

SPECIAL FEATURES

Everything My Eyes Hold Ends: Lessons in Jain Aparigraha

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In his hands, a continent. Bharat Chakravarthi's stars had always aligned into an arrangement for victory. His battalion had marched on to kingdom after kingdom until it was his name on their lips, until there weren't any kingdoms to claim anymore.

Bharat had just yet to cement his final victory by carving his name on the mountain, *Vijarda Parvat*.

What happens when you reach, in regal robes amidst the procession, and there's the mountain, but it's littered with carved letters and countless victories?

Names are everywhere. What happens then?

Bharat has little choice now. He finds a spot, erases one of the names—flattens the mountain, and carves his own three syllables over.

Can he even make out his letters amidst the other names of chakravarthi that graced these lands? His birthright, his kingdom, his name in the echoes. Was anything *ever* his?

When I sit down in pravachan or share the calm of rosary beads in the midafternoon with our Jain ascetics, they'll ask me why *I don't join them, foster the virtues of Jainism properly?*

I know their peace, their aparigraha.

I try, but I'm busy, I'll end up saying—I want to be something, someone.

Wanting success, especially someone's fickle and borrowed definition of success, is no argument. They will win as they pose a simpler question that I don't want to admit the answer to. Could I tuck my success into my soul and carry it forward life after life?

Is it ever mine if it is only momentary? Is it mine if its expiration is in its very definition?

Aparigraha is more than being a trendy minimalist with the most perfect mahogany centerpiece and an aesthetic, decluttered, catalogue-worthy home.

The primal act of wanting is parigraha. It's the last sin in our five numbered list, but parigraha is the most alarming, most damning, and the cause of the rest (violence, falsehood, stealing, and unchastity).

Aparigraha, then, is the simple act of knowing: everything my eyes hold ends. Everything that ends is not mine.

We would be kinder, stronger for embodying aparigraha. We would chasten the greed that just takes and takes from the Earth for a few millions of dollars, from the labor that toils and is undercut, from wars that play out for land that just isn't ours to cut and divide.

But we're raised in this mud, and it clings to me as if it is an ancient part of mine. Slowly, I'll learn to walk this world without clutching things to my heart, let go and let in without claw marks. This is my vow when I promise to hold aparigraha: to be strong, to be enough that nothing deters me as it comes and goes, ebbs and flows.

More than a religion, Jainism is a way of life. After all, Jainism is the path I follow into the storm of this world. Jainism places in me the strength present at the eye of the storm—until I'm out, until the storm dissipates.

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