

The main concepts of jainism

Religion



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Introduction

Jainism is an ancient religion whose origin comes from India. Having been established and founded in contrariety to Hinduism, Jainism nonetheless exhibits certain characteristics of Hinduism. These characteristics are the belief of karma and rebirth. Through religious simplicity, Jainism atheistically denies the belief of a Creator God and views the eternal universe as all-natural forces occurring in motion. They deny the beginning of the universe and insists that the universe is eternal. Although it denies a Creator, Jainism sees a spirituality component of each human being and emphasizes the importance for purity, morals and good deeds (Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions*, 7/e, 2018, p. 176). Followers of Jainism believe in a reality that everything has life, thus it is also capable of suffering; this is called hylozoism.

Additionally, the universe is composed of two realities, one which is spirit and the other of matter; these two realities are known as jiva (spirit) and ajiva (nonsoul). This paper will focus on both, jiva and ajiva, in regards to Jain ethics along with their applications to metaphysical distinction.

Jiva and Ajiva

Jiva is the belief of soul, spirit and life which enlivens matter. Jiva possesses one or more of the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell (Molloy, 2018, p. 197). It also possesses thought, speech, action and respiration (Six Substances (Shad- Dravya), n. d.). It is important to note that this belief does not just pertain to human beings. Life and consciousness are noted to be within fire, rocks, and water; and spirit and feeling encompasses animals,

insects and the miniscule microorganisms that live in earth, water and wood (Molloy, 2018, p. 180). This realm of reality to Jainism requires a great deal of caution in order to do no harm or cause injury.

On the other hand, ajiva is the belief of nonsoul, nonlife. In principle, ajiva is matter without soul or life. Without ajiva, birth, death, pleasure or pain are incomprehensible. Ajiva does not have the capability to accumulate karma. Ajiva is the main barrier in the releasing of personal jivas. This realm of ajiva includes matter (pudgala), space (akasa), the principle of motion (dharma), the principle of rest (adharma) and time (kala) (Wiley, 2004, p. 30). Ajiva is indestructible, imperishable, immortal, eternal and subject to continuously undergo changes (Six Substances (Shad- Dravya), n. d.).

Dualistic Nature of People and Overcoming Limitations

Followers of Jainism view the human being as dualistic with two conflicting parts; material and spiritual. The materialist part being that of pleasure, self-interest and avoiding pain. The spiritualistic part being that of freedom and escape from all ties to the materialistic world and egocentric thoughts. Jains believe, that as complex human beings, they have the capability to recognize and understand the duality of their internal conflicting parts. In order for Jains to bring jiva to its natural omniscience, they need to prevail over the limitations that have been imposed upon by matter (ajiva), such as the constraints of the senses (Fieser & Powers, *Scriptures of the World's Religions*, 6/e, 2018, p. 76). Through this strict doctrine of discipline, Jains are able to overcome these limitations and break their ties to the materialistic world, in turn, further metaphysically liberating their spirits via insights, kindness and austerity (Molloy, 2018, p. 180). In result, Jains are

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liberated by means of “renunciation of material things coupled with ascetic practices aimed at purifying the soul (jiva) by cleansing it of the karmic accretions that have colored it and bound it to matter (ajiva)” (Fieser & Powers, 2018, p. 75).

Karma

All acts will lead to a karmic manifestation, which itself carries a physical quality of matter. Where karma is physical, jiva, is considered permeable and all karmic manifestations are said to permeate the soul. Jainism believes that the ajiva of karma is variable in color depending on the act that was committed, being good or evil. Evil acts permeate jiva with a very dark karma that is challenging to remove. On the contrary, good acts permeate jiva with light karma that is easy to be cleansed. To avoid dark karma, Jain monks will wear masks that cover their noses and mouths and sweep the floor in front of them with a broom as they walk to avoid unintentionally killing a living being (Fieser & Powers, 2018, p. 76). Additionally, Jains are also forbidden from holding jobs that involve the taking of a life in avoidance of dark karma as it is difficult to eliminate.

