



## Chapter 1



### *Origins and Traditional Articulations of Ahimsā*

The concept of *ahimsā* or nonviolence as it developed in India is closely linked with notions of karma. In the context of the *R̥g Veda*, karma means ritual action; through one's actions in the sacrificial process, certain benefits are said to be assured. Numerous studies of early Hindu notions of karma as summarized in Herman Tull's *The Vedic Origins of Karma*, and my earlier study of karma (*Karma and Creativity*) establish a link between Vedic ritual action and Upaniṣadic forms of meditative transformation.<sup>1</sup> However, although such Vedic sources as the *Śatapatabrāhmaṇa*, and the *Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣads* make mention of the efficacy of ritual action in creating and maintaining the world in which one lives, these texts from the earliest phases of Hindu thought do not demonstrate as great an emphasis on ethics as expressed in later Hindu texts that list nonviolence as preeminent. The earliest mention of the ethical importance of karma in the Hindu context is found in the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, when Yājñavalkya states that "one becomes good by good action, bad by bad" (3.2.10.13). It is only in the later *Dharmaśāstra* materials that the specific doctrine of rebirth according to one's meritorious or sinful deeds is fully expounded.<sup>2</sup>

Within the very first written documents of the Jaina tradition, by contrast, we see a fully developed and quite distinct doctrine of karma that entails strict observance of ethical precepts rooted in *ahimsā*. The earliest extant text of the Jains, the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, dating from the fourth century B.C.E., proclaims a much stronger message than that of Yājñavalkya:

Injurious activities inspired by self-interest lead to evil and darkness. This is what is called bondage, delusion, death, and hell. To do harm to others is to do harm to oneself. "Thou art he whom thou intendest to kill! Thou art he whom thou intendest to tyrannize over!" We corrupt ourselves as soon as we intend to corrupt others. We kill ourselves as soon as we intend to kill others.<sup>3</sup>

As we will see, the ideas contained in this passage found full development in the cosmology and psychology of the Jaina tradition. We also will see parallel developments in Hinduism, though the practice of animal sacrifice, inseparable from the all-important Vedic ritual tradition, mitigates the extent to which Hindus can be said to embrace fully the doctrine of *ahiṃsā*.

Before we turn to an examination of the theory and practice of *ahiṃsā* in the classical texts of Jainism and Hinduism, two other topics need to be addressed. First, in order to place the present study in the context of modern scholarship on this topic, a brief survey will be given of previous work on the origins of *ahiṃsā*. Second, we will discuss the possible archaic origins of Jainism in the Indus Valley civilization. Although any discussion of this early phase of India is difficult to undertake, due to the lack of translated textual materials, various scholars have suggested that certain artifacts of the Indus Valley cities indicate a link with the later Jaina tradition.

### *A Brief Survey of Prior Studies on the Origins of Ahiṃsā*

Modern scholarship has been surprisingly scant and inconclusive on the origins of *ahiṃsā*. Two sources often cited include L. Alsdorf's *Beiträge zur Geschichte von Vegetarismus und Rinderverehrung in Indien*,<sup>4</sup> and Hanns-Peter Schmidt's "The Origin of *Ahiṃsā*." Both of these studies emphasize social law theory as found in Hindu law manuals. Although they mention Jaina nonviolence, they seem to minimize its importance; Schmidt states that "the concept of *ahiṃsā* as we meet it with the Jains is not based on ethical ideas but on a magico-ritualistic dread of destroying life in any form."<sup>5</sup> These authors also claim that Mahāvīra, the organizer of what has become institutional Jainism, was not a vegetarian, a claim that has been contradicted by Jaina scholar H. R. Kapadia.<sup>6</sup>

Alsdorf and Schmidt differ sharply on the extent to which the Indus Valley culture may have contributed to later Indian religions. Alsdorf suggests that Śiva worship, reincarnation, veneration of the cow, and nonviolence all have roots in Indus Valley culture. Schmidt dismisses the notion that vegetarianism is found in the Indus Valley civilization, stating that these people could

not have been vegetarian because the bones of flesh animals were found in the ruins of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. He writes that “there are...no traces of similar ideas to be found among the non-Aryan population of India—not influenced by the Brahmanical culture—which could justify the assumption that *ahimsā* and vegetarianism did not originate from conceptions evolved among the Aryans.”<sup>7</sup> Recent scholarly investigations tend to refute Schmidt’s conclusions, as materials in the next section indicate. Additionally, I would like to suggest that the presence of bones in a city’s garbage does not mean that all its inhabitants ate meat. Within India to the present day, both carnivores and vegetarians coexist. Although the articles by Schmidt and Alsdorf are often cited as the standard studies on the origins of nonviolence, they do not seem to pay sufficient attention to the Jaina texts, particularly the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, which, having been composed in the fourth or early third century B.C.E.,<sup>8</sup> predates the Hindu *Dharmaśāstra* material upon which these authors base most of their arguments.

