

# **Jainism**

A short survey.

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# JAINISM

## SRI SWAMI SIVANANDA

### INTRODUCTION

"Jain" or more properly speaking "Jaina" means a follower of Jina, which is applied to those persons who have conquered the lower nature, passion, hatred, etc. The word 'Jain' comes from the word 'Jina' which means a conqueror. 'Jina' comes from the root 'Ji'—'to conquer'. It means conquering the passions. It does not mean conquering nations. The passions are considered as enemies of the soul. They taint the natural qualities of the soul, obscure right belief, cause false knowledge and wrong conduct. Lust, anger, pride and greed are considered as the major passions.

The chief point in the Jaina creed is the reverence paid to holy men, who have raised themselves to divine perfection through long discipline. The Jina or the 'conquering saint', who has conquered all worldly desires is with Jains what the Buddha or the perfectly enlightened saint is with Buddhas. He is also called Jineswara (chief of the Jinas), Arhat, "the venerable", Tirthankara or the saint who has made the passage of the world, Sarvajna (omniscient), Bhagavat (holy one). 'Tirtha' literally means a ford, a means of crossing over. It metaphorically denotes a spiritual guide or philosophy which enables one to cross over the ocean of recurring births in this world. 'Kara' means 'one who makes'. The word Tirthankara means a 'Jain Holy Teacher'.

According to the belief of the Jains, only the omniscient are able to give a right code of rules of life. These teachers or Tirthankaras are not creators or rulers of the world. They are pure divine souls, who have attained perfection. They never again take human birth.

Mahavira is not the founder of Jainism. He revived the Jain doctrines. He was more a reformer than the founder of the faith. He was the first active propagator. He was the twenty-fourth Tirthankara. He is claimed to have been omniscient. 'Maha' means 'great' and 'Vira' means 'a hero'. Parasvanath was the twenty-third. The first of these twenty-four was named Rishabha Dev.

The idols which represent the Tirthankaras are like that of Buddha in a meditative posture, Jainism is a representative of Buddhistic ideas. It has much in common with Buddhism. It is a near relative of Buddhism, if not its actual descendant.

The Jain theory is based on reason. It is based on right faith, right knowledge, right conduct, tempered with mercy. Jainism is not a theistic system in the sense of the belief in the existence of a God as the Creator and the Ruler of the world. The highest being in the Jain philosophy is a person and not a Being without attributes like the Brahman of the Vedanta.

## JAIN PHILOSOPHY

The Jain philosophy bases its doctrine on the absolute necessity of conquering the lower nature for the realisation of Truth.

The Jains do not accept the authority of the Vedas.

Jainism divides the whole universe into two main divisions viz., sentient beings (*Chetana*, also called Jiva or Soul) and non-sentient things (*Jada*, also called Ajiva or non-soul). Soul is that element which thinks, knows and feels. It is the divine element in the living being. The true nature of the soul is right knowledge, right faith and right conduct. The soul is undergoing evolution and involution, so long as it is subject to transmigration. Whatever is not soul is non-soul (Ajiva).

The combination of the Jiva and the Ajiva causes all diversities in this universe. Their interaction or interplay is the cause of the world-process or evolution. When the soul is stripped of all its Ajiva bondage, it becomes pure and attains its ultimate Mukti.

## GOD

Jainism does not regard God as a Creator. God in the sense of an extra cosmic personal Creator has no place in the Jain philosophy. But there is a subtle essence underlying all substances, conscious and unconscious, which becomes the cause of all modifications. This is termed God. The Jain idea of Godhood is the perfected Soul (Siddha), the liberated soul (Mukta). The Jains worship these liberated souls (Tirthankaras) who have destroyed all Karmas and attained salvation, as their God. They accept those enlightened souls only, who have abandoned all worldly connections, who lead the life of true Sadhus, who have controlled all selfish desires, as their spiritual teachers. They accept that only as the true religion, which is promulgated by them.

The Jain Tirthankara is free from faults. He is true God. He is the knower of all things and the revealer of Dharma. He is free from the 18 kinds of blemishes viz., hunger, thirst, senility, disease, birth, death, fear, pride, attachment, aversion, infatuation, worry, conceit, hatred, uneasiness, sweat, sleep and surprise.

The Jain philosophy teaches that each soul is a separate individuality, uncreated and eternal in existence. It has lived from time immemorial in some embodied state. It evolves from the lower to the higher condition through the Law of Karma, or cause and effect. It takes fresh bodies after death so long as the Karmas or forces generated in previous lives have not been fully worked out. Eventually it unfolds its absolute purity by breaking the bonds of Karma and attains perfection, Nirvana or Mukti. The individuality is not merged into anything. It is not annihilated also. It attains right realisation, right knowledge and right life. The perfected soul is neither masculine, feminine, nor neuter.

Every soul is potentially omniscient. Consciousness is the very nature of the soul. Soul is a pure embodiment of knowledge. The soul has infinite potentialities. It has infinite capacity for removing Karma-bondages.

