

PREFACE

In the words of Prof. Arnold Toynbee 'Religion -has been the greatest single influence on the history and destiny of mankind.' It is originally aimed to bring out the divine in man, and it certainly uplifts mankind morally and spiritually. As observed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, 'Religion correctly interpreted, gives value and dignity to the individual In its essence, religion is reintegration of human personality and redemption of human society.'

Jainism, the creed of the Nirgrantha Tirthankaras of the Shramana current of ancient Indian culture, is a very comprehensive system, acclaimed as one of the oldest living religions of India. Its last exponent was Vardhaman Mahavira (599-527 B.C.), the twenty-fourth Tirthankara or Jina. Jainism has been described as an ethical system *par excellence*, since it lays the greatest emphasis on self-discipline and self-control in order to lead a life of peaceful co-existence, co-operation, co-ordination and co-realisation.

In this book the essence of this religious system has been dealt with in brief by way of introduction for the benefit of those who wish to acquaint themselves of Jainism at a glance. A brief life-sketch of Bhagwan Mahavira and a few excerpts from his teachings have also been appended. For further and fuller information, the reader is advised to refer to works like

1. Outlines of Jainism by J. L. Jaini,
2. The Religion of Ahimsa by Prof. A. Chakravarti,
3. Jainism by Herbert Warren,
4. An Introduction to Jainism by A. B. Lathe,
5. Religion of Tirthankaras by K. P. Jain,

6. Religion and Culture of the Jains by Dr. Jyoti Prasad Jain (3rd ea., 1981, Bhartiya Jnanapith, New Delhi).

The credit of inspiring the production of this book goes to my friend Shri Jamnalal Jain, a reputed Sarvodaya thinker and writer who has been good to undertake its publication also. I am really very grateful to him.

I hope, the book will arouse the curiosity of its readers to know more about Jainism and take sincere and active interest in its wholesome teachings.

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Dated 27th. October, 1981

Mahavira Nirvana Samvat 2508.

-Jyoti Prasad Jain

ESSENCE OF JAINISM

Jainism is the religion professed by the Jains, so called because they follow the system expounded and preached by the Jina.1

It is one of the oldest living religions of India, purely indigenous in origin, and represents that current of ancient Indian culture which was distinct from and independent of the Brahmanical. It is a fully developed system with all the necessary limbs and accessories, possesses several sects and sub-sects, and owns quite a rich cultural heritage. It is known to have drawn its adherents from almost every caste and social group, and even at present

it is diffused in all parts of the Indian Union, a few Jains residing in many foreign lands as well.

1. Jina (lit. conqueror of self) is also known as Arhanta, the adorable one, Kevalin or possessor of absolute knowledge, Nirgrantha or the one without attachment, Shramana, the practiser of equanimity and Tirthankara (lit. ford-finder), one who establishes the path that takes people safely across the ocean of misery, the round of births and deaths, that is, the samsara. Consequently, Jainism has also been known as the creed of the Jinas, Arhantas, Nirgranthas, Shramanas or Tirthankaras. There have been innumerable Jinas or Arhantas, but only twentyfour of them are designated the Tirthankaras.

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The first in the series of the 24 Jinas or Tirthankaras of the current cycle of time, was Adinatha Rishabhadeva. He belongs to remote pre-historic times and is believed to have been the first temporal as well as spiritual leader of mankind, who inaugurated the 'age of action', the beginnings of human civilization and the practice of religion. The last three Tirthankaras were Arishtanemi a cousin of Krishna Vasudeva of the Mahabharata fame (circa 1450 B.C.), Parshvanatha (877-777 B.C.) and Vardhamana Mahavira (599-527 B.C.).

These Jinas or Tirthankaras were born as ordinary men, but they renounced the pleasures of the world and, by a course of self-discipline, asceticism and concentrated meditation, mastered the flesh, and annihilated all the forces and influences obstructing spiritual development, and attained fullest self-realization and absolute perfection, bringing out to the full the divinity or god-hood inherent in man. Then, for the well-being and happiness of all living beings, they preached what they themselves had practiced and achieved. As such, Jainism is not a revealed religion and claims no divine

origin.