Other materials on the history and literature of *ahimsā* include Unto Tahtinen’s *Ahimsā: Nonviolence in Indian Tradition*,<sup>9</sup> which provides an anthology of select texts on the topic, with emphasis on the Brahmanical tradition. An article by Carlo della Casa discusses the original philosophical impetus of nonviolent perspectives, drawing primarily from later Jaina and Mahayana Buddhist sources.<sup>10</sup> Peter Schreiner examines the issue of nonviolence as presented in a dialogue between Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>11</sup> Koshelya Walli provides a comprehensive survey of nonviolence in India that is particularly useful to those interested in Gandhian studies. She elucidates its impetus from classical sources up into the present.<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass investigates the Mīmāṃsā defense of animal sacrifice in face of resistance from advocates of *ahimsā*,<sup>13</sup> a debate that occurs in the seventh century C.E. In summary, the body of scholarship on the origins of nonviolence is largely restricted to a discussion of Hindu texts, with occasional reference to select Jaina materials.

### *Possible Indus Valley Origin of the Jaina Tradition*

Archaeological evidence of cities dated as early as 3000 B.C.E. points to the presence of a civilization in the Indus Valley characterized by orderly cities and extensive use of terracotta seals. From the layout of the cities, it has been hypothesized that the civilization was remarkably stable, exhibiting virtually no change for a period of over a thousand years. The standardized building materials, the extensive plumbing and drainage systems, and the sturdiness of the ruins at Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Lothal, and elsewhere, give witness to the

durability of a remarkable society, one of sufficient sophistication to engage in trade with the Sumerians and the Egyptians. However, streets and bricks give little insight regarding the hearts and minds of the Indus Valley peoples. For this we turn to the terracotta seals, the interpretation of which has prompted a great deal of speculation and a fair amount of controversy.

The seals of the Indus Valley civilization, many of which can be examined closely at the British Museum, measure approximately two inches by two inches, and depict a variety of scenes: a meditating proto-yogi or proto-Śiva; several depictions of adorned bulls; meditating figures surrounded by animals; and representations of women, both in the seals and in numerous amulets. Asko Parpola has written that these “mostly realistic pictures of animals” denote that they were “apparently worshipped as sacred.”<sup>14</sup>

Several scholars, including Ramprasad Chandra, John Marshall, and Mircea Eliade, claim that current yogic practices stem from Indus Valley shamanistic rituals as indicated on these seals. However, Doris Srinivasan warns against associating them with later Hindu culture. Rather than assenting to the theory that the yogins depicted in the various seals are in fact early versions of the Hindu god Śiva, she suggests that “the figure represents a divine bull-man, possibly a deity of fertility and abundance.”<sup>15</sup> However, she does not dispute the notion that approximations of yoga postures are represented on the seals. Jean Filiozat and Hanns-Peter Schmidt claim that yoga was not related to indigenous cultures but scientifically developed by the Aryan invaders of India.<sup>16</sup> This thesis rests on the assumption that the Indus Valley people were in fact conquered by the Aryans, also known as Indo-Europeans, a notion that has recently been challenged by Colin Renfrew.<sup>17</sup> Renfrew notes that the seals found in Mohenjodaro and Harappa were also found near the Caspian sea and suggests that “early Indo-European languages were spoken in North India by the sixth millennium B.C.”<sup>18</sup>

Both the meditative poses and the apparent veneration for animals have been cited by Thomas McEvilley as evidence of a proto-yoga tradition in India, akin to Jainism. In support of his claim, he refers to the Indus seal wherein various animals surround a person engaged in what he describes as *mūlabandhāsana*, a sitting yogic pose wherein one’s heels are pressed against the perineum with knees pressed firmly to the ground. McEvilley links this figure with the totem and taboo practices described by anthropologists.<sup>19</sup> In shamanic initiation, the practitioner receives training in the art of taking on the powers of a particular animal; in some societies, a clan or even an unrelated group of people will devote themselves to a particular animal. That animal becomes sacred and will not be killed by members of the group, though other animals might be used for food.

This particular image, depicting a contemplative figure surrounded by a

multitude of animals might suggest that perhaps all the animals depicted are sacred to this particular practitioner. Consequently these animals would be protected from harm. This might be the first indication of the practice of *ahimsā*.

This particular scene is also described in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, the oldest text of the Jaina canon. It is said to adorn the palanquin that Mahāvīra ascended in the fantastic and embellished tale that describes his renunciation. Śakra, the leader and king of the gods, praises, worships, and anoints him for his decision to leave the world; he clad Mahāvīra in beautiful robes “interwoven with gold and ornamented with designs of flamingos,” adorns him with necklaces, a turban, wreaths of precious stones, ribbons, and more. He then creates a giant palanquin

adorned with pictures of wolves, bulls, horses, men, dolphins, birds, monkeys, elephants, antelopes, *sarabhas* (fantastic animals with eight legs), yaks, tigers, lions, [and] creepings plants.<sup>20</sup>

This scene with its great variety of creatures is like that found in the Indus Valley seals and echoed in later Indian iconography as well. It can be interpreted as depicting harmony within nature and, I might add, it could provide early indication of reverence for all living beings.

