-fold classification:

From the analysis so far, we now arrive at a four-fold classification of violence:

- When only emotional violence has occurred
- When only physical violence has occurred
- When both physical violence and emotional violence have occurred
- When neither emotional violence nor physical violence have occurred





Emotional violence:

The first kind of violence, namely emotional violence, can be understood by the example of tandul-matsya. This is a creature of the size of a rice-grain and is found on the eyebrows or ears of large fishes such as whales. As a habit, it keeps observing that when the whale inhales and exhales, thousands of small fish enter and exit its stomach via the breath.

The tandul-matsya then ponders, “How foolish and lazy is this whale that he is allowing the small fishes to escape from his stomach. If I had such a large body, I would not have allowed even one fish to escape.” But, when the fishes swim towards him, he hides, fearing that he may be killed. Thus, his thoughts are full of violence, but not his actions.

Such is the violent thought process of the tandul-matsya. He fills his short life span (of one antarmuhurta) with violent thoughts. The Jaina scriptures state that by his constant violent thoughts, he prepares himself for the lowest of hellish regions.

Yet another type of emotional violence is seen when a person commits an action with a violent intention, but the action does not bear fruit. A murdered in a doctor’s garb tries to take the patient’s life by administering poison without realizing that the poison was the perfect medicine in this instance to cure the patient. In some diseases only a certain amount of poison can produce positive results.

Hence the patient does not lose his life, rather, he becomes perfectly alright. His family expresses gratitude to the doctor and praises his efforts. What do the scriptures state in this regard? Whether the patient was harmed or not, the doctor is guilty of committing violence. To destroy one’s goodwill, one’s good qualities and one’s duty is nothing but self-destruction. This is the wisdom in the Agamas of Jainism.

Physical violence:

Imagine a spiritual aspirant on a journey. There is neither any





violence in his mind nor any violent tendency. He treads carefully, yet violence takes place, because however careful one is, there are minute creatures who come under the feet while walking. This is why the seers state that until this body is there, how can violence come to an end?

Of the fourteen spiritual stages which lead to the final purification according to Jainism, until the thirteenth stage, violence takes place, even though in a subtle form. Until the soul is connected with the body, this process continues.

Even if someone is sitting silently, a mere gust of wind leads to the death of innumerable micro-organisms. Even an extremely subtle action like the blink of an eyelid can lead to the death of innumerable micro-organisms.

Here is a situation – If a kevalgyani (self-realized being) comes across a river, what should he do? The obvious reply would be that he should cross the river in a boat. But whether he is walking or going in a boat, he cannot escape from violence. Even a single step forward leads to some form of violence.

Does this form of violence also cause bondage?

The foundation of violence resides in thoughts which are tainted by passion. Thus, if an aspirant is detached from passion, then any act of violence which may take place is unintentional. It falls into the category of physical violence but not emotional violence.

Physical violence, even if it is life-destructive, cannot be considered as violence as long as it is free from attachment and aversion. This is the state of the omniscient beings. They do not harbour any negative feeling towards others. Their hearts are full of positive emotions towards all. Therefore, any bodily violence that takes place does not cause bondage. They are as unaffected by the violent actions as a lotus that remains pure even in murky slush. They have not really committed the violent act; it is said to have simply occurred on its own.





There is a world of a difference between actually committing a violent act and the violent act happening naturally. One is bound by sin only when one has committed a violent act. One is not bound by sin if the violent action occurred on its own.

In this connection, Acharya Bhadrabahu says, “While an aspirant is treading the path with vigilance (iryā samiti), if any creatures gets crushed under his foot, then according to the Agamas, this aspirant is not bound by sin at all. The reason being that since he is vigilant whilst walking, he is untainted by sin.”

The same has been announced by the Digambar Acharya Vattekar, “The lotus leaf blossoms only in slush, yet it remains untainted by the slush. So also, a vigilant monk is untainted by sin even while wandering amidst other beings, for the eternal source of compassion flows within him.”

The Acharya clarifies this with a powerful analogy, “Imagine the scene in a battle. The warriors are attacking each other fiercely with arrows. But can these sharp arrows pierce the chest of those who have chosen to protect their chests with an invincible shield? Certainly not!”

So also, the monks who have protected themselves with the strong shield of vigilance during travel, are untainted by sins even while wandering amidst other beings. He further explains, “A monk who is walking with vigilance, whose heart is filled with compassion for all creatures, is not bound by fresh karma even while walking. Not just this, rather, he also sheds previously bound karma.”

The relationship of merit and demerit lies within the inner world of the doer, and not with the external world. Thus, a strange sort of understanding emerges about the first two forms of violence. There are vast differences between the consequences of both. One is considered as violent even though there is no external violence, while the other is considered as non-violent even though he may be considered violent by the society and law.





Those who look upon non-violence as impractical must reflect seriously upon this principle. In daily life, if one gives up the negative resolve of non-violence and completely moves towards a state devoid of passions, then he is devoid of violence.

Jainism primarily propounds that one must give up violent tendencies. It emphasizes that as violent tendencies are reduced, so also negative thoughts propelled by passion are proportionately reduced. Consequently, carelessness will also reduce and the light of purity and discrimination will illuminate one's life.

Acharya Bhadrabahu states, "There is an established principle in relation to violence and non-violence: Verily, the soul in itself is non-violent as well as violent. The pure, vigilant, serene and careful soul is non-violent. On the contrary, the soul tainted, careless, unwise and passion-filled, is considered to be violent."

Emotional and physical violence:

The third form of violence is a combination of emotional and physical violence. This means that a person's heart is filled with the resolve to kill and he also commits external violence. Thus violent resolve has accompanied violent action. The consequence of this two-fold violence destroys life.

Neither emotional nor physical violence:

The fourth form of violence is when there is neither emotional nor physical violence. Hence it is null and void as far as violence is concerned. Here, violence has no place whatsoever. Such a holistic and total form of non-violence is possible only in the state of liberation which is the culmination of conscious and deliberate efforts. In such a state, there is neither any violent intention nor any possibility of violent action, elevating the individual to a sublime level and the highest ideal of spirituality.

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Chapter 15

Ahimsa - Ideal of Religious War

Wars have been fought since time immemorial, but not all wars are the same. Some are religious, ethnic or economic in character, whilst others may be fought over succession, in defence or for independence.

A war fought for religion is known as ‘dharma yuddh’ or religious war. This type of war is a part of non-violence rather than violence. Another type of war could be fought on irreligious grounds and is known as ‘adharna yuddh’ or irreligious war.

In understanding ahimsa, we have to take into consideration not just the present, but the consequences for the future as well. If there is violence in the present time which will lead to a greater proportion of non-violence in the future, then the present violence actually becomes a practice of non-violence.

On the contrary, if the non-violence in the present is minimal but will eventually lead to further violence in the future, then this minimal ahimsa cannot be considered as belonging to the realm of ahimsa.

True form of ahimsa

Reflect a little deeply and you will see two forms of violence. One is an aggressive form of violence while the other is a small violent act committed to put an end to the larger violence.

Can they both be considered as the same form of violence? The answer is “No.” An act of violence that is committed to put an end to a much larger violence cannot be categorized under violence.





What if you developed a fatal ulcer in your finger? It is imperative to get rid of it immediately, and it may even require to be surgically removed before the poison spreads through the entire body. Would amputating this ulcerated finger be considered as an act of violence?

Jainism clearly states that a small act of violence done to stop violence of greater magnitude is a form of ahimsa. It may be an act of violence, but since its motive is steeped in compassion, hence it is treated with dignity and not considered as violence.

Is ahimsa an ethical ideal during war?

The famous epic Ramayana narrates the episode when Ravana kidnapped Sita and kept her captive in his kingdom. Rama, in turn, attacked Lanka, Ravana's kingdom and a fierce war ensued.

One may ask – is it correct to wage a war for just one woman? After all, Sita was neither being harmed nor hurt. It is not just harming another being that is considered as violence. Even destroying another's ethical life is considered an act of violence.

Reflect upon this: By kidnapping Sita, Ravana committed severe social injustice. If an end was not put to this injustice, then the very foundation of justice will be rattled and will lead to greater injustice in the future.

The tradition of punishment in politics is to control the spread of injustice and persecution. If it is not curtailed, then it will become unmanageable. In this light, the war fought by Rama would be considered as a religious war while the war fought by Ravana is an irreligious war.

Why is it so? Rama was guided by an evolved ethical ideal. His war did not emerge from any unethical foundation, nor was it to serve anyone's lust or hunger for power. Rather, he fought to preserve the sanctity of justice and to stop injustice.

Misnomers with regard to ahimsa:

We have an excellent example in History about the Hindu King





Prithviraj who safeguarded India against Mohammed Ghori's multiple invasions. Prithviraj and his army defeated Mohammed Ghori several times, forcing him to beat a hasty retreat every time.

Mohammed Ghori stumbled upon the fact that Hindus do not attack cows. He used this to his advantage, positioning cows before his armies. When war began, the Hindu soldiers were in a dilemma. They did not attack the enemy for fear of killing the cows since cow slaughter was considered sinful. They lost the war.

If you re-think this situation, you will realize that the viewpoint about the cows was not appropriate. Did the brave Rajputs not consider future consequences? To save a few cows, the entire country's future was put at stake. Why does torture and injustice have to be inflicted on the masses before a deeper understanding of the situation is revealed? Have we lost our culture, ethics and ideology? Or have we lost our religious traditions?

It no longer remains an issue of cows. Wars see thousands of our girls and women being ravaged and abused. It is not a question of religion, whether it was the Hindus or Muslims. Injustice has to be faced, curbed and nipped in the bud.

One should view violence and non-violence not only in the context of the present, but with a futuristic vision as well. After all, a limited vision of the present can sometimes lead to a short-sighted vision of the future and unnecessary harm.

The religious war of King Chetak:

A war of great magnitude ensued in the time of Bhagwan Mahavira between King Kunik and King Chetak. Many references of this war are found in religious scriptures.

Chetak, the chief of Vaishali democracy, was very spiritual and observed the twelve Jaina vows appropriate for a householder. Kunik, the ruler of Magadha, attacked Vaishali. The reason for the war was Kunik's younger brother, Hallavihall. Kunik was trying to sabotage his brother's property and rights. The brother escaped





and pleaded with King Chetak to save his life. When Kunik came to know of this, he warned Chetak to release his brother or face war. Chetak chose war instead of abandoning someone who had sought his protection. A fierce war ensued and thousands lost their life. Chetak too paid with his life.

The question remains – was it right on Chetak’s part to choose such destruction over protecting one person? If he had abandoned Hallavihall, thousands would have been saved.

The answer to this is not simple. Chetak himself was spiritually evolved and had the good fortune of listening to Bhagwan Mahavira’s discourses many a times. From his spiritual view-point, he saw Hallavihall as innocent, oppressed and as one who was seeking protection. He noticed Kunik was snatching away the rights of an innocent person. Chetak did not view this incident as merely someone seeking his protection, rather, he saw it as an issue of inflicting suffering on an innocent person. If those who are powerful and capable do not take care of others who are less powerful, then what is the significance of religion and rightful action?

This incident is significant in the larger context of life. It is not about violence inflicted on a person or oppression of the weak, rather, it is a matter of ideals. For the destruction of an ideal is the largest form of destruction. If an ideal is destroyed, then it becomes an example of injustice and torture for the future. If such instances increase in this world, it will shake the foundation of society completely.

Another point to consider in the battle between Chetak and Kunik is that both fought the war, violence occurred on both the sides and a large number of lives were lost on both ends. The scriptures tell us that Chetak died in the battle and reached Heaven. On the other hand, Kunik became a winner and yet, when he died, he reached the portals of Hell. The same instance leads to two different set of consequences. While both participated in the same war, how did the consequences become different for both?





The answer is that the different consequences arose on the platform of violence and non-violence. One endeavoured to protect an ideal while the other was motivated by his own blind selfishness. It is the responsibility of those in power to offer protection to the weak. If one is capable of offering protection and yet does not do so, then he is not walking on the path of religion.

