

# Jainism

Religion



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The religion of Jainism has many components that are said to be very similar with certain parts of Hinduism as well as Buddhism. The Jain religion is most popular in India where it was first found. There are millions of Jain people around the world.

Jainism first started in ancient East India. The success of this religion all comes down to the 24 Jinas. Jinas are those who overcome or conqueror. The first Jina is believed to have been a giant around 8.4 million years ago (Robinson, 2010). The most recent, and last, was named Vardhamana (also known as Mahavira or The Great Hero). He is known to be the founder of the Jain community.

Jainism was very different from things that the regular community was used to. It went up against the caste system and the performance of sacrifices. It was believed that the Jain followers should avoid hurting all animal life. It also preached vegetarianism and purity of the body and soul. This meant that no material possessions and actions should be used against anyone or anything to hurt them both physically or emotionally.

Non-violence is the most important aspect of Jainism. The word Ahimsa is found on the Jain symbol of the open palm (which means stop). Ahimsa is the first vow that is taken by all Jain followers. It means to not harm any human being and giving protection to all living beings as well.

Many religions practice non-violence but Jainism extends this principle to all jivas (living beings). They believe that not only humans and animals, but everything else someone finds in this world should be treated with the same respect. They only eat food which can be done no harm to in the process of

making. It is believed that when the vow isn't followed through, the person automatically gets unwanted karma.

Karma is usually seen as a way to determine the quality of life. The Jain idea of karma is much more than the karma known to other religions. Jains believe that karma is almost like a physical substance that is attached to everything in the whole universe. This karma gets attached to the jiva (soul) by the actions that the jiva takes. Karma does not have any meaning on its own, it comes to affect when it gets attached to the soul (Karma, 2009). This karma gets attached to the soul when Jains do not follow five main beliefs.

Jain followers were expected to follow certain actions during their everyday life. These included Ahimsa (no violence - mental, physical or verbal), Satya (speaking the truth), Asteya (not stealing from others), Brahma-charya (remaining faithful to one spouse only), and Aparigraha (detach from ownership of places and materialistic things) (Robinson, 2010).

The four vows were already established by the 23rd Jain, while Mahavira added in the 5th vow. After the vows had been set, Mahavira also asked his followers to shed all clothes. This meant that the Jain monks would be able to realize the feeling of absolute chastity and forget about all the pleasures of material life.

Jainism is based on three principles: Right Faith, Right Knowledge, and Right Action. Before people of the Jain religion are able to become monks, they must pass through three other stages during their life time. These stages include Brahmacharya-ashrama: the life of a student, Gruhasth-ashrama:

family life, Vanaprasth-ashrama: family and social services and then anyast-ashrama: life as a monk.

The very early teaching of Jainism had first passed from generation to generation through oral traditions. A religious council would be held Pataliputra (present-day Patna) in third century BC. These teachers were all recorded and later on edited in the fifth century AD. The Jainism followers began to migrate to the southern parts of the country, where there was a slight division between the group into the Digambars (also known as sky-clad) and the Svetambars (also known as the white-clad). The sky-clad monks wore no clothing, while the white-clad monks would wear white garments (Jain Rituals and Practices , 2007). Both practiced non-violence, with the white-clad monks going to the extent of putting a white cloth to their mouth to prevent accidental inhaling of insects.

Every day Jains bow their heads and say their universal prayer called the Namokar-mantra. " I bow down to those who have reached omniscience in the flesh and teach the road to everlasting life in the liberated state. I bow down to those who have attained perfect knowledge and liberated their souls of all karma. I bow down to those who have experienced self-realization of their souls through self-control and self-sacrifice. I bow down to those who understand the true nature of soul and teach the importance of the spiritual over the material. I bow down to those who strictly follow the five great vows of conduct and inspire us to live a virtuous life. To these five types of great souls I offer my praise. Such praise will help diminish my sins. Giving this praise is most auspicious. So auspicious as to bring happiness and bliss." (Jain Prayers, 2009)

It is believed that all good work starts off with this prayer every. It is learned by all children, it's the first prayer that is said each morning and before going to sleep at night. Jains do not pray to anyone specific by name. By praying, Jains receive the inspiration for the right path of true happiness. Jains don't worship to please gods, or in the hope of getting something from gods in return, the prayers do not ask for anything such as favors or material benefits.

The worship or prayers can occur publicly at stone temples or in the privacy of one's own home at wooden shrines which resemble the temple. Jains will often meditate to have a better focus. The worships may include chants or gazing at images of gods. Although, some believe that images should not be used. The main focus on the rituals is to concentrate the mind and achieve peace. Different groups of Jains in different parts of India will carry out rituals with some variations. Performing prayers and meditations are a significant part of Jain worship. It is believed to dismiss all evil, cure illness and bring good fortune.

Jainism, like many Eastern religions, uses the concept of reincarnation. When a being dies, the jiva (soul) goes to another body instantly. This body may not be human or even animal. The quality of the next life is determined by its karma at the time. This means that the mental state of the being at the moment of death is very important and must be calm with the mind focused on spiritual matters.

Jainism is an old religion of India which through right faith, the soul and body is distinguished from the rest. Through right knowledge, one can free itself

and see things with an open mind, and with right conduct, the discovery of all living beings lead to nonviolent behavior (Principles of Jainism).