It starts with the scientific assumption that nothing is destructible, that is, nothing can be created out of something which does not at all exist in one form or the other and that, therefore, the universe is the conglomeration of all that exists, is uncreated, is real, and is without a beginning and without an end. The principal constituents of the cosmos are the two categories: animate objects and inanimate objects. The former comprise an infinite number of independent souls in varying degrees of physical and spiritual development,

and the latter consist of space, time, the media of motion and rest, and matter in different forms. Spirit and matter are thus the real which are pluralistic, eternal and not liable to lose or interchange their nature. These irreducible constituents being themselves existential give an existential character to the universe. Each of these substances is the substratum of qualities and modes, which are its determents and on which its own intelligibility depends. The substance is also subject to constant, incessant change in the qualities and modes of which it is made up. Thus, origination and destruction refer to modification of qualities on the permanent bed rock of substance which is consequently both permanent and impermanent at one and the same time. It is only the permanent that changes, for in the absence of permanence change is meaningless. And, with the simple dogma that the soul has been associated with matter from times immemorial, Jainism explains the phenomenon that the 'Samsara', the round of rebirths, the world of becoming or mundane existence, is, as a remedy against which religion is needed.

This need for religion, in its turn, is explained by the Jaina theory of Karma, which is founded on the simple law of cause and effect. You reap what you have sown. Nobody can escape the consequences of his or her acts of commission and omission, good and bad. This doctrine makes transmigration of souls a proven fact, establishes the continuity and immortality of all the souls and provides a rational explanation for the diverse phenomena and experiences of life. At the same time, it does away with the necessity of any outside agency for the purpose of rewarding or punishing the living beings. They and they alone are responsible for their actions and themselves benefit by or suffer from the consequences. Man is the measure of all things. He is the master of his own destiny and can make it or mar it accordingly as he wills. The entire emphasis is on the development of strong will-power and conscious personal effort in order to thwart and annihilate the various adverse influences, the forces of the Karma, and in this way to effect spiritual evolution, leading to the ultimate goal, the very Godhood, whence is no return to the 'samsara'. This transformation of man into god is the realistic end of religious pursuit in Jainism for a sincere aspirant of the Truth.

In order to work out this spiritual evolution, it is necessary to comprehend properly the seven Tattvas or essentials:

1. Soul, which is the principal and, in its present embodied state, needs and seeks liberation. Matter, the basis of all worldly existence, which keeps the individual soul in bondage, preventing its liberation.

3. Influx of Karma, when the soul acts against its true nature by indulging in anger, hatred, pride, deceit, avarice, cruelty, etc.

4. Karmic bondage, when the soul becomes a slave to karmic forces, resulting for it-self in good or bad fruition, as the case may be.

5. Stoppage of the influx, by the practice of wholesome self-control.

6. Partial annihilation of Karmic forces through renunciation, penance and austerities.

7. Moksha or complete liberation (Nirvana) of the soul from the karmic bondage, which lives thereafter in a state of absolute purity, spiritual perfection, omniscience, bliss and beatitude.

An intelligent comprehension, intellectual conviction and profound faith in the essential nature of the soul, of matter, and of their mutual relationships, actions and reactions, is the first condition for launching upon the path of liberation, which consists in piety, charity, renunciation, self-discipline, penance, meditation and self-realization. This trio of Right faith, Right knowledge and Right conduct, known as the three spiritual jewels in Jainism, constitutes the Path to liberation, 'Moksha' or 'Nirvana'.

The Jaina 'nirvana' is not the obliteration of the individual, nor is it the submergence of the individuality into some universality. It is essentially a religious concept, recounted as the last of the seven 'Tattvas' mentioned above, which are not merely metaphysical conditions but have an ethical import as well. As the religious goal and the driving force of morality, 'nirvana' is a positive achievement of the soul which freeing itself from the 'karma' once for all acquires the state of perfect and everlasting beatitude.