Jainism asks: Among the two kings, who fought a religious war? Chetak fought a religious war and attained Heaven while Kunik fought an irreligious war and reached Hell. Thus the question of violence and non-violence cannot be solved merely on the outside, rather, it has to be solved from within through inner contemplation.

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## Chapter 16

### Delusion – Backbone of Violence

It is time to look at ahimsa in its prohibitive form, which means in terms of what should be avoided. Thus, an absence of violence is the prohibitive meaning of ahimsa. As already stated, as long as activities continue, one cannot be free of violence, whether intentional or unintentional.

The human mind is like an ocean where innumerable thoughts arise and ebb like waves every moment, keeping alive the hub of activity.

When there is no vibration in the body, mind and speech, the soul becomes totally peaceful and steady. This is known as the ‘shaileshi’ condition of the soul where serenity exists.

The Jaina seers have described the spiritual path as consisting of 14 stages of purification. Until the 10<sup>th</sup> stage of purification, karmic bondage occurs because of passions and the three-fold activity of body, mind and speech. There is an absence of passions in the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> stage, but bondage continues to occur because of the three-fold activity of body, mind and speech.

In the final and 14<sup>th</sup> stage, both passions and the three-fold activity are absent, hence the aspirant attains the state where no bondage takes place. It is for this reason that the siddhas or liberated beings are not bound by karma.

The purpose of this analysis is to understand that our body, mind and speech are active at all times. Whether a creature is one-sensed or five-sensed, these vibrations are a part of his life until he continues to live in this world. Just as these vibrations cannot be avoided, so also the subtle types of violence cannot be completely





avoided either. But it would help to know the levels of violence so we can get an intuitive understanding of ahimsa.

### **Levels of violence:**

Whatever actions or movements eventually become visible first originate in the mind. Our entire life is motivated and administered by these mental fluctuations. They become the primary ground of violence. It is in this way that violent thoughts arise, providing an environment to commit violence.

The arising of violent thoughts in the mind is the first level of violence known as ‘samrambh’. The next level is the tools for committing violence including providing an environment for committing violent action which is known as ‘samarambh’. After these two levels, the actual act of violence takes place known as ‘arambh’. The sequence of arambh thus begins at the first stage and carries on to the final act of violence.

Thus, we see that inner negative thoughts first give rise to a violent resolve, this in turn attracts and creates the fabric of violence, and finally, one actually puts in the energy to commit violent actions.

There are four kinds of negative thoughts: anger, pride, delusion and greed. Whenever there is a negative resolve, it is born from one of these four. These four are also termed as kashaya or passions. When these four forms of passions are multiplied with three forms of violence, it results in twelve types of violence. The deeper the colour of the passions, the greater is the form of violence and the milder the colour of passion, the milder is the form of violence. Thus, it is clear that passions form the context and background of violence.

The next question that arises is: Even though violence is rooted in passions, how does it take place? The three main instruments of violence are body, mind and speech. A human being is endowed with all these three powers. When any of these are activated, violence takes place. When the twelve types of





violence mentioned above is multiplied by these three powers, we arrive at 36 sub-types of violence.

Furthermore, the instruments of body, mind and speech are also of three types – performing an action by oneself, getting it done by another, and affirming those who do it. These are the three ways in which the actions of the body, mind and speech are performed. When these three are multiplied by the 36 forms of violence mentioned above, it gives rise to 108 forms of violence.

It is to free oneself of these 108 varieties of violence that many aspirants chant upon the 108 beads of a rosary. We have earlier mentioned that non-violence in the popular sense is considered as freeing oneself of violence. What it implies is that as an individual attempts to free himself of each of these types of violence, he is also practising the different types of non-violence.

There are as many categories of non-violence as there are of violence. As one delves deeper into the understanding and classification of violence and non-violence, one will begin to appreciate the subtle depth with which Jainism has given an understanding into these concepts. To understand it well, the seeker must employ his intelligence as well as his sense of discrimination.

### **The meaning of non-violence:**

From what has been stated so far, it is obvious that violence is not just inflicting hurt upon another creature. It can also be the mere resolve to commit violence. To shift a creature from one place to another, to brush against it accidentally, or to place one creature upon another, or even to cover a creature with dust, all these qualify as violence. If creatures are moving about freely, then obstructing their freedom of movement is also violence. So much so, that even touching another creature without any reason is violence. Many Jaina followers chant a prayer known as ‘iriyavahiya’ where one seeks forgiveness from any such violence arising from physical movement.





## **No hindrance to freedom:**

Jainism propounds that you must not become a hindrance to anyone's freedom. Be it any creature, large or small, each one is entitled to activity within its framework. If you hinder its path or brush against it, then you are partaking in violence. Such a subtle interpretation of ahimsa cannot be found elsewhere.

When a layperson listens to such a detailed understanding of ahimsa, it is but natural for him to be surprised. For activity is a part of human existence. We move from one place to another all the time. It is but natural that one would hinder the path of some creature or the other quite often. Even if the creature is not harmed physically, it may experience fear at the interruption which amounts to internal violence.

If the framework of violence is so vast, the question arises that what kind of a person can be considered truly non-violent? Even a vigilant monk can inflict pain upon a creature. If a fly falls into a monk's glass of water and he tries to rescue it by removing it gently from the water, yet the mere touch of another will cause some pain and fear in the fly.

Imagine a creature lying on a road in the heat of the sun. It is unable to move because of its damaged limbs, hence it is subject to suffering in the unbearable heat. A kind-hearted person takes pity on it and moves it into the shade. Can this act of kindness also give rise to violence since it involves movement?

If any sort of movement is included under violence, then what must one do in such a situation? If this logic is used, then there will be no place left where one can move in any manner whatsoever. It will not be possible to conduct daily activities either. After all, even the air we exhale will hinder the free movement of micro-organisms.

In this connection, a person once asked a monk – “There are organisms and micro-organisms in water and on land. In every inch of the sky, there are innumerable organisms. Given this to be the reality, how can a monk remain non-violent?”





Let us consider the example of ants. When you step upon an army of ants accidentally and drag or crush some of them with your feet, can you imagine the pain they go through? For their tiny bodies, human feet must seem like being crushed under a gigantic mountain.

As stated by the seers, “Whether you have rubbed another creature, touched it or placed them over each other, all of these are but different forms of violence.”

### **The context of ahimsa:**

The above illustrations give rise to some pertinent questions:

How can we lead a life of non-violence?

Is it possible to be totally immovable?

Should we give up all our activities and lie still like a corpse?

In reality, even this last possibility does not exist. Bhagwan Mahavira performed intense austerity and stood still for six months. After that, he broke his fast and there-in, all the movement began. A great saint can meditate for a few weeks or a few months, but eventually the activities involving movement have to start.

Moreover, the Jain monks are forbidden from staying in one place for too long. They have to wander from one village to another, from one city to another. In that case, how can the dilemma of violence and non-violence be resolved?

Penetrating the core of Jainism makes it apparent that the effort which goes into any kind of movement and work cannot be considered wrongdoings in themselves. It is the resolve, thoughts and passions behind them that contain the essence of violence and sin.

This leads to another question being raised: “Is there sin even in eating and drinking?”

Jainism states that these are not sinful activities by themselves,





but it is the attitude behind them which determines if they are violent or non-violent activities. Is the activity being done with vigilance or without discrimination? When any activity is performed without attachment to the body or senses, then it is considered to be free of karmic bondage and violence.

### **Fasting and religion:**

Any issue about food in Jainism automatically brings us to the practice of fasting. Jains are known for their rigorous penances and fasts. Undertaking a fast is considered as a religious deed. The question is: would eating for the sake of breaking the fast (paarna) be considered as religious or sinful?

Mahavira undertook a rigorous fast for six months. On the day he broke his fast, did it elevate his soul or decimate it? The answer to this is a puzzle in itself. Mahavira's soul which was elevated by undertaking the fast, soared even higher on the day of the paarna. For the paarna will be followed by another austere fast, propelling Bhagwan Mahavira to move ahead on the path of austerity and evolution.

Thus the process of self-evolution is escalated by a conscious ethical choice. The aspirant then continues to move higher, whether it is the day of eating or fasting. Its pre-requisite is a pure attitude and the conscious decision to walk on the right path.

### **Delusion – root cause of violence:**

It remains justified to question that if all activities such as eating, sitting and standing incur sin, since they involve some sort of movement, however subtle, then should every minute of our life be considered as sinful?

Jainism offers a practical response to these questions.

No, every activity is not considered as sinful; merit and demerit cannot be applied to actions of eating, sitting etc. The basic principle of Jainism is that it is the intention behind any activity which decides its merit or demerit. If an activity is guided





by passion, then it is sinful. If it is guided by wisdom, then it is pious.

If an aspirant employs conscious discrimination during movement of any kind, he is not bound by sin. Even if some form of violence should occur during his movement, he will remain untainted by sin. Such activity does not cause bondage.

In any activity, one must have clarity of purpose. Delusion can obscure the soul's power of perfect knowledge and vision, preventing it from attaining liberation. According to Bhagwan Mahavira, "Where there is delusion, where there is carelessness and where errors occur, they lead to sinful karma." - Suttrakrutanga Sutra

On the contrary, when there is no delusion or indiscrimination, and one exerts conscious discrimination and vigilance, then any activity that takes place does not lead to karmic bondage. Rather, it is only now that karmic shedding can take place.

### **Cleaning and other activities:**

As we begin to understand how any form of movement can lead to violence even in subtle form, then we need to reflect further. When one cleans any surroundings, then is it considered as an act of violence or non-violence? This is because cleaning involves dusting and sweeping which can harm and disturb creatures and insects. Similarly, take the case of a doctor performing surgery on a young child, who is extremely scared and is upset with his parents and the doctor for subjecting him to such pain. In both the instances, the actions are guided by positive intention, and hence even if they give rise to violence, they will not give rise to karmic bondage.

If you hurt a helpless animal on the street, it is certainly considered sinful. But if you carry the animal because it is injured, then you are doing an act of kindness and piety. This confirms the fact that it is the intention accompanying the action which makes an act pious or sinful.





We can then conclude that if violence and non-violence is viewed and understood from this point of view, it can put an end to the endless and callous wrongdoings done in the name of kindness. The entire debate of violence and non-violence is not a debate of words or actions, but is a complex spiritual issue about appropriate intent.

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Chapter 17

Violence – The Bane of Humanity

The concept and form of Ahimsa is a very pervasive one. Violence is seen in different forms at different levels in our personal, social and national life, in different fields and varied forms. Violence could be known or unknown, gross or subtle, external or internal, but the fact remains that violence is taking place. Any opposition, reaction or restraint to this violence is the positive spectrum of ‘ahimsa.’

It is a daunting, if not an impossible task, to shed light on the totality of ahimsa and its various forms. However, when we accept its importance, consider the right practice of ahimsa as an ideal in life, resolve to lead life within its framework, and accept that the individual, society and nation can only be redeemed by ahimsa, then we begun to understand it in depth, as well as become an example before others.

Internal and external violence:

To understand non-violence in depth, it is essential to understand the two forms of violence: internal and external.

One form of violence is that which keeps on simmering within us in the form of passions such as anger, pride, delusion and greed. Indulging in these wrong endeavours, we succeed in crushing our own soul. For instance, imagine a person who is consumed by jealousy. He cannot bear to hear praises about anyone other than himself and is reluctant to admit the special qualities of another. He burns in the fire of jealousy, thus bringing harm upon his own self and begins to hate the good qualities of others.





Isn't this a way of harming oneself?

Can this be considered another form of suicide?

When a person shoots himself, it is considered suicide. Yet he has killed his body and not his soul. But when he is consumed by jealousy or greed, then he is constantly harming his own self. This form of violence is internal violence or violence by thought.

The other form of violence is external. Actually, it is our internal violence which gives rise to external violence. Thus, according to Jainism, there are two streams of violence. One flows inwards and the other outwards. If violence is considered as fire, then it can be said that the flame of violence burns within and without.

