

# Jainism

Man!

Thou art thy own  
friend why wishest  
thou for a friend  
beyond thyself?

—Akaranga Sutra 1:33

## I. THE BACKGROUND OF JAINISM

### The Tirthankaras

JAINS REVERE twenty-four completely enlightened holy men, the last of whom was born in 599 B.C. His predecessor was born in 872 B.C. and that man's predecessor 84,000 years earlier. The first of these twenty-four truly emancipated individuals was said to be the father of Bharata, the ancestor of the rival clans in the *Mahabharata* epic and the first great king from whom all Indians ("descendents of Bharata") derive their name. These twenty-four liberators are called *Tirthankaras*, i.e., those who have successfully crossed the stream of time to achieve final release and bliss on the other shore.

Huge statues were erected by Jains in the tenth century and later to honor such perfected saints. Carved of alabaster, the idols suggest the sublime translucency of a body purified of material dross. The milk-white stone shines with a glow of divine light while the rigid symmetry and utter immobility of the figures depict an exalted spiritual aloofness. For the Jain the Tirthankara is a great hero, a spiritual victor, a superman with powerful chest and shoulders, erect stature and strong, expressionless face. One Jaina idol on an Indian hilltop measures 561/2 feet in height and thirteen feet around the hips, making it one of the largest free-standing figures in the world.'

Each Tirthankara has his own special symbol—the bull, elephant, ape, hawk, lightning, swastika, blue lotus, etc. While jubilant worshippers throng around his feet, the Jain liberator stands motionless, withdrawn from all earthly cares and blessed with a strange, timeless calm. The Tirthankara towers above the world, unmoved by its struggles. His is the peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

Jains claim that their religion is the most ancient faith in India, far older than the Vedas of the orthodox Brahmins. Most western scholars contend that Jainism began with Mahavira, a

contemporary of Buddha, and represents a protest against the sterile Hindu caste system of the eighth century B.C. However, for some Indologists like Heinrich Zimmer, Jainism embodies earlier Dravidian styles of thought and spiritual experience which pre-date the Aryan invasion. Jainism, they say, is not derived from Brahmin sources but instead reflects the cosmology and anthropology of the pre-Aryan upper class of northeastern India. Although the Aryan invaders overwhelmed the north central and northwestern provinces of the Indian subcontinent, the pre-Aryan nobility of the northeastern states were not all swept off their thrones. In time their descendants were able to reassert themselves. Jainism, we are told, is one example of the revived faith of the surviving princely houses, specifically composed of the native, dark-skinned Dravidian population.

In Zimmer's opinion, the Jain religion is a relatively unsophisticated, clear-cut, and direct manifestation of a philosophy of pessimistic dualism. In the most vivid manner, the twenty-four Tirthankaras symbolize "the life-searing victory of the transcendent principle over the forces of the flesh."<sup>2</sup> Through the most severe ascetic practices, they break free from the sphere of human fear and desire in order to reach a realm far remote from the vicissitudes of time. The Jaina idol expresses "the world-negating, absolute refusal of life's lure."<sup>3</sup> By means of supreme concentration, the Tirthankara dismisses the body. As Jains say, he no longer is a man of flesh and blood, for pure milk now fills his veins. Quite fittingly, once the saint has mastered his body and suppressed all his desires, in the final state of earthly bliss he loses his appetite for food and achieves release from the physical world. The Jaina monk becomes emancipated by starving to death.

### **Parsvanatha**

Parsvanatha, the twenty-third Tirthankara, is the first Jain leader about whose history most Indologists appear reasonably

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<sup>2</sup> Zimmer, *Ibid.* p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> / *bid.*, p. 220.

confident. While the earlier ones are hidden in myth, Lord Parsva was born in the city of Benares in the second decade of the ninth century B.C. His father was king of the region and his mother dreamed she would bear a son who would be able to conquer the world of time. Once, lying in the dark, the queen felt and saw a black serpent crawling at her side, so when the child was born she named him after the snake. All his life, Lord Parsva was connected with serpents. On one occasion, when he had grown up he noticed a Brahmin ascetic kindling a fire from a fallen log. Rushing up, Parsva drew from the wood a terrified snake that had made its home in the log. At another time, when he was meditating and a tropical rain began, a snake appeared and spread its hood over the ascetic, sheltering him like an umbrella.

