

PRAYER AND DHYAN

Since Jainism firmly believes in the doctrine of karma and puts sole reliance on the development of the spiritual force by one's own personal efforts, and further exhorts its followers to develop Asarana-bhavana (none other can refuge or save us), the question that naturally arises is, what is the place of prayers in Jainism? Since the Jains do not believe in God or in the existence of any outside Divinity controlling our fate, any idea of prayer would be irrelevant to them for two main reasons.

- 1) The soul which has been emancipated and became Siddha has no desires or motivations left. Its character is purely that of a knower and a seer. If, prayers could please Siddha then some prayers could also displease Siddha. In the same sense if Siddha could bestow favours or frowns then attributing such human frailties to a Siddha (liberated soul) is to deny soul's liberation.
- 2) Once we accept the doctrine of karma, all results must be sought in that doctrine and therefore unless the prayers are adjusted in the karma doctrine, they remain totally non-productive.

However, it would be totally wrong to say that prayers have no place in Jain philosophy. Jains do not consider prayers as a means of seeking favours from Siddha or even Arihants. True Jain prayers are nothing but the appreciation and adoration of the virtues possessed by the liberated or Arihants and the expression of ardent desire to achieve these virtues in one's own actual life. It is for this reason that Jain scriptures have actually enumerated the virtues of different categories of souls such as Arihanta, Siddha, Acarya, Upadhyaya and Sadhu.

It is basic to the Jain belief that the Tirthankaras (prophets) and their teachings are only to point out to us the way to achieve liberation. But how to acquire liberation and how to put these teachings into the practice, is entirely left to us. We achieve only to the extent to which we exert. However, the path shown by those who have achieved liberation must be studied with utmost respect and sincerity, because it is the proven path, which they have actually taken during their lives and have obtained the results. We feel very thankful to these great souls for providing us such useful guidance. Therefore, in prayer we express our gratitude, extol and enumerate their virtues and wish that such virtues might also develop in our life. Such prayers constantly remind us what made them great and in turn help us to develop such virtues in us. In Jain philosophy, this is the process of prayers.

It is interesting to note that the most outstanding Jain prayer, known as Navakara Mantra, is not referred to any individual personal or sect and asks for nothing in return. It does nothing more than offering sincere veneration to those souls, which are already liberated or are on the path of liberation.



Namo Arihantanam -- I bow down to all Arihantas.

Namo Siddhanam -- I bow down to all Siddhas.

Namo Ayariyanam -- I bow down to all Acharyas.

Namo Uvajjhayanam -- I bow down to Upadhyayas.

Namo Loe Savvasahunam -- I bow down to all the Sadhus and Sadhvis.

Arihantas are those blessed souls who have successfully shed off all the ghati karmas, which blur the potency of the soul. Siddhas are those souls who have achieved the final liberation and have attained a bodiless state of pure bliss. Acharyas are those merciful souls who teach us about the path to salvation and Upadhyayas and Sadhus and Sadhvis are those saints who are themselves on the path to salvation and are striving for the liberation.

These five are called Pancha-paramesthi, five types of great souls, those who have been liberated and those who are on the path of liberation. A Jain bows down to them all, not necessarily because they have followed or are following a particular type of religion but because they have already attained what was worth attaining or because they are striving to attain what is worth attaining.

To be continued...