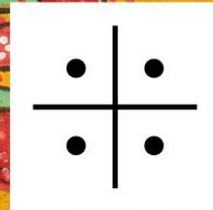


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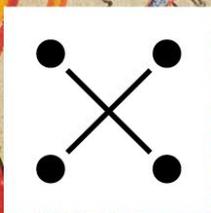
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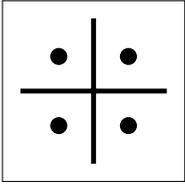
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## What is this exhibition about?

Our world is facing huge challenges: climate change, violence, wars, and increasing social inequality are threatening mankind. Can an art museum contribute to the discourses on these fundamental problems?

In this exhibition, we want to present a religion almost unknown in the West, and its art: Jainism. It emerged in India at the same time as Buddhism. While Buddhism spread all over the world, Jainism remained almost entirely confined to India. With only about 5 million followers it is today a small, but economically strong and influential religious community. In our opinion, Jainism offers particularly interesting and relevant suggestions for dealing with the global problems of humanity. At the core of its teachings are absolute non-

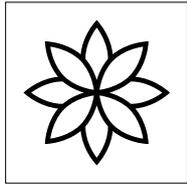
violence, respect for life and nature, renunciation, and the idea that there are several different perceptions of truth.

The exhibition provides insights into the diverse ideas, practices, and currents of this religion. The focus is always on questions about the meaning of life and the responsibilities of humankind. Playing “And you? The Game of Questions” invites us to reflect on our everyday actions.



# What is a Jina?

Jains do not believe in a god but venerate 24 mythical teachers whom they refer to as Jinas (“Victors”) or Tirthankaras (“path- or ford-maker”). Jina Mahavira is the last in this line and is regarded as the historical founder of Jainism. Jains believe that in the remote future another 24 Jinas will appear. Images of the Jinas are more or less identical; they differ only in small details.



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## Why is knowledge so important for Jains?

“Correct knowledge” in Jainism means the ancestral teaching of the Jinas. It is a practical knowledge, because the teachings help to distinguish a good from a bad life or right from wrong actions. Every human being is responsible for his own actions towards his fellow human beings, society, and the environment.

For Jains, this knowledge is not exclusive, unchangeable, or final. It must be constantly supplemented and allow for multiple points of view. For truth can never be fully grasped from only one point of view. Jains often refer to a parable of an elephant being felt by several blind people in different places at the same time. All of them feel something different, trunk, tail, or foot, and imagine the animal accordingly. The parable shows that there are different ways of looking at the

same thing. Acceptance of a multi-layered truth means tolerance of other opinions – a contested commodity today.

The highest form of knowledge is the omniscience of the Jinas. For example, it is said of Mahavira that in the thirteenth year of his wanderings, he attained omniscience under a tree on the bank of a river. From now on, he was a Jina, a “perfect one,” an “all-knowing one” from whom nothing remained hidden.



# How did Jains transmit their knowledge?

In the beginning, oral transmission was at the center of Jainism. Religious texts were memorized and passed down within the communities for generations. Sermons by eminent monks and nuns actually continue to attract large crowds of believers to this day.

Starting in the 5th century, religious texts were reorganized and probably written down for the first time a little later. In the course of time, a multitude of text collections emerged that are still authoritative for different groups today.



# What do Jain “books” look like?

Since the 11th century at the latest, precious illustrated manuscripts were produced in large numbers in western India, initially on palm leaves and later on paper. Members of wealthy families had them made and then donated them to temple libraries.

All manuscripts share the horizontal format, which goes back to older palm-leaf manuscripts. The individual pages were not bound into a book, but lay loosely on top of each other. After a page was read, it was turned upwards over the long edge of the page. The reading continued with the text on the back and on the front of the following page. Numbering of the sheets ensured that the pages did not get mixed up.



# Jain symbols

Many book covers were marked with auspicious symbols. Besides the purely mechanical protection of the manuscripts, these signs provide protection for the manuscript on a religious level. Two series of symbols can be distinguished: the dream images and the auspicious symbols.

