

# Lighting Humanity in the World: The Ethical and Psycho-Philosophical Teachings of Jainism

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## Abstract

In the contemporary era, humanity stands at a critical juncture where rapid technological advancements have bridged physical distances but simultaneously exacerbated psychological fragmentation and social alienation. This shift has fostered a state of "attitude-behavior inconsistency," where ethical values frequently clash with survival instincts in a competitive secular world. This article explores the concept of "Lighting Humanity" within Jain philosophy, positioning it not as an ancient relic but as a living, timeless wisdom that offers profound solutions to these modern crises. Grounded in the teachings of the 24th Tirthankara, Lord Mahavira, and the extensive lineage of twenty-three spiritual predecessors, "Lighting Humanity" represents a psycho-philosophical framework aimed at restructuring human conduct through compassion, non-violence, and environmental harmony.

The study begins by examining the ontological foundations of Jainism, where every soul (Jiva) is viewed as potentially divine, possessing infinite knowledge. The process of "Lighting Humanity" is thus defined as uncovering this inherent light by shedding "karmic dust" through ethical living. The research provides a comparative analysis of Ahimsa (non-violence), bridging ancient discipline with modern environmental ethics and Western psychological models. It demonstrates how the Jain worldview mirrors the "Deep Ecology" movement by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms and offering a moral foundation for sustainability and responsible consumption. Psychologically, the practice of Ahimsa and Kshama (forgiveness) is compared to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), suggesting that Jain principles are effective tools for emotional regulation and attaining inner peace.

Furthermore, the article utilizes case studies, including the Gandhian synthesis of Satyagraha and modern movements like Minimalism and Veganism to illustrate the practical utility of Jain precepts in global ethical reform. An in-depth scriptural analysis of the Tattvartha Sutra and the Acharanga Sutra reveals the rigorous codification of the Five Vows (Mahavratas), identifying internal passions as the root cause of external harm. A unique "Scientific Connection" is also established, highlighting Jainism's sophisticated, pre-modern recognition of microscopic life (Nigoda). This "biological non-violence" anticipates modern microbiology and ecology, promoting the principle of Parasparopagraho Jivanam (interdependence). The article concludes that this extreme sensitivity to life requires immense emotional intelligence and mindfulness, ensuring that the "Lighting Humanity" approach remains a vital, scientifically aligned guide for fostering a more humanistic, harmonious, and compassionate world.

**Keywords:** Jain Philosophy, Ahimsa, Lighting Humanity, Lord Mahavira, Ethics

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## I. Introduction

In the contemporary era, humanity finds itself at a crossroads. While technological advancements have bridged physical distances, they have simultaneously exacerbated psychological fragmentation and social alienation (Kumar, 2014). The pursuit of material accumulation has led to what modern psychologists' term "attitude-behavior inconsistency," where an individual's ethical values often clash with their survival instincts in a competitive secular world (Chapple, 2021).

In the face of this evolution, the principles of Jain philosophy stand out not as ancient relics, but as living, "timeless wisdom" (Jaini, 1998). The central concept of "Lighting Humanity" serves as a beacon, offering a way of life rooted in compassion, non-violence, and a profound harmony with the environment (Miller & Singh, 2023). This article explores how the 24th Tirthankara, Lord Mahavira, restructured human conduct through a psycho-philosophical lens to illuminate the path for all sentient beings (Long, 2009; Soni, 2023).

