

JAINISM

The name Jainism is derived from Jina [conqueror or victor], meaning someone who has achieved the highest spiritual liberation. The Jina's, having gained infinite knowledge and wisdom, laid down the way of spiritual progress for humanity and became known as Tirthankaras [Prophets]. Mahavira was the last of the 24 such Tirthankars. The first Tirthankar was Rishabhdev (initiator of Jainism); a prehistoric person or 'Aadinath' (meaning the First God.)

Jainism is one of the major ancient religions of India. It was revived through the teachings of Lord Mahavira, who lived from 599 to 527 BC. Mahavira was born as a prince in to a royal family near the modern city of Patna in Bihar in North Eastern India. He renounced his wealth and became monk.

Jains believe in an infinite universe and that there is no creator, saviour or destroyer of the universe and there is no supreme power to give you pleasure or pain. Jainism is a religion of self-help i.e. one shapes ones future by ones own deeds (Theory of Karma particles attached to our soul). Jains are followers of Jinas (Tirthankars), who through their teachings of 'Right belief, Right knowledge and Right conduct ('Three jewels' of religion), guide the people on the path to liberation (Moksha).

The universe is filled with an infinite number of souls. Each of them is affected by Karma, accumulated through their deeds and passion, which bind them to the continual cycle of death and re-birth. On rebirth, souls take body of any of the millions of categories of living being on this universe such as plants, insects, animals, humans, heavenly and hellish bodies etc.

. The soul can get released from this cycle and attain liberation i.e. 'Moksha' by complete disassociation from the karmic matter by following the path of the Jinas, although many births and deaths may have to be endured.

The underlining principle of Jain living is non-violence (Ahinsa), i.e. harmlessness to all living beings of the universe and to treat all souls as equal. Other principles are non attachment to possessions, not lying, not stealing and sexual restraint (with celibacy as the ideal). One needs to observe self-control (sanyam) in thoughts, speech and action to follow these principles.

Mahavira founded a fourfold organisation of monks and nuns, who dedicate themselves to follow his teachings exclusively in the pursuit of 'moksha'; and lay men and women who follow them within the constraints of their everyday life and duties. It is accepted that all can eventually achieve the highest level of liberation [moksha], but monks and nuns, because of their ascetic way of life (observing the principles at the highest level), can follow the path of purification more quickly. (Jain Monks & Nuns do not use any transport hence not seen outside India)

Lay persons however, are recognised members of the Jaina order and are encouraged to worship, study the scriptures, exercise self control, give to charity and practice austerities and fasting. Six essential activities are recommended as daily routine of worship.

WORSHIP

Recommended daily religious routine for all Jains

- Meditation [Samayik] and prayer.
- Honour to the Tirthankara. [Puja] and Pilgrimage to holy places
- Respect for, and listening to, spiritual teachers.
- Repentance [Pratikraman], twice a day and the annual one on Samvatsari day
- Renunciation of certain pleasures, activities, eg. food and drinks for a fixed time. [Pachchakhan]

JAIN FESTIVALS (Dates vary every year)

March / April:

Mahavir Janma Kalyanak (Birthday)

August / September:

Paryushan (A period of eight days of religious austerity/fasting and forgiveness)

Last day of Paryushan:

Samvatsary (Annual Forgiveness/repentance day)

October/November:

Lord Mahavir's Nirvan (Diwali) (Last day of the Jain / Hindu Year)

Day after Diwali: New Year

Jains follow a lunar calendar of twelve months to a year and 29 to 30 days a month. A Lunar year is of 354 or 355 days, hence to make up with the Solar year, there are 13 months in every third year

CARE for JAIN PATIENTS

Special considerations

- Jain patients usually prefer to have close friends or relatives to be present as much as possible.
- Patients prefer to be accommodated in separate male or female ward areas and women to be cared for by a nurse/doctor of the same gender, wherever possible.
- Patients may wish to brush their teeth before breakfast and wash themselves with flowing water and rinse their mouths before reciting prayers.
- Patients may wish to recite prayers or read religious books/scriptures or listen to religious audio recordings.
- Jains are not strict about medication, but will tend to avoid medicines derived from animal products or developed by testing on animals.
- Prayers are chanted in a baby's ears immediately after birth.
- Termination of pregnancy is not allowed.
- There are no religious objections to blood transfusions.

Diet

- Jains do not drink alcohol and are vegetarian (no egg, meat, seafood or mushrooms, but milk is permitted). Food is normally prepared separately to avoid contamination by non-permitted foods. Those who are strict followers of Jain principles may also avoid root vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, beetroot, onions, garlic etc. The strictest will not eat or drink between sunset and sunrise and will only drink water that has been boiled, cooled and filtered.

Care of the dying

- Jains may value the presence of a Jain spiritual care-giver.
- Close family members and relatives will wish to remain at the patient's bed side and may read from their religious books. Prayers are offered for the soul of the dying patient.
- Jains prefer no interference with the dead body. If a coroner's post-mortem is required, explanation will be necessary.
- There are no religious objections to organ donation.
- The body is always cremated at the earliest opportunity.

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