Questions to ask oneself:

Ahimsa is not just a very broad concept, it is also quite complex. Complexity often becomes a part of principles which have a broad outline. There are often instances when it is not even clear to the layperson whether it is violence or non-violence!

For instance, when pain is being inflicted upon a person and violence is being committed, and consequently the feeling of revenge rises in him, then is this feeling one of violence or non-violence? Is it himsa or ahimsa? Can revenge, whatever its source may be, be considered as non-violence? We often see such violence committed in the name of religion or community under the label of ahimsa! It is important to reflect upon the devastating effect of communal violence. There are a few questions you should ask yourself:

What is your relationship with the human world around you?

How do you behave with the people in your vicinity?

Does your behaviour stem from hatred and animosity or from respect and care?

Is it born from the cruel need to hurt others or is it born from a generosity to nurture others?





Communal differences:

Bhagwan Mahavira's practice of austerities led to some important transformations which touched many lives. Many powerful priests and religious heads shed their pride and laid their differences at Mahavira's feet. They sought refuge in his teachings and allowed compassion and kindness to permeate their hearts and lives. Unfortunately, with the passing of time, the Jain community itself has lost sight of these great ideas. Then how can we expect others to respect our philosophy?

Communal differences are like a deep-rooted disease. They plague our lives and we need to make a conscious effort at eradicating them. Many great leaders have sacrificed their lives hoping to solve this problem. Gandhi's life was also sacrificed at the altar of communal differences.

Jain monks are also caught up in the web of communal thoughts, trapped in societal narrow-mindedness, wrongly supporting communal differences. Their thinking process needs to be cleansed of these destructive weeds. Feelings of animosity have been given the form of communal, societal and group violence. Not viewing others as human beings, treating them with narrow-mindedness and with feelings of animosity and hatred – is this not violence?

Deep chasm in humanity:

Human race now stands divided into several sects and sub-sects. It stands fragmented into so many bits that it is impossible to count the divisions any more. Relationships seem to be steeped in conflict rather than amicability.

An inner conflict seems to be present at all times with each one wanting to display his superiority over another. What appear as a bouquet of fragrant flowers on the outside, also has sharp thorns within. It would not be fair to speak of other communities when the Jain community itself is also caught up in their differences rather than co-existence!

Look within and you will observe how your everyday ethical





behaviour is dominated by communal feelings. Take the instance of a child who accidentally falls while walking and a passer-by immediately rushes to help him. As he nears the child, he realizes that the child belongs to a lower caste, and is hesitant to pick up the child. It is often seen that people hesitate to help those whom they consider as belonging to the lower caste.

They are fortunate whose vision is not blurred by casteism. Their compassion is genuine compassion. Bhagwan Mahavira clearly affirmed those who worshipped qualities and not community. Be it a brahmin or a shudra, or one of ordinary lineage, Mahavira only looked at the qualities of the person. As is stated in the scriptures, a person may be an untouchable, but if his life is fragrant with truth and non-violence, then even the celestials aspire to prostrate before him.

One such hero was Harikeshi - a 'Chandal' which means one of lower birth. On account of his previous actions, Harikeshi was born into a lower caste, but he adopted the spiritual way and led a worthy life. As long as he was caught in the mire of worldly life, he was disrespected. But when he cleaned his thoughts and adopted the life of a monk, he was considered worthy of everyone's respect.

In this context, many arguments and debates have ensued between scholars and pandits. Some believe that only the Brahmins can be considered the greatest and purest among mankind. However much one may argue, the final case rests on Harikeshi who is considered as a Brahmin not by virtue of birth, but by his qualities. It is not surprising that the celestials showered flowers upon him.

Bhagwan Mahavira stated, "You can directly see that excellence is in austerity, excellence is in quality, and excellence is in the purity of life. There is no excellence in class and caste; that is merely an egoistic and imaginary claim. Harikeshi may have been born into an untouchable family, but such was the height of his spiritual austerities that even the celestials sing in his favour."





Every word of the above quote flows with the eternal Ganges of truth. Every syllable is in honour and praise of qualities.

It does not matter if one is born into a low caste, he can still be reborn in this very life! His rebirth is through his qualities, via his reflection and intuition. When life is constructed with one's own endeavours and right thought, then it is the most glorious construction. This is referred to as the second birth.

If you look at the life of Karna, the great philanthropist of Mahabharata, it is the same phenomenon. Similarly study the life of sage Valmiki who was a dacoit earlier. It does not matter which lineage you are born into. What matters are the values you imbibe and inculcate to lead your life.

Can caste be changed?

Can the lineage and caste in which we are born, be changed? What if a person born in a lower caste, and through his spiritual leanings displays a very noble character, then is it right to say that he has changed his caste?

When a person undergoes a transformation, do others treat him like a transformed individual or do they continue to treat him like before? Ask yourself, are you willing to treat a person based on his qualities or his caste? If one belongs to a high caste, will his reputation remain untarnished irrespective of his actions? We have seen time and again that a family's reputation is determined by the behaviour of family members.

We can conclude that when a person is trapped in wrongdoings, then he is residing in an ignoble gotra, but when he corrects his actions, then he will earn the fame due to a noble gotra. The scriptures state that a monk is in the sixth stage of spiritual purification from where he cannot move into an ignoble gotra. Harikeshi, the monk, was born in an ignoble gotra, yet became a monk. The question is: When he became a monk, did he continue to remain in the ignoble gotra? If yes, then how did he become a monk as well as elevate himself to the sixth stage of purification? Hence, it is evident that he transformed from an ignoble gotra to a





noble gotra. Thus, one can move from noble to ignoble gotra and vice versa.

As stated by Acharya Samantbhadra, “If a person born in ignoble birth (chandaal) attains the right vision, then he elevates from a human into a celestial being. The Tirthankaras call him as a devata. The divine light shines within him just as the sparks that are evident even within ashes.”

Transformation of a prostitute:

I remember an incident during my wanderings as a monk. It was very sunny and I wanted to rest. I came across a dwelling near some shady trees and was about to sit down under a tree when someone said, “Maharaj! If you wish to rest, kindly go ahead and rest further down, but do not sit here.”

When I asked him for the reason, he stated, “Don’t you know that this dwelling, this tree and this well have been formed from the wealth of a prostitute? Of course, she gave up prostitution at one stage of her life and surrendered herself in service to God. She then aspired to do charity and dedicated her wealth in making this dwelling and other things. But since all of these are created from wealth earned in prostitution, hence noble beings like you should not be seated in such places.”

On hearing the words, I began to reflect, “On the one hand, this person is saying that the woman transformed and repented for her wrongdoings by such noble deeds. Yet, on the other hand, he is asking me to refrain even from sitting here. It is unfortunate that many like him refuse to drink water from this well or rest under the shade of this tree. Why doesn’t her positive transformation erase the wrongdoings from her past, in the minds of people?”

The question is – Does not the prostitute, having transformed her life, become a nobler person than these people who refuse to see her change. Continuing to treat her like before reflects poorly on their character and on the aggression within them.

We need to reflect on this debate of birth versus karma. As individuals and as members of a family, community and nation,





we need to rise above dogmatic beliefs which harm us. We need to remember that the community and clan which accords respect to qualities, creates individuals of noble character.

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Chapter 18

What is Social Violence?

It is easy to understand the direct form of violence since it is based on how many creatures one has harmed, whether they are one-sensed or five-sensed creatures. Indirect violence has a more pervasive form and is not easy to grasp or define. It is far deeper and more complex than direct violence and can be appropriately called social violence.

You may wonder what is the relevance of introducing this new concept of violence. Violence does not have one form. It has many forms and is of many types. As we reflect upon these issues, we will get a glimpse of the subtle details with which Jainism has understood, incorporated and propounded the concept of ahimsa.

To understand the meaning of social violence, let us look at how one society behave with another? What is the kind of relationship that exists between them? Is it one of amicability or animosity?

If the relationship between one caste and another, one neighbourhood and another, one class and another is that of hatred and animosity, it is known as social violence. So also, when one kingdom, state or country shows hatred towards another, it is social violence.

Jainism is a vast religion and at its core lies an important message for all humanity. It's fundamental message is: "However may people exist in this world, they are all basically one. No community or class can destroy the fundamental oneness of humanity." But sadly, over the years, changes in society have affected society in a negative way, creating a fragmentation of





humanity. It is impossible to count how many classes and castes have emerged as a result of this fragmentation.

Caste system:

Bhagwan Rishabha, the first Tirthankara of Jainism, formed the social system by dividing society into four castes: brahmin (clergy), kshatriya (warriors), vaishya (traders), and shudra (menials or labourers). The main basis for this caste system was occupation. It was established to fulfil the different needs of society.

The role of the Brahmins was to spread education and awareness in the society and to guide people towards the right path. It was not based on any bogus concept such as superiority, lineage or nobility.

To avoid misuse of power and corruption by might, the warrior community was formed. Its purpose was to protect the weak and the sick, whilst protecting the kingdom from foreign attacks. It was not formed to enable some people to use their power and might to fulfil their lust or greed.

The trader community was established to maintain a balance in production and consumption. This community included agriculturists as well, who were meant to look after crops and ensure it does not get spoilt or wasted. It was not formed to fulfil the needs of only the rich or powerful nor to allow exploitation of any kind.

The fourth caste was that of menials who played an important role. Their duty was to serve society in order to maintain health, hygiene and cleanliness. It was not established with any inferiority or narrow-mindedness in mind. If that was the case, then why would people have accepted to belong to that group? Just like the other castes, this too was established only for the betterment and comfort of society.

Abuse of Caste System:

Today the original and in-depth understanding of the caste





system has vanished. Each person wants to be superior to the other, so much so, that human beings have stopped being humane. People are happy to travel with their pet cats and dogs in their vehicles, but they are reluctant to make place for another human being. Several religious places disallow the entry of people from other religions.

In a religious gathering, an untouchable enters to listen to the discourse. He absorbs the essence of the scriptural words and gives up alcohol and non-vegetarian food. He even undertakes fasting on important days such as ashtami and chaturdashi, becoming regular in his prayers. Yet when he enters the religious gathering, people say, “Give him a lower seat.”

He quietly sits down and listens to the holy words. You take the upper seat and feel superior and happy about what you have done. Did you stop to think, what is the difference between him and you? He breathes the same air as you and is listening to the same words. Perhaps you should go and offer a prayer asking for divine intervention so that you may breathe different air from him, and ask for a different sun to shine on his hut! This certainly was not the reason for the formation of the caste system.

Whose water is it?

I know of a Brahmin who is also a mill owner. After his travels he met me upon his return. He was distraught, “Maharaj! There is no trace of religion anywhere anymore!”

When I asked him, he explained as follows:

As always, I got down at a station to drink some water. I went near the water bearer and asked him, “What is this water?”

He replied, “It is clean water for drinking.”

I again asked him, “It is undoubtedly clean, but whose water is it?”

He next replied, “It is fresh water from a well.”





I had no choice but to speak frankly, “I did not ask you whether it is from a well or a pond. I asked you whose water is it?”

He still looked blank, so I bluntly asked, “Does it belong to a Hindu or a Muslim?” He stayed adamant and replied, “How can water belong to someone, Sahib? Water is neither Hindu nor Muslim. You can check if it is hot or cold, fresh or stale, but how can it have a caste?”

Well, he refused to understand my point. So I stayed thirsty for 3 or 4 stations, by which time I was dying of thirst so I drank the water.”

Bewildered, I asked him, “So what will you do now?” He replied, “I will take a dip in the Ganges and purify myself.”

I said, “What will happen if you dip in the Ganges? Will it help you remove the water that you have already drunk? Your body has already been energized by it. What can you do now? Do you understand that you are walking the same earth as others?”

In this context, the story of Buddha’s disciple, Ananda, comes to mind. Once when he was passing by a village, he stopped at a well and asked a young girl to give him some water. She hesitated, saying that she was the daughter of an untouchable, Ananda said, “I did not ask for caste, I only asked for water.”

