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*Genuine Practice Of The Jain Religion*¹

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In the Eastern stream of religious thought, there is no place either for a Deity who shapes the universe and meddles in its matters, or for a priest invested with mysterious powers to propitiate Him.² This line of thought is well represented by Jain TEERTHANKARS like Neminath, Parshva and Mahaveer, by Aajeevik teachers like Goshala, by Saamkhya philosophers like Kapila and promulgators of Buddhism like Buddha. Since the political freedom of our land (India), there is great enthusiasm all over the country. This is particularly true among the educated class that has started to reevaluate the ancient Indian heritage in a new perspective. It is in the fitness of things that great personalities like Mahaveer and Buddha are remembered with reverence in this context. ...

Jainism lays down certain ethical standards, which are duly graded for the uplift of the individual as a social being. As long as he lives as a member of society, he owes a good deal to the society in which he is living in addition to what he owes to himself for his spiritual betterment. But if he relinquishes the world and leads the life of an ascetic, his ties with society and his responsibilities towards it are considerably reduced. In Jainism, the duties of a householder are, in miniature, the same as those of a monk. A householder, while duly carrying out his household duties, rises steadily to the status of a monk.

Nonviolence (AHIMSA) is the most important principle that permeates through the Jain outlook on life. In simple language it means the greatest possible kindness towards the animate world. Jainism has prepared a graded series of living beings and a religious person has to strive his best to minimize harm to other beings. Every living being has a sanctity and a dignity of its own and one has to respect it as one expects one's own dignity to be respected. A man of kindly temperament sheds around him an atmosphere of kindness. Jainism has firmly held that life is sacred irrespective of species, caste, color, creed or nationality. A resident of

¹ Adapted from 'Mahavira And His Philosophy Of Life', contained in Lord Mahavira And His Teachings, published by Shree Vallabhsuri Smarak Nidhi, Bombay, India, 1983.

² Thus, in the Jain religion, no religious observance or practice is carried out for pleasing any God or gods or goddesses. - D.C.J.

Hiroshima or Nagasaki is as sacred as one in New York or London: what his color is, what he eats, and how he dresses - these are external adjuncts. Thus, the practice of nonviolence is both an individual and a collective virtue; and this kindly attitude, which requires that our hearts be free from baser impulses like anger, pride, hypocrisy, greed, envy and contempt, has a positive force and a universal appeal.

The second virtue, which the Jain ethics lays stress on is good neighborliness. One should speak the truth and respect the right to property. Thus one becomes trustworthy of society, and at the same time creates an atmosphere of security for others. One's thoughts, words and acts must be consistent with each other. Further, they must create an atmosphere of confidence. A reciprocal sense of security must start with the immediate neighbor and then be gradually diffused in society at large, not only in theory but also in practice. These virtues can lead to coherent social and political groups of worthy citizens who yearn for peaceful coexistence with the well-being of the entire humanity in view.³

The third virtue is a steady and progressive restraint on acquisitiveness, which manifests itself either in the form of yearning for sensual or sex pleasure or for acquisition of property. This virtue is to be practiced in different degrees at different stages of one's spiritual or religious progress. An ideally religious man is entirely free from acquisitiveness in thought, word and deed. His last vestige of property is his body alone and his wants are the minimum required to sustain it; and this too he voluntarily relinquishes in the end when he finds that it gives him no more aid in the practice of religion. Pursuit of pleasure is an endless game. Individual inclinations and passions must be duly trained and curbed, thus, indeed does one get mental poise and spiritual balance. A voluntary limitation on property is a community virtue, which results in

³ This means that genuine practice of the Jain religion goes far beyond rituals. In many cases, the ulterior purpose of celebrations and rituals is to collect funds, a practice which provides an atmosphere for individuals to fulfill their ego. In addition to visiting temples and studying the scriptures, good practice of Jainism entails performing one's duties as a member of the society with honesty and integrity. In "Jaina Path Of Purification" on page 207, Dr. Padmanabh S. Jaini writes, "The Jaina teachers have stressed time and again that such PUJA (worship) with external objects (DRAVYA PUJA) is not efficacious unless accompanied by great peace of mind and devotion to virtues of the Jina-ideal"
- D. C. J.

social justice and fair distribution of utility commodities. The strong and the rich should not weed out the weak and the poor but put such voluntary restrictions on their instincts and possessions so that the under-privileged too have a fair chance in life. Any attempt to enforce these qualities by an external and legal authority, either on the individual or society, will lead to hypocrisy and secret criminal tendencies. It is for sensible individuals to practice these virtues, and thus set an example from which an enlightened society will gradually be developed.

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"With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion."

-Steven Weinberg