

Concept and Stages of Meditation in Jainism

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The Jaina thinkers have indicated the practical steps to be followed in the attainment of insight to the real nature of the Self and the knowledge of the various substances in the universe. The journey begins with the development of spiritual attitude. Acharya Kundakunda has indicated with sufficient clarity the nature of the fully liberated soul. According to Jainism, the march of the soul towards a spiritual life starts with attainment of *Samyaktva*. The moral and spiritual principles pave the way for evolution leading to purification of the soul. *Dhyana* or meditation is of supreme importance for achieving concentration of the mind and liberation of the soul.

Penance and Meditation

The ideal of Jainism of asceticism. The very word *sramana* means an ascetic. It has three meanings *samata* = equanimity, *samana* = self-control and the third *srama* = to strive. There is no spiritual upliftment without persistent and sincere efforts in the right direction. Penance is meant to transform the inferior into the superior soul. According to Jainism all powers, natural or supernatural and highest achievement of purification of soul are the clear resultants of penance and pure meditation experience. Penances and meditation are fruitful only when the mind is not distracted, when the body is not needlessly emaciated and when the pull of binding karma is loosened. So one should be away from inauspicious thinking and there should be no distraction practicing meditation.¹

The internal austerities comprise expiation (*prayascitta*), respect for holy persons (*vinaya*), rendering service to ascetics in difficulty or suffering from some ailment (*vaiyavrtya*), study of the scriptures (*svadhyaya*), renunciation of all possessions including the sense of ego (*vyutsarga*) and meditation (*dhyana*).² These internal austerities are intended to purify the mind with a view to attain greater concentration and meditation on the nature of the self. There cannot be real meditation unless the mind is rid of all sloth, indifference and carelessness.

Dhyana or meditation is common to almost all religions. The ancient Hindu philosophers developed a theory called Yoga which is the science of self-realizations. The Yoga prescribed by Patanjali regards moral and physical discipline to be indispensable preliminaries to the spiritual progress.

The Jainas are in agreement with the fundamental principles and practice of this system . The 'Jnanarnava' of Subhacandra and the 'Yogasastra' of Hemacandra are valuable contributions to the study of Yoga as a science of spiritual progress. In Jaina literature Haribhadra defines Yoga as that which leads one to emancipation and terms the Dhyana and Yoga.³

According to Jainism, the march of the soul towards a spiritual life starts with the attainment of Samyaktva. With the right insight, the individual exerts to acquire the knowledge of the world he lives in, the nature of the principal substances Jiva and Ajiva, the causes of bondage of various kinds of Karmas, and the vows and practices by which he can get release from the Karmas. The moral and spiritual principles which are aimed at internal purity and release from attachments pave the way for evolution leading to purification of the soul. Dhyana or meditation is of supreme importance for achieving concentration of the mind and liberation of the soul.⁴

Concept of Meditation

Kundakunda Acarya has stated that he who is possessed of right faith and knowledge and meditates upon his self with concentration becomes free from the Karmas and attains the higher Self.⁵ Yogendudeva says that the Karmas of the ascetics, who dive deep into the ocean of the highest meditation, get washed away and the soul attains purity. The self which attains Omniscience and understands the *Loka* and *Aloka* will surely become an *Arhat* full of bliss. ⁶ Etymologically 'Dhyana' term means thought but in practice it means to fix it on someone point. Acharya Umaswamy has explained that the fixity of thought and perfect control over mind, body and speech is concentration.⁷

Uttamasamhanana syaikagra-cintanirodhodhyanamantarmuhurtat

-Tattv. ix.27.

Dhyana has been defined by Umasvami as concentration of thought on one particular object.⁸ It is turning away the thought from several objects and fixing it on one : it is up to one *antarmuhurta* or a period up to 48 minutes. In one sense it is negative, in that, it requires curbing of other thoughts. These are certain causes which retard concentration. Apprehensions of motive and public opinion retard one's own progress. Passions and desires, emotions and excitement, to which the mind is long habituated to dwell upon, deprive the soul of its serenity and the body, of its restfulness. Health, habits of luxury and inability to bear hardships are the other causes of distraction.⁹ Control of diet and other activities of the mind and body play a significant role in curbing all activities, both physical and mental, and pave the way for development of a strong will which is a pre-requisite for concentration.

