

Jain-Catholic Dialogue on Compassion:

Jain Center of Washington DC

May 24, 2015

Practice of Compassion as a Contribution to Peace - Jain Perspective

Your Eminence, Cardinal Tauran, venerable faith leaders from Catholic, Jain and other communities, and distinguished guests.

Namaste and Jai Jinendra,

First, I would like to thank our Catholic brothers for helping initiate this important seminar. It is indeed a historic occasion today to have – for the first time – a leader of the Roman Curia visiting our Jain Temple in the Washington DC area.

I would like to start this paper by reciting “Universal Forgiveness Prayer” of Jain faith

Universal Forgiveness Prayer

खामेमि सव्वजीवे, सव्वे जीवा खमंतु मे।
मित्ती मे सव्व भूएसु, वेरम् वेरं मज्झं न केणइ।।

Khämemi Savva Jive, Savve Jivä Khamantu Me,
Mitti Me Savva Bhuesu, Veram Majjham Na Kenai.

I forgive all living beings,

May all living beings grant me forgiveness.

My friendship is with all living beings,

I have no enmity with anyone.

By means of this prayer, we ask for forgiveness from all living beings of the universe and we also grant forgiveness to all living beings of the universe. In this way, a relationship of mutual forgiveness and friendship is developed among all living beings. This is the true essence of the Jain religion and it is the fundamental duty of all Jains to confess their wrong doings and repent for their lapses.

Introduction

Today we live in the age of science and technology. The growth of scientific knowledge and technology have given new dimensions to our life and influenced each and every field of our living. Science has done a great service to mankind by providing amenities of pleasant living and saved the human race from many miseries and uncertainties of the primitive past. It has also destroyed many superstitions and religious dogmas.

However, at the same time it has also uprooted certain moral, religious, and cultural values of our society. Most of our traditional religious values and beliefs have been thrown away by the growth and outlook of scientific knowledge. We know much about the atom but not enough about the moral values needed for a meaningful life. Our life is full of excitement, emotional disorders, and conflicts of moral values. It seems that spiritually we live in a state of chaos. Thus, we do not only live in the age of science but also in the age of anxiety and mental tensions.

The need for greater understanding among different faiths cannot be over emphasized at this particularly challenging time in our society with some deeply shocking and saddening events of recent times.

Today what we need is mental peace; a complete integration into our personality, and integration into the social environment.

Today we are gathered to better understand one such value and practice – and its contribution to a lasting world peace – whereby we can not only develop a richer understanding and appreciation of our own faith, but also understand and learn from the faith of our neighbors.

Essence of Jainism

Jainism can meet this need of our times if we understand its true essence.

Jainism embraces ancient teachings and philosophies handed down by the Tirthankaras. These are the perfect human beings and leaders of the Jain faith numbering twenty-four. The lineage can be traced back to prehistoric times.

Bhagwan Mahāvīr was the last Tirthankar (599 BC to 527 BC), and Bhagwan Pārshvanāth was his immediate predecessor (850 BC). Whereas Bhagwan Ādināth was the first Tirthankar in what is considered prehistoric time.

Bhagwan Mahāvīr's preaching were memorized and orally compiled into many Sutras (collection of small sentences or aphorism) by his disciples. These Sutras are known as Jain Āgam or Āgam Sutras. Later on, Agam sutras were compiled into several books known as Jain scriptures. The Āgam Sutras promote great reverence for all forms of life, compassion, non-violence, strict codes of vegetarianism, non-attachment to worldly objects, and opposition to war.

Bhagwan Mahāvīr's message of Ahimsa, truth (Satya), non-stealing (Achaurya), chastity (Brahmacharya), and non-possession (Aparigraha) is full of universal compassion and simple living.

Jainism is a unique religion of self that prescribes code of conduct that is applicable to all human beings irrespective of creed, caste, color, and religion.

The Jain philosophy fully advocates limitless power and energy of the human soul and its independency. It bestows full responsibility upon us, and us alone to attain the peace and harmony among us and within us.

Bhagwan Mahāvīr emphasized that all-living beings, irrespective of their size, shape, form, creed and spiritual status, are basically equal and we should love and respect them. In this way, he preached universal love.

In order to attain enlightenment, it is necessary to reduce our wants, curtail our desires and consumption levels should be kept within reasonable limits. Using any resource beyond one's needs and misuse of any part of nature is considered a form of theft and an act of violence.

Jains believe in the philosophy of karma, reincarnation of the worldly soul, heaven and hell are a reward and punishment for one's deeds, and liberation (Nirvana or Moksha) of the self from life's misery of birth and death in a way similar to the Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. Though there are multiple similarities in these South Asian religions, some fundamental differences do exist.

Jain philosophy is ennobling and optimistic, where the soul of a man or woman through his or her efforts evolves into a perfect human being (Godhood). This happens when the soul purifies itself by removing its impurities such as anger, ego, deceit, and greed, arising out of attachment and aversion. This process is explained in the philosophy of karma in Jainism. Attachment, Hatred, and Ignorance of Self are the three principal reasons for the bondage of karma to the soul. The path that diverts away from such karma is the true path to liberation.

