

5 minute guide to **JAINISM**

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Introduction

There are approximately 3.5 million Jains in the world today.

It is one of the world's oldest living religions and originated in India, where the majority of its followers still live today. Jainism does not believe in a creator God, but it does believe in many Gods who are the self-realised individuals who have attained enlightenment. Jainism believes that the universe and all its substance or entities are eternal. Jains believe that all living things (animals and plants) have souls and are of equal value.

All Jains are compelled to be vegetarians.

History

Jainism was founded by Mahavira in the 6th Century B.C.E. Mahavira was the son of a minor ruler in India. While pregnant with him, his mother is said to have had a series of fourteen dreams which were portents to Mahavira's virtues. After his birth his family prospered. When grown, Mahavira married and his wife had a daughter. In spite of his family's good fortune, Mahavira was not happy. After the death of his parents (at the age of 30) he left his family and turned his back on a life of luxury. He joined a group of ascetics.

He did not find what he was looking for with the ascetics and went off on his own to develop a more extreme asceticism. During this time he had the following experiences:

- He swept the path where he walked and strained the water he drank. One should not injure any form of life (**ahisma**).
- He decided the path to enlightenment should also be through torment. He went naked and sought the coldest spots in winter and the hottest in summer.
- He begged for his food.
- He did not resist when beaten or attacked.
- He never stayed more than one night in the same place.
- He became indifferent to all things.

Growth

During the thirteenth year of these practices, he achieved release (**moksha**) and attained Nirvana.

During this thirteen-year period, Mahavira moved from being a solitary ascetic to a leader and teacher of monks. He preached that the world was made of two substances, soul and matter. He believed that the cause of all misery is the connection of the contaminated material body to the pure eternal spirit. He believed the goal for all is to liberate the soul from matter and that the laws of karma and reincarnation are closely linked to the drama of the flesh and spirit.

Mahavira believed that the salvation of the soul was each individual's responsibility and could not be achieved through outside forces. To Mahavira, the Gods were of little consequence because they are living on a different plane, unconcerned with mankind's reality. Therefore, he did not feel that there should be any worship or prayer. While Mahavira did not believe in prayer or worship, his followers worship and pray to him because it is believed that he was

sinless, omniscient and incarnate as the last of the twenty-four Tirthankaras (saviours of men).

By the year 80 C.E., Jains were divided into two distinct sects. These were the Svetambara (white-clad) and the Digambara (sky-clad).

The **Svetambara** are mainly concentrated in Northern India and are more liberal in the interpretations of Mahavira with regard to nudity (they allow their monks to wear white garments). Women are also allowed in their religion and monasteries accept the possibility that they may find salvation.

The **Digambara** Jains are mainly based in Southern India. They adhere to the old ideals and require their monks to go about naked. They also disagree with the **Svetambara** Jains on certain aspects of Mahavira's life. The Digambara believe that women have no chance of salvation until they are reborn as men. Therefore, women are prohibited from entering monasteries and temples.

Jains are forbidden from entering all occupations that profit from taking life; which has resulted in most Jains working in commercial or "white-collar" fields.

Traditions/Beliefs

Like some of the other world religions, Jainism is a religion of self-help. There are no Gods or God who will help humans on the road to liberation. They believe that life is a series of births, deaths, and rebirths until the soul has shed all karma and can achieve liberation. The three most central guides for the individual to attain this goal are: **Right Belief, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct**. The physical actions of a lifetime do not take precedence over the mental or contemplative acts of the individual. Both physical and mental/spiritual acts are needed to break the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Therefore, deed and thought are weighed equally in Jainism.

Nine fundamental philosophies

There are nine fundamental philosophies in the Jain tradition, known as the **Nav Tattvas** (nine fundamentals) and they are:

- **Jiva** (soul). All living beings are called **Jiva**. The soul is described as a sort of eternal energy which is indestructible, invisible, and shapeless. The body is merely a home for the soul.
- **Anjiva** (non-living matter). Anything that does not have a soul or consciousness. **Anjiva** is divided into five categories:
 - **Dharmastikay** (medium of motion)
 - **Adarmastikay**(medium of rest)
 - **Pudgalastikay** (matter)
 - **Akashatikay** (space)
 - **Kala** (time)
- **Punya** (results of good deeds) **Punya** is acquired by the undertaking of wholesome activities. Charitable acts and propagating religion are among the activities which can help to attain **Punya**. When **Punya** matures it brings forth comfort and happiness.

- **Pap** (results of bad deeds) Bad activities lead to **Pap**, or bad karma. Cruelty, violence and anger are among the things that can bring **Pap**. When **Pap** matures it brings suffering, misery and unhappiness.
- **Asrava** (influx of karma) **Asrava** is caused by wrong belief, passions and negligence, among other things. These karma “particles” attach themselves to the soul.
- **Samvar** (stoppage of karmas). This is achieved by observing carefulness, control, mental reflection, suffering, and through the ten-fold **yati-dharma** (monkshood).
- **Bandh** (bondage of karmas). This occurs when we react to any situation with a sense of attachment or aversion.
- **Nirjara** (eradication of karma). **Nirjara** is the process by which we shed karmas. It can occur through passive or active efforts. Passive efforts mean simply waiting for karmas to mature and give their results in time. Actively matured karma can be achieved by performing penance, regretting, asking for forgiveness and meditation (to name a few).
- **Moska** (liberation). If we rid ourselves of all karmas, we attain liberation.

Five tenants of the Mahavratas

The individual Jain is also called adhere to the 5 tenants of the Mahavratas (5 great vows), which are:

- Non-Violence (non-injury to life)
- No Lying
- No Stealing
- Non-Attachment to possessions
- Sexual Restraint (Celibacy is the ideal)

All Jains must strive to attain the first three vows, while members of the monastic community adhere to all five.