Parsva was said to have been born with a beautiful blue-black complexion, showing that he belonged to the non-Aryan aboriginal stock of India. As a boy he enjoyed riding on the back of the royal elephant, playing in the water and wandering about in the forests. Yet even in those childhood years Parsva displayed an extraordinary moral sensitivity. When his grandfather left his palace to become a holy recluse and boasted that he stood for days on one leg, suffered thirst and broke his fast only by eating a few dry leaves, Parsva chided the aged king for ignoring ahimsa, reverence for every living thing, in eating the leaves.' The distinctive mark of the Jains is their combination of self-renunciation and compassion for non-human life. If not the originator of ahimsa, Lord Parsva was an exemplification of that ideal.

When he was thirty he decided to become a monk. Taking leave of his royal parents, Parsva entered the forest near Benares. Standing upon a stone slab beneath a tree, with his own hands he removed his jewelry and garments, one by one. When he was completely naked, he plucked out his hair and began the meditations which would bring him total emancipation.

Once he had been liberated from desire, Parsva started to

attract disciples, becoming the head of an enormous community of monks and devout laymen. His wife and his mother were among the first to join him. Lord Parsva made four vows binding on all his followers: not to take life (*ahimsa*), not to lie, not to steal, not to own property. According to the Jaina sacred texts, not only did great crowds of people throng to hear Parsva speak, the whole forest around him was filled with peace—even lions and young deer played together in his presence. By the time he became a hundred years old, he had completed his ministry and achieved final release.

### **Mahavira**

Parsva laid the foundations for later Jainism. But as time passed, a successor was needed—to reassert the basic principles of the Jaina faith, to correct abuses which had appeared and to carry the work still further. What this successor did is a matter of debate. Some say it was he who added the vow of chastity to the four Parsva had insisted upon. Others think that he expanded the vow not to own property by including the requirement of nudity for monks. A third major change made after Parsva's death was the rule of compulsory (instead of optional) confession of sins for members of the Jaina monastic brotherhoods.

Mahavira, the last Tirthankara, was born in 599 B.C. near the modern city of Patna. This area between Delhi and the Himalayas was more under the control of the warrior caste than the Brahmins. Also, instead of the autocratic monarchies of other areas this part of India contained oligarchic republics much like the city states of ancient Greece. Each republic was governed by a senate composed of clan heads and was presided over by a king with limited authority. Mahavira's father was one of these clan leaders and his mother was the daughter of the king.

Differing scriptural accounts of Mahavira's life have been preserved by the Jaina faithful, much as Matthew's Jewish-Christian life of Jesus is markedly unlike John's Greek-Christian gospel. According to the strict party of Jains, Mahavira was

committed to a stern life of self-denial from his early childhood. But according to the more moderate Jaina sect, their leader knew that if he forsook the world to become a homeless wanderer it would cause his parents great pain. Consequently, he lived the ordinary life of a happy boy in the privileged upper class, watched over by innumerable servants and enjoying to the full the pleasures of the five senses. When the proper time came, Mahavira was betrothed to an aristocratic girl and after ten years a daughter was born.

When Mahavira was about thirty years old, according to this version, his parents became ascetics and died of voluntary starvation. Now free of filial obligations, he asked permission of his elder brother to renounce the world. However, another story is told by the stricter Jains, who relate that Mahavira decided to become a monk before his parents died. For them, Mahavira began ascetic practices when he was only eight years old and was never tempted to enjoy wedded life. This is compatible with their idea that the bachelor is spiritually superior to the husband.

Determined to become a holy man, this account continues, Mahavira moved from his home to a nearby park where several monks were dwelling. Sitting under an Asoka tree (whose leaves are believed to know neither grief nor pain), he fasted for two and a half days, painfully pulled out every hair from his body as a sign of his willingness to endure suffering, and meditated for six months absolutely motionless. Gradually, he learned how to become indifferent to sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure. When some herdsmen lit a fire between his feet and drove nails into his ears, Mahavira remained in complete bliss, unaware of what had taken place.

