

*Some Unique Features Of Jainism:
A Make-believe Dialog With Grandma¹*

Brittany: Grandma, the sun rises in the morning. Wind blows. Clouds gather and it rains and snows. There are fires and floods. How do these things happen? Who manages these things?

Amartya: Brittany, my friend Robert said that God is behind everything that happens in the world.

Grandma: Children, modern science has found that all the events in the world take place according to the laws of nature. The natural forces and properties of various substances cause all events in the universe. For example, clouds are formed when water of rivers and oceans is converted into vapor by the heat of the sun. Then the clouds bring rain or snow.

Divya: This is easy to understand. But how does the earth go around the sun and the moon revolve around the earth?

Grandma: You know that all objects near the surface of the earth fall downwards because of the force of gravity. The sun applies its force of gravity on the earth. This gravitational force of the sun makes the earth revolve around the sun. Similarly, the moon goes around the earth because of the force of gravity of the earth.

Amartya: Grandma, my friends say that God created the whole world. What does science say about it?

Grandma: Science believes that matter and energy cannot be destroyed. This means that matter and energy have always been in the universe. In many events, some matter is converted into energy. In others, some energy is converted into matter. Thus the question of creation of the universe does not arise.

Brittany: Grandma, what does Jainism say about these things?

Grandma: Jainism says that the universe has always been there. All things in the universe change in form but not in substance. The universe has no beginning and no end.

¹ Similar to Studies In Jainism: Primer, Lesson 14. How Does All That Happen?

Divya: Grandma, does Jainism say that things and events in the universe follow the laws of nature?

Grandma: Jainism says that things change according to their own properties. When ice gets heat, it melts. This is the property of ice. When a piece of wood catches on fire, the atoms of carbon combine with oxygen atoms. The properties of atoms of carbon and oxygen make their atoms combine with each other under suitable conditions.

Brian: My friend John says that we should pray to God because God can make good things happen to us. Does Jainism teach such things? Can things happen by reciting some mantra, prayer or worship?

Grandma: As I told you all things and events take place on account of the properties of various substances. Laws of nature play an important role in everything. The laws of nature cannot be changed by prayer and worship. This is the Jain belief. However, we have good thoughts and feelings during prayers and worship. They do help in this manner.

Divya: Grandma, does Jainism say anything about energy?

Grandma: Jainism says that matter and energy are two forms of the same substance. This idea agrees with modern science.

Amartya: Grandma, this is very interesting. I see that Jainism and science are very similar.

Grandma: Amartya, you are right. In many ways, Jainism and science are similar. However, there are important differences also between science and Jainism.

Brittany: Grandma, what are some other similar things between Jainism and science?

Grandma: There is one more important likeness between Jainism and modern science. A scientist is open-minded. He is impartial. He does not have any likes or dislikes. In the same way, an intelligent and educated Jain has an open mind. He too is impartial. He does not have blind faith in any person or scripture. He studies the scriptures. He studies other things and thinks carefully. Then he accepts only what agrees with his common sense, observations and experience.

Brian: Grandma, how does Jainism differ from modern science?

Grandma: All religions including Jainism believe in soul or spirit. A soul occupies the body of each living being. Jainism says that the soul is different from the body. It is different from matter and energy. Thus soul cannot be detected by our senses. Scientists do not say anything definite about soul.

Amartya: Grandma, then why do we have to believe in soul?

Grandma: We see that there are living beings and there are non-living objects. The living beings are born, they grow up and then die. Non-living objects are not born, they do not grow on their own accord and they do not die. Living beings have feelings. They feel pleasure and pain. They have likes and dislikes. They have feelings of attachment (likes) and aversion (dislikes). The differences between living and non-living indicate that living beings have souls while non-living objects do not. When the soul leaves the body, the living being dies.

Brian: Why do living beings feel pleasure and pain? Why are we sometimes happy and sometimes sad?

Grandma: The worldly souls are impure because they are associated with matter. We are worldly souls. We interact with other living beings. We are affected by our surroundings. Our lives are influenced by our circumstances. We react to such influences and so we feel pleasure and pain.

Divya: My friend Raju was saying that we suffer on account of our bad karma. Is it true?

Grandma: In fact, we have good and bad thoughts and feelings when we interact with our surroundings and react to the events in our lives. These thoughts and feelings are called abstract karma. Jainism says that such thoughts and feelings lead to the bondage of very fine particles of matter called material karma. These karmas may have some positive or negative effect on our lives at present and in future.

Amartya: If we have bad karma, how can we make our lives better?

Grandma: We should try our best to avoid bad things. However, sometimes, bad things happen in spite of our good intentions and efforts. In such cases, we should not react to painful and unpleasant things in a negative way. We should accept them as part of life. This

way of thinking leads to a peaceful life. We can be really happy by having such attitude.

Brian: Why is human life said to be the highest form of life?

Grandma: Human beings can think. Thus they have the most control over their lives. In this respect, we belong to the highest form of life. We can lessen attachment and aversion by having good thoughts and feelings. We can do good deeds. Thus we can lessen the effect of bad karma. In this manner, we can ultimately get rid of all karma.

Brittany: What happens when a soul rids itself of all karmas?

Grandma: A soul without the bondage of karma becomes a SIDDHA (God). Such pure soul has no attachment and aversion. It serves as an ideal for the worldly souls. Having no attachment and aversion, a pure soul is not interested in the things and events of the universe. It does not favor or punish anyone.

Divya: Jains believe that each pure soul (SIDDHA) is God. Accordingly, God does not have any likes and dislikes. So he does not punish or reward the living beings. He does not run the universe. He also did not create the universe. The various things in the universe interact with each other. All events in the universe take place in this manner. Everything occurs according to the laws of nature. Right grandma?

Grandma: Absolutely right, Divya. These are the Jain beliefs. Jains believe that things like birth and death, disease and old age, success and failure, and, pain and suffering, are part of nature. No God or gods, prayers or worship, mantras or charms can help us in avoiding failures, pain, suffering and gloom. The only thing we can do is to give everything careful thought and do our best. Even then if we meet failures, disease and pain, we accept them without getting upset. Also, when we succeed, we do not become too elated or proud.

Brian: We have learned some science in school. These ideas go well with science. They make a lot of sense and go a long way in explaining the ups and downs of life, and teach us how to deal with them calmly and rationally.

All: Grandma, these ideas of Jainism are very interesting.