

Jain Worldview Traditions

In-Depth Subject Knowledge Essay



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This in-depth subject knowledge essay is also available on our website. We also have an accompanying glossary, available both on our website and for download.

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Introduction

Jainism is one of the oldest religions of the world, based on the philosophy of Ahimsa or reverence for all living beings. Jains are widely acknowledged as having made major contributions to the art, literature and culture of India and have been vegetarians for thousands of years. The last prophet was Mahavira, or the Great Hero, who lived in 559BCE. Jainism originated in India and has spread throughout the world. There are Jain temples in a number of places in the UK including London, Leicester and Manchester. Worldwide there are about seven million adherents.

The resources contained in the list of subjects below are a basic introduction to the facts and beliefs of Jainism. They are a portal or window into the world Jainism and by following the websites and bibliographies, an enquirer may discover more and more about this faith.

The six units are based on the QCA non-statutory framework for Religious Education and the Areas of Enquiry. They provide not only a comprehensive guide to the factual and belief structures of Jainism, but also address the issues that Jainism encounters as it engages with the 21st century.

Beliefs, Teachings, Wisdom, Authority

Basic beliefs

Belief for Jains is a normal part of life – it is not something reserved for the time of prayer or the visit to the temple. It is rarely expressed or experienced as miracles, but it is the giver of inner strength and the triumph of hope over adversity. Belief is seen as the line which continues from past lives to the current life and helps us move beyond death to future lives or liberation. It is the thread that weaves the soul in its journey through the Universe.

Much of Jain belief is based on respect for enlightened souls, wherever they may live. The most sacred Jain prayer, the Navkar Mantra is a salutation to all such souls of whatever faith they may belong. It is a universal prayer. Belief fills everyday life with a sense of purpose and helps us to be contented and thankful. Belief helps us put the material world in its place and prevents it from overwhelming our lives.

A distinctive belief of Jainism is that the whole of nature is included in the cycle of liberation – men, gods, animals, insects, plants and all living beings. Consequently, life and its direction are ruled by karma – deeds, and these decide the condition of the next life. Liberation arises when all karmas are destroyed and the soul becomes pure and free.

Ethical conduct is an expression of belief – with values like service, respect, simplicity, selflessness and forgiveness its guiding lights. The word Jain derives from the root Jina which

means conqueror of the inner vices. A true Jain is one who has reached the inner purity of the soul and is not tainted by greed, violence or vices of any kind.

Authoritative scriptures

The primary sources of authority are the Agamas or scriptures. There is no one bible or main scripture but a whole series of scriptures numbering at least forty-five and some have been lost over the years. These cover a wide range of topics, from the life and times of the Tirthankaras, to the code of conduct for Monks and Nuns, the values and science of living (Acharanga Sutra), the psychology of non-violence, the science of existence (Tattvartha Sutra).

The 'Tirthankaras' or ford-makers are the primary source of authority for the wisdom of the tradition. The latest Tirthankara, Mahavira was born in 599 BCE. The scriptures are partly based on what he said whilst he was alive, and have partly evolved over later centuries and written by scholar monks and agreed upon by monk congregations.

The role of scriptures is important and they have evolved over the years – however the scriptures are not absolute nor are they treated as the last word. They are presented for study and reflection rather than as a precise prescription of right livelihood. They are open to analysis and interpretation. There is a vast artistic, poetical and literary tradition which expands upon the core values and practices.

The agamas were passed on orally for many centuries and probably fixed about the 5th century CE.

Authoritative leadership

There is an order of monks, Sadhu, and nuns, Sadhvi, who observe the highest values of purity, non-possessiveness, non-violence, chastity and non-stealing. They walk barefoot and do not carry any possessions nor are they allowed to travel by car or aeroplane. Their existence is nomadic and they depend on the lay community for their basic food and shelter. They translate the tradition to the lay community through lectures and by example and dialogue. They are present at auspicious events such as festivals and poojas and participate in some temple and other rituals.

In practice, spiritual leadership in the community is provided by monks and nuns living in India. Lay people listen to their sermons and consult them on difficult concepts and for spiritual guidance. Some lay people even adopt certain monks or nuns as their 'gurus' or primary mentors.