McEvelley offers various other evidence for a possible link between the Indus Valley culture and later institutional forms of Jainism. Seal 420, unearthed at Mohenjodaro, portrays a person with three or possibly four faces. Jaina iconography frequently depicts its *Tirthankaras* with four faces, symbolizing their missionary activity in all four directions.<sup>21</sup> The figure portrayed in seal 420, as well as those depicted in seals 222 and 235 and in various other images, sits in the *mūlabandhāsana* mentioned above. According to McEvelley, the first literary mention of this pose is found in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* and then repeated in the *Kalpa Sūtra* in association with Mahāvīra’s pose when he entered into the state of *kevala*, the pinnacle of Jaina spirituality:

...under a Sal tree,...in a squatting position with joined heels, exposing himself to the heat of the sun, after fasting two and a half days without drinking water, being engaged in deep meditation, [Mahāvīra] reached the highest knowledge and intuition, called Kevala, which is infinite, supreme, unobstructed, unimpeded, complete, and full.<sup>22</sup>

For McEvelley, the depiction of this pose in the Indus Valley materials and its later description in Jaina texts provides strong evidence of a link between archaic and institutional religion in India. However, McEvelley’s assumption

that Mahāvīra sat in the *mūlabandhāsana* is somewhat contradicted by both the depiction on the seal and by the description found in the texts. On the seal, it is difficult to clearly ascertain if the knees are firmly planted on the ground, which is essential for *mūlabandhāsana* as traditionally practiced. In the text, the pose is described as a squatting position, known as the *godoha-āsana* or cow-milking pose.<sup>23</sup> This differs from McEvelley's naming of the pose, but does resemble the position as drawn on the seal.

One stamped amulet from Mohenjodaro depicts a figure in what McEvelley calls *mūlabandhāsana* flanked by two devotees and two upright serpents; McEvelley notes that the Tīrthānkara Pārśvanatha, at the moment he passed into *kevala*, was "protected on both sides by upright serpents."<sup>24</sup> Pārśvanatha has been verified as living around the time of 850 B.C.E. The seal is presumably older, but may indicate a stylistic tradition associated with spiritual accomplishment that was passed down through the centuries.

Another seal depicts seven persons in "an upright posture with arms hanging somewhat stiffly and held slightly away from the sides of the body," which McEvelley correlates with the Jaina *kāyotsarga* pose, the posture in which the very first Tīrthānkara, Ṛṣabha, is said to have entered *kevala*.<sup>25</sup> The particular seal used for this argument is elsewhere interpreted in so many different ways that this would be very difficult to establish. This seal has been used also in an attempt to establish the existence of a proto-mother goddess tradition in India.<sup>26</sup> Richard Lannoy, however, does see Jaina influences in this seal: "that of a nude man represented as a repeat-motif in rigidly upright posture, his legs slightly apart, arms held parallel with the sides of his body, which recurs later as the Jaina Tīrthānkara, repeated row upon row." However, Lannoy also links the same seal to the seven goddesses!<sup>27</sup>

Depictions of a bull appear repeatedly in the artifacts of the Indus Valley. Lannoy, McEvelley, and Padmanabh Jaini all have suggested that the abundant use of the bull image in the Indus Valley civilization indicates a link with Ṛṣabha, the first of the twenty four Tīrthānkaras, whose companion animal is the bull.<sup>28</sup>

In summary, McEvelley posits that six images indicate a proto-yoga tradition akin to Jainism was present in the Indus Valley: a meditating figure seated in what he calls *mūlabandhāsana*, a similar figure surrounded with an array of benevolent wild animals, a four-faced icon, a meditator flanked by two upright serpents, seven figures in what appears to be the *kāyotsarga* pose, and the bull.

Additionally, the *R̥g Veda* describes the odd practices of an ancient religious order wherein men with unshorn locks are described variously as naked, "going where the gods have gone before," intimate with the wind, and "a sweet most delightful friend" (*R̥g Veda* X:136). The *Atharva Veda* devotes its

fifteenth chapter to the Vṛātyas, a sect that includes among its practices standing erect in one spot for a full year, a practice mentioned in the *Uttara Sūtra*, a Jaina text. These references to not cutting the hair, postures such as *mūlabandhāsana* and standing motionless, nudity, and so forth, might be indicative of a proto-yogic religion related to later forms of Jainism.

All these materials suggest that some form of religion involving meditation and veneration of animals flourished in the Indus Valley cities. Although it is not possible to conclude that these persons were practitioners of *ahimsā* as it exists in its present form, some iconographic and thematic continuity stretching from the Indus Valley into classical and modern Jainism seems evident. We now turn to an investigation of the Jaina religion in its fully developed form, wherein *ahimsā* serves as the centerpiece of religious practice.

### *Ahimsā and the Jaina Religion*

The Jaina and Buddhist traditions are referred to as the heterodox schools of Indian thought. Both reject the authority of the Vedas; both emphasize meditation; both contain teachings regarding rebirth; both were established in their present forms by historical personalities. However, whereas Buddhism is rooted in a markedly anti-theistic stance and generally evades questions of a metaphysical nature, Jainism seemingly combines physics with metaphysics, propounding a world view that regards all aspects of physical reality to be imbued with multitudes of life. This perception of the livingness of things resulted in the practice of *ahimsā*, an ethic requiring a respect for all living forms that shaped the day-to-day life of lay Jains and the austere path followed by Jaina mendicants. This thorough respect for life, and its attendant lifestyle, profoundly influenced Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam within India and, to the extent that it helped to shape Buddhist practice, spread throughout Asia. We have seen some indications of Jainism's antiquity; a survey of its basic teachings, which have served as a major inspiration for the observance of *ahimsā* in India for millenia, now follows.