Because he believed the true saint should conquer all emotions, pain, pleasure—even shame, Mahavira stripped off his clothes and wandered about completely nude. Modern Jains connect this with the Adam and Eve story:

Adam and Eve were naked and pure.... Our knowledge of good and evil, our knowledge of nakedness,

keeps us away from salvation. To obtain it we must forget nakedness.<sup>5</sup>

Since Mahavira lived long before the Bible was brought to India, traditional Jainism did not refer to the Garden of Eden account to prove the virtue of nakedness. A true monk would not feel heat or cold, and is indifferent to appearance and social convention, so would be unconscious of wearing garments or not. Also, by ridding himself of clothes he frees himself from material attachments.

For twelve years Mahavira wandered from place to place, never staying in a village for more than one night or in a town for more than five days, except for the annual rainy season when he settled down for four months. Before his thirteenth year of travels, he attained the highest degree of mystic knowledge. Henceforth he became the twenty-fourth Tirthankara, a teacher who could lead men to supreme enlightenment. Gathering twelve disciples around him he soon won large numbers of converts. In a long ministry of forty-one years, Mahavira assembled a following of 14,000 monks, 36,000 nuns, 159,000 laymen and 358,000 laywomen. Many nobles of high rank and even kings accepted the Jaina faith. At age 72, Mahavira delivered fifty lectures to a vast host of disciples and admirers, then went off to die quietly alone.<sup>6</sup> Gautama Buddha, his rival, passed away a half century later.

Aside from other basic differences between Brahminism and Jainism, Mahavira deserves special praise for his disregard of caste. Like Buddha, he opposed Brahmin pretensions. Jainism expressed the general social ferment fomented by the Kshatriya (warrior) protest against the caste exclusiveness of the Brahmin priest. In the eyes of Mahavira, the Brahmins and Sudras, the highest and lowest classes, were the same. He recog-

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Benarsi Dass, *Lecture on Jainism* (1902) in Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson, *The Heart of Jainism*, Oxford University Press, London, 1915, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> This is only one of several Jaina accounts of their leader's death. Cf. Stevenson, *ibid.*, pp. 43-45.

nized a Brahmin not by birth but by how he acted. Men may be born in higher or lower castes because of their virtuous deeds or vices in a previous existence, but by a life of purity and love, everyone can at once attain the highest salvation. A slave girl could be as saintly as a priest. In fact, Jains ordinarily assert that the great saints have come from the warrior class rather than from the Brahmin priesthood.'

## **H. JAIN HISTORY AND DOCTRINE**

### **Days of Triumph and Disaster**

For over two thousand years, from the ministry of Parsva in the 9th century B.C. to the Muslim conquest of India in the 13th century A.D., Jainism grew and prospered. It spread from its birthplace in the north to the south, winning numerous converts and attracting the patronage of powerful rulers. Among the Jain believers was Chandragupta Maurya, first emperor of India and grandfather of the well-known Buddhist monarch, Asoka. Jaina leaders compiled their traditions in numerous sacred books. Various sects recognized the canonical authority of sixty-four or eighty-four volumes of scripture. \* For centuries Jainism was far more popular than Buddhism, its closest rival, and among the educated won many adherents away from Hinduism. Particularly noteworthy were Jaina contributions to **Indian** logic.

However, Jainism was plagued with numerous schisms. Rival sects arose because of debates about what books should be included in the scriptures, when certain holy days should be observed, whether idols should be venerated, etc. Most controversial was the question of holy nakedness. One group, the Digambara, meaning the "sky-clad," insisted that the true Jaina monk should be nude. Another, the Svetambara, meaning "white-clad," allowed the wearing of clothes. This division probably goes back to the

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Upendra Thakur, *Studies in Jainism and Buddhism in Mithila*, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi, India, 1964, pp. 85-88.

\* For representative selections of Jaina scripture, cf. *Sacred Books of the East*, volumes XXII, XL V.



earliest days but the final schism occurred about 79 A.D. Although both sects now wear some clothing, the breach between the purists and moderates has never been healed. A few Jain monks in isolated areas may still practice nudity but the original ideal of Mahavira was actively suppressed by the British occupation authorities.

