



Viren, Jain

Viren is used to answering people's questions about his religion.

What's it like to be a Jain? I suppose that one thing you get as a Jain, is that people say, 'I've never heard of that'. I don't mind – I'm happy to talk about it.

The Jain Centre in Leicester was purchased by my community in the year that I was born. This particular Jain Centre is the first place of its kind in Britain. There are about 30,000 of us altogether, and practically every weekend there are two or three coaches from London or other parts of the UK coming to the Centre.

Viren explains some key Jain beliefs:

- **Mahavira.** Mahavira is our 'Pathmaker'. We follow him for our example; what he managed to do was what very few achieve, to get out of the cycle of birth and death.
- **Tolerance and respect.** Pluralism is a very strong feeling in Jainism; not only should you be tolerant of other religions, but they are just looked on as other paths up the mountain. Whenever we're taught about religion, we're always taught that your view is not the only view; it's important to firstly listen and then accept that the other view has validity too. That has massive implications where a lot of people point to a god-figure or force and say, 'This is where we came from'; Jainism doesn't have that. So, someone who is a believer in another tradition could be a 'better Jain' than me if that person lived and practised the ethics of Jainism although they believed something different.
- **Code of conduct.** Within Jainism there are values that are written down – a code of conduct rather than a rulebook. We believe that the natural world has always been here, and while we believe that there are heavenly beings who influence things that happen, and the cycle of birth and death, at the end of the day it's you yourself who are responsible. So we take the view that your actions and feelings are more important than your beliefs.

Viren explains why he decided to train as a doctor:

The first principle of Jainism is *ahimsa* (nonviolence). This means not hurting but also actively trying to minimise hurt in the world. It is extremely hard to live totally harmlessly, but being minimisers of pain matters and makes a difference.

One of the main things that drove my decision to be a doctor (I'm training as a house officer at the moment) is to be a healer, to make a difference, to help the sorrowing. Compassion is the value that fits with this.

The cycle of birth and death teaches me that the body is the temporary residence of the soul. When a person dies, you do feel that this isn't the end. I've always felt that the medicine and science isn't the core of the doctor's job. It's amazing how many times listening is the thing that makes the difference.

Vegetarianism is a vital part of Jain life.

If people only know one thing about Jains it is probably that we are vegetarian, but there's more to our view of what it's good to eat than that.

We know that plants are alive, and we don't want to destroy that life needlessly. The strictest Jains won't eat things that grow underground and stick to green vegetables and fruit; with these, you don't have to kill the plant to eat from it, so that's better.

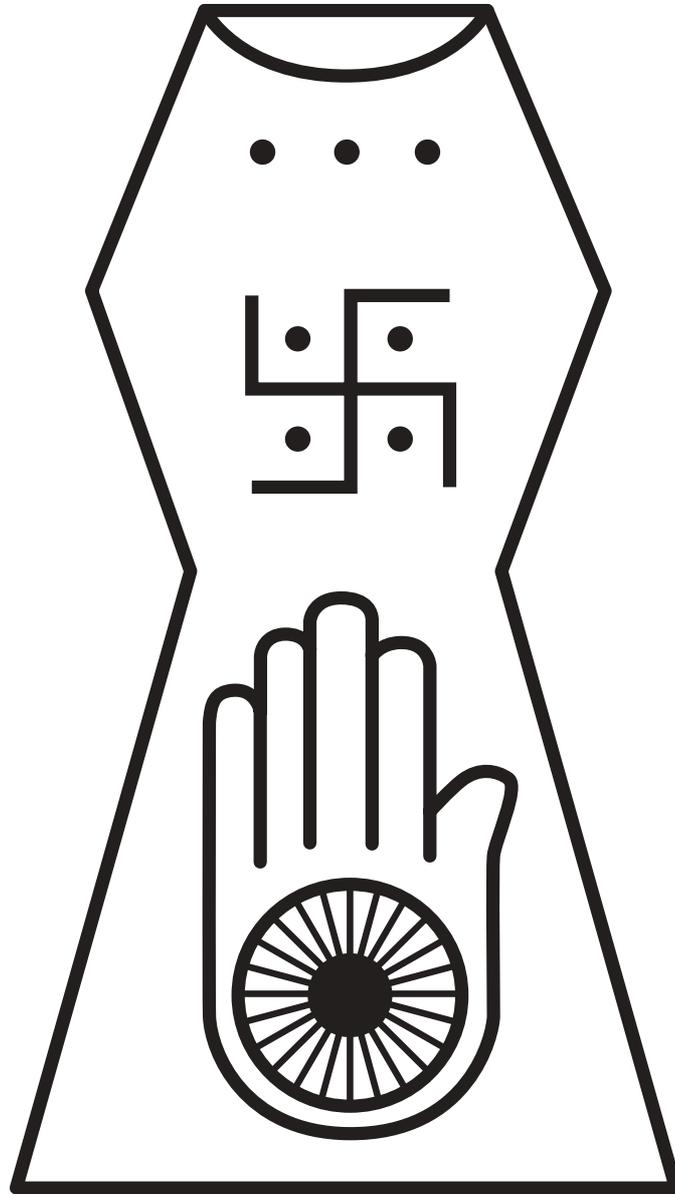
Across the spectrum of living things, people choose how much damage or harm they are going to inflict. We try to choose to do the least possible harm.

I personally live on a vegetarian diet. I do usually eat potatoes and other root vegetables but I often avoid them. At certain times of the year, or when I'm going through a more religious patch, then I'll try and abstain more than usual.

Viren, Jain



May all living beings in the world be happy
May nobody ever feel distressed
May the people of the world renounce enmity, sin, pride
And sing the songs of joy every day.
May truth be the topic of house-talk in every home
May evil be scarce
May people increase their knowledge and conduct
And thereby enjoy the blessed fruit of human birth.
Jain Prayers & Songs 11,12



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