Jainism is one of the most ancient of India's indigenous traditions, and the oldest of the surviving non-Vedic schools. The name Jainism is derived from the term *jina*, which means conqueror or victor; hence, the Jains are followers of the path established by the *Jinas*, those who have conquered the suffering (*duḥkha*) inherent in attachment. The most recent Jina, Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, lived from approximately 540 to 468 B.C.E. according to modern scholars; the traditional dates given by Jains are 599 to 527 B.C.E. His immediate predecessor, Pārśvanatha, has been dated to the years surrounding 850 B.C.E. Twenty-two other Jinas (also known as *Tirthankaras*) are said to



have preceded Mahāvira and Pārśvanatha, but no historical evidence exists to prove or disprove their existence.

At the heart of Jainism is the practice of *ahimsā*, the vow of noninjury. The word *ahimsā* comes from the Sanskrit root *hims*, a desiderative form of the verb *han*, to kill or injure or strike. Prefixed with a privative “a,” it is best translated as “absence of the desire to kill or harm.”<sup>29</sup> This is the prime practice in Jainism for overcoming past actions, and all dimensions of the religion and the philosophy, including its logic, reflect a concern for *ahimsā*. Acts of violence are to be avoided because they will result in injury to oneself at some future time, even perhaps in another embodiment. In order to uphold the vows of *ahimsā*, two paths of practice were developed: one for the Jaina monks, who adhere to greater vows (*mahāvratā*), and another for the Jaina lay community, who follow a less-rigorous discipline (*aṇuvratā*). These *aṇuvratā* include nonviolence (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), not stealing (*asteya*), sexual restraint (*brahmacharya*), and nonpossession (*aparigraha*). Four types of violence are acknowledged: intentional, nonintentional, related to profession, and self-defense. The monks live according to rules that avoid all types of violence; lay persons, as we will see, are allowed to take life in some instances. All Jains are strict vegetarians, living solely on one-sensed beings (vegetables) and milk products. Alcohol, honey, and certain kinds of figs are also prohibited, because they are said to harbor many forms of life, especially *nigoda* (microorganisms).

*Ahimsā* is said to be practiced by the Jaina population, both lay and monastic, in five ways: restraint of mind, control of tongue, carefulness on roads, removing beings from the road, and eating in daylight (to avoid ingesting bugs).<sup>30</sup> In order to observe these forms of *ahimsā*, obedience to several rules is enacted to uphold the *aṇuvratā*, including care in movement, speech, eating, placing and removing, and elimination. An additional rule suggests that one limit the area of one’s activities, thus renouncing potential harm one may cause in far-off places.<sup>31</sup> This last rule contributes to the regional nature of Jainism: monks face strong prohibitions against travel. These concerns have led the Jaina community to pursue limited means of livelihood: government and farming are acceptable but not desirable occupations; writing, arts, and crafts are encouraged; and commerce is the most desirable, provided that the trade is not conducted in tools of violence, such as in weapons.<sup>32</sup>

For the most advanced monks, the discipline becomes increasingly rigorous. In addition to limited food intake, restraint from sexual desire, and the renunciation of all possessions (in the case of the Digambara sect, any form of clothing is renounced), no digging, bathing, lighting or extinguishing of fires, or fanning is allowed, in order to protect earth, water, fire, and air bodies, respectively.<sup>33</sup>



As evidenced by these prohibitions, the world view of the Jainas presents an unparalleled concern for life. "All beings are fond of life; they like pleasure and hate pain, shun destruction and like to live, they long to live. To all, life is dear."<sup>34</sup> With this basic orientation, the Jaina community has exerted a great deal of influence on Indian society as a whole, though it has consistently remained a tiny minority. They have protested vigorously against the Hindu practice of animal sacrifice. One text declares: "Those terrible ones who kill animals under the guise of making an offering to the gods, or the guise of sacrifice, are bereft of compassion and go to a bad fate."<sup>35</sup> Largely as a result of their efforts, vegetarianism is practiced in all parts of India, and animal sacrifice is now illegal in most states.

The philosophical system underpinning the practice of *ahimsā* posits that all being (*sat*) is divided into nonliving (*ajīva*) and living (*jīva*) forms. The nonliving forms include what might be considered principles (motion, rest, space, time) and matter. Matter includes atoms that are indivisible and infinite in number, each possessing form, taste, smell, and palpability. These atoms form the foundation for both physical and psychic or karmic realities.

