# Jainism

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| **General** | **Core Belief**Jainism is one of the world’s oldest religions originating in India. The Jain path to life is set out by previous human beings called **Jinas**, people who have conquered their inner enemies such as pride or anger. The followers of **Jinas** are called **Jains**. **Jains** believe there is a path to spiritual development, purity and self-realisation through **Ahimsa**, non-violence which signifies reverence to all living creatures. By seeking knowledge about the reality of existence, rather than being deludedly seeking happiness through worldly goods, **Jains** should seek to free themselves from karmic particles. These particles bind **Jains** to the cycle of **reincarnation**, rather than freeing them from the cycle. According to Jainism every soul has capacity to become super soul through highest purity and can attend **liberation**. **Mahavira**, the 24th and last **Tirthankara**, enlightened teacher of the **Jains**, (599-527 BCE) is regarded as the ford-maker of present Jainism, his teachings are written in the **Agamas**. However modern Jainism can be traced to **Mahāvīra**, a historic figure and a senior contemporary of the Buddha. Jain religious leaders are monks and nuns who live according to five great vows known as **Mahavrat**. There are Jain lay community leaders who follow 12 vows known as **Shravak** and **Shravika**. There are three guiding principles (the three jewels): 1. **Right Belief** or enlightened world view; 2. **Right Knowledge;** and 3. **Right Conduct**. **Jains** try to practice these three jewels in order to attain **liberation**. **Jains** believe that there is not one version of the truth. Truth is complex and can be many-sided, from multiple viewpoints. This philosophical principle is known as **Anekantvad**. A story associated with the Jain idea of truth and wisdom is the story of the six blind men and the elephant. These blind men encounter an elephant, each in turn examines and explains to the others what they are encountering, eg. the elephant’s ears were like a fan, her trunk was like a snake. The blind men could only experience one part of the elephant at a time. They did not ‘see’ the whole picture. This openness to the multiplicity of viewpoints welcomes an exploration of truth and demonstrates an openness to all faiths.**Living as a Jain****Ahimsa** - non-violence**Jains** basic belief is in **Ahimsa** – no violence, no injuries. No-one should cause pain to others. They view violence in three ways – physical violence; verbal violence and mental violence (thinking or feeling anger and animosity towards others, speaking and acting in anger). Many **Jain** ascetics wear cloth masks over their faces to stop them inhaling creatures in the air or hurting air bodied living beings and sweep the floor in front of them before walking on it so not to step on any living creature. The **Jain** symbol contains a hand which asks **Jains** to pause and think before they act. The word in the middle of the hand is **‘Ahimsa’**. **Asteya** – is a vow of not stealing.This involves not stealing through thought, words, or action. When teaching about **Asteya** explain it is not as easy as just not taking something that is not yours; tricking someone or deceiving someone would be considered stealing by **Jains**.**Aparigrapha** – giving up worldly possessions.Some followers practice the giving up worldly possessions (**Aparigrapha**) in order to gain contentment. Although **Jain** monks and nuns might follow this more strictly, other lay **Jains** might interpret this vow on day-to-day level, in that they will have things and possessions to live (clothes, furniture and a home) but should not have things in excess. Too many possessions can lead people becoming attached and cluttering their minds. This is seen as not being helpful to support mindfulness and mindful living. The extent to which an individual **Jain** follows this vow is for each individual to follow.**Satya** – to always tell the truth.Truth is important since in not telling the truth, someone may be harmed.**Jains** fast on certain holy days.**Five Great Vows**The **Mahavrata**, or the ‘Great Vows’, are fundamental to **Jains**, guiding adherents towards spiritual liberation and ethical living. These five vows, considered the cornerstone of **Jain** ethical principles, are **Ahimsa** (non-violence), **Satya** (truthfulness), **Asteya** (non-stealing), **Brahmacharya** (chastity or celibacy), and **Aparigraha** (non-attachment). **Ahimsa**, the foremost vow, emphasizes non-violence in thought, word, and action, extending compassion to all living beings. **Satya** encourages truthfulness, fostering honesty in speech and intentions. **Asteya** promotes non-stealing, encompassing not just physical possessions but also refraining from taking what is not willingly offered, including time or opportunities. **Brahmacharya** emphasises moderation and control over sensual pleasures, advocating for self-discipline and purity of thoughts. **Aparigraha** focuses on non-attachment to material possessions, encouraging a minimalist and detached lifestyle to overcome desires and selfishness. These **Mahavratas** serve as guiding principles for Jains, guiding them towards a path of moral integrity, spiritual growth, and a harmonious existence with all beings.**Scripture****Agamas** are the original teachings attributed to **Lord Mahavira**, the 24th Tirthankara, who is considered the primary figure in Jainism. The **Agamas** are considered the most authoritative texts, composed in Prakrit language and are divided into two main categories:**Shvetambara Agamas**: These are the scriptures followed by the **Shvetambara** sect of Jainism. They consist of 12 **Angas** (main texts), **12 Upangas** (subsidiary texts), and several other texts like Chedasutras, Mulasutras.**Digambara Agamas**: These texts are followed by the **Digambara** sect and are believed to have been lost over time. They recognise that **Mahavira's** teachings were transmitted orally and eventually written down. Over the time **Digambara** composed their own agamas such as **Shatakhandagam**.**Commentaries and Explanatory Texts**: In addition to the **Agamas**, Jainism also has a wealth of commentaries, interpretations, and secondary texts that explain and elaborate on the teachings found in the **Agamas**. These include works by various Jain scholars, philosophers, and thinkers throughout history. Notable among these are the works of Acharyas like Kundakunda, Haribhadra, Hemachandra, and others, who have written extensive commentaries and philosophical treatises.**Jain** scriptures emphasise non-violence, ethical conduct, asceticism, and the path to liberation (**moksha**) through spiritual purity and detachment from worldly desires. These texts serve as the basis for **Jain** philosophy, guiding adherents on the path of righteous living and spiritual advancement.**Major Annual Festivals/Events**Jainism celebrates various festivals throughout the year, marking significant events in the lives of **Tirthankaras** (spiritual teachers) or important religious occasions. Some prominent **Jain** festivals include:**Mahavir Jayanti:** This festival commemorates the birth of **Lord Mahavira**, the 24th Tirthankara, who is central to Jainism. Celebrated in March or April, devotees engage in prayer, processions, and charitable activities. Temples are decorated, and teachings of **Lord Mahavira** are recited.**Paryushana**: This is one of the most important festivals for **Jains**, lasting for eight or ten days (depending on the sect). It is a time of intense reflection, fasting, and seeking forgiveness. **Jains** engage in self-study, meditation, and listen to sermons on **Jain** principles of non-violence, truthfulness, and self-discipline.**Dasalakshan**: The **Dasalakshan Parva** is a significant festival observed by **Digambara Jains**. It is a period of intense spiritual reflection and renewal, marked by observance of the **Dasalakshan Vrata**, or the Ten Virtues Vow. **Digambara Jains** focus on practicing and contemplating the ten essential virtues:1. Forgiveness (Kshama): Embracing forgiveness and letting go of animosity.
2. Gentleness (Mardava): Cultivating gentleness and compassion towards all beings.
3. Honesty (Arjava): Practicing honesty in thoughts, words, and actions.
4. Purity (Shoucha): Striving for internal and external purity.
5. Truth (Satya): Upholding truthfulness in all aspects of life.
6. Self-restraint (Sanyam): Exercising self-control and restraint over desires and impulses.
7. Austerity (Tapa): Engaging in spiritual discipline and ascetic practices.
8. Renunciation (Tyaga): Letting go of attachments and practicing non-attachment.
9. Non-attachment (Akinchanya): Living with minimalism and detachment from worldly possessions.
10. Non-possession (Brahmacharya): Practicing celibacy and control over senses.

