



Jain Philosophy and Religion

Introduction

All actions are united by responsibility. Religion is an act of discovery, a way of rising to a standard of moral and spiritual excellence. Since very ancient times human beings have been rediscovering, practicing and passing on the moral culture of Jain religion and philosophy. This philosophy has come to making through the experience of human individuals who assumed mastery over destiny, witnessed the eternity of all existence and attained the most grand and permanent freedom – the subject of these reflections.

Here we will gradually see a teaching based on the example of ordinary mortals who found a way to overcome the inner causes of hatred, desire and destructive passion and who conquered the aggression, pride, deceit and greed which divert the living soul from a brilliant and self-contained spiritual identity. Free and independent, that true nature of the self is infinite happiness, unlimited knowledge, perfect self-control and unobstructed vision of all that exists, at all times. Jain philosophy is based on the idea that the highest goal in our existence is to reach this destination, by progressively gaining the strength of our own awareness through the power of pure conduct in our every faculty.

Jain religion is the path of the **Jinas**, or “conquerors”. The **Jina** is also called **Kevalin** (“omniscient”) and **Arihant** (“destroyer of [inner] enemies”), one who has overcome and defeated the flaws and weakness that stop us from realizing our infinite spiritual potential. A Jina is any person of this world who has subdued the senses, silenced the passions, eliminated every level of attachment and aversion, and thus attained absolute knowledge and peace.

The way of the Jinas bears witness to the fact that all living beings have the innate potential to be truly free – free from all ignorance, from debilitating thoughts and behaviors, from being controlled or swayed by the diversions of worldly existence. Countless past human beings have discovered and traversed a “path” that culminates naturally in the soul’s liberated state. It is a path of entirely human origin, shone forth by such individuals who boldly took responsibility for their spiritual destiny and achieved ultimate independence through their own will and discipline. Striving to be a living example of pure freedom equals the greatest charity one soul may bestow upon the world. A follower and believer in the example set forth by the Jinas is called Jain.

Jain faith speaks from heart that sees in every single organism the same fundamental hope for survival, safety, contentment, longevity, fulfillment, freedom and peace. This vision comes from a serious concern for the soul and its relationship with natural laws that condition our existence and our future state in eternity. The golden rule is Ahimsa, or nonviolence, in all aspects of a person – mental, verbal and physical. “Nonviolence” historically derives from the Jain faith which maintains that all souls, regardless the body and mind, are spiritually equal to each other, and the soul equivalent of oneself.

Nonviolence is the positive path to glory, a principle which when practiced has never failed to move those touched by it. We have the challenge of living it with regard to each and every creature in thought, word and deed. For humans, who possess the physical and mental capacities to both discern and choose right from wrong, the Jain path calls on us to act responsibly toward all life by living life with compassion, forgiveness, fearlessness and rationality.

Jain philosophy is not a protest or offshoot of another creed. Since early times its principles have successfully motivated the leaders and followers of certain other faiths to embrace and represent many of its original ideas and ethics. Coming from the region of South Asia, the Jain transition dates before the beginning of Indo-European culture and is one of the oldest world religions.



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Yet the Jain tradition is a historical tradition. While the Jain path to freedom comes from a remote period in human's history, the most recent Jinas to actually deliver its message to mankind were **Lord Parshva** (877-77 BCE) and **Lord Mahavira** (599-527 BCE). They were not founders of any religion, but only the last of 24 "Crossing Makers" or "Tirthankaras", great omniscient teacher who lived at different times in the cultural development of the human race. These Crossing Makers accomplished the ultimate spiritual goal of existence, and then taught their contemporaries the way to reach it by crossing over to the safe shores of spiritual purity. By example, they imparted their path to the rest of humanity and inspired one of the most intellectually prolific, philanthropic and ecological traditions in world history.

The spiritual path's living heritage is today called Jainism.

Jain teachings are summarized in six statements:

1. SOUL EXISTS.

Pure soul is the real me. I exist and I am real. I am something different from my body and from anything I might choose to imagine, contemplate or visualize in my mind. Thoughts and memories of sensations, sights, sounds and words are things that I construct mentally, but they do not define what I am.

