

A Friendly Awakening:

Jainism: In The Eyes Of A Prudent Youngster

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The young writer, Priyanka Doshi, brings out the fact that 'Jainism is not only a religion; it is a beautiful way of life'. She has exemplary enthusiasm for religion. Youngsters like Priyanka lead us to believe that the future of our religious system is bright.

- DCJ

I begin by asking for hearty forgiveness ('MICHCHHAAMI DUKKADAM) from all my Jain friends to whom this article is specifically addressed. We, the youth, are responsible for the present and future of our family, society, country; and our responsibility towards all of these is very well taught to us, in schools by teachers and at home by our parents. But, don't we have any responsibility towards our religion? Who would lead it to the next generation after our respected SADHUS and SADHVIS? Does anyone even care to focus on these things before concentrating on family, careers and other social things? Why have we lost the faith and dedication towards our religion?

May be because, it is not 'cool' and happening. But does being religious outcast you from the 'in' crowd? I don't think so, but it would definitely make you stand out from the crowd; and being different is what is called being 'cool' and the 'in' thing. If you get up early for yoga or gym it is cool, but if it is introspection (PRATIKRAMAN) or worship (POOJA), why is it so 'uncool'? The Jain introspection has all the appropriate yoga positions (AASANS) for the body and doing it everyday is as healthy as going to the gym or yoga or whatever. Eating Jain food all the time may sound boring to most of you, but eating salads and dieting all the time is great, isn't it?

Jainism is not only a religion; it is a beautiful way of life. It has all the ethics and virtues required for a healthy, peaceful and mindful well being of ourselves and the society as a whole. Our TEERTHANKARS, who reinstate and reform the religious system, have been thoughtful of everything and everyone and have accordingly prescribed the Jain code of conduct. Like, for example, following the basic principle of taking food only during daylight hours (NAVAKARSHI and CHAUVIAAR) is beneficial to the body as it

helps strengthen the digestive system. Further, it is an aspect of our practice of minimizing violence because there are fewer living organisms in the environment during daylight hours. Despite this fact, we would never really follow it until and unless we are advised to do the same thing by a doctor.

Though routine activities like bathing, driving or running electricity are unavoidable by nature, we must by religious ethics, indulge in limiting the use of everything to necessity and refrain from wasting anything. This same principle has been hyped lately due to 'global warming'. Had everyone followed these ethics from the very beginning, 'global warming' wouldn't have been an issue, at least for another couple hundred years.

Non-vegetarians claim to eat animals and mammals to save the world from being flooded by animals and birds. But, what about animal rights, and, the moral and health issues involved in the killing of animals? It is utter insensitivity and cruelty to animals and we must respect the philosophy of 'live and let live.' We have no right over any living being and must not involve in harming or killing of animals for our benefit. Moreover, it is a fact that producing non-vegetarian food requires far more water and other natural resources than plant food.

Some may argue that eating plants is equivalent to eating animals as both have life and feelings. It is true but Jains believe that we cannot avoid violence completely; we can only minimize violence. However, Jainism does take nonviolence to a very strict level and respect all life including plant life. Jain diet consists of food falling in the non-injurious category such as grains, pulses, lentils, as they are only yielded when their plants become dry on their own after their life ends. Also, fruits and vegetables that become ripe on the plants and trees are taken as food. Root vegetables such as potatoes and carrots are avoided as extracting them involves the uprooting of whole plants. And, intake of liquor, cigarettes, drugs or any addictives is strictly prohibited, to help us lead a conscientious lifestyle.

In arguing on the base that even basic chores like talking and walking would harm and kill creatures, we must understand that our religion relies on the fact, 'the lesser, the better'. Though, nonviolence was preached by JIN (victor, one who has conquered his/her passions), it is practically not viable to follow complete nonviolence, but it is our duty to avoid harming or killing even the slightest and tiniest of creatures. Obviously,

some violence is involved in everything and so it is impossible to maintain a totally nonviolent lifestyle. So, to minimize the impact of undesirable thoughts and actions on our lives, just like other religious systems, Jainism preaches charity such as offering alms and food to the poor, not wasting food and being thoughtful of every life form.

It is also worthy to note that repentance and contemplation is a way of Jainism. In our daily lives, we may indulge in many inappropriate and unethical thoughts and actions, which cause the influx of bad (PAAP) karmas. Thus periodic repentance is advised to maintain a balanced state of mind. Jainism emphasizes more on our mental state rather than actions. Thus repentance should be done whole-heartedly. Granted that this is a difficult discipline, but remember 'nothing is impossible'.

I have encountered so many cases in my life that strengthen my faith in the above phrase. And such cases are best encountered in our religious capital, Palitana, where Jains from all over the world do feats like seven pilgrimages (JAATRAS), two-day fast (UPAVAAS) and more. These are practically impossible for us to do or even believe. But, remember, Jainism like other religions gives its followers great strength and courage to do great things and to win appreciation of others for good deeds.

Recently there have been some instances in the Jain society all over India, which are contrary to the basic teachings of Jainism.¹ These have caused dismay, discouragement and disappointment among the Jain youth. These cases seem to have shaken their faith in religion. But we must not forget that nothing in this world can be inculpable and it is our responsibility to fix up the root cause of such evils. Instead of losing faith, we must get together to fight the negative and make a difference.

We are Jains because we were born into a Jain family. However, being a Jain in name is not sufficient. We should follow the basic teachings of our religion, study the scriptures and practice virtues such as nonviolence, non-possessiveness and vegetarianism. We should do introspection and repentance. Following Jainism religiously leads to good physical and mental health. One may find that Jainism is too rigid and hard to follow. Nevertheless, we should respect our religion and try to follow it to the best we can. This will lead to contentment and peace in our lives as well as in society.

¹ Evidently, it is the responsibility of our religious leaders and institutions to refrain from such activities. -DCJ