

**NONVIOLENCE – THE ONLY WAY TO PEACE,
JUSTICE AND ECOLOGICAL HARMONY :
A JAINA PERSPECTIVE**

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Introduction

(i) Religion and Dharma

The word ‘religion’ is used globally to mean ‘*dharma*’ in the Sanskrit and Hindi languages, but as a matter of fact it falls short of the real meaning the word ‘*dharma*’ carries with it. The word ‘religion’ stands for the belief in god or gods or (semi-) divine preceptors and the activities connected with their worship. It also denotes a system of faith called Christianity, Islam etc. In this context the word ‘religion’ stands for a religious sect. On the contrary ‘*dharma*’ means a righteous or pure conduct, and is shorn of labels. The old Jain text *Samansuttam* defines *dharma* as the most auspicious of all. Its characteristics are (i) *ahimsa* (nonviolence); (ii) *samyama* (self-restraint); and (iii) *tapa* (austerity). If a religion is devoid of these three essential values of life, it can’t be called *dharma*.

(ii) Universality of Jainism

When I discuss the Jaina way to peace and harmony, it becomes imperative for me to explain at the very outset that Jainism doesn’t stand for a sect. It is a way of life and doesn’t owe allegiance to a particular god. JAINA (also known as JAIN) means a follower of a Jina – a supreme sanctified example of perfect life, and teacher who has conquered the self and has attained omniscience in this universe, i.e. he knows that all can be

known, with the complete realization of the soul (*jiva*) which is inherent in every being. He is free from attachment and hatred and knows the cosmic truth in its entirety. According to the Jains he is a liberated being, freed from all mental and spiritual illusions which created his cyclic rebirths in the past. He may be a Mahavira, Buddha, Shiva, Allah or be called by many other names. The common mark of perfection in all liberated beings is complete annihilation of all forms of *kasayas* (passions. i.e. illusion-based movements of the soul). The Jain sacred text (*navkar mantra*), repeating the hierarchy of noble beings, doesn't identify a particular Jina. It only pays obeisance to five types of spiritual beings which include (i) *arahanta* (those who have destroyed their internal enemies i.e. anger, carnality, deceit and pride); (ii) *siddhas* (liberated souls who have abandoned their mundane bodies); (iii) *acharyas* (spiritual masters); (iv) *upadhyayas* (spiritual teachers); and (v) *sadhus* (all ascetics of the world).

(iii) *Tirthankaras or builders of the lord*

The Jinas or conquerors of the self are also known as the Tirthankaras (parallel to the Buddhas of Buddhism) and the Jains believe that the continents of Bharata (India) and Airavata (its geographic antipole) on Jambu Island at the center of our universe are governed by descending and ascending half cycles of suffering and prosperity (*avasarpini* – descending half) and (*utsarpini* – ascending half) consisting of six aeons each (these can be compared to the more generally known yugas of Hinduism). The twenty-four Tirthankaras appear in each ascending and descending half of the time cycle. At present we are in the 5th aeon of the descending half of the time cycle and the twenty-four Tirthankaras of the present descending half of the time cycle were born in the third and fourth aeons. The first of this series of

Tirthankaras of the Jaina tradition was Lord Rishabh, also called the First or Original Lord (Adinath), who is said to have been born in the third aeon of this descending half of the time cycle; the last two Tirthankaras – Parshvanath and Lord Mahavira were born in the 4th aeon of the descending half of the time cycle. Lord Parshva was born 250 years before Lord Mahavira. Jainism today is mainly known after Lord Mahavira – the 24th Tirthankara. He was born in 599 BCE in the kingdom of Vaisali in the Magadha region (Bihar), India. He was a contemporary of Lord Buddha, who also lived in Bihar at that time.

This paper presents a review of the Jaina worldview of peace and happiness and analyzes the causes of violence, climate change and ecological and environmental degradation from a Jaina perspective.

