

**Title: Conversations**

**Subtitle: Jainism**

**Second Subtitle: Jainism**

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**Early History of Jain Dharma**

Jainism traces its roots to a succession of 24 Jinas ("those who overcame") who have appeared in the world at various times. The first Jina is traditionally believed to have been a giant named Arishtho. The most recent and last Jina was Vardhamana (a.k.a. Mahavira, "The Great Victor") who lived around 550 BCE and was the founder of the Jain community. He attained enlightenment through extreme asceticism and deprivation. In 420 BCE, he committed the act of salekhana which is fasting until death. This act "conquered love and hate, pleasure and pain, attachment and aversion, and freed the soul from the karmas obscuring knowledge, perception, truth, and ability."

Jainism is a syncretistic religion, which contains many elements similar to Hinduism and Buddhism. The world's almost 4 million Jains are almost entirely located in India. There are small communities in Canada (1991 census).

**Jainist Beliefs and Practices**

The universe exists as a series of layers, both heavens and hells. It has no beginning or end. It consists of:

- The supreme abode: This is located at the top.
- Siddha, the liberated souls, live.

The upper world: 30 heavens where celestial beings live.

Middle world: the earth and the rest of the universe.

Nether world: 7 hells with various levels of misery and punishments.

The Nigoda, or base: where the lowest forms of life reside.

Universe space: layers of clouds which surround the upper world.

Space beyond: an infinite volume without soul, matter, time, medium of communication.

Everyone is bound within the universe by one's karma (the accumulated effects of one's actions). One's karma is created through one's thoughts, words, and actions (body, mental, verbal and physical).

Moksha (liberation from an endless succession of lives through reincarnation) can be attained through spiritual enlightenment, which can be attained only through asceticism.

They are expected to follow five principles of living: Ahimsa: "non violence" (not harming any living being, including plants and animals); Satya: "truth" (speaking truth; avoiding falsehood); Asteya: "no偷窃" (to not steal from others); Brahma-charya: (soul conduct); remaining sexually monogamous to one's partner; Aparigraha: "detachment" (detaching from people, places and material things). Avoiding the accumulation of material possessions, abstaining from over-indulgence, restricting one's desires.

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which it is taken. e.g. milk, fruit, nuts.)

They read their sacred texts daily.

Jains are recommended to pass through four stages during their lifetime  
the life of a student

Gruhasth-ashrama: family life

Vanaprasth-ashrama: family and social services

Sanyast-ashrama: life as a monk; a period of renunciation

#### Divisions among Jains

There are two groups of Jains:

The Digambaras (literally "sky clad" or naked): Their monks carry asceticism even clothing (even when they appear in public).

The Shvetambaras (literally "white clad"): their monks wear simple white permitted to wear clothes of any color.