The Acharya is the highest rank among monks and nuns, and is appointed by the peer group of existing Acharyas. He would be the leader of a group of monks and nuns.

Lay Jains are supposed to live an ethical life endowed with these principles and ideals. They observe daily rituals such as Samayik and Pratikramana (meditations and prayers) and visit temples and community centres regularly. There are no middlemen in the act of worship – each soul has to make their own personal efforts to liberation and there is no hierarchy of bishops and priests. There are many festivals, the most important being Paryushan or Daslakshan where there is intense fasting, prayer and listening to lectures.

Founders and exemplars of faith

The Jain tradition is believed to be at least three thousand years old. Mahavira was the 24th in the line of Tirthankaras (Prophets / Ford Makers) and he was born in north-east India in 599 BCE. There is scientific and historical evidence of his existence and that of Parshva, the 23rd Tirthankara who was born 250 years before Mahavira.

Mahavira was born into the Hindu Kshatriya caste in the Indian town of Vaisali, near the Ganges River. His father was a local prince and according to legend, his mother had dreams and portents that foretold the birth of a prophet son. Mahavira was brought up as a Jain and followed ascetic practices. At the age of 30, Mahavira himself became an ascetic, left his home and family and became a wandering teacher, begging for his food. He lived on gifts for twelve years spending most of the time in meditation. Then at the age of forty three, he became enlightened and a jina, or conqueror of life and death. For the next thirty years of his life, Mahavira taught his ideas, gathered disciples who were willing to renounce all possessions, and ordained them as monks, Sadhu, and nuns, Sadhvi. He attained liberation (nirvana) at Pavapuri near Patna in 527BCE – Jains celebrate this liberation during the festival of Diwali every year.

A Jina is a victor over the inner vices and weaknesses, one who not only carves his own path to enlightenment, but also leaves a torchlight of wisdom for others to follow in this journey. They were great teachers and wise and enlightened souls, and stories of their lives and accomplishments abound in the scriptures, with much more known about the life of Mahavira than any other Tirthankara.

The lives of the Jinas were simple, their sacrifices immense and their compassion boundless. Their lifetime was dedicated to the pursuit of truth in all its manifestations and encouraging others to follow truthful living through a minimization of harm to other living beings. Many were often born in royal households and had access to all material comforts, but chose to give these up to pursue spiritual enlightenment. They were truly courageous and victorious, not in the sense of victory or power over others, but in the sense of providing genuine and democratic leadership and vision. They espoused the values they preached and there was no hypocrisy and significant humility.

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the most venerated leaders of the twentieth century, was strongly inspired by the Jain faith in his movement of non-violent resistance. His mentor, Shrimad Rajchandra, was a distinguished businessman, poet and philosopher who was able to translate the practical dimensions of the faith with great lucidity and insight.

Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara is the most celebrated of heroes, but there have also been several monk heroes such as Hemchandraacharya who was a great scholar and poet around the 11th century and Pandit Sukhlalji, one of the greatest Jain scholars of the twentieth century.

All the heroes lived simply and humbly, but had very strong aesthetic and intellectual wisdom. They provided vital leadership in many dimensions of life and were able to influence individuals, leaders and whole societies toward positive transformation. Pandit Sukhlalji was blind, but this disability did not in any way get in the way of his scholarship – he had opened his third eye to seek and translate ancient wisdom. Their very life was their message, showing people how to live with integrity, non-violence, simplicity, respect and selflessness. These are the lasting values of sustainable living.

Ways of Living

Belief and religious practice

Belief, for Jains, is a very important part of life, in fact the core of life. However, it is not a form of fundamentalist belief or a belief in one truth and one God or the set written scriptures of God. Instead it is a faith in oneself and one's own powers and potential to live truthfully and ethically and overcome hardships and suffering. Prayer and worship is aimed at building this inner strength as opposed to seeking salvation and emancipation from an external being. Belief drives everyday action and provides strength at times of despair and pain.

Gods or Tirthankaras are role models and teachers of ethical living. They have lived a life which has helped them attain liberation and left a light of wisdom for all of us to follow. This wisdom is the Jain philosophy and its virtues. It is believed that right knowledge is the best gift one could have as it shows the path to eternal happiness and enlightenment.