## **Auspicious symbols**

Individual symbols, such as the chest sign and the throne, directly relate to Jainism; other motifs are also found in the groups of eight auspicious motifs of other Indian and Asian religions.

- 1 Swastika: a sun symbol known in many cultures in the form of a cross with bent arms of equal length.
- 2 Chest sign of a Jina: often shown as a star- or flower-shaped symbol; its original meaning has not been conclusively determined.
- 3 Vase: symbol of nature in its abundance and inexhaustible life force.
- 4 Throne: the seat is often equipped with cushion, umbrella, and fly whisk; it is reserved for persons of high status.
- 5 Two fishes: symbol of the two north Indian rivers Ganges and Yamuna and their fertile alluvial land.
- 6 Mirror: a symbol of feminine beauty, but also an ancient means of warding off sorcery and the evil eye.
- 7 Powder box: it is not the box that is auspicious here, but probably the red powder it contains. A growth- and above all love-promoting effect is ascribed to it.
- 8 Auspicious swirl: geometric symbol reminiscent of the swastika. However, its arms are angled several times.

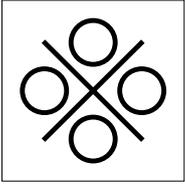
The order of the symbols is not fixed, nor can they all be clearly explained. Their meaning has been reinterpreted over time, and some, such as the auspicious swirl and the chest sign, have changed shape in the process.



# Dream images

Dream images and their interpretation were an important means of elucidating the future in ancient India. The objects on display show 14 dream signs that announce the birth of a Jina or a great ruler. They appeared to the mother of Jina Mahavira in her dreams.

- 1 Elephant: symbol of royal and divine dignity. The ideal ruler and king of the gods, Indra, rides a white elephant.
- 2 Bull: symbolizes power and virility as a source of security and prosperity.
- 3 Lion: represents fearlessness and courage.
- 4 Goddess Shri: represented is the consecration of the goddess, who originally embodied all aspects of kingship and its legitimacy. In the Middle Ages, her function as a goddess of wealth became more prominent.
- 5 Garland pair: mark of one chosen to rule.
- 6 Moon: symbol of plant growth.
- 7 Sun: symbol of light, which overcomes deception and ignorance. As a pair, sun and moon are also indicative of the cosmic dimension of the upcoming birth.
- 8 Waving banner: traditional sign of honor of a ruler.
- 9 Vase: filled with water and foliage, the vase is a symbol of fertility and abundance; at the same time, it is an important requisite in ritual acts such as the consecration of a king.
- 10 Lotus pond: possible site of enlightenment of the Jina.
- 11 Ocean: possibly alluding to the ocean surrounding the Island of the Rose Apple Tree, that is the region inhabited by humans.
- 12 Palace of the gods: abode of a Jina before his descent into his mother's body.
- 13 Heap of jewels: allusion to the wealth associated with rulership.
- 14 Fire: another allusion to lordly dignity and duties. Contracts were sealed by offerings into the fire, the truth of statements tested in a trial by fire.



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## Why is renunciation a religious objective?

In Jainism, the highest goal is not eternal life, but leaving the cycle of rebirths. This is achieved by no longer creating or acquiring karma. Only then can the soul be liberated from rebirth and achieve salvation.

Traditional Jainism teaches that all people are on their own on the path to salvation. They themselves must reduce or prevent the acquisition of karma. They can do this by renouncing violence, wealth, possessions, and worldly comforts. Although Jains today attach less importance to the ancient ideas of heaven and hell, they hold to the idea of renunciation. For them, active renunciation contributes to a meaningful life in the here and now.

Jains, for example, believe that the acquisition of karma can be prevented by voluntarily limiting consumerism or by a deliberately simple lifestyle. The ideal of an ascetic life thus remains relevant even in the modern world.