### 1.1 The Ontological Foundation of "Lighting Humanity"

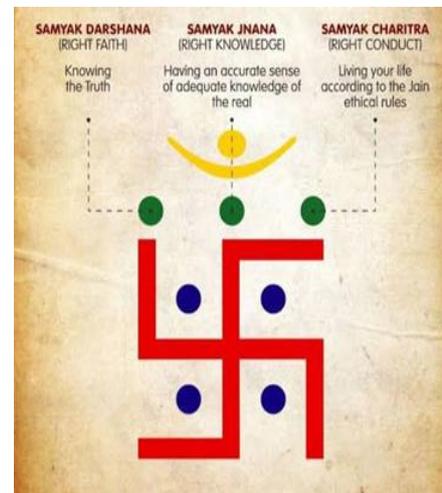
The philosophy of "Lighting Humanity" is not a modern invention but the culmination of a vast, unbroken spiritual lineage, with Jainism recognized as the oldest non-Vedic philosophy originating in India (Long, 2009). The term Mahavira, applied to the founder, serves as a profound psychological descriptor meaning "great spiritual hero" or "conqueror of the world," signifying one who has mastered internal passions rather than external territories (Jaini, 1998). This wisdom was nurtured and refined by twenty-three preceding Tirthankaras (spiritual teachers) who laid the foundational ethics for the faith.

The lineage began with the founding teachers Rishabha, Ajita, Sambhava, Abhinandana, and Sumati. It was carried forward by the "Keepers of Wisdom" Pradmaprabha, Suparsava, Chandraprabha, Suvidhi, and Gitala and further refined by the "Nurturers of the Faith," including Shreyansa, Vasupujya, Vimala, Ananta, and Dharma. The succession continued through the "Establishers of Peace" Shanti, Kanthu, Ara, Malli, and Suvrata before reaching Nami, Nemi, and finally Parshvanatha, the 23rd teacher (Dundas, 2002). As the 24th Tirthankara, Vardhamana Mahavira emerged to synthesize, expand, and spread the collective wisdom of these predecessors to the wider world.

His message of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) was radical, directly challenging the status quo of animal sacrifice and strict social stratification (Dundas, 2002). Mahavira advocated for a way of life rooted in compassion for all living beings, including nature and the environment. These teachings went beyond physical restraint to encompass thoughts and words, promoting peace and social equity as essential components of humanity (Sethia, 2004). This philosophy aligns with modern ecological movements that emphasize the intrinsic value of all life forms (Naess, 1973).

Mahavira's life and preaching were grounded in *Kshama* (Forgiveness), presented as a proactive choice to release resentment rather than a passive acceptance of unethical behavior. By spreading this ancient wisdom, Mahavira laid the foundation for ethical living through the "Triple Gems" (*Ratnatraya*): *Samyak Darshana* (Right Faith), *Samyak Jnana* (Right Knowledge), and *Samyak Charitra* (Right Conduct) (Tatia, 1994).

This radical framework aimed to reshape the cognitive and emotional framework of the practitioner, offering a path to self-control and spiritual growth that remains profoundly relevant for addressing contemporary global challenges (Jaini, 1979). By integrating Right Knowledge with Right Conduct, the individual achieves a state of "emotional intelligence" that fosters social harmony and personal liberation (Goleman, 1995; Long, 2009). This commitment to non-violence is ultimately a transformative practice that begins with the self and extends to the entire Earth (Chapple, 2002).



## II. Comparative Analysis: Ahimsa in the Modern Ethical and Psychological Landscape

The Jain concept of *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) serves as a bridge between ancient spiritual discipline and contemporary secular needs (Sethia, 2004). While historically viewed as a path to spiritual liberation, its "Lighting Humanity" framework offers a profound parallel to modern environmental ethics and Western psychological models of emotional regulation.

### 2.1 Ahimsa and Modern Environmental Ethics

In the present world, which witnesses increasing conflicts and environmental degradation, the relevance of *Ahimsa* is more significant than ever (Long, 2009). Modern environmental ethics, particularly the "Deep Ecology" movement, mirrors the Jain view that all life forms are interconnected (Naess, 1973). While Western ethics often prioritize human utility (anthropocentrism), Jain *Ahimsa* advocates for the cultivation of compassion toward all living beings, including nature and the environment (Chapple, 2002).