This powerful statement belongs to the golden pages of History. After drinking the water, she asked, “Are there really such people who do not discriminate based on caste?” Ananda explained to her that all humanity is one and that all human beings have the same set of rights. He said, “In Buddha’s religious gathering, equal respect is accorded to a brahmin and to an untouchable.” Inspired, the young girl followed him and later embraced the spiritual way of life.

Such poignant and powerful stories arouse joy in our hearts. Many such glorious stories are found even in the Jaina scriptures. The stories of Harikeshi and Metarya are some such examples.





But unfortunately, we do not live our lives according to these ideals. We have adopted a narrow minded attitude and live like frogs in a well. We should endeavour to eradicate social violence and live peacefully with the human race as a whole.

A new vision of ahimsa

Ahimsa needs to be examined in a new light. How it is understood today is not exactly what ahimsa truly stands for. It appears as if it has nothing left in it, and is irrelevant in today's context. Huddled from all sides, it is standing on a platform of denial. An ahimsa of denial cannot have any life in it; it becomes shallow and lifeless. Today ahimsa is considered synonymous with not committing violence – that too in a one-sided, narrow, shallow and illogical manner.

Today, ahimsa has lost its power to respond strongly against injustice and torture. Ahimsa lies not just in tolerating violence, but its real power lies in countering violence effectively. That was Gandhi's method. But now ahimsa does not have that life-pulsating dynamism and seems to have become dormant.

It is only when society gets together and unites to shower an ethical attack against the violators of ahimsa, that a positive change can be expected in this world. The non-violence activists must adopt such brave non-violence.

The true form of religion is service. Religious organizations spend all their wealth, energy and time in power games rather than undiluted service. Only service can be considered as true compassion and true non-violence.

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## Chapter 19

### Animosity – Root of Social Violence

*“There is no enemy outside your soul. The real enemies reside within; they are anger, pride, deceit, greed, attachment and hate.”*

**-Mahavira**

Two kinds of poison exist in this world – the first is found outside and the other resides within us. The poison that is found outside has thousands of forms and names and is detrimental to our life. Yet, their effect is not as damaging as the poison that resides within us; the inner poison is detrimental to our very spirit and has an impact over lifetimes! Hence it is much more fatal.

External poison can harm us only when it is consumed. On the contrary, violence, which is the inner poison, affects us every minute of our life. This inner poison appears in forms such as animosity, jealousy, anger, revenge, hatred and envy. It has infinite forms. It can adversely affect our family life, social life or even national life. Wherever this poison attacks, it only brings destruction in its wake.

As Bhagwan Mahavira stated, “Animosity is the greatest enemy of life. One who has conquered animosity has conquered the world. He is the greatest of conquerors.”

How does hatred affect us? It is a deep and emotional extreme dislike, almost like a mental obsession. It creates a disposition of hostility and negative resolve towards people, objects, groups or even ideas which eventually leads humanity towards destruction. Hatred is an apathy and animosity which churns within the subject





but establishes no other relationship with the world, other than a desire for destruction.

How can we refine our life by transforming and overcoming this inner animosity? Let us examine our inner emotions and thoughts. When we speak about the wrongdoings of another person or a family or any society, it is important to first examine our intention. Are we pointing to others because of some animosity towards them? Or are we driven by the intention and hope of them shedding their negativity? This is a crucial point.

If there is animosity within us, how can negativity get wiped out, and if we can't erase negativity, how can transformation take place? It will only worsen the situation. Negativity cannot be erased by negativity. A blood-stained-cloth cannot be cleaned with blood; it has to be cleansed with water. If we add our own negative intention to another person's negative traits, then we are only building a chain of negativity. We should endeavour to cleanse our inner self before attempting to bring about a transformation in another. If there is an inner impurity, then external cleanliness is of no use.

### **Can sacrifice be steeped in animosity?**

Bhagwan Mahavira has made some profound observations on whether sacrifice driven by hatred can ever be considered a sacrifice.

When you give up the use of an object to break your attachment with it, then it is important to examine the intention behind this act. Is your sacrifice inspired by detachment or by aversion? For instance, when you stop speaking with someone because of anger or ego, can you pretend to yourself that your silence is some form of sadhana.

Ask yourself, was it ego which propelled you to sever the relationship? If you have fought with another person, then instead of retreating into silence, you must first seek forgiveness. Giving up on a relationship because of conflict and ego will not cleanse the soul, rather it will hinder the evolution of the soul. It will form





greater karmic bondage. The seeds of animosity are sown and will soon start bearing poisonous fruits.

### **Violence in the name of socialism:**

From centuries, we have seen violence committed in the name of religion and community. Who sows these seeds of violence? The animosity that exist within any human being is the root cause of such violence.” It is hatred which propels one person to kill another and to cause bloodshed between brothers.

What is noteworthy is that the ideal of love and non-violence is dear not just to the Jains, but also to Buddhists, Hindus and seers of other religions. Then who is teaching one group to massacre another? Who teaches such lessons? Not a Jain or a Buddhist or a Shaivite or a Vaishnavite. It is that demon called “hate” which resides within human beings, teaching them lessons in hatred in the name of religion and casteism.

### **Violence in the name of religion:**

Pages of History are stained with shameful incidents of animosity and violence. Even in the Jain community, groups and sub-groups had formed in the Middle Ages and became the cause of unnecessary divisions. We often see how two disciples of the same Guru fight over ideology with each other, like wrestlers in an arena. They contradict each other, thereby creating their own individual sects. They justify their actions by praising themselves and criticizing others. What kind of leaders will they become and what service will they render to the masses?

Such self-centred leaders can only transmit their own social hatred to their followers, imposing their own narrow-minded communal hatred. Bhagwan Mahavira did not propound any of this. His broad religiosity was far beyond such narrow divisions. He taught people to respect qualities and not sects. He emphasized on introspection and repentance of one’s own wrong actions.

Mahavira did not advocate criticism of others. Those who think that they can rise higher by putting others down are only deluding





themselves. They can never become true leaders. When religion is weighed down by such negativity, it in turn will influence society in a negative manner. The human spirit is scarred by these wrong actions in the name of religion and by some religious leaders.

### **Violence in family life:**

When religious communities and groups are plagued with such poison, it is bound to permeate and impact the sphere of the family. Relationships bound together in love and care become plagued by disrespect and mistrust. No one is then spared: be it a sibling, spouse or grandparent. A mother is not respected as a mother and a step-mother is not considered as a mother at all. When you speak ill of your parents in the presence of children, how will your children learn the quality of respect?

The story of Ramayana is a great inspiration at such times. When Rama prepares to depart for the forest, Sumitra happily grants permission to her son Lakshmana to accompany his brother to the forest. She bids him farewell with these words, “Do not ever think that you are wasting your life in the forest. Do not miss us. Do not think that your parents are absent. Think of Rama as your father and extend the same love and respect to him as you do with your father. Think of Sita as your mother and extend the same love and respect to her as you do with me. Think of the forest as Ayodhya.”

Who is uttering these words? None other than a mother who is a mother not to her own son alone, but to her nephew as well. She could have stopped her son from going to the forest and bearing the hardships of forest life. But there is no duality in her heart. Her heart considers Rama and Lakshmana not as cousins but as siblings.

It is imperative to understand that as long as we are consumed with the violence of hatred and animosity, until then brothers will not look upon each other as brothers or parents as parents. We are choosing to become the greatest enemy of our own happiness.





### **Becoming angels of peace:**

Think for a moment, how did Gandhi die?

Was it the bullet from a pistol that killed Gandhi?

On the contrary, it was the demon of hatred in Godse's mind which killed Gandhi. The murderer was not Godse but that hatred and animosity which had seeped into our conscience and country. The poison of hatred does not spare anyone; it destroys anything in its wake.

What caused the partition of India?

What caused the inhuman acts of violence and torture at the time of partition?

We cannot blame Jinnah or the British. It was the communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims which divided India. It was not religion which caused the divide but the animosity which couched itself in the name of religion, which was the culprit. This is why the two countries have not found peace even after the partition!

Until the passions (kashaya) of mutual hatred, animosity, opposition and rejection do not get erased from families, societies, communities, castes and districts, social violence will not disappear. We can speak of non-violence only when we have freed ourselves of such emotional and mental violence. Only then will the stream of amity flow in our lives. For peace and joy to pervade in our social lives, we need to remove this poison from our hearts. Let us not become the agents of animosity, let us become the angels of peace. Where there is Love there is Life. Violence is Suicide.

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Chapter 20

Casteism – Culprit of Social Violence

It is now becoming clear that violence does not have only one form. It appears in various forms such as societal, national and religious violence. It destroys the sacredness of life, because life is sacred regardless of faith, caste, race or even species.

Just as you cannot discriminate between what is yours and what does not belong to you in pitch darkness, similarly the dark clouds of violence can only lead to confusion and despair. In order to lead a successful life, we need the divine light to guide us. Until non-violence does not seep into the various spheres of our life, it is impossible to tread on the right path.

Jainism is a spiritual religion. Its subtle gaze rests on the human soul, penetrating beyond the walls of the human body, senses, external form, gender, lineage and caste to absorb the subtlety of the soul. It speaks about the soul and in the language of the soul. Beyond the polarities of happiness and sorrow, high and low, even beyond this world and beyond, it speaks about pristine spirituality.

“There is no quality of soul more subtle than non-violence and no virtue of spirit greater than reverence for life.”

– Mahavira

This also implies that all external contradictions which seemingly exist in this world – whether they are based on wealth, power, lineage, success or any other criteria – crumble before this noble vision. They become meaningless and baseless. The soul has no relation with any of these options. Mahavira’s discourses





originally in the ancient Prakrit language, are available to us through the scriptures.

The Acharanga Sutra contains many of Mahavira's profound teachings. It is considered as the most ancient of all the Jain scriptures. It clearly states, "If you are standing before an emperor who is surrounded by unlimited opulence and wealth, who is seated on golden throne in the midst of powerful commanders, yet if you have to impart wisdom to him, do not be guided by his opulence and power, rather, consider him as another human being and speak with him. Connect with the soul within him which is the same as the soul in all others. All you must keep in mind is that the flame of wisdom alights within him just as in others. Impart knowledge to him with this goal alone and proceed fearlessly."

"So also, if a beggar or an untouchable comes before you who is considered as lowly in the eyes of the world, then speak with him in the same manner as you would speak with the emperor. Do not get trapped in his external poverty and shabby living. Keep your gaze fixed on his pristine soul. Your duty is to impart the message of the great seers for uplifting and liberating his soul."

Thus, the sounds of Jain religion have scaled meteoric heights. Time and again, our seers have stressed that a beggar and a sweeper be addressed in the same manner as an emperor. One must neither look down upon the weak nor fear the strong. Then the sounds of our speech will be clear and strong.

Going beyond casteism:

Although Vedic religion is a great supporter of the Varna system, yet we find enough instances from its period and literature which show that caste or creed is meaningless. This short dialogue between a Guru and his disciple illustrates it beautifully:

A disciple aspiring to cross the worldly ocean goes to a Guru and says, "I am the son of a Brahmin. I am born in this lineage. I wish to ferry across this worldly ocean." The Guru says, "Young man! Your body will surely degenerate in this world. Then how can you swim across this worldly ocean? That which meets its end





on one bank of the river cannot swim across to the other bank!”

The disciple reflects and realizes the existence of the soul. He says, “O Lord! I am distinct from my body. When death comes, the body ends, but I don’t end because I – meaning the soul – is eternal. The body takes birth and dies. It can be penetrated by a weapon and burnt by the fire, but the soul is eternal. Just as a bird resides in a tree, so also I (soul) reside in the body. Just as a bird can move from one nest to another, so also the soul moves from one body to another, but stays undisturbed in its own pristine form.”

The Guru smiled and said, “What you now speak is the truth. Then why did you utter untruth words in the first place and state that you are a Brahmin born in a certain lineage?”