My objective is to unfold the Jaina ethics of tolerance, interdependence, reciprocity, and reverence for all forms of life and explain its teachings of nonviolence, non-absolutism and restraint.

The Jaina Concept of Peace and Harmony

Jainism is generally known as a nonviolent religious tradition but if we go deeper and analyze the foundation on which the edifice of Jainism stands we will realize the truth that it is *samata* (equanimity) or equity, which epitomizes Jainism. Lord Mahavira has propounded many forms of equity. They can be summarized as below :

- (i) Regarding all jivas as one's own soul
- (ii) Remaining equanimous in adverse circumstances – not to lose equilibrium
- (iii) Remaining free from the arrogance of superiority

(iv) Living in a state free from attachment and hatred

In other words we can say that *samata* is a tree which has many branches – one of its significant branches is *aparigraha* (non-possession) and the other more important one is *ahimsa* i.e. nonviolence. In the fertile soil of inequality the seeds of hesitation and uncertainty are sown. Attachment and hatred become active. Prejudices incline people in different directions. Since the environment of *samata* (equality) is free from the sentiments of *raaga* (attachment) and *dvesa* (hatred), certainty and uncertainty disappear automatically and *trishna* (desire) generated by them also becomes weak. The Jaina pathway to peace is articulated by its principle of oneness. The soul becomes the focal point.

(i) *Peace as an Essential Value*

The Jains believe that the main cause of conflicts and unrest in the world today is man's unrestrained activities of mind, speech and body. A good or bad thought first appears in the human mind. If it is controlled and purged of evil tendencies, peace will naturally prevail. We can co-exist and grow only if there is peace. Highlighting peace as an essential value for our survival, the five lines of the Jaina sacred text which every Jain repeats before going to sleep run :

je ya buddha aikkanta

je ya buddha anagaya

santi tesim paithanam

bhuyanam jagai jaha

(Peace is the basis of all the *buddhas (tirthankaras)* who have come into this world and are likely to come just as the basis of all living beings is this earth.)

(ii) *The Four Tenacious Passions and Wars*

When man is gripped by the four tenacious passions of anger, pride, deceit and greed, he becomes aggressive and resorts to physical violence to gratify his lustful desires. Unrest, conflicts and wars have a very old history. It is said that since the advent of human civilization more than 6000 wars have been fought which resulted in the killing of millions of people. We have a recorded history of the wars fought in battlefields, but the truth is that we have no record of the infinite disputes and conflicts we have with our neighbors during our interaction with one another.

Psychologists assert that aggressiveness is a basic human propensity. The seeds of war lie in the human mind, but they sprout and grow only when they are stimulated by passions. It is at this stage that thoughts of weapons appear in man's mind and his propensity towards armament increases. When there is unrest, the number of weapons of mass destruction increases. When unrest diminishes, a discussion on limiting arms begins. The main cause of unrest in the world was and is man's imperialistic passion of possessiveness (his wish to impose his own ideals on others). Acquisition of wealth and violence are intimately connected. In the ancient days wars were fought mainly for women and land. Ideational and economic imperialism appears to be a major causative factor that leads to war. With the concentration of resources in the hands of a few persons the gulf between the rich and the poor has increased. It is a shame that two thirds of the human population on this planet live below the poverty line and more than three billion people go

to bed hungry. If all the people of this earth are the children of God, how is it that mere 20 percent of the people consume 80 percent of all these resources? Are the religious readers not aware of this stark reality? What are they doing to change the stony hearts of a handful of billionaires who turn a blind eye to starving millions?

(iii) Mahapragya's Views on Possessiveness

Acharya Mahapragya, a leading Jain Acharya and an enlightened thinker also draws our attention to man's greed for wealth and cruelty that increases with it.