2. THE SOUL IS ETERNAL AND INDEPENDENT

I have always existed and will always exist. I was never created and cannot be destroyed. I am the only thing that has affected my state in the past and the only thing that does so now and in the future.

3. THE SOUL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS OWN ACTIONS

I am the only force that controls my activities be they conscious, subconscious or unconscious. Ultimately, nothing other than or outside of me makes me do what I do, feel what I feel, or see things the way I see them.

4. THE SOUL EXPERIENCES REPERCUSSIONS FROM ITS ACTIONS

Nature dictates that I am affected by my own mental, verbal and physical activity, for which I am alone responsible. Spiritually those effects alter my ability to know reality and perceive the truth about myself.

5. THE SOUL CAN ATTAIN LIBERATION

I have the ability to reach the highest human attainment, which is to know and perceive the full truth about me, about this world, and about life itself, across all changes of time and space. When reached, this experience of complete knowledge, perception, control and freedom is final, everlasting and my own true nature.

6. THERE IS A WAY TO LIBERATION

I can reach that state of perfection by a path of Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct. They are a spiritual way of seeing myself in relation to the rest of the universe, learning to understand things just as they are and living in ways that respect and honor my own spiritual nature and that of every other living soul.

The Jain concept of "God"

The soul is unique in that it is the only substance in the universe that can be aware of its own existence. The soul is real thing indeed, but has properties unlike those of matter and energy. It is not something that can be pursued or desired like an external object.

Every single soul, animating each living organism, has the same inherent attributes. "Inherent" means that the soul, all by its pure self, has always had and always will possess these qualities no matter what. Those of prime concern in Jain Philosophy are

1. Infinite happiness and self-reliance



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2. Infinite power to know reality, omniscience
3. Infinite spiritual strength and will power
4. Infinite perception and vision
5. Inherent immunity to any sense of attraction or repulsion
6. Incompatibility with the processes of birth, death and rebirth
7. Having no material properties, nor any inherent physical proportions
8. Being neither superior nor inferior relative to any other souls.

Together, these *pure soul* attributes are the Jain concept of “God”. Jains worship and meditate upon these characteristics of the soul.

Jain worship or veneration for perfected souls is simply a profound respect for the most difficult human accomplishment. Wherever these great souls are in the universe, whenever born, they are solemnly appreciated. By honoring spiritual heroism, by meditating upon its attributes, the same qualities tend to become manifest in us. It's in the nature of life itself that our thoughts, speech and behavior absorb the character of that towards which we direct our consciousness.

In the Jain vision God is not man's keeper, absolver, intervener or judge, nor is God a person, power or anything else outside us. God ('Bhagavan') is simply a word to signify a certain state of our own existence.

PanchaParamesthi (Pañcaparamēṣṭhī) – The five supreme spiritual people

1. **Arihanta** – Souls who have reached the state of non-attachment towards worldly. Also known as Jina or Tirthankara (Tīrthaṅkara). Tirthankaras are the founders of the fourfold order (monks, nun, laymen and laywomen).
2. **Siddha** – Liberated souls.
3. **Acharya** (Ācārya)–Acharyas are our spiritual leaders. In addition to acquiring a high level of spiritual excellence, have the ability to lead the congregation of monks, nuns and laypeople.
4. **Upadhyay** (Upādhyāya) – This title is given to those who have acquired complete knowledge of the Jain scriptures and philosophical system. They teach Jain scriptures to other ascetics and laypeople.
5. **Sadhu** (Sādhu) and **Sadhvi** (Sādhvī) – For spiritual uplift, when a person renounces worldly life and all worldly attachments and become Sadhu (monk) or Sadhvi (nun). Their renunciation is total, which means they are completely detached from social and worldly activities. Instead they spend their time in spiritually uplifting their souls and guiding householders on how to uplift their souls.