The question then rises – If Jainism does not give importance to caste and family, then why do the terms ‘jaisampanne’ (rich caste) and ‘kulasampanne’ (rich lineage) appear in the scriptures? It is important to reflect on this issue.

The meaning of ‘jaisampanne’ and ‘kulasampanne’ is that a person is fortunate enough to belong to a certain caste or a certain family by virtue of his birth. What he is born with as well as the environment he grows up in, can prove to be extremely beneficial. For instance, by virtue of being born in a certain community, a person may be vegetarian by birth. His environment may keep him away from alcohol and other vices, making it conducive for his spiritual evolution. Yet it must be remembered that despite being born in certain families and communities, eventually the credit for remaining a vegetarian or being a scholar will belong to the person since he anyways had to work for it. Mere inclination or inheritance is not enough, being proactive is important.

The environment can prove to be a very powerful influence in our lives. A conducive environment can be an advantage while a negative environment can destroy the individual’s character. Also, all children born in Brahmin families are not equally noble. Hence caste and environment may influence, but they do not determine a person’s character.





The Jaina religion allows a person of any caste to renounce the world and become a monk. Whether one is born in a sweeper's family or from royal lineage, he will be considered as equal to other monks. Age and caste does not entitle monks to any special favours.

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Chapter 21

Purity – Credibility of Social Ahimsa

When we reflect upon our life and try to touch its core, it becomes apparent that the by-lanes of life are not separate. Everyone has to tread upon the same path. This path reflects the purity of life! Externally, we may adopt different religions and different views, and fix different goals, yet the internal journey of life remains the same.

The path of purity:

The most important and the surest by-lane of purity is ahimsa. To be born a human is a blessing and it is not easy to get. It is a reward of the accumulated good deeds and austerities of previous births. To make it meaningful, we must reflect on its usefulness and goal.

Should we use this opportunity for the benefit of the world, by reducing the sorrows and suffering of the masses, by spreading the fragrance of humane qualities and remove social misbehaviour, or should we become a road block in human evolution and increase social difficulties by adding our own to it? This point needs serious reflection.

In this context, Bhagwan Mahavira has prescribed the one and only right path. He says, “Use this human life which you have received to solve the problems of humanity. If the problems are due to familial issues, then solve them at that level. If the problems are due to society, then find an answer. So also, if these problems are due to national conflicts, then remove those thorns one by one. The basic goal of human life is to clear and strengthen the life path for oneself as well as for others.”





Thus, by virtue of its innate usefulness, ahimsa is a path laden with flowers and not thorns. This path may seem difficult initially, and when we start walking upon it, we may even feel that it is not an easy path. But what is certain is that if life has to evolve, it can evolve only on the path of ahimsa. Violence can only increase difficulties in life and cannot solve any problems at any level whatsoever.

The message of oneness:

Jainism has come into this world to give an important message: However many human beings are there in this world, even if they are spread out from this end to the other end, yet they are one as human beings. They belong to the same category and class. They do not belong to different groups. The various classes of human beings that have emerged are based on different occupations and work. Since human beings have to work for a living, they take up different occupations. Some do trading of clothes, some of grains, some start their own venture – all of these are but simple ways to solve the problems of life. But when man develops feelings of purity and impurity towards these occupations, then it is ungracious. All one can say is, that such feelings develop from mere pride and ego, nothing else.

There seems to be an innate attitude within man wherein he looks upon himself as superior and higher. This attitude is seen in the young and old. This attitude of pride and ego makes them move away from the true path of life. Instead of developing self-confidence, one develops pride which actually diminishes one's spiritual strength.

Man possesses a sense of 'aham' or I-ness, which verily refers to the soul. You cannot separate this 'I' from yourself nor can you relinquish it. You are nothing without the soul. You are there only because the soul exists. It is important to understand: when man develops the feeling of being superior in a pure sense, it will give rise to goodness. To realize that I am the soul and there is nothing more superior than the soul is the highest realization.

Contrarily when that 'I' gives rise to ego and you are filled





with the need to view others as lesser, inferior, or even impure, then it is obvious that the ‘I’ has not evolved in the true sense. To view oneself as supreme by regarding others as inferior is an enormous mistake, leading to the path to self-destruction.

To look upon oneself as supreme by realizing that there is a soul within, is the right path and leads to the road of compassion. There is a difference between self-contentment and self-pride. It is important to focus on the former and stay away from the latter.

Realizing the pure self:

Jainism has always delivered this message to man – “O human being! Consider yourself as pure and supreme. You have not come into this world to wander aimlessly. Your life is not meant for you to suffer and live in pain. You have come into this world as one who is supreme. Because of countless meritorious deeds in previous lives, you have attained this human birth. A birth, that is so great and divine that even the celestials worship it.”

By giving this message of self-love, Jainism has awakened the pure ‘I’ within man. The message of Jainism which resonates in a pervasive manner is that the soul is the super-soul and that the pure soul is the very form of the divine being. Jainism elevates the human life and human race to such a level that it leads to the conclusion that all human beings are pure and divine. It is only the mistakes and misconceptions which are impure.

Thus, Jainism does not teach us to abandon or neglect wicked and evil people. It clearly explains why one should not hate the thief but abhor only the act of theft. The thief also possesses the same pure soul within. Hence no person is inferior or impure. The same elements that exist within you exist within the thief as well. His goodness is veiled by his wrong acts. With vigilance and discrimination, you must unearth his goodness by wiping the dust of wrong thoughts.

It is only when one starts discriminating between the person and the action, that non-violence and compassion will be aroused within.







Chapter 22

Exploitation – Method of Social Violence

Bhagwan Mahavira has stated that ahimsa is the only solution to wars between nations. His ideal is thus: To fill every human being's heart with the thought that he must stay content within the 'self' and not crave for the 'other'. To be attracted to 'other' is to covet their wealth and luxuries and then try to snatch them away.

Until a river flows between its two banks, it brings benefit to the world. But as soon as it crosses its boundary and begins to stake claim on the nearby areas, it takes the form of a destructive flood. It leads to devastation and ruin. So is the case with man. As long as he operates within his own framework, there is no unrest. As soon as he begins to claim power over the other's territory and begins to overtake them, he becomes the cause of unrest and war.

Bhagwan Mahavira has made a Herculean effort in this direction. He instructed his disciples, especially those who were householders, to restrain themselves and stay within their boundaries. He did not permit them to cross their stipulated boundaries in business or trade. To go beyond one's legitimate rights is the simplest way to engage in conflict and war, with one's own clan or friends.

The eternal ideal of Jaina culture is: Every man must endeavour to fulfil his needs by rightful means. To hoard more than one's requirements, is considered as stealing in Jaina culture. Why do individuals, societies and nations wage war against one another? It is only because of this greed to accumulate more than one's need. As long as one ignores the needs of others, he cannot





find peace or contentment. The seeds of ahimsa can germinate only in non-possessiveness.

From this point of view, ahimsa and aparigraha are synonyms.

Jaina scriptures extol the virtues of Shravaka Anand who spent his entire life at the lotus feet of Mahavira, performing the greatest of austerities. Even though he remained a householder until the end, yet his sadhanas were so great that he became an immortal figure in Jaina history. He is considered an ideal for all householders.

It is important to reflect:

How did he practice ahimsa?

How did he follow the path of truth?

How did he perform his sadhana?

How was his conduct with others?

On this vast earth, many have been born in the form of traders, wealthy people, emperors and kings who have wreaked havoc with their greed. They have exploited others for their own pleasure and needs. History talks of them as well – but not as examples to be followed but as an example of what one should not do.

The lesson of humanity:

Ask yourself these questions time and again:

What have you given to this world and what have you gained from this world?

Have you behaved in a humane manner with other human beings?

You were born as a human being, but have you behaved as one?

If yes, then you have passed the exam of life.

But if your answer is negative, then you cannot be considered praiseworthy.





Bhagwan Mahavira explained to the monks – “If you encounter an emperor, a seth or a successful trader, then you must speak with him with the same frankness and clarity with which you speak to any poor and defenceless man. Treat both with the same kindness and compassion. Keep the message of equal affection and compassion towards all beings in your heart.”

We do not have to fight with society but we should wage war with the negative attitudes and thoughts that exist within the heart.

In Bhagwan Mahavira’s time, the issues that plagued the Brahmanical society were very complex. In the name of violence, yajnas was taking place along with animal sacrifices. But Bhagwan Mahavira did not oppose the Brahmin community at all. Rather, he openly tried to transform wrong customs into right ones and wrong attitudes into right ones. Whether emperors such as Shrenik or Kunik came to him, or whether poor woodcutters came to him, he continued his revolution against wrong actions with equanimity towards the rich and the poor, as well as the powerful and weak.

Who is worthy of liberation:

Once Mahavira was asked what would be the height of a true seeker of liberation. He replied, “A very tall man can attain liberation as much as a dwarf can.” This only proved that Lord Mahavira did not place any emphasis on the body or bodily height. If a man is short in stature but evolved in his thoughts, if he has attained the 13th gunasthana (stage of spiritual purification) and is on his way to the 14th and the final stage, then he will surely attain liberation. But if a man is tall in height and poor in his way of thinking, then he is not worthy of liberation.

Applying this analogy to the concept of ahimsa, we can clearly see that kindness and compassion as mentioned in our scriptures stands lofty and tall in stature. However, the manner in which we practice non-violence and compassion in present times is very small and petty. It is important to note that we don’t need to grow in physical stature but instead allow our mental and emotional stature to grow.





The power of discrimination:

Jainism considers ‘viveka’ or discrimination to be the highest of all virtues. What makes a certain trade rightful is only whether it is practised with discrimination. This discrimination is an internal exercise even though we keep focussing on its external form.

A good example of this is found in religious practices. Many religious leaders emphasize on external attributes such as shaving the head or wearing a tilak on the forehead as marks of religion. Some believe that monks must pierce their ears while for others, robes of a certain colour is the first sign of monkhood.

Is all of this true religion? Jainism goes beyond all these and states that discrimination is the true practice of religion. The Acharanga Sutra states that Jainism does not define violence by how one speaks or listens or walks or sits, but rather by the direct relationship with discrimination.

Jainism states that one is religious to the extent to which one practices discrimination. Its opposite is also true. One is considered to be as irreligious as the extent to which one is careless and steeped in indiscrimination.

What is wealth:

If one rupee is locked in a box and is taken out after decades, it will still remain just one rupee. It cannot transform into 10 rupees even after a century. But if you invest it in some trade, business or even in financing, then it becomes a means of exchange and becomes active. This act can breathe life into money. Then it is no more dead, barren or a burden.

Money is not dead or alive. Do not make the mistake of thinking so. But you can make think of money as a burden or wealth, purely by how you choose to use it. When it is kept locked and does not benefit anyone, individual, society or nation, then it is inactive. You can make it active through religious and rightful means. It should not be used for unlawful activities.





Some financiers are so lacking in discrimination that when a rich person asks them for wealth as a loan, they offer it on low interest, but when a poor man asks them for the same, they offer it on high interest. Instead of using wealth to earn goodwill and save lives, they use it as an instrument for exploitation.

Wealth is not just a means of monetary exchange. It is also a medium of humane generosity and love. The true meaning of wealth is found when the debtor becomes a part of your family and when you remain truly concerned about his well-being. It is important to let him know that you care for him by asking about his family and business conditions now and then.

There is a famous incident in the life of Raichandbhai whom Gandhiji revered as his Guru. Raichandbhai was a diamond trader in Mumbai, who struck a deal with another jeweller. They fixed the amount with this regard, and an advance was paid. However gold prices soared very suddenly, so much so, that on the day of payment if the man was to pay the gold price of that day, he would have fallen into an enormous debt.

Raichandbhai met the jeweller on that day and seeing his piteous condition, said to him, “Do not worry about my payment.” Saying so, he tore the paper on which they had signed the contract, saying “Raichand can drink milk, but he is not here to drink blood. I understand that we have signed a contract, but I realize that you are not in any position to pay me back. Hence I cannot accept even a penny from you.”