“Today man's greed for wealth has increased to such an extent that it will be better for us to call him *arthapurusha* (one who hankers after wealth) instead of *dharamapurusha* (religious person). Material objects are necessary for a person's living but it is not right to develop excessive attachment towards them. Owning a material object is not *parigraha* (possessiveness) but it is one's covetousness for it that can be described as *parigraha*. It is of two kinds – *dravya parigraha* (material possession) and *bhava parigraha* (deep attachment to a material possession). In other words a feeling of attachment for a material object or what we call wealth, pieces of land, houses, cattle etc. is *bhava parigraha*. It is this form of *parigraha* that is at the root of violence. Cruelty is too associated with this sort of possessiveness.”

(iv) War with the Self

In this perspective, the Jain principle of having a war *with the self* and achieving victory over it becomes very important. The soul (*jiva*) occupies the most important place in Jainism. The rise of passions veils the

soul with layers of karmic ‘dust’, which can be wiped by suppressing or eliminating our passions. It is a sort of war with the self. In this sense all Tirthankaras are victors. The heart of the great emperor Ashoka, who fought the Kalinga war which killed thousands of human beings several centuries before Jesus’ birth, was filled with disgust and distress. It led to his *inner* battle which transformed him into a nonviolent crusader, thus bloodlessly ‘conquering’ India and even Sri Lanka. The Jaina key to universal peace lies in our ability to overcome passions. When we talk of disarmament and world peace, we will have to concentrate our attention on decentralizing economic system, political power and violence.

(v) ***Three Categories of Human Beings***

The basis of peace or peacelessness is man’s classification into three categories of human-beings.

- (a) Those that are very ambitious, highly possessive, unrighteous and are deeply immersed in the mire of wickedness, greed and exploitation belong to the first category.
- (b) The second category consists of those who are less ambitious, less inclined towards acquisition of wealth and believe in righteous conduct. They stabilize themselves in *dharma* and earn their livelihood by right means.
- (c) The third category consists of those who are nonviolent, non-possessive and righteous.

It is the first category of human beings who wage wars to gratify their lust for wealth, sex and political power. They produce arms. Lord Mahavira

said, “A vicious mind, vicious speech, and a body immersed in vicious things and non-abstinence lead to armament.”

(vi) Mahavira Opposes Glorification of War

In the age of Mahavira it was commonly believed that those who were killed in a war or battle were born in heaven. Mahavira opposed this belief. When Gautam, one of Mahavir’s main disciples, sought his opinion, Mahavir said, “Gautam, those who say so are not correct.” Man’s next birth is determined by his good or bad actions. Mahavira knew that it is impossible for a householder to refrain from violence completely, so he laid down twelve small vows for him. One of these *anuvrats* (small vows) is, ‘I will not kill an innocent being, or, in other words I will not kill a person deliberately.’ As a householder a man may also be required to fight a battle, but merely because he dies fighting he cannot claim birth in heaven. It is the state of his mind while dying in a battle that decides his next state of being.

Mahavira cites the examples of two warriors of his time.

One of them was his disciple Varun who obeyed the orders of his republic and army and took part in the battle. He had taken a vow that he wouldn’t resort to the first strike at his enemy. So when he was challenged by his opponent to begin fighting by shooting his weapon, he said, ‘I will not strike first. I do not use a weapon against one who has not hurt me.’ The opponent was furious and attacked him with a dreadful weapon and injured him. Now it was Varun’s turn to retaliate and he took his bow, shot an arrow and killed him at once. But Varun was also fatally wounded and knew that he would soon die. He got down from his chariot, put his bow down and paid his obeisance to all *arhats*. Thereafter he vowed not to eat and drink till

he breathed his last. His mind was full of pure thoughts when he died. So he was temporarily born as a god in a heaven. (not yet as a liberated being of course, who is eternally above even the heavens.) If people take a vow that they wouldn't strike at any one first, the world would be saved many wars and conflicts.

(vii) *Victory of the Self as Supreme Victory*

Just one small vow, "I will not kill a person who has done no harm to me" can create universal peace in the world. Jainism exhorts people to launch an internal war against passions and evil propensities and refrain from external war (physical violence). To war with the self is an auspicious act, one doesn't benefit from external war. Only he who conquers his soul with his soul achieves happiness.

