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Unit 4 Jaina Traditions

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

The Jain tradition, while a minority within India, has managed to flourish there, unlike Buddhism, which survived by branching out of India. Historically, it began a little earlier than Buddhism, in 6th century BCE. Like Buddhism, it is a philosophy that emphasizes ascetic practice, non-violence, and detachment, albeit in more extreme forms.

The Jains have managed to maintain their identity despite being a minority in Hinduism, and there are about four million Jains in the world today. Presently, Jains not only live in India, but also reside in Europe and North America. As well, there are many Jain centres throughout the world.

THEMES

In order to draw attention to the complexities and seeming contradictions found within Hinduism, this unit highlights the following:

Key historical developments

- ➔ Mahavira (599–527 BCE)
- ➔ Sectarian interpretations of Mahavira's life

Basic concepts and key terms in Jainism

- ➔ The Jain view of the universe
- ➔ Ahimsa
- ➔ Dharma
- ➔ Karma and bondage
- ➔ Liberation

Gender and Jainism

- ➔ Female Ascetics
- ➔ Digambara and Svetambara attitudes toward female ascetics

Jainism and ritual practice

- ➔ The Five Vows
- ➔ Rules of asceticism

Elements of a Jain community

- ➔ Jainism in India
- ➔ Jainism in North America

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. the founder of Jainism and various sectarian interpretations of his life;
2. sectarian differences on how liberation is achieved, especially within the context of female renouncers;
3. Jainism as a way of life by looking at its distinctive religious ideas, religious practices, religious community.

READINGS

World Religions: Eastern Traditions 5th Edition, Ed. by Amore, Hussain, and Oxtoby – Chapter 4: Jaina Traditions by Anne Vallely

HOW TO PROCEED

Proceed through this unit by following the steps outlined below:

1. Read Chapter 2 in the textbook paying special attention to the highlighted terms (definitions are in the glossary at the end of the chapter). It may be useful to keep a list of terms and definitions as you read through the chapter to use as a quick reference later when you are preparing for the final exam.
2. Read the Unit 4 course notes and complete the exercises.

3. Review the list of terms to know at the end of the course notes. These are the only terms from the textbook that you will be responsible for on the final exam.
4. Answer the study questions provided at the end of the course notes.
5. Complete the interactive assignment.

Course Notes

KEY HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Jainism, like Buddhism, emerged during approximately the 6th century BCE in India. This time period was characterized by an emphasis on rationalism, detachment, and the ability to become liberated based on internal developments of skill and knowledge. This section focuses on the life of Mahavira, who is often considered the the founder of Jainism. In particular, this unit specifically addresses the following:

- ➔ The life of Mahavira (540–468 BCE); and
- ➔ Sectarian interpretations of Mahavira's life.

Mahavira

According to Jain literature, Jainism was founded by a long line of holy people who transcended suffering and attained enlightenment. The last of this line of ideal holy people is Mahavira, a senior contemporary of the Buddha's. Mahavira is considered by Jains to be the great religious leader of our age, and is labeled a jina or victor because of this. Those who follow Mahavira are thus called Jains, or followers of the Victorious One.

The name Mahavira is a Sanskrit term that means great hero, (the term maha means great, while vira means hero), referring to the idea that Mahavira was the last of 24 teachers who were victorious over the afflictions of life. Jains acknowledge that many spiritual leaders have become perfected beings through their victory over the pain of rebirth (i.e., liberation) as noted by the 24 teachers who came before Mahavira. These spiritual leaders are viewed as being born on Earth at special times, largely when the world needed them. This is similar to Buddhist teachings, which argue that Gautama came at a time when the world needed him to remind people of the Dharma, or the Buddha's teachings. In Jainism, the 24 jinas are considered teachers of our age, all of whom came to Earth when happiness was in regression and moral conditions had become steadily worse.

These jinas are also called **tirthankaras**, or bridge-builders. The reference to jinas as tirthankaras has two meanings. First, as bridge-builders, jinas represent the bridge over life and death, meaning that the jinas have overcome both, and are thus liberated beings. Second, jinas represent the bridge or connection that integrates the four sections (**tirthas**) of the Jain community. As in Buddhism, the Jain community consists of a hierarchy including monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen, respectively. The jina

overcomes the diversity of these divisions not by obliterating them, but by emphasizing the interconnectedness of the community in general. Basically the tirthankara brings the community together. Mahavira is viewed as one of these figures.


