



Ahimsa Hand



Equality Policy Unit

'everyone included, everyone involved'

Briefing note: **Jainism**

Key beliefs

Jainism places great importance on the spiritual independence and equality of all life with a particular emphasis on non-violence. Jains seek to attain Moksha, through Vrata or restraint. Through this they realise Keval Gnan, or the true nature of the soul. There are no Gods in the received sense in Jainism, rather exemplary teachers, who help humans achieve liberation, through their example. The three guiding principles of Jainism, (the three jewels), are:

- Right belief
- Right knowledge
- Right conduct

The supreme principle of Jain living is non-violence (ahimsa). Jainism is one of the world's oldest religions and originated in India, where the majority of its followers still live today. Jainism believes that all living things (animals and plants) have souls and are of equal value.

Places of worship

Jain temples range from the immense and elaborate to the very plainest of worship rooms. Monks and nuns in the Jain religion are key figures and role models, as the religion does not have formal priests or intermediaries. Jain prayers tend to recall the great qualities of the tirthankaras and remind the individual of various teachings. Every day most Jains bow and say their universal prayer, the Namokar Mantra.

Food and drink

Jains are strict vegetarians; it is unacceptable to harm a living thing. For this reason, some Jains are not just vegetarians but also "fruitarians" they eat only fruit, nuts and milk. These foods are acceptable because they are only the by-products of the living beings and not the living beings themselves.

Festivals and days of worship

Jains do not engage in traditionally conceived worship, as they do not embrace the concept of the Creator God. However they do celebrate specific events and festivals.

Mahavira Jayanti - A celebration of the birth of Mahavira (the founder of Jainism). Celebrations include community worship, processions, and other devotional and spiritual activities.

Paryushana – signifies a time of reflection and repentance for the Jain devotee. This festival consists of eight days of intensive fasting, repentance and puga's. It is also a festival of forgiveness.

Diwali – This festival is celebrated throughout all of India. In Jainism it has special significance, as on this day in 537 BCE, (according to Svetambara tradition) that Mahavira gave his last teachings and attained ultimate liberation. The day after Diwali marks the beginning of the New Year in their calendar.

Kartak Purnima – Is an important festival. This is considered to be an auspicious time for pilgrimage to sacred sites associated with the Jain religion.

Mauna Agyaras - This is a daylong observance of fasting and silence.



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Texts and denominations

The sacred texts of the Jains are called Agamas. The two main branches of Jainism share many of the same sacred texts but since their split in the fifth century C.E, they have developed different traditions. The most ancient texts derive from Mahavia and were handed down orally in the monastic communities. The sacred literature was not written down until about 500 C.E.

The Jain faith is divided into two major sects, the Digambaras (sky clad) and the Shevtambaras (white clad). The sacred texts of Jainism are principally the teachings of Mahavira in various sources. The two main sects, agree on the basics of Jainism, with philosophical differences principally effecting monks and nuns. They disagree on:

- details of the life of Mahavira,
- the spiritual status of women,
- whether monks should wear clothes,
- rituals,
- which texts should be accepted as scripture.

The Digambara sect is more traditional in outlook, reflecting more closely Jain Dharma at the time of Mahavira.

Q For further information on faith dates and religious festivals follow this link: <http://www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/for-staff/good-practice-guidance/faith-calendar-and-dates-of-religious-festivals/>

* This information sheet was produced using the 'Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation, information about the Foundation is available here <http://www.thefrf.org/work/archive>.