Lord Mahavira said, "*jo sa hassam sahasanam, samgame dujjae jinegam jinejj appanam jaita suhamehae*" – one person achieves victory over a million persons in a battle. The other achieves victory over the self. If we compare the two victories we will realize that the supreme victory is one that the other person has achieved by conquering the self. Jesus Christ too expresses more or less, the same view. He says, 'He who taketh his spirit is greater than he who taketh a city.'

The Jains are of the view that peace can prevail in the world not through atomic bombs or other weapons of mass destruction, but through self-restraint and nonviolence.

The Jaina Approaches to Peace and Social Excellence

As has already been stated in Jainism the goal of *moksa* (liberation) can be reached only by rigorous path of austerities rooted in man's

equanimous state of mind. The Jaina *thirthankaras* have laid down a carefully crafted course consisting of various spiritual practices. In this section the writer tries to explain these spiritual practices which a lay person or an ascetic has to follow in order to annihilate the bondage of inauspicious karmas which is mainly responsible for conflicts and unrest in the world.

(i) *Three Eternal Values – Nonviolence, Non-absolutism and Non-possession*

As has already been stated in the preceding section, both war and peace originate in the human mind. In order to create peace, we must begin it at individual level. If the individual has the right inclination, attains a state of equanimity towards all and behaves ethically, society will be naturally free from violence. Dr. Nathmal Tatia, an internationally acclaimed scholar of Jainism, writes in translator's introduction in *Tattvartha Sutra*¹ that the most important values enshrined in Jaina scriptures are (i) nonviolence; (ii) non-absolutism and non-possession. I quote his exact words,

“Nonviolence strengthens the autonomy of life of every being. Non-absolutism strengthens the autonomy of thought of every individual. Non-possession strengthens the interdependence of all existence. If you feel that every soul is autonomous you will never trample on its right to live. If you feel every person is a thinking person you will not trample on his or her thoughts. If you feel that you own nothing and no-one, you will not trample on the planet. In the second century CE, when the Jaina philosopher-monk Umasvati wrote

¹ Umasvati (translated by Nathmal Tatia): *That Which Is – Tattvartha Sutra; A Classical Manual for Understanding the True Nature of Reality*. San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1994.

the Tattvartha Sutra, these principles were the only way to global peace. Today, this is even more the case. These are the only values that can save humanity from the deadly acts of war, economic exploitation and environmental destruction.”

According to the Jaina doctrine of *anekanta* or non-absolutism, truth is many-sided. The ancient seers have investigated the nature of reality that surrounds the universe and have made diverse statements. According Jainism all these statements are true from their standpoints, but they are only partially true. To reject the standpoints propounded by others and assert that what we say alone is true is not only wrong but also unethical. Conflicts arise when we become dogmatic in our view. Standpoints are different angles of vision from which a phenomenon can be understood. Another significant value that Jainism advocates is non-possession. The ideal is complete abstinence from all forms of possession – house, gold, silver, animals and all belongings; but for a householder this is not possible. So Lord Mahavira asks his followers to fix a limit to their propensity to acquire. Affluence is not a taboo for a householder, but he should take a vow that he would not acquire wealth beyond the limit he voluntarily imposes on himself. This vow of gradually reducing one’s possessions paves the way for social excellence. The instinct of possessiveness must be curbed.

(ii) *Three Jewels and Seven Categories of Truth Explained*

The Jains believe in the three essential components of the spiritual path, right faith (*samyag darshan*); right knowledge (*samyag jnana*); and right conduct (*samyag caritra*). It is only through our true understanding that we can determine our spiritual path.

The first and foremost thing a follower of Jainism is to understand these three essential components of truth. A Jaina lay person is also required to know the seven categories of truth. They are:

- (1) souls (sentient entities)
- (2) non-sentient entities
- (3) the inflow of karmic particles to the soul
- (4) binding of the karmic particles to the soul
- (5) stopping the inflow of karmic particles
- (6) the falling away of the karmic particles
- (7) liberation from worldly (karmic) bondage.