Biography of Mahavira

The biography of Nattaputta Vardhamana, otherwise known as Mahavira, is complex. As in the case of Gautama Buddha, Mahavira’s biography is a mix of historical fact and hagiography. Historians acknowledge that Mahavira existed, yet details about his life are under debate, especially within the context of various Jain sects. Scholars know with certainty that Mahavira was born into a warrior caste family in approximately 599 BCE, although the actual date of his birth is under contention. It is also known that he was born to a successful king and queen in North India (in present-day Patna). Arguably, after living a life as a householder until approximately 30 years of age, Mahavira led the life of a nude ascetic under the guidance of a guru for about 10 years before establishing his own tradition known as Jainism (Wolpert, 2004).

Exercise #1 Using the chart below, outline the similarities and differences between the biographies of Mahavira and Gautama Buddha, drawing from information found in the textbook, as well as units 3 and 4 in the course material.

Mahavira	Gautama Buddha
1: Example: born in 599 BCE and died in 527 BCE; dates are under contention	1: Example: born in 563 BCE and died in 483 BCE
2:	2:
3:	3:
4:	4:
5:	5:
6:	6:

Now that you have outlined information about the biographies of Mahavira and the Buddha, analyze the material you have compiled by answering the following question:

 What do the similarities between the biographies of the Buddha and Mahavira indicate in terms of the historical context in which Jainism and Buddhism were formulated?

Sectarian interpretations of Mahavira’s life

After Mahavira's death, his followers split into two separate sects within the Jain tradition. There are more sects than the Digambara and Svetambara, but this section will only focus on these two views. The Svetambaras or white-clad monks, are dominant in Northern India, while the Digambaras or sky-clad monks, are more dominant in Southern India. While the Digambaras and Svetambaras adhere to the same core concepts found within Jainism, each group has its own interpretation of Mahavira's life, both of which involve more hagiographic accounts than presented thus far in this unit.

The Svetambaras, for example, argue that a Brahmin couple originally conceived Mahavira, and that the embryo was later moved to his historical Kshatriya parents. While the Svetambaras may accept this aspect of Mahavira's biography as completely true, Wolpert (2004) argues that this version of events may have emerged out of growing tensions, rooted in political struggles over ideas about caste, between early Buddhists and Jains,. Wolpert notes that most Jains at this time were from the Brahmin caste. As Brahmins, these Jains viewed themselves as endowed with special spiritual wisdom. However, these Jains also understood caste in such a way that only a man of the warrior caste could conquer the world spiritually (recall that the Buddha was also born into the warrior class). With this political context of India in mind, Mahavira's birth could be interpreted as a way to assert the superiority of one caste over another; for example, Mahavira chose to be born into a warrior caste, signifying the importance of this caste. At the same time, Brahmin Jains could simultaneously justify their own place in the caste system by creating a hagiographic account of Mahavira's life that described him as being originally conceived within the Brahmin caste.

In the Svetambara accounts of Mahavira's biography, Mahavira marries in a wedding ceremony, has a daughter, and lives as a Hindu householder. However, this lifestyle does not last long. At age 30, as also noted in historical accounts of his life, Mahavira renounces the world. It is at this time that Mahavira begins his quest for enlightenment. In hagiographic accounts, his quest for renunciation is viewed as special and is marked by the attendance of various gods and goddesses. To symbolize his complete renunciation of the world, Mahavira plucked each hair from his head individually, denoting his official role as an ascetic. Even today, Jains initiated into the monastic community pull out their hair to show that they do not have a high regard for their own bodies. This action also shows that the renouncer is oblivious to pain and discomfort.

In contrast, Digambara accounts argue that Mahavira was never married nor had children, and when he renounced the world, he gave up everything including his clothing. According to the Svetambaras, the giving up of clothes does happen, but not until many years later, after Mahavira's practice of renunciation became more advanced. However, the Digambaras consider the wearing of clothing to be indicative of an attachment to possessions and a false sense of self. To discard one's clothes is to represent complete detachment and the idea that a true renouncer is not supposed to cling to anything.

In both the Digambara and Svetambara sects, Mahavira attained enlightenment at the age of 42, after 12 years of extreme ascetic practice. After his enlightenment, Mahavira sought to spread a message based on his experience of enlightenment. Nonetheless, the understanding of the nature of Mahavira's life and teachings are mixed, and he is often portrayed as 'trans-human', meaning he transcends human form, and is greater than one who is simply a human being. How this is interpreted again varies

according to what branch of Jainism one follows. For the Svetambaras, Mahavira was only human, even if unique, as exemplified by his enlightenment. This is because he lived like and taught other human beings. The Digambaras, on the other hand, argue that Mahavira did not engage in any worldly activity, denoting Mahavira's essence as being something more than human. For example, the Digambaras argue that when Mahavira achieved enlightenment and became a perfected being, he did not speak. Instead, a sacred sound emanated from him. Only his chief disciple could interpret these sounds, and the disciple recorded them as the words of jina. The implication is that Mahavira was more than human, because he could communicate sacred sounds that were incomprehensible to all except those to whom he chose to record his message for humanity.