The man fell on his feet and said, “You are the epitome of humanity. You are no mere man, you are God incarnate.”

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## Chapter 23

### Rightful and Wrongful Occupation

The true meaning of ‘arambh’ in Jainism is violence. Literally translated, “arambh” means the beginning, in Jainism, it implies the initiation of violence. It is important to consider that Jainism adheres to the dictum that even in violence there are degrees of violence.

Alparambh refers to minimal violence which cannot be avoided such as micro organisms being harmed during agriculture. Maharambh refers to extremely violent and sinful activities such as butchering and hunting. Samarambh is the violence which lies in-between the two.

It is now important to discuss the difference between rightful occupation (arya karma) and unrightful occupation (anarya karma). Whether one is a monk or a householder, everyone needs food to sustain life. Renouncing the world does not mean one can renounce hunger as well. The householder has to work for his living but even the monk cannot get food by sitting in one place, he has to venture out in this regard.

A householder has to engage in some occupation to fulfil his needs. Farming as an occupation is directly connected with food. The householder may engage in any other occupation too, for he cannot lead his life by begging for alms. Each one has to operate based on their respective framework.

Just as Jainism does not propound undertaking an occupation for the monks, it does not prescribe seeking alms for the householder either. It is important to understand that Jainism does not consider eating by seeking alms as a religious act and





undertaking an occupation such as farming as a sinful act.

There are many who wrongly believe that since a householder is immersed in an occupation which may involve some form of violence that his earnings are sinful. Such misconceptions need to be erased.

That would amount to stating that renunciation is the only noble way to live. But Jainism does not prescribe renunciation as the only way to attain salvation. The world cannot only be made up of people who have renounced everything, nor can it only consist of householders. There needs to be a balance between the two and Jainism prescribes how this balance can be achieved whilst all humans lead their life in an ethical way.

### **Misconceptions regarding sacrifice:**

There are two kinds of sacrifice – one which is forced or performed in haste and the other which comes naturally and is an effortless sacrifice. When a sacrifice is performed forcefully, then a subtle connection still remains with the object which has been sacrificed. In such a case, it is likely that one may become tempted once again. But when a sacrifice happens naturally, then it is an irreversible act. In spiritual language, it is known as going away gracefully rather than having to relinquish something.

In this context, Ardrakumar's story is significant. When he decided to renounce, a divine announcement declared, "It is not the time to renounce since your karma for enjoying things are still on the rise. Once they have been satisfied, you can renounce." But with pride and vanity, Ardrakumar ignored those words. He stated, "What are karma? I have the power to destroy them."

He then proceeded to renounce the world and stepped onto the path of sadhana. Infused with complete sincerity, he performed severe penance and austerities. He was sure that he would prove the divine announcement wrong. But after some time, temptations lured him and he re-entered the householder's life. If a student of Class 1 is promoted to Class 3, he will lose his balance. It is better to follow the systematic process rather than succumb to





short cuts.

A monk's life is certainly a higher and more evolved state of existence than that of a householder's. This is why most people have great respect for monks and nuns. But one cannot enter it in haste. Jainism does not believe in any kind of force or haste. On the contrary, in Jainism doing things naturally at the right time with complete awareness is more important.

Can you give high calorie food to a sick man? So also, can you give light food to a healthy labourer? The same rule applies everywhere. Understanding the framework of your own life is necessary. It is important for religious leaders to emphasize to the householders the importance of performing one's duties. A householder needs to know the significance of his own life. Being a householder should not be considered as lesser or lowly, for it is necessary to retain the balance and belong to the worldly realm.

### **Not renunciation but reformation:**

If as a community, you decided to stop farming, agriculture, trade and commerce, can you survive even for one day? If you think that all of you can stop these actions and instead start seeking alms as monks do, you are mistaken. Seeking alms is not an escape route from work. By escaping work, you cannot stop the mind from wandering, for it constantly continues to meander along diverse paths. You may be able to stop physical work, but you cannot stop the mind.

Jainism propounds – let the impulse remain, but the poison in it needs to be removed. Remove the feelings of petty selfishness and attachment from these. If you are opening a shop, do not earn by unlawful means, do not exploit the poor, and do not think of ruining the lives of others. If you can remove these negative tendencies from your impulses, then they will not become a hindrance, rather they will become the road to your further development and success.

Jainism advises the same to agriculturists: if you are engaged in farming, do it in a proper manner with a positive spirit. Remove





the tendency of haste and exploitation from it. Do not aspire to sell your yield at a higher cost than is lawful. Rather, pray that you may start a chain of prosperity for yourself and others. When done in this manner, then farming becomes a rightful occupation. It becomes a medium for pure and compassionate thoughts and leads to meritorious deeds.

Whatever work is undertaken by the householder, if he performs it with discrimination, then it is rightful occupation. If he does the same work with carelessness and selfishness, then it becomes wrongful occupation. Jainism has one simple definition for rightful and wrongful occupation: Work done with discrimination and lawfulness is rightful occupation (arya karma) while work done with injustice, deceit and negative thoughts is wrongful occupation (unarya karma).

### **Rightful or wrongful occupation:**

Consider the example of a shopkeeper. Whether a young man comes to his shop or an old man, child or woman, an innocent or someone wicked, he continues to deal with each one in the same manner. He uses the same honest measure each time and quotes the same rate. If he does so, then he is following a rightful occupation. But if he changes the measure and the price depending on the customer, shows a sample but gives another, then he is following a wrongful occupation.

So also a teacher – his duty is to impart education to children and build their character. If he is careless towards his duty, does not care whether the students study or not, or if he gets angry needlessly with the students and canes them for the smallest of mistakes, then his occupation is considered wrongful. But if he is vigilant and makes the right effort to bring out the best in his students, then his work will have the purity of a yajna and it will qualify as rightful occupation.

### **The measure of intelligence:**

A question is often asked in the context of farming– Is it a rightful or a wrongful occupation? This question stems from





the fact that while farming, many insects, worms and micro-organisms are harmed. It also destroys and harms water-organisms and earth-organisms. Hence does it qualify as an occupation filled with violence according to Jainism?

We don't need to look outside for answers. When one has the power of discrimination, one can decide for oneself. One's own experience and intuition is sufficient to decide between what is right and wrong or lawful and unlawful! Ganadhara Gautama has stated in the Uttaradhyayana Sutra – "The natural intelligence of an aspirant is sufficient to arrive at the perfect analysis of any religious concept."

What does experience tell us about farming? The farmer who toils in sweltering heat or braves the cold to produce grains, spends all his time and effort in the fields, how can we call his work wrongful occupation?

The Uttaradhyayana Sutra makes a reference to an aspirant who treads the path of right conduct and performs austerities throughout his life. Thus upon death, he enters heaven. The question arises – where does he go after heaven? The sutras ask where do the aspirants who are in heaven go once their celestial lifespan is over?

The answer is: he will be sent thereafter to where the fields will flourish! The sutra clearly states that such a pious aspirant will now beget fertile fields where he will grow yield, more precious than gold. Hence here the agricultural land is counted as more precious than gold and silver.

Jaina tradition considers farming as a meritorious deeds. If farming, farms and land are considered wrongful and the result of sin, then why would the Agamic writers mention them as a reward of merit!

In one of the commentaries of the Agamas, farming and caring of domestic animals is mentioned as an occupation of the vaishyas. But today farming is being demeaned by many and considered as a lowly occupation of the shudras. Bhagwan Mahavira also mentions agriculturists as vaishyas.





Some of Mahavira's devoted disciples mentioned in the Upashakadashanga Sutra were all agriculturists. According to the scriptures, farming is considered as the first occupation of the vaishyas, raising domestic animals as the second and trade is mentioned only as their third option in choice of occupation.

In the twelve vows for the householder, farming has not been excluded anywhere. Only when the householder reaches a higher state of meditation known as the 'eighth pratima', he begins to give up many forms of activities known as 'arambh' including farming. The Shwetambar and the Digambar Acharyas hold the same view in this regard.

The Pragyapana Sutra gives a detailed explanation of 'arya karma' and 'anarya karma'. The nature of rightful occupation is described along with a mention of some, ending with 'and such others'. The occupation of the potter is also mentioned as a rightful occupation.

Acharya Umaswati, a noted commentator of 'Tattvartha Sutra' has reflected on rightful occupations and enumerated literature, farming, trade and many such occupations as rightful occupations.

Hence one can safely conclude that the framework of the householder is one of 'alparambh'. The reason for it being that he implements his capacity for discrimination. Whatever he does, he discriminates and performs the right action there-in.

In every aspect of life, it is important that we are able to discriminate between rightful and wrongful occupation as well be able to distinguish between alparambh and maharambh. Only then can we be certain of following the right path.

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## Chapter 24

### Minimal Violence in Occupation

Indian culture has always placed great emphasis on farming and agriculture. India having always been an agrarian society, even today, boasts of a large number of agriculturists. Additionally the importance of agriculture as an occupation also lies in the fact that it entails the conservation of animals.

Hence agriculture has become the foundation of ahimsa. It plays a great role in abstaining from non-vegetarianism and partaking of satvik and pure food. There is no greater medium to reduce and stop the intake of non-vegetarianism. This forms the basis for considering agriculture as the soul of ahimsa.

Vedic vocabulary refers to an agriculturist as the son of the soil. Agriculture became a powerful force, with important Jain followers and householders of that period, adopting it as their occupation. Thus agriculture holds a very special place in Jaina culture.

According to Jaina tradition, Lord Rishabha was the first proponent of agriculture. He educated the illiterate and lazy masses to employ themselves in agriculture and other satvik occupations. At the time, in order to redeem the state of mankind, agriculture was not just important, it was necessary.

Agriculture is also considered an activity which entails minimal violence (alparambh), and is known as pure and arya karma (rightful occupation). Even though the ideal would be to abstain from violence of all kinds, yet, on a practical platform, to escape from the great violence of non-vegetarianism, one





cannot escape the minimal violence (alparambh) that occurs in undertaking agriculture.

Jainism states that every person must examine his actions to check how much violence is being undertaken and employ steps to minimize it. Jain ideals clearly state that one should indulge in any action only after examining it from the point of view of violence and non-violence.

### **Unavailability as basic reason of conflict:**

Jaina scriptures state that before Lord Rishabha's period, twins would be born to parents towards the end of their lives. The twins would in turn become a couple and give birth to twins at the end of their lives. Since one couple would be born only as the other was passing away, there was no significant increase in population. Hence there was never any lack of grains and food. The kalpavrikshas provided sufficient food. But in Lord Rishabha's time, the population began to increase and the kalpavrikshas did not increase proportionately. In a situation where food becomes less and population becomes more, conflict is bound to arise.

Look at the conflict that arises at a water pump. People try to push their way in the queue, yelling at others for trying to fill an extra bucket of water. They fear that the water may stop anytime. But there is no such fight near a well, because a well is always full of water.

Conflicts and wars are always a consequence of more users and less produce.

### **The path of ahimsa:**

In order to find a solution to the emerging problem of insufficiency, Lord Rishabha encouraged the masses to turn towards other forms of occupation like agriculture. Some people ask, by teaching how to increase production, did he show the path of violence or non-violence? Did he show how to save life or to walk the path of sin?





If Lord Rishabha had not taught alternate occupations in that period, then the existing couple twins would have fought and destroyed each other. Rishabha pondered on the problem and realized that after his demise, the masses will adopt the path of violence and destruction. He therefore taught and encouraged them to work hard with their own hands. He said, “You can create a beautiful universe with your own hands and this creation will become the basis for happiness in your life.”

It is significant to note that Lord Rishabha did not ask the masses to solve the problem of consumption by resorting to non-vegetarianism. Why did he not teach them to open slaughter houses or take up hunting? The reason is evident. Rishabha knew that if he did not teach people an occupation of minimal violence (alparambh), they will undertake another of immense violence (maharambh). He could see that they will kill organisms, animals and each other in the process. This will lead to increased violence within and compassion will become extinct. Rishabha did not teach wrongful activities such as non-vegetarianism and hunting because they represent intense forms of violence.