Within space and continuous with atomic structures are an infinite number of life forces that have existed since beginningless time. The category of living forms includes almost everything regarded as animate or inanimate by non-Jainas. According to Jainism, rocks, mountains, drops of water, lakes, and trees all have life force or *jīva*. These *jīvas* are able to assume diverse dimensions, just as a piece of cloth can be rolled into a small ball or unfolded to occupy an extended space. Each *jīva* is in a state of flux; each is suffused with consciousness (*caitanya*), bliss (*sukha*), and energy (*vīrya*). However, this latter aspect is obscured due to each *jīva* having been defiled by psychic atoms called karma that cause the *jīva* to be reborn repeatedly within a hierarchy of states ranging from that of the gods (*devas*), humans (*manuṣya*), hell beings (*nārakī*), to plants and animals (*tiryāṅca*), which includes several subcategories. The universe thus conceived is in the shape of a giant person, with hell beings occupying the lower realm, humans and *tiryāṅca* occupying the middle, gods residing in the heavenly realms which are divided into sixteen abodes, and, finally, dwelling in the *siddha-loka* are the liberated *jīvas* or *kevalins* who have been purged of all karma. This is the final goal, the telos of the cosmos, achieved by those who have successfully and, most likely, repeatedly lived the life of a Jaina monk.

The category of animals and plants (*tiryāṅca*) is divided into three parts. The lowest form of life is called *nigoda*, beings that "are so undifferentiated that they lack even individual bodies; large clusters of them are born together as colonies which die a fraction of a second later."<sup>36</sup> They are said to reside in flesh, among other places. Above these are the earth bodies, the water bodies, the fire

bodies, and the air bodies; these comprise the second group. The third and the highest division of this plant and animal group includes plants and beasts. This entire category is further subdivided into a hierarchy dependent upon the number of senses the life forms possess. The tiny microorganisms known as *nigoda* possess only the sense of touch, as do the earth, water, fire, and air bodies and plant life. Animals are said to possess more than one sense. Worms add the sense of taste; crawling bugs add smell; flies and moths add sight; water serpents add hearing. Mammals, reptiles, fish, and humans all possess six senses, adding mental capacity to the five senses listed above. Gods and hell-beings likewise possess six faculties but also have special powers, arise spontaneously (without parents), and—if a god—continually experience pleasure and—if a demon—experience only anguish. Regardless of one's state of life, from a clod of earth to heavenly beings, repeated existence on the wheel of life is certain until one achieves human birth and begins the quest for liberation.

A *jīva*'s status in this hierarchy is not fixed but is in a constant state of flux, indicated by the Sanskrit term *saṃsāra*. The universe is filled with living beings that have no beginning but that, because of unquenched desires, continually take on new embodiments in one of the four categories (*gati*): gods, humans, hell beings, and animals and plants. We have mentioned that the tradition attributes a thinking faculty (*manas*) to animals; this special ability has spawned the proliferation of numerous stories in which animals make reasoned choices, particularly in regard to nonviolent behavior, that subsequently advance them from animal to human or godly status. One story tells of a frog being trampled by an elephant while en route to hear a lecture by Mahāvira; he is said to have been reborn in heaven. Similarly, the pair of cobras associated with the Tīrthankara Pārśvanatha were said to have been blessed by him and consequently were reborn in heaven. In a prior birth as a lion, Mahāvira himself is said to have been so moved by a sermon on the importance of *ahiṃsā* that he refrained from all food normally consumed by a lion, resulting in his death and subsequent human birth wherein he achieved enlightenment. One such story amply demonstrates the Jaina belief that animals can exhibit remarkable powers of both intellect and will:

Long ago, there was a large forest fire, and all the animals of the forest fled and gathered around a lake, including a herd of elephants, deer, rabbits, squirrels, etc. For hours the animals crowded together in their small refuge, cowering from the fire. The leader of the elephant herd got an itch, and raised a leg to scratch himself. A tiny rabbit quickly occupied the space vacated by the elephant's foot. The elephant, out of an overwhelming desire not to hurt the rabbit, stood on three legs for more than

three days until the fire died down and the rabbit scampered off. By then, his leg was numb and he toppled over. Still retaining a pure mind and heart, the elephant died. As a reward for his compassion he overcame the need for embodiment as an animal and was born as a prince by the name of Megha and eventually became a disciple of Mahāvira, taking the vows of a monk in hopes of transcending all forms of existence.<sup>37</sup>

This fanciful story is noteworthy for its confidence in animal abilities, illustrating the Jaina conviction that animals can hold a very high place in the greater order of things.

Under normal circumstances, the most important state to achieve is that of the human being, as this is the only state in which a living being (*jīva*) can be freed totally from the bondage of action (*karma*). For the Jainas, karma is a physical entity, a viscous mass that adheres to the *jīva* and causes attachment and suffering. The average person is filled with karma, which obstructs one's true nature of infinite knowledge, bliss, and energy. The influx (*āsrava*) of new karma must cease if a person is to achieve the pinnacle of all life, the state of liberation, wherein there is no more attachment to passion and impurity. In order to overcome the negative influences of karma, Jainas take on the series of vows mentioned above, the practice of which aids in the purging (*nirjarā*) of the residue accumulated during repeated deleterious activity.