At the age of 72 Mahavira "died," in that he attained liberation or nirvana, and it is thought that within a few hours after his death, Mahavira's primary disciple also gained enlightenment. Festivals surround this moment, with a focus on the victory of good over evil, and lightness over darkness. For a more extensive account of the ideological and historical formations of the Digambara and Svetambara sects, see Paul Dundas, *The Jains*, London; NY: Routledge, 1992.



Final words on Mahavira's life

This section has not dealt with Mahavira in purely historical terms, but rather has outlined the impact that sectarian divisions have had on understandings about Mahavira. Such understandings include hagiographic interpretations of Mahavira's life. While both the Digambara and Svetambara sects mix mythology with historical fact, it is under contention as to which sect offers a more historical account of Mahavira's biography. Noss, for example, favours ideals drawn from the Digambara sect. This viewpoint is rooted in facts that indicate that Mahavira did, indeed, live life as a nude renouncer. However, keep in mind that as scholars, we must continually question such assumptions due to the lack of evidence concerning Mahavira's life in general.

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Many of the terms that are introduced in this section should be familiar; they have already been outlined in units three and four in relation to Hinduism and Buddhism respectively. However, keep in mind that terms and concepts take on new and/or alternate meanings when outlined within different religious traditions. As you will discover, the Jain concept of karma, for example, entails significantly different ideas and practices than the concept of karma found in Hinduism and Buddhism. Throughout this unit, you will be reminded of these differences, though it may be helpful to create a chart citing various terms and how they are understood within Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

This section highlights the following key concepts:

-  The Jain view of the universe;
-  Ahimsa;

- ➔ Dharma;
- ➔ Karma and bondage;
- ➔ Liberation; and
- ➔ The importance of knowledge (Jnana).

The Jain view of the universe

Jains do not have a creator god but instead view the world as infinite, with no beginning or end. Without a creator-god, everything instead falls under two categories: **jiva** (life or animate objects) and **ajiva** (non-life or inanimate objects). This form of dualism contrasts with Hindu ideals, which claim that Brahman and atman are one and the same. For Jains, there is no god named Brahman or a soul that connects with some greater power. Instead, emphasis is placed on the jiva category, which is comprised of an infinite number of independent spirit-units, or souls. The infinite possibility of the number of jivas means that it is very difficult to describe them extensively.

The universe as understood within the Jain tradition consists of three realms, which are also comprised of multiple subdivisions. The universe consists not only of our reality, but also of other facets or worlds. The underworld consists of various layers or levels in which demons and demigods reside. The Earth's surface forms the middle world, also consisting of layers or worlds. Within these layers, only a few realms are fit for humans, and one of those realms is the world we perceive now. It is only within these limited realms that one can commit the human actions needed to attain liberation. Above the Earth is the celestial world, with sixteen layers for beings born in the heavens but without Jain insight and 14 layers for people born with Jain insight. On top of all this, situated beyond the heavens, is a crescent-shaped apex of the universe occupied by souls who are already liberated.

Jivas

In the Jain tradition, all beings have jivas or souls. Jivas fall into one of two categories: the liberated or the non-liberated. Non-liberated jivas reside in the earth, water, fire, air, and vegetation (the idea of non-liberated souls is elaborated further in the discussion on ahimsa following this section). In general, Jains argue that souls have always been in some state of bondage, and never existed in an originally pure state. However, the aim of the practitioner is to make one's jiva crystal-like and pure. This means that while the soul is viewed as unchanging, the qualities of the soul can change.

The idea that a soul can change implies that jivas are viewed as being in a constant state of flux, and can take on a variety of forms through continual rebirth, from the smallest, almost imperceptible creature called **nigoda**, to a celestial being or god. Nigodas are born in clusters, die within milliseconds, and are found in every part of the universe, including the bodies of humans, plants, and animals. However, the most beneficial form a jiva can take is the human form; for it is only then one can achieve liberation.

