

Living Life the Jain Way

By Ajay Sheth



Ajay Sheth is a Trustee of the Quest Foundation and publisher/editor of the Ma Swami Prerna magazine. He has dedicated his life to serving others and making a positive impact in the world. But what truly sets Ajay apart is his commitment to being a practitioner of Effortless Awareness. He has mastered the art of living in the present moment, letting go of ego and conditioning, and embracing life with an open heart and mind. Through his Effortless Awareness practice, Ajay has cultivated a profound sense of inner peace, compassion, and wisdom. He radiates a warm and loving energy, touching the lives of all those around him. As he continues on his journey of self-discovery and service, Ajay inspires others to embrace their path of effortless awareness, reminding us that being a true human being means living a life of authenticity, love, and freedom.

What is our life? What is the purpose of our life? What is religion? What is the purpose of religion? What is the importance/significance of religion in our life? Are there hell and heaven after our death? Is there life after death? These are fundamental questions that have puzzled humans for centuries, and there are many theories swirling around in the name of religion. Such questions have been a perennial concern for humans across cultures and belief systems.

However, the more pressing issue is that many people fail to live their current lives fully, beautifully, and meaningfully. The real question is not whether life exists after death but whether we are truly alive while living. We often become so caught up in speculations about the afterlife that we neglect the precious gift of the present moment. We forget to cherish, appreciate, and honor the beauty, wonder, and complexity of life right here, right now.

The two most important days in our life are the day we were born and the day we find out why. Perhaps our purpose in life has nothing to do with the job we find, the new things we will manifest or attract, or the mystical journey we complete. Perhaps the purpose of our life is to live fully and to make a difference in each other's lives. Life is an opportunity, life is a festival, life is celebration, life is playfulness. Look at toddlers. They enjoy life with innocence, curiosity, playfulness and a beautiful smile. They don't worry about their growth, they simply grow.

Bhagwan Mahavir, despite being born in a palace, went in search of a state of perpetual peace and fulfillment, a state of ultimate joy and bliss. And that is what Jainism teaches us. Bhagwan Mahavir taught us that "Happiness, in its purest form, is not a fleeting emotion dependent on external circumstances, but an enduring state of being that stems from inner harmony. True

happiness is not found in fulfilling desires but in liberation from them. Detachment is not about owning nothing, but about nothing owning you. Religion is no religion if it becomes mechanical, a mere ritual. One who has a pure mind and pure conduct does not need worship. Happiness is a journey, not a destination. Happiness is the experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude. Happiness is a state of mind; it is priceless and, most of all, free."

Unfortunately, as we grow (only in age), we enter the world of comparison and competition. This brings the four Kashays (Passions) into our lives; four negative emotions or states of mind that rob us of the true happiness, peacefulness, lightness, and sweetness that we experienced as toddlers.

They are:

1. *Krodh* (Anger): Uncontrolled anger, frustration, or irritability, that can lead to harmful actions and hurt others.
2. *Maan* (Ego): Excessive pride, self-importance, or arrogance, that creates a sense of separation and ignorance.
3. *Maya* (Deceit): Dishonesty, fraud, or deception, that can cause harm and suffering to oneself and others.
4. *Lobh* (Greed): Excessive attachment, craving, or covetousness, that can lead to exploitation and harm to others.

These four Kashays are considered obstacles to Sat Chit Ananda, a state of ultimate bliss that leads to abundant joy and inner happiness. By recognizing and overcoming them, one can cultivate a more peaceful, compassionate, and enlightened state of being.

In Jainism, the four Dharmas believed to help overcome the Kashays are as follows:

1. *Daan* (Charity): Overcomes Greed

Practicing generosity and giving to others selflessly, and being content with what one has, helps reduce attachment and greed.

2. *Tapas* (Self-discipline): Overcomes Anger

Developing the virtue of forgiveness, cultivating self-control, and finding inner peace through meditation, fasting, and other spiritual practices helps manage anger.

3. *Sheel-Sadachar* (Morality-Good Character): Overcomes Deceit and Ego

- Embracing honesty, integrity, and moral values helps eliminate deceit and dishonesty.

- Developing humility, compassion, and kindness helps reduce excessive pride and ego.

4. *Bhav* (Right Belief, feelings, emotions): Overcomes all four Kashays and maintains Equanimity

Cultivating the right understanding, faith, and spiritual awareness helps overcome all negative emotions.

By embracing these four Dharmas, one can gradually overcome the four Kashays and progress on the path of spiritual growth and self-realization. Remember, this is a continuous process that requires effort, patience, and self-reflection. By practicing regularly, you will experience peace and equanimity in your spiritual journey.

The highest level of Dharma is the regular practice of Dhyana (meditation), which removes restlessness and fluctuations of the mind, bringing it to a more stable and peaceful state with no thoughts or mental agitation. This is often referred to as the state of "Shunya Avkash" which translates to "Empty Space". One who has stability in their mind cannot be affected by the hustle and bustle of the world. Bhagwan Mahavir practiced intense Dhyana for 12.5 years, a remarkable feat of spiritual discipline and endurance. During this period, he achieved a deep state of spiritual enlightenment and self-realization.

This state can be achieved through Dhyana practice, which includes:

- Training the mind to focus and concentrate
- Reducing mental chatter and distractions
- Cultivating awareness and observation of thoughts and emotions

- Gradually quieting the mind, leading to a state of inner peace and stillness

In this peaceful state, one can experience a deep sense of calm, clarity, and connection to their inner self and the universe. Regular meditation practice can lead to a more stable and peaceful mind, even amidst challenging situations.

Once one is devoid of all Kashays and has achieved the state of Shunya Avkash, they reach a state of non-duality with all living beings, characterized only by love and compassion. A state of non-duality is a profound spiritual concept that points to the ultimate reality beyond all distinctions and separations. To approach non-duality with love and compassion is a graceful and gentle path.

Remember, non-duality is not just a philosophical concept but a living experience. When we become one with nature, we tap into its vast and vibrant energy. As we become one with nature, we may experience:

- A sense of unity and interconnectedness with all living beings
- A flow of energy that nourishes and balances our body, mind, and spirit
- An expansion of consciousness, allowing us to see the world from a new perspective
- A deep sense of peace, harmony, and belonging
- An increase in vitality, creativity, and inspiration

Remember, becoming one with nature is a journey, and every small step can lead to a deeper connection with the world around us.

As the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, said, "Not what we have, but what we enjoy, constitutes our happiness." Yet, many of us get trapped in worries about the future or regrets about the past, rather than embracing the present with mindfulness, gratitude, and joy.

Let us strive to live each day with intention, passion, and compassion, creating our little slice of heaven right here on earth. In the end, it's not just about what awaits us after death, but how we choose to live, love, and cherish the life we have now. And this is what Bhagwan Mahavir's teachings teach us in a practical way.

May we all aspire to live a life that is worthy of our highest potential and cherish every moment with love, laughter, and light.