At the core of this discussion, we can see that one who propounds non-violence will never teach people to perform violent activities since it will only lead people towards sin, paving their path to hell. Jainism has uprooted superstitious practices, propelling society towards the path of development, thus doing a great service to India.

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Chapter 25

Ahimsa and Cow Protection

The argument for cow protection generally emerges from a simple logic: “The cow gives us milk, so we should take care of it and protect it.”

My question is –why just the cow? Does the buffalo not give us milk? Or the goat? After all, human beings use more of buffalo milk. Goat milk is also considered as more digestible than cow’s milk.

Then the next logic which comes forth is: “The cow is our mother and celestials reside in its body. It is a pure creature and its milk is pure. Hence we must protect it.”

How can the issue of ahimsa be resolved on the basis of purity or impurity of the body? We have read in the scriptures that only the consciousness which resides in all beings is pristine and pure. Thus the vision of ahimsa is the vision of consciousness.

Consciousness does not get entangled in the contradictions of bodily purity or impurity. It does not make a distinction between one form of consciousness and another. In everybody, it accepts the existence of the same consciousness and denies the existence of any other god or goddess.

Hence the important point is that every creature should be protected. According to Jainism, not just cow slaughter, but slaughter of any form should be stopped. No animal or creature, whether small or large, should be killed. Industries which exist for the production of leather and meat should be shut down.





This is a great ideal, but at present it may not seem a practical possibility. Hence the idea is to start somewhere, perhaps with whatever is closest to you. The cow is found in close proximity, so let's begin by protecting it. This does not mean that we are not concerned about other creatures. In fact, an attempt should be made to stop slaughter of all creatures.

To create a transformation of any kind, we need to appeal to the heart. There is no real point in joining a protest march or forcing anything upon any one. That is not a far sighted vision. Bhagwan Mahavira said that for any inner transformation to take place, ahimsa needs to be established in the heart. It is with love and compassion that we should eventually transform hearts.

There is a story which illustrates this well. In the kingdom of Shrenik, the king of Magadha, there lived a butcher named Kaalsaukarik. He mercilessly killed 500 buffaloes every day. King Shrenik, being a disciple of Bhagwan Mahavira, abhorred such violence. The butcher was captured and imprisoned upon royal orders. However, even in prison, Kaalsaukarik drew images of buffaloes and continued the act of butchering them. Thus his violence continued at an emotional level.

It was then that Bhagwan Mahavira explained to Shrenik, "O king! You cannot force him to abandon violence. Without transforming the heart, non-violence cannot be established." The pages of Jain History tell us that finally Abhaya, the minister of Magadha won Kaalsaukarik's trust and gradually transformed his heart, and helped him move towards compassion and non-violence.

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Chapter 26

The Vision of Ahimsa in Culture

Bhagwan Mahavira is considered the greatest messenger of non-violence. During his lifetime, 2500 years ago, yajnas and animal sacrifices were performed in the guise of culture and religion. Meat and alcohol were consumed recklessly and a veil of violence pervaded across India.

It was a dark period in history. The cultural and religious heads were exploiting the masses. Women were deprived of many rights. A pall of gloom had descended everywhere. At that time, Bhagwan Mahavira's message of ahimsa came like a ray of hope and transformed the culture of India. It is important to cast a glance towards the cultural implications of ahimsa.

Ahimsa and the festival of Holi:

When mankind braves adversities and moves ahead, it becomes a moment of celebration. This happiness and cheer is presented before us as the festival of vibrant colours, Holi. It mirrors our social revolution and culture. On this auspicious festival people come together to celebrate social happiness.

On this one day, everyone abandons issues of caste, creed and class. Brahmins, kshatriyas, vasihyas and shudras all get together to enjoy and celebrate. There is no discrimination of any kind at Holi. It is a pure symbol of our basic non-violent culture, carrying with it the message of love and equality.

Holi is symbolic of erasing social discrimination between individuals. In the present times, some impurities may have crept into the celebrations, wherein people use foul language, sprinkle





mud and filth, crack dirty jokes and display perverted behaviour at the pretext of celebrating a festival.

This unsocial behaviour is completely contrary to our basic culture and tradition. Those who indulge in such perverted practices will only suffocate the soul of this festival. Holi needs to be revived its pristine form, to ensure that social life starts brimming with love and non-violence. Only then will the true spirit of Holi emerge.

Ahimsa and the festival of Deepavali:

Deepavali is perhaps the most important social and national festival of India. People from all strata of society celebrate this festival of lights with cheer and joy. Deepavali celebrations soar beyond the barriers of caste discrimination. To understand the basic aim of the festival of Deepavali, we need to reflect upon its seasonal background.

During the rainy season, many kinds of poisonous creatures are born, multiplying quickly due to the high levels of moisture and humidity in the atmosphere. The days are dark and dim with gathering monsoon clouds, allowing filth and dust to accumulate in and around the homes.

Cleanliness and brightness from the previous season is replaced by murky surroundings, affecting not just the atmosphere but also the human mind. As the monsoon season comes to an end, the skies clear and the filth outside dries up. This is also the most opportune time to spring clean homes.

On the full-moon night of Sharad Poornima, countless stars twinkle in the velvet sky, and our minds are once again filled with cheer and happiness. Soon after Sharad Poornima, people start cleaning, white-washing and painting their homes. This is a clear indication that the festival of Deepavali is drawing near.

At this time of the year, people clean up their homes inside and outside. When rows of lamps are lit on Deepavali, inside the house, the beauty of this spectacle spreads everywhere. Minds





are now filled with renewed hope, with the lamps symbolically illuminating the heart, mind and soul.

This is the reason why it is known as festival of lights: darkness and filth represent violence and cleanliness and brightness represent non-violence. Whatever brings gloom and sorrow also causes unrest and violence within. By removing filth, we remove violence from our lives and through cleanliness, we worship ahimsa.

Through the medium of Deepavali, we worship light which is worshipping ahimsa. Symbolically, light also represents knowledge, it dispels the darkness of ignorance giving way to enlightenment. To relinquish violence and to nurture non-violence, it is important to reflect on these symbols of our cultural life in depth.

The role of ahimsa in spiritual evolution:

The basic impulse of life is the quest for happiness. It is this need which has broadened the path for the development of ahimsa. Ahimsa stands on the strong foundation of 'jeev daya' or compassion for all creatures. Ahimsa is verily another name for compassion.

The illustrious avatar of ahimsa, Bhagwan Mahavira, called this basic impulse of human beings, the building blocks of ahimsa. He stated, "All creatures like peace and happiness and dislike unhappiness; hence one must not cause unhappiness to another."

When human beings move towards the path of evolution through mutual co-existence and co-operation, it leads to a stage wherein the duality of the self and the other vanishes into the expanse of oneness. It is only then that humans tread on the one and eternal path of ahimsa.

He further explained, "Since sorrow is disliked by all creatures, hence we must not cause violence upon another." This pristine reflection makes it clear that the aim and ideal of ahimsa is to diminish the pain and sorrow of mankind and to maintain peace and happiness.





Pain and sorrow disturbs the consciousness; it causes unrest and turbulence. In such a situation, the mind cannot stay calm, and without calmness and steadiness, the spiritual evolution of human consciousness is not at all possible. The greatest and ultimate goal of ahimsa is spiritual evolution.

What we need to understand is that to attain the goal of ahimsa, it is essential to erase pain and establish peace and happiness in life. The history of humanity is a witness to this truth that when peace and happiness are stabilized, only then ahimsa and ethics have evolved and developed.

The reason being, when man's mind finds stability with life's basic needs, then he does not seek support of or feel the need for indulging in any unethical activities. It is only when there is a lack of resources that a variety of imbalances and misconduct emerge.

Another reason for indulging in misconduct is the unrestrained need in man's mind which expresses itself in various forms of misdemeanours. When his mind loses balance and self-restraint it becomes the cause of multifold complexities and problems, chasing undesirable thoughts, seeking worldly and material pleasures.

The more a man's mind chases these illusions the more it experiences a lack of what he truly seeks. This unrestrained desire of the mind, greed, coveting what belongs to others and an unrestrained desire for worldly pleasures only diverts his mind from the goal of seeking effortless happiness.

The role of ahimsa in family planning:

The primary and most severe problem before humanity today is how to stop the increasing over-population. Several efforts are being made in terms of education and equipment to solve this issue. The question often arises whether the methods being used are non-violent in their approach.

Ahimsa stands at the core of the pervasive possibilities of life, thereby making most questions of life issues of ahimsa. The





issue of family planning too is connected with ahimsa. Just as agriculture became a path-breaking solution in ancient times, so also a foolproof method of family planning can help solve the problems that plague the world today.

A valid question arises: will the artificial methods used to avoid pregnancy propagate greater unrestraint in the masses? Of course, this danger exists. Hence, first and foremost, man should be inspired to curtail his desires by self-restraint. The practice of celibacy would be the ideal path for this.

Incessant and continuous pursuit of desires destroys the radiance of life, whilst it also hinders the quality of discrimination and reduces inner strength. The problem arises with those who cannot practice celibacy for a long period, leading to an increase in population every year which in turn diminishes the resources and propels the problems of hunger and jeopardises basic existence.

Very often we read and hear reports of individual and family suicides. Why does this happen? Reflection reveals that it is due to a lack of resources: since food is less and consumers are more, clothing is less and wearers are more. Man is neither able to solve the problem of food, shelter or clothing.

The simple solution to all these issues would be to control the population. How violent it is to give birth to children and then subject them to a life where they are deprived of fundamental resources! Thus the issue of family planning becomes a non-violent solution.

Celibacy offers a solution which has positive implications internally and externally. Through celibacy, one's social as well as spiritual life is elevated. It is the duty of religious traditions to propagate celibacy as an ethical awakening. It may be a difficult path, but it is not impossible. Even partial celibacy is a powerful step.

It would be non-violent, ethical and religious. There are many practical ways to encourage this practice: consumption of pure food, abstaining from addictive products, noble company, spiritual





introspection and reducing the use of products which ignite the senses such as make-up, vulgar dances and objectionable movies.

An underlying fear remains, that by using artificial methods, people will involve themselves in unethical relationships, encouraging pre-marital and extra-marital affairs. The answer to this issue lies in disseminating spiritual education and emphasizing the importance and value of self-restraint.

One also needs to keep in mind that repeated childbirth can be harmful to the mother's body. When her body becomes weaker and health deteriorates, her lifespan can also become shorter. It is imperative to extend compassion and understanding towards women and take care of their well-being and health.

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## Chapter 27

### Ahimsa in Thought and Anekanta

Jainism is based on the principle of anekanta or multi-faceted views. There is no stubborn insistence on any one view. Anything can be perceived from many points of view. Upon deep reflection it is apparent that such a view is non-violent in itself. It brings in equanimity and the acceptance of another's point of view. Hence, equanimity is given special importance in Jainism. It is from equanimity that anekanta is born. Thoughtful ahimsa is anekanta.

When everyone's points of view are considered, given respect and importance, then the field becomes pervasive. There is place for everything, be it religion, philosophy, culture or science. Without this, no aspect of life can function normally.

#### **Anekanta – an analysis:**

Jaina studies include the analysis of anekanta. When Bhagwan Mahavira reflected on material objects, he arrived at the view that every object, be it small or large, has many facets, many aspects and many qualities. It is impossible for any individual to understand all the facets of an object.

To know something is to know its similarity with other objects as well as its dissimilarity from them. You can know that your pen is long and red, you can know that it looks like a stick, but can you know how dissimilar it is from other red or long objects? It is not just difficult, but impossible to do so. To know one object in totality one has to know all the objects in their totality.

What this implies is that to know one thing is to know all things and to know all things is to know one thing. Since ordinarily





people do not have this expansive vision, they consider their own view as the final verdict and get into quarrel or argument with anyone who disagrees. Such a person is narrow-minded and continues to remain stubborn in his point of view.