The Jaina conception of divinity is also unique and is another illustration of its realistic pluralism. Each soul, when completely free from karmic influences, becomes 'itself' and transforms into 'divinity'. Viewed as a type, as the state of highest spiritual evolution, divinity is one, connoting collectively all the divinities represented by all the emancipated

and liberated souls. But, viewed individually, each liberated soul is a full and perfect divinity in itself and by itself; it retains its individuality even in liberation. This is the conception of God in Jainism, which as a type is the ideal to the aspirants. It does believe in Godhood, but not in a God as the 'first cause'. The 'Siddhas' and the 'Arhantas' represent the two types of divinity or Godhoods, the former being the absolutely liberated bodiless pure souls, and the latter, also known as the 'Kevalins' or 'Jinas', including the 'Tirthankaras' are those who attained emancipation in life, becoming all-knowing, all-perceiving, full of compassion for all, and immune to all feelings of attachment and aversion, like and dislike. There is also a large pantheon of godliness, celestials or angels, who are superhuman but not supermen, are divine beings but not divinities or deities. The only divinities or deities are the Arhantas and the Siddhas, who are adored and are worth adoring. After them come the true ascetic saints who pursue the path of the Jina in earnest.

The Jaina theory of knowledge is a highly developed one, which also deals with the validity of knowledge, based on a comprehensive apprehension of reality as also the various individual view-points revealing the different aspects of the multi-sided reality. This conception of reality as being manifold, highly complex and pluralistic in character, gave the Jaina system the name 'the philosophy of Anekanta or Syadvada.' In fact Anekanta is concerned with the thought process when viewing a thing, and Syadvada indicates the manner in which that thought process is given expression to. If one sticks to only one of the many aspects of the thing, ignoring and rejecting all the others, he can never realize the truth. Scholars have interpreted the 'Anekanta' philosophy of the Jains as the theory of non-absolutism, of relative pluralism, of realism, or of coexistence. In its practical implication it means a healthy spirit of sympathetic understanding of other peoples' views, reconciliation, tolerance, cooperation and co-existence. It is a rational creed, opposed to blind faith and fanaticism.

Then, the concept that every living being, from the lowliest to the highest, possesses a soul of its own which is independent, is amenable to pain and pleasure, is immortal and potentially divine, engenders belief in the community, rather brotherhood, of souls, which makes the believer respect all alike and practice the virtue of 'live and help others to live'. It is why, in its practical aspect, Jainism has been described as an 'ethical system par excellence', and Ahimsa, or perfect non-violence, is the keynote of that system. It is the 'dharma', or essential nature, of the spirit and pervades the entire length and breadth of the Jaina code of Right conduct, or the Path.

The aspirants in Jainism fall into two categories, the ascetics and the laity, or the monks, nuns, laymen and lay-women, which constitute the fourfold jaina order (Sangha). The male ascetic are known as the 'Sadhus', 'Munis' or 'Yatis', and the female ones as the 'Aryikas' or 'Sadhvis'. All of them represent persons who have renounced worldly life and pleasures, adopted a life of

self-abnegation and asceticism and devote themselves to the pursuit of 'Moksha' or 'nirvana' by attending primarily to their own spiritual well-being and secondarily to the moral welfare of the society in general. There is an elaborate and strict code of internal and external conduct laid down for them.

The householders of both sexes, known as the 'Shravakas' and 'Shravikas' respectively, on the other hand, take the world as it is and live their life with as much piety as each individual possibly can, depending on his or her aptitude, capability and environments. They instinctively pursue the activities of producing, earning or acquiring wealth or worldly goods, as also those of enjoying the fruits there of including the satisfaction of basic needs, enjoyment of comforts and luxuries and indulgence in sensual and aesthetic pleasures. But, they are advised to add a third activity, the Dharma, to their pursuits, nay, it should better precede the other two and act as a constant guiding factor in regulating them. One must produce, earn and acquire wealth by putting in as much hard work, skill and foresight as he is capable of, but only by lawful means. He can certainly enjoy the fruits of his labor, but he should do so, again in a lawful way.

The keynote of this lawfulness is Ahimsa, which demands that one must not intentionally injure the feelings or the life forces of another, either by thought, word or deed, himself, through the agency of others, or even by approving of such an act committed by some body else. Intention in this case implies ulterior or selfish motive, sheer pleasure and even avoidable negligence. This Jaina or the 'Ahimsite' way of life guarantees perfect amity and helpful coexistence between individual and individual, community and community, one nation or race and another, even between human beings and sub-human life.