The Jaina tradition presents a highly technical interpretation of karma, considering it to be a material, sticky, colorful substance, composed of atoms, that adheres to the life force and prevents ascent to the *siddha loka*, the world occupied by the liberated ones. This karma is attracted to the *jīva* by acts of violence, and persons who have committed repeated acts of violence are said to be shrouded in a cloud of blackish matter. The following story illustrates the personality type associated with each of the primary five colors (*leśyā*) of karma:

A hungry person with the most negative black-*leśyā* karma uproots and kills an entire tree to obtain a few mangoes. The person of blue karma fells the tree by chopping the trunk, again merely to gain a handful of fruits. Fraught with grey karma, a third person spares the trunk but cuts off the major limbs of the tree. The one with orangish-red karma carelessly and needlessly lops off several branches to reach the mangoes. The fifth, exhibiting white karma, “merely picks up ripe fruit that has dropped to the foot of the tree.”<sup>38</sup>

Through passion, desire, and hatred, the *jīva* attracts karma, which remains until its potency is exhausted. It is stated in the *Sarvārthasiddhi* that the *jīva* “has successively taken in and cast off every particle of karmic matter in the universe.” Karma comes in 148 possible forms known as *prakṛtis*, ranging from the destructive (which produces delusions, passions, sentiments and obscurations), to the nondestructive.<sup>39</sup> In the eyes of the Jainas, all karma must be purged (*nirjarā*) in order for liberation to be attained.

The path to liberation in Jainism proceeds through fourteen stages of purification or *guṇasthānas*. At the first stage, *mithyādṛṣṭi*, one suffers from wrong views and is attached to both a sense of self and to things as they appear to be in the world. The second state is similar to the first, but one falls to it after having previously reached a higher state. The third state is transitional, and arises after the second when one begins a reascent to the fourth *guṇasthāna*. In this state, mixture of correct and incorrect views prevails. The fourth state, *samyak darśana*, is pivotal; its significance is second only to the attainment of *Jina* status. It may last from a single instant up to a maximum of forty-eight minutes. In this state, all obstructions of karma are prevented from arising:

So great is the purity generated by this flash of insight that enormous numbers of bound karmas are driven out of the soul altogether, while future karmic influx is severely limited in both quantity and intensity.<sup>40</sup>

This suppression of karma is preliminary to total elimination, yet it guarantees the *jīva*'s “irreversible entry onto the path that leads to *mokṣa*” (liberation). It heralds a leaving behind of preoccupation with the body, with psychological states, and with possessions. The gross forms of anger, pride, deceit, and greed are “rendered inoperative.” One “no longer perceives things as ‘attractive’ or ‘desirable’ but one penetrates to the fact that every aspect of life is transitory and mortal.”<sup>41</sup> At this point a resolve sets in to change one’s lifestyle and to adopt the rigors of Jaina renunciation. Additionally, tremendous compassion arises, wherein all beings are seen as holding the potential to be liberated from the shackles of karma.

It is only after this insight experience that the Jaina lifestyle of *ahiṃsā* is purposefully adopted rather than merely imitated. This happens in the fifth *guṇasthāna*, wherein the vows of a layperson (*aṇuvrata*) are undertaken, which were explained above. Following the “baptism” of insight in the fourth *guṇasthāna*, one undoubtedly has reverted to conventional “wrong views,” as indicated in *guṇasthānas* two and three. These disciplines allow the active cultivation of right views on the part of the practitioner, advancing one forward again.

In the subsequent nine stages, increasingly strict monastic vows are adopted, leading to the progressive elimination of karmic matter. First the passions of anger, pride, deceit, and greed are eliminated, not merely suppressed (sixth *gunasthāna*). Then carelessness is overcome (seventh). Then the subsidiary passions (sentiments) are suppressed. These include laughter, pleasure, displeasure, sorrow, fear, disgust, and sexual cravings (eighth, ninth, tenth). After a hiatus wherein a fall from this state is expected (eleventh), one then proceeds to eliminate any smoldering passions (twelfth), and then the karma that obscures knowledge and perception and restricts energy (thirteenth). In this state, one has become an *arhat*, a *kevalin*, Jina or Tirthankara. The final (fourteenth) state is obtained the instant before death and signifies the elimination of those karmas that keep one alive (feeling, name, life span, and family).<sup>42</sup> The key to progressing along this path to liberation resides in the observance of *ahimsā*, resulting in the progressive purification of the *jīva* through the purging of negative karmic matter.

We have examined the practice of *ahimsā* in the Jaina tradition, exploring the greater world view of which it is part, as well as the pathway to liberation with which it is associated. In later chapters, we will return to our discussion of traditional Jainism, with an investigation of its perspectives on logic and its suggestions on how best to approach the end of one's life.

