

Jainism & Environment

a precursor to modern day ecology





A profound truth for all times

“One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation, disregards his own existence which is entwined with them”.

- Mahavir (599-527 BC)





Mahavir

- Not only did he preach on environmental and ecological issues, but his entire life was an example of how to live in perfect harmony with the environment.



The ancient Jain scriptural aphorism

- Parasparopgraho Jivānam
All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence.
- Refreshingly contemporary in its premise and in its promise.
- Forms the basis of the modern day science of ecology.



What does Jainism teach about ecology?

- According to the Tattvārtha Sutra
there are 8,400,000 species of living beings
– each of which is part of the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth, and is therefore precious.
- They are Sheltered, fed, nurtured and allowed to grow
- Humans are not satisfied with the bounty of nature



What does Jainism teach about ecology?

- Ahimsä: non-violence.
 - Ahimsä means more than not hurting others
 - It also means not intending to cause harm, physical, mental or spiritual, to any part of nature.



What does Jainism teach about ecology?

Compassion.

- This is the positive aspect of non-violence: to practice an attitude of compassion towards all life.
- Jains pray that forgiveness and friendliness may reign throughout the world and that all living beings may cherish each other.



What does Jainism teach about ecology?

Interdependence.

- This ancient Jain principle teaches that all of nature is bound together, and says that if one does not care for nature one does not care for oneself.



What does Jainism teach about ecology?

Non-Possessiveness/Self-restraint.

- An important Jain principle is not to waste the gifts of nature, and even to reduce one's needs and wants as far as possible.



Non-violence and Compassion

- Ahimsa is disciplined behavior towards every living being - *Dashvaikalika Sutra (6/9)*
- Absence of violence of any sort towards all beings at all times is Ahimsa. - *Yogasutra*
- In its absolute definition, ‘Ahimsa is the absence of destructive thoughts, feelings or attitude’



Practice of compassionate living

- Respect for the lives of others and for the environment we live in.
- Avoidance of Animal based foods and products.
- Service to *lift someone who is down trodden.*



Practice of compassionate living

Ahimsa is not merely non participation in destructive activities; it principally manifests itself in constructive activities and service which leads to the upward growth of man.

- Acharya Vinoba Bhave





Non-possessiveness / Self discipline



Self-discipline
requires an
understanding of
oneself in relation
to one's
environment



Non-possessiveness / Self discipline



It also requires an awareness of the ways in which one can live in harmony with all creatures of this universe.



Mahavirswami said

- “Aparigraha seve attai karanti prananam behanam”
- Meaning, because of our possessiveness we kill other lives. Our greed, our possessiveness is the primary cause of all violence as well as imbalance in the environment.



“What is (Possessiveness)?”

- Attachment
- Desire
- Craving
- Urge
- Passion
- Possessive attitude



“What is Possessiveness?”

- Possessiveness is a reaction to fear of loosing something or someone.
- Insecurity within leads to possessiveness outside.
- At the same time possessiveness results in greed - mind wants more and more - a never ending process.
- More you possess, more the fear of loosing and therefore more insecurity - a vicious circle



Overcoming Attachments

- Body is impermanent – soul is eternal
- What takes birth must die
- “This too shall pass”
- Knowing the transient nature of things helps overcome attachment to body as well as to physical substances
- True renunciation is mental, not necessarily physical