Jainism teaches that *Ahimsa* includes not only refraining from physical harm but actively seeking to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings (Sethia, 2004). This aligns with contemporary sustainability goals, where "responsible consumption" and the "conservation of resources" are paramount (Kumar, 2014). For instance, the vow of *Aparigraha* (Non-attachment) encourages a mindset of minimalism, directly questioning the relentless pursuit of material wealth that fuels current ecological crises (Tobias, 2000). By promoting harmony with nature, Jainism provides a moral foundation for promoting peace, sustainability, and social equity (Miller & Singh, 2023).

### 2.2 Ahimsa and Western Psychological Theories of Emotional Regulation

From a psychological perspective, *Ahimsa* goes beyond physical actions to encompass thoughts and words (Sethia, 2004). This resonates with Western psychological theories such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

(CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which emphasize the link between thought patterns and behavioral outcomes. Jainism suggests that achieving self-control is intricately linked to cultivating a pure mind free from attachments (Jaini, 1979; Tatia, 1994).

The practice of *Brahmacharya* for modern life involves developing emotional intelligence and practicing emotional regulation (Goleman, 1995). This includes managing stress, anger, and negative emotions through mindfulness, meditation, and self-awareness (Long, 2009). Similarly, the concept of *Kshama* (Forgiveness) is not passive acceptance of unethical behavior but a proactive choice to release resentment and embrace healing. In Western psychology, this is viewed as a mechanism for improving mental health by liberating the heart from the burdens of anger (Chapple, 2021). By embodying these principles, individuals can attain inner peace and harmony, effectively addressing the "attitude-behavior inconsistency" prevalent in modern society (Miller & Singh, 2023).

### III. Case Studies: Jain Principles in Modern Social and Ethical Movements

The practical utility of Jain philosophy in "Lighting Humanity" is best demonstrated through its profound influence on historical social movements and contemporary lifestyle shifts. By examining the life of Mahatma Gandhi and the rise of modern Minimalism and Veganism, we can observe how ancient Jain precepts have been utilized as tools for behavioral transformation and global ethical reform (Sethia, 2004).

#### 3.1 The Gandhian Synthesis of Ahimsa

The most prominent historical application of Jain principles is found in the life of Mahatma Gandhi. While Gandhi was born into a Hindu family, his ethical framework was deeply influenced by Jainism, primarily through his relationship with the Jain philosopher Shrimad Rajchandra (Long, 2009). Gandhi's radical political strategy of *Satyagraha* (truth-force) was essentially a sociopolitical application of the Jain vow of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) (Sethia, 2004).

Mahatma Gandhi took the Jain precept of *Ahimsa* beyond the monastic cell and applied it to the liberation of a nation, demonstrating that non-violence encompasses thoughts, words, and actions on a structural level (Dundas, 2002). His insistence on vegetarianism and simplicity mirrors the Jain belief that refraining from harm is a proactive choice to foster a culture of empathy and reconciliation (Chapple, 2002). Gandhi's success showed that Jain concepts are instrumental in shaping personal conduct and promoting harmony with all living beings (Jaini, 1979; Tobias, 2000).

##### 3.1.1 Minimalism and the Vow of Aparigraha

In the contemporary context, the global movement toward Minimalism serves as a secular manifestation of the Jain vow of *Aparigraha* (non-attachment) (Tobias, 2000). As modern society faces a crisis of identity fueled by relentless material pursuit, *Aparigraha* teaches the virtue of simplicity and detachment from material possessions (Long, 2009).

Minimalism, much like Jainism, encourages a mindset of responsible consumption and questions the relentless pursuit of material wealth (Kumar, 2014). By recognizing the interconnectedness of all life forms, modern minimalists adopt a Jain-like psychological framework to manage stress and find inner peace by liberating the heart from the burdens of "excess" (Goleman, 1995; Jaini, 1979). This practice aligns with environmental sustainability by promoting the conservation of resources and ecological awareness (Chapple, 2002; Naess, 1973).