Ahimsa

The most important concept in the Jain tradition is the idea of no harm, or ahimsa. This is because the idea of 'non-violence' is the highest form of Jain religious conduct. The emphasis on no harm translates into ideas about the preservation of all forms of life, including concern for the preservation of the Earth itself. However, ahimsa is not restricted to general ideas about the environment; it also dictates what one eats, how one travels, and how one makes a living, and determines Jain moral conduct in general. This idea of non-violence relates to how Jains perceive the universe, which is viewed as pulsating with various forms of life. Violence to any life form, no matter how small, through thought, word, or deed, is said to stain one's soul. When one avoids hatred and all other forms of violence, whether intentional or not, then the soul becomes clean and translucent, allowing one to become liberated. In this way, the concept, ahimsa is key to achieving liberation.

As previously mentioned, jivas make up every aspect of the universe in some form or another; therefore, because they make up the basis of matter such as the earth, water, fire, and air, every time a lamp is lit and the flame is put out, fire bodies come into being and are extinguished. Plants and animals are also harmed by our consumption, and even the use of water, whether for bathing or drinking, entails the destruction of jivas. For the everyday Jain, it is impossible to not cause any harm, and so many practitioners at least try to do the best they can to cause minimal violence to the world. Jain ascetics, however, often take extreme measures to avoid causing harm; this is discussed further in the section on Jain ritual practices.

Dharma

Dharma refers to two aspects in the Jain tradition. First, dharma is the essential and inherent nature of everything, including animate and inanimate objects. Everything that exists has dharma. Second, it refers to the means or path of pursuing that essential nature. Dharma is what leads, binds, or takes back a being to its essential nature. For humans, it enables one to realize the divinity inherent in oneself, and it helps one to cease rebirth and to attain nirvana. Therefore, dharma includes knowledge, conviction, belief, creed, law, righteousness, piety, and everything that is included in religious theory or practice. Because dharma includes knowledge and actions that precipitate liberation, it is also closely tied to ideas about karma.

Karma and bondage

As in Hinduism and Buddhism, Jain ideas about karma determine what kind of rebirth one will have. To review the concept of karma already outlined in unit 3, karma means, action, and refers to the accumulation of action in one's present life and previous ones, which in turn dictates the form one takes into the next life. One cannot avoid the karma accumulated, and karma cannot be extinguished simply by giving up the body and becoming an ascetic, because previous karma still has to be accounted for.

Unique to Jainism is the idea that karma is material in nature and exists as subtle matter which flows into a receptive soul influenced by attachment. The more karmic matter that changes the meaning—clings to a soul, the more attached and passionate one becomes, making it harder to rid oneself of the

clinging matter. Like rebirth, the accumulation of karma is cyclical. The soul has an increasingly difficult task of removing karma, while karma accumulates with every action. This is because these karmic particles become attracted to the soul when the being thinks, speaks, or acts in any way. Karmic matter seems to be especially attracted to souls that are 'moist' with desires, while the drier, more dispassionate (i.e., detached) souls are not so easily polluted. The idea is that as karmic matter sticks to the soul, it keeps the soul in a state of bondage. Over many births, souls become coloured with the type of karma they are polluted with. The darker the soul, the more polluted it is with negative karma. This is in contrast to a pure soul, which is light and crystalline.

Jains differentiate between two types of karma: karma that governs the nature of the soul, and karma that governs the conditions and circumstances of rebirth. In both instances, intention to act is the key to determining the kind of karma one accrues. For example, it makes a significant difference if a particular action is planned rather than accidental, as the intention to hurt or harm a being is the most violent of the karmas, and is considered the worst in the whole scheme of things, as noted in the previous discussion on ahimsa.

Liberation

Liberation or **nirvana**, consists of absolute freedom from karma. As in Hinduism and Buddhism, liberation in the Jain tradition signifies the end of rebirth, or release from **samsara**. The Jains view liberation as a state where souls are at their best, as they are cleansed of grimy karma. In contrast, samsara, or rebirth, involves suffering, struggle, anxiety, and despair of the soul. Ideally, liberation occurs when the soul can detach or get rid of karma. This means that one is also detached from bondage, or clinging to this world. Upon nirvana, the perfected being or **siddha**, ascends in complete isolation to the summit of the universe; this view differs greatly from the Buddhist notions of nirvana which is described as a blowing out (see unit 3). Though isolated at the summit, the siddha is viewed as all-knowing and unlimited.

The Importance of knowledge (Jnana)

But how does one get rid of karma and achieve liberation? In Jainism, emphasis is placed on knowledge. Knowledge may take place in a number of ways, yet it is important to remember that only the soul can obtain knowledge. This is because knowledge is the soul's intrinsic, inherent, inseparable attribute; without knowledge, the soul cannot exist. What this means is that every soul possesses an infinite capacity for knowledge, and has the ability to acquire infinite knowledge, thus becoming all-knowing and all-perceiving. If an individual does not obtain this kind of knowledge, it is not viewed as the fault of the soul, but is attributed to the karmic matter that sticks to the soul. As already mentioned in the section on karma, this karmic matter can veil the soul so that it cannot view things properly. The potential for knowledge lies dormant then, until the obscuring karma is removed. This also means that knowledge is not found outside of the soul but is derived from within.

