

*THE
NUANCES OF
TRUTH*

**Preaching of
Rashtrasanth Upadhyaya
Shri Amar Muni Ji**

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Foreword

By Acharya Shri Chandanaji

Revered Gurudev Upadhyaya Shri Amar Muniji was a great thinker and one of India's foremost philosophers. He is celebrated as a spiritual revolutionary for his work. Being a scholar of many languages, he has contributed immensely through his preaching and writing.

With his holistic understanding of life, he offered suggestions and solutions for personal, social and national evolution. With such solutions, he brought spirituality into the realm of the common man's heart.

“Satya Darshan” was one such gem which solved the mystery of truth and its influence on a human being's spiritual journey. Truth, as Gurudev states, is not merely stating a fact but an attempt to absorb its real essence and reflect its soulful meaning. The single-minded focus should always be on realizing life's ultimate truth that human form was given primarily to take the soul towards salvation.

Every thought, word, and action should be aligned with this supreme aim of life. Hence, treat all the incidents, circumstances, and people around you as mere tools to drive you towards the right path. One also needs to understand that the responsibility of human life is not limited to the self, but for universal betterment.

In this regard, my blessings and gratitude to the members of Sugal & Damani group for their dedication in bringing out this English rendition of Satya Darshan, titled The Nuances Of Truth.

This is a valuable addition to the spiritual wealth of Jain Philosophy. Such books are of, immense benefit to those who do not know Hindi and I commend the efforts of the Sugal & Damani group in this regard. As all of us know, this group has brought out number of such translations, including:

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| Aparigraha Darshan | – Bliss |
| Samayik Darshan | – Equanimity & The Samayika Sutra |
| Aadarsh Kanya | – Ideal Girl |
| Ahimsa Darshan | – The Distilled Essence of Non-Violence. |

20.10.2017

Acharya Chandana
Mumbai
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A Word from the Publisher

Universal brotherhood and collective responsibility are the need of the world, and a seeker who understands this and plays an important role in the upliftment of society will be a true saint. Rashtrasant Upadhyaya Shri Amar Muniji is one such divine soul who spread the pure nectar of his wisdom for the benefit of mankind.

A common man struggles to grapple with many facets of truth and its relevance in life. As Gurudev explains, the essence of truth is not just to utter a fact but to reflect the true spirit and soul of truth in every moment of human life. Through this book, we have attempted to bring forth his preaching on truth and its impact on various aspects of a human being's life. The situations that a household faces versus that of a sadhu, and the practical approach to imbibing truth in a common man's life, are some of the deep thoughts sure to inspire readers across the world.

I am once again, grateful to Acharya Shri Chandanaji for the emphasizing the need for Gurudev's preaching to be available in English, enabling life changing directions and solutions to the large reader population. We are deeply indebted to have her continuous encouragement and blessings. This book is an English translation of Gurudev's discourses on Satya, published in Hindi as Satya Darshan. Ours is a modest attempt to assist non-Hindi readers in gaining access to the spiritual wealth of Jainism.

I thank Mr T.R Daga, Honorary General Secretary of Veerayatan and Directors of Sugal & Damani group, G.N Damani, R.N Damani, P.B. Chedda, Vinodh Jain, Prasanchand Jain, Kishor Ajmera, Rajen Chadda, Nitesh Damani, Pramod Jain, Mitul Damani and Pratik Jain for the support extended in bringing out this book. I extend my appreciation to Praveen Kona for the translation and Kirti Goenka for enabling the editing and printing through Writer Quill publishing. We hope the message of Gurudev reaches far and wide, in guiding numerous souls on their path of salvation.

N Sugalchand Jain,
Chairman Emeritus,
Sugal & Damani Group

Translator's Acknowledgements

The divinity and true nature of the soul reflect nothing but the truth. Rashtrasant Upadhyaya Shri Amarmuniji's preaching reflects such a great essence of life and bares the soul of truth in simple words. I express my deepest gratitude and thank the divine souls who were instrumental in assigning me to the honorable task of translating these words of pure nectar into English, from the Hindi book, Satya Darshan.

My heartfelt thanks to the readers of this book. It is my sincere hope that the true essence of the preaching gets embedded in your lives. The true spirit behind the creation of this book, Shri Sugachand Jain, has been the guiding light in its making. His passion to spread such great ideas and thoughts in a simple and lucid manner, to the society at large, particularly to those not knowing Hindi, has been the driving force behind this effort. I extend my gratitude to Shri Jaychand Bafna for being the sutradhar in this book taking its current form.

Having attempted to pen down the thoughts and bring forth the wisdom of truth to the best of my ability, I sincerely seek pardon for any unintentional misrepresentation of the ideas, which could be perceived by the learned. As stated in the book, it is the righteous intention that matters in any attempt. The result, even if it is not up to the mark, will eventually reach its true destination on the path it is set to achieve. I welcome all suggestions which will contribute to the improvement of the quality of this publication.

With deepest gratitude
Praveen Kona

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Chapter 1

From Fact to Essence: Journey of Truth

“Truth is not an activity of merely stating the facts. It has a deeper essence which reflects in the Soul.”

What is truth? Is it merely stating a fact? Or, merely reporting an event as it happened? Does it have an intent, essence, and most importantly, a soul? The search for truth is the biggest thirst a human being can have. But the unfortunate fact is that very few have this thirst in them and genuinely strive to explore this path. It's as if the sea of truth is waiting to quench the thirst but hardly anyone is thirsty for it. Even amongst those few who are thirsty, most are unable to find the right path.

NUCLEAR AND ABSOLUTE:

When human beings started their quest to explore the world, they stumbled upon the micro universe within the organisms. This led to the discovery of the nucleus, and subsequently, of the atomic energy. A revolution began in scientific discovery and led to many new inventions. With these inventions, using this nuclear energy as source, look where human beings have reached. They are able to walk on the Moon and have travelled to Mars. Such is the power of the inner energy.

The scientific quest for nuclear knowledge is different from the search for the absolute, the supreme divine. The fruits of nuclear research can be shared amongst human beings as each new discovery will surely help others. The fruits of labor of one scientist can inspire others to innovate or invent something useful for the world.

Similar cooperation cannot happen in the search for supreme divine, the absolute. In the spiritual journey, guru and shastra can guide, but the ultimate destination can be reached only through self-effort. In this

journey, one cannot enjoy the fruits of labor of others and each must work and strive towards their own destiny.

There is a simple reason for this. The supreme divine can only be felt and experienced by each individual soul according to its capacity. This is not a material thing and hence, it cannot be taught. Bhagwan Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Tirthankara of Jainism, said “Inner self cannot be spoken of or taught. It has to be felt.” He also said, “There is no role of logic in experiencing the supreme divine.”

Feelings can be felt only when experienced. Another person’s experiences are mere words. Your hearing about sugar’s sweetness versus experiencing it yourself, are two different things, isn’t it? Thus, other’s experience might be different than yours, despite searching for the same thing. Once, a learned person said, “Mahavira and Buddha were contemporaries. Both were enlightened souls and showered spiritual light into the lives of many. But their ways were different. Their ultimate destination was salvation and being with supreme divine. The journeys were different.”

INITIATION ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH:

When we look around the world, all major faiths may appear different but have certain common concepts in the path to the supreme. Diksha is one amongst them. This is initiation into a higher journey of attaining spiritual enlightenment. But this does not just refer to tying a sacred thread, wearing certain types of clothes, or changing external appearances by tonsuring hair. These are just external paraphernalia to create the right atmosphere for inner discipline.

The true objective of this discipline is to search the inner soul for supreme divinity. It means using yourselves to search within and realize your true self. Diksha and its surrounding rituals are just to help get rid of avarices and external bondages, but further to that, a seeker has to seek within.

Some find the true answer within seconds, some take years, and some, many life times. The number of cycles of births are irrelevant. The real essence of truth is the intent and the journey. With true intent, the seeker will realize the ultimate answer.

Those who renounce must share the difficulties they face with the commoners. Many people nowadays undertake Diksha without even understanding the repercussions or assessing the true meaning and limitations of renunciation.

ENBRACING THE WORLD:

Many saints nowadays routinely preach that this entire world is an illusion, and not the truth. Hence, one needs to discard it. They advise everyone to join the spiritual journey, leaving family, friends, relations, bondages and avarices, as these will drag one towards hell. Listening to such preachings, innocent minds truly jump on to the spiritual bandwagon without understanding the consequences. Very often, it is only after taking Diksha, many come to know what the reality is.

The tussles within the sadhu brotherhoods start when feelings of jealousy, comparisons and ego start to take over. Adding to this, the complexities of spiritual realization and its different paths and concepts, disturb the human mind completely. It’s like a goat tied by one rope which gets released only to be tied by another. This creates an enormous illusion and dejection in the minds of people who take sainthood and are unable to live up to its expectation.

This is where the sadhus have to come forth and dispel the illusion that the world is a myth. They need to make the preaching simpler in essence, which can be easily understood. There should be a laboratory kind of support system which explains the nuances of the spiritual journey. The basic fact that, being detached from bonding and relations doesn’t mean that we should hate society and discard its members.

Indeed, it needs to be taught that realizing the self means aligning with the entire universe and this realization will lead to supreme divine. The world we live in, should not be treated as myth and discarded, but rather embraced and accepted wholeheartedly.

UNITY WITH THE BEYOND:

The soul is unique in its qualities but also a part of the eternal universe. This should be the realization for all seekers. The ones on the spiritual path should live for the upliftment of society and not just for their own realization. The seekers who have taken Diksha, thus have dual goals. One is to cleanse the avarices within, and the other is to devote life for the upliftment of society.

One must realize that sainthood is only a means towards self-realization and not the end goal. It's just one of the many steps in the long journey of inner cleansing. Merely becoming a sadhu is not the destination of the path of salvation. The role of a sadhu is to help cleanse the world from the ill effects of blind faith, superstition and religious bondage. The larger purpose of a true sadhu is to help society come out of these misconceptions and focus together on societal upliftment and universal brotherhood.

What is self-realization? It is a three-dimensional consciousness for the soul towards the path of enlightenment. The universal dimension of self-realization refers to arriving at the state of unity with the beyond—transcendence, merging with the source of existence. The individual dimension of self-realization refers to the awakening of our higher individuality, our soul. The personal dimension of self-realization refers to our awakening on the level of me, the human body. These three aspects of our evolution are absolutely interdependent and mutually supportive. For instance, our mind can reach a limited level of evolution within itself, but only when it is linked to the soul, and through the soul to the universal self, can it be awakened fully.

One needs to internalize the fact that every step taken should be for the benefit of society and the universe. The world needs such holy sadhus who are genuine in their efforts for universal brotherhood and help in societal upliftment.

The sadhu not only has to fight within, against avarices and wrongs, but also should strive for the betterment of the world, and help worldly souls to get rid of these avarices and wrongs. That is the true essence of a sadhu and the core principle of Diksha.

Chapter 2

Being True to Our Nature

“An unwavering stand in all circumstances, reflects the true nature of a righteous Soul.”

We must delve deep to understand the relevance of truth in man's life. Every soul is filled with unlimited virtues and we can use pledges to enable those virtues to reflect in our life as well. Jainism inspires the soul to gain self-realization and attain divinity by being with the supreme soul. But this can happen only when each virtue starts encompassing the whole world through the soul.

Is it possible that only a few virtues of the soul attain supremacy, while others do not? Is it not possible to gain divinity without all virtues attaining the same level of supremacy? Our life's goal is to drive our soul from the filth at the bottom, towards progress and evolved humanity.

We should not stop until we reach a stage where there is no further path to progress on. This will be the stage of supreme self-realization. Once this stage is reached, there will no further path. It is so complete. The question before us is, how can we ensure all our virtues continue to progress, ultimately reaching divinity. Do we have to keep a separate vow for each virtue to reach divinity?

We do not even realize the existence of all the virtues that our soul possesses. We can start from the virtues that we know of, and undertake a vow to progress in the others. If we start with the pledge of being truthful and righteous, we will realize the value of our entire life. The path of truth and righteousness in life is ridden with difficulties and obstacles arising from various circumstances. There are circumstances which demand huge sacrifices in exchange for a person to be truthful. Certainly, it is difficult to be truthful and righteous at every stage of life, but it needs to be done with constant practice and discipline.

FACTS VERSUS TRUTH:

Imagine a beautiful person with glitter and glow on the body. Now, what if this person does not have a nose? Will the person still be considered attractive? Similarly, however pure and good is the life you live, if it is not built on the foundation of truth, it is considered as worthless. A person who takes a tough pledge and leads a difficult life, but is also a liar, will never gain any respect. Unfortunately, this means that the society which he represents, will also be misjudged.

This is irrespective of the talent you showcase to the world. The world sees through the falsehood and only judges the person's actions. If you look from this perspective, you realize that life doesn't have any value without truth. No matter how many pledges and efforts one takes, if truth is not present in life, all these vows and sacrifices would not help in reaching salvation. Instead, they will destroy the human being further.

A person who is weak, unable to digest even plain food, if force fed with nuts, seeds and nutritiously heavy food, what will happen? Instead of giving strength, it can kill him or make him unwell. The same applies to saints who are a bad influence on their disciples. They are the ones who merely show off their intelligence, without possessing the essence of truth in their life.

Take that example of a sadhu who wanted to pen down a few thoughts. There was a pencil and paper in front of him. The sadhu first performed puja and aarti to the pencil, and then begins to write. When his disciple asked him, why he prayed to a pencil, the sadhu replied that Jainism says not to touch anything without praying. If such is the case, would he also pray to the aarti thali before touching it? Is this not just a means to show off one's knowledge?

Life should be simple and humble. Occasionally, we come across a strange kind of duality in people.

Once a sadhu was asked his disciple to fetch water from a lake, but told him to ensure that a Sagari (a person at the last stages of his life, who vows to fast until death) does not see the water. There is a blind faith that if such a person sees the water, it becomes inauspicious for our usage. This is illogical and absurd, and seems an act of boasting. Water cannot become pure or impure based on who sees it.

If a person living in dire poverty is advised to steal, but replies by saying, "I fear getting caught? Hence, I won't steal," his fear of being caught is not a good enough reason on the spiritual path.

If another person in the same situation says, "I am afraid of society and ill- fame. Hence, I wouldn't steal," his thought is a bit different from the first person. He values society, but it's still not the right reason to say no.

A third person says, "I fear going to hell and bearing consequences. Hence, I won't steal". He is having the fear of his afterlife. Still, all these three answers will not help any of them progress on the path to salvation.

If one does not steal because it's not righteous and against their true nature, then that is a right perspective and would help on the path to salvation. If a person is resisting sin just because of the consequences and not because it is against his nature, he can never progress in life.

As Jainism says, "A sin is not a creator of difficulties but sin in itself is a difficulty."

A person who treats sins as the source of all pain and discards it because it goes against the soul's nature, will progress on the path to salvation. If Bhagwan Mahavira is asked the same question as the three people above, he would answer saying, "How can I sin when my nature does not permit me to sin. How can I steal if my conscience doesn't permit me to steal?"

If Bhagwan Mahavira is asked, “You are an emperor and have all the wealth and worldly joys at your access. Now that you are a Tirthankara, self-realization and salvation are anyway yours. Come whatever may, you will get salvation. So, why not enjoy the worldly joys? What stops you now?”

His response would be, “My soul doesn’t seek worldly joys. Its nature doesn’t want any worldly joys, so why should I even think about it?” Such is the evolution of the soul that it gets detached from all the worldly things and is experiencing pure bliss.

An old lady used to carry a water tumbler and a burning torch in her hand. When people asked her why she was carrying them, she replied that if she went to hell, she would pour water and put off the fire in hell, of which people are so scared. And if she went to heaven, she would light a fire and burn down heaven, which people are greedy for.

She said to the shocked people listening to her that human beings are living either in the fear of facing punishments in hell or with the greed for joys in heaven. She wanted to destroy both and remove these reasons driving a man’s deeds. She said that she wanted human beings to live with their true nature and genuinely live righteously, not with the fear of something or with the greed of a thing. This is indeed the correct way of living.

While I was travelling, I overheard a prayer in a house. The prayer says, “O Prophet, as you are near God, I do not fear the consequences of my actions. Whether they are good or bad, when God asks you before my judgement, please tell him I am his true believer, so that he may pardon me for my all sins”.

Is this even possible? Our philosophy of the land always says, one must bear the consequences of their karma. No guru or God can help avoid this, so human beings should be conscious of their actions.

Jainism has not built any sacred places or holy shrines where God is passing judgements and our Gautama is sitting there, speaking on behalf of the person’s deeds and asking for pardon. Jainism clearly says that human beings should be rooted to their true self. They should always be true to their nature and adopt the pledge of righteousness.

One should shun sin for sin itself and not due to the fear of its consequences. A businessman behaves differently with a villager versus a government official. This is just due to the fear of being caught for black marketing. If we remove the fear of consequences, nothing would stop him from the practice of black marketing. This is indeed not the right way and will never help on the path to salvation.

When people perform Rituals or Yagnas, they are told that sacrificing an animal for such activities does not fetch any bad karma. Thus, people can go ahead and kill animals in the name of religious sacrifices without any fear. This is purely an idea that stems from the lack of fear of consequences. In many festival rituals, this is done on such a scale that the blood of animals flows like a river on the streets. If there was the fear of committing the sin of killing an animal, this act wouldn’t have happened. So, people should think of their deeds and pros and cons associated with the deeds. They should not be merely concerned about the consequence. This will help in correcting the behavior and progressing on the path to salvation.

Chapter 3

The Trident of Truth

“Truth, in its real essence, needs to reflect in how we think, what we speak, and eventually in the way we act.”

The trident of truth, known as Eternal Satya, flows with our thoughts, speech, and action. The same can be said for non-violence. Non-violence and truthfulness are two critical aspects of our lives. Whether it is human beings, nations, society, common men, or Sadhus, life has these two facets. When there is just non-violence in life but no truthfulness, then non-violence cannot grow. Ahimsa will weaken itself in the absence of truthfulness. Similarly, for truthfulness to grow, it requires the support of non-violence. Hence truth and non-violence are supplementary and complementary to each other.

A bird wants to fly high in the sky. If one of its wings is weak, it cannot fly. Both the wings must be strong for an undisturbed and safe flight. Truth and Non-Violence are exactly the same in a person's life.