A person professing Jainism puts his faith in the trio of 'Deva', 'Shastra' and 'Guru'. The Deva is the Jina who is the most adorable ideal, the Shastra connotes literature comprising, based on or imbued with the spirit of the teachings of the Jina, and the Guru is the selfless ascetic who pursues the path to liberation as shown by the Jina. These three are the objects of worship and deepest reverence in as much as they serve as spiritual guides and sources of inspiration to and the noblest ideals worthy of emulation by the seeker. He must abjure drinking liquors and eating animal food, including fish and eggs and excepting milk and milk products. He usually avoids all passion-arousing victuals and takes fresh, simple, healthy and wholesome meals and that, too, only in daytime, not after nightfall, and drinks clean filtered water. To him fornication, adultery, harlotry, wanton killing of life by way of sport, stealing, robbing and gambling are evil indulgences to be shunned and shaken off. The 'primary eight virtues' of a Jain, although described differently in different Jaina books, agree in essence with the above summing up.

Besides the primary eight virtues, a Jain should take the 'five vows,' the first of which is abstinence from intentional killing of life for food, sport, pleasure or some other selfish purpose. But, he can and should use force, if necessary, in the defense of his country, society, religious institutions, family, life and property. His agricultural, industrial and diverse living activities do also involve injury to life, but it should be limited to the minimum possible through carefulness, cleanliness and due precaution. Thus, in the first stages a lay aspirant absolutely abstains only from the first of the four forms of 'Himsa'. The second vow is to abstain from telling lies and taking recourse to falsehood in speech or actions, to using harsh, cruel, shocking or abusive language, to ridicule, back-biting and flattery. The third vow is to abstain from stealing or misappropriating others property and includes abstinence from cheating, robbing and using dishonest or illegal means in acquiring any worldly object. The fourth vow is to abstain from having sexual relation with any body but one's own lawfully wedded spouse. And, the fifth vow is abstinence from acquiring and possessing worldly goods without a limit, in other words, it requires the imposition of a limit on one's needs, acquisitions and possessions and enjoins the use of the surplus for the common good. These are the partial or qualified vows, applicable only to the laity, the ascetics have to observe the vows absolutely and practice various internal and external austerities.

A Jain is expected to cultivate, as best as he or she can, the ten differential of 'Dharma', which are, forgiveness, humility, integrity, truthfulness, greed, discipline, penance, renunciation, possession-lessens and continence.

The six necessary daily duties of a Jaina householder are: devotional worship of the 'Deva (Jina), reverence to the Guru, study of holy books ('shastra'), practice of self-discipline, observance of fasts including the curbing of desires, and charity. The last duty includes providing food to holy persons and to the indigent, medicine and medical aid to the ailing, educational facilities for those who are in need of them, and a sense of security and fearlessness to those who are under duress, are wrongfully oppressed, persecuted or tyrannized. This fourfold philanthropy is a very important positive aspect of the Jaina way of life and in substance consists in selfless service of humanity as a pious duty done out of love for all and compassion for those in want or distress, the Jaina motto being, 'piety is rooted in active compassion'.

Another significant feature of the Jaina way of life is the great emphasis it lays on what you think and how you think, that is on the Bhavanas, or yearning pure thoughts and pious aspirations. On leaving bed in the morning and going to it at night, while

worshipping before the images of the Jina in the temple or performing Samayika, a Jaina fervently wishes for the well being, happiness and peace of all and every body.

Sects & subjects: Schismatic tendencies resulting in sects and subsects are known to have existed in Jainism since the early periods of its history. In course of time many died out, a few survived and several new ones emerged. At present, the community is divided into two principal sects, the Digambara (sky-clad) and the Shvetambara (white-clad). The former is so called because its male ascetics go naked and possess nothing except a peacock feather brush and a wooden jug for water. The followers of this sect also install in their temples the nude images of the Tirthankaras in the Kayotsarga (standing) or lotus-seated postures of complete bodily abandonment and contemplative spiritual meditation. This sect is further divided into three subsects: the 'Terahpantha' which is more puritanical in conduct and simpler in worshipping ritual; the 'Beespantha' which is much less so in both these aspects and adheres to the institution of the Bhattarakas, the saffron-robed religious pontiffs; and the Samayya or 'Taranapantha' which is opposed to temple and image worship. The Shvetambara sect is divided into the temple worshippers and Sadhumargis. The former adorn the images of the Jinas and indulge in an elaborate worship-ritual, while the latter are opposed to temple and image worship and are further divided into the Sthanakavasis and the Terapanthis. The ascetics of both these denominations wear a piece of cloth ('muhapatti') over the mouth. All the Shvetambara ascetics of the three divisions wear a piece of two or three simple, unsewn, white garments and keep very limited possessions. A Jaina ascetic, male or female, of whichever sect or subsect, has no home, no worldly possessions, no intimate associations with house-holders, takes meals only once in a day, and does not stay in any one place for more than a few days except during the four-months rainy retreat when they abide in any one place. The basis of these sects and subsects is not so much the difference in the doctrine or the basic principles of the creed as in the codes of conduct, particularly of the ascetics, and in the modes of worship and ritual. There are some other differences, too, relating to certain traditions, etc., but they are of minor significance.

