The Three Jewels of Jainism

The three jewels of Jainism are also known as three gems and three refuges. They constitute the core practice of Jainism for both the ascetics and the laity. While the laity is given some freedom to practice the law, no lenience is given to those who have chosen to become the ascetics and follow the path in letter and spirit. The three jewels which are common for both groups are cultivation of 1. Right perception (Samyak Darshan), 2. Right knowledge (Samyak gyan) and 3. Right conduct (samyak charitra).

1. **Right Perception (Samyak Darshan)**

Right Perception is not a mere physical act. There is a mental process behind it and it is very much influenced by the attitude and the background of the preceptor. Right Perception comes with the ability to discriminate correctly between right and wrong, good and bad, right belief and wrong belief, right knowledge and wrong knowledge, and between truth and untruth.

Right Perception comes from right thoughts, right insight, right knowledge, right understanding, right faith, right relationships and right attitude. In a traditional sense, right perception comes from having right beliefs and right thinking about the Tirthankaras and their teachings, and by knowing the difference between the Jiva, the embodied soul and Ajiva, the inert matter. In a negative sense, right perception also means not having the wrong perception, which is acquired by not believing in false prophets, not following wrong scriptures, not believing in the wrong knowledge and not indulging in wrong practices.

Right perception leads to contentment (prasanna), detachment (nirveda), spiritual yearning for liberating, (samvega), kindness (anukampa) and faith in the path (astikaya). It also results in freedom from eight kinds of pride, namely pride in family, physical strength, beauty, knowledge, wealth, authority, relationships and spiritual progress. Cultivation of right perception requires a great deal of inner discipline and assiduous practice which demands the following requirements.

1. Faith without doubts,
2. Complete renunciation of desire for worldly comforts,
3. Respect for believers on the path,

4. Absence of likes and dislikes,
5. Disinterest in wrong paths,
6. Bringing non-believers to the path,
7. Cultivation of right faith, and
8. Spreading the knowledge Jainism

2. Right knowledge (Samyak gyan)

Right knowledge (samyak gyan) comes with right perception, right understanding, right discrimination and by knowing the true doctrine. Knowledge that is gained through external agencies is liable to error whereas knowledge gained directly through the faculties of the soul cannot be wrong. The true test of right knowledge lies in its ability to help us in getting what is good for us and in avoiding what is sinful. Right knowledge is useful and reliable because it is a true representation of what is.

Jainism acknowledges eight types of knowledge. Of them, five constitute right knowledge. They are mati (mental knowledge), sruti (acquired knowledge), avadhi (distant knowledge), manahparyaya (paranormal knowledge) and kevala (absolute knowledge). The remaining three types of knowledge constitute false knowledge (mithya gyan). They are invalid knowledge, erroneous knowledge and wrong knowledge.

Mati gyan (mental knowledge) is ordinary perception obtained through the normal faculties of the mind such as perception, cognition, analysis and memory. It is further divided into smriti (remeberance), pratyabhijna or samjna (recognition), tarka (inductive logic) and abhinibodha or anumana (deductive logic). According to another classification, it is divided into upalabdhi (end result), bhavana (feelings and emotion) and upayoga (usefulness). Matigyan comes to us mainly through the sense organs (indriyas). So sensory knowledge always precedes mental knowledge.

Sruti gyan is verbal and non-verbal knowledge acquired through signs, symbols and words. Study and hearing are the usual methods of obtaining srutigyan. While matigyan is acquired through primary contact, srutigyan is acquired through secondary contact or another source. Srutigyan is of four types depending upon how it is acquired: labdhi (contact), bhavana (attention), upayoga (utility) and naya

(perspective). The difference between sruti and mati is very subtle because in case of srutigyan also perception, cognition and understanding play an important role. Matigyan is the raw material from which comes srutigyan as a finished product. The former is based on personal experiences and perceptions while the latter is based on other people's knowledge and experiences that have been borrowed through communication.

Avadhi gyan is clairvoyance or knowledge of distant and remote things acquired through higher faculties, without the use of the senses or study. It comes either from birth (bhava) because of previous karma or from virtues (gunas) acquired by doing good karma and destroying bad karma.

Manahparyaya gyan is the knowledge acquired psychically through other people's minds using the paranormal faculty of mind reading or telepathy. People endowed with this faculty have the ability to actually see the thought forms and mental impressions of other people and know instantly what they are thinking. Manahparyaya gyan is acquired because of previous good karma or virtue acquired in the present life by removing impure karma. Manahparyaya is a kind of avadhigyan but it is limited to the extent of other people's minds and what is going on in them. In comparison, avadhigyan extends to everything and everywhere. Secondly, both human beings and others can acquire avadhigyan, but manahparyaya is possible only in case of humans.

Kevala gyan is the "Only" knowledge or the absolute knowledge. It is also described as the perfect knowledge and the ultimate knowledge. Kevalagyan is not subject to standpoints or perspectives because it contains all viewpoints and perspectives simultaneously. It is omniscient, omnipresent, indescribable, unlimited, eternal and transcendental to which the limitations of space and time do not apply. It is acquired only when a person has achieved nirvana.

Knowledge obtained by these five means is divided into both direct knowledge (pratyaksha) and indirect knowledge (paroksha). Direct knowledge is that knowledge which is acquired directly without the intervention of an external agency. Of the five types of knowledge, the first two is considered indirect and hence reliable while the last three are direct and more reliable. Indirect knowledge is susceptible to error, invalid conclusions, and falsehood, whereas direct knowledge is perfect.

From right perception comes right knowledge. From right knowledge comes right conduct and the power of discrimination. As karma is gradually removed from the embodied self, it begins to acquire different types of right knowledge. First comes perceptual knowledge. From it arises the desire to study and acquire the sruti knowledge. From the study of the doctrine and its practice comes clairvoyance or knowledge of distant objects and telepathy. These extraordinary powers enable the jiva to come into contact with higher beings from whom it gains more knowledge leading to its further purification. As the Jiva becomes adept in different types of knowledge, it gradually moves on the path of liberation and achieves keval gyan or the highest knowledge. Ultimately, in the transcendental state, the Jiva gains perfect knowledge and becomes complete.

3. Right Conduct (Samyak Charitrya)

The three jewels are interconnected and work in tandem. One cannot have right conduct without right knowledge and one cannot have right knowledge without right perception. Right conduct comes from the awareness of what is right and what is wrong and by doing what is right. It is practicing right knowledge as revealed by the Tirthankaras and the jinas. At the core of their teachings is the practice of non-violence as a solution to the problem of karma. However, ahimsa has to be practiced in conjunction with other teachings. A follower of Jainism should not have any doubt about the teachings of the Jinas. From faith comes the conviction and the resolve to remain committed to the path. Faith in the doctrine is therefore the first commitment expected of each follower. The conviction is further cemented by the 12 vows or vratas, which each initiate into Jainism has to undertake to begin his or her journey on the path. Of the 12 vows, five are main vows or maha-vratas and the rest are supplementary vows or anuvratas. Jain scriptures provide ancillary information on how to practice each of the main vows.