NON-VIOLENCE AND TRUTHFULNESS:

The human life form, which we are born into, is not just for getting into conflicts. This is not an ordinary life form. It is not meant for living like animals and devils. Insects may just try to enter the ground and do nothing more, but a human being is meant to fly high. **Wealth and caste are not the wings to fly high.** Innumerable people have been blessed with wealth and high caste, including many kings, but they could not reach high in their spiritual journey. They just vanished under the earth without a trace. Many ruthless kings were born on the earth, who just created havoc. But they also got buried in the earth along with that thunder and power.

In the first place, people have forgotten such names and moved on. Even if the names somehow survived, they are uttered with feelings of hatred and disgust. People spat on them even after their death. The world still prays to Bhagwan Ram, and not to Ravana.

Thus, we must realize that the importance of life is to fly high and raise the standard of our life. Only non-violence and truthfulness can give us this super power. Truth follows ahimsa. Before following truthfulness, it is essential to know what exactly truth is. Our ancient saints have much to say about this.

A person who carries the message of righteousness and behaves accordingly is a True Soul. It is this Satya which is immortal. What is mortal is Asatya. Falsehood cannot sustain and truthfulness cannot perish. Hence, we can say that the soul is truth, as it has existed since time immemorial. It exists even today and shall continue to exist into the future.

Bhagwan Mahavira has spoken about Satya in the following manner.

The mind of a Saadhak (spiritual seeker) should be pure and his heart must be generous. He must be an open-minded person, who is not self-centered and has space for others in his heart. If you cannot do this, you have not attained truthfulness.

Hence, you must speak only of the action you intend to take. Your hands, legs, mind, soul, and the entire body should act for the sake of truth alone. That is when a seeker can progress on the path to salvation.

Who is a Mahatma? Is he a realized soul? The soul of a Mahatma is at the highest level, while that of an evil person is at the lowest level. The latter is a 'Duratma' – a non-realized soul which drags you towards darkness while the realized soul leads you away from darkness.

A Mahatma's mind and speech contain the principle of truth. Such persons do what they say. They will not change their stand from time to time. Thus, a Mahatma will act how he speaks, as his mind will contain the same thought. The truth binds his speech, actions and mind with one single thread. They run in the same direction. It is the direction towards God. This is the attribute of a 'Mahatma'.

In contrast, if what is in the mind is totally different from one's actions, then such a speech produces only thorns. This is the attribute of a 'duratma' (bad soul). The life of a Saadhak, whose speech and actions are the same, will remain holy without any paradoxes. This uniformity of life is a form of Satya. In contrast, if there is a variation between thoughts and actions, it is an indication of Asatya.

People follow the path of truthfulness only to a certain extent and begin to hesitate, when they reach the door of eternal truth. There are as many forms of falsehood as there are of truthfulness. As such, if you want to follow the path of Satya, you should know about Asatya. Bhagwan Mahavira says that you should walk on the path of Satya as much as you have walked on the path of Asatya. Meaning, one must realize fully the nature of falsehood with the same eagerness as they would seek truthfulness.

If somebody offers you sugar and asks to consume it by saying that it is bitter, you will think twice before accepting it. "It has a sweet taste. But if it is not sugar, then what is it?" A fire is not a fire if it is not burning hot. If a flower does not emit fragrance, it is not a flower. You may find all of these things are strange and think that you cannot explain or define such a concept.

Similarly, you cannot say that a person is a sadhu if he does not follow the path of truthfulness. It's like a fire without heat. It means, where there is the fire of truth, there exists a sadhu or a shravaka, the staunch follower.

A body without heat is dead. A man can be called alive as long as there is energy in his body. Energy creates heat in the body. When these two things leave the body, he becomes dead. A dead body decays and cannot even fight bacteria. Similarly, if truthfulness leaves a person's life, he begins to follow the path of falsehood. However efficient he may be, he will never be a successful person. The clouds of smoke are not meant for pouring rain. They disperse eventually and will never water the earth. The fate of a person with efficiency but without truthfulness is no different.

Where there is truth, there cannot exist any deceit and treachery. Often, we see that vices take control of us when our minds are weak. These evil designs will not come near us as long as we follow the path of truthfulness. Thus, only the light of truth can enlighten our lives.

BORN WITH TRUTHFULNESS:

We may tell ourselves that we will follow the path of truthfulness, but this is no easy task. In reality, it is a very difficult path to follow as speaking the truth in every circumstance is extremely difficult. It is rather easier to speak lies. When we actually try to follow the path of truthfulness, we realize the challenges in our daily life.

Which one comes first in a human being's life? Is it truthfulness or falsehood? A young child speaks only the truth. He does not know anything about falsehood as he is innocent. As he slowly starts growing, the element of truthfulness starts leaving him. He starts speaking lies as this practice of uttering lies is taught by the child's parents, brothers, sisters, other family members and friends. He is thus, taught to speak lies. He is taught that lying will benefit him. So, look at what happened! On his own, the child was speaking the truth, but due to the teaching of his family members and others, he started going on the path of Asatya. The fact is that it is not necessary to teach truthful speech to anyone. It comes along with birth because it's the very nature of the soul.

We are born innocent and truthful. Satya is a beautiful and natural part of life while Asatya is a learnt and imbibed ugliness.

A visitor came to a house and started calling out for the householder. The householder was inside the house but unwilling to meet the visitor for a certain reason. The visitor was determined to meet him. So he stayed by the door and continued to call the householder. Finally, a child came out of the house and informed the visitor that his father had asked him to tell the visitor that he was not at home.

The visitor now straightaway barged into the house and asked the householder why he had been lying that he was not at home. The surprised householder asked him how he knew that he was in the house. When the visitor told him about how his child had exposed the lie, the furious father began to scold the child. But, in this case, was the child really at fault? The child had not yet mastered the art of telling lies, as he was true to his innocent nature, and had simply spoken the truth.

The moral of the story is that in today's life, Asatya rules everywhere. Children are trained to speak Asatya. Parents and elders teach children to speak the truth with them but lie to others. Slowly, the child learns to lie to his parents as well. But in this case, he gets beaten up and punished for speaking lies. The child gets confused, not knowing when a lie is acceptable and when it is not. Eventually, he masters the art of lying and gets deeply immersed in the darkness of Asatya.

In reality, one should allow their children to explain their thoughts truly and clearly under all circumstances, thus adding to their own glory. Even as adults, when we go wrong, we should be courageous enough to say, "I am wrong and apologize for that." The same way, let your child also accept his mistake with humility. The guru should also accept his mistakes and encourage the disciple to do the same.

THE TRUTHFUL FATHER:

At this juncture, I am reminded of an incident in the life of Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the eminent freedom fighter and thinker. Once, he was sitting in a room and wanted to write something. He requested his son, who was sitting nearby, to bring ink and a holder for him. People used ink bottles and pen holders for writing in those days. The boy brought the ink bottle and Mr. Gokhale started writing. After finishing his writing, he wanted to return the ink bottle and called the boy to hold the ink bottle. Being deeply immersed in his thoughts, Mr. Gokhale did not hand over the bottle properly to the boy and the ink bottle fell down, staining the carpet. The young boy became afraid and started shivering.

Mr. Gokhale gently asked how the ink spilled down. "I..I could not hold it properly", said the boy in fear. Then Gokhale said, "No dear. I was immersed in the article I was writing. Therefore, I did not hold it properly. This is not your fault; it is mine."

This appears to be an ordinary incident, but it is important in the sense that the blame for spilling ink is taken by the father on himself. Can the concept of falsehood enter such families? The boy would have realized that his father, despite being a leading personality of the nation, took the blame on himself. How proud he must have felt about his father! Such pride encourages a man to stick to the truth until the very last moment of life.

All of us know that we must stick to the truth and not utter lies. We also know that in practical life, nobody is prepared to follow this. Merely talking about truth but not implementing it in real life, will not have any impact of truth in our lives. People are afraid of speaking the truth, but I believe that it is easier to follow truth than to follow falsehood.

Assume that a man decides to follow the path of truthfulness. If he makes a genuine resolve, he can stick to his vow irrespective of his lifespan.

He will overcome all the difficulties in life without being disturbed. On the contrary, there is another man who decides to live his life by following the path of falsehood. Such a person will surely find it difficult to spend even one day peacefully. Let me explain this further.

Our ancestors spent their lives following the path of Satya. Even in the modern world, there are examples such as Mahatma Gandhi, who abided by truthfulness throughout his life. Whereas, when a person who follows falsehood, states that he is hungry, he would have already broken his vow to speak only lies or Asatya. It is not difficult to guess about his condition in such a situation. By and by, he will start wondering why he is not opting to speak only the truth. He will have to take shelter under Satya eventually.

Our lives are fully surrounded by Asatya. But ultimately, it is only Satya that prevails over Asatya. No society can survive without truth. Bhagwan Mahavira emphasized upon one principle - every living being's life can sustain only on truth. When he first decides to speak the truth, he thinks before following it in his practical life. The light of truth must occupy every aspect of our life. One should find a solution to every problem in life in view of that very light.

Unfortunately, nowadays we talk about speaking the truth but do not talk of thinking about truth. We also forget to follow it in real life as it requires a free mind to know about truth. We may shout and speak about truth but it will not be the truth of mind and body. In such a case, we will not be in a position to achieve eternal truth. Without the Satya of mind, the Satya in scriptures and sayings will prove to be a disaster.

TRUTH OF MIND AND BODY:

Our old seers tell this story. A man purchased a cow but soon realized that whenever he tried to milk her, she had the habit of kicking him. He got frightened and started thinking, "I feed her grass daily. But she kicks me instead of giving milk. I should sell her off and pass my headache onto someone gullible." But who would buy such a cow?

There lived a priest near this man's house. He shared the story of the cow with the priest and sought help in selling the same.

The priest assured him, saying, "Do not worry. I will get the cow sold."

The cow owner was happy and relieved, "So kind of you! But how will you sell it?"

The priest just smiled and said, "If any buyer comes, bring him to me."

Finally, there came a purchaser. He saw the cow and said that she was beautiful and strong. When he asked, "How about milk?" the owner directed him towards the priest.

The purchaser approached the priest, who was sitting in meditation with his 'japmala' (a rosary of small beads).

The buyer asked the priest about the quantum of milk given by the cow. The priest did not answer, still busy with his japmala. The purchaser repeated the question.

As if in reply, the priest pointed to a stone nearby. The purchaser guessed that the stone weighed seven to eight kilograms, and concluded that the cow must be giving an equivalent amount of milk.

Satisfied, the purchaser paid the price of the cow. The cow owner made it clear that he had purchased the cow after enquiry, hence the deal was final. The purchaser agreed and took the cow away. The next day, when he went to milk the cow, she kicked him on the forehead. He thought that it was because of a new place and a new owner. The next day, he again went to milk her, but the same thing happened.

Realizing his folly, he went back to the cow owner and accused him, "You have deceived me". The man shot back, saying, "Me? When? I did not finalize the deal".

Frustrated, he then went to the priest who had finalized the deal. He said to him, "You have deceived me. This was not expected of you, Mr. Priest."

"How did I deceive you?" the priest calmly questioned back.

The purchaser was shocked and said. "You pointed to a stone!"

"Yes, but I told you the truth that the cow hits like a stone when milked. You assumed otherwise. Do you have only bones and no brains? What can I do if you are so stupid?"

"Is it so? I have lost money. Oh, such is my fate." The buyer burst into tears and left the place.

The priest was happy and felt proud of his wisdom. But, is this not falsehood? Empty truth can lead to such inferences and carry double meanings. It depends upon one's interpretation and inference.

Hence, Bhagwan Mahavira has given priority to one's intention, which means the truth in one's mind. If there is truth in your mind, then whatever you speak, will be Satya. In the absence of truthful intention, the essence of speech may become Asatya.

The Priest did not have the intent of truth in his mind. That is why he did not think twice before deceiving another person as there was no purity in his mind.

Fortunately, we need only to look at the life of Bhagwan Mahavira, to understand the real form of truth. The path of Satya will not run smoothly by words alone. The trident of Satya flows with the mind, speech, and actions. Those who want to follow the path of truth, should first give place to Satya in their mind. Only one who is a true follower of truth in mind and intellect, can worship Bhagwan with true faith.

Chapter 4 Truth - The Divine

“Satyadharm is not limited just to speaking the truth. Its scope is wide. Understanding the inner-soul and maintaining truthful relations with one’s family and all living beings on this earth also come under the definition of Satyagyan.”

Let us explore much deeper now, to understand the soul of truth and its essence in various aspects of human life including spirituality. When people introduce a new habit or practice in life, they must accept some discipline or voluntary restrictions. As an example, daily yoga practice would require one to wake up at sunrise, discarding the habit of sleeping for long hours. This discipline could be beneficial in stimulating one's inner energy, providing the strength generated by the willpower. By stimulating this strength, the seekers move forward in their practices, and ultimately achieve success.

In the absence of self-discipline, the willpower of a person is not awakened, and as a result, complete success cannot be achieved in any practice. This is also the case with regards to starting a spiritual life. If a person has started a journey embracing spirituality, he must accept certain restrictions and discipline for the soul. The scope of these restrictions is very broad according to Jain scriptures and cover the entire lifespan of a person.

However, this is not the space to discuss and elucidate all the earlier customs which were perhaps suitable for the circumstances of those days. As an example, due to lack of electricity in olden days, many household chores were stipulated to be done before sunset. A simple activity such as cleaning the house, was strictly advised not to be done past sunset, as it carried a risk of sweeping any valuables lying unattended on the floor along with the dust. But in current times, we see that electricity has extended the working hours of people.

Hence the restriction is no longer relevant. Dwelling into each of these customs and the logic behind them, would be a deep and lengthy study. So, let us focus on the core principles which form the foundation for all customs and drive human beings towards spiritual enlightenment. They can be called 'Core Virtues'.

THE FIVE PRIMARY VOWS

Our Indian scriptures prescribe many principles and practices for a person embarking on a spiritual journey. The Vedic scriptures for example, prescribe the four ashramas in human life which are: Brahmacharya (duties till marriage), Grihastha (duties after marriage and while leading a family life), Vanaprastha (duties to be followed when handing over responsibilities to the next generation) and Sanyasa (renunciation of family life). These phases would eventually lead to the spiritual path.

Simple things such as the ideal time for food intake, what kind of food and how it should be taken, when we should sleep, how we should walk on the path of life, when and how spiritual activities should be done, and the conditions for all such large or small activities have been prescribed. But these are driven by the core principle of guiding a human being towards spiritual enlightenment and not merely rituals to be followed for a disciplined life.

As per Jainism, there are five basic practices on which all the other disciplines (Maryadas) are based. They are as follows:

1. AHIMSA (Non-violence)
2. SATYA (Truthfulness)
3. ASTEYA (Non-stealing)
4. BRAHMACHARYA (Chastity/Celibacy)
5. APARIGRIHA (Non-attachment)

All the nuances and philosophies of life are based on these five principles. The seeker who follows these principles can reach his goal and attain the destined spiritual progress in the path to salvation. Each of these five principles is important in its own way. However, Ahimsa is the core pillar for these five principles.

As an example, 'Satya' and 'Asteya' can be termed as the branches of 'Ahimsa' because, deviating from those two makes us indulge in violence in one form or another. How can our acts result in violence, when we do not follow the four virtues of Satya, Asteya, Bramhacharya and Aparigraha? Let us ponder over this thought.

It is a sin to speak a lie, to indulge in sexual perversions, or to be trapped in attachments. These are sins because these are the causes of violence or Himsa. A lie spoken can cause drastic and violent impact on a person's life. The eldest of the Pandava's, Yudhishtira was known for always being truthful. When the powerful Drona became lead his opponent's army in the Kurukshetra war, Yudhishtira had to lie saying, "Ashwaththama Hatah!" misinforming Drona that his son Ashwaththama had died in the battle. He whispered the word "Kunjaraha" to hold back the truth that the Ashwaththama he was referring to was an elephant and not Drona's son. A distraught Drona threw down his weapons in sorrow and lost his life. This is a classic example of a lie leading to violence.

Many saints have stated that the origin of any untruth lies in our 'kashayas' (passions), which are bitter or acerbic. Wherever bitterness is present, it will result in hurt and violence. Hence, we now know that while uttering a lie, violence exists, causing hurt and pain. The same way, stealing and violence are not separate or distinct either. In fact, wherever theft is present, violence is part of the experience. Stealing others' valuables or accepting stolen valuables is bitter, causing hurt and pain to the actual owner and their families. Thus, even the act of stealing involves violence.

Similarly, sexual violence emanates from perverted sexual desires, and in present times, we see numerous horrifying examples of the same. Perverse sexual intercourse involves violence with forceful domination of another human being to satisfy one's own sexual desires. Greed causes violent behaviour as well in human beings and we can see people joining rioters and looting shops during bandhs and protests. Decline of good qualities within a human being is indeed a form of violence.

It is clear from the above that aspects such as lies, stealing, etc., are forms of violence, and hence these are sins. The seeker who realizes this and constantly engages in spiritual practices, must protect himself from any such form of violence in every aspect of life. It is essential to follow the path of truthfulness for following non-violence. Hence much importance is accorded to Ahimsa amongst the five disciplines. By practicing acts of non-violence, thoughts of truthfulness, and righteousness automatically get triggered.

Ancient scriptures and religious scholars have emphasized the priority of non-violence, saying that Satya follows Ahimsa, which means Ahimsa leads to the door of Satya.

One who does not give space for others' pain in his or her heart, and instead gives pain to others, cannot accept the truth. It is not possible that in a heart filled with violence, truth co-exists.

Truth is important in our lives. But if we grasp the commonly known meaning of truth, we will not realize its soul, the real great Light of Satya. To understand the light of Satya, we must see deep within the depths of this Universe. Now you will realize that Jain philosophy has brought about a great revolution in the world. What form of revolution is it? Our friends and followers of other belief systems and faith make the aspect of God central to the religious philosophy. All their practices and beliefs are centered around God and rituals.

Any practice that does not center around God is considered unfit for spiritual progress.

Jainism is distinct since it does not treat God as the focal point for spiritual progress or its practices.

TRUTH AS THE FOCAL POINT:

Thus, arises the question as to what the center or core of our spiritual practices should be. Bhagwan Mahavira has given the answer to this question, dispelling the confusion on what should be the core of spiritual practices, in his wise words. Human beings have created a superhuman image in the name of God and have made it central to all their spiritual activities. They imagine God to be the ultimate power and started spending all their efforts and energy in pleasing this majestic power. Many erroneous practices were introduced while experimenting with ways to please the so-called superhuman. These mistaken notions have slowly become rituals and religious bindings. For instance, to please the rain God, some tribes get two frogs married. Is this belief based on any truth? Will marrying two frogs ever yield rain?