Jainism is a way of life based on ahimsa (non-violence), compassion, and simple living. Ahimsa and Compassion are the backbone of Jain philosophy. It is the focal point of Jainism. Rational thinking and rational conduct are auxiliary colors spread on the vast canvas of Ahimsa. Thus, Jains have presented a deep and vivid study of Ahimsa.

The cardinal principles of Jainism are

- Ahimsa and Compassion towards all living beings
- Pluralism of views (Anekāntavāda or Syādvāda) towards all faiths and ideas
- Non-possession (Aparigraha) or limitation of possessions and non-possessiveness

- Self-purification, Self-control, Austerity, Penance, Renunciation, and Meditation

If we observe these principles in their true spirit, peace and harmony can certainly be attained within us as well as in the world.

Ahimsa and Compassion

Ahimsa is a concept shared by all Indian religions, but Jainism has given significant importance to it since its origin. Popularly, Ahimsa is known as non-violence. However the word Ahimsa has a much deeper spiritual meaning in Jain texts than just non-violence.

In a positive sense, Ahimsa means caring for and sharing with all living beings as well as tending to, protecting and serving them. So Ahimsa is not the passive behavior of people satisfied in observing what is happening around them, but the positive and constructive behavior aiming at promoting others' life and well-being through gentleness, friendship, and peace. Hence it is a form of compassion – Karuna or Daya.

Ancient Jain texts explain that not only the intention to harm but also the **absence of compassion is what makes actions violent**.

In the scripture – Āvashyak Nir yukti – it is said;

जो गीलाणं परियारइ सो माम् परियारइ

A Person who serves the sick, Serves Me.

Mahavir (Avashyak Nir yukti Sutra)

Hence Ahimsa entails universal friendliness (Maitri), universal forgiveness (Kshamā), and universal fearlessness (Abhay).

Ahimsa is the principle that Jains strive to practice not only towards human beings, but also towards all other living beings including the environment.

In Acharang sutra, it is said;

“One should not injure, subjugate, enslave, torture or kill any living being including animals, living organisms (plants, vegetables. or pollute water, air, and earth), and sentient beings. This doctrine of Ahimsa Dharma is immaculate, immutable and eternal.”

Mahavira (Achāranga Sutra)

The teaching of Ahimsa refers not only to the avoidance of physical acts of violence but also to the avoidance of violence in the hearts and minds of human beings.

In the context of one's spiritual advancement, violence imposed upon others in any form by our body, mind, or speech leads to the bondage of new bad karma, which hinders the soul's spiritual progress. In other words, violence towards others is violence towards one's own self because one acquires bad karma which impedes one's spiritual progress and journey towards liberation.

In the Bhagavati Aradhana sutra; it is said,

“To kill or hurt any living being amounts to killing or hurting one's self.

Compassion to others is compassion to one's own self.

Therefore one should avoid violence that causes pain to any living being.”

Mahavira (Bhagavati Arādhanā, 797)

The basic tenet of Jainism is “**Ahimsa Parmo Dharmah**”.

From an ethical point of view, Dharma means duty. Hence, the tenet indicates – Ahimsa and Compassion are the supreme duty of an individual.

From a spiritual point of view, Dharma means the true nature of a substance. Hence, Ahimsa and Compassion is the true nature of a human soul.

In addition, the Jain dictum

परस्परोपग्रहो जीवानाम् - parasparopagraho jivānām

“All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence”.

From Tattvārtha sutra

All living beings depend on each other for their well-being and existence. Since all lives are interconnected, one should realize that,

“if we harm ONE we harm ALL living beings” and “Greed, Possession and Possessiveness are the primary causes of all violence as well as imbalance in the environment”.

It is said that “**One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation disregards his own existence**”.

Bhagwan Mahāvīr’s entire life was full of compassion and was an example of how to live in perfect harmony with nature and provide utmost respect for the environment.

In brief, the other human beings, animals, and plants, air, and water are not there to be used or abused. Their destruction means the destruction of ourselves.

Hence the Jain motto should be “**Live and Help Others to Live**” instead of Live and Let Live.

In summary Ahimsa supersedes all concepts, ideologies, rules, customs and practices, traditional or modern, eastern or western, political or economical, self-centered or social. Ahimsa in the center is guarded by truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-possessiveness.

Doctrine of Pluralism (Anekantwad)

With regard to truth, Jain philosophy firmly states that the whole truth cannot be observed or explained from a single viewpoint by common people. To understand the true nature of reality, it is essential to acknowledge the multiple perspectives of each situation or idea. We must strive to be open-minded, view every situation with equanimity - without likes or dislikes and embrace the positive thoughts and vantage points of other human beings, other religions, and other philosophies. In Jainism, this doctrine is called *Anekantwad* or the doctrine of pluralism

Anekāntavāda stops the violence of thought and speech. It is also called the intelligent expression of Ahimsa.

Non-possession / Non-attachment (Aparigraha):

Jainism believes that the more wealth a person possesses, the more he or she is likely to commit sin to acquire. Wealth creates attachment, which results in continuous greed, jealousy, selfishness, ego, hatred, and violence. Lord Mahāvīr has said that desires have no limit. An attachment to worldly objects results in the bondage of karma, so desires should be reduced and consumption levels should be kept within reasonable limits.