Besides internal dissension, Jainism suffered from ruthless persecution. In the seventh century a Jaina king was converted to Siva worship and massacred thousands of his subjects who refused to embrace Hinduism. Five hundred years later Brahmins destroyed many Jain temples as part of an aggressive revival of Hindu orthodoxy. Then came the merciless Muslims of the thirteenth century. One conqueror, fittingly nicknamed "the Bloody," butchered every Jain he could find, burned their libraries and razed their temples. To save themselves, the remaining Jains disguised themselves as Hindus and hid in the Indian subject masses which were far too numerous for even the most fanatical Islamic rulers to eradicate completely.

The Islamic warriors succeeded in wiping out Buddhism in India by closing its universities and suppressing its monasteries. Jainism survived because it had always a strong corps of lay supporters as well as monks and nuns. These laymen protected the Jaina mendicants, encouraged them in every way possible and also kept the monks from succumbing to the natural vices of the wanderer's life. Long before the arrival of the Muslim invaders, Buddhism had badly deteriorated. By contrast, Jainism continued to possess a respected monastic group generously supported by a wealthy lay constituency. In fact, the free-thinking Muslim monarch Akbar the Great (d. 1605) may have been so impressed with Jainism that he joined that faith, as Jains believe.<sup>9</sup>

Because of Muslim attacks on Hindu, Jain and Buddhist idols, two groups of Jains decided to abandon this aspect of their traditional ritual. One noted Jain leader, living in a Muslim

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<sup>9</sup> Most scholars doubt that Akbar actually became a Jain. He was tolerant of all faiths and by listening to the rival claims of the theists he may have doubted that any of them had a very reasonable faith in God. If so, he would have looked like a Jain humanist.

area, was surprised to learn that his own sacred scriptures made no mention of the need for religious statuary. At about the same time that the Lutherans were reforming Catholic Christianity (1453 A.D.) and later when Puritans were denouncing medieval superstitions retained by the Church of England (1653), certain Jains in India were purifying their own faith of idol worship. For all the excessive zeal of the Muslims, they did indirectly promote reformation. Jains and Hindus, as well as Christians, were profoundly affected.

Jainism, nevertheless, barely recovered from the assaults of the Hindu sectarians and the Muslim conquerors. Never again would it enjoy the patronage of the royal court. Its influence in India, however, is still enormous. As the religion of money-lenders and bankers, Jainism has amassed great wealth. While having only about two million followers, Jainism wields influence far beyond what its small membership would ordinarily warrant.

Its role in Gandhi's life, for example, was crucial. He recounted in his autobiography that in his youth he was much impressed by the Jain ascetics whom he met. A Jain monk helped him to travel to England to complete his education. Before leaving India, Gandhi was asked by his mother to vow in front of a famous Jain teacher that he would abstain from wine, flesh and women while living abroad. In later years, Gandhi admired the Jain philosophy of non-violence to such a marked degree, as he said, "Many take me to be a Jain."

Like Hinduism, Jainism has experienced a noted revival in India since the middle of the 19th century. Vijaya Dharma Suri (d. 1922), who was successful in encouraging the study of the Jain scriptures and collecting rare manuscripts, wrote commentaries on the essentials of the faith, carried out intense missionary activities and created schools for Jain youth. In 1949, nearly a century after Suri's birth, the World Jain Mission was founded in India to propagate the faith. Jaina temples now can

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in John A. Hardon, *Religions of the World*, Image Book, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1968, vol. I, pp. 154-155.

be found in most of India's port cities and commercial centers. Jain laymen occupy eminent positions in industry and banking because of their caution, sobriety and reflective capacity. Strange as it may seem, the Jainism that is built upon a rigid ascetic ideal favors the interests of India's rising commercial middle-class." Many compare Jaina influence to that of the Parsis; it could also be compared to that of the American Quakers or Unitarians.

### **Indian Humanism**

For the student who is accustomed to Hindu polytheism or Jewish-Christian-Muslim monotheism, it may come as a shock to learn that Jainism denies the existence of a creator and savior God. The Jains believe the universe is eternal so there is no need for a First Cause. They say the world of matter has always existed so there is no purpose in assuming the hypothesis of a Creator. And they are convinced that man himself has the power to subjugate his passions and liberate himself from worldly attachments, so why speculate about the value of a savior from beyond?

