

JAIN CONCEPT OF THE SACRED

Prof. Padmanabh S. Jaini, California University, Berkeley, U. S. A.

Eliade, in his celebrated work *The Sacred and the Profane*, defines the sacred as being “equivalent to a power, and, in the last analysis, to reality”. “Man becomes aware of the sacred”, he observes, “because it manifest itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane”. He maintains further that “for those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality”. Accordingly, Eliade sees a religious man as one “who attempts to remain as long as possible in a sacred universe” and believes that “the completely profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit”.¹

Sacred for the Systems

It is obvious that Eliade’s concept of the sacred and his idea of religious man are appropriate only to those religions which affirm the existence of a “wholly other reality” capable of manifesting in the “profane”. The idea of a reality that is *wholly* other is somewhat unsatisfactory to the Hindu tradition: otherwise, Eliade’s scheme, if suitably modified, would appear to be adequate to comprehend the classical Vedic darśanas and Hindu theism in its multiple forms. The latter has all the major ingredients of a “sacred” tradition: belief in an Almighty Creator, his divine incarnations and power of his grace; belief in the authority of a revealed text, namely the Vedas, which are seen as the source of all knowledge, both ritual and spiritual; and belief in the divine origin of a social system which defines and regulates the activities of each and every member of society. Eliade’s concepts of the sacred are, however, deficient when we consider the heterodox systems, particularly the religion of the Jains. Unlike the Cārvākas, the Jains are salvationists; unlike the Buddhists, they believe in the existence of souls; hence they must have a concept of the sacred. Nevertheless, their atheism requires that this sacrality be located neither in a Deity nor in its divine ordinances and manifestations, but in man himself, both in the middle of his bondage and in the very act of his isolation (kaivalya) from that bondage. Jainism is distinguished by its man-centredness, a feature which forcefully presents itself in the Jain opposition to all forms of theism and the alleged sacrality of the phenomena inspired by the Deity.

It is the Jain Claim that he alone among salvationists can truly explain the twin doctrines of bondage and freedom, of a beginningless saṃsāra and an endless mokṣa. The Vedāntin, because of his doctrine of the Absolute Brahman,

is forced to declare phenomena as illusory; he must hope that bondage can be wished away merely by denying its reality. The Sāṃkhya might admit the reality of both individual souls (puruṣa) and Prakṛti, but he renders the bondage of the soul a mere mockery by declaring that Puruṣa is totally incorruptible and unchangeable. The Mīmāṃsaka is loath to admit the very idea of mokṣa, and does not accept the possibility of a man ever knowing anything beyond what the senses will perceive. Lest human beings should imagine that their puny intelligence is capable of properly managing their affairs, the Mīmāṃsaka, who quietly disposes of gods as mere nominalizations with dative case-endings, stipulates that the dharma or the laws of the universe and the duties of mankind are known only through the Vedas. These are not the relations of a God whose authority must depend on a circular "validation" by the Vedas, nor are they compositions of human beings, however exalted. Rather, these are eternal words, emanating from no man (apauruṣeya) but manifest themselves throughout the cyclical movements of the universe.

Yoga and Jain Systems

Yoga is one Vedic system which probably comes close to the fundamental teachings of the heterodox schools. The term Jina is primarily a description of a yogin who has attained the goal of isolation (kaivalya) and omniscience (kevala-jñāna); indeed, the Jains have claimed that they are the true successors of the yogin depicted in the Indus valley seal. They point to the very significant fact that Hindu divinities are never represented in the posture of meditation (with the possible exception of Śiva as Dakṣiṇāmūrti) and that the early Buddha images depict him either in the bhūmiśarpa or the abhaya-mudrā of preaching. By contrast, images of the Jain Tīrthaṅkaras, from the immemorable past to the present day, are invariably shown either seated in a lotus posture or standing erect, rapt in meditation. The discipline of the Pātañjala yoga, comprising of yama, niyama etc., agrees in many respects with the rules and regulations and holy practices prescribed for a Jain aspirant. It is conceivable that the Jains and the Buddhists on the one hand and the compilers of the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, represented by the Pātañjala school, on the other, all draw upon an earlier source of yoga which is common to both the Śramaṇa and the Brahmanical traditions. What mainly distinguishes the Vedic yoga from that of the heterodox systems is Patañjali's adoption of Īśvara-praṇidhāna (devotion to the Deity) as a means of attaining yoga, however inconsistent this may be with the doctrines of the atheistic Sāṃkhya and the monistic Vedānta.

