

Dharma and Logo: A Jain Perspective

I would like to thank His Eminence Cardinal Tauran and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID) for inviting me as a representative from the Jain community to participate and express our views.

In this paper, we will first look at the definition and meaning of dharma, especially from the Jain perspective, and the relevance of this definition to the path of salvation. We will then discuss the Jain logo, which symbolises this path and how it encompasses the Jain universe and nature of reality.

So let's look at what is meant by dharma?

Dharma is usually translated as 'religion' but it has deeper connotations from the perspective of Indic faiths, which again varies slightly between each of the Indic religions.

Dictionary.com defines 'religion' as:

1. the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods:
2. a particular system of faith and worship
3. a pursuit or interest followed with great devotion

Dharma in Jainism means true or inherent nature of a substance. Prakrit quote, *Vatthu sahavo dhammo*, translates as 'the inherent, permanent quality of a substance is its dharma'. The substance could be *jiva* which means soul or *ajiva* which means matter. *Jiva* is sentient and living, while *ajiva* is non-sentient or non-life or physical matter. For the Jains, *jiva* or the soul is the subject of interest.

It has been propounded by Omniscient gods that the inherent qualities of the *jiva* are: infinite perception, infinite knowledge, infinite energy and infinite bliss. This is apparent from a general observation that every living being wants happiness and all its activities are geared towards achieving this. Our energy is spent on striving to know or learn more. However, knowledge and happiness is within us as it is the inherent quality of the soul. This inherent quality cannot be separated from the substance, for example sweetness cannot be removed from sugar.

The inherent qualities of matter are: touch, taste, smell and colour which are perceptible to our senses.

Life forms in their embodied state exhibit dual nature, both of the soul as well as matter, as body is physical matter.

Due to ignorance, one has considered the body as one's true identity, rather than the soul. In this state of ignorance we have conceded to the whims of bodily and sensual desires. From the Jain perspective salvation is achieved when one realises one's true nature. The path of salvation is shown by the *Jina* and the term *Jina* means victorious, one who has conquered the illusive mastery of the senses and mind, and realised or experienced the true self or the soul. One who follows the teaching of a *Jina* is a Jain.

Dharma in Jainism is experiencing the true nature of the soul through 'righteousness'. In fact, righteousness is universal *dharma*, as righteousness is preached by all religions.

The path for dharma has two aspects: the external or rituals which give identity to the religion and the internal which is ethical conduct through practise of forgiveness, mercy, charity and equanimity in daily life. These qualities are actually that of the soul which blossom through nurture and practise. We have seen through history of our religions that the external aspect can change over time, but the internal, which is the inherent aspect remains.

Through practise of dharma, one achieves liberation, the 'highest spiritual state' called *moksha*, and one is no longer bound in the cycle of transmigration.

For the Jains, the *Jinas* are the superhuman powers or gods who have shown how to lead an ethical life through practise of non-violence or *ahimsa* that will lead to salvation. The *Jinas* have also shown the temporal journey of the soul in its various aspects and conditions, and where it can reside at any particular time in the Jain *Loka* or universe. At this juncture, we can discuss the Jain logo which explains the Jain universe. The logo currently in use is shown on the slide.

Logos are symbols which give identity to an organisation. They can represent its ethos or core values. Symbols convey messages and can be understood transcending language barriers. We see symbols in everyday life, like the danger warning sign which is a yellow triangle with an exclamation mark within.



This contemporary Jain logo was created in 1975 to commemorate the 2500th anniversary of the liberation of Bhagwan Mahavira who is the last *Jina* of the current era.

The Jain universe as depicted in the scriptures is called the *Loka-purusha* or the ‘cosmic man’. The Jain symbol is in the shape of the ‘cosmic man’ standing arms akimbo, where the body represents the habitable universe. This concept is also used in other religions, like Hindu and Norse. In Hinduism the body is a microcosmic form of the Cosmic Being Himself, representing His entire creation down to the beings and the worlds. Reference to the class system or *varna* comes from the Rig Veda where it is explained that the four *varnas* that is *brahmins* came from the mouth, *kshatriyas* from the arms, *vaishyas* from thighs and *shudras* from feet of the Purusha, the cosmic man. The parts of the body correlate to the function of each of these classes where the *brahmins* recite the scriptures, the *kshatriyas* are protectors or warriors, *vaishyas* are business people and *shudras* do the menial work. In Nordic mythology, the first being was Ymir, a primeval giant. His flesh was used for creating the earth and his blood for the sea. His skull, held up by four dwarves, was used to create the heaven. Ymir's eyebrows were used to create a place where the human race could live in; a place called Midgard or Middle Earth.

