

JivaRelatednessandRelationships:FormsofBecoming

NinaMehta - author

NinaMehtalivesinNewYork,butttravelsotootherplacesdoingsocialscienceandethnographicresearch. Sheplaysmusic,formerlyinringsandfirstnation,onAnimalCollective'sPawTrackslabel,andnowanewprojectcalledearthbones.

Sheisalsocurrentlymakingadocumentary,tellingdifferentJainstories,interrelatedversions,practicesandexperiencesofandwithJainism.

NunstravelingbetweenLondon,Texas,FloridaandpilgrimagesinRajasthan,anex-monklivinginNewYork,ananimalhospitalinDelhi,vegananimalactivistsinBangalore,acooperativedairyfarminTanzania,templesinsuburbanNewJerseyhomes,aresomeofthesitesandcharactersexplored.

JainMeditationInternationalCenterinNewYork

InJainphilosophy,soulsattachtobodies,flexibleinsizeandscope,sothatthesamesoulcanfitinsideahurricaneandtheuprootedtreethatlaysinitawake;soulsmove through,andsometimesfrom,theformsofawhale,anant,ahuman,araindrop. Thesesoulschange,andthebodieschange,butttheyallexist,always. Theuniverseandeverythinginitis eternal.

AccordingtoJainscriptures,elaboratedbyMahavira,the24th andlastTirthankar[1],thereare8.4millionkindsoflivingbeings,orjivas[2].

ConsideringJaincosmologiesandthekarmicconnectionbetweenlivingbeingsmaychangethewaysthatwethinkaboutandrelatetosubjects,objects,things,livingtogether.

ThroughJainperspectivesonlifecycles,wemaycometodifferentformsofknowingandbeingrelatedtoothers,connectedthroughsoultransmigrationandkarma.

Thisconceptdoesn'tfollowalineartrajectoryfromatomstoanimalsinanevolutionaryway—it isinteractionthatmovebeingsthroughtimeandlifecycles.

JainformermonkandspiritualleaderGurudevShreeChitrabhanu'sJainmeditationcenterinNewYork,providesonewaytoseeapracticeofthisphilosophy,andtheemergenceofaJainmoralself,inrelationtolivingintheworld,together.

JainMeditationInternationalCenter

Chitrabhanuspentthefirstfiveyearsofhismonasticlifewalkingthroughwoods,mountainsandvillagesinsilence,fastingandmeditatingundertheguidanceofaJain*Acharya*, ormonkinstructor.

In1970,after28yearsasamonk,heacceptedaninvitationtotheSecondSpiritualSummitConferenceinGeneva,becomingthefirstJainmastertoleaveIndia.

Choosingtotravelbyothermeansthanhisfeet,Chitrabhanurenouncedhisvows,andmarriedlong-timestudent,Pramoda.

WhenaskedwhyhedecidedtoleaveIndia,hetellsme"Globalproblemsarecreatedbyglobalpeople."So,hetransportedhismessageofnon-violenceandrespectforallformsoflifetoaglobalaudience,openingtheJainInternationalMeditationCenterinNewYorkin1974,anda[virtualcenter](#)ontheweb.

Chitrabhanuhaswrittenover25books,andisaspiritualguidetoJaincenters throughouttheUSandinEngland,Africa,Japan,Singapore,DubaiandIndia. Chitrabhanuhopestobeanexampleofawareness,non-violence,"rightvision,"toinspirepeaceandrespectforalllivingbeings.

AfterawinterinIndia,ChitrabhanuisbackinNewYorkathisJainMeditationCenter,whichexistsintheformofWedn

esday evening meetings in a carpeted auditorium on the 17th floor of an office building in Chelsea, offered by the Indian cultural organization Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

There are around 30 people who come to the weekly lecture, mostly white, mostly Western, many who have been coming for 30 years.

People greet each other, tell stories of how they first became interested in Chitrabhanuji's lectures, they speak of others who are not attending because they are abroad, or have recently died.

It is clear that the attendees have separate lives, lifestyles, but they are a close community.

When Chitrabhanu walks into the room, the students, or "friends" as he calls us, greet with *Namaste*.

Pramoda, Chitrabhanu's wife, leads in the singing of a mantra, *Mangalam*, as Chitrabhanu explains, "This is blessing from inside. Blessings are human being."

After the singing, and a brief meditation on peace, happiness and presentness, Chitrabhanu tells a story about a eagle shot by a hunter.