Patañjali describes this Deity (Īśvara) as one who has never been in bondage, a being who is eternally free from afflictions, actions and their results. He is also an eternally omniscient being, "the guru of all gurus", unrestricted by time. Although called a "puruṣa-viśeṣa", Patañjali's 'guru' is not a human being like Mahāvīra or Gautama, both of whom also claimed to have acquired freedom from bondage and an irreversible state of omniscience. The belief in an eternally free

person capable of dispensing salvation by grace is a feature conspicuously absent in the heterodox systems. The Jains as well as the early Buddhists rejected this special category of an eternally free soul as purely arbitrary and observed the activities of a teacher were inconsistent with one deprived of the means of communication, namely mind, body and speech. They also maintained that the belief in such an omnipotent power makes the salvation of the human being dependent on the sweet will of an agency outside the control of the aspirant. They affirmed, and sought to drive home by the examples of Mahāvīra and the Buddha, the message that human beings formerly in bondage, are able to break the beginningless bond of saṃsāra, that they have within them the innate powers to realize, here and now, perfection and omniscience, independent of a Deity.

Theistic Systems

The Yoga school probably saw Īśvara playing only the limited role of the spiritual teacher, the Guru. But the theistic darśanas like Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the sectarian cults of Viṣṇu and Śiva, supported by their respective Upaniṣads. Āgamas and Purāṇas, saw this Īśvara not merely as a benign Guru but as the “Sacred Power”, the very source and sustenance of all creation. He, the omniscient and omnipotent Lord, created the world of matter and souls and presided over the destinies of His creations. He dispensed divine justice, weighing the actions of men, punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous. He held in balance the forces of good and evil (dharma and adharma) by the mighty acts of His divine interventions, the avatāras. Through the Vedas this Lord instructed man in his duties to gods and manes, to the society, and to himself, and stipulated that he be guided not by a free choice of conscience but by the dictates of varṇa and āśrama, that is, by the caste and stage of life in which he found himself. While stating in the *Gītā* that all actions (karma) must be followed by their results, the Lord also predicted dire consequences for breach of the caste duties, duties which must be maintained for the upkeep of the Universe. But it was further promised, rather benignly, that these duties, however unpleasant, could become “sacrifice”, or sacred acts, if performed as an act of devotion, and thus comprise the very means of man’s salvation from the bonds of action.

This kind of theism soon became the most favoured means of salvation, asking nothing more than conformity to the varṇāśrama-dharma and an emotional adoration for the Deity in any chosen (iṣṭa) form. It inspired mighty waves of bhakti movements which swept across the nation, absorbing countless numbers of diverse people, and assimilating a multitude of gods and cults within its fold. Caves were scooped and temples were erected to enshrine the images of the Lord, who was shown either in the terrible acts of destroying a demon, or, bedecked in royal splendour, enjoying conjugal happiness in the endearing company of His consorts. Poets and scholars alike, joined hands in glorifying the name of the Lord, whom

they trusted to take care of not only their ultimate salvation but even of their immediate yoga-kṣema, the daily bread and butter. The sectarian Purāṇas vied with each other in creating a world of fantasy for the benefit of the devotees, who silently accepted as “the Lord’s will” untold injustices of an oppressive caste system from within and humiliating defeats and devastations at the hands of unbelievers from without.