Types of Meditation

Umasvami mentions that there are four types of meditation according to the mental state : *arta*, *raudra*, *dharmya* and *sukla*.¹⁰ The first two are inauspicious. *Arta-Dhyana* is contemplation in which the concentration is disturbed by thoughts of painful, sorrowful or disagreeable objects. Disagreeable objects are such as poison, prickly, thorns, enemies and weapons. They cause pain and the individual's attention is disturbed by the thoughts of suffering and of the ways of getting rid of them. It is of four kinds: contemplation of the presence of an unpleasant object and the anxiety to get rid of it ; contemplation of the loss of a pleasant object and the anxiety to regain it ; constant thought of pain and disease and the desire to remove it ; and the anxiety to enjoy unattained objects of pleasure. These four kinds of thoughts which disturb the mind are the consequences of passions, hatred and ignorance which are sure to increase attachment to the world rather than awaken his sense of other-worldliness.

Raudra-Dhyana or cruel and violent contemplation is also of four kinds as the mind becomes occupied with violence, falsehood, stealing and protection of one's possessions.¹¹ Such thoughts disturbing the meditation create aversion, attachment and infatuation of worldly life. The two kinds of contemplations which are disturbed by unhealthy thoughts will retard the progress of the soul and generate new Karmas of inauspicious type. That is why they are called *aprasasta* or inauspicious. They bar the path of liberation and involve the individual into the cycle of births and deaths.

Dhyana or meditation is of vital importance for attainment of emancipation. It is of four kinds:

1. ***arta-dhyana*** refers to contemplation of past associations which cause distress, pain and suffering. It occurs in the perverted and vacillating minds who are partially disciplined in the vows and austerities ;
2. ***raudradhyana*** occurs in the case of those ascetics whose mind is not still free from passions, anger, harsh, falsehood, propagation of false doctrines, censure of others and pleasures of senses. These two are inauspicious (*aprasyasta*) kinds of meditations;
3. ***dharmadhyana*** implies reflection and meditation on the means of annihilating the karmas and getting release from worldly miseries and sufferings. To meditate upon the self by subduing all other thoughts is *Dharma-Dhyana*;
4. ***sukla-dhyana*** is the best kind of meditation. All inauspicious thoughts and desires are eliminated and there is annihilation of the passions that defile the soul.

It is by practice of this pure kind of meditation that the soul becomes liberated. ¹² In the scheme of internal austerities, Dhyana occupies the highest place of importance. Jainism, like other systems of Indian thought, attaches supreme importance to *Dhyana* (concentration of mind) as a means of spiritual realization. Along with its purification, the soul develops the capacity for self-concentration.

It would be clear that this kind of meditation presupposes the acquisition of the three jewels and non-attachment. Subhacandra has stated that for this kind of meditation, the person must possess love (*maitri*) for all living creatures, respect towards the learned (*pramoda*), compassion towards those in difficulties (*karuna*) and indifference towards the perverted (*madhyastha-bhava*). With these virtues, one is sure to rise high in spiritual status driving away all delusions and misconceptions about worldly existence. ¹³

According to Jinabhadra Gani, this kind of meditation is a stepping stone to *Sukla-Dhyana*, as the mediator would be familiar in practice with the twelve kinds of reflections (*anupreksas*), colorations (*lesyas*) and the fruits of the various kinds of Karmas. Constant awareness of the nature of the soul and its relationship with the body is of vital importance in keeping him on the true path. The fourth but the best kind of meditation is called the *Sukla Dhyana* (or the white or pure meditation). It is the highest kind of meditation. This kind of meditation is possible only for the Omniscient. It is of four kinds. The first two can be attained by those who have attained the full knowledge of the scriptures and thereby realized virtuous concentration¹⁴

Comprehensive treatise on Meditation

The Jnanarnava of Jaina Acharya Shubhchandra is a comprehensive treatise on the science and art of yoga and Dhyana as prescribed in Jainism. This monumental work throws light and shows the path of emancipation of soul through various stages of meditation and yogic activities. It provides who are engaged in practicing meditation realizing their true nature of soul. Acharya Shubhachandra advises his readers to concentrate on the study of scriptures and literature which are helpful to them in their pursuit of discrimination between self and self and which inspires them to go ahead on the path of liberation.¹⁵

Jainacharya Shubhachandra has given name Jnanarnava to his text, which is actually a text of meditation and yoga. This text is a ocean of meditation and mysticism in Jaina tradition. All aspects of meditation are discussed in this text. The author of Jnanarnava has declared that his text is *dhyanasastra*. It may be called *Yogapradeepa* aslo-

Avidyaprasarobhuta grahanigrahakovidam I

Jnarnavamimam vaksye stamanandamandiram II-- Jna.1.11

--Now, I will commence (the composition of) "The Ocean of Knowledge" the pleasure-resort of good moral persons, that shall be instrumental in controlling the monster (*Setana*) of obstinacy, caused and nourished by the propagation of false and perverse knowledge (*Avidya* / Illusion).