### **The blind men and the elephant:**

The Acharyas have explained this narrow-minded view of reality with the example of the elephant and blind men. It's a popular analogy and one of the most powerful. Some blind men wanted to understand what an elephant was like, so they were taken near an elephant. Each man touched it to know what it was.

Someone caught its tail, another touched the trunk, the third its ear and the fourth its trunk and so on. One who touched the tail said an elephant is like a flimsy rope, the one who touched the ear said it is like a fan, another said it was like a pillar etc. Each of them started arguing about their own point of view.

Each one thought his view to be correct and deemed the other's as wrong. None of them could know the elephant in its totality. Finally a sighted person arrived on the scene, heard the argument and explained to them that each of them were partially correct. When all the views would be taken into consideration, only then would all the physical attributes of the elephant be known.

### **The consensus of Acharyas:**

Acharya Siddhasen Diwakar, who is considered as one of the greatest thinkers of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, talks of the exalted status of *anekanta* in his popular book 'Sanmati Tarka'. He establishes that *anekanta* is the guru of the universe, it represents knowledge in the correct way.

Acharya Haribhadra's views on *Anekanta*: A stubborn person always forces his limited point of view. But an impartial person will accept only that point of view which is logical and reasonable. Many other Acharyas have also explained the significance of *anekanta*.

When one becomes compassionate towards another person's





point of view, then one is truly on his way to becoming a practitioner of ahimsa. I am right and you are also right – such a view holds anekanta and ahimsa in its wake.

Ahimsa is truly practiced in its totality when it is practiced with mind, body and speech. Ahimsa stresses the importance of not committing any violence as also not encouraging others to commit violence. One should also not affirm a violent act or speech of another.

In the practice of ahimsa, prime importance is placed on the mind. This is the first step of ahimsa and anekanta. When we consider another person to be wrong in our thoughts, then we develop animosity towards that person. As soon as we begin to include another person's view, we do not develop any animosity.

When there is no animosity, there is no place for violence. Anekanta teaches us not to be one-sided in our views towards any principle. It is important to include as many points of view as you encounter. This will help in developing a compassionate attitude which is inclusive, and this is when ahimsa will begin to blossom.

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## EPILOGUE

### Ahimsa in Different Religions

Almost every religion in the world includes reference to ahimsa in one way or another. They are united in propounding ahimsa in their own way. They accept its principle and endorse its strength. Just as lying, committing theft and adultery are considered as wrong by all religions, so is violence shunned by all. There may be differences in boundaries and practice, but no religious scriptures state that violence is right and non-violence is wrong. All accept non-violence as the greatest value of life.

#### Ahimsa in Jainism:

Ahimsa is the life-breath and cornerstone of Jainism. The mention of Jainism is synonymous with ahimsa. 2500 years ago, Bhagwan Mahavira revolted in his own unique way against violence, to strengthen the foundation of ahimsa. He raised a voice against the prevalent violent practices that were being undertaken in the name of religion. He removed this cloak of false façade and inspired humanity with his simple message: that no form of violence can ever be considered as religion.

*“All beings in this world – whether small or big, human or animal – want to live. None want to die.”*

– Dashavaikalika Sutra 6.11

*“All living beings love life, they wish to relish pleasure; loath misery, shun annihilation; enjoy life and love to live long. In short, life is dear to all beings.”*

– Acharanga Sutra 1.2.3





*“Just as you do not like to be treated with violence, others do not like it too. Just as you like to be treated with compassion, others like it as well. This is the essence of all the knowledge of the Jinas and this is the essence of all the religions.”*

– Brihatkalpa Bhashya 45.84

*“Taking the life of another cannot be religion. True religion is non-violence, restraint and austerity.”*

– Dashavaikalika Sutra 1.1

*“Do not commit violence towards any of the mobile and immobile creatures that reside in this world, either knowingly, or unknowingly, nor ask another to commit violence towards them, because the same soul resides inside all.”*

– Dashavaikalika Sutra

*“Just as life is dear to you, it is dear to all. Knowing this, free yourself of fear and animosity, and do not commit violence towards another. One who commits violence by oneself, gets it done by another, or affirms the violent acts of others, increases violence for himself.”*

– Uttaradhyayana Sutra 8.10

*“Have the same feeling towards other creatures as you have towards your own self.”*

– Suttrakrutanga 1.1.1.3

One must be non-violent towards all living beings. A true spiritual aspirant is one who does not commit any act of violence towards any living being through body, mind or speech. The soulful gaze of Bhagwan Mahavira conveys this message clearly: his philosophy is immersed in ahimsa and presents the glorious ideal of universal oneness.

### **Ahimsa in Buddhism:**

The traditional Buddhist understanding of ahimsa may not be as rigid as it is in Jainism, but Buddhism condemns harming or killing of any living beings. Ahimsa in Buddhism is described as a prerequisite for attaining ultimate salvation and eternal bliss. Like





Mahavira, Buddha was also a great representative of the Shramana civilization.

In defining the term ‘Arya’, Lord Buddha explains that only a person who practices non-violence is an Arya. He stated:

*“By killing living beings, one cannot be called as an Arya. Only someone who does not commit violence towards others is an Arya.”*

– Dhammapada 19.15

*“Everyone fears punishment, everyone fears death. Thinking of another as oneself, a human being must not kill another nor inspire others to do so.”*

– Dhammapada 10.1

*“One who does not attack another by oneself, nor by asking someone else to do so, neither does he conquer another, nor ask someone else to conquer over others, he is a friend of all creatures and has no enmity with anyone.”*

– Itibuttak, pg 20

*“As I am, so are these others, and as are they, so am I – by this understanding and considering all as oneself, one must not kill another by oneself or by another.”*

– Suttanipat 3.3.7.27

*“All creatures have a desire for happiness; hence one who does not harm or punish another, such a person values happiness and finds happiness in his next life.”*

– Udaan, pg 12

Through these words, Tathagata, the Buddha negated violence and established the importance of non-violence. He led a compassionate life and his heart bled with undiluted compassion for the sick, poor and needy. He conducted successful experiments to douse the fire of social and political violence with the serene waters of love and peace. With his actions and message, he strengthened the belief that the right solution lies not in the sword, but in love and goodwill.





Thus Buddhism teaches us that walking on the path of non-violence will ultimately lead to peace and prosperity.

### **Ahimsa in Vedic religion:**

Ahimsa forms the pivot of Vedic religion, around which all virtues revolve. Adopting ahimsa leads to fearlessness, truth, love and eventually it becomes a strong spiritual force. Where there is ahimsa, selfless love and service co-exist. Ahimsa is highlighted as the path to ultimate salvation, peace and bliss

The sacrosanct principle of ‘Ahimsa paramo dharma’ has been kept at the forefront to define the principle of non-violence.

*“Ahimsa is the highest of all religions; hence one must not commit violence towards another creature at any time or any place.”*

– Mahabharata-Aadiparva, 1.1.13

*“Whatever you do not like for yourself, don't do it to another.”*

– Manusmriti

*“In this transient life, do not commit violence or inflict pain upon another. Instead, establish friendliness towards all souls and move on. Do not have enmity with anyone.”*

– Mahabharata-Shantiparva, 278.5

*“Just as life is dear to human beings, life is dear to all creatures. Hence those who are intelligent and blessed must think of all other creatures as similar to their own self.”*

– Mahabharata-Anushasanparva, 215.19

*“In this world, nothing is dearer than one's own life. Hence just as a person has compassion for himself, he must extend kindness towards others.”*

– Mahabharata-Anushasanparva, 116.8

*“A kind soul bestows fearlessness upon all creatures and in turn receives fearlessness from them.”*

– Mahabharata-Anushasanparva, 116.13





*“Ahimsa is the one and only complete religion. Violence destroys religion and austerity.”*

- Mahabharata-Shantiparva

These words stand testament to the fact that Vedic religion also considers non- violence as a central doctrine and synonymous with divinity. Adopting non-violence is considered the secret mantra for pure and positive cosmic love.

### **Ahimsa in Islam:**

The great mansion of Islam also rests on the foundation of ahimsa. The Quran is itself a message of peace revealed by Allah to Mohammed, his Messenger.

Islam acknowledges that “Allah is the father of the whole world. All the creatures in this world are His children.” Every Chapter of the Quran, except one, begins with the poetic phrase “Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim” which when translated, means “In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate.” In the larger sense it means those who recite this with selfishness will find suffering and pain. Whereas, those who recite it selflessly dedicating themselves to Allah, will find everlasting love and peace.

The Quran advocates answering tormentors with “Peace be upon you.” This in a way pledges one’s own non-violence towards tormentors.

Hazrat Ali, the successor of Muhammad, says, “O human being! Do not make your stomach the grave of animals and birds.”

Akbar the Great, the proponent of Din-e-ilahi, also said, “I do not want my stomach to be the burial ground of other creatures.

*“When a person saves the life of another, it is as though he has saved the life of all living beings.”*

– Quran Sharif, 5.35

The motto of the Ahmadiyya sect is “Love for all, hatred for none.”





An offshoot of Islam, Sufism also talks of love for fellow human beings as love for God. Pacifism is one of its' fundamental principles.

All of this clearly goes to show that ahimsa features beautifully in Islam as well.

### **Ahimsa in Christianity:**

Christianity firmly endorses that any form of violence is incompatible with the Christian faith. Jesus said,

*“Keep your sword in the scabbard because those who wield the sword will be destroyed by the same.”*

– Matti, 2.51.52

It has been stated in the scriptures,

*“Love your enemies and pray even for those who inflict torture upon you.”*

– Matti, 5.45.46

*“Love your enemy and think kindly even of those who have enmity with you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who insult you. Turn the other cheek to him who slapped your first cheek. Give your shirt to one who has grabbed your bedsheet.”*

– Looka, 6.27.37

*“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called Sons of God.”*

– Matt 26:52

This message of Jesus perfectly mirrors the virtues of ahimsa. “While going to the church to pray, if you remember a certain person towards whom you have animosity, then return to him and seek forgiveness for your actions. Without seeking forgiveness for your wrongdoings, you do not earn the right to pray.”

### **Ahimsa in Judaism:**

Peace or non-violence is one of the most esteemed values of Judaism. It even takes precedence over truth. Judaism also saw





violence as a social evil and controlling the causes of violence is deemed imperative.

*“You must not inflict hurt on someone’s self-respect. Insulting a person in the presence of others is as grave a sin as committing murder.”*

- Baba Metaliya; Metaliya-58 (b)

*“If your enemy comes to your house with the intention to kill, but he is hunger or thirsty, first offer him food and water.”*

– 25.21, Paramidas

*“If a person is in trouble, or he is about to drown, or wild animals or dacoits are attacking him, then it is our duty to protect him.” Inspiring us not to have animosity towards humanity, it has been stated that, “Do not have the negative feeling of animosity towards anyone.”*

– Laivya Vyavastha, 19.17

### **Ahimsa in Zoroastrianism and Taoism:**

Zarathustra, the great prophet and founder of Zoroastrianism, the religion of Parsis, stated, “Those who hamper and obstruct people from leading a good life and recommend the killing of animals, are considered as wrong by Ahuramazda (Ha., 34.3). Therefore, do not nurture the feeling of revenge against anyone. Revenge is an emotion that will constantly drain you. Hence do not avenge even your enemy. Do not commit any sin because you are caught in the throes of revenge. Always light the lamps of beautiful thoughts in your heart.”

*Lao-Tze, the great proponent of Taoism, expressed his views about non-violence in thoughts as follows, “I extend good behaviour even towards those who do not do the same with me.”*

– Tao Teh King

Confucius, the great Chinese philosopher, has said, “Whatever you dislike for yourself, do not ever do it towards another.”

The above quotes and messages from other religions clearly





allow us to conclude that the seed of ahimsa, which was sown by Rishabha and nurtured lovingly by Mahavira, has also been embraced by other religions of this world. Thus ahimsa is the power that can unite all religions. This is one of the greatest and most valuable contribution of the Shramanic culture to the world.