## WORLD

The world is beginningless and endless. There is no extra cosmic creator or ruler of the world. There are six real substances which constitute the world. These six are space, time, matter, souls, Dharmastikaya (fulcrum of motion) and Adharmastikaya (fulcrum of stability, or rest). Space serves as a receptacle for the other substances. It is infinite. Time is real. It is beginningless and endless. Material objects consist of atoms.

## DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND REINCARNATION

The only enemy of the soul is the force Of its own Karmas (actions). It can destroy the Karma by becoming fully self-conscious. When the bonds of Karma are destroyed, the soul attains Mukti. It cannot be overcome afresh by Karma.

The doctrine of Karma occupies a very prominent place in the Jain philosophy. *Punya* is the effect of virtuous deeds (*Subha Karma*). *Papa* is the effect of evil deeds (*Asubha Karma*). If a man has abundance of good actions, his happiness increases; if he has abundance of evil deeds, his miseries and pain increase. When both the good and evil deeds are eliminated, he attains emancipation or Moksha.

The doctrine of Karma is the companion doctrine of the transmigration of the soul. "With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall be also reaped." These are but the corollaries of that most intricate Law of Karma. This solves the problem of the inequality and seeming injustice in the world. A student of the Jain Karma philosophy can trace any effect to a particular Karma. Those who by right faith, right knowledge and right conduct destroy all Karmas, attain perfection. They become divine and are called Jinas. Those Jinas who, in every age, preach the law and establish the order, are called Tirthankaras.

The Jains believe in reincarnation. The doctrine of reincarnation alone can explain the inequality seen in the world. Why is one man born rich and the other poor? Why is one man healthy and strong, and another man weak and unhealthy? Why one man lives for 30 years, and another for 85 years? Why one man is a king and another a labourer in the field? What is the cause of this apparent injustice? Karma. Good Karmas give good birth. Evil Karmas give rise to low births. The doctrine of reincarnation is another grand doctrine of the Jain philosophy. It is the companion doctrine of Doctrine of Karma.

## TRIPLE JEWELS

Right faith, right knowledge and right conduct constitute the path to Nirvana. Wrong beliefs, wrong knowledge and wrong conduct prolong the bondage of the souls. The belief that the Jaina Tirthankaras are the true Gods, the Jaina Sastras the true scriptures and the Jaina saints the true Preceptors is called the *Right faith*.

*Right knowledge*: Right knowledge reveals the nature of things as it is and with certainty.

*Right conduct* (Jain ethics): That noble soul who has right knowledge on account of right faith begins to practise the rules of right conduct, to attain the state of desirelessness by eradicating likes and dislikes, which destroy the five kinds of sin viz. Himsa (injury), falsehood, theft, unchastity and attachment to mundane objects.

The universal principles of Jainism are *Ahimsa* (non-injury), *Satyam* (truthfulness), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) and *Aparigraha* (non-covetousness). This corresponds to the *Yama* of Raja Yoga of Patanjali Maharshi. Jainism preaches universal brotherhood, equality of all beings. It enjoins on all its followers the practice of the greatest self-control.

The five *Mahavratas* or great Commandments for Jain ascetics are:—not to kill, i.e., to protect all life; not to lie; not to take that which is not given; to abstain from sexual intercourse; to renounce all interest in worldly things, particularly to call nothing one's own.

The Jain doctrines are summed up in the maxim '*Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah*'. Non-injury to living beings is the highest religion. Ahimsa is the foundational tenet of Jainism. Jainism always tends to protect and advance the interests of all kinds of living beings.

One should not kill, tell lies, steal, be unchaste or over-greedy for possession of property. This constitutes Jain ethics. The Jains are vegetarians.

According to the Jain philosophy, all evils are due to *Raga* and *Dvesha* (attachment and hatred). Raja Yoga philosophy of Patanjali Maharshi, the Nyaya philosophy of Gautama and Vedanta also say the same thing. Attachment produces *Moha* or infatuation. *Moha* causes entanglement. Separation from the object causes pain and suffering. Through *Dvesha* man injures others. Attachment also is as much an evil as hatred. Both are causes of bondage. Both taint the mind.

## MOKSHA

Moksha is the total elimination of Karma from the Jiva. The Jiva gets freedom as soon as it attains this stage. The liberated state is known as Mukti. The Jiva attains perfect, unlimited, eternal happiness, untouched by cares and worries. Moksha implies freedom from matter. The liberated soul goes to the abode Siddhakshetra, which is at the top of this world.

The individual by his own efforts liberates all his latent qualities, which were obscured by foreign elements (Karmas). This state of purity or perfection is attained only in the human life through the triple jewels, viz. right faith, right knowledge and right conduct.

The soul becomes pure by the removal of matter. In this condition there are no pain, misery, disease, old age or death, fatigue, discomfort. It is a condition of immortality, infinite knowledge, eternal uninterrupted bliss.

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