

Nine Tattvas - Doctrine of Karma Philosophy

The group of nine Tattvas or fundamentals is the single most important subject of Jain philosophy. This subject deals with the doctrine of karma, which provides the basis for the path of liberation. The proper knowledge of these Tattvas is essential for spiritual progress.

The doctrine of karma provides a rational explanation to the apparently inexplicable phenomena of birth and death, happiness and misery, inequalities in mental and physical attainments and the existence of different species of living beings.

It explains that the principle governing the succession of life is karma. The karma that bind our soul are due not only to the actions of our body, mind, and speech but more importantly, to the intentions behind our actions. Jainism strives for the realization of the highest perfection of the soul, which in its original purity is free from all pain, suffering, desire, and bondage of the cycle of birth and death.

Nine Tattvas (Nine Fundamentals) are:

Jiva	Soul or living being (Consciousness)
Ajiva	Non-living substances which include all the remaining five substances.
Äsrava	Causes of the Bondage of karma
Bandha	Characteristics of Bondage of karma
Punya*	Merit or karma of good deeds
Päp*	Sin or Transgression or karma of bad deeds
Samvar	Stoppage of attachment of new karma
Nirjarä	Exhaustion of the accumulated karma
Moksha	State of total liberation from all karma

*Some literatures define Punya (merit) and Päp (sin) as separate Tattvas while others include them in Äsrava. In reality, Punya and Päp are the result of Äsrava. Hence, truly there are only seven Tattvas.

Jiva and Ajiva (Soul and Nonliving Substances)

The first two Tattvas, Jiva and Ajiva comprise the physical reality of the universe. Jiva Tattva refers to the soul and Ajiva tattva refers to other five substances which are Matter, Dharma, Adharma, Space, and Time. However, in reference to the Theory of Karma, Ajiva Tattva refers to karma or karmic matter only. The remaining tattvas explain the relationships between the soul and karma.

Äsrava (Causes of Bondage of Karma)

The primary causes of the attachment or bondage of karma to the soul (known as Äsrava) are as follows:

- A person's illusion, which includes wrong conviction and wrong knowledge of reality (Mithyätva),
- Lack of self-restraint or vowlessness (Avirati)
- Spiritual laziness or unawareness (Pramäda)
- Passions (Kashäya) like anger, ego, deceit, greed, and lust
- Activities of body, speech, and mind (Yoga)

These causes convert the karma particles or karma Varganä into karma attaching to the soul. Collectively they are called Äsrava.

The soul has had this karmic matter attached to it from eternity. This karmic matter is known as the Kārman body or causal body or karma. The soul, which is covered by karmic matter, continues to acquire new karma from the universe through the above-mentioned actions at every moment.

Also the old karma after producing their result, are shred or leave the soul when it is time for them to do so.

Because of this continuous process of acquiring and exhausting karma particles, the soul has to pass through the cycles of birth and death and experience pleasure and pain. Therefore, under normal circumstances the soul cannot attain freedom from karma and hence liberation.

Bandha (Characteristics of Bondage of Karma)

Āsrava causes karma particles to attach to the soul. When karma attaches to the soul its bondage to the soul is explained in the following four forms and it is determined at the time of the bondage:

Prakriti bandha	Type or category of karma bondage
Sthiti bandha	Duration of attachment of karma bondage before they separate from the soul.
Anubhāga bandha	The intensity of the attachment of karma bondage
Pradesha bandha	Quantity of karma particles attached to the soul

Primarily the soul's activities of body, speech, and mind are responsible for the types or categories (Prakriti) and quantity (Pradesh) of Karma bondage and the soul's Mithyātva (Illusion), Avirati (Lack of self-restraint), Pramāda (Spiritual laziness), and Kashāya (passions such as anger, ego, deceit, and greed) are responsible for the duration (Sthiti) and the intensity (Anubhāga) of Karma bondage.

It is due to the intensity and the duration of the karma bondage that the soul passes through many pleasure and painful situations and suffers. Hence one needs to get rid of Mithyātva, Avirati, Pramāda, and passions first to progress spiritually towards liberation.

