

# Jain Way of Life and Ethical Living and Environment

## 1.0 Jain Ethics

Jainism states that; earth, water, fire, air, and vegetation which constitute the five basic elements of our environment, possess life. They possess one sense which is the sense of touch. Animals and human beings possess all five senses and a mind. The five senses are: touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing.

Human beings are also blessed with advanced developed thinking as compared to animals. Therefore, humanity is responsible for achieving oneness and harmony among all living beings including the environment, through **compassionate living**, and **disciplined behavior**.

Lord Mahāvīr's entire life was full of compassion and was an example of how to live in perfect harmony with nature and provide utmost respect for the environment.

Lord Mahāvīr made the following profound statements of all times:

- "All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence". This is an ancient Jain scriptural aphorism of Tattvārtha sutra.
- "One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation, disregards his own existence" (Āchārāṅga sutra).
- "We harm and kill other lives because of our greed and possessiveness" (Shrāvakāchār).

Since all lives are interconnected, one should realize that, "**if we harm ONE we harm ALL Living Beings**" and "Greed, Possession and Possessiveness are the primary causes of all violence as well as imbalance in the environment".

These ancient statements form the basis of the modern science of ecology and are refreshingly contemporary in their promises.

The main theme of Lord Mahāvīr's teaching:

- Ahimsa (Non-violence) is respect for the life of all living beings.
- Aparigraha (Non-possession / Non-possessiveness) stems from respect for the other lives as well as the environment.
- Anekāntavāda (Non-one-sidedness/ Open Mindedness) is respect for the views of the other because Truth has many sides.

## 2.0 Survival of Life and Ethical Living

It is not possible to sustain human life with absolute non-violence and absolute non-possession. **To live a life one needs to eat organic food which is a life by itself according to Jainism.** Also one needs minimal clothes and shelter. Hence the destruction of one or the other form of life and limited possession are essential for human survival. The goal of Jainism is to minimize the negative impact of our existence to other living beings and environment.

Jainism states that for our survival if we hurt or destroy:

- A living being with five senses (animals, birds, and fish etc.), it creates maximum pain and their destruction involves greater violence. At the same time, killing five-sensed beings has greater negative impact on the environment.
- A living being with one sense (plants and vegetables), it feels minimum pain and its destruction involves minimum violence and it produces a minimum negative impact to the environment.

Hence, Jainism advocates vegetarianism and is against raising animals for food for ethical, spiritual, as well as environmental reasons.

All Jains believe in vegetarianism and most Jains are vegetarians. Hence it is of no value to the Jain community at large to discuss the cruelty to animals and death inflicted by the meat industry.

However a majority of Jains consume dairy products and because animals are not directly killed during the milking operation, these Jains justify that their consumption of dairy products is **not in violation of the fundamental principle of Ahimsa**.

This may be true in olden times because at that time the cows were treated as a part of the family and only excess milk was consumed by the people after feeding their calves. Also the agricultural industry was not producing enough crop to feed the entire population. Hence it was necessary to consume dairy products for our survival.

However, the output of modern agricultural production is such that it can feed the entire world several times over. Also the dairy industry is commercialized. Dairy cows are treated as milk producing machines. The dairy industry wants the maximum production of milk with minimum expense. It inflicts terrible cruelty on cows.

As there is a huge demand for dairy products, the modern dairy industries have to raise animals on a mass scale. Raising large numbers of animals for food creates a significant ethical problem and environmental imbalance because it involves a significantly greater use of natural resources than for the equivalent amount of plant food. The cruelty to animals and the impact on the environment by this industry is unimaginable. All animal use involves treating animals as our property, our slaves.

### **3.0 Ethical Living and Dairy Product**

The following list summarizes some of the violence (Himsa) inflicted on animals used in the production of dairy products. These problems exist in the large factory farm in the U.S. or Europe as well as in the small dairy farm in India or anywhere else in the world. I speak from experience; I have visited several dairy farms in USA and many small dairy farms in India and observed these practices.

- Milk cows are kept pregnant all the time. They are subject to artificial insemination or some other practices that ensure the maximum production of milk.
- Approximately 95% male and 65% of female baby calves are sold to the veal or beef industry, where they are slaughtered in six months to three years in the west. Sometimes, farmers let the male calf die of hunger as practiced in several villages of India (I have observed this practice in our holy city of Palitana).
- Milk cows are sold to slaughterhouses after five to six years of age when their milk production yield drops more than 30% naturally due to old age. This is true in India more than 80% to 90% of the time. The life expectancy of a dairy cow is 15 to 20 years.
- Hormones and antibiotics are fed or injected daily to increase the milk yield (except – organic dairy farms). Almost all small dairies in India use hormones and antibiotics.

Because the cows are kept continually pregnant and are fed or injected daily with hormones and antibiotics, they produce about six to seven times more milk than what they would produce normally and naturally (example - about 80 years ago cows were milked twice a day and total daily milk yield was about 15 to 20% than of current yield). In this way, farmers try to meet the growing demand of dairy products without increasing the number of cows.

To produce very large quantity of milk in a day, the cow's body needs to work very hard. After about five years of this intense stress, the cow's body breaks down and her milk production yield drops significantly. At this time she is sent to a slaughterhouse legally in western world and in most states illegally in India. There exist many illegal slaughterhouses in India. I have visited few of them in Ahmedabad and other places. Less than 1.0% cows end-up in the cow shelter place called "Panjarapol" in India.