The benefits of right belief on individuals and communities are significant especially in a time of unprecedented global change and transformation. They provide inner strength and stability and a framework for negotiating and adapting to worldly living.

For Jains living outside India, belief is critical to their adaption and assimilation. Community is seen as a natural extension of the individual and one of the most important acts is to build a temple and community centre where faith is sustained and nourished through collective action and worship. It is remarkable how active the Jains are in this sphere even though they are so far away from their homeland.

Worship and the scriptures

Texts and scriptures have an importance in religious worship, but different Jain sects give different emphasis to these. For example, The Kalpasutra, is a sacred text used by the Shvetambara during the Paryushan festival and is recited and celebrated during this time. It contains the stories of the lives of the 24 Tirthankaras or prophets of Jainism and rules of code of conduct of monks and nuns.

The Digambara place a strong emphasis on scriptures and their study and encourage discussion and dialogue about them. There is a strong emphasis on this. Even Sthanakvasi Jains attach importance to scriptural study and reflection. They are written in Prakrit and Ardha Maghdi, ancient language of India which have links to Sanskrit. Ardhamaghdi was the language of common people during the time of Lord Mahavira whilst Sanskrit was the language of the educated elite Brahmins. Thus not only the faith, but even the language of the scriptures was democratic and non-discriminatory.

The scriptures were written almost a thousand years after the death of Lord Mahavira. Oral recitation and memorisation was given significant importance and is critical even in this day and age. Many religious rituals are conducted in these ancient languages which have been preserved over all these years and even young people in Britain can recite prayers and rituals which were originally written in these words.

The interpretation of these texts changes over time and different emphasis is given by different spiritual leaders and saints. Even lay people are allowed to interpret them and write articles and books based on their interpretations. Many have done so and there are scholars who are not brought up in the Jain tradition but are highly respected.

The journey of life

Death is a comma, not a full stop. Life and living is the key to immortality – there should be no fear of death but instead an active attempt to seek liberation and salvation through right living and right conduct. The ceremony of death is performed collectively and the body is cremated within a few hours of death and not preserved any longer than absolutely necessary. The focus of prayer and funeral rites is on a peaceful afterlife and a prayer for ultimate liberation.

Family and community come close together to support the bereaved at this unfortunate moment. It is a duty for close family members to do this. The philosophy encourages detachment and therefore makes it easier for people to accept death of close relatives or friends as they are seen as independent souls on their journey to eventual liberation. However, the practicalities of closeness and attachment are also respected and people are allowed to express their emotions at this difficult time.

As it is the soul which transmigrates, the cremation of the body is seen as natural and environment friendly. Burial is seen as unnecessary as the body is now pure matter and devoid of any life.

Holy days and celebrations

There are many festivals in the Jain calendar. The most important of these are Mahavir Jyanti (birth of Lord Mahavir), Diwali (Enlightenment of Lord Mahavir) and Paryushan or Daslakshan (festival of forgiveness). The dates follow the lunar calendar and not the Christian calendar so they vary from year to year. The festivals are celebrated at temples and community centres wherever Jains live or if such facilities are not available then local community halls are hired for this purpose. They are always celebrated collectively and Jains make a point of coming together during these special days.

For example, during the eight day Shvetambara festival of Paryushan, there is a lot of fasting. It is a time to apply a handbrake on life and focus on personal salvation and liberation. The ideal fast is for the full eight days without any food whatsoever – it is not compulsory but many endeavour to do this at least once in their lives. There is a daily communal prayer and lectures and readings from the sacred scriptures. The eighth day is the day of forgiveness. On the ninth day, there is large and colourful fast-breaking ceremony where people come to 'spoon-feed' those who have fasted for the eight days.

The distinctive feature of these celebrations is the way in which they spiritually recharge individuals and the community. Faces light up and spirits are lifted and rejuvenated. They play a key role in the renewal of commitment to faith and the uniting of the community. None of these events are exclusive.

Ways of expressing meaning

Stories of faith

Stories have been central to the survival and dissemination of the faith. There have been not hundreds nor thousands but hundreds of thousands of stories in the Jain faith. Some scholars have said that the Jains were the master story-tellers of India. The stories were used to explain values and ideals, and often covered complex aspects of the faith which were otherwise difficult to grasp. For a long time, the tradition was oral and it would not be surprising to find the average Jain mother to know hundreds of stories through memory.