The Jain understanding of knowledge is that it can be developed over time and be intuitively acquired through proper ascetic practices such as ahimsa. The ultimate knowledge is perfect knowledge, which is pure, absolute, complete, whole and total, representing the consummation of all knowledge. This form of knowledge is only possible when all jnana-obscuring karma is destroyed, meaning that the soul is completely free from any bondage.

The knowledge that leads to liberation is unlimited and requires no further actions to hone or obtain it. Basically, once one has experienced this knowledge one will always have it. Once this knowledge is obtained, it requires no mediums or agencies to access it, such as the mind, the senses, light, words, and signs. Once knowledge is successfully accessed, the soul becomes full and pure and is the perfect manifestation of one's true self. Ideally, anyone can have access to this knowledge, yet Jains view this form of knowledge as reserved for a select few.

JAINISM AND GENDER

In unit 2 on Hinduism, the section on gender focused on the concept of women's duty and the practices related to stridharma. In unit 3, the section on Buddhism and gender identified scholarly debate about representations of women in Buddhist myth. This unit on Jainism offers yet another approach to studying women in religion by outlining attitudes toward women as understood within the Digambara and Svetambara sects. Understanding these sectarian attitudes is important, as they inform female religious practices and religious views about women in Jainism. Specifically, this section includes brief overview of female asceticism in Jainism and identifies how views about female asceticism impact ideas about liberation. Arguably, such views are dictated by sectarian debates about the nature of woman, which is discussed in this section, within the context of female, Jain asceticism.

Female ascetics

Part of understanding attitudes toward women in the Jain community is to remember that these communities are divided into four tirthas or sections: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. Not only is the division between renouncer and householder significant here, so too is the division between male and female. Just as the Jain tradition gives precedence to the renouncer over the householder, preference is given to men over women, influencing mandates concerning the spiritual role and status of women.

Mahavira ordained women as ascetics under the leadership of a woman named Candana. Thousands of women became nuns as a result. The ordination of women into Jain monastic life is a practice that continues even today, in contrast to Buddhist ordinations of women, which has decreased due to stringent rules about who can conduct initiations. However, even though female monastic life is prominent in Jainism, this popularity is primarily due to female membership within the Svetambara sect. The Digambaras do have nuns, though to a significantly less degree, with approximately less than 100 of them in existence today.

In theory, any woman who is not pregnant and has the strength to practise the difficult vows required of her is eligible to become a nun. Just as for men, women must be able to ensure that her initiation into renunciatory life does not cause hardship for her family. For example, if the nun's renunciatory vows cause distress to the family, she should reconsider becoming a nun. This rule applies to monks and was supposedly also practised by Mahavira. For example, some practitioners argue that Mahavira did not renounce until after his parents died, fearing that his renunciation would be too upsetting for them. This emphasis on ensuring the emotional health of the family is rooted in the practice of ahimsa. Not only must an individual avoid physically harming others, but he or she must also to refrain from emotionally harming others.

Mahavira's decision to initiate women came at a time when the practice was discouraged in Hinduism. By the time Mahavira died, women ascetics outnumbered men ascetics 2.5 to 1. However, this does not mean that Jainism provided a feminist alternative by emphasizing women's equality in the monastic community. While there may have been greater opportunities for women to renounce in Jainism than in Hinduism, these opportunities were limited to sectarian ideals and the established hierarchy of the Jain community. For example, Digambara nuns are not considered by their community to be renunciators, but householders of exemplary status. Female Digambara renunciators, therefore, are viewed as renouncing in a limited fashion in a significantly different way from men. Alternatively, female Svetambaras may renounce in the same manner as men.

Digambara and Svetambara attitudes toward female ascetics

Underlying the debate on female renunciation is to question whether women can achieve liberation. The Digambaras argue that a woman cannot become liberated because her body is host to a unique number of micro-organisms that live and die in her, for example, during each menstrual cycle organisms die, meaning that women regularly cause harm, even if unintentional. Consequently, the inadvertent violence to life that occurs on a regular basis results in the accumulation of karma, which in turn inhibits liberation.

