

The Understanding of Hope: A Jain Perspective

Vibhuti Mehta, Co-ordinator, Jain Education Team, Institute of Jainology, UK

Good morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to present a Jain perspective on Hope.

Hope uplifts us in times of hardship, and it inspires the most noble human qualities like resilience, patience and courage. From a Jain viewpoint, hope is the aspiration for liberation (*moksha*). It is active and inward-looking, anchored in self-effort and ethical living. Hope arises from knowing that transformation is possible by refining our conduct to reveal the soul's innate purity.

Let us see how this ancient tradition fosters a deep, steady hope built on inner growth.

Jain Philosophy and the Nature of Hope

In Jain philosophy, every soul, regardless of its current condition, is inherently pure and radiant. It possesses infinite perception, knowledge, energy and bliss. However, this true nature is clouded by *karma* – subtle matter that binds to the soul due to our own actions, words, and even thoughts.

Hope, then, is not a naive optimism that things will get better "somehow". It is the conviction that we can stop further bondage of *karma* and remove the layers already bound, allowing the soul's qualities to shine through.

This is achieved through the three jewels (*ratnatraya*) of Jain practice:

1. Right Faith (*Samyak Darshan*): A deep, intuitive trust in the reality of the soul and the possibility of liberation from *karma*.
2. Right Knowledge (*Samyak Jnana*): Accurate understanding of the nature of the world, *karma*, and spiritual principles.
3. Right Conduct (*Samyak Charitra*): Living ethically, with self-restraint and compassion toward all beings.

These three are not steps but an integrated path. They remind us that hope requires understanding, conviction, and action.

The *Tattvartha Sutra*, a foundational Jain text accepted by all Jain denominations, opens with this path. Its very first verse¹ proclaims these three jewels as the path, underscoring that liberation – our highest hope – is attainable through conscious practice.

Expression of Hope Through Jain Principles

I have selected three well-known principles to express their relevance to the subject of Hope.

¹ Tattvārtha Sūtra 1.1, Umāsvāti 1994, That Which Is – Tattvārtha Sūtra with the combined commentaries of Umāsvāti/Umāsvāmi, Pujyapada and Siddhasenagani, (English translation by) Nathmal Tatia (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994)

At the heart of Jain ethics is *ahimsa* or non-violence in thought, word and action. It extends beyond human beings to include all forms of life, even microscopic organisms, vegetation and the four elements: earth, water, fire, air.

The *Acharanga Sutra*, a text considered to contain the most authentic description of Mahavira's biography, defines life that we should protect:

“Thoroughly knowing the earth-bodies and water-bodies and fire-bodies and wind-bodies, the lichens, seeds, and sprouts, he comprehended that they are, if narrowly inspected, imbued with life, and avoided injuring them.”²

This deep reverence for life builds ecological and ethical hope by fostering compassion and responsibility.

Anekantavada emphasises the complexity of truth and multifaceted nature of reality, suggesting that no single viewpoint can fully express it.

This is not just philosophical – it is deeply practical. For example, listening to others with openness, recognizing that their perspective too, can carry truth. It cultivates humility and encourages dialogue and peaceful coexistence, both essential tools for hope in a divided world.

Finally, *aparigraha* teaches us to set limits on our possessions and attachments. Without any control, they breed cravings, greed and ego. Restraining them develops resilience and leads to a path of inner peace and outer harmony. We free up space for generosity and hope. It reminds us that joy does not lie in accumulation but in freedom from it.

These principles are lived most fully by Jain ascetics who serve as beacons for us. Jains do not believe in a supreme creator or in divine grace. Only self-effort (*purushartha*) drives the gradual unfolding of the soul's potential. And yet, this is not bleak; it is deeply empowering. We are the authors of our liberation from suffering.

The Role of Prayers

You may wonder, if there is no supreme creator, then what role do prayers play?

Jain prayers are not a means of communication with the divine or requests for help. They are tools for reflection and purification. They honour enlightened souls and encourage us to emulate their virtues. Themes of forgiveness, non-violence, and inner peace promote spiritual upliftment and hope rooted in self-growth.

Hope in Interfaith Collaboration

The *Tattvartha Sutra* also tells us:

“Souls render service to one another.”³

² Ācārāṅga-sūtra Book 1, Lecture 8, Lesson 1, Verses 11-12, Hermann Jacobi 1884 (translated from Prakrit), 'Ācārāṅga Sūtra' in Jaina Sūtras Part I, The Sacred Books of the East Vol 22 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1884)

³ Tattvārtha Sūtra 5.21, Umāsvāmi 1994, That Which Is – Tattvārtha Sūtra with the combined commentaries of Umāsvāmi/Umāsvāmi, Pujyapada and Siddhasenagani, (English translation by) Nathmal Tatia (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994)

This idea of interdependency of all beings nurtures mutual responsibility. We know that destroying forests in one continent can lead to a climate crisis in another, highlighting our interconnected fate.

Jain scholar Kumarpal Desai wrote:

“The life of a living being is a life of mutual co-operation and assistance. Industry, labour, service and sacrifice of innumerable living beings are behind the sustenance and growth of an individual. Thus every individual is indebted to the universal society of all beings. Even virtues and meritorious qualities cannot be cultivated in isolation.”⁴

Hope flourishes through shared efforts and recognition that personal growth depends on communal well-being. We have to work together.

Acharya Tulsi, a prominent Jain thinker of 20th Century, made a very good point. He described religion as having three dimensions: ritual, ethics and spirituality. While rituals may differ, our shared ethics surely allows for meaningful collaboration, where hope is not just spoken, but enacted together.

Conclusion

From a Jain perspective, hope is not passive. It is a discipline and a choice to live consciously, compassionately and with moral clarity.

It does not deny suffering, nor does it rely on any external favour or intervention. It calls us to act with conscience, to grow in awareness, and to remember that every soul, no matter how burdened, can shine.

In this spirit, interfaith dialogue becomes not only possible – but a source of shared hope for our collective future.

Thank you.

⁴ Kumarpal Desai, The Value and Heritage of Jain Religion, Glory of Jainism, 1st Edition, 1998, Published by Shri Anilbhai Gandhi, Shri 108 Jain Tirth Darshan Bhavan Trust, Shri Samavasaran Mahamandir, Palitana 364270, India.