# Jainism Says…

### Q 5. Why are products that involve ahimsa or cruelty of movable beings (Tras Jiva) used in various Jain Rituals? Products like milk, wool, silk, peacock feathers, saffron, varakh etc. Should we continue to use them?

Rituals play an important part in our religion to build culture around the community, to inspire one another, strengthen religious values, build up interest in religion and for survival of any religion. However, rituals must be performed with the right understanding and interpretation, such that it provides an inspiring and uplifting experience. Rituals should enable our spiritual growth and serve as a reminder to reflect upon the Jain philosophies, values and proper conduct.

There are many rituals in place today that are rooted from generations of history and they are performed with the mindset that "this is how it's always been done". In some cases, these rituals are done in Mithyatva (ignorance), not knowing that some of these materials used in rituals do indeed come from violence. This Mithyatva can be seeded from lack of knowledge, lack of desire to gain information, blindly following rituals, believing in the wrong beliefs, lack of alignment with Jain values/principles, or fear of challenging that status quo.

Our intent in addressing this question is to create awareness, create a positive and enriching experience about the religion and answer questions for curious minds who want to understand rather than follow blindly. It will cause a little discomfort as we are stepping out of our comfort zone.

Now, let's understand the use of certain products in Jain rituals, spiritual intent behind the rituals, cruelty associated with these products in current times and potential alternatives.

#### Use of Milk in Abhishek and other rituals

**Spiritual Significance:** The spiritual intent behind Abhishek is to make our life simple and pure by cleaning our souls, getting rid of our undesired qualities, and ultimately ending the cycle of birth and death (i.e. Moksha).

**Background:** Jain literature indicates that during Tirthankar Abhishek only pure water called kshir samandra water was used. This water was so pure that it looked white in color. Hence to symbolize this water, people started to mix a small amount of milk with water and a tradition established.

**Compassion / Non-violence Point of View:** In today's commercial environment, the milk is produced in the most cruel way by depriving calf of its mother's milk, slaughtering male calves and ultimately slaughtering mother cows around 5 years of age. Also, there was never a reference made to use actual milk in any Jain scriptures. Hurting or killing five sense animals are considered highest sin in Jain literature.

**What can we do now?** Given what we know and understand about commercial milk production, we should refrain from using milk, and milk products like ghee, sweets, especially in any religious rituals.

We can also find alternative ways to complete the rituals, for example use only pure water or add small amount of non-dairy milk like almond milk instead of cow's milk, use vegetable oil instead of ghee in any ritual. In the past about 100 years ago, Castor oil was used in the temple Arti and Mangal divo and other rituals.

## Use of Woolen Katashanu and Charavalo during Samayik and Pratikraman Rituals

**Spiritual Significance:** Samayik and Pratikraman are the most important rituals for our spiritual growth. The purpose of Samayik is to meditate, reflect and strengthen our soul on a daily basis. During Pratikraman ritual, we repent for our mistakes and wrongdoings. Hence the aims of both rituals are to prepare us in attaining divinity through perfection in conduct and Meditation.

**Background:** Katashanu is used to sit on and Charavalo is used for any movement during the Samayik and Pratikraman rituals. In older days, during cold weather the woolen Katashanu and Charavalo provided health protection to insects and us.

**Compassion / Non-violence Point of View:** Sheep which thrive in nature without human intervention, will grow just enough wool to protect themselves from the cold in the winter and to keep them cool in the summer. When it is time, they will shed their winter coat all by themselves.

Sheep used for wool production are bred to have way more wool than they would have produced naturally. Plus, when they have their wool shaved off (a process called shearing), the people are paid by how much wool they can get, and a lot of sheep get hurt and some even have parts of their ears or skin cut off. The wool industry does not only exploit sheep, but it is also very cruel to them.

Other kinds of natural wool also known as, mohair, pashmina, shahtoosh, cashmere etc. have the same suffering and exploitation of animals.

**What can we do now?** Use alternatives to wool, including cotton, cotton flannel, polyester fleece or other cruelty-free fiber for Katashanu and Charavalo.

## Use of Silk in Places of Worship

**Spiritual Significance:** The tradition says that silk is purest and cleanest material and it should be worn during Puja in temple rituals.