#### **3.1 Organic Dairy Farm:**

The Organic dairy farm is generally smaller than the huge factory-style farm. It does not use antibiotics, pesticides, and hormones on the cows. They do not add any milk additives into the milk. However, these farms also keep the cows continually pregnant, sell approximately 80% of calves to the veal or beef industry, and cows are sold to slaughterhouse after five or six years of life. Therefore, organic milk is almost as cruel as regular milk.

### **3.2 Ecological Impact of the Dairy Industry**

The following data summarizes the magnitude of cruelty and the impact on the environment. These data are taken either from USDA or other similar sources.

#### **1. Waste Released in Environment**

In the USA alone, more than 500,000 cows, hogs, and other animals, and 24 million chickens are killed every day. Waste released into the environment by the US meat and dairy industry is 230,000 pounds per second, polluting our land, air and water systems.

#### **2. Greenhouse Effect**

The world's 1.3 billion cows annually produce 100 million tons of methane, which is a powerful greenhouse gas and traps 25 times as much solar heat as carbon dioxide.

#### **3. Water Consumption**

Livestock (cattle, calves, hogs or pigs) production accounts for more than half of all the water consumed in the USA. To produce one lb of meat, an average of 2,500 gallons of water is used, while one lb of potato, wheat or rice requires an average of 50 to 250 gallons of water.

#### **4. Land Usage**

A third of the surface of North America is devoted to grazing. Half of American croplands grow livestock feed for the dairy and meat industries. In the USA, this represents 220 million acres of land, in Brazil 25 million acres, and half of the forests in Central America have been deforested for livestock production.

#### **5. Impact on Health**

Over the past more than 25 to 50 years of medical study indicated that consumption of meat and dairy products is associated with the major causes of disease and death among middle and upper class people around the world: heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, prostate cancer, and even fractures. Some medical studies have observed that as milk consumption increases, fractures actually increase, which shows, contrary to advertising, that consuming calcium in milk does not protect people.

**“Not only meats, but also dairy foods, contribute to the high fat and cholesterol diets which are major causes for heart disease and type 2 diabetes”. “Dairy foods are linked to prostate cancer and the development of type 1 diabetes”.**

### **4.0 Jain Way of Life**

The Jain Way of Life is very ethical and it respects and honors the Earth and the Environment. **Our scriptures indicate that we need to practice our religion based on time, place and the environment that we live in.**

A cow is slaughtered immediately in meat production, while during milk production cycle the cow is:

- Tortured and tied most of the time at one place
- Kept pregnant
- Fed or injected with hormones and antibiotics

- Forced her to produce 5 to 7 times more milk than her natural ability

And almost all dairy cows are slaughtered after five or six years of their life even though their life expectancy is 15 to 20 years. It seems that the cruelty in the production of milk is as bad as the cruelty associated with the production of meat.

From the point of view of an environmental degradation, all animal based products such as milk, leather, silk, and wool cause significant harm to the environment relative to the plant base products. Various studies indicate that the degradation is about 7 to 10 times higher.

Both Shvetāmbar and Digambar sects use milk and milk products in temple rituals. This is an ancient tradition. We should reevaluate the usage of dairy products (ghee for ārti, milk and sweets for puṣā etc.) in the temple rituals under the new technological environment. Our scriptures indicate that no tradition is to be followed blindly. **The highest Jain principle of non-violence (hurting or killing of five sensed animals)** should not be compromised under any circumstances.

Milk and other products represent certain religious symbols in Jain rituals. However, the product we use in the rituals must be of a non-violent source. The intention of our rituals is to inspire us to grow spiritually. The net outcome of the rituals should result in the reduction of our ego, greed, anger, lust, and attachments. Milk and other dairy products, which involve violence, can not help us to grow spiritually.

In our rituals, we should substitute the regular milk with simple water or soya bean or almond milk, vegetable oil for ghee which is used in deevo, dry nuts for various types of sweets, and we should serve only plant base pure vegetarian (vegan) meals during any religious function.

Please remember that if we consume dairy products for our personal use we are responsible individually for our actions and the resulting karma or sins. However if we use the dairy products in the temples and religious functions, it is considered that the entire community is involved in the sin. For this reason we do not use root vegetables in religious programs even though more than 95% of Jains of North America consume root vegetables at home or outside.

**Almost all Jain youth (YJA and YJP youth) of North America accept the fact that extreme cruelty to cows exist in the dairy industry and that the usage of dairy products in religious functions grossly violates our basic principles of Ahimsa.** Our youth will greatly appreciate if we make above changes in our rituals.

The New York Times reports that - mostly for ethical reason, more than six million Americans are vegan. This is about 2% of the population. About 15% of Jain youth are vegan (strictly vegetarian) but not even 1.0% of Jain adults are vegan in North America. This indicates that our youth are more knowledgeable than the Jain scholars and adults with regards to the cruelty caused by dairy industries to the cows. In conclusion I would state that more than 98% of the milk production of the world inflicts pain, sufferings to the cows and slaughtered them after 5 years of their productive life.

I sincerely apologize to the people whose feelings got hurt because of this article.

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