



Parasparopgraho Jivanam

“All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence”

Near our home there is a beautiful lily pond with pink and yellow lilies floating in the calm waters, fishes jumping up and down, frogs croaking, loons calling back and forth, birds nesting in the nearby shrubs, butterflies and dragonflies flying from one flower to another. It is a breathtaking site. With the recent lack of rain, the pond has dried up completely. Do you know what is at the bottom of the pond? Rusty metal, old furniture parts, broken tires stuck in the mud etc... It just looked awful. It made me realize that we humans are the same way. When we are dried up, the worst parts of us show up. We need to be fulfilled.

In this society we have learned to encourage and strive for individualism and independence. We want to be ‘in charge’, we want to ‘control’. We are willing to eliminate any obstacle that comes in the way of our selfish wants. This has led to exercising rights without responsibilities, pleasure without conscience, commerce without morality, Science without humanity and politics without principles. In the end, this only leads to emptiness and leaves our dried up soul longing for inner peace.

The ancient Jain scriptural aphorism Parasparopgraho Jivanam (All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence) is refreshingly contemporary in its premise and in its promise. It is the water for our soul and our spirit. It means that all aspects of nature belong together and are bound in a physical as well as a metaphysical relationship. Life is viewed as a gift of togetherness, accommodation and assistance in a universe teaming with interdependent constituents.

Mahavir proclaimed a profound truth for all times to come when he said: “One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation, disregards his own existence which is entwined with them”. Jain cosmology recognizes the fundamental natural phenomenon of symbiosis or mutual dependence that forms the basis of the modern day science of ecology.

The worldview of rugged independence – we have learned to value so much, has given us a false sense of success. In fact that has made us arrogant. This arrogant notion of independence stems from underlying insecurity within us. In an individualistic point of view, ‘I write therefore I am a writer’. In a Jain view of interdependence, ‘you are the readers, therefore I am a writer’.

I AM, BECAUSE YOU ARE; without you I am nobody. It is a viewpoint based on relationship and dependency. It is the statement of humility and gratitude. Understanding Parasparopgraho Jivanam gives us this humility. It helps us build relationships that are built on the pillars of respect, understanding, acceptance and appreciation. Mahatma Gandhi once said “Tolerance is not enough, we don’t want people to tolerate each other, we want them to understand and respect each other”

Satish Kumar a former Jain monk and the author of “Path without destination”, at his recent visit to Yale said “When you meet someone as an Indian, you will meet an American or a Mexican or a German etc... If you go as a Jain, you will meet a Christian or a Muslim or a Jew. But if you go as a

human being, you will only meet a fellow human being”. He even went further in saying that if you go just as a ‘being’, then the entire universe is your friend and you will come in touch with other beings of the universe. A refreshing way, to put ‘Parasparopgraho Jivanam’ in practice.