

From Religious Books:

Jainism: Principles And Practice

Based on excerpts from 'AHIMSA - The Science of Peace'
by Surendra Bothara,
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Origin of religion:

“Man, when he first opened his eyes, must have been astonished to see the infinite varieties of things and phenomena around him. When he closed his eyes, he must have been equally astonished with his capacity to look into the world within. This capacity of observing the self in association with the environs as well as independently made him unique in the animal kingdom. That was the long journey into the labyrinth of knowledge ... through unbiased investigation, just one step on just one of the pathways of that hitherto unraveled labyrinth; the pathway known as Jainism. ...

Jainism and its diversion:

“Most of what we know as Jainism today is attributed to Mahaveer and the lineage of his followers. One of the most revolutionary and radical thinkers of all times, Mahaveer developed a unique method of analysis which could be applied to any facet of two cardinal fundamentals: life and matter. He struck at the roots of blind faith, biased dogmas and authoritative absolutism with the open minded, bold and simple principle of multiplicity of viewpoints (ANEKAANTAVAAD/SYAADAVAAD) - the first ever concept of relativity of truth.

“As happens with almost every philosophy, Jain philosophy suffered under the weight of decaying traditions with passage of time. It stagnated and degenerated into a social system infested with ever multiplying misinterpretations. It became divided into sects and subsects. In spite of the array of brilliant scholars and original thinkers in its fold, Jain philosophy has, for all practical purposes, become a jumble of dogmas, idiosyncrasies, and sectarian fights on petty issues.

“Although known as the most ardent opposition to ritualistic religions, it appears to have succumbed to ritualism. ... Instead of following the path of right knowledge, right perception and right conduct, as was prescribed by its founders, the Jains have been sidetracked into petty fights of factionalism and religious power seeking. In this process, a large part of true knowledge has been forgotten and irretrievably lost.

Return to basics:

“While much of the profound knowledge of Jains has become extinct, whatever still remains buried in literature is enough for generations of scholars to study, evaluate, and revive for the benefit of humanity. The ideas put forth by the Jain thinkers were revolutionary not only for their times but continue to be so even today. In the remote past, when the creation of earth and sky, and all we see was attributed to some omnipotent all pervading entity by almost every school of thought, the Jains said that the universe is without a beginning, ever changing and endless.

“Mahaveer expressed the idea in simple words - ‘There never was, neither is, nor will be a moment when this universe did not exist, is not existing, and will not exist. But at the same time, its apparent form continues to change with the passage of time.’ Such knowledge should never be neglected or discarded, and if frozen within the ice of misdirected tradition, it should be thawed out and revived.

...

The process of reform:

“Although the basis will be traditionally accepted interpretations, the modern approach may open new insight and direction. It may even go against the tradition. It should not be taken as an attack on the faith of the followers of Jainism. It should be taken in the spirit that when truth is sought for, it is inevitable that the tradition of rituals and dogmas comes under heavy and unflinching attack. Reforms are inevitable result of such critical but constructive analysis.

“Any reforms coming from any source should be considered with an open mind before acceptance or rejection. Reforms have never been denied by the authors of Jain principles, because if they are healthy they are within the framework of the basics. The form of these principles, which most of us know and try to follow, is nothing but social religion, or the applied form of the Jain philosophy. As such, there should be no bias against healthy reforms.”

- Excerpts from Preface, pages XXVII-XXXI

Gautam said, 'Monks, accept not what I say as truth because it is backed by tradition, or because it is the law of the land, or because it sounds good, or because it comes from your teacher. Accept as truth only that which is sagaciously acceptable to reason as well as sentiment.'

- ANGUTTAR NIKAAYA

All that is ancient (old) is not always true; whatever is new is not always faultless. The wise accept the best after proper examination and discrimination. Only the foolish depend on interpretation by others and follow blindly.

- Kalidas in MALVIKAAGNIMITRA