According to Jainism, the soul (jiva) is compelled to the cycle of rebirth which can be reborn through various forms. While the ultimate goal is freedom from rebirth, rebirth is a result of the karma that has been accumulated. Karma is in control of these various forms including the direction or level of rebirth, which can be either up or down on the scale of rebirth. The level at which rebirth occurs is determined by the state and quality of karma at the time of death of the material body (Molloy, 2018, p. 181). There are eight forms of karma that have been categorized into two groups: destructive

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(ghātiyā) and nondestructive (aghātiyā). Destructive (ghātiyā) karma negatively affects jiva and prevents the innate capabilities of consciousness, energy and bliss. Nondestructive (aghātiyā) karma allows proper perception, knowledge and conduct (Wiley, 2004, p. 3). These forms of karma will also aid in determining rebirth and the type of body, the longevity of rebirth, social influences, and the experiences. As mentioned previously, the ultimate goal of Jainism is to reach a state of absolute metaphysical distinction. This distinction of supernatural freedom is achieved by way of purging the soul of all karma (Webb, n. d.).

Jaina Path to Liberation

While karma can be eliminated naturally, Jains seek to work off the consequences of past actions. This can be done through fasting, celibacy, along with other ascetic practices that develop tapas. Tapas, which can be used to burn off karma, come from the energy acquired through austerity and self-restraint (Fieser & Powers, 2018, p. 76). However, while karma is being eliminated, new karma is being created at the same time. The first process of the Jaina path to liberation is stopping the accumulation of new karma (samvara). After samvara, cleansing of acquired karma (nirjarā) must take place. Once samvara and nirjarā are completed, liberation (moksa) is obtained. At moksa, “the soul is released from its bondage to matter and is luminous, omniscient, and completely free” (Fieser & Powers, 2018, p. 76). Once the soul is released, it rises towards the top of the universe and rests in a reality known as the “World of Saints” (siddha-loka). The “World of Saints” is home to all other perfected beings who have been eternally removed from the world and are no longer subjected to any future suffering

(Fieser & Powers, 2018, p. 77). This metaphysical distinction can also be seen through the ethics of Jainism.

Virtuous Practices

Ethically, Jainism practices include five virtuous practices. These include nonviolence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), nonstealing (asteya), chastity (brahmacharya) and detachment (aparigraha) (Webb, n. d.). Ahimsa is the base of all Jainism ethics. Although Jainism can be considered extreme because of its uncompromising beliefs, it is important to highlight their nonviolent ethics and practice of Ahimsa. Ahimsa (nonviolence) translates to gentleness or harmlessness and is the basis of Jain ethics (Molloy, 2018, p. 182). Jains take extreme measure to ensure they are nonviolent and avoid causing any sort of injury to all living things no matter how big or small. Accordingly, Jains insist on being vegetarians. Yet, plants are considered living things, albeit one-sensed things. Thus, a vegetarian life still does cause harm (Webb, n. d.). This is why fasting and starving to death is the ideal way for a Jain to bring an end to their life.

Jainism carries a respected reputation of being honest. Their ethics disapprove of lying, exaggeration, and telling of any and all falsehoods because they have the capability to cause hurt to others. Jainism disciplines state that “ Jains may not take from others that which is not given” (Molloy, 2018, p. 182). The act of stealing is derived from selfish desire and causes pain to others.

Chastity ethics provide a couple different disciplines, which are dependent on the status of the Jain. Sex can be a hinderance to liberation due to the

binding of a person to the physical world through desire and passions that can harm others. Jain monks or nuns practice complete celibacy. Married Jains practice sexual fidelity to their spouse. Improper sex that hurts others is forbidden (Molloy, 2018, p. 182).

Attachments to possessions, money, and families are examples that create a materialist tie to the universe. Jainism ethics of nonattachment suggest to cultivate a jiva of generosity and detach from and limit possessions to only to what is necessary. For Jain monks and nuns this discipline includes even one's clothing (Molloy, 2018, p. 183).

By means of this strict ascetic discipline, Jainism ethics in addition to karma aid in leading to the ultimate goal of liberation, moksa. In order to fully understand Jainism, one must first understand jiva and ajiva, in regards to Jain ethics along with their applications to metaphysical distinction.