



SCRIPT Jainism for Carers

Hello and welcome to another in the series of videos which explores the JAINpedia project. This video concentrates on various aspects of the ancient Indian faith of Jainism that will be of most use to those working in medical fields, social services or as a carer.

Background



It is hard to establish the number of Jains living in modern Britain, but the best estimate is about 30,000. There are Jain communities in all of the main cosmopolitan areas of Britain. British Jains are mostly concentrated in the suburbs of North London and in Leicester; the Jain Centre in Leicester is pictured on the left.

Jains share many beliefs and ideas with both Hindus and Buddhists but there are also significant differences between Jainism and

the other two ancient Indian faiths.

If you are working with, or caring for, somebody who practises Jainism then it is important to understand these differences.

Jain beliefs

Like Buddhists, Jains do not have to worship or believe in any gods. Jains believe that the ideas and practices of their faith have been established through the teachings and lives of the Tirthankaras. These were people who, like the Buddha, achieved spiritual enlightenment. The Tirthankaras or Jinas were prophets who lived in ancient India; the last was Mahavira, who lived about 2500 years ago.

Today, many Jains rely on monks and nuns to guide them in their faith. There are Jain monks and nuns in Britain and some Jains will look to them for guidance during important moments in their lives.

Jains also believe in the principle of reincarnation. Like both Hindus and Buddhists, the aim of practising Jains is to break free from the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth. This is achieved through ridding their souls of karma.

Practices connected to dying

This belief in reincarnation affects the way that Jains approach both death and care at the end of life. When someone is dying, they will often be visited by family members, other relatives and members of the local community. There the dying person will be encouraged to seek forgiveness for any past wrongdoings and to say prayers, such as the Namaskara Mantra.

There is also the principle of Samadhi Maran. If a Jain is dying and feels that he or she is spiritually ready for death, then they can request that any life support, including food and water, is withdrawn. This is not seen as a way of hastening death but rather as a way of ridding themselves of the desire to prolong life. This does not mean that the comfort of the dying person should be neglected and pain relief should still be offered.

After death the body is washed and put into new clothes. A lamp is often kept lit in the same room as the body. It is common for people to remain with the body and for prayers and devotional songs to be sung continually.

Jains practise cremation as a way of disposing of the body. However, autopsies and the use of organs for transplants or medical research are permitted.

Potential impact on medical care



One of the most important ways in which Jains can remove karma from their souls is by following the principle of 'Ahimsa'. 'Ahimsa' means non-injury or non-violence. Ahimsa lies at the heart of Jainism and is the key to understanding how Jains aspire to live. Jains believe that all living things should be protected as far as possible from any kind of injury or harm.

For those working with Jains, especially those in the medical professions, this will have some implications on the way that Jains can be cared for. All practising Jains are vegetarian. Some will avoid dairy products, some will avoid root vegetables and some are vegan. It is important to establish quickly what their dietary needs are.

In principle any medical intervention, including transplants and transfusions, that prolongs life and relieves suffering is permitted by Jainism. However, some practising Jains may want to know that the medicines they are taking do not have animal products in them or have even been tested on animals in the past.

Jain worship

Jain worship mostly consists of daily prayers and meditations, which can be done with the aid of an image or statue of one of the Tirthankaras. Jains commonly fast, especially at special times such as festivals like Paryushana or on other holy days.

Fasting can easily be suspended if the fast is seen as being harmful. This can include pregnant women or those for whom eating and drinking is strongly advised as part of the recovery process.

More information



If you want to discover more about the Jain faith, then the JAINpedia website has lots of articles and collections of images from museums and libraries across the country to help you find out more.

Go to:

www.jainpedia.org

www.learnjainism.org



If you are working with children or young people then the Learn Jainism website, which is aimed at children and those who work with them, has games and activities that can help you gain a better understanding of Jainism as well as provide some education and entertainment for children.