

JAINISM

(For Young Inquisitive)

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Front Cover

Jain symbol: The raised hand means stop. The word in the center of the wheel is “Ahimsa”. Ahimsa means non-violence. Between these two, they remind us to stop for a minute and think twice before doing anything. This gives us a chance to scrutinize our activities to be sure that they will not hurt anyone by our words, thoughts, or actions. We are also not supposed to ask or encourage others to take part in any harmful activity. The wheel in the hand shows that if we are not careful and ignore these warnings and carry on violent activities, then just as the wheel goes round and round, we will go round and round through the cycles of birth and death.

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PREFACE

Jains are varyingly referred as *Shramanas* (believers in self effort to achieve their objective of self reliance), *Vartyas* (one who observes vows, fasts) and *Niggantha* (without any possessions) in Indian philosophical literature. They believe in the eternal existence of individual soul in each living being. This mundane soul is capable of attaining its pure soul state / *Moksa* through its own self effort. This is the ultimate objective of human life. So whatever activity they indulge in, they do so but always keep their eyes on this objective. They are strict followers of *Ahimsa*. This is very well reflected in their credo or *Navakar Mantra* given below:

namo arihantāṇaṃ; namo siddhāṇaṃ,
namo āyariyāṇaṃ; namo uvajjhāyāṇaṃ;
namo loe savvasāhuṇaṃ.

(I pay obeisance to the perfect human beings who are perpetually enjoying the nature of their pure souls; liberated soul who crossed the sea of transmigration and attain liberation, heads of the congregation of ascetics, holy teachers and those who are following the above doctrine and *Ahimsa* through their strenuous self efforts.)

The above mantra sets the Jain ideals of self-realization through conscious strenuous self-effort.

This book intends to provide brief but comprehensive knowledge/wisdom about Jainism to young and inquisitive high school and college students primarily who are unfamiliar with Jainism and arouse interest in them to know more about it.

The book starts with the Jain symbol of the raised hand, a sign that means to stop for a minute and think twice about Ahimsa/nonviolence before doing anything. This gives us a chance to scrutinize our activities to be sure that they will not hurt anyone by our words, thoughts, or actions. The wheel in the hand shows that if we are not careful and ignore these warnings and carry on violent activities, then just as the wheel goes round and round, we will go round and round through the cycles of birth and death. Impact of non observance of the message conveyed by this symbol is shown in the picture Madhu-Bindu/Honey-trap on the back page. It depicts the life of a mundane human being who is totally engrossed in satisfying his momentary sensual pleasures/inklings without stopping even for a minute to think of the consequences.

What goes on in the mind a person who becomes aware of the Jain symbol of hand? The picture Leshya tree/thought colouration on the inside back cover page depicts six different scenarios of six different persons who gradually become aware of the consequences of their acts and hence try to inflict lesser harm to other living beings as well as to themselves.

Finally the picture, wedding of Nemi Kumar, on inside front cover shows the state of a highly inquisitive person who rationalizes the immediate and long term impact of his actions and quits all

activities that result in violence. As a result he gives up the mundane life of pursuing worldly pleasures as they involve violence, develops total detachment from such worldly pleasures and performs introspection and meditation on his soul. As a result He gets enlightened, becomes a tirthankara to guide others achieve happiness and bliss and ultimately achieves liberation /*moksa*.

Thus nonviolence is the heart of Jain metaphysics, thought and ethics / conduct giving rise to *Ahimsaparmodharma* or Nonviolence is the supreme spiritual value and derived from it, three cardinal principles, namely: *Ahimsa* (nonviolence) for conduct, *Anekant* (Pluralism) in thought and *Aparigrah* (limiting possessions) as lifestyle for peaceful coexistence and development. Emphasis on ‘*Ahimsa*’ (non-violence) can be very well observed from the occupational choices of the Jains in the past, as they practically avoided all the other professions on the grounds of the level of violence involved in them.

This book is divided in six chapters briefly describing origin and history of Jainism, its doctrine, discussing some philosophical issues vis a vis Jain doctrine, Jain response on some worldly matters, practices / way of life and finally Jain art and artifacts.

The essence of Jainism starts with self improvement first with simultaneous concern for the welfare of every being in the universe and for the health of the universe itself. To that end:

- Jains believe that animals and plants, as well as human beings, contain living souls. Each of these souls is considered of equal value and should be treated with respect and compassion.
- Jains believe in reincarnation and seek to attain ultimate liberation - which means escaping the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth so that the immortal soul lives forever in a state of bliss. Liberation is achieved by eliminating all karmas from the soul.
- Jainism is a religion of self-help. There are no gods or spiritual beings that will help human beings.
- The three guiding principles of Jainism, also known as the “three jewels,” include right/rational belief, right/rational knowledge and right/rational conduct.

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