Hence Aparigraha (non-possession) stems from respect for other lives and the environment. The scripture says, “We harm and kill other lives because of our greed and possessiveness”.

Selfless Service to Needy and Suffering (Vaiyavrutti)

In order to attain liberation, a person continuously performs six internal austerities (penances of the soul) which help to purify the soul.

Prāyashchitta	Repentance for our bad deeds
Vinay	Humility and respect towards all living beings
Vaiyavrut	Selfless service to needy and suffering
Swādhyāy	Study of religious scriptures and study of self
Dhyāna	Meditation
Kāyotsarga or Vyutsarga	All activities of body, mind, and speech are steal.

The Vaiyavrut is one such penance, which means a true seeker renders selfless service to needy and suffering people.

Compassion inevitably manifests itself in selflessly serving others, especially those in need and in pain. It impels us to work together tirelessly, with humility and with unwavering conviction not only to alleviate the suffering of others but also to honour the inviolable sanctity of every living being, treating them with love and respect – and finding our own joy and spiritual fulfilment in doing so.

Charitable acts conditioned on a return of favors are not truly compassionate and where there is self-interest there can never truly be peace and harmony.

Four Compassionate Bhavna or Reflections

Four Compassionate Bhavna help one to develop purity of thought and sincerity in the practice of religion. Adopting these Bhāvanās in one's daily life can make a person very virtuous

Maitri	Amity or Friendship to all living beings
Pramod	Appreciation of virtues of others
Karunā	Compassion and helping others who are suffering and in need of it
Mādhyastha	Equanimity or impartiality in regard to those who are devoid of virtues.

Seven Cardinal Virtues of Ātmasiddhi Shastra

The true seeker of the self-possesses the seven cardinal virtues namely; compassion, peace, equanimity, forgiveness, truthfulness, renunciation, and non-attachment to worldly relations and objects. These qualities keep one constantly vigilant.

Jain Conduct and its Relevance to Modern Times

The principles of Jainism if properly understood in their right perspective and faithfully adhered to, have great relevance for modern times.

It advocates a path of minimum violence, minimum accumulation of possessions while remaining non-attached to these possessions, and the practice of self-restraint. These principles bring contentment and inner happiness and joy in the present life through spiritual development based on freedom from passions and kindness towards all beings.

Non-violence (Ahimsa) which strengthens the autonomy of life everywhere, non-absolutism (Anekāntavāda) which strengthens autonomy of thoughts & speech, and non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) which strengthens autonomy of interdependence are the three realistic principles which strengthen our belief that every living being has a right to existence.

In summary to live a proper ethical and spiritual life we should:

- Establish universal friendship and peace through Compassion and Ahimsa
- Practice compassionate living, by respecting the lives of other beings and the environment we live in and provide service to lift anyone who is down-trodden

- Establish true social equality based on non-acquisitiveness and non-possession
- Reconcile differences between diverse religious faiths, political parties, and communal and racial factions through the philosophies of pluralism or non-absolutism
- Promote ecological conservation through the values of an austere life-style, non-possessiveness, and self-restraint
- Practice a pure Vegetarian / Vegan lifestyle by avoiding all animal base foods and products. This includes all dairy products such as milk, cheese, butter, Ghee, ice-cream, and meat, fish, eggs, honey, leather goods and other items such as, fur, silk, and pearls
- Reduce needs and wants as far as possible and minimize consumption
- Do not waste the gifts of nature. Reuse and recycle all the products and share the resources

“Nature provides enough for our NEED and not enough for our GREED”. Let us pledge to live a compassionate, ethical and disciplined life, to minimize the negative impact on our life, on the life of others, and on the environment.

The ultimate goal of every soul is to achieve liberation through understanding and realization. This is accomplished through the supreme ideals of Ahimsa, kindness, reverence for all forms of life, non-possessiveness, conquering all passions such as attachments and aversions, and through the philosophy of non-absolutism (Anekāntavāda).

Above all, these ideals translate into a religion of universal love and compassion not only towards human beings but also towards all forms of life and the environment.

Let me conclude by reciting Universal Friendship prayer of Jainism

Universal Friendship Prayer

शिवमस्तु सर्वजगतः, परहितनिरता भवन्तु भूतगणाः।

दोषाः प्रयांतु नाशं, सर्वत्र सुखी भवतु लोकः॥

Shivmastu Sarva Jagatah,

Par hit niratā bhavantu bhutaganāha,

Doshāha Prayantu Nāsham,

Sarvatra Sukhi bhavatu lokah.

May the entire universe be blessed;

May all beings engage in each other's well-being.

May all weakness, sickness and faults diminish;

May everyone everywhere be healthy, peaceful and happy in all respects.

At the end, I would like to indicate that we are highly obliged Your Eminence - for sparing the time to be with us today, as well as we thank the other representatives of the Jain and Catholic communities for joining us on this auspicious occasion.

Thank you, Namste, and Jai Jinendra

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