**Background:** It all started around 1133 AD at the time of King Kumarpal, the King of Gujarat, a state in Western India. During his rule he was greatly influenced by a great Jain teacher Acharya Hemchandra. The King was so inspired by his teachings of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Compassion that he declared in his entire state to stop killing of animals for food, sport or fun.

It is said that he was further inspired by the saint to lead a religious life and perform puja (a symbolic worship to a Tirthankar Murti (idol) in the temple) to show his devotion to Lord Mahavir. The King decided to wear the best and most expensive new clothes to perform the puja and so he ordered the best of the material to be obtained. His men went and purchased the costliest, finest and softest material from China, called silk, for their King.

At that time, no one knew that the imported material was made by killing silkworms, which involved sheer violence. But since then the tradition continues. Unfortunately, even today some people wear silk clothes in religious rituals justifying that King Kumarpal used it.

**Compassion / Non-violence Point of View:** How many people know that the silk, one wears or uses involves 100% violence to silkworm, but one wears it with great pride in the places of worship? It is sad that one follows tradition blindly without questioning the origination or it's making process. 15 silkworms are killed to get 1 gram of silk. Silkworms are usually boiled alive and female moths are slit open to check for diseases after they lay eggs.

**What can we do now?** Use other materials. There are many other materials that look somewhat like silk are from man-made fibers known as artificial silk (art silk). Of these, rayon (viscose) is of vegetable origin; whereas nylon and polyester (terrene) are petroleum products.

## Use of Peacock Feather

**Spiritual Significance:** Peacock feather is used for a broom/picchi to clean Murti in the temple by one sect and the floor by another sect. The spiritual intent behind this usage is to practice Ahimsa and save insects and minutest micro-organism.

**Background:** A Jain sadhu practices 5 mahavrats: Ahimsa mahavrat, Satya mahavrat, Asteya mahavrat, Brahmacharya mahavrat and Aparigraha mahavrat. Digambar sadhu uses Picchi or Picchika to clean the floor as one of the aspects for practicing Ahimsa duirng moving from one place to another. The Picchis are made of peacock feathers (Shwetambar sadhu use woolen Charavalo which has similar concerns from a compassion point of view).

Traditionally, the feathers are collected in the rainy season when a peacock shed them naturally one at a time. A digambar sadhu never walks without his picchika. Shwetambars use picchi to clean Aangi (Puja) material from Murti every morning in the temple.

Peacock naturally discards one feather at a time and a new feather comes in. According to the tradition, in the past, the picchis were made from only using the naturally discarded feathers and they were replaced only when the Picchis were not usable.

**Compassion / Non-violence Point of View:** Nowadays to collect peacock feathers manually from the forest takes a lot of labour which is very expensive. Hence now peacocks are raised just for feathers. They manually pluck all the feathers from live peacock and then kill the peacock. China is one of the biggest suppliers for peacock feathers. Also, nowadays picchis are replaced every year regardless of their usability. It is an annual ritual in certain tradition.

**What can we do now?** Be aware and mindful of the spiritual intent behind the picchi ritual. Ensure that the material used for such a compassionate purpose of saving minutest bugs does not involve so much violence towards peacock. Going forward, it is best to use other sweeping materials that does not involve violence towards any movable living beings.

## Use of Saffron in Puja

### Spiritual Significance:

In the ancient Jain literature, there is no mention of using saffron for murti puja. Rather, only chandan (sandalwood) is used. The spiritual intent behind using chandan in puja is to remind us that by applying chandan to Bhagwan murti we wish to make ourselves peaceful, quiet and calm (samata).

### Background:

Somewhere along history, someone mixed saffron with chandan, probably because of smell / color or because it is a very rich product and Jains traditionally like to use the best. It got introduced only a couple of hundred years ago and after one generation, these kinds of things become traditions.

### Compassion / Non-violence Point of View:

About 50,000 - 75,000 saffron flowers are plucked / destroyed to create 1 lb of saffron. Each flower only has one thread of saffron and using the saffron thread destroys the flower. There is a youtube video on saffron production.

In addition, saffron is significant acidic and the acid in saffron harms the marble murtis. Hence to protect the murtis, Acharyas at that time decided to put placeholders' "tikkas" for where the saffron can be used during puja. We will never see "tikkas" on the old murtis. Tikkas on murtis gives out the perception that the murti is for puja only. The old murtis without tikkas, ornaments or other

decorative material serves as a more conducive symbol for meditation and internalization of the Jain values and principles.