During **Dasalakshan Parva**, **Jains** intensify their spiritual practices, engage in fasting, meditation, studying scriptures, and participating in religious discourses. It is a time for self-reflection, seeking forgiveness, and striving for spiritual growth and purity. **Diwali** (**Mahavir Nirvana**): Diwali holds a special significance for **Jains** as it marks the **nirvana** (liberation) of **Lord Mahavira**. It is celebrated with lamps, fireworks, and religious observances, emphasising the importance of light overcoming darkness, symbolising spiritual enlightenment.**Navapad Oli**: This festival spans nine days and is dedicated to the nine auspicious padas (stages) of spiritual advancement. Devotees focus on specific spiritual practices with fasting each day to progress spiritually.**Akshaya Tritiya**: Celebrated in April or May, this festival signifies the yearlong fasting of the first **Tirthankar Rishabhdev**. It is believed to be an auspicious day for starting new ventures, performing acts of charity, and seeking spiritual growth.These festivals are occasions for **Jains** to reinforce their faith, engage in religious practices, and strengthen their commitment to **Jain** principles of non-violence, truth, and spiritual growth.**Diet**The **Jain** diet is deeply rooted in the principle of **ahimsa** (non-violence) and involves strict **vegetarianism** with additional layers of dietary restrictions aimed at minimising harm to living beings. **Jains** strictly adhere to a vegetarian diet, abstaining from meat, fish, eggs, and any animal-derived products. The diet emphasises consuming foods that involve minimal harm to living beings. **Jains** avoid root vegetables like onions, potatoes, garlic, and carrots. These vegetations are seen to continue to grow after being harvested and are seen to have infinite lives within them. Also uprooting these plants can harm the organisms living around their roots.**Places of Worship**There are six acts which constitute worship:* Worship of the **Tirthankaras** involving prayers and meditation
* Listening to teachers
* Study of the scriptures
* Obeying restrictions for a **Jain** lay person – such as vegetarian or vegan diet
* Giving charity
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| **Classroom Practice** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| When teaching about **Asteya** explain it is not as easy as just not taking something that is not yours; tricking someone or deceiving someone would be considered stealing by **Jains**. |  |
| **Visits** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| There are no restrictions on dress but you will be asked to remove your shoes before entering the temple room and asked to remember not to point your feet at the likenesses of the **Jinas** or **Tirthankaras**. |  |

Holt, James, (2019), Beyond the Big Six Religions, University of Chester Press, Chester.