Literature: The original Jaina scriptures ('Agama', 'Shruta' or 'Jinavani'), as preached by the 24 Tirthankaras, one after the other, and finally codified in the time of Mahavira (599-527 B.C.), the last of them, consisted of the twelve 'Angas' (limbs of canon) and a number of Miscellanies ('Painnas'). The last of the 12 Angas, the 'Drishtivada', comprised five sections, the most important of which was that of the fourteen 'Purvas' dealing with philosophy in detail. Thus, the Jaina canonical knowledge has often been described as the Eleven Angas & Fourteen Purvas. After Mahavira's nirvana, this body of knowledge flowed down by word of mouth through a succession of eminent Acharyas, dwindling in volume with the passage of time. At last, about the beginning of the Christian era, what remained of the contents of the Purvas was recollected in the form of 'Mahakarmaprakritiprabhrita' and Kasayaprabhrita, and the remnants of the 11 'Angas' together with certain other older texts were redacted about the middle of the 5th century

A.D. Side by side, a number of quasi-canonical texts were also compiled by eminent Acharyas like Kundakunda, Battakera, Uma-Svami, Sivarya and Yativrishabha, during the first and second centuries of the Christian era. The original language of the canon was the Ardhamagadhi Prakrit, most of the other texts also being in Prakrit. A vast exegetical literature came into being and numerous independent works and treatises written on different topics in the Prakrit, Sanskrit, Apabhramsha, Kannada and Tamil languages. The entire religious literature of the Jains is classified into four 'Annyogas': 'Prathamanyoga', dealing with 'Puranic' and historical traditions and religious lore; 'Charananuyoga', dealing with the rules of conduct of the ascetics and the laity, including consecrations, ritual and devotional compositions; Karananuvoga, dealing with metaphysics and, cosmology; and Dravyanuyoga, dealing with pure philosophy, mysticism and dialectics. In addition, the Jains also produced a rich secular and scientific literature on different branches of ancient learning. They have handsomely contributed to the development of almost all the ancient, mediaeval and modern Indian languages literary styles and forms. The institution of 'Shastra' 'bhandaras' ('manuscript-libraries') has helped the preservation and dissemination of Jaina works. Jaina literature forms a valuable part of India's literary heritage.

Holy Places & Monuments: The principal places of Jaina pilgrimage are those associated with birth, 'nirvana' or any other important event in the life of the twenty-four Tirthankaras, or with some important event in the ecclesiastical history of the Jains, some miraculous Jina image or shrine, or some important ancient religious or cultural center. As such, the Jaina holy places are scattered all over India, from 'Mt. Kailas' (in Tibet) to 'Cape Comorin', and from the western coast to the Bay of Bengal. Jaina 'stupas', 'caves', cave-temples, pillars, shrines, temples and temple-cities, with superb sculptural and architectural specimens, are to be seen in almost every part of the country. More important of the Jaina pilgrim centers are: 'Parasnath Hill', 'Rajgir', 'Pawa', 'Champapur', 'Kolhua-pahar' and Vaishali in Bihar; Paharpur and Pak-Vir in Bengal; Udayagiri Khandagiri caves in Orissa; Ayodhya, Ratnapuri, Shravasti, Varanasi, Kakandi, Kaushambi, Kampilya, Hastinapur, Prayag, Shauripur, Ahichchhatra, Mathura and Deograh in U.P.; Khajuraho, Una, Siddhavarakoot, Dronagir, Nainagiri, Muktagiri, Badwani, Sonagir, Kundalpur, Bandhahi and Bahoriband in Madhya Pradesh; Rishabhadeva, Mt. Abu, Mahavirji, Ranakpur, Osia, Padmapuri, Tejara and Chittor in Rajasthan; Gimar, Taranga, Shatrunjaya and Palitana in Gujarat; Ellora, Ajanta, Badami, Dharasiva, Nasik, Mangitungi, Kunthalgiri and Ramtek in Maharashtra; Ramkond and Banvasi in Andhra; Shravanabelagola with its Gommatesha colossus, Moodbidre, Karkal, Venur, Humcha, Hampi and mbhoj-Bahubaliin Karnataka and Kanchi, Madura, Sittanvassal, Tirumalai, Mylapore and Nagarcoil in Tamilnadu; Mithila in Nepal; Mt. Kailas in Tibet; and Taxila in Pakistan. The Jaina monuments are important not only from the religious but also from the cultural, artistic, antiquarian and historical points of view.