Bhagwan Mahavira shared a very deep thought to answer the question as to what the central theme for spiritual practices should be. He preached that truth alone can be the real form of God. Hence, whatever vow a human being intends to practice, truth alone should be central to such a spiritual practice. Wherever truth is the focal point, spiritual growth is possible and, otherwise, such practices are useless.

We have seen that whenever human beings follow truthful practices, they get enlightened. Otherwise, if the focus is to just appease God in some way or the other, human beings face immense difficulties and failures. We see numerous temples or religious places in the world with fictitious Gods and Godmen being worshipped, but such places lack the divinity of truth and hence lose sanctity.

Whether a Jain or a non-Jain, most of them use their energies in practices intended to please the superhuman God they have created. No matter whether they are idol worshippers or not, the same thing is seen everywhere.

We get to see ridiculous practices such as donating diamond studded crowns to statues and crores of money to the temples. But this bounteous nature strangely vanishes the moment these donors come out of the temple. On the steps of these religious places, scores of needy beggars sit, bowing their heads for alms. But the same generous followers of Gods, who donated crores inside, do not even glance at the needy ones. They even twitch their nose at the smell and sight of these needy people. They despise the sight of poverty and reject the thought of accepting or supporting these needy ones, instead running away to the comforts of their cosy homes.

Why would such disconnection and ruthlessness creep into the lives of human beings? Where did it come from? When you contemplate, you will realise that this is due to not keeping truth as the central theme of the spiritual journey. Whether one is a Jain or not, the norm is for people to indulge in artificial display such as blaring music and boasting even in religious activities. Crores are being spent to please the Gurus and Gods. But the truth is that when a fellow human being is in trouble and struggling to make ends meet, he is blatantly ignored by us.

In essence, until truth is not made as the central theme of life and its practices, the correct answer cannot be obtained. The ruthlessness and disconnect in life cannot be discarded, and hence, the fruits of true spiritual practices cannot be enjoyed. People have performed tasks in the name of religious practices merely to please Gods and Goddesses and have become slaves to the thought of pleasing them. That is when Bhagwan Mahavira enlightened them by professing that truth is the real God. Bhagwan's words have inspired many to search for the soul of truth within.

They realized that truth was lying within and there is no need to search for it, in the outside world or in any external image.

As long as you do not realize and awaken the real God within, you cannot realize God in all the three worlds or across the three time zones of past, present, and future. It is the God who is within that enlightens our soul with spiritual bliss.

The same spiritual advice of searching for God within is given to a billionaire who possesses all worldly riches as well as to a pauper, who didn't even have a grain to offer God. Even if you don't have a grain to offer the true God within, it doesn't matter as God doesn't need your grain as an offering, nor desires for a gold studded crown. Genuine and positive thoughts offered as flowers and prayers with truthfulness from your heart would suffice. This alone is the real offering that the God looks for.

If someone ignores this and tries to look for God outside, it would just be foolishness. The moment you see the True God within, you will find the soul and the supreme soul switching faces as if they are unified. The devils inside you, which are anger, ego, illusion, greed, etc., bent upon destroying you with thousands of their swords, will suddenly vanish once you realize the God within.

The true divine within will shine and dispel the darkness that has clouded over the years.

One of the spiritual seekers has said, "To seek God, you go around the world searching in the streams, mountains, rivers, seas and skies. But try to search in your soul. Your body is the real temple and your soul, the real abode of the true divine. If you are able to seek the true divinity in your soul, there is no need to search for God elsewhere. You, the seeker, will surely meet the Divine. But if you keep the devil within you alive and then go to seek God, you will get nothing but failure."

THE REAL POWER:

This means that Jainism has brought forth a great revolution in the world. The human power you have, money power, time, and all other material possessions are being rendered useless by being utilized only to be submissive to Gods and Goddesses. Even such expenditure doesn't benefit you in any form. If you really want to serve God, it's important to realize that God resides within the human beings all around you. The innocent babies, the women in stress, and other people in pain and difficulties, are different forms of God and serving them is indeed serving the God within.

Any other external form of God cannot break the shackles of anger, greed, illusion, ego, and other vices within. The strength to break the shackles of vices within can only emerge from the inner spirit. Hence, Jainism did not emanate to make people serve Gods and Goddesses but vice versa.

If we observe ancient scriptures, history, and our real world, we can realize that the strengths and uniqueness of the real world are rendered useless when true needs come up. For example, consider the beauty of a person. Wherever beautiful people are present, they attract the attention of all the eyes around. When others get mesmerized with their beauty, it often makes them proud and egoistic. But, is this beauty permanent? Accidentally, if this beauty gets destroyed, it wouldn't take a second for all the attention to vanish. This shows that external beauty is not permanent.

The other major power perceived is that of money. Money power makes a person feel that he can achieve anything and everything, but the reality shows that the money power is just a myth. One should indeed be considered poor if one has only money but nothing else in life. How much money did Ravana have? Or, did Hitler or Osama bin Laden lack wealth? Wealthy people have been showing off money power and building huge gold studded palaces, claiming to control not just the world with money but Gods as well.

But how long did the money power stay? In fact, it got destroyed in front of their eyes. Ravana's golden palace in Lanka got burnt to ashes in front of his eyes. This proves that money has limited power and reach.

Moving forward, let's explore the power of people, followers, and family. You will realize that they too have their own limitations. Let's glance through Mahabharata and visualize the scene where Draupadi is standing helpless in King Dhritrashtra's court with thousands watching. Every attempt was made to outrage her modesty, insult her, and unimaginable things were being said and done to her in the presence of the most powerful people on earth. Most of these stalwarts were from her family, her relatives, and well-wishers. None dared to intervene. The mighty Pandavas sat with their heads bowed, staring at the ground while their queen was getting humiliated and molested. None of these powerful people or family could help her. Who was the only power that saved her from shame? When human beings face such helpless situations in life, only one power comes to help - the power of True Faith.

We human beings have these false attachments and emotions for other people including our families. We live in an illusion that they would come to our rescue when a situation demands. But the fact remains that no one can truly help you. Draupadi's chastity was not saved by money, her beauty, or the powerful men in her life. None of the people around her stepped forward to help her. The only power that came to her rescue was her true faith.

Thus, we have seen that to reach God, what is required is truth and nothing but the truth. Other things such as wealth, power, wisdom, etc., will not help you reach the Supreme Soul within. It's just truth and its Godly power that has the magnetic pull. We hear of so many disasters and horrendous things happening around, but where are the Gods? Why do they not come to the rescue of the stricken? Spiritual leaders and thinkers have even agreed that the whole world's power together cannot be greater than the power of truth. These worldly strengths may give success only for a short while but not till the end.

When a person awaits his death, neither his position in society nor his wealth will save him. He keeps crying but none of these come to his rescue. At the same time, the realized soul will not cry while facing death. That person will welcome death. Who gives such people the light? Human beings must leave their entire wealth behind and cannot take anything with them. Not even bones of their own body will accompany at the time of death. Still the weak men despair, whereas realized souls leave this world smilingly. Who gives them such power? It is only the eternal power of truth that gives such spiritual power to face even death with a smile.

We have discussed this aspect with many thinkers including communists whose cadres lay down their lives. What gives a human being the strength to face his death with a smile? What or who is responsible for that self-sacrifice? This intuition can be realized only through truth. This leads a person to 'Dharma'. Yes, that is the Satyadharma, True Justice. When the eternal light of Satya and Dharma shines brightly in our lives, we sacrifice our own lives for the sake of others with a smiling face. The concept of Satya helps us even after our death.

Some people say that this world rests on the head of a serpent while others say that it rests on the horns of a bull. All such stories are nothing but imagination without any scientific basis. The reality is that this vast world is dependent on the Earth's natural environment. Mother nature has its own rules and principles. These regulations are based on truth and the Earth is based on these principles. The Sun rises and sets on time. Any shift in this cycle will spell doom for Earth. Such a drastic change will never happen, and this is true. This is the law of Nature.

Similarly, the air also blows based on truth. Thus, the spiritual leaders say that all the principles of life, no matter whether they are of nature or energy, are self-embodied and embedded in truth. As long as energy rests within the limits of truth, there will not be any problem. When it outstrips its limits, there will be havoc in this Universe, causing ecological disasters.

What is our life? We are alive as long as there is heat in our body. Once the energy leaves the body, we are declared dead. We can't tolerate even a mosquito sitting on our body when we are alive and we immediately react to remove it. But when we die, even if our body is cut into pieces, we do not react. In fact, we cannot. That is the reality.

We assume that our body is useful when there is life in it but otherwise, it is useless. But there is one more important principle governing our body, the truth (Satya). As long as truth exists, the power on this Earth will be right and healthy. Vices in life such as anger, lust, and greed exist in this world and these cannot be rectified without truth.

Bhagwan Mahavira has said that the bad traits of lust, anger, and violence can be rectified. The follower of the path of truthfulness will readily accept his his mistakes, and thus, he can rectify the blunder. However big the blunder might be, if the follower accepts that he has erred, nothing wrong can happen to him. Such people's mistakes can be rectified regardless of how grave it is; and such a person can follow the right path. In contrast, if a person commits even a small crime but does not accept it, then the wound grows within, and life starts to rot. Our Gurus have given a beautiful example of this.

SATYA PREVAILS UPON THE THIEF WITHIN:

Once upon a time, Bhagwan Mahavira was conducting a meeting where many spiritual leaders as well as common men were present. Bhagwan was delivering his spiritual discourse, with words flowing like nectar. The audience were listening in rapt attention and enjoying the nectar. A thief was also present in the audience, listening. The discourse ended, and the crowd dispersed, but the thief did not. One Saint asked him why he did not leave.

"I heard a sadhu's speech for the first time in my life," came his reply.

The sadhu said, “Did you grasp anything? There was a shower of pearls. Did you catch at least one single pearl? If not, then what is the use of the shower of pearls? Take at least one pearl.”

The thief started thinking, “What should I take? Bhagwan Mahavira’s voice is elixir. It turns a demon into a human being. But I cannot grasp it. I am a thief and it is my livelihood to steal. What will my family eat if I do not steal? If I am not able to leave stealing, then what did I achieve in life?”

The Saint was a philosopher and he had the knack of understanding the human mind. It is easier to understand money matters, but difficult to gauge people’s mind. Even if there is a single person in a family who can understand others, then the life of all the family members becomes happy.

The sadhu said, “If you cannot leave stealing, can you leave some other thing?”

“Yes, I can. I can leave some other thing,” said the thief.

The Saint said, “Ok. If you cannot leave stealing, start being truthful. Do not lie. The account of your life’s karma is written in a book. The page on which the account of your thefts is written will be left blank by me. My advice is that you better keep it blank in future as well.”

The thief was highly impressed with the advice of the sadhu. “Yes, I will always speak only the truth hereafter.”

The sadhu now explained to him that it is easier to accept a rule, but it requires the power of Satya to follow it. If you cannot follow Satyadharma, you cannot fulfil any vow.

The thief promised to adhere to Satyadharma.

He went back to his house. He saw that there was food grain available in the house. He had no need to speak a lie or steal. He decided that he would steal only after the stocks are exhausted. This was a good thought and lacked greed of hoarding. The stock of food grains got exhausted one day and he then started thinking as to what to do.

Saintly people ignite a small good thought or action in you and it starts growing automatically thereafter. Throw a small seed on the earth and watch it grow into a big tree. Similarly, a small seed of good thought nurtured in our minds becomes a huge tree of good deeds in due course of time.

The thief started thinking. “I heard a discourse on Ahimsa. Himsa is indispensable in the act of stealing. I cannot restrain from not indulging in any form of act of stealing. Is it not possible that I still continue to steal and at the same time there is non-violence?”

The thief started thinking, “If I steal from a poor man, he will face a lot of problem and will surely curse me. I should steal from such a house that the house owner should not be affected badly, and he should not bear a grudge. Which house should I select?”

He realized “Yes, here is the King. His wealth belongs to others. What difference will it make to the King if I take a few coins from his coffers? So, I should commit theft in the King’s palace itself.”

As decided, he went to the King’s treasure house. He examined the locks and prepared the keys. On a fine midnight, in the garb of a wealthy man, he reached the treasure room with a bunch of keys. In those days, the kings used to collect taxes. But they also took good care of their citizens. The name of the King in this instance was Shrenik and his minister was Abhaykumar. They used to mingle with their citizens during night hours by changing their appearance. Their intention was to get first-hand information about the real situation in the city.

The King was aware that when the citizens went to the King's palace, they might not be able to speak the truth. People tend to talk freely in their houses during night time with their family members.

On one such night, they came across the thief who was in the guise of a wealthy man. When the King asked who he was, the thief was confused. Because he had decided to speak only the truth, it was a testing time for him. He decided to speak the truth alone, come what may. He replied that he was a thief and started moving on. The King was confused now and decided that since this man was honest, he could not possibly be a thief.

The minister agreed with the King and said that a real thief would never reveal his identity. The King and the minister walked away. As the thief reached the entrance of the treasure house, the guard enquired as to who he was.

“I am a thief,” he replied. The guard mistook him to be an officer of the King sent for inspection, and let him in without any further questions. The thief opened the door of the treasure house and selected two boxes containing valuable jewelry. He locked the treasure and started returning to his house thinking that those two boxes would suffice for many days to come.

Accidentally, he met the King and the minister again. Once again, they asked him who he was. He repeated that he was a thief.

“Where are you coming from and what did you do?” the King probed.

“From the King's palace. I went there to steal,” replied the thief without an iota of fear.

“What did you steal?” the King found this amusing.

“Two boxes of jewellery,” pat came the thief's reply.

The King and his minister, assuming that he was being funny, bid him adieu and went to their homes. The very next day, the treasure house was checked with the stock. They realized that two boxes were missing.

“How were they stolen?” the King asked the guard.

“A man was here last night. When asked, he replied that he was a thief. Thinking he was probably an officer in your employ trying to be funny, I let him in. I didn't think a thief would reveal himself.”

The King then realized, “He was really a thief and not a businessman. But an ordinary thief would not have the courage to speak the truth. He had the strength of ‘Satya’ (truthfulness). A saintly person must have met him and decided to turn him into a satyavadi, a truthful soul.”

The King returned to his palace and announced that the person who stole the jewelry from the treasure the previous night should present himself in the court. The citizens thought that the King had gone crazy. Why would any thief present himself in the King's court voluntarily? It was just impossible. The thief heard this announcement and thought, “This is a challenge to my truthfulness. I have already tested the power of truth. Now I will not retrace or retract. Now, hereafter, I shall live only for the sake of truth.” This thought gave him immense power.

The thief went to the King and told the security guards that he was the one who stole the two boxes of ornaments. When the guards informed the King that the thief had indeed presented himself, he was astonished. The King asked for him to be brought in and told him, “My guards told me that four boxes were missing.” He asked the thief whether he stole two or four boxes. The thief said firmly that he had stolen only two boxes and not four.

He reiterated his resolve to speak the truth and only the truth. “I have stolen only two boxes. Even if you order my execution, I would stick to my stand. I would not have come here in the first place, if I wanted to lie. I attended a spiritual discourse by Bhagwan Mahavira. There a sadhu had advised me to stop stealing. I told him that I cannot stop stealing because I had no other means of survival. He advised me that if I could not leave stealing, then I should at least start speaking the truth. I decided to speak only the truth. The truth has given me strength and I am standing in front of you.”

The King could not distrust the words of the thief. He was so impressed that he made the thief in-charge of his treasure. The thief followed the path of truthfulness thereafter and became a good man.

If a man decides not to speak a lie and follow only the path of truthfulness, the bad vices would never enter his mind. The biggest power on earth also cannot stand against truthfulness. If a man follows the path of truthfulness, then he makes his life beautiful and sets a good example for others to follow.

Chapter 5 Spiritual Analysis of Truth

“Imbibing truth and simplicity in one’s character is Dharma,” says Bhagwan Mahavira.

The biggest revolution in the understanding of Bhagwan Mahavira’s preaching is his emphasis on intention regarding the principle of truthfulness. He gives importance to truth, but more than that, he states that truth should be followed in thoughts. The mind must be free of evil thoughts and vengeance, otherwise mere verbal truth cannot be called truth. The first step of truth is purity of the mind and the next one is that of speech.

Today, there is confusions and chaos in the minds of people. The main reason for this is the absence of truth. If the mind does not become pure and follow truth, such things would continue. While talking of falsehood, the spiritual gurus have asked a few questions.

Where is the source of lie? How and by whom were the seeds of Asatya sown? Without the germination of a seed, how can there be a big tree? They themselves have taken the efforts to provide answers to these questions.

THE REASONS FOR ASATYA

One of the reasons for Asatya is anger. When a person gets angry, he loses his judgement and starts lying. In such a situation, when the words are filled with ego, even a person speaking the truth is treated as a liar.

When a man becomes a slave of lust, money, and other avarices, he forgets about the importance of his life. He does not remember whether he is an ordinary man or a realized soul. (A realized soul is one who has established oneness with God.

For such a soul, heaven, hell, good and bad are all the same. This soul has attained enlightenment and realized the true essence of life.)

The head of a family, full of avarices such as ego and self-centeredness, would always expect his family members to serve him. But the truth is that he is born not just to take but also to give. He should think of it as his duty; he should return things to society with pleasure.

Such type of broadminded thinking makes a man kind-hearted. He gives away liberally as the light of God shines in his mind and his family also flourishes. Societies where such people live become healthy and nations consisting of such societies prosper.

If a man is generous, he does not develop misery. He does not allow the poison of vices to enter him. His generosity is Satya and forgiveness. To forgive is an attribute of Satya. To be humble is Satya.

The life of a man who follows the path of Satya is an open book and he follows the straight path. Be it day or night, whether he is alone or in the company of many, he would follow the same straight path. Bhagwan Mahavira has said, "You are alone. When there is nobody to watch you, to recognize you or to hold you accountable, you may be tempted to follow the path of falsehood, but remember that Satya is always there for you to follow. Do not let public opinion determine whether or not you will follow the truth."

Similarly, you follow truth whether you are sleeping or active. Sleep and being active should be in your control.

A man says, "When I am awake, I am conscious of myself. But when I am asleep, it is not in my control. What would be my responsibility then?" Jainism deals with the issue firmly. It says, "Even then you are responsible. You are equally responsible whether you are asleep or awake. Whatever bad ideas you get while sleeping, where do they emerge from?"