# Can ascetics survive on their own?

The original Jain community was a group of itinerant ascetics who wandered through north-eastern India following the teachings of their spiritual leader. They had no home of their own and were dependent on alms. In the course of time, groups of believers emerged who systematically supported these ascetics. Ascetics and believers have been the cornerstones of Jain communities ever since: monks and nuns instruct the believers in the doctrine, and the believers in turn provide for the ascetics.



# How do ascetics live?

The daily routine of Jain ascetics follows strict rules. Monks and nuns spend a large part of the day meditating and studying the holy scriptures.

Apart from their clothing, the ascetics carry only a few objects with them, because lack of possessions is part of the ascetic life. This is interpreted particularly strictly by the Digambara, whose religious rule even bars monks from possessing garments. Instead, ascetics go naked.

An indispensable item in the possession of all Jain monks and nuns is a brush, which they use to clean the surfaces on which they place something or where they want to settle. Made of cotton string or peacock feathers, it is used to gently remove living creatures so that they are not injured or killed.



# Ascetic practices in Jainism

## **Three films on the topic**

Length total: approx. 30 minutes

Languages: Kannada and Hindi with German and English subtitles

## **Vihara – a path to salvation (15 mins)**

The film follows nuns and monks on their pilgrimage through India with special focus on the Digambara ascetics.

## **Asceticism – a day in the life ... (5 mins)**

The film provides insight into the daily life of monks and nuns and their daily routine.

## **Manuscripts – Jain texts of knowledge (10 mins)**

The film shows the production of manuscripts and their use.

## **Film team**

Director, script, and concept – Harsha Vinay

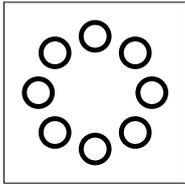
Camera – Tariq Thekaekara

2nd camera – Bhargav Shandilya

Editing – Sowmya Swaminathan

Sound – Alok Kotian, Klink Studio

Image Editing – Anandh Raju, The Madras Colorist



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## How do Jains live together?

The Jain community is composed of ascetic monks and nuns, and believers leading a secular life, the laity. Unlike the nuns and monks, the laity are allowed to live in prosperity.

The growing prosperity of the Jain communities in the Middle Ages led not only to the production of many magnificent manuscripts, but also to the construction of numerous temples, libraries, as well as shelters that provided safe sleeping places for monks and nuns on their perilous wanderings.

At first glance, there seems to be a contradiction between the wealth and prosperity of individual members of the Jain community and the abstinence of the ascetics. This contradiction is resolved by the argument that the pursuit of wealth and prosperity are not inherently bad. They are even desirable as long as they do not serve the greed of individuals but benefit the Jain community. The wealth of individuals is thus diverted into public good.



# Pilgrimage

Jain religious practice includes pilgrimage, that is visiting Jain holy places throughout India. These undertakings, in which Jain believers often travel long distances alone or accompanied by monks and nuns, have become increasingly popular since the Middle Ages and still are today. Many pilgrimage sites are places associated with legends of the life and work of the Jinas.



# Ritual veneration

Jains worship the Jinas as supreme beings in house shrines or temples. Their worship differs very little from Hindu rituals. In the temples, Hindu priests usually perform the rituals. Jain monks and nuns condone this worship practice but do not practice it themselves. Historically, temples do not seem to have played a major role at first. Larger numbers of distinctly Jain temples developed between the 8th and 10th centuries. Even today, the magnificent Jain shrines and large imposing temple complexes impress with their beauty. However, not all Jains approve of the worship of cult images. Especially the reform movements that emerged since the 15th century fundamentally reject any image worship.



# Jainism in Practice

## **Two films on the topic**

Length total: approx. 30 minutes

Languages: Kannada and Hindi with German and English subtitles

### **Sallekhana – The Raven and the Coconut (15 mins)**

In Jainism, Sallekhana (or Samadhi / Santara) means voluntary fasting until death.

The film deals with the subject of death and may not be suitable for all viewers.

### **Jains in the World (15 mins)**

This film portrays how Jains incorporate their core religious values into their daily lives.

