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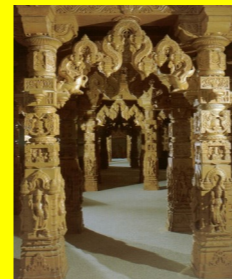
JAINISM

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Front cover images: *Main image - Shantinath Bhagwan*
From top down: 1. Architecture of the sandstone pillars inside the Jain Centre, Leicester 2. Stained glass window illustrating Birth Celebration by Heavenly Beings 3. The Lord's cradle being held



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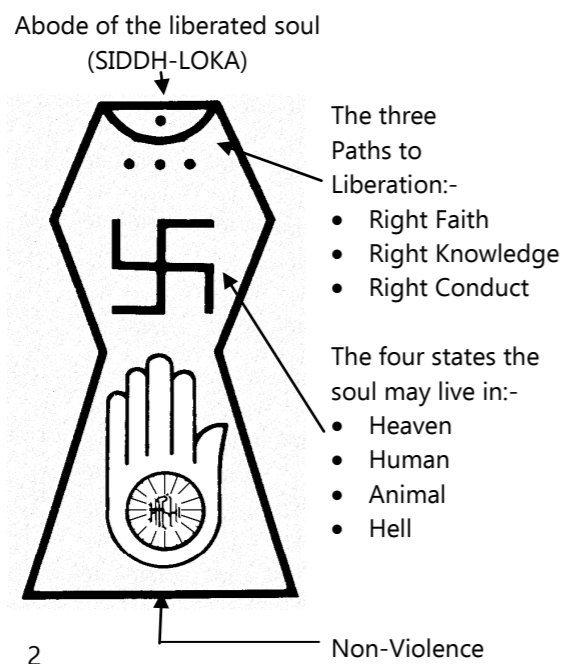


What is Jainism?

Jainism traces its roots to a succession of 24 **Jinas**. Jina conquers one's inner enemies such as Kaam (Desires), Krodh (Anger), Lobh (Greed), Moh (Attachment) and Maan (Ego). The first Jina was Rushabhdev and the most recent Jina was Vardhamana known as **Mahavira**. He was born in India in c.599 BCE and is regarded as the man who gave Jainism its modern day form. These teachers, or **Tirthankaras** taught a path to religious awakening based on renouncing the world by practice of strict religious austerity. Mahavira established a four fold sangh or community of monks, nuns and lay male and female Jains.

Jains reject belief in a creator god and seek release from endless reincarnation through a life of strict self-denial. The title of Jina is given to those who are believed to have triumphed over all material existence. As all human activity accumulates karma, the force that perpetuates reincarnation, the only way to free one's jiva or soul, from the bondage of material existence is by reducing this activity through ascetic practice (good deeds).

Jainism places an emphasis on ahimsa (non-violence) to all living beings. The concern for life is extended to all creatures, even minute microbes that are not visible. The Jain ideal is to avoid injuring all creatures. Monks and nuns are sometimes seen with cloths over their mouths to prevent harming insects in the air and they often use small brooms to gently sweep away living creatures from their path, so that they do not accidentally harm them.



Devotee performing puja



Preparing for the Puja

Peace Prayers

*Upsargäh Kshayam yänti,
Chhidhyante Vighna vallayah,
Manah prasanna tämeti,
Pujya mähne jineshware.*

All problems get resolved,
All obstacles get removed,
The mind and heart become full of joy,
For who has got in touch with the inner higher self.

*Shivmastu Sarva Jagatah,
Par hit niratä bhavantu bhutaganäha
Doshäha Prayantu Näsham
Sarvatra Sukhi bhavatu lokah*

May the entire universe be blessed;
May all beings engage in each other's well being.
May all weakness, sickness and faults diminish;
May everyone and everywhere be healthy, peaceful and blissful.

Diet

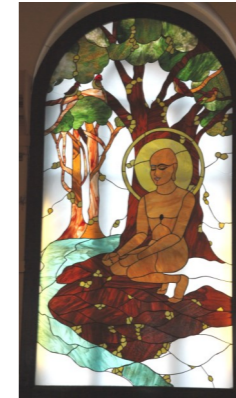
Jains follow a very scrupulous diet of vegetarian food which excludes potatoes, carrots and other root vegetables e.g. onions and garlic because when the root is pulled up, living organisms that live around the root die. In addition, there are innumerable organisms on the root vegetable which are not visible to the naked eye which may also be harmed. Jains object to the eating of meat, fish and eggs because of the principle of ahimsa (non-violence). Every act by which a person directly or indirectly supports killing or injury is seen as violence (himsa), which creates harmful karma. Jains eat after sunrise and before sunset because in the absence of sunlight, there is the growth of organisms not visible to the naked eye.