Why were they born? Only you are responsible for them. While walking one may have stepped on a thorn. It may not hurt during the day but at night, the pain would be felt. It may even increase. Similarly, all the vices which come to our mind during the day pinch us during the night. It is essential for us to have full control over these vices be it day or night."

If anybody speaks truth because he hopes to reap some benefits, that is also Asatya. Similarly, where there is anger or ego, there is Asatya. Such a person does not care about what he or she said or has not said. That attitude corrupts even the words spoken with the right intention. When the reason itself is falsehood, how will it become Satya? Have you ever seen the earthen pots made by a potter automatically converting themselves into golden pots? There is a wise saying, "What you sow is what you reap," meaning, "Your intentions will shape the result." So, if the pot is made of earth, it will be a muddy pot. If the material used is gold or silver, then it will be a golden or silver pot. Similarly, an action done with anger automatically becomes an act of falsehood. The same principle applies to ego, treachery, lust etc.

RECOGNIZING THE ESSENCE:

There are fourteen stages or attributes of human development according to Jainism. The first 12 stages pertain to basic human thinking such as attachments. They indicate the mental state of a man who is immature. If such a man, adheres to truth in the first stage itself, he is already following the principles of ahimsa. But as per Jain philosophy, if he does not realize the essence of truth, he is not enlightened. The truth spoken by such a person is not truth in real essence, but mere words. The ahimsa followed by him is not ahimsa in true essence.

Thus, if a person is speaking truth in the first stage itself, it cannot be treated as truth in its real essence. Then what type of Satya is it? It is a question with a twist. It requires deep and detailed thinking. Scriptures have specified certain steps to climb the ladder of spiritual evolution.

Similarly, one must climb down in the same sequence as that of going up the ladder. Otherwise, we cannot achieve our goal and we will fail to climb the ladder of truth.

It is very simple. Whenever someone follows the path of falsehood, there is darkness in his life. It is so dark that even if the person has taken birth in a spiritually rich family, he cannot go anywhere near the truth. Perhaps he might be truthful, but even then, his truth is not truth in the real sense. People may think that he is speaking Satya but he is merely stating facts without feeling the essence in his soul.

He has not recognized the 'Soul' and the 'Supreme Soul'. In Jainism, each soul or atma or individual self is a potential Paramatma or Supreme Soul. It remains as Soul only because of its binding "karmic" limitations, until such time as those limitations are removed. The Supreme Soul represents the ultimate point of spiritual evolution for the Soul.

Take the example of a drunkard who is highly intoxicated but can recognize his father and his son. He also treats them properly. Can we say that he is following Satya? We have to say that he is drunk, his mind is not in his control, and cannot be trusted. Why do we not treat his words as truth? Because, he has no clear idea of what he speaks as he is in a state of delusion, and is confused as well as disoriented.

Under the circumstances, you don't believe his words, since his speech lacks reasoning and thinking. Whatever he speaks, when in fully conscious state of the mind, can be treated as Satya, otherwise it is Asatya.

If a person's mind is full of falsehood and filled with ignorance, his acts of non-violence are also considered as violence as he would be performing these acts out of ignorance. However much the person pretends to follow wisdom, he is being untruthful from within.

Wisdom always comes first and is followed by actions. Bhagwan Mahavira has said, "First come knowledge, wisdom, and rightful thoughts, then the light of knowledge shines and actions take place." What can an 'Agyani' (an ignorant person) do? How can he distinguish what sin is? How will he distinguish between 'dharma' and 'adharma'?

Thus, we have prepared the ground for our principle. Truth must be truthful and righteous. Truth cannot be accompanied by anger, lust, greed etc. If so, our philosophy treats it as Asatya.

Bhagwan Mahavira said, "By misfortune, if somebody becomes blind or deaf, we bluntly call him so." But the wise vision of Bhagwan Mahavira says that calling that man blind or deaf itself is a form of Asatya. We have no right to say so. Any speech causing hurt is not truth. There is some form of aversion as well as mockery in your speech. You are deriving self-satisfaction at his expense, and you are thinking of yourself as great by pointing towards his disability. This is cruelty, and spiritually, it is wrong.

Here, you should understand the difference between a fact and truth. The fact, when spoken openly, may harm or displease some. But, a fact is always a fact and it depends on the intention of the person stating the fact. In such a case, it becomes Asatya even though it is a fact. It can be concluded and inferred that truth should emerge from within, and when it does, the tongue also speaks the truth consequently.

There are several discussions on principles. Many people, including sadhus and shravakas, participate in these discussions. After the discussions, they form an opinion, and arrive at certain conclusions. Now imagine that the opinion as well as conclusion is not correct, but the participants still think that they are right. They start thinking and practicing such false assumptions, which is downright dangerous.

We should understand that truth is one thing and having the soul of truth is another. A highly realized soul would correct himself without hesitation when his mistake is pointed out.

FACTS VERSUS TRUTH

When a man reaches the stage of being an omniscient, his knowledge is complete since he has realized what eternal truth is. An ignorant person, on the other hand, not only commits an error, but also insists on it being the truth.

A truthful and righteous man never disowns his mistake when it is pointed out. When he comes to know the truth, he openly admits his mistake and says, "I had supported such an idea in the beginning, but now that the truth has been revealed, I realize that my thinking was wrong. How can I disown the truth?" Thus, he accepts the truth immediately. In a human being's life, there is no place for both.

Bhagwan Mahavira has asked us to reflect on this question, "Which philosophy is true and which is untrue?" Scriptures are an embodiment of truth themselves but they do not create their own rules and prescribe actions. It is done by those who abide by them, and they prescribe actions, suiting to the context of societies and living era's, considering the well being of all living things in the world.

Each thinker has a different interpretation for the same words and the same principles. The principles of different religions are the same but the interpretation differs. Each leads to a different direction. Why is that? What should it be called? Is it a philosophy with a proper perspective or otherwise?

THE GENUINE SAADHAK:

A Saadhak who has the soul of truth alone can be called a person with right understanding.

On the contrary, a saadhak who has closed his mind and is not open to truth, his principles become one with those of false belief. It can thus be inferred that a man's vision can be influenced, wherein truth and falsehood are based on perceptions and understanding. Thus we have got the art of life which makes us convert elixir into poison and vice versa. On the one hand, Bhagwan Mahavira had disciples like Gautam, Sudharma, Jambu and thousands of many others; on the other hand, there was a Saadhak whose name was Goshalak. He stayed with Bhagwan for six years. But do you know what happened? He was prepared to kill the disciples of Bhagwan Mahavira. He turned two of his disciples into ashes with his powers. For him, Bhagwan was Asatya whereas the same Bhagwan was an embodiment of Satya for other disciples. Disciples like Gautam could attain heaven while others went to hell because of their karma.

The point of all this is that the things we possess and come in contact are only excuses for future consequences. If you have obtained the right light, the power of correct judgement, it means you are a human with the right perception. You have truth in your vision, hence have pure love for Bhagwan but others have created hatred for him, due to the lack of truth in their vision. Your intention and mental capacity, changes the message you get from Bhagwan.

Thus, Knowledge and Bhagwan are neutral. The world sees them with their own perceptions and it gets reflected in the way they perceive God. The perspective should be positive, as a negative perspective will never lead to good things in life. So, it is the positivity in perspective that is important. Bhagwan Mahavira's disciple, Goshalak, despite staying with him for six long years, could not understand Bhagwan and went on to declare that Bhagwan was false and he himself was the true God.

Shastras, Sadhus, and Gurus come and go. On their own, they do not distribute any punya (good deed), or any paap (sinful deed). The deed by themselves do not distribute punya or paap.

It depends on what type of feeling you get by watching their deeds. Their actions and preachings have an influence on our mind.

Jain religion by itself does not judge as to whether a body or a thing, is Satya or Asatya. It is left to an individual. If the seeker has right vision, he will grasp the truth, and if his sight is full of falsehood, he will not be able to grasp anything. Thus, we have to initially prepare ourselves to grasp the right things.

THE FOOLISH THIEF:

A thief stole a beautiful horse and decided to sell it. He went to the market and asked around for potential horse buyers. There was an intelligent buyer who recognized that it was a stolen horse. He had realized that the seller was a thief since he was not mixing freely with the crowd. That man went to the thief and enquired as to whose horse it was.

“It is mine,” said the thief.

“Would you like to sell it?” asked the man.

“Yes, I am willing to sell it.”

“Ok, what is the price?”

The thief got confused. He did not have any knowledge of horse trading. He thought for a while and mentioned a price.

The buyer immediately knew that the thief was ignorant and that it was a stolen horse. “The price is somewhat high but the horse is very beautiful. I will buy it, but before buying, I would like to test its gait, whether it walks as beautifully as its looks.”

“Ok, you may ride and test it,” said the thief.

The buyer handed over his ‘hookah’ to the thief and asked him to preserve it till he returned.

The buyer sat on the horse and started riding. The thief tried to follow him, asking him to return, but to his dismay, the buyer rode away with the horse, leaving his ‘hookah’ with the thief. Disappointed, when the thief returned to his house, the neighbors asked him about the price the horse fetched. He showed them the ‘hookah’ and boasted that it was the price, trying to hide his disappointment.

The inference is that we gain and lose many things in life and that the value we attribute to them are merely driven by circumstances. The hookah was of no value to the thief initially, when he thought the man will buy the horse. But when he realized his loss, even the hookah was payment enough.

Faith gives man the sense of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. What do human beings bring when they come into this world and what do they take when they leave this world? One leaves behind everything before death, except the karma from past actions. If a person had wise thoughts, he would get the light of good deeds, and if his thoughts are full of hatred, filth, lust, anger, ego, etc., he will fall into the dark zone of sins. The fruits of our karmas are reaped by us based on our deeds.

If you are not following the path of truth, then even if God himself appears before you, you will call him Devil. If there is evil in your mind, you will see evil in God as well, not just in your family and fellow human beings.

In the language of our daily conversation, sometimes truth becomes untruth and a lie becomes the truth. A man with the vision of truth worships the soul of truth. He who follows the God of truth should clean his mind first, fill it with truthfulness and awaken wisdom.

Chapter 6

The Hardships of Being Truthful

“In the journey of Truth, obstacles transform into the path, when seen through pure intellect.”

With regard to the spoken word, there is not much ambiguity about truth and its value. Matters of speech and truth sometimes require logic beyond comprehension, and hence we should need to rely on Shastras (ancient scriptures) for drawing any conclusions.

Matters of truth are usually assumed to be simple. Hence, conclusions are drawn very quickly and decisions are announced. However, matters of intellect or consciousness are not that simple and straightforward. Matters pertaining to the soul of truth are not simple and cannot be decided in a jiffy. Human beings have been struggling for thousands of years to comprehend these matters and seeking advice from saints and the learned, but clouds of darkness still engulf the human mind and make them feel alone in the spiritual path.

Why should human beings seek truth? Did we or our near and dear ones attain truth? How factual are the claims of the so-called speakers of truth? These serious questions cloud our consciousness.

The path of truth is difficult and not simple. Whenever we see through the lens of intellect, we realize that we are indeed walking on the path of truth but are still miles away from attaining any goal. In such a situation, we rely on our assumptions of truth and lies, ending up judging or making premature conclusions. Such assumptions create complications in our search for truth and make it more cumbersome.

A holy Indian sadhu said, “The path of truth is like that of the edge of a sword. It’s so sharp and dangerous that any lack of preparation or callous approach will make you bleed immensely.

A lot of practice, patience and concentration are required if you truly want to walk on the path of truthfulness.” Learned Sadhus have said that this path is extremely difficult and painful; hence any slack in preparedness will be dangerous and will bring pain.

Bhagwan Krishna spoke in the Bhagawad Gita, “It happens that even learned and intelligent ones get confused in some situations while judging what truth is and what is not, what Karma is and what is not, and what the duties of human beings are and what are not. Commoners are indeed confused but even the learned are rattled by this confusion many times. It’s not due to shallowness of their intellect or knowledge but rather it’s the difficult path of truth itself that causes such a misery.” This gives us an idea of how complicated the path of truth can be.

A person who is willing to initiate spiritual practice and takes steps towards the path of truth, needs to be first humble towards the mighty power of truth. After walking the path, once a decision is arrived at, ego should not be a block, as ego makes human beings blind to the beauty of truth.

Indeed, one learned sadhu said that the path of truth is not just sharp as the edge of a sword, but it is much sharper. Hence, it is much more difficult than walking on the edge of the sword. The might of the sword is nothing in front of the difficult path of truth.

Today’s world has taken the path of ritual-based service as the path to serve God. This form has become a drama in daily life. People nowadays are mesmerized with such ways and are blind to the real path of seeking truth. Saint Anandghan says, “Bowling to someone, placing offerings or falling at someone’s feet are not sharper than the edge of a sword. In fact, human beings can walk on the edge of a sword with sufficient practice. Enough practice and discipline will enable a person to balance their bodies on the edge of a sword and make them walk, dance and even pose standing on the edge of a sword.

This may get applause from the crowd watching, but it’s not as difficult as walking on the actual path of truth. Being blessed by Bhagwan Jaineshwar is not as easy as walking on the edge of a sword.”

A sadhu has said that it is indeed an easy task for a commoner or a person in circus to balance themselves on the edge of a sword and seek applause, but the path of true service is so sharp and edgy that even the Gods stumble on such a difficult path. These Gods and demigods have mesmerizing powers to make people mad in their devotion. By keeping the realization of dharma and adharma at bay, the world is just running after tangible and short-term benefits. The powers of such Gods and demigods are rendered useless in front of genuine service.

THE SACRIFICE OF RAJA DASHARNABHADRA:

Bhagwan Mahavira once arrived at the gates of Dashaharnapur. On hearing about this, the King felt happy that he now had the good fortune of serving Bhagwan. He was eager to place his head at Bhagwan’s feet and seek his blessings. But at the same time, a tinge of ego too entered his mind. He felt that he could use this chance to serve Bhagwan in such a way that no one would have done it in the past or could do it in the future.

The human mind is strange that despite having limited capabilities, it still dreams of making an everlasting impact on the universe. Actually, what is a person’s strength? With miniscule strength and efforts, can a human being make such an impact on the universe ever that it remains unmatched even in the future?

The King, who initially wanted to follow the beautiful path of service to Bhagwan, now decided, due to his immaturity and ego, to make the service an opportunity to show off. A fleet of army, elephants, horses, and riches were lined up as part of service to Bhagwan. Bhagwan was giving the nectar of spirituality and truthfulness in his discourses, but the King was blinded by the desire to show off his might.

Looking at this, Indra, the ruler of heaven, started thinking that though the King is devoted, his ego is blinding him and has taken him on the wrong path. Indra thought that this poison would spoil the nectar of true devotion and hence decided to show the true path to the King and the world by visiting Bhagwan himself. As the King was relishing the mighty show he had put up, he was taken aback when Indra came up with his own show backed by the might of Gods. Indra's power of creation was unmatched and even the King's riches could not stand before that might.

As the King was wondering where this majestic group had come from, in front of whom his own decorations seemed as ordinary as that of a pauper, the Gods spoke. "We, walking in the front, are just the servants, who play the honchos, beat the drums and hold the flags. The real dazzling might is coming behind, adorned by Indra."

The King was shocked at this and his heart broke into pieces due to disappointment. As he reached Bhagwan Mahavira's feet, he bowed with a heavy heart and broken ego. He now decided to make his service memorable with a sacrifice which even the Gods would not fathom. As per the scriptures, however powerful the Gods may be, they cannot match human beings in one thing, and that is sacrifice. The King sacrificed all his wealth and power, adorned a sanyasi's dress, and fell at Bhagwan Mahavira's feet. "O Bhagwan, I want to sacrifice all my riches and vices. Here I am at your feet and begging you to accept me as a disciple."

Bhagwan Mahavira, the embodiment of omniscience and supreme intelligence (Kewal Gyani), saw the transformation in the King. He knew that the change had occurred in the King's ego. Though the King had started walking on the path of ego, it was to express his devotion. Hence it eventually led him to the path of sacrifice. The Bhagwan knew that now there was no point of return for the King and he kindly accepted the King, bringing him into the disciple's fold. Thus, the King became a sadhu. Indra arrived and bowed before Bhagwan, also looking for the King to see the disappointment his entourage had caused in puncturing his ego.

But he was unable to see the King as he didn't know that the King had chosen the path of sacrifice.

The Bhagwan addressed Indra saying, "What are you looking for, Indra? He has become a sadhu." Indra looked at sadhu Dasharnabhadra in astonishment. The sadhu's face was lit with spiritual energy and the aura overshadowed Indra's pomp and glitter. The spiritual glow was so magnificent that it seemed as if the sadhu was the bright shining sun while Indra was the moon, pale before the sunshine.

Indra proceeded towards the sadhu and bowed in front of him saying, "This transformation is amazing. I can only compete with worldly wealth and pleasures. But they pale in front of your spiritual light. The celestial heights you have reached on the spiritual path is impossible for me to reach and I am eligible only to touch your feet."

Jain philosophy and experiences show that the path that King has taken is indeed the right path for enlightenment. Life's journey is such that if you don't take decisions based on simple truths, you can not realize the path of truth which is difficult even for Gods to tread. Realization of truth is possible only by treading on the path of truth, but trying to realize it through the means of assumptions, ego etc., will push the person into further darkness. Truth cannot be realized by treading on the path of selfish and self-serving means.

As told in the Ishopanishad, "The real face of truth is hidden behind the glittering diamond studded vessels of ignorance and assumptions. One needs to discard these assumptions to face the truth."

On one side, we have a vision of illusion, and on the other, the vision of righteousness. The illusions are caused by our assumed knowledge of the senses (Mati Gyan) – the sights we see, the odour we smell, the tastes of the tongue, the sounds we hear, and the touches we feel. The knowledge we get out of these five senses is the basis for our illusion.

But there is another vision deep inside, which is of the mind. Our mind knows everything; it assesses and judges each action of ours. These six forms of senses are what guide us on the path of realization.

A human being thinks he has immense knowledge. What does a human being know in this vast universe? Sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste are the only things that a human knows, and that, too, within the limits of experiences of these senses. Beyond these, human beings fail to understand and lack awareness.

Human beings lack awareness on the matters of the soul. The senses take them not towards spiritual enlightenment but towards worldly things. Even in worldly things, they enable awareness just of five areas. Beyond these, if a human being has known other areas, it is through his mind and intellect. Where else is the knowledge of law, geography, astronomy, etc., coming from? All are formed with mind and intellect as the source.