The eagle is holding here egg, which falls down, among some chicken eggs, "born as an eagle, die as a chicken." This kind of mistaken identity or morality story may be common—

what is particular to Chitrabhanu's lecture, is the emphasis on reaching one's potential, not in spite of, but because we don't know our pasts, our karma.

He emphasizes the disconnection between one's name and one's being, and the importance of reconnecting to oneself, through breath, meditation, reprogramming one's self as an individual, in relation to others.

This Jain ethic is tied very closely to action.

In Sanskrit, karma means action. In Jainism, karma is the result of subtle microscopic elements called *pudgala*.

This is what and how being experiences life, until emotional attachment, as a matter, falls away.

In Jain philosophy, cycles of death and rebirth are the effect of karma, conceived of as karmic bondage.

Soul transmigrates in search of condition that will bring about non-attachment, enlightenment, *moksha*.

Karma is often seen as a template, or a receptacle of past deeds from which the present is constructed, and the future charted.

Carrying beings from one birth to the next, through the soul's recording of traces of karma, living things experience the effect of actions manifested through different life cycles, as incarnations.

Being With

With lectures that traverse space, place, and time, referencing contemporary truck drivers in Florida and indigenous animists ritual in Africa, Chitrabhanu emphasizes connection and translation across traditions.

Chitrabhanu makes clear the way that different people and practices fit within, and extend Jain conceptions, and conceptions of Jain thought in the world.

Different practices and thoughts interact and relate, rendering different experiences of Jainism, different iterations of Jainism, and different experiences of and within other traditions.

This is not unique to Chitrabhanu's philosophy—

my father, who grew up in a Jain household in Bombay is quick to tell me that anyone can be Jain, pointing to the way that at Gandhi, Jesus, and my Jewish grandfather all practiced versions of Jainism.

Referencing other traditions doesn't claim them as Jain, but points to the way that they may relate to, or with Jain philosophy.

In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida discusses being in the world, together with living beings. [3].

He criticizes the simplification of an animal life that takes place as a result of the distinction between man as a thinking animal and every other living species. "The animal is there before me, there next to me, there in front of me—

I who am (following) after it. And also, therefore, since it is before me, it is behind me. It surrounds me" (Derrida, 11).

Derrida addresses the complicated interconnection, pluralism, difference and multiplicity of beings, offering a term "animot," as a pseudo-remedy to the violence that labeling living beings as "animal" commits.

For Derrida this kind of generalization is "a crime," and robs living beings of their density, their individuality and their specificity.

In Jain philosophy, we are *being with* and in relation to different life forms, in many different ways, through and within specific life cycles.

Ian Hacking talks about having sympathy *with*, rather than *for* animals in "On Sympathy: With Other Creatures," insisting that we look at the animal with "a whole gamut of emotions," as a whole.

[4] What does it mean to have sympathy with animals when there are so many kinds of living beings, whose souls move

efrom, between and amongsteach other?

Jain Taxonomies

Questions as to other living beings *being*, can be explored through Jain classifications and conceptions of senses. *Jivas* are categorized within Jainism and divided on the basis of sensory organs and vitalities, or life force existing in such beings, forming a hierarchy based on conceptions of the senses.

In Jain thought, senses produce one's being in the world, something like Estonian Biologist and Philosopher Jakob von Uexküll's perception-

based *umwelt*, described in "A Stroll Through the World of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds." [5] Each being occupies a different sphere of consciousness, sentience, subjective reality, based on sense perception. This is true in Jain thought, but the categories created through sense recognition, participation, inclusion and exclusion interact in more complicated, entangled ways, considering the fact that souls move between differently sense-capable beings.

Jivas fit into two main categories, with multiple subcategories: immobile, single-sensed and mobile, multi-sensed. Immobile, single-sensed beings are thought to have the sense of touch.

These are earth-bodied, like sand, and metal; water-bodied, like rain and fog; fire-bodied, like lightning and flames; air-bodied, like wind, tornadoes; plant-bodied, like plants, trees and roots which can also be multi-sensed.

Besides harming the beings that may attach themselves to roots in the dirt, this multi-sense is the reason why Jains do not eat potatoes, beets, not to mention crickets, fish, and pig, which are also considered mobile and multi-sensed, and are further categorized in terms of their additional senses.

Two-sensed beings like shells, worms and microbes have the faculties of touch and taste. Three-sensed beings, like lice, ants, moths, are capable of touch, taste and smell.