As there is no major distinction between the sacred and the normal, stories were seen as expressions of the heritage rather than divine revelations or statements. Perhaps the most important stories are the life stories of the Tirthankaras – but as such there are no stories which are more special than others. Some are enacted through theatre and drama, accompanied by music and poetry and have become more popular as a result. However, stories abound everywhere and some are expressed through songs and poetry as well.

The subjects of stories have been equally vast – from stories of angels and gods, to animal stories, family stories and stories of miracles and the triumph of truth over falsehood. Often there is a deep analysis of the complex web of living beings in the Universe and the drama of

their interdependence and entanglements. The stories are synonymous with core values and beliefs and have played a critical role in the survival of such a minority faith during periods of persecution and curtailment. They have been expressed and written in many languages in different parts of India. In many cases, the artistic depth and poetry behind the stories has been legendary. Sometimes, there are artistic illustrations of stories in ancient texts and manuscripts.

Symbols of faith

Symbolism is important in the Jain tradition. It is manifested in temple designs, paintings and illustrations, printed matter such as wedding invitations and Diwali cards, and in rituals and worship. There is a broad range and there is no one core symbol or central emblem for all Jains. The swastika, however, is often seen as a key Jain symbol and there is a Jain Om which incorporates the Universe and symbols representing the three jewels of Jainism – right faith, right knowledge, right conduct. This is a very ancient symbol which is many thousands of years old and was possibly originally a representation of the shape of the Universe according to the Jains.

Symbols have meaning and remind the seer about the core values of the faith – such as the three jewels of right conduct, right knowledge and right faith as the key to liberation. This is expressed sometimes during the temple ‘puja’ ceremony using rice to draw the symbol. Symbols are used as an expression of belief and as a reminder of core wisdoms.

Symbolic actions

Worship is performed in home shrines and in the temples and community halls either specially built or rented for purposes of personal and communal worship, for example the Jain Temple in Leicester. Worship is conducted through recitation of prayers, through puja or a bathing of the sacred images, through meditation, collective singing and recitation of sacred words and scriptures, through art and ritual implements, use of flowers and rice and other natural ingredients.

Ideally, each morning, Jains recite sacred verses when they wake, whilst saluting five kinds of spiritual beings. They vow to live a good life and not to injure living beings. Often they will go to the temple to bow before twenty-four images of the jina and perform the puja. The most important Jain observance is pratikramana or penitential retreat which is to rid the believer of karma that is gained either knowingly or unknowingly through a person’s daily life.

Jain art and architecture

Art and architecture of temples and places of worship is given special importance. Jain temples in India are some of the most beautiful spaces and monuments to sacred art. The Jain Temple is the primary places of worship and its location, construction and maintenance has to be performed carefully and in line with scriptural guidance. Jain temples are very fine,

and although Jainism is a small religion, it has attracted many wealthy people who have built lovely temples. Temple design follows symbolic patterns – for example, the mountain is regarded as a spiritual place and most Jain temples are shaped around the symbol of the mountain inviting worshippers to seek height and elevation and remember that wisdom lies away from the crowds and in peaceful serene environments.

There are cities in India with hundreds of Jain temples, and many have symbolic decoration of the highest standard – like New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Kolkatta. There are major pilgrimage sites in Gujarat, Jharkhand and Karnataka – Palitana, Samet Shikhar and Shravana Belgola.

Art is seen as a key method of unlocking and expressing divinity and opening divine dialogue. This art can be through architecture, songs and poetry, through creative ritual worship and music, and through stories and literature.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is given a very high importance in life and well-being and regarding as the key to spiritual elevation. Most sacred pilgrimage sites are in different parts of India and penance and hardship in the act of pilgrimage is encouraged to help focus the mind on the ultimate goal of liberation and salvation. Shatrunjaya in Gujarat, Sammet Shikhar in Jharkhand and Bahubali in Shravana Belgola (Karnataka State) are regarded as some of the most auspicious pilgrimage destinations.

