



## LESSON PLAN 1

### Introduction to Jainism and Lord Mahavira

The first unit in this series provides your class with a brief overview of what Jainism is and where it is found today before looking at the story of Lord Mahavira.



Reading and understanding the following resources will help in planning your lessons on Jainism:

- 1) [www.jainpedia.org/resources/jainism-faqs.html](http://www.jainpedia.org/resources/jainism-faqs.html)
- 2) [www.learnjainism.org](http://www.learnjainism.org)
- 3) [www.youtube.com/user/JAINpedia](http://www.youtube.com/user/JAINpedia)
- 4) *Discover Jainism & Jain Tales* books  
(<http://schools.jainpedia.org/books/where-to-buy.html>)

## What is Jainism?

Jainism is one of the oldest living religions in the world and comes from India. Jains do not believe in a god. The term 'Jain' means a follower of the Jinas ('Spiritual Victors').

## What is a Spiritual Victor?

The Spiritual Victors are the Jinas, whose teachings form the basis of the religion. They were humans who practised perfect discipline and are believed to have infinite knowledge. A Spiritual Victor is someone who has conquered anger, ego, deceit, greed, fear, attachment and hatred, and achieved liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

## A Jina is also called a Tirthankara

There are 24 tirthankaras in the Jain religion who have achieved liberation. The teachings of the Jinas have travelled through time, and the last three Jinas – Neminath, Parsvanath and Mahavira – are regarded as the historical teachers of the Jain religion. Lord Mahavira was the last Tirthankara. The aim of Jains is to follow his example. They believe this can be achieved through following his teachings.

## Lord Mahavira

The 24th and last Jina was Mahavira ('Great Hero'). He was born in about the year 600 Before the Common Era (BCE) and his parents named him Vardhamana. He

was the son of King Siddartha and Queen Trishala. His family were followers of the teachings of Parshva (the 23rd Tirthankara).

When he was about 30 years old, Mahavira left the palace where he lived and began living a simple life without any pleasures or comforts. For the next 12 years he spent his time fasting and meditating. At the end of this he reached a full understanding of his soul. He spent the rest of his life teaching others and made Jainism more popular. At 72 Mahavira died and attained nirvana, that blissful state beyond life and death.

Jains do not believe that Mahavira was the founder of a new religion. They believe that he consolidated the Jain faith by drawing together the teachings of the previous Tirthankaras, particularly those of his immediate predecessor, Parsva, who lived about 250 years earlier.

## **The Expansion of Jainism**

The followers of Jainism lived throughout the Ganges Valley. Around 250 BCE, most Jains migrated and travelled to other states in India.

Jainism has approximately 7 million followers worldwide, most of whom reside in India. Approximately 100,000 Jains live outside India in North America, Britain, Belgium, East & South Africa, South-East Asia and Australia.

## Classroom Activities

- 1) Visit [www.learnjainism.org](http://www.learnjainism.org) and go to the 'Teaching Jainism' section. Click on Teachers' notes for the *Discover Jainism* book and download the PDF called *Discover Jainism – Mahavira (Religious Figure)*

[www.learnjainism.org/teaching-jainism/for-teachers/teachers-notes/discover-jainism-notes.html](http://www.learnjainism.org/teaching-jainism/for-teachers/teachers-notes/discover-jainism-notes.html)

- 2) Visit [www.learnjainism.org](http://www.learnjainism.org) and click on the 'Puzzles and games' section to find the 'Life of Mahavira' crossword.

[www.learnjainism.org/puzzles-and-games/life-of-mahavira-crossword.html](http://www.learnjainism.org/puzzles-and-games/life-of-mahavira-crossword.html)

- 3) Go to your Resource box and look at the idol of Lord Mahavira.

[www.learnjainism.org/teaching-jainism/for-teachers/resource-box.html](http://www.learnjainism.org/teaching-jainism/for-teachers/resource-box.html)

- 4) Read page 5 of the *Discover Jainism* book for further information on Lord Mahavira.

Bulk copies of the book can be bought by contacting the Institute of Jainology via: [www.learnjainism.org/contact-us.html](http://www.learnjainism.org/contact-us.html)