Festivals: There is hardly any month of the year which does not contain one or more Jaina holidays, fast days, festivals or fairs. The 8th and the 14th days of each fortnight are regular fast-days. Then, there are the three Ashtanhikas (eight-day festivals) and three Dashalakshaniks (ten-day festivals) including the Paryushana, falling in different months. The birth and 'nirvana' anniversaries of the Tirthankaras, especially those of Rishabha, Parshva and Mahavira, are celebrated with great eclat. At most of the important places of pilgrimage, annual fairs are held, and in many cities and towns car-processions of the Jina are taken out annually. Keeping fasts, worshipping the Jina and other adorable objects, recitation of hymns and of the sacred texts holding religious discourses, alms giving, taking the vows, and such other acts of piety usually characterize the celebration of their holidays by the Jains.

To sum up, Jainism is a rational creed and a living religion which has preserved in a large measure its originality and integrity. It is a well developed system with a rich cultural heritage and its own characteristic way of life and thinking. The number of its declared adherents may be comparatively small, the percentage of literacy and education among them is very high, and numerous educational, charitable and social-welfare institutions owe their existence to the philanthropy of the Jains.

TIRTHANKARA MAHAVIRA

The conflict between himsa and ahimsa dates from the beginning of man's history, but it was, perhaps, never before so poignant as at present. There is also no doubt that it was the first awakening of the 'ahimsic' attitude in the soul of the uncivilized, barbarous, primitive man which marked his transformation from a veritable brute into a humane being. The moment he began to realize the truth and justice of the precepts 'live and let live and 'do unto others as you would have others do unto you' angered the dawn of human reason, culture and civilization. The endeavor to translate these wholesome precepts into practice gradually humanized the brute in man.

The brute could, however, not be completely annihilated; it still lurked and lived. The attraction of gross materialism; the desire to indulge in unrestrained sensual pleasures and the greed to acquire and possess more and more power and pelf tended to awaken the brute in man and goad it into fury. And, in the face of this inhuman fury, humanity has often found itself paralyzed. It was, therefore, left to the great teachers who, renouncing even the very idea of mundane pleasures, devoted themselves heart and soul to the eradication of inhuman tendencies from human society and helped it to regain itself. Again and again, in different fumes and lands, such masters have been born to help mankind.

Among these, the Jaina Tirthankaras of ancient India were the foremost in showing to suffering humanity the 'ahimsa' way of life and peaceful coexistence, not only by precept but by their own practice and conduct. Beginning with Lord Rishabhadeva, twenty-four such Tirthankaras gave in their respective fumes this message of peace and good-will to the world. The last in this series of great teachers was Vardhamana Mahavira (599-527 B.C.). He was a senior contemporary of the Buddha who always spoke with respect of the Nigantha-Nataputta (Mahavira). Both these masters were the last great exponents of the Shramana or Arhat current of ancient Indian culture, which had 'Ahimsa' for its fundamental creed.