##### 3.1.2 Veganism as a Modern Expression of Universal Compassion

The rise of **Veganism** is perhaps the most direct application of Jain *Ahimsa* in the 21st century. Jainism advocates for the cultivation of compassion toward all living beings, including nature and the environment. Modern vegan movements align with the Jain teaching that "Lighting Humanity" involves not only refraining from harming others but also actively seeking to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings.

Jain philosophy promotes mindful consumption regarding food and material possessions, a core pillar of the vegan lifestyle. By avoiding products derived from animal exploitation, vegans practice a form of *Asteya* (non-stealing) by respecting the rights and feelings of other living creatures. This ethical stance against injustice and oppression highlights the practical utility of ancient precepts in modern behavioral therapy and social equity.

### IV. In-depth Scripture Analysis: The Codification of Universal Ethics

The transition from abstract wisdom to a structured ethical framework is most clearly visible in the *Tattvartha Sutra* (c. 2nd-4th Century CE) and the *Acharanga Sutra* (the oldest Jain scripture). These texts provide the specific mechanisms through which the practitioner reshapes their cognitive and emotional framework.

#### 4.1 The Definitive Nature of Vows: Tattvartha Sutra

In the *Tattvartha Sutra*, Acharya Umaswati defines the Five Vows (*Mahavratas*) not merely as rules, but as "the path to the stoppage of karmic influx".

**Ahimsa (7.1, 7.13):** The text defines violence (*Himsa*) as the "severance of vitalities out of passion". This definition is crucial for "Lighting Humanity" because it identifies **internal passion** (anger, pride, deceit, greed) as the root cause of harm. By neutralizing these passions, the individual fosters a culture of empathy and reconciliation.

**Satya (7.14):** Truthfulness is described as abstaining from "untruthful speech prompted by passion". This aligns human thoughts, words, and actions with ethical values, promoting trust and accountability in modern decision-making.

**Asteya (7.15):** Defined as the "taking of what is not given," this precept is analyzed as a respect for the property and feelings of others. It guides against exploitation, promoting a stance against injustice and inequality.

**Brahmacharya (7.16):** The scripture views this as "abstaining from sexual or sensory indulgence". In a modern context, this is applied through mindful consumption and emotional regulation.

**Aparigraha (7.17):** This is defined as "attachment to possessions". The analysis emphasizes that it is the *internal attachment*, more than the external object, that creates psychological distress.

#### 4.2 The Radical Compassion of the Acharanga Sutra

The *Acharanga Sutra* provides a more poetic but equally rigorous analysis of *Ahimsa*. One of its most famous verses (1.5.101) states: "*All breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away*".

This verse serves as the foundation for the "Lighting Humanity" concept. It demands an active expansion of the practitioner's moral circle to include nature and the environment. The *Acharanga* further analyzes that "one who neglects or disregards even a single living being, disregards the self". This provides the psycho-philosophical rationale for the interconnectedness of all life forms, suggesting that the pursuit of material wealth must be questioned to preserve the sanctity of the environment.

### V. Scientific Connection: Biological Non-Violence and the Jain Microscopic Worldview

The Jain concept of "Lighting Humanity" is uniquely distinguished by its early and sophisticated recognition of life forms invisible to the naked eye. Long before the invention of the microscope or the formalization of modern microbiology, Jain scriptures detailed a complex biological classification system that mirrors contemporary scientific understandings of the microbial world. This "biological non-violence" forms the bedrock of Jain environmental ethics and behavioral therapy.

#### 5.1 The Concept of *Nigoda* and Microscopic Life

At the core of Jain biological science is the concept of *Nigoda* sub-microscopic organisms that exist everywhere: in the air, water, soil, and within other living bodies. The *Acharanga Sutra* and *Tattvartha Sutra* categorize these as *Ekdendriya* (one-sense beings), possessing only the sense of touch but nonetheless considered sentient souls capable of experiencing pain.

