



Jain Initiation: Search for Divinity Within

The members of Jain Education and Research Foundation extend warm welcome to all the guests from FIU and from the Jain community at this great occasion of 2610th birth anniversary of Bhagwan Mahavir. We are delighted to have Prof. John Cort, the renowned Jain scholar, to present his scholarly insight on artistic perception of Jain Tirthankaras. We are also specially blessed this auspicious day to have an opportunity to congratulate Mumukshu Sheetal for her new spiritual journey to the life of a Jain nun.

About JERF: Jain Education and Research Foundation (JERF) was established to foster the global values, ethics and philosophy of Jainism, rendering a momentum to Jain Studies at the academic level. Under the spiritual guidance of Late Acharya Mahaprajna, Acharya Mahashraman and with the blessing of HH Dalai Lama, supplemented with a philanthropic and intellectual efforts of Jain Community, a historic milestone was attained with the inauguration of the Bhagwan Mahavir Professorship of Jain Studies at FIU. Prof. Nathan Katz was installed as the first Bhagwan Mahavir Professor of Jain studies in 2010. This was the first ever endowed professorship on Jain studies anywhere outside of India. This unique initiative will pave the way for many such initiatives in future.

About Jain Initiation: The ultimate goal of life, in Jainism, is liberation from the karmic bondage to attain eternal peace, bliss and wisdom. Jainism firmly believes that divinity is within us. Each human being is essentially or potentially divine. To unfold the divinity we need to remove the karmic dust accumulated by our own actions. The path to liberate from the dust is threefold—right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. There are two ways to follow the path—strict and middle. To take initiation (*Diksa*) means to follow the strict path to liberation, through the total renunciation of the worldly attachments and complete devotion to the Guru, spiritual guide. Thus, practically initiation is inner acceptance of the discipline of the Guru for spiritual upbringing. When one gets initiated into the nun or monkhood, one takes five major vows and act strictly in accordance with those vows. The vows are: nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-attachment. The monk and nun are also strict vegetarian and do not eat before sunrise or after sunset.

There are two orders of Jain ascetics—traditional and modern. The traditional order has been in place since the time of Bhagwan Rishabh, the first Tirthankar. The modern one was established in 20th century by Acharyas Tulasi and Mahaprajna, the two revolutionary thinkers and philosopher-saints. The monks and nuns of the traditional order are known as Sadhu and Sadhvi, while those of the modern order are known as Saman and Samani respectively.



The monks and nuns of both the orders wear all white cloths which symbolize purity and live simple lives. Traditionally Jain nuns and monks are not allowed to use any mode of transportation and are not allowed to eat in food prepared especially

for them. These vows made it impossible for the Jain nuns and monks to travel outside India and thus severely curtailed any efforts to spread the philosophy or knowledge of Jainism outside India. In comparison to the traditional order, the monks and nuns in the modern order, while still practicing the austere life styles of the old order, are allowed to use different modes of transportation and are able to take in food prepared for them. The new order was established especially to facilitate the spread of knowledge and culture outside India. It allows for a greater degree of freedom in the quest to share knowledge. The primary goal of all Jain monks and nuns is spiritual development of the self and to help enlighten others through their own knowledge.

Initiation Ceremony: The ceremony is observed in colorful, ritualistically elegant and spiritually heightened setting. The members of the family dress the renunciate with most multihued clothing adorn her rich jewelry and organize a grand procession. The whole community participates and rejoices in the ceremony. After the ritual procession, the final ceremony is performed in an intense, spiritually charged setting. The Guru presides over the whole event by receiving the permission of the parents, and of the family members. He conducts the ceremony through reciting from the scriptures, guiding the renunciate through the purification meditation, followed by the final initiation mantras orated to the disciple. The mantra is as simple as, “**All sinful acts are renounced for life-long**”. The novice with the simple attire of a nun and receives the blessings of the Guru by having a new name with a new life. The Guru symbolically removes a strand of the renunciates hair and gifts the woolen broom a symbol and tool of nonviolence.



Sheetal Ashok Kumar is an aspirant of initiation. She spent six years as an apprentice nun, called a Mumukshu. She has been trained before initiation in the institute named Parmarthik Shikshan Sanstha. Her background of engineering education was replaced with the pursuit of truth and liberation. With her six years journey Sheetal has nurtured the virtues of patience, dedication and equanimity. With the blessings of her Guru, His Holiness Acharya Mahashraman and her perseverance, Sheetal is heading towards her next destination of Spiritual journey to be a Jain nun. We wish her spiritual awakening and success in her journey.



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organize the great event of Mahavir Jayanti. Our heartfelt thanks to our esteemed donors. Please! visit our website at www.jaineducation.org and religion.fiu.edu/mahavir, to have more information about JERF.