## **Film team**

Director, script, and concept – Harsha Vinay

Cinematography – Tariq Thekaekara

2nd camera – Bhargav Shandilya

Editing – Sowmya Swaminathan

Sound – Alok Kotian, Klink Studio

Image Editing – Anandh Raju, The Madras Colorist



# The daily life of a Jain ascetic

## **Eberhard Fischer's photo story about Acharya Vidyasagar**

About 50 years ago, the Museum Rietberg, under the then direction of Dr. Eberhard Fischer, showed the traveling exhibition *Art and Religion: 2500 Years of Jainism* at the Helmhaus in Zurich. In preparation for the exhibition, Eberhard Fischer, together with the well-known Indian art historian Jyotindra Jain, traveled to northern India in the 1970s. There he met the then still young ascetic Vidyasagar, who allowed him to take photographs while he performed his duties, such as preaching and meditating. The photos taken at that time are unique documents from the life of young ascetic. Some time ago, Eberhard Fischer received an inquiry as to whether the photos still existed. Fischer then sent prints to Kundalpur, where the now elderly Acharya Vidyasagar was attending a large gathering. The photos caused a great sensation.

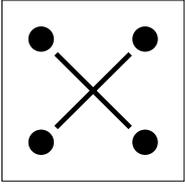
- 1 1973: the young Vidyasagar preaching, Jain manuscripts lie in front of him.
- 2 Vidyasagar and another young monk give a massage to their sick teacher, Acharya Gyansagar.
- 3 Vidyasagar meditates next to his teacher.  
(Photos 1 to 3 Eberhard Fischer)
- 4 February 2022: Priyank Jain and Harsha Vinay hand over enlarged prints of Eberhard Fischer's photos to Abhaysagar Maharaj, who had contacted him about the photos.
- 5 Acharya Vidyasagar blesses Harsha Vinay and Priyank Jain for bringing the photos.
- 6 In the following days, numerous Jains viewed the photos.  
(Photos 4 to 6 Tariq Thekaekara)



# How can a Jain cult image be “read”?

Metal sculptures are among the most extensive areas of Jain art production. Early single representations of standing Jinas can already be found in the first centuries after Christ. More complex altars develop until the Middle Ages; their design follows a fixed program. From the 13th century onward, a process of geometrization and abstraction begins, which coincides with a rapid increase in the number of figures produced. The composition continues to follow standardized principles.

- A 1–24 the 24 Jinas (recognizable among them are no. 1 Rishabha, no. 13 Suparshva, and no. 17 Parshva)
- B Bull; the signature emblem of Rishabha
- C Cakreshvari (together with Gomukha she forms the Yaksha pair at the throne of Rishabha)
- D Male deity
- Dh Wheel between two gazelles (reference to the first sermon taken from Buddhism)
- E Elephants; together with lions they carry the throne of Rishabha; more elephants flank the screen over Rishabha
- G Gomukha (together with Cakreshvari he forms the Yaksha pair at the throne of Rishabha)
- H Celestial beings with garlands
- L Lions; carry the throne together with elephants
- M Musicians; proclaim the glory of Jina
- P Nine planetary deities, represented as eight small heads and a small snake; they are placed below the Jinas; further indication of the high position of the Jinas in the world
- S Goddess Shantidevi; popular deity in northwest India who watches over the performance of temple rituals. That she is depicted in bronzes such as this indicates that sculptures of this type are comparable to large temple buildings
- St The donor couple; representative of the patrons of the sculpture
- T Drummers sound the glory of Jina
- W Fly-whisk bearers testify to the royal status of the Jina
- X Group comprising a reclining elephant (bottom), a lion-like mythical creature standing on its hind legs (middle), and a crocodile-like mythical creature (top)