(a) Prakriti Bandha (Type of Karma Bondage):

When karmic matter attaches to the soul, it obscures the soul's essential nature of infinite knowledge, infinite perception, bliss, perfect power, eternal existence, formlessness, and equanimity. The different types of karma obscure different qualities or attributes of the soul. This is known as Prakriti bandha.

Bondage of karma is classified into eight categories according to the particular attribute of the soul that it obscures. These eight categories of karma are explained below

(b) Sthiti Bandha (Duration of Attachment of Karma):

When karmic matter attaches to the soul, it remains attached for a certain duration till it produces the complete result. The duration of the attachment is determined according to the intensity or dullness of the soul's passions or actions when the karma was originally attached to the soul. After producing the result, the karma will separate or detach from the soul.

(c) Anubhāga Bandha or Rasa Bandha (Intensity of Attachment of Karma):

When karma produce the result, the intensity of the result is determined by the severity of the passions of the soul when the karma were originally attached to it. This phenomenon is called Anubhāga or Rasa bandha.

(d) Pradesha Bandha (Quantity of Karma):

The quantity of karma particles that are attracted and attached to the soul by our activity of body, mind, and speech (Yoga) is called Pradesha Bandha.

Summary

In summary, the soul's passions such as anger, greed, and ego are responsible for the duration and intensity of the karma and the soul's activities of body, speech, and mind are responsible for the types and the quantity of the karma.

Eight Categories of Prakriti Bandha Karma

The eight categories of Prakriti Bandha karma are divided into two major groups known as Ghāti karma, which subdue the qualities of the soul, and Aghāti karma, which relate to the physical body, mind, and physical environment of the living being.

(i) Ghāti karma (Destructive Karma):

The Ghāti karma subdue the qualities of the soul. Due to these Karma, the soul possesses limited knowledge, vision, happiness, and power instead of infinite knowledge, vision, happiness and power.

Mohaniya karma (Deluding Karma)

This karma generates delusion in the soul with regards to its own true nature. The soul identifies itself with other external substances and relationships. This entangles the soul into happy and unhappy environments. It is divided into two subcategories.

Darshan Mohaniya karma (Mithyātva or Delusion):

This karma generates delusion (Mithyātva) in the soul's innate nature of Right Conviction and Right Knowledge. It is the most dangerous karma. Because of this karma, a person does not have the right knowledge of the self (true nature of the soul) and of reality but he/she believes in the opposite or false knowledge of reality and of the soul (for example: the belief that the body and soul are one or I am this physical body etc.).

The proper knowledge implies to having a proper understanding of the true nature of the soul, karma, the bondage of soul to karma, and the way to liberate the soul from karma. To have total conviction in the above knowledge is called Right Conviction or Faith. This state of spirituality is called Samyaktva or self realization. A person's spiritual progress begins from the Samyaktva state (4th Gunasthanak).

Chāritra Mohaniya karma:

This karma partially covers or obscures the soul's original nature of Right Conduct. Due to this karma a person possesses many weaknesses such as lack of self restraint, spiritual laziness, and various vices (known as Kashāya) such as anger, ego, deceit, and greed and hence, one experiences pleasure and pain. After the attainment of Samyaktva, a person's weaknesses gradually diminish and one moves towards spiritual progress and ultimately by removing all Chāritra Mohaniya karma he/she attains passionless or Vitarāga state also known as perfect happiness or perfect conduct (12th Gunasthanak).

Jnānāvaraniya karma (Knowledge Obscuring Karma)

This karma partially covers or obscures the soul's power of infinite knowledge. After the attainment of Vitarāga state a person destroys all his Jnānāvaraniya karma within 48 minutes and attains Keval-jnān, a state of infinite knowledge.

Darshanāvaraniya Karma (Perception Obscuring Karma)

This karma partially covers or obscures the soul's power of perfect perception or vision. After the attainment of Vitarāga state a person destroys all his Darshanāvaraniya karma within 48 minutes and attains Keval-darshan, a state of infinite perception.