Identity, Diversity and Belonging

Foundations of identity and belonging

Belonging is not expressed in any specific way. One reason is that it has never been nor does it seek to be an exclusive community in any way. Jainism is founded on inclusivity and accepts difference as normal. It is up to the individual to express their belonging primarily through service, teaching or charity. In India, belonging may be different and is expressed in the followership of particular monks, Sadhu, and nuns, Sadhvi, or alignment to certain clans. However in the urban areas, even these distinctions are breaking down and Jains are uniting through location, temples, beliefs and dedication to community upliftment.

Charity is one expression of belonging and there is social status given to the donors. Also as Jains generally are a very successful business community with integrity and respect, belonging to a Jain group can help with business and social networking among high quality entrepreneurs. Here there can be direct benefits from belonging and social status. The impact of this is much less in foreign countries where Jains have settled.

Being a Jain

Jains do have several sacred duties – the first is a daily penitential retreat or pratikramana in the morning and evening in order to rid the believer of karma. Forgiveness is requested, penance is performed and no further repetition of the acts is sought. There is also an annual festival of atonement and repentance called paryushana, which involves listening to sacred texts and taking positive steps with regard to ahimsa and fellowship to fellow Jains, visiting temples and right living. The words ‘micchami dukkadam’ are said requesting forgiveness of those who have been harmed in any way.

A person following Jainism is expected to observe basic vows – called anuvrats – as part of ethical living. These vows include non-violence, non-possessiveness, simplicity and non-materialism, self-restraint, honesty and sincerity. They are also expected to follow key religious rituals, but there is no pressure from community to do so. A significant amount of freedom is given to the individual to practice their faith. As a result, there is also considerable variety of expression. Throughout history, women have been more spiritual than men and have shown a greater degree and depth of devotion. Even the numbers of nuns, Sadhvi, have always outnumbered the numbers of monks, Sadhu, by at least three times.

Commitment is recognised through the observance of rituals and participation in festivals and special ceremonies. Generally no special status is given to those who are more committed than others – credit for ethical conduct is accumulated by the individual directly and there should be no seeking for outer glory or recognition. Each individual is expected to look at the mirror – not to admire their own beauty but to introspect on their actions and how synonymous they are with their values. Self-improvement is constantly encouraged and this is why Jains everywhere are natural leaders.

Religious/spiritual identity

Egoism is discouraged and selflessness is encouraged in the Jain tradition. Each and every individual is believed to be unique and worthy of equal respect. Family is more important than the individual and there is strong family unity and loyalty. Community as natural extension of family is also important and worthy of support, nourishment and preservation.

The soul is the permanent feature of the individual, not the body or its material accomplishments and successes. Religion places the highest emphasis on the soul and encourages the individual to communicate with the soul and connect with its inner beauty, purity and wisdom. It educates individuals not to place too much importance to the physical body and its outer appearance and material possessions. This can easily clutter the mind and prevent the soul, jiva, from attaining liberation.

Family and community

Families practice their faith through collective worship and collective participation in special ceremonies and festivities. Just as family is seen as a natural extension of the individual, community is seen as a natural extension of family. During special festival days, there is communal worship. All this serves to bind the family and community together and forge unity and commonality. A large number of volunteers are needed for organising and promoting communal worship and for coordinating these gatherings and celebrations. This also provides an opportunity for selfless service called seva which is central to the faith. None of these events are exclusive for the Jains, and outsiders are welcomed with open arms.

Thus the faith promotes community cohesion internally and externally and helps sustain values such as mutuality, sharing, caring and humility which are very relevant to modern society. All worshippers are treated equally and no-one has a special status or merit in the act of prayer or worship and this promotes equality.

The very basis of the Jain faith is pluralism and a respect for alternative viewpoints – anekant. This is manifested in practice – Jains are very active in inter-faith dialogue and are also seen as excellent assimilators wherever they migrate

Jain diversity

There is diversity within the tradition as there are different sects and sub-sects – Shvetambara, Digambara, Terapanth, which respect one another even though they are different. It was around the 4th century CE that the two major divisions developed within Jainism. The Shvetambara or white robed ascetics live mostly in the northern India, whereas the Digambara or sky-clad ascetics are to be found in the south although today, Jains of both sects are spread out all over India. There is a lot of similarity between the values and scriptures although there are differences in the practices and rituals.