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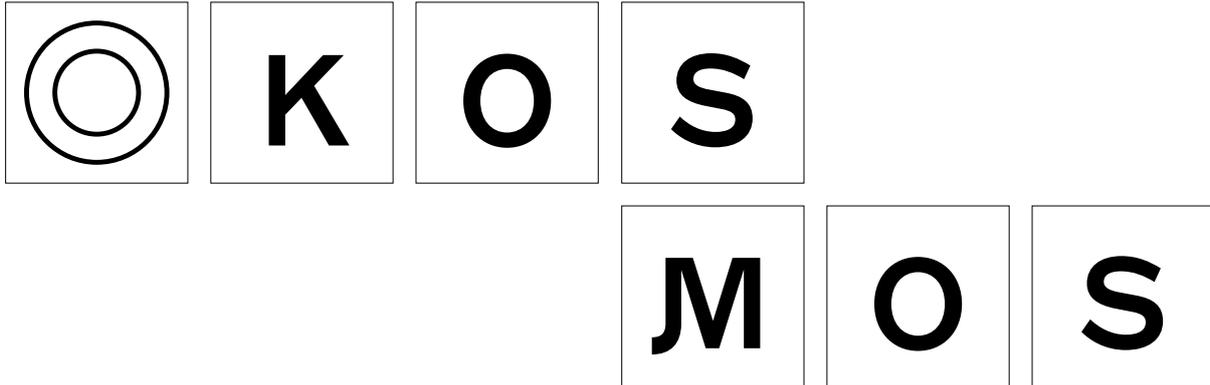
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## How do Jains position themselves in society?

In recent centuries, Jains continued to expand their influence as traders and businessmen. In the course of globalization in the 20th century, the first Jain communities were established in Europe and North America. Here, Jains face new challenges. Will they open up their exclusive community into which one has to be born? Can people from outside the community convert to Jainism? Will Jainism remain a religion or become a lifestyle? How do Jains respond to global challenges such as climate change, wars, and growing social inequality? Interviews, films, and exhibition discussions explore these questions.

### Why do we play “And you? The Game of Questions”?

Life in society runs according to certain rules. At the same time, these rules are always being tested, changed, and negotiated. Every individual has his or her own freedom of action and can decide to a certain extent how to shape his or her life. We want to relate this freedom of choice to ethical behavior and responsibility in society. The point is not to look at what Jains do in India, but how we respond to ethical questions. How do we face ethical challenges? Do Jain concepts such as tolerance and non-violence offer answers to our questions? Are we guided by similar principles in our own lives? We explore these questions in a game based on the well-known board game “Snakes and Ladders.” It invites us to reflect on our own and common values and ideas.



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## What does the cosmos mean to Jains?

The traditional worldview of the Jains does not draw on any concrete geographical or astronomical knowledge. It is instead a spiritual guide, which can be found exclusively in religious texts. The worldview thus shows, like a map, the possible places of previous and future existences: depending on acquired karma, people are reborn in heaven, hell, or the human world. The place of salvation is also mapped. This cosmos was not created, but exists eternally.

The traditional Jain cosmology has a spiritual dimension: it visualizes man's responsibility and the consequences of his actions in the form of worlds, heavens and hells. It is a system that unites material and spiritual worlds.

This cosmology has not lost its importance. Jains understand this worldview, including the order that prevails in it, not as a counter design, but as a complement to Western science. By depicting hells and heavens on a map of the world, they invite us to reflect on the consequences of human behavior and ethical action.



# What does the Jain cosmos look like?

In terms of shape, the cosmos consists of three superimposed levels: In the center is the disk-shaped world where humans and animals live; above it, the heavens of the gods are arranged and below them the netherworlds with the hells.

## **World of humans**

The world of humans is presented as a disk. The center is a circular continent, the Island of the Rose Apple Tree, with Mount Meru in the middle. In the south of the continent is the land of Bharata with the rivers Ganges and Indus. Bharata is a reflection of the Indian subcontinent and reflects the geographical knowledge of ancient India. At the same time, Bharata is the setting of Jain mythology.

## **Heavens and Hells**

The inhabitants of the heavens and hells are not omnipotent beings and have only limited power. The world of the gods is organized in a strict hierarchy, mirroring the world of humans in its order. Their divine power is limited to their respective domains. Like the heavens, the underworld is divided into several levels. The inhabitants of hell are subjected to indescribable tortures, which they inflict on themselves in boundless hatred.