Who are human beings? Some say the word Manushya comes from being descendants of Manu. Each thinker has his own definition of what human beings are. But all of them agree that they are the ones who use the mind and intellect. Human beings are the ones who think, analyze, assess the depth of life, understand, and empathize with others. It's the human spirit and the never-ending quest that pushes a person beyond worldly limits and helps him pursue the spiritual path. Human beings are torn between animal instincts and Godly instincts. Thus, they go through the ups and downs of joys and sorrows. Jainism says, "O Human, you are well capable of becoming God. It's good to explore the scriptures and gather more knowledge, but if you are unaware of the power of self, what is the use of those things? If you cannot understand fellow beings, what's the use of being a human?"

The physical form of our bodies is visible. It's visible in different colours and shapes. It is observed by the human eye as well as by the human soul. But what the eyes sees and what the soul observes are entirely different.

Mati Gyan as per Jainism is the knowledge arrived through the senses. But the perspective the senses create will lead to ignorance, and Righteous Vision alone will always lead to true knowledge. Shruta Gyan is the knowledge derived out of studying or hearing scriptures and books. Righteous vision coming out of Shruta Gyan is rewarding and correct.

Avadhi Gyan, relying on clairvoyance, is also fruitful when utilized for righteous vision. Even the benchmark, based on which one is judged as knowledgeable and others ignorant, is debatable, but we proceed considering this as a reliable benchmark.

THE RIGHTEOUS VISION:

If we treat the knowledge emerging from sensory perception as ignorance, then do we also consider the truth coming out of the same as untruth and the peace as violence? When viewed through righteous vision, it is indeed found to be so. This is because the lack of complete awareness makes us ignorant. No sect or faith can be judged based merely on sensory perceptions. In fact, in Jainism, no one is assumed to belong to any faith or sect by birth. It's possible that a non-Jain can have the vision of righteousness as well.

The sensory perceptions create ignorance as they are not supported by the intellect. Even if such a person comes across truth, he would not be able to assimilate the essence of truth due to the lack of intelligence. In contrast, if a person with the vision of righteousness, one who reads the scriptures or listens to discourses, misunderstands the truth, the leaders and saints will never fault him. This is because such a person would always base his judgements and actions on truth. Even if his judgements are wrong, the path of truth he follows would surely give him the correct results in the end.

Even if such a person realizes that his thinking and judgements have been wrong, he would graciously accept his mistake rather than let ego come in the way. He sacrifices all his vices and ego for the sake of truth.

The Agamas (Jain texts) state, “Judgements and decisions made on the spiritual path are to be based on intellect, knowledge and rational analysis. One who lacks such intelligence would never be able to walk on the right path due to the lack of the vision of righteousness.”

Once I met a foreigner who was well read and highly qualified. When I asked why he studies the Hindu scriptures and dwells on these philosophies, his response was that he wanted to get a good job in a university. Imagine if the reason behind his search is just to achieve a worldly goal as small as finding a job, then his knowledge and intellect are nothing in front of a commoner who would never have read or even heard of these scriptures but practices righteousness in his daily life.

A righteous person will always be on the correct path. If, due to circumstances, he unknowingly takes the wrong path, he would correct himself and return to the right path the moment he realizes his mistake. The person who sees with his righteous vision and always seeks truth, his intellect is righteous and even the wrong steps would lead to a righteous path.

TRUTH AND INTELLIGENCE:

Imagine a sadhu practicing his daily sadhana, partakes of food offered by a commoner. The sadhu takes care to eat only the right food. Despite this, if a food that he is not permitted to have is consumed by mistake, will he be considered wrong? No, our scriptures say that he is still righteous as he tried to follow the right path. In contrast, another sadhu who did not consciously seek to eat the right food but is given such food doesn't qualify to be called right. He did not even think or use his intelligence to seek the same.

What does this tell us? For righteousness, one must seek, think, and practice truthfulness, and it should not be just by mere coincidence. There should be genuine effort to seek the righteous path, only then can a person attain truthful self.

A preacher wrote a perspective on Uttaradhyayana Sutra and had misinterpreted an episode. Just because of that, do we all judge him to be wrong? If he wrote it with sincerity and truth alone as the base, his interpretations should not be judged as wrong. He is still the one with that righteous vision. However, even after realizing his mistake, if he persists in not correcting it, fearing other's censure, his ideology is based on false vision.

If someone writes a correct perspective without any mistakes, but purely with a desire to benefit in some way, then such an attempt, even if it is giving right results, cannot be called as a righteous path. The essence is that, just speaking, writing and replicating the right words does not mean the righteous path but it has to be genuinely felt, practiced and appreciated. As long as this genuineness is not reflected, the person is stuck in the muck of falsehood.

VISION AND INTELLECT:

Righteous and rational vision can turn even stone into gold. In fact, the sensory perception also sees the same truth but due to lack of rationale, it absorbs falsehood. Righteous vision, on the other hand, despite starting with a wrong perspective, eventually walks on the right path as it seeks truth. Hence it is imperative that one does not judge others merely by their actions but should seek and understand whether the intent behind their actions is true or not.

Chapter 7

Truth for Truth's Sake

“Joy and sorrow in life are merely the consequences of past actions. Every Soul is bound to face them, and hence, the focus of life should be to bear their consequences, by being detached.”

Truth is as essential in life as peace, non-stealing, celibacy and non-attachment. Just as the soul cannot be complete without all its attributes, truth is that main organ without which our spiritual journey remains incomplete. Unless there is intellect, seeking and thinking, there is no place for truth.

If a person speaks the truth because of compulsions or pressure, it doesn't reflect righteous truth. Being truthful does not mean merely stating facts. Even if all the world's miseries surround you, if you can still stick to the truth, then that is righteous path. Even if you are swamped with all the world's material pleasures, do not deviate from the path of truth.

A person who is unwavering in his faith for truthfulness would realize the inner self and become enlightened. Thus, his strong will and dedication would give miraculous powers to overcome any difficulty in life.

THE CORRECT ADDRESS:

Truth seeks truth and peace seeks peace. This may appear strange as truth and peace should be meant for bigger and larger things in life. Life's essence is purity, and what is purer than truth seeking just truth and peace seeking just peace?

The soul possesses varying attributes. Each right attribute helps remove a malice from the soul. Truth replaces falsehood, peace replaces anger, and greed is replaced by detachment, thus bringing solace to the soul. Imagine a person roaming the streets searching for a house without the address.

The person may have crossed the streets near that house without being unaware. If the person had the address and is guided appropriately, then he can reach his destination easily.

Similar is the case of the soul, aimlessly roaming around with avarices of greed, anger, fear, illusion etc. Once it gets rid of these avarices and realizes the self, the soul no longer suffers, roaming aimlessly. What's the essence of peace? Salvation. But what's the essence of salvation? Getting rid of all avarices of life.

THE PURE SOUL:

It is believed that salvation would mean detachment from all deeds. If you observe the path of salvation as defined, at various stages, the soul gets rid of avarices by replacing them with right attributes. At further stages of enlightenment, it embodies right and truthful attributes, removing any possibility of the rebirth of wrong avarices. This stage makes the soul pure and slowly from here it reaches a stage of complete detachment and enlightenment. This is the true state of salvation.

Some interpretations of our scriptures suggest that once the soul crosses the ultimate stage of cycle of life and reaches its final destination, salvation is attained. But the fact is that the moment the soul reaches complete detachment and becomes enlightened, that in itself is salvation and from then on, it's just a natural process to reach its destination.

Hence the attainment of salvation happens in this world as the soul gets purified here. Bhagwan Mahavira attained salvation here, and after that, his soul travelled to the Siddha state on crossing the 14 Gunasthanas or stages of purification. The soul's existence in a particular state is dependent on one's deeds and those deeds determine the results, and hence, the repercussions. So, the soul will be able to cross only as many stages as its deeds permit it to.

THE SOUL'S NATURAL INTENT:

As per Jain scriptures, the soul's intent is to progress to further stages and attain salvation. During a discussion with President Dr. Rajendra Prasad, he was asked as to how Jainism perceives the soul and its spiritual journey, and whether worldly souls are truly trying to attain salvation or are they on the reverse path of reaching a lower stage.

This can be viewed from two perspectives. The natural form of the soul is to traverse the path of progress to salvation, and hence, to be away from avarices. But there is a counter view that, in general, the soul moves towards avarices quite easily, but it must take a lot more effort to correct itself and go towards the righteous path. Which path is natural for a soul from the above two? Jainism believes that the natural path of the soul, is to go towards the righteous path and hence, it is difficult to go towards the avarices.

The scriptures say that if a soul goes to hell due to its bad deeds, the more time it spends in hell and faces the justice for its actions, the more it gets purified. The more it stays in hell and completes its retribution, the more it moves towards stages that take it eventually to salvation. This shows that the natural tendency of a soul is to move up on the path of righteousness and towards salvation, and not vice versa. The true nature of the soul is that wherever it goes, it tries to improve and move ahead in the path of salvation.

Why did King Shrenik end up in hell when he eventually became a sadhu and Tirthankara? His soul was burdened by his actions of the past, and it had to bear the consequences in hell. The time spent in hell helped his soul to slowly bear the consequences and get rid of the baggage, thus purifying and preparing his soul for the journey as a Tirthankara.

As Bhagwan Mahavira said, "O Seeker, don't despair about facing innumerable difficulties in your spiritual path."

These difficulties and troubles are because of the deeds of your past and have come to purify your soul. It's like a dirty cloth that is being cleaned, so don't despair, rather, be positive. Think of the spiritual progress that you would make once you are rid of this dirty baggage.”

Whether a sadhu or a commoner, everyone needs to understand that the difficulties being faced are merely to clean the soul and help in getting rid of the avarices. The seeker should feel glad that due to these difficulties, the soul is getting rid of the baggage of consequences from wrong actions.

Similarly, the fruits of good deeds are to be enjoyed only with the view that eventually the soul must be detached and continue the path towards salvation. One should not get blinded by the good that is happening in life. These things happen due to the past good deeds that were done. Hence the fruits should be enjoyed knowing very well that one day, these fruits will be out of stock as well. Ultimately, detachment and replacing all bad attributes in the soul by good attributes is what will help attain salvation.

The emperors who became Tirthankaras enjoyed their wealth and position fully conscious that these were bestowed due to their good deeds in the past. Ultimately, they need to get rid of this baggage as well. So, when happiness comes, stay detached; and when misery strikes, do not be disheartened. These are just results and consequences of your past actions.

Jainism preaches us to be detached in distress and in success. Allow things to happen their way and let not sorrow or joy affect you. Be balanced and maintain your composure.

Jainism says that happiness and difficulties are nothing but the consequences of your past actions. The principle of life is to let you bear these actions but at the same time you would keep adding new consequences due to your newer actions.

The ideal way is to stop adding consequences, good or bad, from your actions. This will help you to expend the consequences. As the outflow will increase, it will help you to be detached and attain salvation. The best way to do this is to be detached from everything in life, knowing fully that you are facing these situations only to bear the consequences of your past, and hence there is no need to be sad or overjoyed.

Acharya Shankara says, “All the shackles of old vices, consequences, burdens of past deeds, and actions can be broken by the power of the vows and thinking intelligently.”

Some karmas are prarabdha karmas, meaning collection of consequences of past life's actions. These need to be borne, irrespective of one's stature in current life. In fact, the only way to break these karmas is by bearing them and facing the consequences in a detached mode.

The fruit on the tree can be plucked as it ripens or it will fall on its own, once it ripens. Its fate is to fall from the tree. Similar are the consequences of life. They can be broken with pledge, intellect, thinking, or just by bearing them out.

Hence the path to reach the supreme soul, who is the source and destination of all souls, is to use vows, intellect, and clear thinking to break the shackles of past karmas. Be detached and refrain from adding new consequences or karmas by avoiding forbidden actions. Lastly, bear out indelible bondages or those karmas which are unavoidable.

Hence, the core of Jainism believes that all souls are pure and strive to attain good. If these souls strive to walk the path of righteousness; they indeed would be on the path to attain salvation. Once we realize this, we look at all souls around us with respect and feel no hatred. This realization helps us to be patient and understanding with all.

THE STREWN COINS:

Once a sadhu was travelling and a commoner asked him, “You are

travelling on a spiritual path, but do you have any money? How will you sustain?”

Smilingly the sadhu said, “I do not have any coins in my pocket, but I am sure there are many strewn around in the world. I will pick them whenever I need them.”

Surprised, the commoner asked, “How and where will you find these coins?”

The sadhu gave a beautiful response, “Human beings are good by nature and strive for purity in general. These are the valuable coins strewn around. I believe in their purity and seek them wherever I go.”

Similar is a Jain monk’s journey. There will be a son of the land who will lend a helping hand when someone is in need. There will be a mother who will gladly feed a hungry soul. Journey of life has to be like this, based on faith in humanity.

All human beings strive to be positive and reach a higher goal. If you have the right and conducive environment, you will strive to create a positive impact and move ahead in life. If Mahavira were asked why he was stuck on the path of salvation, he would surely say, “At the stage my soul has reached, I could not find an environment conducive to help me go further, hence I am stuck here. I am just like a fish that can swim rapidly till it reaches the shores. But after reaching the shores, a fish cannot travel further.”

Similar is the human body. It carries the soul only to a certain point with its burdens of karmas, good or bad. Once death comes, the soul becomes free of the baggage and moves forward to the next stage.

Imagine if you are a spiritual seeker and God appears saying, “You will attain salvation, but, if you spend a few thousand years in hell as repentance for your actions, you will attain moksha.

On the other hand, if you got to heaven, you will enjoy there for millions of years before attaining moksha. Which path will you choose?”

A true spiritual seeker would want to destroy this cycle of birth and death as quickly as possible and attain salvation. He will not resist the suffering for a shorter duration nor will he exchange it for a longer duration of heavenly joy. If the seeker gets lured by joys rather than pain, he is still not detached in the true sense, and hence is ineligible for salvation or moksha.

Shrenik was distraught and crying at the feet of Bhagwan Mahavira since he had to spend time in Hell. Bhagwan told him, “Why do you cry? After spending a few thousand years in hell, your soul will be as pure as mine and you will be a Tirthankara.” On hearing this, Shrenik was overjoyed, “Then I will happily go to hell for a few thousand years. These years will be over in a jiffy!”

This is what a rational vision gives to a soul. A person can see sorrow and joy through the same lens. There is no differentiation. The only aim is to bear the consequences of all the actions and free the soul for the onward journey towards salvation.

Chapter 8

Truth and Weaknesses

“Truth is the only weapon to effectively wipeout the weaknesses and avarices such as greed, fear, anger, lust, ego or hypocrisy.”

We have discussed various aspects of truth until now. Still, the canvas of truth is so vast that our intellect cannot reach its complete depth. How can mere speech fathom the intricacies of truth? But we do not have any other means to discuss such matters. Hence, we must strive to understand the principle of truth within the framework of the two powers, namely intellect and speech.

We have already stated that truth is not merely an act of speech. That is just one part of seeking truth. Righteous and truthful soul is more powerful than stating the truth orally. Our life is enormous in its scope. It entails responsibility of the self, our surroundings, and the entire world. It needs to run on the basis of truth, but unfortunately, it is limited to the truth that is being spoken. But, merely speaking the truth is an incomplete form of accepting truth.

The genuineness with which truth needs to be followed has to be imbibed in our thinking, practice and implementation in all aspects of our life. Else, it's merely an act of boasting. Our scriptures speak about truth magnanimously, giving examples which seem beyond human capacity. But, we tend to think that most of these stories are merely fiction.

Goddess Sita was asked to jump into fire to prove her sanctity. The mountain of pain and sorrow did not stop her. Before jumping into the fire, she said, “Whatever has happened in each day of my life, be it in Ayodhya's palace as a queen or as a captive in Ravana's Ashokavana, if my soul is genuinely pure, let the fire turn into water.” Indeed, the fire turned into water and she came out unscathed. In the examples of Draupadi, Sita, Anjana or any great woman's story, we have heard about the power

of being truthful and its huge miraculous impact.

OUTSIDE – INSIDE:

Does inner awareness influence external awareness and knowledge about outside world or is it vice versa? On one hand, it's the self-awareness and intellect within the body and soul, and on the other, it's the outward universal intellect. Let us see some examples of how external world influences the inner intelligence and hence our feelings or behaviour.

When you meet a thief, your inner psyche gets disturbed by fear. When you meet a learned person, you feel pleasant and peaceful. If someone rejects you, you burn with anger. It appears that your inner self is getting influenced by the outside world.

What is the zone of this influence? To what extent is the external intellect able to influence one's inner being? Saints and Siddhas like Bhagwan Mahavira and Parshvanath reached a stage of absolute knowledge. These self-realized souls were never influenced by the outer world's paraphernalia; they had immense power to influence the outer world with their intellect. This proves that as long as our soul is in the lower stages of its journey to salvation, we get influenced by the outer world. Once we realize our true inner power, we gain the power to influence the outer world.

There is a difference between truth and righteous truth. How can there be such a difference, when truth should simply be the truth? We embody truth in our actions and deeds, but when we see that society and our surroundings are not in a position to accept the truth, we waver and discard the truth. If righteousness was an essential element of truth, we would stand by it. Societal pressure would not have deterred us from our stand for truth.

When we say that truth seeks truth, our resolve should be so strong that it cannot be influenced by external factors. If seeking truth itself becomes a

pledge of truth, then no external influence can stand in the way of truth, and in turn, you will begin to exert a powerful influence on society.

TRUTH IN INTENTION:

This is a story of two students who went to their village bazaar. They saw an apple cart and wanted to taste an apple.

“But we do not have money,” said one of them.

“Yes, our guru told never to lie and always stick to the truth,” said the other.

“If we tell the truth, we will never be able to eat the apple.” Both were disappointed.

“I have a trick wherein we can speak the truth and still get an apple,” one of them suddenly said.

Both went and stood near the cart. While the apple seller was busy with other clients, one student picked an apple and put it into his friend's bag. When the seller asked the boys whether they had stolen the apple, the one with the apple in the bag replied saying, “I have never touched the apple, and if I did, I am ready to face the wrath of God!”

When the seller turned towards the other boy, he replied, “I do not have any apple in my bag, and if I have, I am ready to face the wrath of the God.” Hearing this, the seller turned away and got busy.