Jainism distinguishes two substances in the universe: *jiva* and *ajiva*. *Jiva* means both Soul and Life. To *ajiva* belong only matter (*pudgala*) and a number of abstract concepts, such as time, space, movement, and nonmovement. Matter, which has no soul in itself, is used to build all bodies of all entities, whether visible (physical) or invisible. The Jains believe that a *jiva's* spiritual progress depends on his ability to refrain from violence in thought, word and deed. It is the inauspicious activities of mind, speech and body of a *jiva* that generate eight types of karmas in the form of material clusters that bind the soul.

As you can see from the above list of seven categories which are indispensable to reach full understanding and clarity of mind, the last five are about karma. So this concept I would like to give some special attention

here. Those who study Jainism know that Jainism is not merely a religion, but includes a vast field of philosophical ideas, and – with emphasis – science, and also that these are inseparable. No ancient thought system in the world has discussed and categorized nature in such an elaborate and integrated way as the Jains did many centuries and even millennia ago.

This detail applies also to the doctrine of karma. Karma, which literally means ‘action’, is directly connected with a vibration of the soul during its manifestation. Karma and therefore the particles of the karmic matter remain with the soul until the moment of the soul’s full liberation – when the soul forever leaves our world. When there is passion, i.e. whenever one thinks something, feels something, desires something or does something, the soul vibrates according to intensity. The immediate result of this vibration is that karmic particles rush to the soul (3) and cling to it (4), thus forming a layer of specific molecules around the soul, corresponding to the nature of its vibration. These obstruct the full shining forth of the real nature of the inner soul, which is purity, and its inherent omniscience and infallible discrimination of what is unreal.

So, what one has to do is to prevent or stop further inflow of karmic matter by complete inner silence, absence of vibration of the soul concerning an outer world. This one does by living as pure, harmless and truthful as possible (5). But the karmic matter that has been accumulated in the past can only be removed (6) by austerity, so that it will fall off. When one finally, via the fourteen-fold path of purification, reaches absolute non-attachment and has purged away all past karmas, one becomes a conqueror or jina – to leave the world forever, except in the case of the *tirthankaras*, who remain

for the rest of their lifetime among the people and other manifested souls, to teach and to exemplify full accomplishment.

The key to a good world as well as to liberation for oneself which Jainism presents to the world is therefore: inner and outer non-violence: to practise ahimsa at all times and all places under all circumstances, to avoid suffering for others, to lead the noblest life, or in a practical example: to negotiate peace whenever possible, and to inspire by one's example. This will save the earth and humanity, physically and morally, short-term and long-term. That is all – no 'spiritual' gadgets are needed.

Jains have recognized 148 types of karma, each the result of the self-chosen action-vibrations of the soul, which are subdivisions of each 4 subclasses of both main classes. The two main classes are those of the so-called *destructive karmas*, which attack on, and darken or obscure the essential nature of the soul; and the *nondestructive karmas* which do not obscure the essential nature of the soul.

The destructive karmas are:

- 1) Knowledge obscuring karmas (obscuring the ability to interpret the information from the senses, mental activity and clarity, and a few other faculties).
- 2) Perception obscuring karmas, obscuring the perception by the senses, as well as clairvoyant and omniscient perception.

- 3) Deluding karmas, which include obscuration of the ability to develop right insight and viewpoints as well as proper behavior which, if otherwise, would lead to progress.
- 4) Energy obstructing karmas, for example those which take away the energy to do charity, to enjoy life, etc.

The four categories of non-destructive karmas are:

- 1) Feeling-producing karmas (happy/unhappy feelings).
- 2) Form-producing karmas, which determine which birth the soul will take in what type of body (plant, human, animal, etc.) and what will be the specific characteristic of these bodies (color; scales, skin or feathers etc; types of joints; organs, imperfections, health) indeed comprising any thinkable category and species of living being, including those invisible for our eyes).
- 3) Longevity karma: how long our life will be.
- 4) Family karma, determining our family and social circumstances in which we will be born.