Antarāya karma (Obstructing Karma)

This type of Karma obstructs the soul's innate ability to acquire infinite energy. It obstructs the natural quality and energy of the soul such as charity and will-power. It also prevents a living being from doing good and positive actions. After the attainment of Vitarāga state a person destroys all his Antarāya karma within 48 minutes and attains Anant-virya, a state of infinite power and energy.

In reality a person destroys the above three karma together within 48 minutes after the attainment of Vitarāga state. Once all four Ghāti karma are destroyed, a person is known as Kevali, Arihant, Tirthankar, or Jina (13th Gunasthanak).

(ii) Aghāti karma (Non Destructive Karma): Relates to the Physical Body and Physical Attributes

The Aghāti karma do not degrade the qualities of the soul but they relate to the physical body, mind, social standing, and physical environment of the living being. Due to these Karma, the soul possesses physical body, life span, social status, and favorable or unfavorable environment instead of eternal existence, formlessness, equanimity in status, and unobstructed happiness.

Vedaniya karma (Feeling Pertaining Karma)

Vedaniya karma is responsible for the creation of favorable or unfavorable environment or situation mainly at a physical level such as sickness, terminal illness, hunger, fatigue, accident or a good sound health and positive physical (body and sensual) capability. This way it gives the feeling of pain (Ashātā) or pleasure (Shātā). This feeling is channeled through the physical level only.

This physical level feeling activates the Mohaniya Karma to produce happiness (Sukha) and agony (Dukha) at the mental level. The happiness and agony are experienced by the soul because the soul is at Mithyātva and Kashāya stage and hence its interpretation of the situation (knowledge wise and feeling wise) is biased and illusive. This way the Vedaniya karma indirectly obscures the blissful nature of the soul via Mohaniya karma.

A Kevali possesses Vedaniya karma but not Mohaniya karma. He also possesses infinite knowledge (Keval-jñān). Therefore he remains a silent observer and knower of the favorable or unfavorable (Shātā or Ashātā) circumstances that exist through the channel of a physical body, but he does not interpret it as joy or sorrow, because he does not have Mohaniya Karma. He remains in a blissful state all the time under all circumstances.

In summary, Vedaniya karma being Aghāti karma can only produce favorable or unfavorable circumstances at the physical level, create feelings of pain and pleasure through physical channels and indirectly make the soul feel joyous and sorrowful or in agony via Mohaniya karma. However, without the existence of Mohaniya Karma one cannot feel happiness/joy or unhappiness/sorrow. Hence, Vedaniya karma has no real impact on the soul.

Nām karma (Body and Physique Determining Karma):

This karma obscures the non corporeal or eternal existence of the soul, and produces the body with its limitations, qualities, and faculties. In summary Nām karma determines the quality and nature of a physical body a soul may possess such as:

Destiny (Gati) - heavenly beings, human, hellish beings and animals and vegetations

Birth species (Jāti) - Physique or characteristics of the body (Sharira)

Gotra karma (Status Determining Karma):

This Karma determines whether a living being will be born in a restrained and respected family or otherwise. It obscures the soul's characteristics of equality, and determines family, social standing, and personality.

This karma is not simply with mundane aspects of birth environment, but rather with whether that environment is more or less conducive to the pursuit of the spiritual life.

Äyu karma (Life Span Determining Karma):

This karma determines the span of life in one birth or one life cycle, thus obscuring the soul's nature of eternal existence.

Summary

On the path of a spiritual progress, a person first destroys Darshan Mohaniya karma and attains Samyaktva (4th stage of Gunasthānak). Then he destroys Chāritra Mohaniya Karma and attains the stage of Vitarāga (12th stage). Then he destroys Jnānāvaraniya, Darshanāvaraniya, and Antarāya karma and attains Keval-jnān (infinite knowledge), Keval-darshana (infinite perception), and Anant-viryā (infinite power and energy). This stage is called Kevali or Arihant (13th stage).

A Kevali attains liberation only after all Aghāti karmas are destroyed which occurs at the time of death. After nirvana, all Kevali souls are known as Siddhas. The Siddha state is a state of pure consciousness. It does not possess a physical body. The soul remains in this total blissful state forever.

