

SPECIAL FEATURES

Vegetarianism and Veganism in Jainism

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Ahiṃsā, or non-violence, is the foundation of Jainism. This extends beyond just physical violence to also include verbal and mental harm. For Jains, violence is not limited to only humans but includes all forms of life, including, animals, insects, plants, and microorganisms. Ahiṃsā is not just a simple moral, it is a way of life which directly controls the actions of Jains. Vegetarianism in Jainism directly stems from this way of life called ahiṃsā. Consuming meat involves the killing of animals, which is considered a form of violence that goes against the teachings of Jainism. Eating meat is thought to be a major contributor to the cycle of birth and death that Jains seek to avoid. In order to minimize violence, consuming meat is banned. In addition to avoiding meat, Jains often are careful about other forms of harm. Many Jains don't eat root vegetables, such as onions, garlic, and potatoes, because harvesting these plants results in the death of the organism and many small microorganisms around it. All of these practices follow the same thought process that all living beings, no matter how small, deserve respect and protection from harm.

While traditional Jainism has promoted vegetarianism, veganism is a more recent extension of vegetarian principles that many Jains follow especially because of modern concerns about animal welfare and ethical treatments of animals. Veganism in Jainism is a natural progression of ahiṃsā. Avoiding all animal-derived products is more relevant nowadays because of the harm given to animals in order to produce the products. Specifically, dairy production often involves practices that cause harm to animals, such as the separation of calves from their mothers and the exploitation of cows for their milk. The practices of producing animal-derived products didn't harm the animals involved, so veganism wasn't really relevant in Jainism back then. Nowadays, many Jains have embraced veganism as a better diet than vegetarianism because of a more ethical lifestyle today. The idea of causing harm to animals in order to enjoy their benefits goes directly against the foundational principles of Jainism, therefore, the idea of veganism is gaining traction in many Jain communities.

Recently, a significant global concern has become the environmental impact of animal agriculture. Not only does animal agriculture involving the process of slaughtering go against Jain principles of ahiṃsā, it also causes harm to the environment, which also goes against Jain teachings. It is known to contribute to deforestation, climate change, and the reduction of natural resources. By adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet, Jains align their lifestyle and

ethics with their commitment to protecting the Earth and everything living on it. They believe that all living beings are interconnected, and that their actions contribute to the overall harmony of the world. The environmental benefits of a vegetarian and vegan diet are extensions of the Jain commitment to reduce harm to each and every thing.

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