

A Brief Introduction to JAINISM

**By
Dr. Bipin Doshi**

Albert Einstein remarked that the eternal mystery of the world is its intelligibility. True religion fastens to this element of intelligibility and creates a system of thought and action which leads to true harmony and bliss. And it is indeed so with *Jainism*.



Dr. Bipin Doshi is a Jain scholar teaching Jain philosophy at various academic and non academic forums. He has played vital role in establishing Jain chair at University of Mumbai where thousands of students are trained in systemic and analytical study of Jain tradition.



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India At The Time of Tirthankar Mahaveer

6th Century BC, this was the time when civilization in India was not mature. The Gender discrimination, The Caste discrimination, Slavery, Worshiping numbers of Gods with so many rituals, Animal sacrifice in various religious ceremonies, Socio economic disparities etc. are few examples. Some **Priests** under the cover of vedic teachings twisted the rituals to exploit the common people for their selfish motives. The social fabric was fragmented and it was need of a time to have a bold reformer to raise voice against these powerful people who had resources, so called knowledge and the claim to have direct connections with God.



Vedic Yagna



Tirthankar Mahaveer (599-527 BC)



Tirthankar Mahaveer revolted against these existing practices and tried to bring common man out of the clutches of dominant **Brahmin** caste. His thoughts on gender equality, equality of all irrespective of caste and equality of all living beings including animals and plants and his concept of self-purification for eternal happiness attracted large followers. His most vital opposition was against animal sacrifice.

Meaning of word "Jain"



Ranakpur Jain Temple

The word Jain is derived from "Jina", which means the one that is victorious over the self-passions like anger, ego, deceit and greed. They are one having neither attachment nor hatred to anyone and devoid of any possession whatsoever. The

followers of such **Jinas** are called Jains. Jainism is one of the oldest religion in the world. Jains traditionally trace their history through a succession of twenty-four propagators of their faith known as **Tirthankaras** with **Rishabh** as the first and **Mahaveera** as the last of the current era. Unlike many religions Jains don't have one God but they worship all 24 Tirthankaras.

Jain Community

There are around 6,000,000 + followers of Jainism with the majority population based in India with some diaspora population mainly in UK, Belgium, USA, East Africa, UAE and Australia. Though very small in population it is one of the wealthiest, educated and most influential community in India. Historically they have enjoyed the vital position as ministers and treasures in ancient Indian Kingdoms. Jains don't believe in religious conversion but wherever they have gone they have taken their philosophy and have influenced others about their doctrine. One can accept Jain religion by his own will and conduct without any formal rituals.

How to achieve the perpetual happiness ?

Ahimsa, Anekant and Aparigraha

True happiness can be achieved by conquering all temptations and inner enemies such as anger, greed and pride by practicing non-attachment with the material world and by living peacefully disciplined lifestyle with equality and simplicity.

Ahimsa

There is unique emphasis on non-violence or *Ahimsa*. Hence, the word *Ahimsa* is found on Jain symbol of the open palm meaning 'stop'. No hurting or pains to anyone in anyways. Although non-violence is a common practice in most religions, Jainism is unique in extending this principle to all living beings or *Jivas* on earth and interestingly Jains consider the microbes, insects, animals, plants and even the soil and water as living beings. Jain's thought of non-violence specially to minimize the destruction of plant and animal kingdom has great beneficial effect on environment.

In Jain tradition vows or rules to be observed by common person (Male - *Shravak* And Female - *Shravika*) and monk (Male - *Sadhu* and Female - *Sadhvi*) in their daily life are prescribed with clarity focusing on principle of nonviolence.



Jain Ellora Caves

(2600 years back Jainism described microbes and life in plants)

[illegible]

- George Bernard Shaw



Soul and Karmic matter

Fundamental to Jainism is the doctrine of two eternal, coexisting, independent categories known as *Jiva* (animate, living soul: the enjoyer) and *Karma* (inanimate, nonliving subtle particles of matter, termed Karmic matter) *Jiva* or souls are intrinsically pure and possess the qualities

“What you sow so you reap”

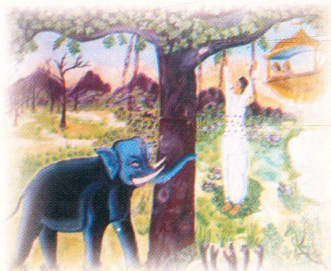
of infinite knowledge, infinite bliss and infinite energy, however, these qualities are found to be defiled and obstructed, due to the soul's association with *karmic* matter over an eternity of time.