The Digambaras also hold that only an ascetic can achieve liberation. For the Svetambaras this has little impact on a woman's ability to become liberated, but for the Digambaras, renunciation requires that the renouncer give up his clothes. For the Digambaras, the practice of nudity is reserved for men only. Digambaras argue that a woman should not be naked and therefore liberation is not possible for her because she can never fully renounce. Svetambaras do not view nudity as a requirement for renunciation. This means that in this sect women can renounce in the same manner as men and thus become liberated.

In addition to sanctions against female nudity, the Digambaras also argue that women only possess mediocre qualities, making them incapable of descending into the worst of hells or ascending into the highest state of liberation. Mediocrity inhibits the accumulation or cleansing of karma, either of which would be needed to enter these realms. The Svetambaras do not hold this view and argue that not only can a woman become liberated, but she can also become a teacher or a jina. This view is supported by

Svetambara religious texts, which point to female tirthankaras as indicative of women's capabilities for liberation. The idea of female tirthankaras is disputed by the Digambaras, who portray the same jinas in question as being male in their religious writings.

JAINISM AND RITUAL PRACTICE

This section addresses the codes of conduct pertinent to the Jain community at large, and how this in turn impacts ritualized practices. While the Jains have many festivals, methods of worship, and rituals related to both, this section will instead focus on ritual in terms of day-to-day living. Specifically, this section outlines the expected practices for an everyday adherent of Jainism.

This section first describes the five vows that all Jains should aspire to; second, notes how these vows function differently between laity and ascetics; and third, discusses **sallakhana**, or fasting unto death, as a unique ritual reserved for the very few, that exemplifies the culmination of Jain practice. Throughout, this section uses examples of specific rituals shared by Jains in general in order to emphasize the diversity of ritual within any given Jain community.

The five vows

The five vows are rooted in Jain ideas about the three jewels. Recall that Buddhism has the three jewels or refuges, which include the Dharma, the Buddha, and the **sangha** (Buddhist community). For Jains, the three jewels denote a path of spiritual development that includes right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. The five vows are rules that detail specific practices meant to promote right conduct. These include:

- ➡ non-violence;
- ➡ truthfulness, non-stealing;
- ➡ sexual purity; and
- ➡ non-possession.

Non-violence (ahimsa)

As already mentioned in the discussion on ahimsa, non-violence is the most important concept in Jainism. Ahimsa requires one to avoid both actions and thoughts that cause harm. Ideally, non-violence is supposed to be applied to all areas of life. For example, it dictates dietary habits in that all Jains are vegetarians. In the Jain tradition, the taking of animal life is absolutely prohibited, as it is viewed more harmful than the destruction of plants. In addition, one must destroy plant life for food as sparingly as possible.

In terms of ritual practices related to ahimsa, restrictions on food have been incorporated into periods of religious fasting for both the laity and the monastic community. The monastic community eats very little in general, with many monks and nuns only eating one meal per day. It should be added that this often equates to only a small portion of food. For example, Digambara monks in India obtain food through donation, using only their hands as begging bowls. This is because owning cutlery is viewed as contradictory to their vow to renounce all possessions. The expectation is that laity will provide food as needed.

For both the laity and ascetics, meat, fish, and fowl are always avoided as well as any other foods that are considered abundant in life forms. Examples include honey, alcohol, eggplant, and root vegetables like potatoes, radishes, onions and garlic. This is because these foods are viewed as containing millions of micro-organisms that are killed upon preparation and consumption, as opposed to other foods that have fewer organisms and, therefore, cause less harm. Only under extenuating medical circumstances can one eat honey or the vegetables stated above. For many present-day Jains, these dietary restrictions are difficult to follow, so they often include vegetables that are traditionally prohibited. However, the consumption of meat should never be made an exception.

Other food bans include food that has been touched by excrement, or any other food that has been in contact with a substance that has come in contact with the body. For example, food that has been tasted by someone else is viewed as contaminated. This is because the taster's saliva, which contains living organisms, may be on the utensil that is dipped back into the cooking pot. Modern Jains also interpret this prohibition as reflecting a strong sense of personal hygiene, in this case, the cleanliness needed to incur minimal damage to organisms that live on one's body. This means that intoxicants are prohibited, as are other materials such as cigarettes. As well, liquids such as water should be strained or boiled before drinking in order to avoid inadvertently consuming any micro-organism that might grow in it.

Dietary restrictions as dictated by ahimsa are not restricted to the consumption of food, but also inform when and how one eats. Traditionally, meals were eaten before sunset to avoid lighting lamps for dinner. This is because the flames in the lamps would attract insects, kill them, and thus cause inadvertent violence. In addition, Jain monks sweep the ground before them in order to avoid harming life forms that are unseen to the human eye. Some monks and nuns even wear small scarves or plastic screens around their mouths in order to avoid breathing in organisms and causing harm to the creatures residing in the air, with the hot air that they breathe out. In extreme cases, some renouncers do not bath so as to avoid harming water bodies in the organisms that may live in one's body.

