

Title: Conversations

Subtitle: Jainism

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Early History of Jain Dharma

Jainism traces its roots to a succession of 24 Jinas ("those who overcome") in the East India. The first Jina is traditionally believed to have been a giant who lived 840,000 years ago. The most recent and last Jina was Vardhamana (a.k.a. Mahavira, "The Great Hero", 550 BCE) and was the founder of the Jain community. He attained enlightenment through self-deprivation. In 420 BCE, he committed the act of salekhana which is fasting to death. He "conquered love and hate, pleasure and pain, attachment and aversion, and freed his soul from the karmas obscuring knowledge, perception, truth, and ability."

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

Jainist Beliefs and Practices

The universe exists as a series of layers, both heavens and hells. It has no beginning and no ending. It consists of: The supreme abode: This is located at the top where 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

Everyone is bound within the universe by one's karma (the accumulated actions done).

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

They are expected to follow five principles of living: Ahimsa: "non violence against mental, verbal and physical." 3 Committing an act of violence against a human or vegetable generates negative karma which in turn adversely affects one's karma.

Satya: speaking truth; avoiding falsehood

Asteya: to not steal from others

Brahma-charya: (soul conduct); remaining sexually monogamous to one's spouse

Aparigraha: detach from people, places and material things. Avoiding the accumulation of material possessions, abstaining from over-indulgence, restricting one's desires.

They follow Jains follow a vegetarian diet. (At least one information source says they follow a frutarian diet -- the practice of only eating that which will not kill.)

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 to the extreme, wearing no clothing (even when they appear in public).

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