Samvar (Stoppage of New Karma)

The process that stops new karma from attaching to the soul is called Samvar. This process is the opposite of Āsrava. It can be accomplished by the constant practice of:

- Right conviction and Right Knowledge of Reality (Samyaktva)
- Observance of Vows (Vratas)
- Awareness or Spiritual-alertness (Virati)
- Being Passionless (Akashāya)
- Peacefulness of Mental, Verbal and Physical activities (Ayoga)

57 Practical Ways of Samvar

Jain literature defines 57 practical ways, by which one can stop the influx of karma:

- 5 types of Samitis (Carefulness in our activities)
- 3 types of Guptis (Restraints in our activities)
- 10 types of Yati Dharma (Religious Virtues)
- 12 types of Bhāvanā (Reflections or Contemplations)
- 22 types of Parishaha (Endurance of Suffering with equanimity)
- 5 types of Chāritra (Conduct)

Five Samitis (Carefulness in our activities)

Samiti means carefulness or continuous awareness of all our activities with special attention towards nonviolence.

Iryā Samiti	Proper care in walking
Bhāshā Samiti	Proper care in speaking
Eshanā Samiti	Proper care in taking Gochari (receiving food)
Ādāna Nikshepa Samiti	Proper care in taking and keeping any items
Utsarga Samiti	Proper care in disposing waste

Three Guptis (Restraints in our activities)

Restriction of non-virtuous activities of mind, speech and body is called Gupti, which is an important aspect of Samvar.

Mano Gupti	Proper control over Mind
------------	--------------------------

Vachan Gupti	Proper control over Speech
Käya Gupti	Proper control over Body

Ten Yati Dharma (Religious Virtues)

These ten virtues are pure passionless modes of the conduct.

Kshamä	Forbearance, Forgiveness
Märdava	Modesty, Humility
Ärjava	Straightforwardness, Candor
Shaucha	Contentment
Satya	Truthfulness
Samyam	Self-restraint, Control of Senses
Tapa	Austerity, Penance
Tyäg	Renunciation
Äkinchanya	Non-attachment
Brahmacharya	Celibacy, Chastity

Twelve Bhävanä (Reflections or Contemplations)

To make room for pure thoughts and to drive out the evil ones, Jainism recommends reflecting or meditating on the twelve thoughts known as the Twelve Bhävanä (Anuprekshä) or Reflections. These twelve Bhävanäs cover a wide field of Jainism.

Anitya Bhävanä	Impermanence of the world
Asharan Bhävanä	No one provides protection
Samsär Bhävanä	No permanent relationship in universe
Ekatva Bhävanä	Solitude of the soul
Anyatva Bhävanä	Separateness
Ashuchi Bhävanä	Impureness of the body
Äsrava Bhävanä	Influx of karma
Samvara Bhävanä	Stoppage of influx of karma
Nirjarä Bhävanä	Shedding of karma
Loka Bhävanä	Transitory of universe
Bodhidurlabh Bhävanä	Unattainability of right faith, knowledge, and conduct
Dharma Bhävanä	Unattainability of true preceptor, scriptures, and religion

Four Compassionate Bhävanäs (Compassionate Reflection)

There are four compassionate Bhävanäs some times known as auxiliary Bhävanäs. They help one to develop purity of thought and sincerity in the practice of religion. Adopting these Bhävanäs in one's daily life can make a person very virtuous.

Maitri	Amity or Friendship
Pramod	Appreciation
Karunä	Compassion
Mädhyastha	Equanimity

Twenty Two Parishaha (Endurance of Suffering)

One should remain in a state of equanimity when hardships occur. There are 22 types of hardships defined in the scriptures such as Hunger, Thirst, Cold, Heat, Insect bites, Hearing of evil words, and Diseases etc.