From a scientific perspective, this ancient classification aligns with the discovery of bacteria, archaea, and various microbes. While modern science views these organisms through the lens of pathology or ecology, Jainism views them through the lens of "Universal Compassion". This biological awareness dictates the "Lighting Humanity" way of life, where practitioners are encouraged to minimize harm to these microscopic entities through mindful actions, such as filtering water or avoiding walking on vegetation.

#### 5.2 Interconnectedness and Ecological Balance

Jainism preaches a philosophy of *Parasparopagraho Jivanam* the interdependence of all living beings (Tatia, 1994). Modern ecology has confirmed this scientific reality, demonstrating that human survival is inextricably linked to the health of the microbial world and the broader environment (Naess, 1973). Jain "biological non-violence" recognizes that harming nature is, in fact, a form of self-harm, as it disrupts the delicate ecological balance (Chapple, 2002).

Applying this to modern environmental sustainability, Jainism encourages living in harmony with nature by promoting responsible consumption and the conservation of resources (Kumar, 2014). By acknowledging that even a single drop of water contains countless living beings, the Jain practitioner develops a mindset of minimalism and profound ecological awareness (Tobias, 2000). This scientific connection proves that Jainism's ancient precepts are not mere religious dogma but are based on an intuitive understanding of life's complex biological tapestry (Long, 2009; Miller & Singh, 2023).

#### 5.3 Psychological Impact of Biological Sensitivity

This extreme sensitivity to life has significant psychological implications for "Lighting Humanity." Practicing such a high degree of *Ahimsa* requires immense emotional intelligence and self-awareness. It

necessitates a constant state of mindfulness, which Western psychological theories identify as a key tool for emotional regulation and stress management.

By embodying the principles of forgiveness and kindness toward even the smallest creatures, individuals can attain inner peace and break free from cycles of resentment. This scientific and psychological synthesis ensures that the "Lighting Humanity" approach remains a vital guide for fostering a more humanistic, harmonious, and compassionate world.

## VI. Conclusion

The psycho-philosophical framework of "Lighting Humanity" offered by Jainism provides a vital alternative to the materialistic and fragmented paradigms of the modern era. As explored throughout this study, the teachings of Lord Mahavira and the unbroken lineage of the Tirthankaras are far from being historical artifacts; they are precise instruments for attitude reorganization and ethical governance. In a world plagued by "attitude-behavior inconsistency," where global crises from environmental collapse to social injustice stem from internal passions of greed and attachment, Jainism offers a systematic path toward restoration. By shifting the focus from the external conquest of territories and resources to the internal conquest of the self, Jainism empowers the individual to become a "Mahavira" of their own mind.

The integration of *Ahimsa*, *Satya*, *Asteya*, *Brahmacharya*, and *Aparigraha* into contemporary life facilitates a profound shift in how we relate to the world. Comparative analysis with modern environmental ethics and psychological theories demonstrates that the "biological non-violence" inherent in the Jain microscopic worldview is both scientifically sound and ecologically necessary. Principles such as *Parasparopagraho Jivanam* (interdependence) serve as the ultimate rationale for global sustainability, reminding us that the health of the human soul is inextricably linked to the health of the smallest *Nigoda*.

Ultimately, "Lighting Humanity" is a proactive choice to embrace *Kshama* (forgiveness) and mindfulness as daily practices. As evidenced by the influence of Jainism on Mahatma Gandhi and the modern resonance of Minimalism and Veganism, these ancient precepts possess the practical utility to drive significant social and ethical reform. By adopting the "Triple Gems" of Right Faith, Knowledge, and Conduct, modern humanity can navigate the complexities of the 21st century with integrity and compassion. The timeless wisdom of Jainism concludes that a harmonious world is not built through technological dominance, but through the illumination of the inherent divinity within every sentient being, fostering a future where all life can thrive in unity.

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