Jains consider ahimsa to be the most critical religious duty for everyone (ahimsa paramo dharma, a statement often inscribed on temples). It is a vital condition for moksha (liberation) from the cycle of reincarnation, which is the ultimate goal of all Jains.

Fasting is very important to Jains. Jains may fast at any time but most will do so during festivals and holy days. Jain fasts may be done as a penance, especially for monks and nuns. Fasting also purifies the body, mind and reminds the person of Mahavira's emphasis on renunciation and asceticism. It is not sufficient for a Jain to simply not eat when fasting. They must also stop wanting to eat. If they continue to desire food, the fast is pointless. Some Jain monks fast for months at a time, following the example of Mahavira, who is said to have fasted for over 6 months.

There are several types of fasting:

- Complete fasting: giving up food and water completely for a period
- Partial fasting: eating less than you need to avoid hunger
- Vrutti Sankshepa: limiting the number of items of food eaten
- Rasa Parityaga: giving up favourite foods



Achievement of Total Knowledge by Kevalgnam



Tirthankaras

A Tirthankara appears in the world to teach the way to moksha, or liberation. A Tirthankar is not an incarnation of God. He is an ordinary soul that is born as a human and attains kevalgnan (or total knowledge).

Tirthankaras are great teachers who lived at various times throughout history. They accomplished the highest spiritual goals of existence and taught their contemporaries the way to reach it by crossing over to the safe shores of spiritual purity.

Each new Tirthankara preaches the same basic Jain philosophy but they give the Jain way of life subtle different forms in order to suit the age and the culture in which they teach.

Of the 24 Tirthankaras during this present age, 5 have special status:

Rushabhdev: The beginning of civilisation, farming, art, culture, construction, pottery and educates them in 72 branches of learning

Shantinath: Famous for peace. He protects a defenceless dove by offering his own life.

Neminath: His compassion makes him turn back from his wedding procession having heard the piteous cries of the animals waiting to be slaughtered for the wedding banquet.

Parshvanath: There is some historical evidence for the earthly existence of the 23rd Tirthankara, Parshvanath, who lived about 250 years before Mahavira. He was born in Varanasi.

Mahavira: Mahavira laid down the principle of ahimsa (non-violence), aparigha (limiting your acquisitions), anekantvad (multiplicity of viewpoints), speak truth, not to steal and celibacy.



Rushabhdev Bhagbwan

Sects

There are two major sects in Jainism; the **Digambara** (meaning sky clad) sect and the **Swetambara** (meaning white clad) sect.



Holy Texts

The texts containing the teachings of the Tirthankaras are called the **Agamas**. This knowledge of the Agamas was memorised and passed on by senior monks from one to another. This knowledge was written down in books in 4th century AD. The Swetambara tradition has 45 such Agamas.



God

The concept of God in Jainism is different from other faiths. Jainism does not believe in God as the creator of the Universe (like monolithic faiths e.g. Judaism, Christianity, Islam), nor do they believe in God as the trinity e.g. Hinduism with Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (as Creator, Maintainer and Destroyer). Jains believe in the eternity of a soul and the supremacy of the liberated soul. A soul is present in every living entity such as humans, animals and plants but that soul is not liberated and has not realised its full potential. It is known as **Jeevatma**, which goes through endless cycles of birth, death and rebirth.

Each soul (Jeevatma) is the possessor of infinite knowledge and power but it cannot realise its full potential and goes through an eternal cycles of births, deaths and rebirth. However, by following the principles of Jainism, the soul can be liberated. This liberated soul, Omnipotent and Omniscient, is the God in Jainism. It is also known as **Paramatma** (also Siddha or Siddhatma). Arihants or Tirthankaras are special people who in their last life highlighted the path to salvation for humanity. One sees the Pratimas (images) of these Tirthankaras being worshipped as Gods in Jain Temples.



The Holy Days

Mahavira Birth Celebration

This festival celebrates the day of Mahavira's birth. Jains will gather in temples to hear readings of the teachings of Mahavira. Images of Mahavira are paraded through streets with celebrations and ceremony.

Paryushana

The word 'Paryushana' means 'to come closer to the soul', which signifies a time of reflection and repentance for the Jain devotee. Originally this was primarily a monastic practice. This festival consists of eight days of intensive fasting, repentance and pujas. Often monks will be invited to give teachings from the Jain holy book 'Kalpasutra'. **This is a festival of forgiveness.**

Diwali

This festival is celebrated throughout India. In Jainism it has special significance, as on this day in 527 BCE that Mahavira gave his last teachings and attained ultimate liberation. On Diwali parents will often give sweets to their children, and lamps are lit all over India. Some very religious Jains will also fast for the two days of Diwali, following the example of Mahavira.