Jaina Concept of the Sacred

As far as we know, no complaint was uttered either by the oppressed masses below or the enlightened brahmins above. The only recorded protest that survives is to be found in the vast literature of the heterodox systems, especially of the Jains, a literature created mostly for the guidance of the Jain laity, which had to be protected from the overwhelming waves of bhakti that engulfed the rest of India. A careful study of this literature, particularly during the medieval period, shows the Jains as pioneers among those who challenged the authority of the Vedas, disputed the efficacy of their sacrifices, repudiated the doctrine of the Creator, ridiculed the sacrality of the avatāras, and rejected the brahmanical rituals. In this way they sought to establish a “desacralized cosmos”, if we can use such an expression, in which to pursue kaivalya or “isolation”, their vision of salvation.

The Jain critique of the “sacred” in the Vedic tradition centers around the examination of the nature of an āpta, a technical term meaning ‘reliable authority’ in matters pertaining to salvation of the soul from the bonds of saṁsāra. This clearly falls in the realm of dharma, and the Mīmāṃsaka declares that only the Vedas, by virtue of their being apauruṣeya (uncreated by a human or divine agency) are to be considered āpta. The problem of eternal words engaged the attention of such scholastic philosophers as Jaimini, Kumārila and Bhartṛhari; but Jains saw no difficulty in dismissing the whole controversy with the simple observation that the Vedas consist of words, and like any other composition, must have a human author. The Theist intervenes here, attempting to save the situation by declaring that the Veda are neither Uncreated nor man-made, but emanate as revelation from the Creator, the eternally free and omniscient being who alone deserves to be called āpta. The Jain arguments against this theory are basically two-fold: 1) Creation is not possible without a desire to create and this implies imperfection on the part of the alleged Creator. 2) If karma is relevant in the destinies of human beings, then God is irrelevant; if he rules regardless of karma of beings, then he is cruel and capricious. In brief, the Creator is not free from rāga and dveṣa and hence is neither free nor omniscient; therefore, he cannot be an āpta.

The Jain needed no better proof for his thesis than the Hindu Purāṇas, which narrated the most shocking deeds of their God, perpetrated as He assumed the forms of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. They extolled what appeared to the Jain the most hideous and immoral exploits of Narasiṃha or Kṛṣṇa, the Lord’s alleged avatāras or manifestations on earth. Akalaṅka, a celebrated ninth century logician

expresses the Jain indignation over worship of the Hindu Trinity in his famous stotra to a Jina².

The Jain could allow that the Purāṇic tales of the avatāras were probably figurative and therefore their teaching should be tested against more definitive texts like the Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas or the Dharma-sāstras, which claimed the prerogative to instruct on dharma and adharma. Even here the Jain was disappointed, for these texts bristled with self-contradictions and seemed to lack any universal ethic which could be applied at all times for all human beings³. Having, for instance, enjoined that “Thou shall not injure any being” (na himsyāt sarvabhūtāni), the scriptures had no scruples whatsoever against openly prescribing killing of animals for the sacrifice to gods and also as offerings to the manes ! Even more obnoxious to the Jain was the fact that such sacrificial himsā was not only declared to be without evil, but was even labelled as “dharma”, a virtuous act ! Hemacandra (1088-1172) indignantly asks : If hurt, how cause of merit ? If cause of merit, how hurt ?” The Dharmaśāstras, having said “Let him not speak what is untrue” (nāṇṭam brūyat), proceed to make an exception : “For the sake of a Brahmin he may speak what is not true” (Āpastamba); they even list five occasions upon which speaking an untruth is not a lie : when spoken in jest, when told in dealing with women, at the time of marriage, when in the peril of life, or in the complete loss of goods. (Vasiṣṭa XVI 36). Having forbidden stealing and having repudiated taking what is not given, Manu has no hesitation in saying : “Even if a brahmin by violence appropriates another’s goods, or by ruse, nevertheless there is on his part no taking of what is not given; for all this (world) was given to the Brahmins, but through the weakness of the Brahmins the outcasts enjoy it. And therefore a Brahmin, taking it away, appropriates his own, a Brahmin simply enjoys his own, he dresses himself in his own, he gives away his own” (Cf. *Manusmṛti* I, 101).