Jains affirm the existence of numerous benevolent or evil spirits but deny the heavenly Father of the Christians, as well as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the creative, preserving and destructive trinity of Hinduism. Modern Jaina theologians quite explicitly agree with the ancient Greek sophist that "man is the measure of all things." Like the 19th century French positivist Auguste Comte who said that belief in gods is outmoded in our present scientific age, Jains today would classify themselves as religious humanists.

From within the Indian tradition, they raise all of the objections to the theory of the creator-God which Europeans and Americans are familiar with. If God creates it must be to satisfy some inclination or to remove some wants in His nature. But this makes God clearly imperfect. Secondly, if the world is the

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" Carlo Della Casa, "Jainism," C.J. Bleeker and G. Widengren, *Historia Religionum*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1971, vol. II, pp. 368-369.

handiwork of a perfect God, how is it His creatures suffer so much sorrow and evil? Thirdly, if the woes of creatures are to be accounted for by the acts of men themselves, of what use is the theory of a creator-God at all? Therefore, "why not eliminate the outside creator-God altogether and make the creatures creators of themselves in and through their own Karma?"

Jains reject the hypothesis of God as a transcendent being outside of our universe. This means they oppose both the Vedanta doctrine of the Absolute and the Buddhist denial of all substantial realities. In the place of Hindu monism and Buddhist skepticism, Jainism makes four basic affirmations: 1) A creature (or a soul) is a really existent being; 2) The existing soul possesses the attributes of joy, intuition, knowledge and power; 3) It is responsible for its own miseries because it is its own creator; 4) The perfections of the soul—power, knowledge, intuition and joy—will be fully manifested as soon as it detaches itself from the shackles of karma. In other words, Jains explain that when most people define the attributes of God they are actually defining the latent perfections of their own souls. Theism projects the qualities of the human spirit into an imaginary external God. When ordinary believers talk about God, they are really talking about themselves. There is no perfect, all-knowing, all-joyful, all-powerful being existing somewhere up there in the starry heavens. But inside the human soul there is the capability of achieving the knowledge, joy and power which bestow everlasting bliss. As atheists like Ludwig Feuerbach would say, theology is actually anthropology; because the object of religion—"theos" in Greek—is nothing but an expression of the essence of man. "God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of a man, religion the solemn unveiling of a man's hidden treasures, the revelation of his intimate thoughts, the open confession of his love-secrets."<sup>13</sup>

Christian missionaries emphasize the weaknesses of the humanistic side of Jainism. In their eyes, because Jains do not

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<sup>12</sup> Harisatya Bhattacharyya, *The Jaina Prayer*, University of Calcutta, 1964, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, Harper Torchbook, N.Y., 1957, pp. 12-13.

believe in one supreme God, they have no conception of the forgiveness of sin. A system without God, say Christians, has no room for prayer. Belief in karma and transmigration as eternal impersonal facts of existence is said to kill all sympathy and human kindness. Possibly worse, a faith which denies the Fatherhood of God has no way to condemn a caste system which violates the brotherhood of man. Thus, the Christian missionary can easily condemn "the empty heart of Jainism."<sup>4</sup>

Whether Christian (and Hindu) criticisms of Jainism as an atheistic system are valid or not, it seems likely that the first Jains did not acknowledge the existence of any god at all. Originally they taught that one should not say "God rains – but just "the cloud rains. – For them it was a fundamental principle that no power higher than man exists. At present they recognize the reality and power of many good and evil spirits which non-Jains call gods and demons. But when Jains worship, the real objects of their meditations are neither God nor gods. They worship Tirthankaras, who are men: the founders of their religion of victory over the temporal world."

Several factors should be taken into consideration to appreciate the atheism of Jainism. First, it serves as a valuable (even if exaggerated) protest against degraded concepts of piety. In many types of folk religion the gods and goddesses are little more than useful servants of mankind. Primitive peoples pray for rain in a time of drought, cures for their sicknesses, material prosperity, victory in war, the birth of male children or escape from the punishment due to their violations of the moral law. In all such cases, men set their hope on worldly gratifications. Since Jainism is a faith which stresses the supreme value of detachment from material concerns and liberation from sensual pleasures, it would quite naturally oppose a concept of God which made Him nothing more than a provider of earthly satisfactions.

Secondly, Jainism emphasizes the absolute immutability of

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Cf. Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson, *Ibid.* pp. 289-298.