Gnan Pancham

The Agamas are revered on this day. All Agamas are laid down for devotees to do puja and we start to learn new knowledge from this day.

Kartak Purnima

Following Diwali in October/November is an important festival called Kartak Purnima. This is considered to be an auspicious time for pilgrimage to Palitana, the sacred site associated with the Jain religion. During the monsoon season, monks remain resident in one place. After the monsoon (Kartak Purnima), they walk to their next destination.

Mauna Agyaras

This is a day-long observance of fasting and silence. The day marks 150 kalyanak (milestones) of the Tirthankaras.

Universal Forgiveness and Peace Prayers

Jains recite the following Sutras for confession of their sins, requesting forgiveness from others and desiring peace over the entire universe to all living beings.

Forgiveness Prayer:

*Khāmemi Savve Jive, Savve Jivā Khamantu Me,
Mitti Me Savve Bhuesu, Verum Majjham Na Kenai.*

I ask forgiveness of all living beings,
May all living beings grant me forgiveness.
My Friendship is with all living beings,
My enmity is totally non-existent (I have no enmity with anyone).

Who are Jains?



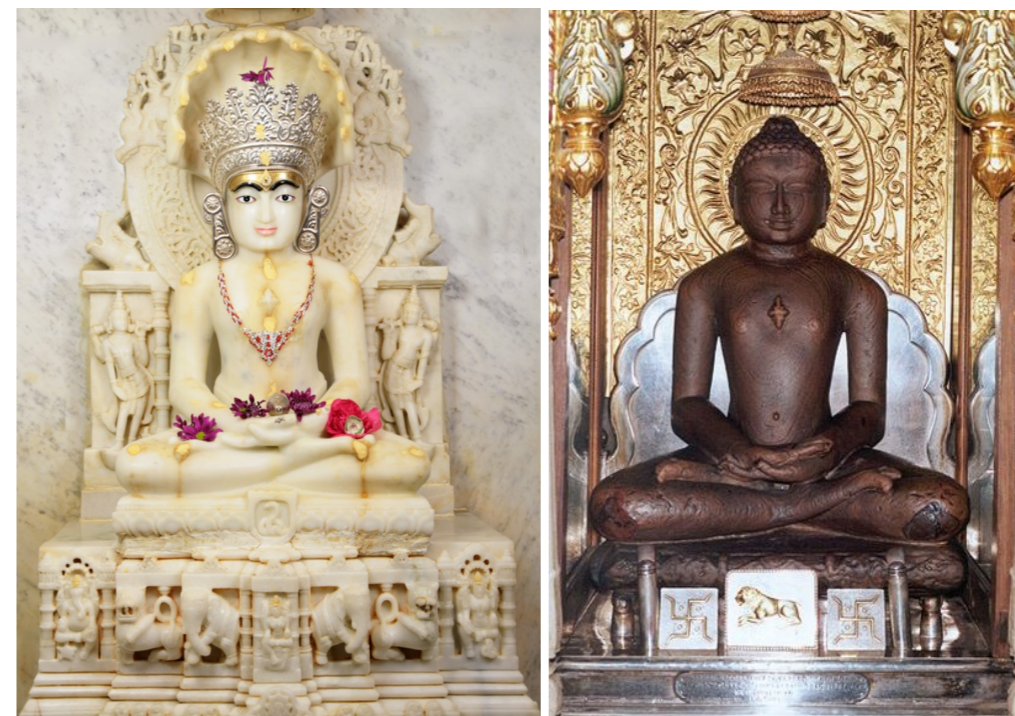
Jains are the followers of Jina. Jainism is based on three general principles called the three Ratnas or jewels. These are Right Belief, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct.

At the heart of Rational or Right Conduct for Jains are the following **five great vows**:

- 1. Ahimsā (Non-violence/Compassion)** - Not to cause harm to any living beings
- 2. Satya (Truthfulness)** - To speak harmless truth only.
- 3. Asteya (No Stealing)** - Not to take anything that is not properly given.
- 4. Brahmacharya (Chastity)** - Not to indulge in sexual relationships outside marriage.
- 5. Aparigraha (Non Possession/Non Attachment)** - Complete detachment from people, places & material things.

Jains are also known as Shraman (e.g. Shraman Bhagwan Mahavir) or Nirgrantha. In India two schools of thought were always prevalent, i.e. Vedic and Shraman. Jainism is another name for the Shraman school of thought, which was practiced and preached by Tirthankaras. Hinduism is another name for the Vedic school of thought.

Jainism does not preach the superiority of one caste over another. Monks, nuns and lay female and male Jains are from all castes.



Parshwanath and Mahavira (left to right)