Further, in examining the domestic rituals enjoined by the Law books the Jain found that a great many of these were acts of gross superstition, exploited by the brahmins to earn an easy livelihood. They scrutinized, for example, the ceremony of śrāddha to the ancestors by feeding the brahmins, a practice of great antiquity which forms the very foundation of the Hindu family system even to this day. This ritual is of crucial importance to the Hindu because it is considered a fulfilment of a major obligation under the varṇāśrama-dharma. A man must enter the stage of a householder (gṛhasthāśrama) by marrying according to the caste rules. Begetting a son is obligatory because only a son can guarantee the ghost (preta) of the dead (father) a new body and a safe passage to the world of ancestors (pitṛs); he does this by periodically offering nourishment in the form of śrāddha. Brahmins are fed sumptuous meals on these occasions and it is believed that they are able to transfer the merit directly to the deceased fathers. The son is rewarded for his service with the right to inheritance of the paternal property, and a prosperous lineage is expected to result from the blessings of the ancestors.

The Jain ācāryas forbade this ritual to their laity not only because it defied common-sense but also because it was in direct violation of the law of karmas. They argued rather sarcastically that there was no invariable causal relationship between the performance of the śrāddha and prosperity of the lineage. It was clear that most people who performed it saw no increase in their lineage; on the other hand, such creatures as donkeys, pigs and goats increased their lineage even without performing the śrāddha. And as for the claim that “What is enjoined by the Brahmins accrues to the ancestors”, the Jain critic Malliṣeṇa (1292 A. D.) retorts : “Whoever is to agree to that ? For only in the Brahmin do we see the fattened bellies; and transference of these into their (the ancestors’ bellies) just cannot be believed; since at the time of feeding no single sign of such transference is perceived; and because only on the part of the Brahmins is satisfaction witnessed”.⁴

The claim that the departed soul depended on his son’s offerings in order to acquire a new body was a rather serious one. The Jain believed that a departed soul automatically assumes a new body—human or animal, hellish or heavenly—forged by his past karmas, and also that the new incarnation occurs no more than three instants (samaya) after discarding the old body. The Jains had no place for the world of Fathers (Pitṛ-loka) in their cosmology and could not cherish the idea of preserving a “point of meeting between the living and the dead”, which they saw as a constant source of fear and attachment. Nor could they accept the dictates of the varṇāśrama, pertaining to marriage and the begetting of a son; rather than being obligatory, these acts were considered optional and preferably to be avoided. A man owes nothing to either gods or ancestors; while kindness to parents is a virtue, it is nevertheless perfectly proper to renounce the world whenever one is ready to follow the higher call.

The Jain law-givers extended this same critical attitude towards variety of “holy” and “meritorious” practices which orthodox Hindus cultivated with the aim of coming closer to the divine manifest in nature. Somadevasuri (959 A. D.) gives a long list of such practices, which he labels as mūḍhatās (follies) : 1. Offering libations to the sun, 2. bathing during eclipse, 3. spending wealth at samkrānti (winter solstice), 4. performing sandhyā ritual (ablutions at dusk), 5. worshipping fire, 6. worshipping a house, 7. worshipping one’s own body (by smearing it with ashes, etc.), 8. ritual bathing in rivers and oceans, 9 saluting trees, 10. jumping from holy mountains, 11. saluting the end of a cow’s tail, 12. drinking cow’s urine, etc. “These and many others”, he warns, “are follies prevalent in the world. A Jain performing these, whether in order to obtain a favour or to maintain one’s position in society, will surely lose samyag-darśana, the true insight into the nature of reality”.⁵