Bees, scorpions and flies are considered four-sensed beings, and they also have the sense of sight. Five-

sensed beings like fish, birds, mammals have a fifth sense of hearing. Five-

sensed beings may be infernal, in one of the hells, non-human, celestial, in one of the heavens, or human.

Within Jain philosophy, the higher the number of senses a being has, the more its capacity to feel pain.

Thus, violence to beings with five senses like humans or cats attracts more karma than violence to beings like insects, or single-sensed beings like microbes and plants.

In Jainism, one avoids behavior that causes harm, to the best of one's abilities, because these actions inhibit one's ability to reach *moksha*.

The Jain principle of *Ahimsa*, or non-violence and non-

injury is important for an understanding of karma, Jain ethics and relationships between living beings.

Ahimsa is central to Jain philosophy and ethical-

spiritual practice emphasizing care and prevention from knowingly, or unknowingly being the cause of injury or harm to any living being, including humans, animals, insects, plants, single-celled organisms, atoms.

This accounts for that popular image of Jain monks sweeping before they walk—

there may not be any animals in their path, but they use their energy toward harm reduction.

This does not mean simply abstaining from harmful practices, but being attentive to the ways that one's actions may provoke others to cause harm, violence or injury as well.

My father, drawing on his Jain roots, is wary of organdonation, fearful that this gift could cause another person to harm another living being.

If giving his eyes, the donor or recipient decides to hunt, consciously engaging in violence with this new vision, it would then impact *this* karma. We can see the many entanglements that ensue from *Ahimsa*.

Jain philosophy attends to the relationship between actions, cause and effect as manifested in, or through a subject's being or becoming.

Causing harm, or killing living beings does not only cause suffering to other beings, but causes harm and injury to one's own soul, affecting one's position, incarnation within life cycles, and one's ability to attain *moksha*, liberation, enlightenment.

Mahavira expresses this directly: "One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, water, fire, air, vegetation and other living beings disregards his own existence which is entwined with them." Interactions with living beings are central to Jain practice and theory, and are what affects one's soul movement.

Relating

Besides *Ahimsa* or non-violence, *Anekantavada*, the principle of multiple viewpoints, is a practice that helps decrease the harm that one does to the interrelated souls of oneself and others.

This pluralistic notion posits that truth and reality are perceived differently from diverse points of view, and that no single point of view is the complete truth. [6] Humans, like all living beings, are capable of partial knowledge only.

Von Uexküll's *sumwel*t relates in part to this Jain philosophy attending to a multiplicity of viewpoints.

Von Uexküll sees beings as occupying their own environments, perceived and inhabited through senses.

Space and time are relative to beings' perception and experiences.

In Jain philosophy, since all unenlightened beings only perceive and experience partial truths, there are certainly multiple worlds, and we exist in them in particular, subjective and situational ways, coming into being as subjects in relation to our experiences, relationships, practices.

Anekantavada shows how there are many worlds that are expressed and experienced differently, taking seriously the reality of each organism's different perception, as reality, equal to one's own, each has partial truths.

These two philosophies recognize the existence of multiple realities, but unlike von Uexküll who would most likely think it impossible to understand the *umwelt* of another being, especially one with different sense capacities, *Anekantavada* advises that one should try to understand the positions of others, to the best of one's ability, even if one is limited by categories of sense perception.

This may be explained through soul transmigration and the potential that one may one day become, or has already been in the sense-world of another *jiva*, with different sense-perceptions, and another being.

Metamorphoses

Besides relating through *jiva* category placement—the rock and tree are both single-sensed, and may share a more similar *umwelt*-

relationship stake on, or shaped different meanings through change, transformation, or metamorphosis.

In Jain philosophy, energy and its manifestation in individual souls exist eternally, it is the forms and relations that shift.

Chitrabhanu spoke at the Wednesday meditation session about energy in this way, "Energy cannot be destroyed.

You cannot increase. You cannot decrease. It transforms from one to another.

It changes, but energy is energy." Action and interaction move beings and relations.

You can look at karmic dirt, or *pudgala* as forging the transformation and movement of, and between life forms, moving, then, those, through specific vectors, and pathways.

In Jainism, we are all always transforming through interaction, metamorphosing according to karmic accumulation

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Animal Welfare

Consciousness of karmic accumulation affects the life choices and actions of many Jains.