### *Ahimsā in Hinduism and later Indian Culture*

Having discussed the practices of *ahimsā* in the Jaina tradition and some aspects of Jaina thought that support its observance, we now turn to its mention and some of its applications in the Hindu or Brahmanical tradition. At the earliest phase of Hindu culture, *ahimsā* is not emphasized. The *Rg Veda* mentions *ahimsā* only in supplication to Indra for protection from violent enemies. The *Yajur Veda* proclaims: "may all beings look at me with a friendly eye, may I do likewise, and may we look on each other with the eyes of a friend" (36. 18). It is only in the later phase, when the classical form of Hinduism known as Brahmanism begins to emerge, that nonviolence is seen as an important religious value. It may be surmised that this phase of Indian thought, starting around 600 B.C.E., is marked by a merging of traditions; perhaps Śramaṇic or proto-yogic attitudes and influences from Jainism directly influenced Hindu texts and teachings as they developed. One clear example of this process is the adoption of vegetarianism by the Brahman or priestly caste. In the *Rg Veda*, Brahmins and others eat meat; by the time of the classical period, vegetarianism becomes a hallmark or indicator of high-caste status.

In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, *ahimsā* is mentioned in a list of virtues along

with an attribute for one who desires not to “return again.” The *Laws of Manu*, which have played a great role in shaping Hindu society, list *ahimsā* among the rules to be performed by all castes, along with truthfulness, non-stealing, purity, and control of senses. In regard to meat-eating, the *Laws of Manu*, which date from between 200 B.C.E. and 100 C.E., contain three separate recommendations: that only “kosher” meat may be eaten; that only meat obtained through ritual sacrifice may be eaten; and that one should eat no meat:

Live on flowers, roots, and fruits alone which are ripened by the time and fallen spontaneously (6. 21). He who for a hundred years annually sacrifices a horse sacrifice and he who does not eat meat [at all]: for both of these the fruit of their meritorious deeds is the same.<sup>43</sup>

As Francis Zimmerman has noted, the *Laws of Manu* contain several strata regarding the status of eating meat because they simultaneously must address the issues of life in the world and renunciation of the world. Meat-eating is traditionally sanctioned in Hinduism as part of the sacrificial process (hence referred to as “kosher”) and in emergency situations such as famine.<sup>44</sup> However, greater status is accorded to those who are able to follow a strictly vegetarian diet, prompting Louis Dumont to state that “vegetarianism forced itself on Hindu society, having begun in the sects of the renouncers, among which are Jainism and Buddhism.”<sup>45</sup>

The *Mahābhārata*, the great Hindu epic story of the war between two sets of cousins, contains an extensive discussion of the importance of *ahimsā*. The following passages attest to the significance of nonviolence within a Hindu context:<sup>46</sup>

One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one’s own self. This, in brief, is the rule of *dharma*. Yielding to desire and acting differently, one becomes guilty of *adharma*.

*Mahābhārata* XIII:113. 8

The meat of other animals is like the flesh of one’s son. That foolish person, stupefied by folly, who eats meat, is regarded as the vilest of human beings.

*Mahābhārata* XIII:114:11

Those high-souled persons who desire beauty, faultlessness of limbs, long life, understanding, mental and physical strength, and memory, should abstain from acts of injury.

*Mahābhārata* XIII:115:8

Persons endowed with intelligence and purified selves should always behave toward other beings after the manner of that behavior which they like others to observe towards themselves.

*Mahābhārata* XIII:115:22

*Ahimsā* is the *dharma*. It is the highest purification. It is also the highest truth from which all *dharma* proceeds.

*Mahābhārata* XIII:125:25

*Ahimsā* is the highest *dharma*. *Ahimsā* is the best austerity (*tapas*). *Ahimsā* is the greatest gift. *Ahimsā* is the highest self control. *Ahimsā* is the highest sacrifice. *Ahimsā* is the highest power. *Ahimsā* is the highest friend. *Ahimsā* is the highest truth. *Ahimsā* is the highest teaching.

*Mahābhārata* XIII:116:37–41

The purifications of one who does *ahimsā* are inexhaustible. Such a one is regarded as always performing sacrifices, and is the father and mother of all beings.

*Mahābhārata* XIII:115:41

In these passages from the *Mahābhārata*, *ahimsā* is extolled as the best of all actions, giving birth to all righteousness or *dharma* and serving as the best possible means for purification. A chapter on *ahimsā* from the *Mahābhārata* will be discussed in chapter four.

In the classical Yoga system, which in a certain sense may be regarded as the premiere renouncer school of the Hindu tradition, wherein the values and some practices of the Jainas and Buddhists are given sanction within the framework of orthodoxy, *ahimsā* is mentioned as the basis of and the reason for all ethical practices. The commentator Vyāsa defines *ahimsā* as being the absence of injuriousness (*anabhidroha*) towards all living beings (*sarvabhūta*) in all respects (*sarvathā*) and for all times (*sarvadā*). It is said to result in the alleviation of enmity in the proximity of the one practicing *ahimsā* (*Yoga Sūtra* II:35). Vyāsa acknowledges that circumstantial exigencies might preclude the total practice of *ahimsā*. He gives as examples several cases in which one may be exempted from the practice of *ahimsā*. The first is that of the fisherman who only injures fish for his own survival. The second is the vow to abstain from killing only in a special place. Another case is the observation of harmlessness exclusively on particular days. In another hypothetical situation, an act of violence could be approved because it is committed for the gods or for a Brahman. Or, like a fisherman, a warrior can justify violence as being



necessitated by his profession. In the final analysis, however, Patañjali, the author of the *Yoga Sūtra*, requires that the yogi practice *ahimsā* in its broadest sense (*mahāvratam*), unrestricted by caste (*jati*), place (*deśa*), time (*kāla*), or circumstance (*samaya*). *Ahimsā* here is required as the foremost spiritual discipline, to be strictly adhered to by aspiring yogis.