The two boys gladly went and ate the apple thinking, “See, we did not lie but managed to able to eat an apple.” Such is the duality of truth and lies. Both cannot coexist in our soul. Just as Rama and Ravana cannot sit together on a single throne, truth and lies can not stay together in the soul.

Sometimes we speak to escape the consequences of speaking the truth. It's merely playing with words to escape from a certain situation.

The intention is not to truly abide by truth but to conveniently get away with merely stating the facts. A person who consciously knows that something is a lie and yet speaks the lie can eventually shift towards truth, but the one who knowingly manipulates the truth by playing with words can never be on the righteous path. He is regressing instead of progressing on the path of salvation.

A righteous truth is one which does not get influenced by anger, greed, lust or illusion, and which doesn't hide behind any wordplay. When truth is genuinely felt, there won't be any need to slip around the truth. However, if words are uttered superficially in the name of truth, then you will find many such deceitful ways.

Nowadays society has started accepting the twisted form of truth as a compromise. People do talk about evil practices in society but when asked to stand against such practices, they start expressing helplessness. One example is the huge wedding expense, which everyone agrees is a burden and unnecessary expense. But when asked to oppose it, they shy away from taking any action, stating, "What to do, it has become a norm to spend such large amounts." This is a classic example of knowing and speaking truth just for the sake of words, but not having the intent to stand by the same.

TRUTH VERSUS TRADITION:

This escapism of adding 'But what to do, we must adjust according to societal norms,' has become a disease in our spiritual world and national integrity, and slowly in all walks of life including politics. This kind of compromise drags our soul downhill as you are not standing up for truth, but merely speaking truth for the sake of truth. There is no value of speaking such truth as it is merely stating facts to survive, without any belief in its intent. Such thinking is a major setback as it dilutes the impact of the social revolutions that are needed to reform society. Thus, it not only impacts you as an individual, but impacts your entire society as well.

Nowadays human beings talk a lot about spirituality but do not try to implement basic changes to improve their livelihood. You will find many people, without any intention of maintaining basic hygiene or cleanliness as well, talking about salvation and moksha. It appears as though they are disinterested in their own living style, yet somehow want to go elsewhere, where things are beautifully prearranged for them.

Instead of facing the ground reality, people try to live in escapism. But this can only hamper society further in lieu of bringing about revolution and reform.

In many villages, if someone expires in a family, they follow the practice of crying in sorrow, albeit loudly and painfully for days, especially the women of the house. In fact, their near and dear ones would also join them for days and months, extending the mourning period. Is this not a societal practice that is spreading negativity?

As per our scriptures, when there is a death in a house, one needs to console the grieving by speaking about immortality of the soul versus the transient nature of our life in this world. Bhagwan Mahavira has stated, wherever there is pain and sorrow, it only indicates attachment to the worldly things, which needs to be severed.

If someone is crying, be the one to wipe tears. Bring them peace and solve their troubles. If a bread earner in a family dies, merely expressing sorrow doesn't help, but assisting their livelihood will. If you cannot help address their problems, what is the value of mere words of condolence?

THE BLIND BELIEF OF SATI:

The practice of Sati in some parts of India, where the wife of a deceased man would also sit on the pyre and offer herself to death, was based on a belief that she could accompany her husband's soul. This is indeed a blind

faith. In his time, Bhagwan Mahavira put in efforts to stop such menace in society. He called them immature and ignorant practices. He punctured their blind faith by explaining that the soul and its journey are solely dependent on an individual's karma. There is no guarantee that the wife's karma and the husband's karma are intertwined, or that she would definitely meet her husband's soul after his death. Just imagine, what if the deceased husband's soul is pushed to hell or he gets a rebirth as some insect?

This doesn't mean that entire society of those times followed the same blind faith. There were rational people who strove to raise their voices against these practices and help people overcome their sorrows. Even in the current times, such rational thinkers exist. We must follow them and make such people our role models.

Here, I will share a story of a sadhu named Anandghan. One day while he was walking, he noticed a pyre being set and a young woman standing nearby ready to jump into the fire. When he approached the people gathered there, he was told, "A landlord's son has expired, and his widow is getting herself ready to die and join him in the afterlife." The sadhu was shocked.

He went to her and said, "Sister, what are you intending to do? Do you realize what you are doing is suicide? You did not play any role in your husband's death. You did not murder him, but in lieu of that, tried your best to revive his life. Then why should you sacrifice yourself to blind faith? Do you even know where your deceased husband's soul has gone? Then how can you be sure to join him in the afterlife? Bhagwan Mahavira has mentioned that committing suicide is a sin and it will never get your soul to a higher stage on the path to salvation. What if your deceased husband's soul, depending on his past actions, is going to a higher stage? Your death would then be futile. And what if he is going to hell because of his past deeds, why do you want to join him there? Both of you have to bear your consequences individually in the afterlife." He spoke further, "Did you love his body or his soul? If it was the body, then the body is still here. It has not gone anywhere?"

So why would you commit suicide for that? If you loved his soul, then there is no concept of death to the soul. Soul is eternal and his soul has just changed the carrier body and moved on to wear the next body, assigned per his fate and past karma. This is independent and irrespective of your soul's fate. Then what is the point of destroying the beautiful human life that is given to you?"

Saying this, he convinced the woman not to be a victim of a wrong social practice. Later, the woman reformed herself and went on to become a successful businesswoman, and carried out a lot of social work.

A society where such practices and forceful celebrations for death are still being followed is a regressive society that needs to reform.

Chapter 9

The Pillar of Humanity

“The root of religion is humanity and as a person’s humanitarian attributes reaches its peak, the true essence of spirituality also spreads wide across the world.”

Observe your surroundings. There are innumerable living beings in different lifeforms around you. It is beyond comprehension to count these living forms. Just imagine, if this is just on earth, what about beyond it?

In this infinite Universe, what would be our role as human beings? Are we just a drop in the enormous ocean?

CYCLE OF LIFE:

What is human life? The scriptures say that to get a human form, the soul must cross millions of life cycles since it is very difficult to get the human form.

There is the story of a God who came up with a rather crazy idea. He broke a pillar made of diamonds and crushed it into powder. He then took this powder and threw it around the world from the top of the mighty Mount Meru. He then decided to collect all the strewn powder and rebuild the diamond pillar once again. Can you imagine how impossible such a task would have been! A Soul getting a human form is said to be an even more difficult task.

Now, imagine that you get such a form because of your good deeds, and yet lose it because of your bad deeds. If you once again slip down the cycle of life, it would be next to impossible to get the human lifeform once again. The uniqueness of human form is due to the means and essence of spirituality, as well as the presence of virtues such as truth,

peace, kindness, and duty. All these virtues are attributes of human life and they make human life truly special.

The Gods have been shown as joyous and abundant in the scriptures. Yet, a human form is given a higher status than the celestial lifeform. Any other form of life does not have the intellect to seek higher spiritual growth in life.

As per the scriptures, the creation of human form cannot happen in a place where there is enormous pain and sorrow such as hell, nor can it happen in a place where there is just joy, bliss and happiness such as heaven.

Human life is a balanced combination of happiness and sorrow. This combination brings sweetness to human life. It inspires us to understand the essence of joy and sorrow.

There is a beautiful example explaining the same. When a cloudy night completely hides the moon, it doesn't inspire us. So also, if the moon is shining in a clear night sky, it doesn't inspire us either. It is the hide and seek of the partly cloudy sky and the moon which makes for an interesting and joyous view.

This is the essence of human life. It's a mixture of pain and joy, and the more a person experiences it, the more he realizes that other living beings go through the similar cycle of joy and pain. Thus, a person learns to empathize and understands that just like him, others too need help when they are in pain and sorrow. And just like him, others also need people to share joy with. Thus, a beautiful society gets created with the virtues of sharing and caring for one another.

We need to realize that just as we feel joy and happiness when good things happen to us, others too have similar needs and feelings. As a human being observes his own self with the measure of pain and joy, he applies

the same measure to understand others as well. This creates a beautiful society driven by the values of humanity and co-operation.

Religions which have been successful, have presented compassionate lessons from the experiences of human beings, thus depicting the canvas of human nature. This acts as a mirror to human life and has been the major source of spiritual learning and growth. The virtues of truth, peace, kindness, etc., can be taught and imbibed, but they become integrated as if they are natural ingredients of human nature.

Our scriptures have often mentioned that the positive and good virtues are a natural part of human self and by no means can be imparted by external effort. When a sweetener is mixed in water, though it's an external addition, it lends sweetness to the very nature of water, and enralls whoever drinks it but that does not mean that water loses its true nature and qualities of quenching thirst. Similar are the virtues of good deeds in human life. The external additions can never replace the true self of human being, but can only enhance the same.

SPIRITUALITY AS TRUE NATURE:

As Bhagwan Mahavira said, "Being spiritual is the true nature of the soul."

Good virtues cannot be pushed into human nature by any external force. All that is happening is an inner awakening of the virtues that have been subdued. Due to avarices and bad habits, these virtues get suppressed and hence need an awakening.

Our saints have stated that the human form is in itself an awakened soul. This means that virtues are already ingrained in the nature of human beings, and all that is required is to awaken the dormant virtues. The soul is ignited, and the spark of spirituality gets awaked within, as this is true nature of the soul.

On the other hand, the spark needs to exist within. If a human being doesn't even show the spark, or intention to have the journey towards the path of salvation, who can help such a soul?

GURU AND DISCIPLE:

There is an interesting conversation between Acharya Ramanuja and a seeker. The seeker approached Acharya and asked to be tutored. Ramanuja said, "I will ask you a question. Whom do you love in your family? Mother, father, brother, sister or someone else. Is there anyone you love?"

The seeker replied, "No one, Guruji. I am detached and do not love anyone." His reply was artificial and born out of his general knowledge about spirituality.

Ramanuja then said, "In that case, I cannot teach you. If there was even a small seed of love for someone in your heart, I could have put in effort and expanded its horizon beyond your family. That would have helped you to love your society, country, and world. I have the skill only to nourish the seed to make it grow into a large fruitful tree. But you don't even have the seed in you. I am not skilled to put the seed in you my friend. The seed has to be within. External guidance by a Guru can only give it life."

Similar is the role of religion and scriptures. A religion can play a role only to expand the inner humanity. It can teach a human being to broaden the love, affection, kindness and righteousness which exist within. If a person goes to a jeweler and asks to polish the jewel and make it shine bright but doesn't even possess the jewel in the first place, what can the jeweler do?

Thus, any religion including Jainism can only help enhance your spirituality and humanity. If one doesn't even have the virtues and humanity within, no religion can help such a person.

VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE:

Saint Tulsidas has said, "It's after umpteen efforts that you get human life. It's one's good fortune that one gets birth as a human being." Why is human life so valuable? Is it because of the body or its organs? No, it is valuable because of its humane nature. It's foolishness to think that we were born as human beings from the very beginning. Jainism says that the soul takes a human form after multiple lives, but unless it realizes the humanity within, its rebirth in a human form is of no use.

History tells us that Rama was born in a human form as was Ravana. Why then do people pray to one and burn the other on Dusshera festival?

Bhagwan Mahavira said, "Human form in itself is not a great thing but the human attribute of being compassionate and selfless, is indeed the greatest achievement. Monkeys also resemble human beings, so what is the difference?"

When a bird is born, it doesn't know to fly. It has two lives. First, it is born as an egg, but it cannot do anything in this form. It just has to wait, hoping that the egg doesn't get eaten away or crushed. Once it breaks open naturally, the bird takes a second birth. That's when it can do things on its own. Similar is human life. In a mother's womb, the soul just takes human form. It has to carry on the destiny from the past and can do nothing else but wait. Once born, its actions determine whether the person will become Rama or Ravana.

The day you realize the value of humanity in life and begin to enlighten the people around you, by spreading the spiritual message, that's when you are said to have taken the second birth as a human being - the ideal form for self-realization. That means, we can attain self-realization and know the true purpose of our soul's existence, only after realizing the spirit of humanity and serving the society around us.

Bhagwan Mahavira said in his last words, “Truly, human life is most difficult.”

Thousands of people were with Bhagwan on his last journey. Most believed themselves to be true human beings, just because of their forms. The real nature of human being is to realize humanity within and focus on serving the society.

Bhagwan Mahavira stated four major points for the betterment of human life. Of those, being aligned to one’s true nature (prakriti baddh), is of paramount importance.

Human beings should remember that they should always be aligned with the true nature of their soul. It should not be that they behave in one way when alone, and in another when with family, and altogether differently in front of the world. This multifarious life is not at all qualified to gain enlightenment and salvation. One must be true to one’s self. The same behavior must be displayed when one is alone, in front of the family, or in front of the world.

But the unfortunate trend in the world is that distrust has become a norm. A person’s work is supervised by multiple layers of higher management and it is considered normal. Where does the root cause of this distrust come from?

It is coming from the lack of belief in people. A person working on a job is more scared of being watched and caught, hence focuses to complete his work correctly and on time. This attitude means that the person is doing his duty out of fear. The fear of being watched by others is his motive. Such an attitude can never bring out the best in anyone nor allow the person to enjoy his work. Such people work only for money or out of a sense of misplaced duty.

When a person behaves out of fear, he may pretend to be humble at work, but will often resort to violence at other places, including at home. This is unacceptable. In fact, the more he fears his boss at work, the more dominating and ruthless he becomes towards his family. This unfortunately has become the order of the day in society. The person who adopts uniformity and aligns his behavior with his true nature will move ahead successfully on the path to salvation.

King Bharat once said, “This entire world is your home and all of us are birds in the same nest. Wherever a person goes, he should spread the fragrance uniformly.” A rose flower spreads its fragrance irrespective of the place and stage of its life. If it blossoms even in a deserted garden, spreading its fragrance is its nature. It doesn’t hold back thinking that no one is there to admire it. Similarly, if a human being doesn’t show his true behavior as per his nature, he would be suppressed by people all around him. This leads to downfall of the society.

The Hindu philosophy brings an important message to human life. You should be truthful to the God within. If you are truthful to the supreme power inside, then you will be truthful to the people and society around you. If not, you will always be untruthful.

What is the heart? Is it a pound of flesh, pumping blood? If you do not fill it with compassion, kindness and humanity, it will remain merely as a pound of flesh. When catastrophes hit, thousands suffer while a few exploit the situation instead of extending help. When riots were happening on the streets of Delhi, people were suffering and crying out for help, but some were ruthlessly looting away. What sort of heartless behavior is this? Isn’t this the land of Rama and Krishna, Buddha and Mahavira? Aren’t we proud that this land gave their teachings to the world? Such behavior comes from not realizing that we comprise the society. We ought to realize that this entire universe is our home, and we are responsible for the universe, and such self-realization is what we respect in Jainism.

Chapter 10

Truth in Practical Life

“Truth sometimes understands, accommodates itself to the circumstances, and even waits, but not for long.”

We have been discussing the various aspects of truth and it's indeed difficult to capture the vast essence of truth in a few words. Peace and truth should co-exist, but in the world, we see that the message of peace spreads rapidly, unlike the message of truth. This must be because truth is not imbibed as the core principle in practical life.

For inculcating truth in our daily life, we need to keep our consciousness awake at all times so that it can help us stick to the truth in all circumstances. Truth has to fight in every space and push for its existence.

Let's discuss about some of the practical aspects of truth. Imagine you are invited for dinner by a family. You agree to be there at a particular time. The family is waiting for you, but you got caught in some discussion and forgot the time. This might look like an irrelevant and insignificant oversight, but shows your utter lack of respect for time and commitment. The promise of arriving on time was not true for you. Truth is not reflected in your nature in this case. You could have tried to inform the host about the delay. Such a small act would have upheld the sanctity of your promise.

In our country, an organizer announces that an event will begin at 7:30 PM, but it starts after 8 PM. Both the organizer and the guests know that the event will not start as scheduled and so are slack about it.

Anyone who arrives at 7:30 punctually will be astonished to find the auditorium empty. This is the unfortunate state of affairs in our country. This shows the respect and value of truth in public life and society.

Remember the Britons who ruled our country? One good thing about them was their punctuality

If one overlooks the ills and vices perpetuated by their occupation of our country, this one aspect of their culture was indeed appreciable. Unfortunately, we imitate their dressing and eating habits, which are irrelevant for us, but have not learnt to be punctual despite being in touch with them for more than hundred years.

Small things together make a big impact and bring in relevance of truth in our lives. We cannot ignore these small things thinking they are irrelevant. But, one large brick cannot build an entire palace. Several small bricks are needed to make the palace stand.

Similarly, we cover ourselves up with a blanket to protect us from cold or heat. Imagine the value of the blanket if the blanket threads were not attached together. Will the blanket have any value? We don't value truth in these small things, but respect Raja Harishchandra for his staunch truthfulness.

With this duality in ethics, we neither end up as per our true nature nor as Raja Harishchandra. People set up companies and assign roles for various top positions. Some of these elected people stick to their authority but do nothing constructive as their role demands. This is another example of falsehood. If a person is incapable of or uninterested in performing one's duties, he or she should not deprive an eligible person who is more dutiful, from doing that job.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY:

An old lady once reached the court of Emperor Alexander the Great. "My son is being unjustly punished in one of the far-off regions of your empire. No one there listened to me, so I came to seek justice from you. Please help."

The emperor said, "My empire is huge and extends across continents. How do you expect me to control administration everywhere? Some injustice is bound to happen in some corner, but I cannot be there to solve every problem."

Furious, she said, "If you cannot take responsibility for administration, then why do you conquer far off lands and proclaim yourself to be an emperor? Do you only seek the authority but not the responsibility that comes with it?" This made the emperor realize his folly.

Similar is the fate of the head of a family. If the family size keeps increasing, he cannot shrug off his responsibilities by saying it's beyond his capacity to feed all of them. Then why in the first place should he let the family grow to such a large number? When you cannot fulfil your responsibilities, then why do you try to acquire beyond your capacity?

Earlier, Jainism had spread widely, but now it has diminished and become a minority religion. The leaders of the religion should focus on whether the children are getting the right education and skills or not, whether the women are getting the right means to cater to their needs or not. Instead of focusing on increasing the numbers in Jain community, efforts must be made to uplift the downtrodden and support the needy amongst the present members.

I have a question for our shravakas. What right do you have to even ask for increasing the number of members when you can't take responsibility of your own fold? You must first feed the needy of the households you count as part of your fold. Then you have the right to seek others to join you and to increase your numbers. Let me give you an example from my experience.

We sadhus once decided to go to villages and preach. After we went to one nearby village and conducted our sessions, we asked them if there was any other village nearby.