Today, community groups are drawn on cultural and religious lines and there are many mixed groups, especially in the West where such sectarian boundaries are seen to be irrelevant when the community itself is so small. Even differences between faiths are not seen as a threat but as an opportunity to learn and grow through difference. For example, many Jain homes would have Christmas trees during Christmas. The smallness of the numbers in Britain has not in any way dented the resourcefulness of the community – in fact, quite the contrary.

There are beautiful temples and community centre all over India and numbering in the tens of thousands in total. Here in the UK, the first major temple was build in the city of Leicester and the second one in London at Potters Bar, close to the M25. Each of them are built with elaborate stone and marble sculptures and are open for school visits. There are only 35,000 Jains in the United Kingdom, but Jains have temples and community centres in many major cities in the UK run and funded by the community.

Citizenship

Citizenship is a key part of religious practice – in fact Jains are supposed to have the highest sense of responsibility and accountability to the planet, and hence citizenship and the observance of law is a key component of this. There are hardly any Jains in prison throughout Britain and on the contrary, their values have inspired many citizenship initiatives throughout the country – making them good role models in many instances.

Meaning, Purpose and Truth

Religious experience

Religious experiences are not different from human experiences. They can occur at any time or place or influence key business and life decisions through intuition and spiritual foresight. They are not public affairs but meant to be experienced and kept private. It is said that many enlightened souls, siddha, had extraordinary strengths and abilities, but rarely did they use them in practical life (save to defend themselves) or show off these skills.

There is no direct evidence basis for truth claims. It is believed that these truths have stood the test of time and they are eternal. There is no separation between spiritual science and material science – they are both seen to be flowing one into the other as part of the larger scheme of truths of the Universe. Religion is described as 'dharma' the science of sustainable living.

Answers to ultimate questions

Jains have no theory of creation (the Universe always existed) but an extensive theory of liberation. All living beings possess a soul which is capable of liberation – moksha. For Jains, the universe is peopled by countless souls which are imprisoned by material actions. Only through the freeing of the soul from matter can salvation be achieved. After many rebirths the soul may be liberated.

The aim of life is to free the soul from the bondage caused by Karma and attain liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth: reincarnation. Ahimsa or non-violence in thought, word and deed is the central pillar of the Jain tradition. Each living being has a zest for life and this must be respected in our thoughts and actions.

Suffering can be overcome through perseverance and right living. Faced with problems, one should not seek to blame others but look for positive solutions and means to overcome the hurdles and develop inner strength and belief. Hardships are a fact of life and accepting them and living ethically is the key to destroying accumulated karma and unlocking the purity and the divinity of the soul.

Religion and science

Thus science is religion and religion is science. The central philosophy of Anekant demonstrates that truth has multiple facets and depends on the perspective of the seer.

This is an inclusive and non-absolutist viewpoint which is very rare among all the religions of the world. It is enshrined at the very heart of the Jain tradition.

Science and scientific truths are highly respected, but questions are being asked about scientific method. For example, the use of animals in scientific research is totally disapproved as it goes against the grain of non-violence (ahimsa). The nature of the tradition is inquisitive and the search for truth, and more importantly, the observance of truth in everyday life (satya and integrity) are given the highest importance. Curiosity is respected and encouraged, but virtuous living is given more importance than pure intellect or intellectual development.

Values and commitments

Rules and ethical guidelines

The Tirthankaras (Prophets) laid down the path of liberation for future generations and it was based on core values, right living and conduct and right knowledge and faith.

These core values are:

- Ahimsa – non-violence in thought, word and deed
- Anekant – respect for different viewpoints and beliefs
- Aparigraha – non-materialism and simplicity of living
- Asteya – non-stealing and abidance of the law
- Satya – Truthful living with sincerity and integrity
- Brahmacharya – Restraint in sensual indulgence

The source of these values are the scriptures which have been derived from the wisdom of the founding prophets or Tirthankaras. Violence, Greed, Possessiveness, Ignorance, Lies and Deceit, Sensual Indulgence are considered to be wrong. Greed is seen as a type of violence and an exploitation of others right to live and be happy. Peaceful living and thinking, modest eating and simple living without greed or malice, honesty and sincerity in thought and action, tolerance and respect for different peoples and faiths are considered right.