Acharya Shubhchandra gives assurance to worldly person that the meditation has been well experienced by great Jaina monks for the attainment of real form of soul, so you should also practice this meditation for external happiness. He explains that-

Punatyakarnitam ceto datte sivamanustitam I

Dhyanatantramidam Dhira Dhanyogindragocaram II

Jna.3.25

- oh brave and patient man! the preaching relating to mediation, if properly listened, sanctified one's mind it purees his mind by reducing the intensity of his attachments etc., and it yields salvation when properly practiced. The meditation has been well experienced by grates ascetics. Hence, you should taste it, hold it, listen to it and translate in to action.

Acharya Shubhchandra has suggested that the of meditation should be done only for gaining spiritual awakens, not for worldly pleasure he says –

Yatitvam Jivanopayam Kurvantah Kim na lajjitah I

Matuh panyamivalambya yathakecid gataghrinah II

-- Jna.4.56

The certain monks, who missuse (or abuse) their initiation (as monks) and earn wealth or means of livelihood therapy, are really very cruel and shameless (or impudent). Their such activities are no better than the activities of those, who convert their mothers into prostitutes and earn money through them.

Jaina Acharyas teach us that without purification of mind real meditation is not possible. it is said in the Jnanarnva that –meditation is science of self realization and it is also the *paramatatva*. He says –

Dhyanasuddhi Manahsuddhi Karotyeva na Kevalam I

Vicchinatyapi nihasankarmajalani dehinam II

- Jna.22.15

Taddhyanam taddvi vijnanam taddhyeyamtatvameva va I

yenavidyamatikramya manastatve sthiri bhavet II

-Jna.22.20

-Self meditation, discrimination that the supreme objective *Dhyeya–Tattva* are same. All of them make the minds of saints disillusioned and constant (steady) .

Fruits of Meditation

Dhyana is the indispensable, integral constituent of right conduct and consequently, it is directly related to the actualization of the divine potentialities. It is the clear, and single road by which the aspirant can move straight to the supreme good. To define *Dhyana*, it represents the concentration of mind on a particular object, which concentration is possible only for an Antar-muhurta (time below forty-eight minutes) to the maximum and that too in the case of such souls as are possessing bodies of the best order.¹⁶ The stability of thoughts on one object is recognized as *Dhyana* and the passing of mind from one object to another is deemed to be either *Bhavana* or *Anupreksha*, or *Cinta*.¹⁷ Now, the object of concentration may be profane or holy in character. ¹⁸

The mind may concentrate either on the debasing and degrading object, or on the object which is uplifting and elevating. The former which causes the inflow of inauspicious Karman is designated as inauspicious *concentration (apradasta)*, while the latter which is associated with the potency of Karmic annulment is called auspicious concentration (*pradasta*).¹⁹ To be brief, *Dhyana* is capable of endowing us with resplendent jewel, or with the pieces of glass. When both the things can be had which of these will a man of discrimination choose.²⁰ Subhacandra distinguishes three categories of *Dhyana*, good, evil and pure in conformity with the three types of purposes, viz., the auspicious, the inauspicious and the transcendental, which may be owned by a self.²¹ At another place he classifies *Dhyana* into *Prasasta* and *Aprasasta*.²² These two modes of classification are not incompatible, but evince difference of perspectives; the former represents the psychical or psychological view, the latter, the practical or ethical view.