<sup>4</sup> G.P. Taylor, preface to Stevenson, *Ibid.* p. xiv.

the law of karma. The universe is controlled by an inviolable law of cause and effect. In the opinion of the Jains, there is no friendly Ruler above the karmic law who can tamper with it, twist it, ease it or temporarily disregard it. **In** many religions, men seem to rely on a god or goddess to abrogate the working of the moral law. If they perform a certain ritual, recite a special prayer, undergo a conversion experience or beg for forgiveness, they can avoid paying their debts. Jainism is opposed to sheer grace. For the Jain, one must work out his salvation. In such a way, adherents maintain, Jainism reinforces ethical religion.

Thirdly, the Jain faith points out the potential dignity of man. If self-awareness, power, knowledge and joy are latent perfections of human nature, men will be encouraged to manifest these talents. They **will** no longer see themselves as help-less puppets guided by external supernatural powers, or as children to be supervised. Therefore, the virtues of self-reliance and personal responsibility will be reinforced. With this fact in mind, one can understand not only Jainism's origin as a protest on the part of the warrior caste against Brahmin priestcraft, but also its present money-lender laity known for shrewdness, ambition and prosperity.

Finally, so-called Jain "atheism" represents an attempt to find a higher, more transcendent religion—"transtheism" rather than atheism. As divinity often refers to personified natural forces, fertility goddesses, tribal patrons, projections of social ideals and popular fetishes, Jainism, in reaction, has sought release from temporal concerns and mystic knowledge. Like Epicurus" who proclaimed that the true gods and goddesses were above worrying about earthly troubles, Parsva, Mahavira and the other Jaina saints inspired men to look to a realm above the gods of earth, wealth, child-bearing and physical well-being. The worship of the creator-God and the Savior-God is too much bound to material cares to be the goal of the true seeker, they say.

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<sup>16</sup> An Athenian philosopher (d. 270 B.C.) who denounced traditional Graeco-Roman religion and was denounced in return as an advocate of living for sheer pleasure alone. He taught that gods lived lives of absolute bliss in a realm far from the pains of earthly existence.

Such an exalted faith could never appeal to more than a small minority. Inevitably when Jainism became the royal faith of one of the Indian kingdoms it began to absorb many of the beliefs and practices of popular Hinduism. In the eyes of many Indians, the Jains were nothing but one of many subsets of the Hindu religion. Nevertheless, there is a vivid contrast between them. Folk Hinduism is polytheistic and Vedanta is pantheistic whereas Jainism is humanistic and atheistic.

### Jaina Cosmology

If Jain humanism sounds exalted, Jaina cosmology fits into the pattern of similar ancient religions. For the Jains the universe exists in the form of an immense cosmic man. Seven hells to which souls are consigned temporarily for punishment and purification can be found in the legs and feet of this universal human-shaped figure. Our world is located at the cosmic waist. The different gods reside in the chest, neck and face. Those souls who have achieved complete emancipation dwell in a state of absolute bliss in the head of the cosmic man.' <sup>7</sup> The purpose of life is seen as a gradual evolution of all souls from the lowest to the upper levels. "We ascend and descend through various states of being, now human, now divine, now animal; the bodies seem to die and to be born, but the chain is continuous, the transformations endless, and all we do is pass from one state to the next." <sup>18</sup>

Jains are hylozoists, believers that all matter is animated. Men, animals, and plants possess souls, according to Jaina theology. There is no "dead" matter: everything is alive—even a rock, a drop of water or a breath of air. Whereas other religions limit the soul to human beings and living spirits, Jainism teaches that the soul is an essential element in the constitution of every existing thing. Jains are panpsychists: for them, souls are everywhere and in everything. Christians define the nature of

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<sup>7</sup> Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, pp. 244-248, compares the Jaina belief to a parallel concept in the theology of Immanuel Swedenborg.

<sup>18</sup> Zimmer, *Ibid.*, p. 228.

the soul in terms of the self-conscious self in man, while Jains define the soul in terms of the more inclusive quality of

In Jaina philosophy actions of souls give them special colors, smells and tastes according to the law of karma. In order from the lowest and most depraved to the highest, souls are black, dark blue, dove-grey, flaming red, yellow (or rose) and white. A black-souled human is merciless and cruel. Dark blue characters are greedy, sensuous and covetous. A thoughtless and reckless individual has a dove-grey soul. One whose spirit is honest, devout and prudent is fiery red. Yellow is the mark of an unselfish, compassionate soul. But when a man achieves the stage of disinterestedness, unruffled calm and freedom from passion, his soul becomes a purified white.