The Jain idea of the “sacred” is clearly shown in one of their most ancient litanies, which lists four śaraṇas or refuges, also called mangalas, the auspicious

ones. These are arihanta (Skt. arhat), siddha, sādhu and the dharma taught by the Kevalin or omniscient one. The first of these, the arhat, means the Worthy, the Holy One; he is also called Jina (The spiritual victor), after whom the Jains take their name. Both arhat and jina were originally Jain terms, which were adopted by many other śramaṇas including the Buddhists; the terms are conspicuously absent in the Brahmanical tradition. The arhat is an ascetic, like Mahāvīra, who by contemplation and exertion, has attained to omniscience and has acquired an irreversible state of freedom from the bonds of saṃsāra. While the current state of embodiment continues, he preaches the law (dharma) as he has perceived it through his omniscience. At the end of his normal life, his pure soul discards the last of the physical and karmic bonds; becomes totally isolated from all associations, and resides forever at the peak of the universe (loka-ākāśa), endowed with infinite knowledge and bliss. He is then called siddha, the Perfected One. Theoretically the siddha is higher than the arhat. but the latter is given precedence in the Jain litany, for only the arhat is able to preach the law and be a guide to the disciples. The third refuge, the sādhu, is an aspirant, an ascetic who follows the path of purification and adheres to the doctrines preached by the arhat. These doctrines and practices will constitute what is called dharma, the fourth refuge, the mangala by which the Jain abides.

It is the contention of the Jain that a person becomes an arhat not by the grace of any Higher Being. but by dint of his own insights (darśan) and exertions (cāritra). He is no doubt helped by the example and preachings of previous Teacher-arhats, called Tīrthaṅkaras ('Ford-makers'), similarly, he will help others who follow in his wake. The line of Teachers had no beginning and will have no end; any one can at any time join the line, be counted a Teacher and become a siddha. The Jain thus replaces the Yoga doctrine of a single and externally free Īśvara with an interminable succession of 'human' Teachers rising in the course of time. These Teachers do not respond to the aspirant's devotion (praṇidhāna), nor can they influence his career; they remain totally indifferent to whether their teachings are received or rejected. The relationship between a Jain and his Jina is strictly impersonal. There is no concept of īṣṭa; although Mahāvīra is recognised as a historical person and his nirvāṇa is commemorated by an era (the Vīra-nirvāṇa-saṃvat, 527 B. C., probably the oldest historical era in India), he receives the same worship as any other Jina, since they all preached the same perfection and taught the same doctrine. The Jain layperson worships the image of the Jina totally independent of any priest; he does this in a rather lavishly furnished shrine—an imitation of the holy assembly (samavasaraṇa) where the Jina preached his sermon—and is fully aware of the absence of any Deity, considering the whole act as purely a reminder of his true goal. Nor is there any expectation of gaining absolution from the confessions (pratikramaṇa) he makes in the presence of the Jina image or of the sādhu, for the laws of karma are irrevocable and no power, however mighty, can enable one to escape the consequences of his own acts.

Through acts of worship a Jain may hope to secure such results as karma-kṣaya (destruction of karma), bodhi-labha (attaining enlightenment) or samādhi-maraṇa (holy death in meditation), but as far as worldly gains are concerned, the Jina is past granting any boons; it is unbecoming to even entertain such thoughts in his presence. It is true that this situation makes it possible for the Hindu divinities and Jain demi-gods (yakṣas) to creep into the Jain temples in the guise of door-keepers (dvāra-pālas) or guardian deities (śāsana-devatās), catering to the emotional needs of the weaker sections of the Jain laity. But the informed Jain pays no more attention to them than he would to a distinguished guest visiting the temple; for he firmly believes that one reaps the fruits of one's own karma, whether good or evil; no one can add to or take away from another's karma, not even the mightiest of the gods, for they too are subject to the same law. Karma is a psycho-physical complex; although neither holy nor sacred, it is nevertheless a power to be reckoned with, a power which is not to be propitiated but rather to be challenged by the aspirant and overcome by his insight and pure conduct. The Jain ācāryas who struggled against the bhakti movements contended that Īśvara and karma are not compatible; the God will always be invested with powers labeled as "sacred", to intervene in the automatic operation of karma, to nullify its effects and finally to set it aside as mere illusion. They argued that such a belief destroys the roots of Universal ethics and justice; instead of making a man self-reliant and motivated to develop his innate powers, it makes him a fatalist resigned to the mercy and favour of a higher power. Therefore they attempted to depict the Hindu trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva as a collection of sham gods (kudevas), not to be depended upon for salvation. Further, they exerted great effort in dealing with the two human avatāras, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, for these could not be dismissed as mere myth, and their cults had become a real threat to the integrity of the Jain laity. The Jain ācāryas had no difficulty in accepting the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, whose life had been nearly ideal, except for the deplorable act of killing the demon king Rāvaṇa, an act which was the main purpose of the Rāmāvatāra. They could not let him kill Rāvaṇa and yet not take the consequences of going to hell! Therefore they very ingeniously drafted a Jain *Rāmāyaṇa* and saw to it that Rāvaṇa was killed not by Rāma but by his younger brother Lakṣmaṇa, and the latter was cosigned to hell.⁶ They made Rāma renounce the world in the time-honoured fashion of Jain ascetics, and accepted him as an arhat and a siddha, a true model for the Jain laity. The controversial Kṛṣṇa, however, did not fare so well. The *Mahābhārata* is filled with accounts of his trickeries as a statesman; he had killed countless humans and demons. The Jain ācāryas tried as best as they could to paint a more flattering picture of Kṛṣṇa in their Purāṇas (e. g. the *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* of Jinasena), making him a contemporary of one of their Tīrthaṅkaras named Neminātha, but finally had no alternative but to send him to purgatory to suffer the consequences of his actions. They did predict however, that when he emerges from purgatory in the near future, Kṛṣṇa will be a Tīrthaṅkara and will be worshipped by both gods and men.