Five Chäritra (Conduct)

The endeavor to remain steady in a state of spiritual purity is called conduct. There are five categories of conduct defined in Jain scriptures based on the spirituality of an individual

Sämäyika Chäritra	To remain in equanimity for a certain duration (minimum of 48 minutes)
Chhedo-pasthäpana Chäritra	To live the life of an ascetic
Parihära-vishuddhi Chäritra	To follow special types of penance as an ascetic
Sukshma-Samparäya Chäritra	To live a life without any Kashäya (anger, greed, ego, deceit) as an ascetic except with very little desire (a form of greed) for Moksha or other similar reflection at micro level
Yathäkyäta or Vitaräga Chäritra	Living the life of an Arihanta i.e. natural living

Nirjarä (Removal of Old Karma)

The process which removes the previously accumulated karma is called Nirjarä. This happens naturally when karma produce their result at the time of their maturity. However at that time a person reacts to the situation that was created by karma and acquires new karma. Hence under normal circumstances a person will not be able to get rid of his/her karma because at every moment he/she removes some old karma and acquires some new karma.

Jainism explains that on a path of spiritual progress a person should remove the previously acquired karma before their maturity. This is achieved by the observance of rigorous penance and austerities known as Tapa. There are twelve types of Tapas defined in the Jain literature. They are divided into two groups; External Austerities (Bähya Tapa) and Internal Austerities (Abhyantar Tapa).

External austerities discipline the human body to minimize passions and desires. Internal austerities purify the soul. The external austerities are essential to help prepare the human body and mind suitable for the internal austerities. The internal austerities are true austerities because they exhaust the attached karma before they produce the resultant effects of good or bad and thus purify the soul.

(a) External Austerities (Bähya Tapa):

Anashan

Complete abstinence from eating any food and/or drinking liquid (some times drinking only water) for a predetermined period of time, such as for a day or more. This is known as Upaväs.

Alpähära or Unodari

Eating at least 10% less than one's appetite at a given time.

Ichhānīrodha or Vritti-sankshepa

Limiting the number of food items while eating and limiting the possession of material things.

Rasatyāg

Complete abstinence from eating or drinking juicy and tasty foods such as butter, milk, tea, sweets, fried food, snacks, spicy food, juices etc. (in other words, no attachment to the taste of the food)

Kāya-klesha

Willful endurance of body sufferings even when one does not have to. Activities include traveling bare foot in severe heat or cold weather and removal of hair by hand (for example - Jain monks and nuns).

Sanlinatā

Sitting in a lonely place in various postures, with all the senses and mind withdrawn inwardly and giving up the pleasures of the five senses and the mind.

(b) Internal Austerities (Abhyantar Tapa):

Prāyashchitta

Repentance for bad deeds and the breach of vows for spiritual purification.

Vinay

Humility and proper behavior towards Sādhus, Sādhvis, teachers, and elders.

Vaiyāvṛuttya

Rendering selfless service to Sādhus and Sādhvis, elderly, needy, and to those who are suffering.

Swādhyāy

Study of one's own self by studying and listening to religious discourses and scriptures.

Dhyāna

Religious meditation and contemplation.

Kāyotsarga or Vyutsarga

Kāyotsarga is the ultimate internal austerity, where the activities of the body, speech, and mind are withdrawn. This process involves making the body and mind as steady as possible to contemplate on the feeling that our soul is separate from our body. This austerity in its highest state destroys Ghāti Karma.

Moksha (Stage of Total Liberation from Karma)

A person who has destroyed all the four Ghāti karmas is known as an omniscient or Kevali. Upon destroying the remaining four Aghāti karmas, a Kevali achieves nirvana, liberation, or Moksha. This occurs at the time of death.

A liberated soul totally realizes its true attributes of infinite knowledge, infinite perception, infinite power or unlimited energy, and total bliss. The soul does not possess any physical body and is in a state of pure consciousness. The soul reaches the top of Lokākāsh and remains there forever in its blissful existence. It never returns to the cycles of birth, life, miseries, and death. This state of the soul is the liberated or perfect state, and is called "Nirvana".

Pravin K. Shah

Chairperson, Jaina Education Committee
Federation of Jain Associations in North America
education@jaina.org

August 7, 08