Bhagwan Mahavira, the greatest apostle of ahimsa and one of the greatest benefactors of mankind, was born on the 14th day of the bright fortnight of the Indian month of 'Chaitra' 599 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, at Kundagram a suburb of Vaishali (in Bihar). His father, Siddhartha, was the republican head of the Jnatrika clan, and his mother, Trishala, was the daughter of the Lichchavi chief Chetaka, the head of the Vajjian confederacy of republics, with his chief city as Vaishali. Thus Vardhamana Mahavira was a scion of a highly respectable 'kshatriya' family, born and nurtured in a free republican atmosphere. From his very childhood, he revealed in various ways signs of true greatness. His extremely compassionate heart combined with a highly spiritual bent of mind made him live the life of a householder with but reluctance and indifference. In the midst of luxury he lived the detached life of a Yogi. At last, at the age of thirty he gave up all worldly possessions and left home to lead the life of a wanderer in search of truth. For twelve years he practiced severe austerities in order to purge his soul of all impurities and to make himself a perfect man. At the end of that period, thanks to this long process of self-purification, he became an Arhat or Jina. And, for the remaining thirty years of his life, like the foregoing twenty-three Tirthankaras, last of them being Parshvanath (877-777 B.C.), he journeyed on foot the length and breadth of the country and with untiring energy incessantly showed to the suffering humanity the Path of liberation both by example and precept. At the age of 72 in the last watch of the night of the 14th day of the dark fortnight of the Indian month of Kartika, in 527 B.C. he attained Nirvana at Pava.

Like the foregoing twenty-three Tirthankaras, Mahavira was a master propagator of the Jaina creed and is credited with the reorganization of the Jaina order. At the same time he was one of those great teachers of marking through whom the problem of the perfection of man came to be recognized as the highest achievement for progressive humanity. All the rules of religious life, which he enjoined, were intended to be practical aids in the attainment of the perfection of the self. He did not preach to others what he had not practiced himself. The path of his was patients, forbearance, self-denial, forgiveness, humanitarianism, compassion and consideration, in short, of sacrifice, love and kindness.

Mahavira, as his name indicates, was an embodiment of physical, moral and spiritual courage of the highest order, and the supreme lesson of ahimsa rings out from every chapter and verse of his life. He believed in non-violence not merely in bodily action but also in word and thought. He and after him, the Jaina saints who followed in his footsteps never tired of reawakening humanity to its duty towards itself as well as other living beings. Ahimsa, the first principle of higher life, is to be the rule of all conduct. Life is sacred in whatever form it may be found to exist. 'Jainist' culture stands for universal well-being and for universal brotherhood. Its aim is spiritual uplift and ultimate perfection of the soul; hence it enjoins on its followers the greatest self-control. It deprecates the action of those who for their selfish end, pleasure, wanton willfulness, or even by careless or rash conduct, hurt other's feelings or deprive them of their life-forces. To treat others as one's own self is Mahavira's principal teaching. Once this truth is realized all other questions are easily solved. The end can not always justify the means. Good cannot come out of evil. Violence cannot pave the way for peace and happiness.

According to Mahavira faith, every living being is endowed with a soul. All souls are alike and possess inherent goodness in them. Every one of them can attain the highest spiritual perfection, although it is dependent on the conditions of its bodily existence and on the environments it finds itself placed in; still in however limited a degree or however slowly, it can always aspire to and achieve the supreme spiritual evolution. If men come to realize this noble community of interest among all living beings they are sure to love one another and also sub-human life.

The path to this spiritual evolution, as practiced and propagated by lord Mahavira, consists in a harmonious combination of right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. The last chiefly consists in 'ahimsa' or non-violence, truthfulness, honesty, celibacy and non-covetousness or possession. Without the other four, ahimsa is meaningless. Everyone is at liberty to follow this noble path according to his or her capacity and circumstances. An aversion to covetousness, in other words, an ever-present wakefulness to keep down one's requirements and possessions, is a primary condition of the 'ahimsic' of life.

Thus gave Lord Mahavira to the suffering world his noble message of salvation, physical, moral and spiritual, about two thousand and five hundred years ago, and it is still true and practicable.