Five Great Vows

At the time of initiation, Sadhu and Sadhvi take five major vows and live strictly in accordance with those vows. The five great vows are:

1. Vow of absolute Non-violence
2. Vow of absolute Truthfulness
3. Vow of absolute Non-stealing
4. Vow of absolute Celibacy
5. Vow of absolute Non-attachment



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Kalyanak (Auspicious Events)

Jains celebrate five major events from the life of a Tirthankar. They are

1. ChyavanaKalyanak – Conception Event
This is the event when a Tirthankara's soul leaves its previous body, and is conceived in the mother's womb.
2. JanmaKalyanak – Birth Event
This is the event when the Tirthankara is born.
3. DikshaKalyank – Initiation Event
This is the event when the Tirthankara gives up all his/her worldly possessions and becomes a monk/nun.
4. KevaljnanKalyanak – Omniscience Event
This is the event when a Tirthankara completely destroys four Ghati Karmas and attains the Kevaljnan (absolute knowledge). This is the most important event for entire Jain order as the Tirthankara re-establishes fourfold order and preaches the path of purification and liberation.
5. NirvanKalyank – Nirvana Event
This is the event when a Tirthankara's soul is liberated from this worldly physical existence forever and becomes a Siddha. This is the event when his soul attains salvation, the state of eternal bliss.

Path of Liberation – Three Jewels

The ultimate goal of all life and conduct, in Jain religion, is to realize the free and blissful state of our true being. The conduct of the present life should be aimed to attain liberation, the state of eternal bliss from which there is no return to the cycle of life and death. Every soul can attain liberation and a supreme spiritual state by realizing its intrinsic purity and perfection. A path to liberation consists of following trinity

Right Perception (Faith)

Right perception consists of seeing the true nature of every substance in the universe. Jain religion advocates that one should first try to know, comprehend and understand the nature of reality, one's own self, religious goal and the path. One should analyze, examine, test, verify and then, if satisfied, be convinced of its truth and efficacy.

Right Knowledge

Right perception or faith makes us realize the reality of life, and the seriousness of our purpose in life. Right knowledge is the true, correct, proper and relevant knowledge of the reality. To understand reality, one should know the fundamental elements of the universe and their relationships.

Six Universal Substances –

Soul, Matter, Medium of Motion, Medium of Rest, Space and Time

Nine Principles –

Soul, Non-living substance, Influx of Karma, Bondage of Karma, Virtue, Sin, Prevention of Karma, Eradication of Karma and Liberation.



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Right Conduct

Right conduct must ultimately lead to liberation. The main goal of a human life is to free one from attachment and aversion. That is to free from all impure activities of thought, word and deed. This will attain the state of perfect equanimity. This resolves into taking the five great vows.

Right perception creates an awareness of reality or truth, right knowledge impels the person to proper action, and proper conduct leads him to the attainment of total freedom. They must coexist in a person if one is to make any progress on the path of liberation.

Four Realms

If we look around us, we see not only men and women, boys and girls, but also cats, dogs, birds, bugs, plants etc. These are various forms of living beings in this universe. All the same time every second, someone dies and someone is born. Nothing is permanent. This makes us wonder what happens to those who die and who decides what one will be born as. Jain religion explains this in a very simple and sound logical way based on karma theory. Due to the karma associated with their souls, living beings have been going through the cycle of life and death in various forms since time immemorial. Unless the soul gets rid of its karma, it will never be free from the cycle of birth, life and death in different forms. When a living being dies, it can be reborn into one of the four destinies. These four destinies are

Human beings

Heavenly beings

Animal (including Birds, Insects and also vegetation, earth, water, fire, air)

Hell beings

It is clear that out of these destinies only human life is suitable for spiritual pursuit and capable of freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Let us aspire to lead a spiritual life without delay so that we may be reborn as human beings again and continue to progress on the path of liberation.

“All schools of thought are valid when understood from their own standpoints. A knower does not categorize them as true or false. They become false only when they deny that other also express aspects of truth.”

(Sanmati Tarka Prakrana 1:28 – by Siddhasena Divakara)

Courtesy:

‘Pure Freedom –the Jain way of self-reliance by Amar Salgia’

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