

# Jainism Says...

## Does Jainism allow the usage of animals for medical research?

This is an important question that has very compelling perspectives for both sides, for and against the use of animals for medical research. Animals, from the fruit fly to the mouse, are widely used in research. From the perspective of the Jain principles, this question is straightforward, however, it can quickly become complicated in the current environment/lifestyle and also as we start hypothesizing scenarios.

Many factors come into consideration with using animals for testing/research:

- Should we use animals solely for human benefit? It is ethical/moral?
- If we don't use animals, then how would we develop new treatments for deadly diseases? For Humans as well as for animal treatment?
- Animals and Humans don't react the same way, then are testing really useful/necessary?
- With animal testing, there is definite pain and suffering for animals, whereas there is uncertainty in benefits for humans
- What about new computer systems, mathematical model, human tissue, cell culture? What about using cadavers (human dead bodies) for research?
- Are there other alternatives to using animals?

These perspectives also vary with individual backgrounds, belief system and experiences in life.

## What is Jainism Perspective?

Using animals for any kind of research involves a lot of violence, exploitation, and cruelty. It is a gruesome and cruel industry. Nowadays a huge number of animals are used in many types of research/testing: medicines, cosmetics, vaccines, agricultural, household materials, aeronautics, automotive, behavioral, consumer product testing, etc. And these animals are subjected to horrifically painful experiments. Tens of millions of animals are used for testing every year, and it is just an approximation since animal testing labs are not required by law to disclose the number of animals used for testing.

From Jainism perspective, any kind of exploitation/use of animals is violence towards those animals and is not allowed. And there are no exceptions to the principles in our scripture. If any exceptions are allowed in our literature, then people will find ways to exploit it. Once there is leeway, people get a tendency towards using animals for their benefit and it can become a problematic situation.

What if the human race is at stake?

Amongst all the living beings, grown-up human beings possess a fully developed mind and human beings are the only ones who can do meditation and ultimately attain self-realization and liberation. So, if the entire human race is at stake then one must do whatever minimum is required, with Jain Acharaya's permission, for the survival of the human race. We can protect ourselves but not have aggression (an example of aggression would let me destroy others before someone is going to attack me).

### **What can we do at an individual level?**

From a spiritual perspective, we should follow the path of minimum violence, do what is absolutely required for individual survival. We should not waste human life, make the best of our human life and use every moment for our spiritual upliftment (i.e. reduce our Kashayas and eliminate Mithyatva).

Now we have the information, we need to internalize the information, verify/test it with our experience, make it our own and then use it to make decisions that are right for us. From a practical perspective, at the individual level, we need to stop/avoid/minimize using any products that involve cruelty. We need to do the due diligence of gaining as much information as we can about everything that we use/consume and ensure that they are cruelty-free. Plus, nowadays given technology/internet, we can do the required research efficiently and find cruelty free alternatives for all the products. There are cruelty-free alternatives for vitamins and medicines too.

Vaccines have been in ethical controversy for long, many vaccines also have animal by-products in them and hence it is not that straightforward. Some people take regular vaccines, and some opt for non-vaccination/religious exemption. For vaccines or any life-threatening diseases, we need to gain as much information as possible and then use our wisdom to decide at an individual level.

In summary, we have to look at the purpose/objective from a holistic point of view and use our own wisdom to make a decision by applying Jain principles in our current environment. Please remember that under any situation, if we exploit animals there is a big consequence and if we use them very minimum for our survival, the consequences to us are minimum.

## About the Blog Source

The question has been taken from the blog - [www.jainism-says.blogspot.com](http://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 the fundamental 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.

The committee members for this effort are: Anita Parikh (CT), Anitha Prabhu (VA), Hardik Mehta (NJ), Krupali Shah (IL), Monica Raju Shah (Metro DC), Minal Shah (IL), Sejal Shah (NC), Shruti Doshi (VA) and Pratiksha Shah (VA)