It's easy to see how alliances with transnational environmental, animal rights and vegan or vegetarian forums are formed.

Especially in diasporic Jain communities, and especially among youth, Jains are increasingly finding relevance and broader application for practices of non-violence and compassion.

Mired by agenealogy connected to pity and condescension, animal welfare takes on a different meaning in a Jain context. For Jains, cruelty to others, to animals, or any living being is equally cruel to the self.

This complicates the paternalism of a care-for model, as there is less distinction and separation between lives.

Since action towards others' lives affects one's own life, all lives are worth protecting, to the best of one's abilities.

Connection and care extend to all life forms, small and big. This ethic is similarly inclusive of other beings.

Each soul within its given forms should, to the best of its ability, protect or cause the least harm possible to others.

This Jain ethic of non-harm, however, does not fit traditionally with the ethics of activism.

As an ideal, Orthodox Jain ethics seek to transcend this world, not work within it.

However, the ideal does manifest itself in actions and practices of activism, advocacy and transnational alliances.

Jainism as practiced is changing, constantly constituted through actions, and interactions.

Chitrabhanu and Pramoda, Chitrabhanu's wife, encourage global animal and environmental rights, encouraging compassionate action as a way to direct one's own energy.

Pramoda, in particular, works within activism networks, espousing a sense of living and being in the world that, as a multiply practiced and experienced religion and philosophy, is Jain.

Pramoda studies Sanskrit, vegan nutrition, and music, leading the meditation group mantras.

Her main interest is applying Jain teachings to daily life.

A list of her public and activist engagement doesn't quite explain the scope of her care for others, or what this generates, but to mention some of her work: she is president of the Jain International Meditation Center in Mumbai, and since 2000 has been on the Board of Directors for PETA in India.

She works for the Reverence for Life Society and Beauty Without Cruelty, which promotes animal welfare.

She tells me that she sponsors projects in education and is particularly focused on women's issues, encouraging women to "emerge from the small self and see their potential." She also gives classes in meditation and Jain Dharma, exposing Western students to the ideals and concepts of Jain teachings.

Articulated in an email, Pramoda explains: "actively practicing ahimsa and helping the animals is what Mahavir taught and here our true compassion is manifested. Non-interference is applied for those who have renounced the world.

So according to me it is better to connect with the animals.

But being aware that doing so would not use any means that involves violence.

Like food. "In her article about the dairy industry, 'Milk: At What Cost?' she tells consumers that 'the capability is within, to protest abuse through consumer behavior, thus changing the way that cows are treated.' For Pramoda, and many who consider themselves Jain, knowledge of the treatment of other living beings can help form Jain ethical relationships, and ethical being.

Intimacies: Ontological Connections

The belief that every soul is trapped in and by worldly bondage inspires compassion and non-violence, for the sake of the souls of others and for one's own soul, each stuck in cycles of birth and rebirth, until liberation. In Jain thought, all living beings are co-creators of the world, entangled in each other's being, and processes of becoming. This kind of inter-being connection blurs the lines between self and other, opening spaces for different kinds of intimacies, connection shifting relations away from a human center.

In *Bestiality*, philosopher Alphonso Lingis talks about beings as composites, formed of symbiotic cooperative units. [7] This conception does not propagate oneness, rather assemblages that are active and participatory.

Within Jain cosmology, there is a fundamental connectivity and collectivity, an ontological blurring comprised of different deep affinities, mediated by action.

Lingis asks, "how does a snail move, blind without sense organs, know it is time to move?" It is through symbiosis, living with others that we move, feel, know (Lingis, 25).

For Lingis, multiply interacting organisms compose, connect and comprise us: "Our movements are not spontaneous initiatives launched against masses of inertia; we move in an environment of fair currents, rustling trees, and intimate bodies.

Our movements are stirred by the coursing of our blood, the pulse of the wind, the ready rhythm of the cicadas in the autumn trees, the whirl of passing cars, the bounding of squirrels, and the tense, poised pause of deer.

The speeds, slowness, and turns of our movements come from movements we meet about us" (Lingis, 29).

In Jain philosophy, we also exist only in relation to others, moving among others who compose us, just as we form others through our actions.

Our souls exist always, but our forms are constantly transforming, enmeshed in dynamic, interactivity, intra-action. Our *pudgala*, or karmic dirt, that carries us from and towards new life forms, illuminates the impermanence, and flux of being.

