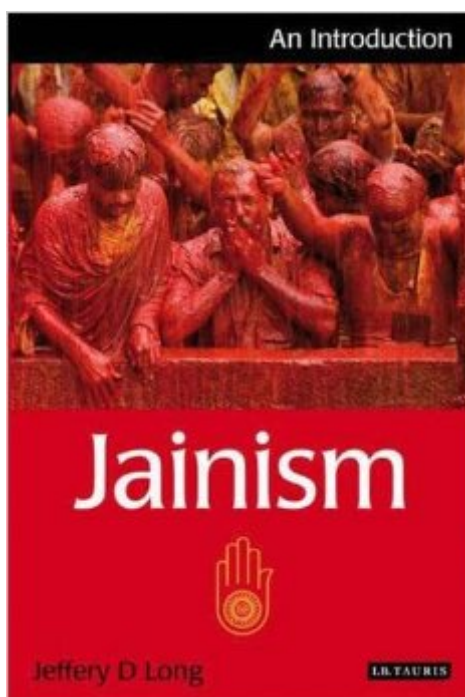


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# Jainism: An Introduction (Introductions To Religion)



## Synopsis

Jainism evokes images of monks wearing face-masks to protect insects and micro-organisms from being inhaled. Or of Jains sweeping the ground in front of them to ensure that living creatures are not inadvertently crushed: a practice of non-violence so radical as to defy easy comprehension. Yet for all its apparent exoticism, Jainism is still little understood in the West. What is this mysterious philosophy which originated in the 6th century BCE, whose absolute requirement is vegetarianism, and which now commands a following of four million adherents both in its native India and diaspora communities across the globe? In his welcome new treatment of the Jain religion, Long makes an ancient tradition fully intelligible to the modern reader. Plunging back more than two and a half millennia, to the plains of northern India and the life of a prince who--much like the Buddha--gave up a life of luxury to pursue enlightenment, Long traces the history of the Jain community from founding sage Mahavira to the present day. He explores asceticism, worship, the life of the Jain layperson, relations between Jainism and other Indic traditions, the Jain philosophy of relativity, and the implications of Jain ideals for the contemporary world. The book presents Jainism in a way that is authentic and engaging to specialists and non-specialists alike.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Professor Long's book, *Jainism: An Introduction*, is a thoroughly researched overview of the Jain tradition, a religion and set of philosophical constructs that have influenced Indian thought for over

2500 years. This succinct, completely engaging overview of Jainism, the historical contexts of Jain intellectual thought, and the relationship of Jainism and Jain philosophers within the greater context of Hinduism, brahminical/Vedic thought, Buddhism, and Indic philosophical movements is indeed quite relevant to understanding and appreciating the Jain communities in India and in the West. This highly-readable monograph is intended as a an introduction to the Jain tradition; and it is aimed at a college-level audience, but it is also a book with considerable relevance to any person interested in philosophy, religion, history, India, or the evolution of intellectual movements. I highly recommend this book for every reader--it is accessible, engaging, and provocative. One of the aims of the book is to put core Jain (and for that matter, Buddhist and Hindu) beliefs and assumptions about the nature and meaning of existence into an intellectual context, both historical, and applicable to modern-day societies. With an exceptionally clear explanation of core Jain beliefs including non-violence, non-absolutism (or perhaps more easily understood as religious pluralism), detachment from materialism, and the karmic cycle, the author has indeed put the evolution of Jain thought into an appropriate historical context vis-à-vis Buddhism and Hinduism. Jainism: An Introduction provides the historical context of the Jain founders, Mahavira, and other philosophers; and, how their intellectual thought challenged historical, philosophical movements within Buddhism and Hinduism.

A Review by Dr. Andrea Diem-Lane Jeffery D. Long in his text Jainism argues that the ancient tradition of Jainism has much to offer the modern world. Today we face intense inter-religious conflict as one group challenges the other, often leading to dispute and even full blown war. In addition to this, our world is facing an environmental crisis as resources are being depleted. The Western mentality that we can use the planet's resources as we please has certainly contributed to a threatening ecological footprint. Interestingly, Jainism, a relatively small religion in India of 4.2 million, offers us two viable approaches to help with these serious global issues. First of all, in place of religious exclusivism and intolerance Jainism advocates religious pluralism, encompassed by the Jain principle of *anekantavada* (the doctrine of non-one sidedness). In Jainism one of the worst philosophical errors one can make is to assume a position of absolutism, or one sidedness (the Indian term for this is *ekantata*). Since Reality, whatever that may be, is infinite the various expressions and perspectives of it are valid. Of course, the Jain would add the caveat that not all religious positions are true if they fall out of a "Jina's view of a normative standard" (usually this means compassion). For instance, when a religion advocates extreme violence and killing a Jain would have a hard time reconciling this with an acceptable viewpoint. However, when compassion

plays a central role (which it often does in the world religions) then the religion's approach to the sacred are to be honored and viewed as a different perspective of a many-faced reality.

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