We were told there is one village but the folks there had turned away from Jainism and are now Arya Samajis.

With the help of an old man, we went to that village despite being warned that people there were not receptive and could even harm us. We were stationed there and successfully convinced a few families to join the fold. But there was one person who was very argumentative and questioned all the concepts of Jainism.

After a few years, this man fell ill and his son brought him to Agra where we were stationed coincidentally. His son was by then a staunch follower. As he had some work, he requested us to keep an eye on his father when he was away.

When we went to the hospital, the old man was very glad and appreciated that we came to meet him despite his negative behavior towards us in his village. We said, "A sadhu will never think like the commoner. His behavior will be the same, come whatsoever."

The old man had to be shifted to Bihar for further treatment and was helped by the Jain society. When he got cured, he repented and sent a letter saying the religion has won him over. Thus, we could change the heart of a strict non-follower.

The reason I tell this story to the shravakas counting the numbers in the Jain fold is to show a gentler way to bring a change in the hearts of the people by creating positivity and trust in Jainism.

The essence of this discussion is to stay away from the falsehood of merely counting numbers and not actually taking responsibility of the ones already in the fold. These are some of the small examples of practical applications of truth in daily life for creating a righteous and truthful path for a person's salvation.

Chapter 11 Choosing Truth over Superstitions

"If you have done good deeds, your karma will take you forward and no strength in the world can stop you. If your deeds are bad, your bad karma will fail you irrespective of how much power you have."

In a vast country like India, we have millions of Gods and Goddesses; they have the names of rivers, trees, and mountains. There are man-made idols as well. People become slaves to these Gods and their rituals in the hope that nothing untoward should happen to their families, near and dear ones. Just imagine how much wealth is being spent on these holy shrines and religious practices. Human beings desire things such as health, prosperity, and progeny, and follow superstitions in the expectation that a God or a Goddess will grant them a boon.

It's very strange that this is happening in the land of India. Our land had a thriving rational culture driven by spiritual focus towards attaining salvation. Such a culture has no place for superstitious practices. A society stuck in rustic, rudimentary rituals and superstitions can never prosper and progress.

For a society to succeed, all its parts should have the right amount of intellect. Imagine a human being with a huge head but a stick like body frame, or a person with elephant like legs but with tiny hands, or vice versa. This would not be considered correct and uniform growth. In the same way, society should have uniform intellect across levels for sensible growth. Progressive thinking and practices are a must for prosperity.

SPENDING WITH WISDOM:

Human beings who behave as per the circumstances and people around are not genuine and stable. A person behaves humbly at his work due to pressure and behaves like a demon at home.

Another behaves like a sadhu at home and but as a dominating demon at work. The first one values his society while the second one values just his family. Needless to say, both are not on the correct path.

The one who can behave in a uniform way, true to his nature, at all times is the one who will grow on the path to salvation. Such people will be the learned, enlightened souls whose presence spreads fragrance and creates joy in the lives of the people around.

Very few can be found treading this enlightenment path. In fact, those who seem to be and boast of being learned are running after holy shrines and donating thousands and millions in search of material things. It is indeed shocking to see even Jain followers doing this. The philosophy preaches that the Supreme Soul is detached and enlightened, who looks and treats everyone in the same manner irrespective of his deeds.

Even amongst idol-worshippers one can find many like Gautama who pray genuinely, and there may be those who curse and insult the God. The enlightened Supreme Soul treats both kinds of people alike.

Uttaradhyayana Sutra says, “On the one hand is a gentle person is applying sandalwood paste with devotion to God, and on the other, a harsh one chiselling the skin and flesh. The Supreme Soul will have the same level of detachment for both the people.”

Now, the people who claim to be devotees of such Gods should know that whatever their fate is as a consequence of their actions, they should bear it. No God can help change the fate and take away your burden of the consequences. Still these so-called devotees run around across the country to various shrines and offer thousands and millions as donations. Just imagine how many billions worth of money and resources are offered in these holy shrines. And yet, those dumping the donation do not realize that the beggars outside these holy shrines, too, are children of the same God.

Why should those needy children of God not be served? Why should efforts not be made to uplift their lot? This is the question to ask the so-called genuine followers. In the name of offering bhog, auctions happen to determine who would pour sacred water on the statues. Why shouldn't that amount be distributed directly amongst the needy?

NEEDS AND RESOURCES:

When we pray, we praise the divine power that makes the sun and moon shine, and the stars as well. Knowing its immense power, why do we light a lamp in our pooja room? Does it make any sense to offer light to the divine power which is full of light. This is similar to the problem in our society – we spend our resources without checking the need.

We constantly see that those sadhus who have made their name and fame, are well cushioned with money bags, and who can take care of their well-being very handsomely, get disciples who flock to these gurus and offer more donation. The same disciple would hesitate to give even a penny to the sadhu who is not so clever in achieving fame, and hence has a simple and humble means of living. Despite both the saints belonging to the same sect, why should such discrimination be shown?

Why should it rain where there is no need of water while another place remains parched? What is the use of rain in an ocean? What's the value in offering a sumptuous meal to the well-sated?

We see that there are saints who are genuinely spiritual, yet struggle for a meal. They do not have the means to make the ends meet. Such sadhus never get financial support from wealthy devotees, but lakhs would be dumped into the donation boxes of temples with the greed for crores. There are many organizations which do social service and strive for the upliftment of needy in society but are starving for funds. Aren't these organizations more deserving than the cash rich holy shrines of religions?

Can't the amount of resources that are being wasted on these holy shrines be used to uplift the society as a whole? Imagine the impact it can have in developing the country and society. This entire cycle is being run on fear. I want to ask, why and what should you fear of a human life? Fear of losing money, life etc., aren't they an illusion?

Whatever has to happen will happen, and whatever is not meant to will never happen. This is the principle of karma. If you are destined to face a consequence due to past actions, no amount of donation can help to change it.

THE HERD MENTALITY

Jain philosophy clearly says, "Whatever good or bad you had done will fetch the equivalent good or bad consequence. What can others give you? It's your own actions that determine what will be the consequences and hence your fate. Only you can make the effort to your fate; hence it's self-belief that is going to get you what you deserve."

Jainism has examples where even a God as great as Indra was challenged that he cannot change a person's fate, because what has to happen will happen. The same applies to God. Even the Supreme Soul cannot change our fate and consequences of our karmas. It's unfortunate that the followers of such a philosophy are running in fear from one shrine to another. It has become a herd mentality.

Once I was travelling in north India and saw hundreds of people travelling in a procession singing bhajans and carrying their crying children along, unmindful of the difficulties faced by the weakest amongst them. When asked where they were going, they replied that they were going to Sati ka mela. Do they know the history and significance of that mela? None knew. Just as a part of herd, all were going to the so-called mela, where as a memorial celebration of the Queen who died 100 years ago by jumping into a pyre, two groups will throw stones at each other as part of the ritual.

Whether the Gods and Goddesses approve this kind of madness, no one knows, but the concept of animal sacrifice in the name of festivals, too, is another cruel superstition. Once a friend went to the Kali temple in Kolkata. The priest asked him if he wanted the tilak on the forehead. The friend agreed, and to his astonishment, the priest dipped his finger into a bowl filled with animal blood and was about to apply. When he resisted, he was told the Goddess would be angry. Not caring, he excused himself saying he cannot celebrate the death of an innocent animal in the name of a ritual and came away.

I read recently, there has been an earthquake in the North East. It was so severe that rivers changed their course and started flooding villages. The people there feared that the Goddess was angry, and to appease her, they started throwing dogs in the river, thinking that such a sacrifice will make her happy. Isn't this height of superstition?

If a philosophy such as Jainism helps remove the superstitious beliefs from these minds, most of these Gods and Goddesses who seek sacrifice would not have their worshippers. A devotee was convinced that his wife would bear a male child if they are made to bathe in the fresh blood of a boy. Thus, on an auspicious day, this man from Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh killed a boy. As the news spread, the family got arrested and were defamed for the blind faith and wrong action.

One has to realize that no external force can help change your fate, only your actions can. can.

THE POWER OF RESOLVE:

Once, a shepherd who was watching his cattle graze in a jungle saw Bhagwan Mahavira in meditation. He approached Bhagwan and said, "I urgently need to go to the village and return in a few minutes. Please watch over my cattle till I return." But Bhagwan Mahavira was deep in meditation and did not hear him.

The shepherd mistook his silence as agreement and proceeded to his village.

On his return, to his dismay, the shepherd found his cattle dispersed in different directions. Since he was unable to find them all, he got furious and blamed Bhagwan Mahavira, even suspecting the latter of having stolen his cattle. He started beating the Bhagwan with his stick in anger.

Bhagwan Mahavira was still deep in meditation and hence he was unmoved by the treatment his physical body was receiving. Bhagwan Indra saw this and became furious. He came down and was about to destroy the shepherd for his foolishness. That's when Bhagwan Mahavira spoke, "There is no point in harming him. It will not erase the mistrust the society has built in his heart. He doubted me because of the general mistrust in the society and thought I was a thief. Just by punishing him, this disease of mistrust cannot be cured."

Indra was astonished at this philosophy and said, "O Bhagwan, it's such a difficult task that you have taken up. It is next to impossible nowadays to even think of curing the society of mistrust. There will be daggers drawn to hurt you, and stones will be thrown at you for speaking against the madness in the society. Let me be your disciple and help protect you. Thus, you can easily achieve what you want."

Bhagwan Mahavira said something beautiful which resonates in spiritual circles even today:

"What you have uttered has never happened, and will never happen."

Tirthankara will accomplish the tasks they set out to achieve with their own efforts. No one else can shower mercy or support them in their tasks. He said, "I will face the consequences of my actions on my own strength. Not by seeking protection from someone else."

I never even intended to depend on someone else. When you feel dependent on others, it's your weakness, and a weak soul can never progress on the path to salvation."

For twelve-and-a-half years, Bhagwan Mahavira struggled at every step in his efforts to reform the society. He faced numerous difficulties in his task to rid the society of its malice and superstitions. We know that the period of his tapasya was filled with difficulties and obstacles, but his spiritual power and divine aura increased just like gold shining brighter after burning in fire.

As his teachings show, since the fate of a soul has can only be changed by the person themselves, what is the point of blindly following superstitions and praying to the Gods and Goddesses? Numerous catastrophes and natural disasters struck, millions are butchered in the name of religion, women are targeted, but did any of these Gods and Goddesses react? Did they even turn around in their temples to show their displeasure?

Jainism does not question the existence of the Gods and Goddesses. It only disagrees with the blind faith and superstitious behaviour in following these Gods and Goddesses. Unless the superstitious beliefs are abandoned, society will not start valuing truth in its real essence.

Truth and righteousness are integral parts of life. Imagine a seeker is keeping a vow called samayika. If his soul, mind, words, and body are not truly involved in the practice, it is not a successful pledge. People have kept elaborate and enormous pledges since time immemorial. Once I was asked, "In olden days, when large vows were being kept, it used to create a huge impact. Sometimes it used to rattle even the Bhagwan of Gods, Indra. Nowadays we don't see such power despite major vows such as fasting for a month being undertaken."

I responded saying, "Those days were different and these days are different. The results of vows depend on the times and needs of society."

But a vow is a vow. The core impact will remain the same. Honey was sweet in those days and sweet now as well.”

Centuries old Ayurvedic principles remain valid and intact. The Ayurvedic medicines and herbs have not changed their power or ability to cure. Truth is not limited by time, nor is it time bound. When there is sincerity and genuineness in a vow, then it would be fruitful. If one keeps a vow without involving his mind, intellect and body, his pledge is not genuine. When it lacks truth, then how can one expect a result?

Nowadays, whoever keeps a pledge is assumed to be very powerful and is hence high-handed all the time. This becomes a false assumption and we project such impression in our mind accepting such a behavior.

A real person keeping a pledge will never lose his stability and calmness. All know that the great Sant Tukaram's life lacked domestic peace. His wife was always angry, and he, calm and composed. When people asked him about his quarrelsome wife, he would smile and reply, “What else should I say, God is kind to us that he gave three different people one home and one life by making us part of one family.”

People were puzzled as to how it's a blessing from God. His reply was astonishing, “You may spend days roaming around the world seeking a person who can test your composure. But I am lucky that I get to undergo the test daily. Similar is the luck of my family that each gets to test their own true nature. So is it not God's blessing to have such an environment at home which will help you evolve in your spiritual journey?”

One day he went out to work and could get only a sugarcane as payment for his service. When he brought that home and gave it to his wife, she got furious and said, “You have been out since morning and came back with just a sugarcane in the afternoon? What will we three eat?” Saying so, she took the sugarcane and hit it with such force that it broke into three pieces!

He smilingly said, “Wow, see the greatness of God! It automatically broke into three pieces. It solved our dilemma of what and how to eat; one piece for our son, one for you and last one for me.” Such a perspective of seeing everything positively and retaining composure reflected his true nature. Eventually his wife repented and joined him in his ways, mending her thinking and manners.

A person living with his mind, soul and actions reflecting righteousness and truth will grow immensely on the path to salvation even at a younger age. A person even at 50-60 years of age, despite keeping a vow following all rules and regulations, but still carrying negativity, will never attain the spiritual growth intended.

To be able to follow the path of truth, one has to wipe off superstitions from the belief system. Unfortunately, even sadhus have got these superstitions ingrained in them. Just tonsuring their heads or taking an oath of silence doesn't make one pure. One has to live righteously irrespective of the challenges. Only then their pledge will bear fruits and ensure spiritual growth.

Taking a spiritual oath is nothing less than that of an oath taken by a soldier to protect his country, risking his life. If the soldier has to defend his territory, he will pump bullets or take bullets but will not stop from defending his country.

Such should be the resolve of saints who take oath of spiritual path. This path has lots of challenges with tough questions and hardships posed at each step. One has to be resolute and truthful to the oath taken.

TRUTH AND ILLUSION:

A bullock tied to an oil rig blindfolded, will keep circling the wheel squeezing oil from morning to evening.

It feels as if it has walked miles but when the cloth on the eyes is removed, it realizes it has walked only in its home, around few feet. Similarly, for a seeker, if he is blindfolded by superstitions and illusions, there is no use in walking spiritual path for 50, 60 years. They will achieve no progress on the path to salvation.

Once a boy was faced by Yama, the God of Death. He cutely smiled instead of being afraid and went to Yama, demanding to be taken on his lap. Yama was not used to this. He was so fearsome that even brave hearts used to weaken on seeing him. He was surprised and mesmerized by the smile. He actually started playing with the boy.

The essence is, if you cry for everything, this world will make you cry. If you fear, everyone around will drive fear in to you. But if you are fearless and have strength, everyone around will value you for your valour. Thus, every circumstance in life is to be faced with courage and valour and not with weakened spirit because of fear and superstition.

I remember once when I was on my way from Delhi, my disciples crowded around me asking me not to go since they felt that it was not a good omen. I said that I am a true believer in karma philosophy and whatever happens would have been meant to happen; so I will proceed. Journeys will have their own hiccups and delays but that doesn't mean we keep blaming the timings and muhurat. Whatever has to happen, will happen. There is no place for superstitions, illusions and false beliefs.

Even if you are in the midst of a jungle, in the middle of a war zone, next to an erupting volcano, or swimming in an ocean, in whichever extreme condition you are, if your good deeds and fate are on your side, you will not even have a scratch; you will be safe. On the contrary, even if you have all the world's security, if your fate and deeds become detrimental, nothing can save you.

When we begin a work or venture out on a mission, we often see people having many superstitions such as avoiding a certain kind of person who may otherwise bring bad luck cause the mission to fail. Even though you say hundreds of prayers to powerful Gods, this superstition takes precedence. Some even curse a cat crossing their path as a bad omen. The only way to succeed in major tasks of life is to be determined and keep focus.

There are many such superstitions including one where husband and wife do not take names of each other in public. This is ridiculous and was never mentioned even in our great scriptures. Even in Ramayana, when Ravana was abducting Sita, she was crying and taking the name of Rama and Dasharath. The flying giant Jataayu heard this and realized she must be Ram's wife and went on to fight Ravana, the powerful demon. Unfortunately, he lost the battle, but before dying, he was the one who told Rama that Sita was abducted by none other than Ravana. Did Sita calling her husband's name save her eventually or bring bad luck to both?

I remember once when we went to have food in a household, they mentioned another sadhu who had come to the house in the past. On asking the name, the household was hesitant to take the name as it was the same as that of their elders. This is laughable and if such things go on, no one would mention Bhagwan Mahavira's name or Bhagwan Ram's as well.

Human beings need to see within and discover the hidden power of determination and focus. Only these will help a human cross the mountain of challenges. Fear and superstitions are going to weaken the will power and pull you backwards in life. Hence, get rid of these and move ahead in life. Where there is a will, there is a way.

Chapter 12

Vows and Fulfillment

“The rational mind should always use intellect to assess the situation, and use truth in the right manner.”

Taking an oath and maintaining it is a critical strength in a human being's spiritual life. One has to be determined and possess strong willpower to be able to stand by the oath, come what may.

One person resists taking an oath, constantly thinking of the difficulties in his life and the potential chances of being unable to keep up the oath. Another person doesn't even think a second time about taking the oath, but also feels that it is extremely difficult to keep up the same.

The first one at least knows his limitations and the fear of not being able to honour his oath keeps him from taking one. He is a sinner because of the lack of faith in his own will power and determination. But the second one is a bigger sinner because of the callous attitude he has towards the oath. He doesn't even think through. There is an element of vanity, and hence he fails miserably in keeping up the oath.

Jainism asks its followers to seek the truth and stick to their true nature before taking any oath. One has to look within, do soul searching and seek truth within. This will strengthen determination and increase will power. If one sticks to truth, its strength alone can help you cross oceans of difficulties in fulfilling your oath and promises.

Unfortunately, nowadays falsehood has become the norm. Whether at home or work, deceit and falsehood have become an accepted part of daily life. It is unfortunate that falsehood is no longer treated as taboo and only a few people are considered bad by weighing the impact of their falsehood and consequences. If the impact is not as bad as compared to others, then such a falsehood is in fact accepted and adjusted to. Nothing is more shocking than this.

LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS:

In a society, major impact is felt if the leaders are known to be truthful. The commoners follow their footsteps. On the contrary, if leaders are found to be corrupt and liars, commoners too imitate them, thinking if a leader himself is a liar, why not them.