Truthfulness

The second vow is truthfulness. Jains are not supposed to hide the truth or tell a lie, with exception being when telling the truth may cause violence. A good example is a hunter who asks a Jain if she or he has seen a deer. Assuming the Jain has, the Jain who responds in silence is viewed as telling a lie.

According to the Jain tradition, this is because silence is equal to concealing the truth. Instead, the ideal response is to state that he or she does not want to tell the truth, or decline to tell the truth, as this is better than saying something that might lead to the death of the deer.

The emphasis on truthfulness is also related to pratikramana, the Jain ritual of confession. As mentioned, pratikramana is the confession of transgressions followed by a request for forgiveness. Ideally it should be done twice a day; the longer one goes without making peace with others and with oneself, the more difficult it becomes to remove the clinging karma that comes as a result of lying. However, the ritual itself can last as long as three hours, making it very difficult for the average Jain to perform. This means that many practitioners perform pratikramana approximately once per year, which is considered the maximum length of time that should be spent between confessions.

Non-stealing

This third vow is very straightforward in that one should not take what does not belong to him or her. For more strict adherents, this means receiving items that are only voluntarily given, which can prove more difficult than it may seem, as extreme renunciators must rely solely on donations by laity for food and/or shelter. This refrain from stealing includes not plucking apples from a tree, or picking flowers if they are in someone else's yard.

Sexual purity

With regard to this fourth vow, there are different expectations concerning sexual purity depending on whether one is a layperson or renouncer. For the laity, sexual purity means fidelity to one's spouse, as this is considered a form of celibacy. This also means that one should remain celibate until marriage. Monks and nuns, however, must give up all thoughts and actions to do with sex, for to do otherwise, even if one did not act upon thoughts about sex, goes against this view of sexual purity.

Non-possession

For this fifth vow, ideally, one should physically renounce all possessions and mentally give up all craving of ownership. This is because possessions distract one from true knowledge, as it impels us to act in ways of violence that may cause harm to others. While this is standard for Jain ascetics, the laity has more leeway, even though they should own as little as possible and give away what is not necessary. Though the laity does not generally renounce all possessions, they are expected to adopt certain principles of renunciation, including abstaining from large quantities of food, clothes, decorations, and the like. When one becomes a renouncer, one gives away all one's belongings, as this is supposed to replicate the great renunciation of Mahavira.

Rules of asceticism

There are six essential duties for an ascetic, which differ from that of a householder. The first duty entails retrospection, introspection, confession, and repentance. Fulfilling this duty usually requires a statement of the sins, transgressions or deviations committed by the ascetic in the performance of his

daily routine, and then making penance for them. The second duty is the determination to renounce or avoid thinking, speaking, or doing all that is inconsistent with one's saintly status and code of conduct. The third duty includes the adoration, recitation, and contemplation of the divine attributes and godly characteristics as manifested in the jinas. The fourth duty requires prostrating properly to saintly gurus—basically, it is ascetic devotion. The fifth duty is meditation, which must be performed three times per day. And finally, the sixth duty is the practice of completely abandoning the body, where one relinquishes all attachment to the body.

Sallakhana, fasting unto death

Sallakhana is a rarely observed ritual among ascetic Jains, yet gains a lot of attention because this ritual is unique among world religions (Settar, 1989). Fasting until death is supposed to occur while one has complete control over his or her mind. This act is not recommended for everyone, even for people considered spiritually advanced. In reality, it is to be undertaken only by a spiritually fit few.

Sallakhana is not considered a form of suicide but instead is considered death with dignity and compassion (Tukol, 1976). It can be undertaken by both ascetics and laity, both men and women, although scholars argue that women already fast more often and in a stricter fashion. In general, sallakhana entails a slow withdrawal from all forms of food. Traditionally, Jains with the right disposition and the correct attitude could undertake this fast. By the beginning of the 20th century, sallakhana was only allowed to take place under strict supervision. Ascetics do have the choice of taking this path on their own, but the act has rarely occurred in the last few centuries.

The act of sallakhana is usually done with the approval of the family and spiritual superiors. Suicide by any other means is considered to be an act that involves passion and violence, meaning that in any other circumstance suicide is condemned. Contrary to suicide, the voluntary absence of food through the practice of sallakhana is said to involve a restraint from all forms of violence to living beings, and this is the ideal form of death.

People who die by way of sallakhana are considered only a few births removed from final liberation.

