

Perspective on COVID-19 through the Jain Philosophy

By Dharmaraj Khot

Shri Siddhasen Shrut Samvardhan Peeth

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Today the entire world is engulfed in a global crisis of historical proportions known as COVID-19. As of this writing, the global spread has surpassed 1 million people with over 50,000 deaths in 180+ countries around the world. What initially started as a regional health crisis has now turned out to be a global pandemic and global economic catastrophe with millions of people losing their means of livelihood.

For many, it's a crisis of lifetime staring in an abyss of destruction, nothingness, disappointment, and shattered dreams. Whatever people have built, created or developed over many years of hard-work appears to suddenly collapse or face potential dire threat, one from which they feel cannot recover or repair. This is the mother of all crises, which is testing humanity's collective will and resolve to fight off the disease. A key question emerges as to how to process and digest this unthinkable human and economic catastrophe?

Jain Dharma has, for many centuries, offered a path of understanding life, its meaning, existential purpose and much more. At such critical juncture, it would serve us well to know, understand and reflect on the following:

- 1) Jain Dharma says we must inculcate a mental state of friendship towards all living beings, exalted happiness for virtuosos, compassion towards the downtrodden, and tranquility toward adversaries.
- 2) This is a time for deep reflection and prayer for those facing life-death situations; those who have lost everything; those who are at the cusp of losing life. We must offer prayers filled with compassion and hope for those facing hardships; proactively provide assistance for those in need; and do everything we can to help others. The attributes of friendship and compassion transcend boundaries of nationality, creed, heritage, race, sex and religious denomination.
- 3) We must express a gesture of gratitude towards law enforcement agencies, health professionals, doctors, paramedics, nurses, govt. officials who are taking extreme risks to help others. This is sure to bound lot of meritorious karma (punya karma) for doing such noble deeds.

- 4) We should undertake special activities that help us to gain mental peace and strength such as chanting of mantras, expressing devotion to the Lordship, undertaking meditation, praying for world peace and health, etc. These activities contribute to invoking the latent meritorious karmas. So has been stated in the faultless Jain scriptures.
- 5) Be wise to know that nothing in this world is built for permanence. On the contrary, transformation and change are the only two constants in the cosmos for all living and non-living entities. This is the true Nature of Reality.
- 6) **All universal substances are characterized by three realities – Origination, Decay and Permanence.** This fundamental principle states that in a changing world, new forms/modes of entities will evolve and originate in the due course of time. These new modes/entities will perish through the principle of decay in the due course of time. While this is happening, the most essential characteristics of a substance will forever remain the same, i.e. the principle of permanence. An unshakable belief in this Nature of Reality will produce calm, stillness and internal strength. So has been said by the Jina, all-omniscient spiritual victor.
- 7) All entities/objects/substances in their current form have an expiration date. There is nothing permanent about this world or the things it contains. What goes up has to come down; what's born has to die; what has united must be separated. These are universal principles related to the Nature of Reality. People chose not to believe in them due to delusion, attachment and aversion. The sooner we understand, analyze and study, the better off we will be for the future.
- 8) **There is no place of ultimate shelter in this world.** All shelters work until meritorious karma (punya karma) is present. The moment de-meritorious karma (pāp karma) rises, all external things will cease to work. All our support systems in the **sentient form** - husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, and in the **insentient form** – wealth, money, mansion, hut, house, vehicles, land, prestige, etc., - will cease to operate. This is the true Nature of Reality as propounded in the Jain metaphysics. The sooner you begin to apply yourself to this truth, the better off you will be when grief strikes. This time-tested knowledge and strong belief have helped true seekers to achieve Moksha, the most arduous effort known to the mankind. There is only one shelter that we can seek – it is the shelter of true Nature of Reality, i.e. Dharma. This will never disappoint or bring misery to you in life.

- 9) Mundane existence has always been, is and will be full of misery and grief. The current time cycle is rightly called Dukhama, i.e., one filled with sorrow, pain and misery. While some of us may experience some happiness through material comforts, one must understand that it is fleeting in the large scheme of things called the **transmigration**. The sooner we accept this reality, the better off we will be in dealing with its consequences and results.
- 10) The true Nature of Reality has emanated from All-omniscient, passionless and All-knowing Jina. This can only provide peace, wisdom and a path to carving out a life full of unending bliss and happiness.