Dharmya-Dhyana or virtuous meditation consists in the contemplation of the objects of revelation, misfortune or calamity, fruition of Karmas and the structure of the universe. This kind of meditation is free from passions and other causes of defilement of the soul. This is possible only in the seventh stage of spiritual advancement. This kind of meditation consists in thinking over the 'nature of things, tenfold virtues like *ksama* etc, the three jewels and protection of living beings. Attachment and aversion, pleasures of the senses and extraneous distractions etc., are avoided and the mind is concentrated on the nature of the atman; and one goes on meditation with joy and peace.²³

The equivalent expression in Jainism for the word 'Mysticism' is '*Suddhopayoga*'. According to Kundakunda, mysticism consists in realizing the trans-cendental self through the internal self after renouncing the external self;²⁴i.e.,after relinquishing the *Bahiratman* and by turning to the *Antaratman*, one should realize the supra-ethical state of the *Paramatman*. In other words, non-conceptual and perpetual meditation on the supreme self ought to be effected after abandoning the *Bahiratman* through the inter-mediation of the *Antaratman*; i.e., *Bahiratman* is to be of necessity renounced to attain *Antaratman*, which will in turn lead us to an un-imaginable transformation into *Paramatman* through the medium of meditation and other practices of moral nature. Following Kundakunda, Yogendu,²⁵ Pujiyapada ,²⁶ Subhacandra,²⁷ Karttikeya²⁸ etc., have endorsed this very statement.

There is another way of speaking about the process of meditation explained in the Jnanarnava. Acarya says that after abandoning the spirit of false selfhood and after attaining spiritual conversion, the Yogi should ascend higher through the ladder of the latter with the steps of meditation. The ignorant are occupied with the renunciation and possession of external objects, while the wise are occupied with the renunciation and possession of internal ones; but the supervise transcend the thoughts of the external and the internal.²⁹ Hence, in order to attain this last state, the Yogi after isolating the self from speech and body should fix his mind on his own self, and perform other actions by means of speech and body without mental inclination.³⁰ The constant meditation upon the fact, "I am that", "I am that" results in the steadfastness of *Atmanic* experience.³¹

The Jaina definition of meditation (dhyana) includes all the four stages of self-discipline advocated by the Yoga system of Patanjali. As has already been observed, these stages are in the form of withdrawal (*pratyahara*), concentration or fixation (*dharana*), meditation (dhyana), and ecstasy (*samadhi*). Umasvati defines meditation as 'the concentration of thought on a particular object by a person of excellent physical construction'.³² The act of concentration presupposes withdrawals of the senses from their objects. Meditation is nothing but the undisturbed flow of thought round the object of concentration. In other words, meditation is a steadfast contemplation without any break. The highest stage of meditation is called ecstasy or trance. Thus, meditation practically includes all the stages of mental or spiritual concentration in it.

Meta-physical Contemplation

The fourth type of concentration which we call metaphysical contemplation (sukla-dhyana) for want of a better term is the highest stage of concentration; It is needless to say that forbearance, humility, straight forwardness, etc. are the pre-requisites of meta-physical contemplation. A.N. Upadhye rightly observes that sex impulse is considered by Jain moralists as the most dangerous impediment on the path of spiritual realization, so sensual consciousness has no place whatsoever in Jain mysticism.³³ The very idea of *Syadvada* or *Kevalajnana* is itself quite mystical because it will indicate supra-sensuous faculty of a man to reach the reality.

The fruit of such knowledge is Moksa because the liberated individual has no consciousness of time-condition limited world, he has 'Trikaladrsti' in which past, present and future exist together for ever. Apart from this intellectual Mysticism, there are elements of mysticism in Jainism. The very discipline for observing vows, will speak for itself. Jainism asks the *Sadhakas* to put up with 22 *Parisahas* at any cost.³⁴ They are preached by Mahavira. They consist of physical, mental and wordy troubles, knowing which a monk can tread his spiritual path successfully. In the 2nd *Khanda* of the *Prasnavyakarana* *Ahimsa* is called *Bhagavati*. *Ahimsa*, is the corner-stone of Jain philosophy. It should be followed in letter and spirit. There are many stories of Jain monks who followed *Ahimsa* in true spirit at the cost of their life. The story of *Meyajja-rsi* is well-known.³⁵ At the cost of his life he saved the life of a bird. Unless he was a mystic, it was impossible for him to follow *Ahimsa*, in this manner. Many mystics of this type are found in Jain literature.