By their rather bold but not altogether unexpected treatment of Rama and Kṛṣṇa, the Jains were proclaiming their firm belief that violence (hiṃsā) is not compatible with the “sacred”; that the scriptures which approved violence as a means of dharma were not holy; and also that no person, however exalted, is to be emulated if his conduct brings harm to other beings. Non-violence or ahiṃsā is the basis of all dharma; and this ahiṃsā itself rests upon the knowledge that all beings, even the most insignificant ones, possess an immortal soul, capable of attaining perfection. This seed of perfection called samyaktva is the single most “sacred” thing for the Jain. Upon this foundation he has built a very elaborate network of holy practices for the realization of his true nature.⁷

References

1. M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York, 1959, pp. 11-13.
2. Akalanka-stotra, *Nitya-naimittika-pāṭhavalī*, Karanja, 1956.
3. Malliṣeṇna's *Syādvādamāñjarī*, Agas, 1970.
4. *Syādvādamāñjarī*, kārikā 11.
5. See *Upāsakādhyayana*, kārikā 136-140.
6. Hemacandra's *Triṣaṣṭiśalāhāpuruṣacarita*, VII, 10, 231.
7. For a full description of this path, see P. S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, California, 1979.

लेखसार

पवित्र जो जैन धारणा

प्रो० पद्मानाम एस. जेनी

कैलिफोर्निया विश्वविद्यालय, वर्कले, अमेरिका

ईलियेड ने अपनी पुस्तक 'दी सेक्रेड एण्ड दी प्रोफेन' में पवित्र और अपवित्र को स्पष्टतः विभेदित किया है और बताया है कि मनुष्य धार्मिक अनुभव से पवित्रता के प्रति उन्मुख होता है। उनका कथन है कि विश्व में अपवित्रता का गुण पहले नहीं था, अभी ही आया है। यह मान्यता सर्वशक्तिमान् ईश्वरवादी, वेदविश्वासी, कर्मकाण्डी एवं अध्यात्मवादी हिन्दू परम्परा पर भी कुछ परिवर्तित रूप में लागू हो सकती है, लेकिन अनीश्वरवादी जैनों के लिये यह पर्याप्त अपूर्ण है। जैन मान्यता के अनुसार, पवित्रता का केन्द्र बिन्दु कोई अतिमानव या ईश्वर नहीं, अपितु मानव स्वयं को मानना चाहिये। मानव को सम्पूर्ण विकास की क्षमता का केन्द्र बिन्दु मानना आध्यात्मिक विकास का मूल है। अनादि संसार और अनन्त मोक्ष की धारणा की सही व्याख्या जैन मान्यता से ही हो सकती है वेदान्त, सांख्य और मीमांसक लोग ईश्वर या वेदवादी