The conclusion is that whatever one is, and becomes, and looks like outwardly, and whatever circumstances one is born in on his or her path, is determined by the individual soul itself. Nobody else is responsible or accusable. One reaps what one sows. The only help the individual receives and gives is by teaching, by example, by inspiration.

(iii) *Interconnectedness of Life and Social Disorder*

The most important thing for a Jaina lay person is the cultivation of right faith and to be able to do that he must understand these seven categories of truth. Everything revolves around the soul. The world is said to be full of infinite *jivas*. A man must have the correct knowledge of souls and non-souls. The interaction between soul and matter is the nature of worldly life. It is only through the interaction with matter that the soul possesses the capacity for speech, breath or thought. Without this these activities are not possible. The other principle underlying the categories of truth is the law of cause and effect. It drives the universe through *karma*. Social disorder emanates from the inability of individuals to see that they are themselves responsible for the problems. All life-forms that are present on this planet are interdependent. We have environmental problems only because we do not recognize our interdependence. One of the most famous sutras in Jaina philosophy is *parasparopagrahojivanam* (Souls render service to one another). All beings on this planet are both autonomous and interdependent. It is human patience, his indulgences and urges that are the causes and results of *karma*. These are the gateways by which *karma* enters a soul and binds it. The world is dominated by the four passions – anger, pride, deceit and greed which give rise to individual and collective violence. They are the greatest obstacles in the path of peace both at personal and global level.

(iv) *Five-fold Path : Small and Great Vows*

The Jinas or tirthankaras have laid down a five-fold path for both householders and ascetics which restrains their activities and enables them to

cause the minimum harm to other jivas and thus prevent conflicts and wars in the world. The vows a householder is stimulated to take are:

- Giving up gross violence
- Giving up gross untruth
- Giving up gross stealing
- Giving up gross sexual indiscipline
- Giving up gross possession

For those who wish to abandon all worldly pursuits with the aim to become liberated for ever from all mundane illusions and bonds, and thus become ascetics (monks, nuns) there are the great vows. The vows for ascetics put the same to their limit:

- Renunciation of all types of violence
- Renunciation of all falsehood
- Renunciation of taking anything that is not given
- Renunciation sexual indulgence absolutely
- Renunciation possessions

In a modern phrasing, composed by the Anuvrat Movement and applicable and practicable for modern times by people who stand in the middle of society, the small vows or anuvrats are given as:

1. I will not willfully kill and innocent creature.
2. I will neither attack anybody nor support aggression and I will endeavor to bring about world peace and disarmament.
3. I will not take part in violent agitations or in any destructive activities.

4. I will believe in human unity, will not discriminate on the basis of caste, color, etc., and will not practice untouchability.
5. I will practice religious toleration. I will not rouse sectarian frenzy.
6. I will observe rectitude in business and general behavior. I will not harm others in order to serve any ends. I will not practice deceit.
7. I will set limits to the practice of continence and acquisition.
8. I will not resort to unethical practices in elections.
9. I will not encourage socially evil customs.
10. I will lead a life free from addictions. I will not use intoxicants like alcohol, hemp, heroin, etc.
11. I will always be alert to the problem of keeping the environment pollution free. I will not cut down trees. I will not waste water.

Conclusion

Nonviolence is the only way to destroy *karmic* particles. Abstinence from violence is the starting point and central value of Jainism. We can conclude that the way to peace, harmony and social excellence as revealed by Jainism lies in unlimited nonviolence, unconditional tolerance and reverence for life. Jainism proclaims that all life-forms which inhabit the earth are sacred and should not be killed. The recognition is that all-life forms on this planet are interdependent, so we cannot survive if we do not cooperate with one another so that this may help us to achieve world peace.