Energy force is permanent, but our lives are durations, manifestations of an ongoing flow that is not ours, although we exist within, and as part, and even contribute to its creation.

We exist as part of a process, sometimes crossing, changing, overlapping as dog, human, rain, yet still existing, whole, in relation to others.

Capacities: Propensity

Chitrabhanu talks about the fundamental properties of elements, beings in relation to their true nature.

"Dharma is nature. It is the original nature. You are that. Everything has its original nature.

The nature of water is cool. Salt is salty, it is its nature. The same way we are always there.

Our nature is consciousness. "Being exactly what each living being is meant to be reflects an immanence reflected in Francois Jullien's *The Propensity of Things*. [8] Jullien discusses processes of becoming, through the capacity to function effectively using one's *shi*, potential force, through positioning.

The propensity of objects, beings, and things in relation and interaction, manifest their own tendency to become animated, stemming from and through the situation: "Reality always presents itself as a particular situation that results from a particular disposition of circumstances that is, in turn, inclined to produce a particular effect: it is up to the general, and equally to the politician, the painter, and the writer, to avail himself of the *shi*... so as to exploit to its maximum potentiality" (Jullien, 260).

In Jainism, different *jiva*s have different propensities, also realized through their arrangements.

Here, difference, is not lack.

Each *jiva* requires different action, and manifestation of their "original nature." Each being is best able to reach their capacity through an understanding of, use of, or flow with their *original nature*, which has different potential through different life forms and lifecycles.

These life forms will continue to change, allowing different iterations, and expressions of *dharma*.

Energy, again, is stable, but, as Chitrabhanu explains, "We are sentient energy.

We have sense, choice, understanding. We can know how we are if we go deeper.

Once you know that you are sentient energy, you can take charge. "This is where choice and action come to matter, affecting and rearranging elements, and one's soul movement, through time, and physical and geographic forms.

Blurred, Ongoing Taxonomies

Different *jiva*s have different dispositions, requiring different actions and enacting different relations.

In Jainism, *jiva* categories are fixed, but the movement between them is blurred.

In Jainism, we are in some ways composites of what we've always been, since each life form, each incarnation, and the actions performed in relation, move us through the universe.

As subjects, we are multiple, overlapping, continually dissolving boundaries between self and other, through time.

We are as much ex-animal, asex-human and ex-

vegetable, and we may be all these things still, as our soul traverses the universe, accumulating and shedding *pudgala*, reflecting the paths we've tread and the lives we've led.

What allows us to relate to different *jiva*s is not just trust, faith, abstract connection, but the fact that our present deeds affect our soul, and it's temporary habitation in life forms that invoke distinct living action, different forms of confrontation, connection and encounter.

Exploring Jain philosophy and practices of Jain ethics, we see how interconnection affects karmic makeup, past, present and future actions, experiences, lifecycles.

We see how interactions with life forms move us beyond sympathy and empathy to different, more enmeshed forms of interrelation with Jain thought as the basis for relating to organisms, living things, to being and becoming human, and different modes of inter- and intra-action.

Soul movement through different celestial and physical bodies, and just as the fly is limited by what it can perceive in its environment, we too are limited, bound by our sensory perceptions in relation to all beings, and especially in relation to a future oriented truth.

Exploration of conceptions of time, considering pasts, presents and futures in relation to actions and practices, broadens an understanding of interconnection, shifting understandings of connection between living beings.

Image by [lumiere](#), Courtesy of Creative Commons license

[1] In Jainism, a Tirthankar is a human being who achieves enlightenment and continues guiding religious teaching to

hat forms Jain scripture, and community. Lord Mahavira is considered the last Tirthankar, but there will be others.

[2] This does not refer just to individuals, but types of living beings.

[3] Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008

[4] Hacking, Ian. "On Sympathy: With Other Creatures," *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 63, no. 4 (2001)

[5] Von Uexküll, Jacob.

"A Stroll Through the World of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds," *Instinctive Behavior: The Development of a Modern Concept*, ed. and trans. Claire H. Schiller (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1957), pp. 5-80.

[6] Dundas, Paul. *The Jains. The Library of religious beliefs and practices*. London: Routledge, 1992

[7] Lingis, Alphonso. *Bestiality*. In H. Peter Steeves. (ed). *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life*. 37-54. State University of New York Press, 1999

[8] Jullien, Francois. *The Propensity of Things, a history of efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995