

Significance of the ethical pillars of jainism



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Jainism is one of India's great religions, which are not based on the Vedas of Hinduism. Though practiced only by a small minority in India, yet, as Mary Pat Fisher noted, the religion's gentle ascetic teaching offer "valuable clues to our global survival (Fisher, M. 1997, p. 114). However, Fisher also noted that foreign observers were not convinced of the spiritual teachings accusing that the religion have an "empty heart" because it has "no personal savior and creator God as the first cause" (Fisher, p. 114).

The revived interest in Jainism claimed that it is becoming recognized as a complete and "fruitful path with the potential for uplifting human awareness and inculcating high standards of personal ethics" (p. 114). The most important ethical pillars of the Jainism is the freeing of the self from Samsara or the "wheel of birth that and death and of life's up downs." (p. 116).

According to Fisher, the soul or the individual's higher consciousness has the capacity to save it self by discovering it own perfect, unchanging nature and transcends the miseries of earthly life but this process requires incarnations until finally the self is freed.

The importance of this pillar is that it frees us from all the "debris of Karmic accumulations. This is important because Jains believe that our actions influence the future course of our current life, and even our future life. Thus, by implications, Jains is very careful to avoid accumulating Karma. They based their lives and action on the three chief principles such as ahimsa or non-violence, aparigraha non-possessiveness, and anekantwad or non-absolutism.

Fisher noted that Jains believe that the universe is filled with living beings, and that even a single drop of water “ contains three thousand living beings, and all of them want to live” (p. 116). Jains believe that human beings are not supreme over all other living beings and that every living creature deserves to live and evolve as they can. Fisher stated that Jains believe that to kill any living being “ has negative karmic effect” (Fisher, p. 116). The significance therefore of the ethical pillar of Jainism is that they highly valued every life on earth.

They are non-violent, as they believe that hurting or killing any living creatures has a potential karmic effect. Thus, to avoid such karmic consequences one must respect all forms of life. The obvious implication is that in the midst of rising criminality, domestic violence, and all other forms of violence, both on humans as well as on animals, the ethical pillar of Jainism is very important as they care on all living things. This ethical religion and all others with the same emphasis on life will make the world peaceful and safer place to live. However, the famine that lasted for twelve years had altered the history of Jainism in India.

Fisher cited during this time, the Jain saint Bhadrabahu led some twelve thousand monks to South India to avoid the famine. Upon their return to their home place, there were already major changes. These changes involve relaxing the nudity required of the monk. The changes could have brought more criticism from the most conservative moral activist, nevertheless, Bhadrabahu and his followers held that monks should wear nothing at all symbolizing their innocence of shame and their non-attachment to material

goods. In other words, their emphasis is to practice ascetic life which to gain purity and obtain spiritual fitness.