There used to be a period in India when kings used to stand for whatever they saw even in their dreams. Take the case of Raja Harishchandra. He saw in his dream that he had donated his kingdom. Next day, he got up and ran searching for the person to whom he had given the kingdom in his dream. This was to fulfil his dream.

Slowly man came to believe that dreams are not true, whereas actual spoken words are. He used to take pride in the spoken word. Gradually even spoken words lost their value, hence written agreements came into place. With time, even written agreements lost their status as signatures could be taken under force. Then the concept of a witness was brought in. Nowadays even one witness is found to be insufficient. Harsh reality is that witnesses nowadays are found for pennies.

Such has been the decline in the value of truth.

A businessman thinks only about his profit and is happy if he makes lots of it. He is not happy when along with him others too earn a profit. Whereas when doing something wrong, he would think otherwise by saying, "When everyone else is doing so, they why shouldn't I?" The Shastras state, "An ignorant fool will think that whatever will be the fate of others in committing a wrong, I will share the same. But it's a known fact that you are the creator of your fate and you need to face the consequences of your deeds."

If a person lies in his personal life it's a sin. But it's a crime if in effort to justify the same, he turns that lie into a religious ritual to gain sanctity.

INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES:

There used to be a Jain King, Raja Vasu. He was a great King and established truth in his kingdom. His truth was so powerful that his throne used to be on a higher pedestal due to the unwavering loyalty to truth alone in his judgements. In his kingdom, there were two learned priests, Narada and Parvat. These two were co-students of Raja Vasu in his gurukul.

Once when Parvat was teaching his students, Narada also went and listened. Parvat explained the meaning of a verse thus: "To do a Yagna, goats need to be sacrificed."

Narada was stunned at this explanation. The word Ajya was used in the verse which did not mean goat, but those things in the household which are old and useless. Parvat was carelessly giving an altogether different interpretation.

An argument ensued between them and Parvat challenged Narada saying let's seek justice from King Vasu. "If he says that I am right, you should cut your tongue; and if otherwise, I will cut my tongue." Parvat could not agree to his mistake in front of his other disciples fearing a loss to his reputation.

Before going to the King, he studied the scriptures and realized his mistake. He started fearing for his life. His mother understood his mistake and assured him that she would seek Vasu's support. She went to meet King Vasu and as she was elder, took a promise from the King that he would not allow her son to be punished.

Next day when the discussion was happening in his court, King Vasu was in a dilemma whether to speak the truth or abide by his promise. He kept quiet when Narada expounded his interpretations but agreed to Parvat's interpretations.

Thus, Narada got punished for speaking the truth. The immediate impact was that due to the lie, King Vasu's throne started coming down to earth, losing its sheen and respect. Not only that, it also had a terrible impact on other living beings.

Such incidents have led to the practice of sacrificing animals during Yagnas. Numerous living beings are being sacrificed in the name of appeasing the Gods. This is the danger of uttering a lie, or giving sanctity to a religious practice that has ill effects on the society.

THE ZONE OF TRUTH:

When disciple Anand took the oath of truth in front of Mahavira, he took it keeping in perspective his family responsibilities. He judged his life and assessed those aspects where he can truly and fully follow the righteous path. As he progressed in his life, he expanded the scope and eventually accomplished complete truth and righteous life with genuine effort.

Just like peace has its phases and zones, truth as well maintains its zones. Jainism says, "Every living being in this world goes through the cycle of sorrow and joy. No one wants to die, just like you. Realizing this, let kindness flow from your soul to theirs."

Jainism introduced peace gradually into human life. The life of human beings was split into zones. First, Jainism explained the philosophy of not harming living beings for food. Then the zone was expanded to other areas of unknowingly killing living organisms in our daily routine.

A toddler cannot be asked to run straightaway; first he needs to learn to stand. A child who's just learnt to stand cannot be asked to run but is taught to walk. A person who knows to walk properly with the correct sense of direction is then taught to run.

This is gradual progress in life. Similarly, one needs to walk the path of peace and truth to the extent that they can manage in the first instance. A novice, just because he has taken a vow, should not be tested on par with a sadhu.

Does this mean, one should be asked not to kill living beings with five senses but can go ahead and kill living beings with one or two senses? One should be careful to consume only to satiate their need. One should drink water to quench the thirst but should not draw more than what he requires. If all the human beings consume the resources only to the extent needed and do not draw excess or stop wastage, imagine the impact on environment. Animals follow this as law of nature but human beings easily go against this. Is it not a crime on nature and violating its law?

Mahatma Gandhi was in a jail and he needed neem leaves for a little oiling to repair his spinning wheel. He asked a staff in the jail, and that person, out of devotion for the Mahatma, cleaned the entire neem tree of its leaves and brought a huge container full of leaves. With tears in his eyes Gandhiji told him, "Out of love for me, you have brought this much quantity, I understand. But I needed just a few leaves. The entire tree need not have been punished like this for such a simple need. From today, promise to consume resources only to the extent that you will need them. Help me by following this and only then you will be my true follower."

Hence, we must consume resources only according to our need. There can still be some harm to living things (microorganisms) which is beyond our control. Fate anyway will balance this as well and we need to be prepared for the consequences. This shows that peace has limitations, and similarly, truth too has its own circumstantial limitations.

Imagine a person being attacked by goons and dacoits. They demand to know from him the whereabouts of his wealth and womenfolk in his family. Should he tell all, as he is the follower of truth?

Would he be ever able to bear the fate that his truth will bestow upon his wife, daughter, mother and sisters? there will be circumstantial limitations to the truth as well for a householder unlike a sadhu.

This doesn't give a leeway to lie whenever and wherever in the name of family limitations. The limitations acceptable for a family person with regards to truthful life is that, he should not lie nor inspire someone else to lie. In the same breath, he should not speak a truth or reveal a fact that destroys other people or their lives. A truth that can harm and destroy lives is not considered as righteous truth. For a sadhu, though, as he doesn't possess anything, such leverage is not given at all. As per scriptures, a Saint should not even treat his body as his own. If the body exists, he lives, else he won't. Both these states should not matter to him.

Our Oswal brothers from Pakistan narrated an incident. During the partition riots, there used to be an old Muslim couple living as their neighbors. When rioters came, this couple hid the Hindu womenfolk in their home. When the goons demanded information about the whereabouts of their women, these two replied that there are none in the house.

Then the goons went to the Muslim man's house and demanded that he tell the truth whether he is hiding them in his home. The old man took their holy book Quran, and swore on it that there were no women hiding in his home. It was a lie, but it saved the lives of those women. Luckily the army came and the goons went away, but the will power and courage of the old man should be much appreciated. Thus, just like peace has its own zones and limitations, for a person living with family responsibilities, truth will also have its own limitations and zones.

Chapter 13 The Relevance of Traditions

“Festivals have indeed been a beautiful tradition of bringing societies and people together in Indian history.”

History shows that human beings had a period of unproductive evolution phase, before getting into a productive phase, and eventually, started focusing on self-realization. Jainism states that there was a long period of human life where human beings were in an aimless society with no activity and focus. The basic needs were met by nature, and this was the phase of Kalpavruksha, the miracle tree which would give whatever one asked for.

In this period, the human emotions were not evolved. Even the relationships between husband and wife relations were merely a transaction of needs with no emotional attachments. This was the phase when there was minimal maturity in human life and there was no struggle to meet the requirements and needs of life. Generations after generations lived aimlessly like this and never bothered to seek any real answers and spiritual realization.

NEW AGE AND NEW VISION:

Then came a phase when Kalpavruksha vanished, and suddenly, with larger populations, human beings had a resource crunch. They could no longer depend on nature to provide sufficient resources for their survival. That's when the avarices of greed, enmity, and pride started entering human life. Society was very disturbed in this phase and unhappiness was written all over.

This was the time when Rishabhadeva entered human life. He gave the message of productivity and turned the society towards industriousness. He taught human beings that they can no longer just sit and expect nature

to feed them but have to use hands and brains to invent and create new resources to cater to their needs. This ushered in a new and productive era, and the necessity drove intellectual enlightenment in the human race.

My effort itself is God, and indeed bigger than God. On the one hand there is duty and enlightenment, and on the other, success and happiness.

Thus, Rishabhadeva introduced the spirit of industriousness in human beings and brought happiness and joy back into the society. Human beings started tasting the joy of success and started celebrating these joys in the name of festivals. After this productive phase, humankind matured to attain the self-realization phase.

MESSAGE OF FESTIVALS:

This phase ushered in the new concept of festivals and celebration into society. Slowly it brought out the concept of universal brotherhood and made people realize the joy of sharing. These festivals started being marked on auspicious days and many cultures and tribes started celebrating these festivals. At one time in India, every day was a celebration, and indeed, there were multiple celebrations in a day, one for children, one for women, one for adults etc.,

The grandeur of our festivals and their importance in society tells us our rich history and shows us the contrast from current times. Those were the days of togetherness, with sharing joy across neighbourhood and the world. Looking back at such memorable times and understanding the society and its evolution is not just for past glory but to help determine the future course of action. It can enable our intellect to think of common good and upliftment of all.

ART OF LIFE:

Jainism teaches that the basic principle of art of life is sacrifice. This doesn't mean to sacrifice the family, relations and society.

This means to sacrifice selfishness and start living for the society. Detachment doesn't mean that all of a sudden you discard your family and move away. It means that you own up the full responsibility of the family but do not become attached to it. One needs to experience all the aspects of life but should not become slaves of those experiences. Stay in a palace, use the riches but just use them without becoming their slave. If wealth starts becoming your owner, human beings start wandering aimlessly, deviating from the path of self-realization.

DEBT TO SOCIETY:

Great Emperors such as King Bharat followed Jainism. He had at his disposal an entire world of riches but he never became their slave. When the time came for being detached, he simply cut the umbilical cord connecting him to the kingdom and its riches, and proceeded on his spiritual journey.

Imagine a new born infant, who lacks even basic strength. How can such a life form grow up to become such a powerful emperor? It is due to the past birth and karma that we get certain kind of birth and in a certain kind of family.

We have a huge responsibility towards the society which has helped us grow. Our entire wealth, happiness and joy are gifts of the society itself. Then why do we hesitate to give back to the society? As the Vedas say, "Collect with a hundred hands and distribute with a thousand hands. That's where true realization of human birth lies."

Once Bhagwan Vishnu invited all for a sumptuous feast. Everyone was made to sit in two lines, facing each other, and delicious meals were served. As they started to eat, Bhagwan performed a magic such that their hands were not bending any more. They were able to hold the food but unable to bend the hand and reach their mouth. All were stunned but some of them quickly realized and started feeding one another.

Few of them couldn't even think of this. They just sat without tasting any food. Bhagwan Vishnu said with a smile, those who fed each other are Gods and others are demons.

Let us not be demons with hands which feed only ourselves, but be the Gods which feed others.

THE ESSENCE OF RITUALS:

Our rituals and festivals have immense meaning and can uplift the society. Indeed, our festivals and rituals not only focus on society but also on our elders who passed away. Some rituals offer food every year for the ones who passed away. In reality, the food we offer is eaten by a bird or a cow. But the essence is to remember the ones who passed away and showing concern for their well-being in afterlife.

One does not need to be prepared only for this life; one should utilize this life to do deeds that can help in the afterlife as well. There was a beautiful kingdom with a vast and dangerous jungle as its borders. The kingdom had a strange ritual: the King used to be elected for five years, after which the King and the Queen were left in the jungle at the mercy of the wild animals. Once a new King sat on the throne and since the first day, he was frightened about his fate after five years.

When a few learned people came to meet him, he opened up, seeking suggestions. They said, "As you are a King for the next five years, you can do whatever you want. So, order the jungle to be razed down and build a new kingdom there. Once you are left in the jungle after five years, you can enjoy the fruits of your labour."

This is the essence of human life. We shouldn't be just happy with the fruits we enjoy in this life but use this life to do deeds that would help us have a peaceful life even after our death.

Thus, the essence of our rituals and festivals is to encourage us to look at society and togetherness, but also to prepare for a better afterlife. What kind of rituals are good is the question that comes to mind. Any ritual done with focus on inner purity is considered to be a good ritual. Focus should not be on external arrangement and decoration but more on inner decoration and cleansing.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "There are two types of rituals. One with a desire of something. The other, without expecting anything, more as an inner faith and discipline. Obviously the ones done without desires are purer."

Festivals can be two kinds, social and spiritual.

Social Festivals: The festivals based on the change of seasons such as Sharad Utsav, Shraavan, Holika, etc., are all beautiful examples of age old traditions and rituals of spreading common joy. New additions such as Independence and Republic days, too, serve the purpose of national integrity by bringing all castes, creed and economical strata to one-fold, celebrating patriotism and universal brotherhood.

Unfortunately, of late, some of these festivals have become a platform to encourage vanity and vulgar display in the name of celebrations. Liquor flowing, gambling, indecent dances, etc., have started becoming part of these celebrations that were originally conceived to promote universal spirituality and wellbeing.

Spiritual Festivals: Our saints must have had this inkling of dwindling societal ethics, and hence created festivals that focused on spiritual upliftment. They made a spiritual practice itself a festival. This needs inner cleansing and focuses on a spiritual journey towards salvation.

Will it suffice to cleanse a vessel just on the outside?

It's more important to cleanse it from within. Bhagwaan Rishabhadeva had created this beautiful society focused on productivity and spiritual upliftment. For cleansing the society, the cleansing needs to start from within each human being.

This cleansing should be focused on peace, truth, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, friendliness, and equality within an individual.

THE SPIRITUAL FESTIVAL OF PARYUSHAN

This is a festival closest to the inner soul and its cleansing. In our daily grind, spiritual realization is confined to mere external display. This realization should be drawn inwards. Assess your own deeds with the focus that you need to face the consequences of the deeds, positive or negative. Paryushan Parva has rituals that make every individual focus yearly on the positivity and negativity of their deeds, behaviour and thinking. Every year the seeker analyses the self as to how much progress they have made on the journey of peace, truth, composure and good behaviour.

Ishopanishad says, "Assess the self and deeds. Remember your good deed and bad deeds."

This festival could have been done on an individual level, but Jain saints have made this a beautiful societal pledge. Thousands of Jains sit together chanting holy words, remembering their past deeds. They wish together that they will be friendly with all the living beings. They pray that with no one should there be any enmity whether based on religion, caste, country, or means. After praying so, they all seek pardon for their doings.

Unfortunately, of late, the true spirit of this festival is getting lost, and it has become mere lip service. Even after this activity, the same feelings of jealousy, anger and distrust persist in people.

One needs to realize the spiritual essence of this festival and how much it can help in growing on the path to salvation. Indeed, such a festival should be open for all human beings. It is by no means a religious practice; it is a spiritual practice. The need of the hour is to remove the external façade of the festival and open up the inner essence, benefitting one and all.

THE FESTIVAL OF AKSHAYA TRITIYA:

Jains celebrate this day to commemorate Tirthankara Rishabhadeva's ending of one-year fast by consuming sugarcane juice poured into his cupped hands. Followers of Jainism consider Akshaya Tritiya to be a holy and supremely auspicious day. It is associated with Bhagwan Adinatha, also known as Rishabhadeva, first of the twenty-four Tirthankaras. On this day, people who observe the year-long alternative day fasting known as Varshi-tap finish their Tapasya by doing parana by drinking sugarcane juice.

During the days of Bhagwan Rishabhadeva, society was transformed from an unproductive one into a productive one. Bhagwan realized that though people learned to earn for themselves, they never bothered or learnt yet to give others. At that time, after years of meditation, when Bhagwan went to seek in households, people were confused as to what they should offer him. The people of Ayodhya offered him gold, jewellery, gemstones, elephants, horses, expensive garments, and even their daughters in marriages in order to honour their beloved King.

But Rishabhdeva was not in search of these things. He sought only a morsel of food, but nobody offered it to him as they were unaware of the concept of giving. During those times, there was nobody seeking anything at all, hence the concept of 'giving' was non-existent. Nobody understood that their King was looking for food. He, by seeking food, wanted to ensure that the monks who would come in future following his footsteps, get food and water in the purest form, which is needed to lead an ascetic life.

As there was no choice, he had to fast for one year until King Shreyans understood his need due to his “purva-bhava-smarana” (previous life). Shreyans Kumar offered him sugarcane juice and thus Rishabhadeva ended his fast.

This was the beginning of donations. It is such a beautiful experience to share. Human beings have evolved now and should, as a duty, donate from their excess earning and contribute for the betterment of society. Rishabhadeva did not seek any wealth, but something as basic as food, the source of energy for life. The lesson is to donate the right things at the right place and time. Donation should be done with humility towards the seeker and, in fact, by thanking the seeker for providing the opportunity to serve. With an empty stomach, no one can be inclined to spirituality and mind stops working due to lack of energy. What will such a soul seek within? As one Acharya said, once man’s stomach is sated, then spirituality and duty comes to mind. We need to understand from Shreyans Kumar that satiating others’ hunger is divine, and hence food is the best donation any one can give. We should carry on the noble tradition of giving.

Chapter 14

Conclusion

Truth must be accepted by a human being in its entirety. The soul of truth needs to be assimilated in every aspect of life, be it a householder with his family responsibilities or a sadhu. As we have seen from Rashtrasant Upadhyaya Shri Amarmuniji’s preaching, the divinity of truth indeed becomes the core for all other virtues, and hence a vital constituent of the soul.

The path of truthfulness is indeed filled with hardships. But living a life of purity, for the sake of truth, and being true to one’s nature, can be the only way to overcome these weaknesses and hardships. Human being can do nothing about the consequences that are to be faced for their deeds, both positive and negative. The focus for a spiritual seeker on the path to salvation is to remain detached always.

The single-minded focus should always be on realizing life’s ultimate truth that human form is given primarily to take the soul towards salvation. Every thought, word, and action should be aligned to this supreme aim of life. With this goal, one must treat all incidents, circumstances, as well as the people in one’s life as mere tools to propel the soul towards the right path.

One needs to understand that the responsibility of human life is not limited to the self, but for universal betterment. Every soul you interact with, will have an impact on your fate, and hence we should consciously strive to make the interaction with each soul meaningful, leading to mutual spiritual growth. Universal brotherhood and collective responsibility are the needs of today’s world. A seeker who understands this and plays an important role in the upliftment of society will be a true sadhu.

A Tirthankara spreads his fragrance of spiritual enlightenment and guides other souls on the right path while they themselves attain divinity. We need to follow them on these steps along with our worldly responsibilities. Let us start to walk on the path of righteousness. Let us be spiritual seekers and contribute to the spirit of universal brotherhood.