This bondage or association of the soul with karmic matter is explained in the Jain texts by analogy with gold, which is always found, mixed with impurities in its natural state. Similarly, the pure state of the soul has always been overlaid with the impurities of karmic matter. This analogy with gold further implies that the purification of the soul can be achieved if proper refining is done.

Like most of the Indian religions Jains believe in cycle of birth and death and rebirth in any forms of life (From one sensed lives like plants to five sensed lives like human beings, hellish beings or celestial beings) depending upon the deeds/karmas of previous lives.

“Man is the master of his own destiny and no external being like God has any influence on his destiny”

Karmas (Actions of souls here) is the natural moral law of the universe in which every good and bad action has a corresponding effect on the doer; one can go to hell or heaven but ultimate destination should be liberation (*Moksha*) by freeing the soul of *karmic* matter which can be achieved only in human life through the practice of the three "jewels" termed as right faith, right knowledge and right conduct.



Man with deluded view

It is unique Jain belief that you yourself can achieve the highest form of purification and be God yourself. Infinite souls have done this and you too can do it. Jains are very spiritual but do not believe in God as creator or controller of universe. They believe that the universe is eternal and beginningless or endless governed by its own laws. They do not believe that any external being or divine grace can help the soul in its liberation, only self-efforts can. This notion has led some to consider Jains as atheists.



*Ostwal Centre,
Poters bar - London*



*Pittsburg Jain Temple,
USA*



Antwerp Jain Temple



Jain Doctrine of Eternal Happiness

Along with social reforms where equality and universal welfare were the focus points, **Tirthankar Mahaveer** showed the path of real happiness. He analyzed and logically put forward that the causes of our

miseries are not so much in the external world but they are within us. If we think critically we will realize that all our pains are due to our inner enemies or passions like anger, ego, deceit and greed. Our so called sensual pleasures are temporary and if we liberate ourselves from these passions and pleasures the true happiness is natural outcome. Even external causes of unhappiness can be fought successfully if one practices equanimity in good or bad situations.

He further explained that the attachment and hatred both are two primary reasons of our pains. He described that least the attachment more will be our happiness. He further described a state wherein person can get rid of all kinds of attachments and reach to a state of total eternal happiness, termed liberation and such person will not have any further cycle of rebirths and deaths.

“Jainism is of very high order. Its important teachings are based upon science. The more the scientific knowledge advances the more those Jain teachings will be proven”

- L. P. Tassetori, Italy

Jain Rituals and Practices

Jains worship their guides called **Tirthankaras** who attained liberation and showed the path of liberation to others, their worship is not for any worldly pleasures or grace to be received from God but God being an inspirational one for them to achieve liberation.

Their most important daily recitation is called "**Navkar Mantra**" wherein Jains worship all those souls irrespective of their religions who are liberated or all those who have renounced the worldly life and pursuing the path of liberation.

Many of them worship idols of **Tithankaras** but there are sects which do not endorse the idol worship and lay emphasis on meditative practices. The other common rituals are meditation (**Samayik**), repentance for sins (**Pratikraman**), austerities and fasting. Penance has vital importance in self-purification. Jain ascetics follow five major or great vows namely nonviolence, truth, not taking anything from anybody without permission, total celibacy and non possession of any thing. They don't use vehicles to travel and observe strict rules prescribed regarding travel, food and stay. Monkhood is a major focus in the Jain faith unlike householder (**Grahastha**) in vedic tradition.

A unique ritual in this religion involves a holy fast to death, called **Sallekhana**. Through this one achieves a death with dignity and dispassion as well as great reduction of negative karma. When a person is aware of death nearing, he or she may decide to gradually cease eating and drinking till death. It is called art of dying or **Samadhi**.