### What can we do now?

Be aware and mindful of the spiritual intent behind the puja ritual. Ensure that the material used for such a pious purpose does not involve the significant large quantity of flowers and we achieve the intended spiritual benefit. Going forward, it is best to use only chandan rather than saffron mixed with chandan for puja. Also, if we were to use pure chandan instead of kesar then there is no damage to the murti either and there will be no need for "Tikas". And the murti will also serve the purpose of meditation object for the beginners.

## Use of Varakh in rituals at Temple

### Spiritual Significance:

The belief is that more people would visit temple because of decoration of the Murti. This will help to spread Jain religion.

### Background:

Varakh or silver / gold foil is used in many Jain temples on idols and in some religious ceremonies. Typically, we are unaware of the process used for manufacturing it. Mostly it is used to beautify the appearance of the murti and other sweet products used in Naivedya Puja.

### Compassion / Non-violence Point of View:

Varakh is made by placing the pure metal (silver or gold) between parchment sheets or by manually pounding between the layers of ox gut. Varakh itself is not derived from an animal source. However, in manual method a crucial material of animal origin, ox-gut / animal intestine, is used in its manufacture. This ox-gut is obtained from the slaughterhouse.

Even though varakh can be made using machines, the costs with using machines is significantly higher. So, we can't really be sure what is source of the varakh production.

### What can we do now?

Rather than using varakh, many temples today use metal moldings that are custom made to fit the murti. These moldings replicate the gold/silver look and are not made with cow's intestines so that violence is eliminated. In reality, we do not need to use Varakh in any ritual or on food items at all.

## Bottom Line:

**It is up to each one of us to ensure that our rituals/products are in-sync with our Jain values and principles.** We don't know who, why or when certain materials were introduced or changed in our rituals. But going forward, each of us as individuals can make a conscious choice, using our own knowledge, research and wisdom, of what we want to use. There are many aspects that plays in a role when it comes to such changes, but it is up to each one of us, to not do things out of ignorance, fear, force, greed, guilt or reward. Without knowledge and awareness, we are either in false belief, blindly following someone else or unknowingly promoting the industries that involve cruelty towards animals and such actions result in karma bondage and limits spiritual growth.

Therefore, when it comes religious rituals, products used for rituals or any such things, we need to do the due diligence of gaining as much information as we can. Plus, nowadays given technology/internet, we can do the required research very efficiently to ensure that we have the knowledge and awareness.

**About the Blog Source**

The question has been taken from the blog - www.jainism-says.blogspot.com, created by JAINA Education Committee (JEC), that addresses challenging questions about our religion and is intended to enrich the experience in practicing Jainism. The purpose of this blog is to address questions that have been collected by the JEC over the last 10+ years. These questions have been raised by the youth and professionals to their pathshala teachers, parents and/or Jain scholars. There is a wide range of questions from, basic to complex ones that involve experiences of modern times on various topics like - Ahimsa, Rituals, Environmental impact, Women Equality, Social Issues, Cleanliness, Health and Medicines, Profession/Business, Penance, Philosophy, Literature, and many others.

To address these questions, the JEC formed a diverse team with members from various backgrounds and from different geographic locations within America and will assign each question an author and editor from committee members. The committee holds regular sessions with Pravin Shah, Chairperson of JAINA Education Committee and thefundamental Jain principles and related questions are discussed in a regular conference call. After understanding the Jain principles and its application in our daily life, the team will document the responses of their questions in this blog. The responses will be published on the blog only after having gone through reviews by all the members. About Team Members: Over 35 years, Pravin Shah has researched Jain literature and scriptures in pursuit of finding informed answers to many of the questions people have about Jainism. In addition to his in-depth knowledge of Jainism, he also has a deep understanding of life as a Jain in the United States. He strives to answer questions beyond the plain and familiar, “that’s the way it is”, no matter how controversial the question is. When it comes to religion, it is an extremely difficult task to challenge a belief system that has been held on for many years. It requires courage, dedication, calmness, open-mindedness, and commitment, to push past those beliefs and come to conclusions based on sound reasoning.

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