Exercise #2 – Compile a list of things you did today. What did you eat? Where did you go? How did you get there? What type of changes would you have to make to your daily regime to live in accordance with the main premises of Jainism? Think specifically about the strict principle of ahimsa in this tradition. This information will be useful for the interactive assignment at the end of the unit.

In addition to death by sallakhana, other forms of withdrawal from life such as death through renunciation, and death through meditation, were also practised in conjunction with abstaining from food. Sallakhana is considered momentous for the whole community.

ELEMENTS OF A JAIN COMMUNITY

Mahavira's Followers

While the Jain tradition is most predominant in India, modern Jain communities are scattered throughout the world. As noted in the previous section on Jainism and ritual practice, Jains participate in communal ritual, indicating that the Jain community is an important facet to the general practices found in Jainism. This section first looks at Jainism in India, and second, Jainism in North America, as examples of differing Jain communities.

Jainism in India

As previously mentioned, Jainism originated in India and continues to exist as a minority tradition there, consisting of about one percent of the population. Jains living in India adhere to the Hindu caste system, though this is not a requirement of Jain practice. However, due to the accepted blending of cultures, marriages are sometimes arranged for men and women between the two traditions in some regions of India. This blend of the Hindu and Jain traditions is also sometimes indicated by shared temples that accommodate both faiths (these temples are also found in North America). However, historically there have been periods of conflict and tension between the Jain and Hindu communities, predominantly in South India, where Hindu devotional poets frequently converted Jain kings to followers of Vishnu or Shiva. Although there was considerable interaction and mutual borrowing leading to shared rituals between the Hindu and Jain traditions, throughout the centuries the Jains have held fast to their own interpretations of rituals and beliefs. The Jains were able to do this because they remained in India as an identifiable minority.

Jainism in North America

Jainism was introduced to North America in 1893, when a proponent of Jainism named Virchand Raghavji Gandhi spoke at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. While people became aware of the Jain tradition, few Jains immigrated to North America at this time. It was not until the 1960s that Jains began to actually settle in North America, with approximately 25,000 in the United States and 10,000 in Canada. Even though the actual number of Jains in North America is relatively few, there are more than 60 Jain centers in North America, all operating under an umbrella organization called, Jains Association in North America (JAINA). It is through this organization that Jains from different sects, geographical regions and backgrounds can come together under the auspice of Jainism.

It is difficult for Jain ascetics to live in North America because of the emphasis and reliance on the four tirthas—such communities do not exist in North America, making it difficult to rely on the laity as needed. Vasudha Narayanan notes that as result, only two major spiritual leaders came to North America, only one of which remained a renouncer until death. Sushil Kumar established a Jain retreat centre west of New York City; it is a centre that still exists, and functions for both the Jain children and adults, as well as those from outside of the tradition who are interested in inter-religious dialogue. As Narayanan states: “Both Sushil Kumar and the Jain centres seek to translate traditional concepts and

practices into themes that are relevant to the concerns of the younger generation. Although traditional asceticism may be impossible overseas, **ahimsā**, non-violence, is clearly applicable to many aspects of personal and social life (Narayanan, 2002). As our discussion on Buddhism revealed, in Canada it is evident that traditions that move to another culture are adapted and changed as necessary to fit the community currently adhering to the tradition. In this case, the emphasis of Jainism in North America has shifted from the focus on renunciation to more environmental concerns pertinent to the Jains who live there. Such concerns include vegetarianism and consumerism.

Terms to Know

Ajiva	Digambaras	Mahavira
Arhat	Jina	Mahavratas
Mendicants	Punya	Samsara
Moksha	Renunciation	Shramana
Paap	Sallekhana	Svetambara

Study Questions

1. How do Jains attain spiritual enlightenment?
2. How is the Jain understanding of karma different from Buddhism?
3. Why is Jainism paradoxical in terms of their understanding of the universe and the human relationship to that universe?
4. How do Jains interpret the concept of ahimsa? How does this affect their daily life?
5. Describe the main differences between the Digambara and Svetambara sects in Jainism.
6. Explain the Jain system of cosmology, specifically commenting on the nature of the soul matter and non-soul matter.
7. What are the three gems in Jainism? Which is the most important and why?
8. What is the practice of sallekhana? Why is this considered an honourable act?
9. Explain how women function in both monastic communities and the laity.
10. What type of ritual practices are included in the various forms of Jaina worship?
11. How is the Jain celebration of Divali both similar and different from their Hindu neighbours?
12. How do Jains celebrate their founding figure Mahavira?
13. What type of difficulties have Jains living in the Diaspora faced since moving to places like England and North America?

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