होने के कारण विश्व और उसकी पवित्रता के सम्बन्ध में यथार्थ नहीं कहते। हां, योग और जैन मान्यताओं के बीच कुछ सह-सम्बन्ध सोचा जा सकता है क्योंकि जैन भी योग का अभ्यास कर पवित्रता की ओर बढ़ते हैं। लेकिन पतंजल की 'पुरुष विशेष' की मान्यता जैन और बौद्धों से मेल नहीं खाती। ऐसे विशेष देव या पुरुष की मान्यता मानव को अपने विकास के लिए परावलम्बी बनाती है। मानव अपने श्रम और साधना से स्वयं ही पूर्ण विकास कर सकता है, यह महावीर और बुद्ध की मूलभूत शिक्षा है।

ईश्वरवादी दर्शनों में कर्मकाण्ड और भक्तिवाद का विविध रूप में विकास हुआ। देवता के मन्दिर बनने लगे, पूजाओं की विविध विधियां आरम्भ हुई ईश्वर लोक की कल्पनायें की जाने लगीं और ईश्वरीय इच्छा के आगे सभी नतमस्तक हो गये। इन मान्यताओं के विरुद्ध शिकायत करने वालों में जैन सर्वप्रथम रहे। मध्यकालीन धार्मिक साहित्य के अवलोकन से पता चलता है कि जैनो ने वेद, बलिप्रथा, ईश्वर, कर्म-काण्ड आदि का विरोध किया और सम्भवतः आत्मविकास के लिये 'अपवित्र' संसार की बात कही।

जैनो ने ईश्वर के विषय में आप्त पुरुष की बात कही और तर्क तथा पौराणिक कथाओं और आख्यानों के बल पर ईश्वर का खण्डन किया। शास्त्रों में वर्णित विरोधी आदेशों का उल्लेख किया। उन्होंने कर्मवाद और सामान्य अनुभूति के आधार पर श्राद्ध के समान अनेक रूढ़ संस्कारों का विरोध किया। सोमदेव सूरि ने बारह मूढ़ताओं का वर्णन करते हुए बताया है कि रूढ़ियां सम्यक् दर्शन में बाधक होती हैं।

जैन धारणाओं के अनुसार, विश्व में चार मंगल और शरण होते हैं—अरिहन्त, सिद्ध, साधु और धर्म। कोई भी व्यक्ति अपने दर्शन, ज्ञान और चारित्र्य की विशेषता से ही अरिहन्त हो सकता है, किसी की कृपा से नहीं। अनेक अवतार या तीर्थंकर उसके लिये मार्गदर्शक का काम करते हैं। इस प्रकार जैन योगमत के अनुरूप किसी पुरुष विशेष को न मानकर समय-समय पर होने वाले पुरुष विशेषों या गुरुओं का मानता है। ऐसे पुरुषविशेषों की पूजा-भक्ति से कर्मक्षय, बोधिलाभ, समाधिमरण संभावित है लेकिन इससे सांसारिक लाभ कुछ भी नहीं होता जैसा अन्य मत मानते हैं। कर्मवादी जैन कर्म को एक मनो-भौतिक जटिल तन्त्र मानते हैं जिस पर विजय पाना अति दुष्कर है। जैनाचार्यों ने बताया है कि ईश्वरवाद और कर्मवाद साथ-साथ नहीं रह सकते। ईश्वरेच्छा की पवित्रता मानव का उद्धार नहीं कर सकती। हिंसा और पवित्रता साथ-साथ नहीं रह सकते। अहिंसा ही परमधर्म है। इसी को जैन शास्त्रों में सम्यक्त्व कहा गया है। जैनो के लिये रत्नत्रय रूप सम्यक्त्व (श्रद्धा, ज्ञान, चारित्र्य) ही पवित्र है। इसकी प्राप्ति के लिये शास्त्रों में अनेक उपाय सुझाये गये हैं। सम्यक्त्व के अनुगमन से मानव पवित्र होता है।