The description of meritorious soul as well as sinful soul, six *lesyas* which are the different states of mind of embodied souls, possessing distinctive colour, touch and smell would also throw light on Jain mysticism which takes into account the real nature of souls. *Satlesya* example is very famous in Jainism. ³⁶

The Uvasagadasao narrates stories of Ananda and Saddalaputta and others who were devoted to Jainism and who reached their goal due to devotion. The salutation to *Panca paramesthins*, who represent the ideal in life at the different stages of realization is a devotional one. Charity with faith and devotion is a glorified virtue. The Stotra literature such as Manatunga's *Bhayahara*, Jinakirtisuri's *Paramesthi namaskara stotra* and praise-verses in honour of Mahavira in different works of Jain writers will constitute devotional mysticism in Jainism. We find in Jaina mysticism an element of universality and there are intellectual, devotional and ascetic aspects of mysticism. Comprehension of non-violence brought about equality and universality. Jainism proclaims that spiritual liberation is the highest goal of human life.

The concept of Jaina mysticism contains all essentials of mysticism. Mysticism proclaims that wealth and glory are nothing in comparison to spiritual life. Jain mysticism also speaks of spiritual meaning of existence and wisdom of goodness and this is indeed a great heritage of India.³⁷ Thus mysticism is not mere speculation, but action. It is the transition from the life of sense to the life of spirit, which is tantamount to achieving the immortal heritage of man. This amounts to the realization of the transcendental self. The limited character of the individual self is disrupted and invaded by the absolute self which the individual feels as his own. We may sum up by saying that mysticism culminates in the heightened and completed form of life, which is accomplished by that transcendental belief, knowledge, and conduct which in our life remains ordinarily below the threshold of consciousness.³⁸

Mystic Ways in Jainism

Thus the *Bahiratman* which is the perverted self is to be renounced; the *Antaratman* is the converted self: i.e., it implies the awakening of the consciousness of the transcendental self within and of its outright separation from the body, external world, and psychical states, both auspicious and inauspicious. *Paramatman* is the true goal of the mystic quest. The journey from the *Antaratman* to the *Paramatman* is traversed through the medium of moral and intellectual preparations, which purge everything obstructing the emergence of potential divinity. Before this final accomplishment is made, a stage of vision and fall may intervene. Thus the whole mystic way may be put as follows: 1. Awaken-ing of the transcendental self, 2. Purgation. 3. Illumination, 4. Dark-night of the soul, and 5. Transcendental life.

Acharya Haribhandra tells us that on account of spiritual life one finds oneself in possession of firmness, patience, faith, friendliness for all beings, popularity in the eyes of the world ones, intuitive awareness of the nature of things, freedom from obsessions, contentment, forbearance, gentlemanly conduct, honour received from others and the supreme bliss of calmness. *Paramatman* is the true goal of the mystic quest in Jainism. The journey from *Antaratman* to *Paramatman* is traversed through the medium of moral and intellectual preparations which purge everything obstructing the emergence of potential divinity.

The purpose of meditation is complete release from all Karmas. The observance of external and internal austerities, renunciation and meditation preceded by self-study of the scriptures form the basis for this process. Just as the mass of dense clouds are wafted away by the winds, the mass of Karmas are destroyed by the strong gale of meditation. Passions, envy, grief and dejection which are conditions of a normal mind do not touch the mind which is purged of its Karmas. Meditation is the basis of all spiritual development and hence it should be practiced by all those who want to attain real happiness. ³⁹

The real meditation is meditation on the soul itself. At that stage, the external possessions like land, houses, gold, wealth etc and the internal hindrances like delusion, aversion, sorrow, fear, hatred etc., which disturb the equilibrium of the mind have disappeared totally from the mental horizon. All faculties become devoid of their external activities and the soul is able to concentrate on itself.⁴⁰ The contemplation of the self is the supreme object of Dhyana and the devotee should reflect within himself that he knows the truth and devotedly believes in the scriptures, and will renounce all external activity and merge the self in the higher Self. As explained in the 'Jnanarnava' 40.19, the person engaged in meditation should unite the Self with the higher self, inspired solely by the nature thereof and impregnating the self with the qualities of the higher Self.⁴¹

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Shatleshya Tree in Jainism



- Almost all the Jaina philosophers who have dealt with the subject of Karma have referred to and expanded theory of Lesya. There are six kind of Lesya [paint], namely: Krasna (black), Nila (blue), Kapota (dove-grey), Teja (yellow), Padma (pink) and Sukla (white). The Lesya is the functioning of yoga, or the activities of thought, word and body as tinged by the Kasayas.