

Dicasterium Pro Dialogo Inter Religiones

Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains and Sikhs: In dialogue and collaboration to renew
and to re-ignite hope in our times

June 4, 2025

Building Hope as a Contribution to Common Good: An Urgent Co- Responsibility in the Spirit of Universal Fraternity

A Jain Position

Dr. Jinesh R. Sheth

j.sheth@bham.ac.uk

Dharmanath Research Fellow in Jain Studies
University of Birmingham

How do we build hope? It is, indeed, an interesting question to explore from a Jain¹ perspective. In continuation with what the previous speakers have told on ‘hope’ from the Jain viewpoint, as well as more broadly from other viewpoints, I intend to reflect on the Jain notion of *bhāvanā* (contemplation) and discuss one such list of *bhāvanas* that makes a case for building hope, and which, I think, contributes to common good. I also deliberate over the Jain theory of *anekāntavāda* (non-one-sidedness) and see what insights it has to offer in this discourse on ‘hope’.

If one were to ask the question, what is the Jain view on engaging with the ‘other’—whether an individual or an institution—the one list that comes to my mind is that of four *bhāvanās* (contemplations), and which are to be cultivated and practiced while dealing with *others*. As *Tattvārtha Sūtra* says:

“[One must cultivate] kindness towards all beings, joyfulness towards the more virtuous, compassion towards miserable, and indifference towards the vainglorious.”²

Kindness or love is to be practiced towards all beings in general without any discrimination. Although a truism, Jain scriptures often reiterate that ‘all living beings wish to

¹ For a recent and brief introduction to Jain philosophy, see Gorisse (2023). For a comprehensive introduction to Jainism, see Jaini (2001), Dundas (2002) and Long (2009).

² See *Tattvārtha Sūtra* TS 7.6 / 7.11: *maitrī-pramoda-kāruṇya-mādhyasthāni ca sattva-guṇādhika-kliśyamānāvinayeṣu*. This list is considered to be ‘trans-sectarian’ for it is also found, with some variations in the Buddhist tradition, known as the *brahmavihāras*, as well as in the Hindu tradition of Pātañjali’s school of Yoga (Wiltshire 1990, 241–42). Also, see Balcerowicz (2022).

live and not to die’³ and here I would like to emphasize the term “all”. One can imagine the levels of kindness that the Jain worldview demands when it is expected to be practiced towards tiny creatures and even plants. In practicing kindness, one cultivates an attitude such as let there be no suffering for others. Acts of kindness, thus, often inspire hope in a positive future for both oneself as well as for others. Further, this kindness is not merely a social or ethical construct, it is rather deeply embedded in the ontological structure of the Jain worldview. The soul (*jīva*), as Jainism would say, is the same for each living being. This is possible because the Jain metaphysics suggests that the soul may undergo numerous kinds of modifications from one phase of life to another, and without altering its eternal nature. Thus, the differences among various souls are with respect to their current mode of existence and not with respect to their nature.

Similarly, expressing joy (*pramoda*)—instead of enmity or bitterness—towards the virtuous ones is another desirable quality that one can practice in different walks of life. Whether in personal, social, professional, or religious life, expressing delight towards the virtues of others is not possible without a deep-rooted hope that may all beings become more virtuous and forsake evil thoughts, and thereby speech as well as deeds. Cultivating compassion (*kāruṇya*) towards those who are suffering is another way to contribute to the common good. Statements such as “just as pain is not dear to you, so is the case with all living beings”⁴ embed an empathetic message such that the pain and suffering of others is not different than our own.⁵ Compassion also demands care, and which can be exercised in a much better way if one is able to empathize with the other. One can, thus, always hope to not inflict any kind of suffering on others.

Lastly, one is also expected to be equanimous (*mādhyastha*) towards the arrogant and vainglorious. While we often hope that acts of kindness may be reciprocated in more or less the same way, it would be foolish to expect so from people who are egotistic and full of themselves. The last *bhāvanā*, thus, reminds us that one must not hopelessly think that a criminal would suddenly stop committing a crime towards us just because we have been kind to him. It is possible for someone to reciprocate acts of kindness with unkindness, of benevolence with evils, of generosity with pettiness, of joyfulness with hatred, and thus, one can only hope that they do not do so.

³ See, for instance, *Daśavaikālika* (DV), 273a/6.10a: *savve jīva vi icchanti jīviūṃ na marijjiūṃ*.

⁴ *Bhaktaparijñā* (BP), 90a: *jaha te na piyaṃ dukkhaṃ jāṇiya emeva savva-jīvānaṃ*

⁵ On empathy from a Jain perspective, see Sheth (2022)

The picture given by the four *bhāvanas* to us is quite holistic, and one that does not ask us to overlook the differences amongst us. While we can have hopes that the world will become a better place, the process towards reaching such an ideal begins when one cultivates these virtues. Hope may offer us bright visions for the future, but it is the virtues like kindness and so on that would facilitate in bringing that vision to life and thereby contribute to the common good and universal fraternity. There are several other themes that one can explore in the Jain context to develop a more thorough account of ‘hope’. For instance, there are other lists of *bhāvanas* that an individual may cultivate in one’s own spiritual journey which also would entail further ‘hope’. Jain scriptures also talk about hope at the face of death and dying, which is through the practice of *sallekhanā*. Nevertheless, I leave these topics for future considerations.

Before I close, I would like to draw attention to one of the key principles of Jain philosophy, i.e., *anekāntavāda* and see whether it can offer any insights on ‘hope’. The central thesis of *anekāntavāda* states that anything that exists is multifaceted (or non-one-sided).⁶ This multifaceted-ness is expressed through asserting simultaneous existence of contrary properties such as existence and non-existence, identity and difference and so on—in one and the same thing. What does it mean when I apply this theory to the concept of *hope* for the common good? Well, one thing it does imply is that hope is not necessarily always a virtue. At times, hope might not be sufficient, and maybe even detrimental. For instance, climate change activists such as Greta Thunberg, thus, are quoted as saying: “Adults keep saying, ‘we owe it to young people to give them hope.’ But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic” (2019, 22; as quoted in Milona 2020, 3). Hope, indeed, is a wonderful gift at the hands of humankind to see light in times of darkness, to envision peace during times of war, but it must not be exploited such that we end up being completely ignorant of the harsh realities and do not exercise our agency in taking concrete steps.⁷

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⁶ Akalaṅka, AŚ *ad* ĀMī 109: *yad sat tat sarvam anekāntātmakam*. For a historical and philosophical introduction to *anekāntavāda*, see Matilal (1981).

⁷ See Milona (2020, 22).

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