Within Jainist society there are four groups, they are:

- Sadhus (Monks)
- Sadhvis (Nuns)
- Shravaks (Male householders)
- Shravikas (Female householders)

Jains are recommended to pass through four stages during their lifetime, which are:

- **Brahmacharya-ashrama**: The life of the student
- **Gruhasth-ashrama**: Family life
- **Vanaprasth-ashrama**: Family and social service
- **Sanyas-ashrama**: life as a monk or nun (a period of renunciation).

Worship

Jains believe that devotions to any God figure would be pointless as God (or the Gods) is not involved in doing or undoing things in the human realm. To perform any devotions therefore, would not lead to liberation.

While Jains recognise that there is no real place for **Bhakti** (devotion) or **Pooja** (worship), they do in practice have certain worship practices.

In Jainism there are certain entities which are acceptable for ritual devotions. These are:

- The Tirthankaras (there are 24 human saviours recognised)
- The Arhant (worthy of worship)
- The Siddha (liberated soul)
- The Sadhu (monk)
- The Dharm (religion)
- The Mangals (four auspicious entities)
- The Lokottams (four supreme entities)

Many Jains worship at a temple every day, while others do so much less frequently. For Jainism, worship is a means to personal spiritual and karmic development, not worship for exultation or devotion to any particular entity.

Jains worship in temples which contain images of the 24 Tirthankaras. There is usually one central being in the temple with other smaller representations throughout the building. Jains worship through meditation, offerings and prayer. Prayers are not made in any form of petitioning to a greater being for grace or influence; instead they tend to remember the great qualities of their religious saviours.

Jainism does not have clergy, though **Svetambara** Jains do have priests (whose only purpose is to assist in rituals, not to direct or guide other Jains).

Holy Days, Festivals and Rituals

Fasting is a very important part of the Jains tradition. Most Jains fast during holy days and festivals; some Jains choose fasting at other times in order to purify or to assist in their spiritual development. This ritual can vary from giving up food and drink entirely to only giving up favourite foods. Many Jains choose to fast when their death is approaching so that they may purify their thoughts in the preceding moments to their death.

Celebrations

- **Mahavira Jayanti.** Occurs around March/April. A celebration of the birth of Mahavira (the founder of Jainism). Celebrations include community worship, processions, and other devotional and spiritual activities.
- **Paryushana.** Occurs in August/September. Considered by some to be the most important festival in Jainism. All Jains are required to fast and the spiritual preceptors read out and explain in detail the Kalpasutra (sacred scripture). The first seven days of the festival are days of attainment, and the eighth and finally day is one of fulfilment and achievement.
- **Diwali:** Occurs in October/November. The whole night of Diwali should be spent in the recitation of holy hymns and meditation. Svetambara Jains believe that on the night of the day of Diwali in 537 B.C.E., Mahavira achieved Nirvan (or deliverance) and attained to a state of absolute bliss. The day after Diwali marks the beginning of the New Year in their calendar.
- **Kartak Purnima.** Occurs in October/November. Thousands of Jains go on pilgrimages on this day to sacred Jain sites.
- **Mauna Agyaras.** Occurs around November/December. This is the day on which Jains fast and observes total silence. It is a day for meditation.

Timeline

3000 B.C.E.	Indus Valley Civilization
1500 B.C.E. (estimated)	Rishabhadeva, 1 st Thirthankara (Prophet of Jainism). The founder of Jainism.
877 B.C.E. (estimated)	Birth of Parsvanatha, 23 rd Thirthankara (Prophet of Jainism). Gave his followers a more defined approach and created a more distinct sect of ascetics. Born a prince, he renounced his life to become a monk.
599 B.C.E. (approximately, some hold that he was born some 60 years later in 539 B.C)	Death of Vardhamana Mahavira, the 24 th Thirthankara (Prophet of Jainism)
590 B.C.E. (approximately)	The first Jainist nun, Aryika Chandana.
327 B.C.E.	Mauryan Empire founded
175 B.C.E.	Kharvel brings the Indian subcontinent under his control.
87 C.E.	Pushpadanta starts to write the Shatkhandagam
156 C.E.	Bhutbali completes the writing of the Shatkhandagam.
	Bhadrabahu, the last man who was the leader of the undivided Jainist.
First Century C.E. (approximately)	The lifetime of Kundakunda, the celebrated author of the four influential Jainist books Samaya Sara (Treatise of the True Self), Pravachana Sara (Treatise of Lectures), Niyama Sara (Treatise on Pure Rules), Panchastikaya Sara (Treatise on Five Universal Components) and Ashta Pahuda (Eight Steps),
3 rd Century C.E.	Rise of Gang Dynasty
345 C.E.	Rise of Kadamb Dynasty
454 C.E.	Devardhigani Complies Jain agams
6 th Century C.E.	Rise of early Chalukyas
7 th Century C.E.	8000 Jains massacred in Madurai
753 C.E.	Rise of Rashtrakuts
821 C.E.	The Jainist Emperor Amoghavarsh takes the throne; he was considered one of the four mightiest emperors of the world, His capital was Manyakhet. He left the throne to pursue spiritual matters.
1022 C.E.	Rise of Hoysalas
1160 C.E.	Rise of Chauta Dynasty at Tulundada
1350 C.E.	Rise of Saluva rulers in Karwar, Karnataka
1451 C.E.	Lonkashah founded the Dhundhia Order of Jainism.
1867 C.E.	Shrimad Rajchandra was born.
1889	Kanaji Swami was born.
1893	Virchand Gandhi attends the first world religion conference.
1963 C.E.	The death of Rajendra Suri who wrote and published the Abhidhana-Rajendra Kosh (Encyclopaedia) which took 13 years to write and 21 years to publish.

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