Mahavira had become poignantly aware of the fact that those in power always try to rob the weak of their happiness as well as of their means to become happy, and that this tendency to exploit is the outcome of a love of one's supposed notions of happiness

resulting from bodily enjoyments. Everybody considers his own pleasures and convenience so important that he attaches no value to the happiness and convenience of others. He ever tries to believe and prove that in the struggle for existence it is only the fittest who survives, in other words, the weak should justify their existence by sacrificing their all in order to make the powerful the more so. According to this way of thinking, the weak has no right to live and the strong must necessarily feed upon him. These false and narrow notions of happiness create a gulf between man and man and between different classes of men. They give rise to class antagonism leading to violence and counter-violence and vitiate the whole atmosphere, which no longer remains congenial to liberty, equality, fraternity, peace and happiness.

This terrible aspect of 'Himsa' led Mahavira to perceive in Ahimsa the root of all piety, religiosity, duty and universal peace. He clearly saw that it is only through a perfectly 'Ahimsic' way of living that lasting peace in the world can be achieved. And in order to be able to follow the path of Ahimsa it was found necessary that one should exercise a perfect and rational control over his senses, curb his desires and do unto others what he would have others do unto him.

The most characteristic features of Mahavira's teachings are, therefore, firstly, that every human being irrespective of color, caste or sex is fully entitled to follow the path of liberation. Birth is no criterion for nobility but it is one's virtues by which he should be judged great or noble and only by those qualities, which tend to make life nobler or purer. To this end he initiated into his order persons from all castes and classes and from both the sexes and delivered his sermon in the common dialect of the masses.

Secondly, he laid the greatest emphasis on Ahimsa, which implied that one must abstain from injuring others by thought, word or deed and follow the golden rule of 'live and help others to live.'

Thirdly, one should try to be catholic in outlook and try to judge a thing from all possible view-points. One should always try to understand and appreciate the other man's point of view. Such a highly tolerant attitude can alone end all differences which otherwise might lead to terrible bloodshed.

Fourthly, a person reaps what he has sown. Everybody is fully responsible for his own actions and it is he who will enjoy the fruits of his good actions and suffer for his bad actions. He is the maker of his own destiny.

An intrinsic belief in the equality of men and a catholicity of outlook are the two great needs of modern world. Only by actively striving to live in a spirit of true co-existence resting on correct behavior and non-violence, can we perpetuate the memory of benefactors of mankind like Mahavira and bring peace and happiness to the suffering and erring humanity.

Excerpts from the JINA'S TEACHINGS

1. Know though the Truth: He who abides by the precept of truth, attains the deathless state.

2. Dharma is the most auspicious of auspicious things, and it consists in Ahimsa, self-control and penance (curbing of desires). Even angels bow to him whose mind remains ever occupied with Dharma.

3. All living beings in this world suffer for their own deeds; no one can escape the good and bad consequences of the deeds committed by himself/herself.

4. Do not, therefore, commit sinful acts, for this life is bound to come to an end. Those who are drenched in lust and engrossed in sensual pleasures blindly will, for want of self-control, be deluded.

5. Venerable is he who views creatures as his own self and sees them all alike.

6. He who looketh on creatures, high and small, of the earth, as his own self, comprehendeth this immense universe.

7. To do harm to others is to do harm to oneself. Thou art he whom thou intendest to kill. Thou art he whom thou intendest to tyrannize over.

8. Greater is the victory of one who conquers his own self than of him who conquereth thousands and thousands formidable foes in a valiant fight. Fight with thyself, why fight with foes external? Happy is he who conquereth his self by his self.

9. Anger, conceit, deceit and avarice are the four evils that defile the soul. By calmness is anger overcome, by humility conceit, by straightness deceit, and by contentment avarice.

10. All the creatures of the earth look for happiness outside themselves, but true happiness must be sought inside the depth of one's own heart.

11. Neither the body, nor family, nor caste, is adorable. Who would have respect for those that are devoid of virtue ? One that has no merit is neither a Shramana nor a Shravaka.

12. Complete absence of ill-will towards every living being and good-will for all, inspire the life and activities of a sincere aspirant who does neither cover life nor desire death.

Prayer

I bow to Him who has conquered fear, conquered all afflictions, conquered sensual vexations, conquered passions, emotions, attachment, aversion and delusion, and has conquered pleasure and pain. May my misery end and the Karmic forces be annihilated. May I attain enlightenment and meet a peaceful death. May thy feet, O' Noble Jina, the friend of all living beings, be my happy refuge !