Vegetarianism is a central tenet of the faith and diet and exercise are considered very important to spiritual progress. Jains have been strict vegetarians for thousands of years and have developed a vast and varied cuisine which is healthy, nourishing and balanced. Monks, Sadhu, and Nuns, Sadhvi, even wear a cloth over their mouths and brush the road before them when they walk in order not to harm any living thing, including insects. Jains have animal sanctuaries called panjrapoors and the principle of ahimsa, or non-violence, has inspired many great people in modern times, including Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther-King Jr.

Sexual indulgence is discouraged, euthanasia is also seen as an escape from life and discouraged, abortion is also a form of violence and capital punishment is seen as harsh and unjust. War is to be avoided as far as possible, but defence is allowed. Wherever possible, problems should be solved through dialogue, tolerance and diplomacy.

Interdependence is the key wisdom of the Universe – parasparopagraho jivanam. Happiness cannot be built at the expense of pain on others. Nature is not separate but a core fabric of life and its protection is synonymous with the protection of human life. Truthful living with honesty and integrity is a vital principle. People should look at the mirror not to admire their own beauty but to see their own imperfections and rise beyond them. Lying, deceit or deception is to be avoided at any cost. Consciences should be clean and should not bear any scars or fears – people should love all, including their enemies.

Individual and social responsibility

Duties are given very high importance in the faith. A person has duties to his or her family, community, society and the universe at various levels without boundaries or borders. The individual merges into the family, society, country, planet and universe and there is a profound understanding of interdependence of all living beings. Hence citizenship obligations, environmental and social justice are critical, not just for the protection of the individual but for the protection of all living beings.

The greatest action is seen through personal example and conduct and this is given the highest importance. Political engagement and action is subsidiary to this and must always be exercised with great humility and responsibility and not as a seat to personal power or prestige. Being a Jain is to take responsibility and not abrogate it. Active citizenship, whether in the local community or school or in the national polity, is encouraged and observed.

Non-violence

The philosophy of non-violence influenced Mahatma Gandhi who used to free a whole society from colonialism and later came to influence people like Martin Luther King Jr. Jains have a beautiful psychoanalysis of the methods of ethical living with a pure mind and they believe this is much needed in the world today.

Jains avoid professions which involve harm to other living beings such as butchery, leather trade, even military and go for medicine, accountancy, education, dentistry and are widely recognised as highly skilled traders and businessmen. Their self-discipline and integrity often puts them in leadership positions in the trades and professions they pursue.

Global issues and sustainable living

From the beginning, the faith had a universal outlook. The entire cosmology of the Universe is elaborated in the scriptures. Hence global concerns and issues have never been alien to the faith. They are more pertinent today as Jains have spread out geographically, live in

different parts of the world and travel frequently – thus there is added exposure. Through education and the arts, different methods of communication and expression are used to share Jain wisdom and learn from other faith and wisdom traditions. Jains have media like newsletters and magazines, events like conferences at a national and international level, youth organizations like the Young Jains which are spread out globally and also use forums like the internet and the world wide web, where there are at least one hundred quality websites on Jain wisdom and Jain bulletin boards.

Jain values are often perceived by the followers to be very timely and prescient for the 21st century. Issues like the food and health crisis, animal cruelty and abuse, environmental catastrophe, business ethics, value-based education, personal and emotional development, family values and community cohesion, are all actively discussed and disseminated. Anup Shah, brought up a Jain, but saying that now he is 'not really religious as such', runs the Global Issues website: <http://www.globalissues.org> which 'presents numerous global issues, aiming to show how they are inter-related'.

No difference is seen between the local and the global – one is seen to merge into another without boundaries or borders. Global issues such as climate change, poverty, animal abuse and calamity have resulted in many campaigns and practical actions of help and support. At the same time, it is recognised that living the faith with honesty and integrity manifests these wider concerns as a natural extension of everyday life.

Jains are one of the most highly educated communities in Britain so there is not a major problem to bring quality into these discussions – and often this quality comes not just from thought but through lived experience. As Jain Dharma is one of the oldest sciences of sustainable living and practice, Jains say they can bring huge insight to all the contemporary debates, and do so through lived experience and integrity, not just because the ideas are fashionable or timely.

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