The Jain *Loka-purusha* depicts the three worlds of the universe. In Jainism, the correlation of the cosmic man is with the qualities rather than function of transmigrating lives which go through innumerable cycles of death and rebirth over time. The lower world, called the *adholoka*, is where the hellish beings live mainly with basal instincts, hence in the lower region of the cosmic man. The middle region, the waist of the cosmic man is called *madhyaloka*, which is neutral and where humans reside together with plant and animal life. It is from here one can progress spiritually. The upper region is the auspicious part of the cosmic man called *urdhvaloka*, and it comprises of the heavens where celestial beings or *devas* reside. They mainly enjoy the fruit of accrued merits or *punya* from previous lives. At the apex, which is the head of the cosmic man, is the abode of the emancipated souls the

siddhashila. The human head is the locus of the intellect and in the cosmic man it is also where the pure souls endowed with omniscience reside. One can see that the auspicious regions are located above the waist, and inauspicious is below the waist where waste is disposed.

The significance of the *loka* shaped as a human is indicative of human birth as the only form from which one can progress spiritually and attain salvation, through choice and control of desires. Without control there is no difference between human and animal.

Below the logo is a quote from the scriptures, *Parasparopagraho jivanam* which translates as 'Souls render service to one another'. It means "all life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence" and is considered as a motto of Jainism because it stresses the philosophy of non-violence and ecological harmony.

Inside the shape, starting at the bottom, there is an open hand. This gesture is called *abhaya mudra* which conveys 'fearlessness'. The open hand is to remind believers to always stop and think before acting, specifically to obey the cardinal principle of the Jain faith – *ahimsa* or non-violence which is written in the wheel. *Ahimsa* refers not only to wars and visible manifest acts of violence but also to violence in the hearts and minds of human beings, their lack of concern and compassion for their fellow humans and for the natural world. The wheel represents the continual cycle of rebirth, through which the soul is fated to pass until it is liberated when it reaches the highest level of spiritual purity. Someone who does harm and does not follow the principles of Jainism remains trapped in this cycle. The 24 spokes of the wheel symbolise the teachings of the 24 *Jinas*, which help the believers to make spiritual progress towards enlightenment and emancipation from the cycle of rebirth.

Above the open hand is the sign of the *svastika* which represents the four modes of existence - human, celestial, animal and hell depending on the individual soul's karmic burden. Here, it should be emphasised that the *svastika* is an ancient Indian symbol also used by the Hindus. However, in 1920s the *svastika* gained recognition as the official emblem of the Nazi party and created a different nuance. For this reason the *svastika* is not depicted publicly in Jain places of worship, and in print to avoid misinterpretation.

The set of three dots symbolises the three jewels of Jainism, the *Ratnatraya*, which depicts the path of salvation, *samyag darshan*, *samyag jnana* and *samyag charitra*. It represents right perception, right knowledge and right conduct. One needs all three to attain salvation or *moksha*.

The crescent at the apex represents the *siddhashila*, the abode of the pure souls and the dot within it as the liberated soul.

Conclusion

Dharma in Jainism is abiding to true quality of *jiva* or soul. Dharma means righteousness and is the path that will lead to our true nature which is salvation through ethical code of conduct. As human beings we have the capacity for spiritual progress, through choice and discrimination of good and evil to achieve the true nature of the soul. The *Jinas* have shown us this path which is through practise of *ahimsa* and code of disciplined conduct. Although the external nature of the path in the form of rituals may change over time, its internal or inherent nature, the dharma, which is practise like forgiveness, mercy, charity and equanimity, will not change.

The principles, practise and goal in Jainism are succinctly represented by the Jain logo. It depicts Jain reality, the universe, which is the *loka* in the form of a cosmic man, *lok-purusha*, with transmigration through the four realms, the practice of *ahimsa* through right perception, right knowledge and right conduct, which is the path to salvation or *moksha*.

Thank you!

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