Shhravan balgora

Some striking differences noted between Temple Visit & Church Visit



Going to Church is usually on Sundays at prescribed timings while going to temple is daily routine and one can choose his own time. Most of the big temples are open from early morning till almost 10 pm. Church prayers are with sermons but in temples there may or may not be sermon. Usually it is individual worship done by people attending temple. In temples family members may go together but the sitting arrangements for male and female are separate. In all temples shoes are removed outside and some even wash their legs before entering the temple. No food is consumed in main area of temple. Jains don't prefer black attire but prefers white or light colored clothes. Every Jain rings the bell by them at every visit irrespective of time. One sees many idols in temples as Jains have 24 guidance Gods known as Tirthankaras and also many demi-Gods.

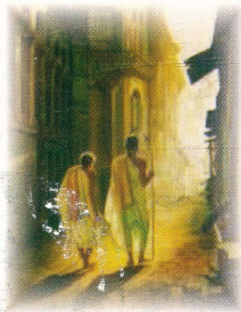


*For any information or literature on Jain tradition click on
www.jainelibrary.org*



Jain Sects

The Jain community is divided into two major denominations, *Digambara* and *Swetambara*. *Digambara* monks do not wear clothes because they believe these, like other possessions, increase dependency and desire for material things. This practice restricts full monastic life (and therefore *Moksa*) to males only, as *Digambaras* do not permit nuns to be nude. *Swetambara* monks and nuns, on the other hand, wear white clothes for practical reasons. Nuns are accorded full status as renunciates and believe that women can attain liberation (*Moksa*).

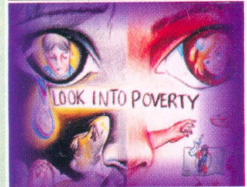
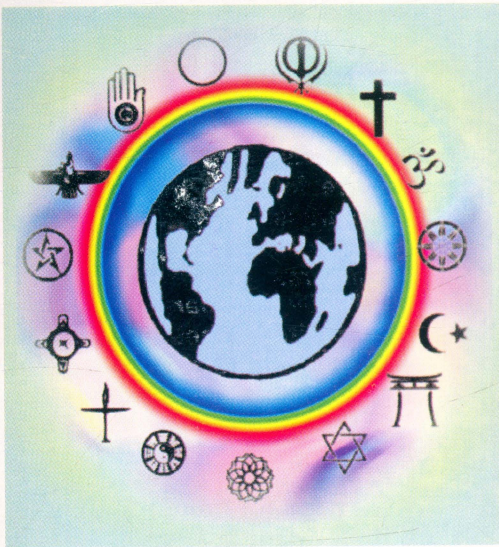


Jain Festivals

Jain festivals are celebrated with penance, fasting and scripture study. There is no fun, feast or entertainments. they are all to increase spiritual intensity. *Paryushana* is one of the most important festivals for soul purification. *Swetambaras* normally refer to it as *Paryushana*, with the literal meaning of “abiding” or “coming together”, while *Digambaras* call it *Das Lakshana* festival.

Unlike many religions Jains don't have one single holy book, but have many canonical texts, termed as “*Agamas*” based on Tirthankar Mahaveer's teachings. Jains also have given immense and praise worthy contribution in the fields of literature; languages of India, philanthropist activities especially in the field of education, medical, animal shelters, community welfare projects, art and architect etc.

Jains greet each other by saying “Jai Jinendra”



Burning Question ? ? ?

In last two centuries mankind has done unparalleled progress in various fields which has led to quality life with comforts and pleasures. Most of us believe in religion, but are we really happy ? It is commonly seen that our increasing desires for materialistic life, fundamentalism about religions and greed have added to our confrontations, confusions and miseries.

Answers to these lie in blending science and spirituality.

Salient Features of Jain Philosophy

- 1) You are the only doer, enjoyer and designer of your deeds and destiny. There is no super being as your creator or savior.
- 2) Souls transmigrate in various forms of living beings according to its past deeds .They have physical body in various states and have miseries but no eternal happiness in these states of lives.
- 3) To acquire eternal happiness one has to totally purify his soul by winning over his passions like anger, ego, deceit and greed. One who wins over these passions is without any attachments and liberated soul. These souls have no miseries and enjoy eternal happiness. This is termed as *Moksha*. They have no cycle of rebirth and death anymore.
- 4) Jain tradition does not believe in eternal heaven or hell. The souls from heaven and hell are reborn after enjoying or sufferings as the case may be. Liberation can occur only from human life.
- 5) It believes in infiniteness of universe, space and time. The time is in cyclic form with circle of good to bad to good and so on.
- 6) Every soul is individual and independent having potential to be omniscience and omnipotent.
- 7) The root causes of our miseries are our uncontrolled attachments and desires. Lesser the desires happier is the life.
- 8) The principal practice in Jainism is nonviolence in thoughts, speech and bodily actions not only to human beings but to all living beings including one sensed organisms.