For the Jain, "whether in the shape of element, plant, animal, man, celestial being or tormented inmate, the visible form is but the temporary garb of an inhabiting life, which is working its way through the stages of existence toward a goal of release from the whole affair."<sup>20</sup> But on the soul's journey karmic matter clings to the soul as dust sticks to a body anointed with oil. Karma veils the mind from the truth: like liquor, it dulls and disturbs the faculties of discrimination. Jainism pits man against nature. The soul's primary aim is to escape from the bondage of this world. Like the Stoic's ideal of philosophic calm, salvation means complete detachment.

### Jain Ethics

Most distinctive about the Jain religion is its solemn vow not to harm any form of life. *Ahimsa* is the heart of its ethics. Because every form of existence possesses a precious soul, the pious man must take many precautions against committing acts of violence. Above everything else the Jain is determined to eradicate the destructive impulses—the so-called killer instinct—in human nature.

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<sup>20</sup> Panpsychism was expounded by Goethe and the German scientist Gustav Fechner (d. 1887). A contemporary panpsychist is the process theologian Charles Hartshorne.

<sup>20</sup> Zimmer, *!bid*, p. 268.



Reverence for life naturally implies refraining from acts of cruelty to domesticated animals. One must never tie up a horse or cow too tightly. He must not beat it unmercifully, overload it or overwork it. Nor should he neglect to feed it properly. Of course, animal sacrifice is forbidden.

*Ahimsa* also sets curbs on the type of work in which a Jain can engage. He must avoid any business that involves the taking of life. He could not be employed as a lumberjack, for instance, who would be required to cut down trees. He should not follow a trade involving a furnace because many insects are accidentally destroyed by fire. He cannot sell artificial fertilizer made of bones of dead animals, or trade in ivory cut from the tusks of elephants, or buy furs taken from trapped animals. A Jain should not drain water from land, depriving fish of a home, or dig deep in the earth, for this would endanger insect life. In modern times, the good Jain refrained from working in factories that built railway cars, because trains often run over animals and sometimes people.

Respect for life occasionally is pushed to strange extremes. The Jain does not eat unripe fruits because they are still alive, or food that takes a lot of fire to cook. Sugar cane is also forbidden because only a small portion is edible and the greater part is to be thrown away. A Jain cannot swat mosquitoes, destroy poisonous snakes or even kill animals which are suffering. To sweep insects from their path which might otherwise be accidentally killed, some Jaina monks carry a long-handled brush and others use a peacock feather. Each day a confession of sins is required for any injury the Jain may have involuntarily inflicted upon the earth, water, fire, air, vegetable or animal kingdoms.

Jainism is an ascetic religion, so the mastery of one's desires is an important part of religious ethics. While the monk and nun are expected to practice the maximum amount of self-denial, even the ordinary layman is encouraged to limit his wants to the minimum. As each individual steadily mounts the steps which lead to final liberation he must take care never to begin anything that might entangle him in worldly pursuits. The

layman should avoid the seven sins which lead to the worst of hells: gambling, eating meat, drinking wine, adultery, hunting, thievery and debauchery. If he is really pious, he can vow never to scent or adorn his body, lest he should cause his wife to love him excessively. In every way possible, he should keep from becoming attached to his worldly possessions. He must not depend upon servants but should wait upon himself. He should always endeavor to lead a quiet, sober and unambitious life.

One need not think of this morality as something purely negative. The Jain gentleman will be serious in demeanor, straightforward, cautious, humble, respectful to others and attentive to business. At the same time he is admonished to be good-tempered, grateful, modest and benevolent. From this list of virtues it is easy to see why a faith originally based on ascetic detachment has produced a wealthy banking class among the laity. Men can save money if they eschew luxury, abstain from sensual pleasures and strive for the simple life. The Jain laymen hence greatly resemble the prosperous Philadelphia Quakers of the 18th century or the millionaire Calvinist industrialists of the 19th century.

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