It is quite possible that Jaina attitudes from the sixth century B.C.E. had a direct influence on the development of the Yoga School; the first sequence of disciplines mentioned by Patañjali (circa 100 C.E.) are identical to the five vows of Mahāvīra's Jainism; nonviolence (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), not stealing (*asteya*), sexual restraint (*brahmacharya*), and nonpossession (*aparigraha*). Due to the early date of Pārśvanatha (ca. 850 B.C.E.), it is also clear that Jainism is an earlier strata of the renouncer tradition that gave rise to both Yoga and Buddhism.

Throughout Indian history, there is evidence of the influence of *ahimsā* on political policy. This includes the rule of Aśoka during the third century B.C.E., which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, and the Jaina kingdoms of Karnataka, which flourished from the second century until the thirteenth century of the common era.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the most thoroughly documented instance of a non-Jaina ruler in India who was convinced to adopt nonviolence as a governmental policy occurred at the court of Akbar, the Moghul Emperor who extended Muslim control throughout most of India, ruling between 1556 and 1605. In 1582, Akbar invited the Jaina monk Hīravijaya Suri to visit the capital at Fatehpur Sikri in order to learn from him the basic principles of Jainism. The monk arrived in 1583 with an additional sixty-seven monks and stayed on for two years, giving private instruction to the Moghul ruler. Impressed with the "character and personality, learning and saintliness"<sup>48</sup> of the monk, Akbar gave him the title of Jagat-Guru or World Teacher, and asked how he could repay him for the teachings that had been given. Hīravijaya asked that Akbar use his influence to spread the teaching of nonviolence throughout the empire. In response, many prisoners were released and animal slaughter was prohibited every year during Jaina festival days in regions where Jainas lived.<sup>49</sup> Personally, Akbar was influenced by the Jaina philosophy of *ahimsā* and very nearly gave up eating meat and hunting. According to the *Akbar Nama*, he passed laws requiring the protection of mice, oxen, leopards, hares, fish, serpents, horses, sheep, monkeys, roosters, dogs, and hogs, either banning or limiting their slaughter.<sup>50</sup> Jaina influence was also seen in other voluntary legislation, such as the suggestion that *ahimsā* be practiced in the first month of the lunar cycle and that the use of leather be avoided in the sixth month. He also enacted legislation that hills sacred to Jainas be handed over to them in Gujarat and Bengal. Clearly, Akbar did much to advance the practice of *ahimsā* in India.

### Conclusion

Nonviolence lies at the root of select forms of spiritual practice in the religious traditions of India, as we have seen in our brief survey. Regardless of religious distinctions, nonviolent action requires that the performer of any activity be aware of all of its implications. The concept of nonviolent action also presumes that another person is, in a fundamental sense, not different from oneself. Philosophically, non-difference of self and others provides a theoretical basis for performing nonviolence. Within the context of the Indian quest for liberation, nonviolence provides an important step toward the direct perception of the sacredness of all life. It serves to free one from restricted notions of self and to open one more fully to an awareness of and sensitivity toward the wants and needs of other persons, animals, and the world of the elements, all of which exist in reciprocal dependence.

For the Buddhists and Jainas, there is no creator god, only a continuation of what has been: time is beginningless, as is life itself. Each life state is interrelated and interchangeable, constantly taking new birth after the death of each particular form. The human condition is the highest, most desirable form of life, but is viewed in context as relating to and dependent upon virtually all other life forms. According to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the elements of the body, when cremated, enter into the atmosphere, join with the rain, return to earth, enter the plants, are consumed by humans, and form the seeds for new life. There is a continuity of substance between one's old body and a future embodiment. According to some schools of thought, after one dies the impressions of the life that has passed continue and find a new embodiment. Depending upon the nature of these impressions (*saṃskāras*), one can achieve a higher birth or a lower birth. Hence, the life force of an animal can evolve into human status; the opposite can also take place.

Given that all life forms are part of the same continuum, the consequences of one's actions require great consideration. This chapter began with a discussion of the importance of karma in Indian religions. The law of karma states that as you have done to others, so will be done to you, succinctly expressed by the Buddha at the beginning of the *Dhammapada*:

If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, evils follow him even as the wheel follows the foot of the ox which draws the cart.

If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him like a shadow that never leaves him.<sup>51</sup>

Action (karma) in the present will make its presence felt at a later time. Through accumulation of merits, one can avoid painful experiences in the future. The most obvious painful act is one of violence; by abstaining from violent acts, one can avoid incurring a karmic deposit which will require retribution in the future. This cornerstone of renouncer thought, so eloquently and simply expressed by the Buddha, and in many ways so uniquely Indian, migrated from India into East Asia not through the Jainas, who have traditionally considered farflung travel as productive of too much violence, but with the Buddhist renunciants who sailed and wandered into China and then Japan.