Samovsaran

- 9) Interestingly Jains consider earth, water, air and plants as living beings and nonviolence to these elements is environment protection or natural ecological balance as described by modern environmentalist.



Animal Shelter House (Panjrapole)

- 10) Love and compassion should be universal and not limited. Practically one may not be able to protect all or help all but in his thought he should always have compassionate attitude towards all living beings.
- 11) Its spiritual focus is monk and not the house holder.
- 12) Self-purification is achieved by penance.

- 13) They follow strict vegetarianism and concepts of Jain food where many vegetarian items like root vegetables are forbidden for the belief that these food have infinite lives in it. One cannot live without air, water and food but one must restrict all possible injuries to any living beings as defined by Jain tradition.
- 14) Though less than 1% of Indian population Jains is a leading business community of India and recently lots of professionals are found in this community.
- 15) There is no history where Jains have attempted religious conversions either by favours or force, contrary to this it has always respected all religions and faiths believing in concept of **Anekant**- wherein they believe that reality is multifaceted.
- 16) It teaches to bow down to all spiritual leaders irrespective of their religions, who have won over the passions like anger, ego, deceit and greed.
- 17) It has significant contribution in the various fields in the history of India especially in the fields like finance, philanthropy, art & architecture and at last the philosophy of **NONVIOLENCE**.

12 Commandment or rules of conduct for house holder-Shavakacar

- 1) Nonviolence by all possible means – *Ahimsa*
- 2) Truth and no hurting in speech – *Satya*
- 3) No stealing – *Acaurya*
- 4) Limiting sensual pleasures – *Maithunvirman*
- 5) Limiting materialistic possessions – *Aparigrah*
- 6) Limiting activities(Violence) in terms of space – *Dikvirti*
- 7) Limiting activities(Violence) in term of time and space – *Desavagasik*
- 8) Limiting activities(Violence) in terms of time, space and materials – *Bhog Upbhog Pariman*
- 9) Remain in equanimity to all and in all circumstances – *Samayik*
- 10) Learn to practice a life of monk – *Paushadhopvas*
- 11) Refrain from all useless sinful activities – *Anarthdand*
- 12) Distrubute all you have to unknown, be possession less – *Atithi Samvibhag*

(- a stage set for monkhood)

The principal idea in these rules is NONVIOLENCE



***“Non-Violence is the biggest
Weapon”***

- Mahatma Gandhi

Appeal for Booklet Sponsorship

**Dear Friends,
Jai Jinendra,**

We all know that our Jain temples, Jain Monuments Specially with World class art & architectures are visited by many travelers from all over the World. Their perspective to visit these places is different but at the same time they have some inquisitiveness about our tradition and religion.

We have seen thousands of foreigners visiting places like Delvada, Ranakpur, Palitana, Shravan Belgoda, Jain Ellora Caves, Walkeshwer temples etc. At these places they wish to have bird's eye view about our religion. It was a request from many that we should have a very brief pocket booklet about Jainism which can be given to these visitors. Inspired with this idea we have prepared such booklet. This booklet is also useful to our new generation who wish to know Jainism in brief.

By this time we have printed 4000 booklets and we plan to print about 1,00,000 copies. This booklet can be gifted to your friends and also can be kept for free distribution. Each copy costs Rs.20/-. If your order for more than 1000 copies your name or name of the institution or company will be put on the 2nd page as Sponsor.

This is simple and cost effective way to propagate the glorious Tirthankar Mahaveer's Philosophy of Non-Violence, aiming at universal happiness, harmony and environment protection. For Your order call -9821052413 (India)

Any Feedback or Suggestions are most Welcome





Sacred “Navkar Mantra” of Jains

Jainism is a way of life with non violence, compassion for animals, equality for all, protection of ecology and environment friendly behavior. It advocates eternal happiness with self-purification by self-efforts.

Non-violence in words, thoughts and actions is supreme universal religion



**Love is that condition
in which the happiness
of another person
is essential to
your own.**

- Robert A. Heinlein