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Disciplines and Vows (Yamas and Vratas): How the Mystical Yields to the Ethical in Yoga and Jainism

Christopher Key CHAPPLE

Conversion followed with a life-altering resolve to abide by high ethical standards constitutes a core piece of the process of religious experience. In this paper, I will first explore the contours of these two ideas as articulated a century ago by William James. I will then look at two traditions from India that offer an Asian counterpart to this process of self-discovery: Yoga and Jainism. I will include with some reflections on my own training on the spiritual path within these traditions.

William James and Walt Whitman

William James writes extensively about the process of conversion. He describes it in the context of several different religious traditions and defines conversion as follows:

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.¹

James states that this experience, regardless of the particular religious tradition, changes a person. Rather than considering religion to be extraneous or uninteresting, religious ideas move the core of one's being:

To say that a man is 'converted' means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy.²

In conjunction with this transformation, James states that a purity arises that alters one's actions within the world:

1 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Collier Books, 1961), p. 160.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 165

The shifting of the emotional centre brings with it, first, increase of purity. ... the cleansing of existence from brutal and sensual elements becomes imperative.³

In other words, an individual who has undergone the process of conversion feels a compulsion and responsibility to move away from one's base impulses and develop a more elevated, more ethical lifestyle.

James cites the life and work of Walt Whitman as an example of a modern American saint, an individual he considers to have been touched and transformed by conversion. He quotes William Bucke's classic book, *Cosmic Consciousness*, in regard to Whitman:

His favorite occupation seemed to be strolling or sauntering outdoors by himself, looking at the grass, the trees, the flowers, the vistas of light, the varying aspects of the sky, and listening to the birds, the crickets, the tree frogs, and all the hundreds of natural sounds. It was evident that these things gave him a pleasure far beyond what they give to ordinary people. ... All natural objects seemed to have a charm for him. All sights and sounds seemed to please him. ... He never spoke deprecatingly of any nationality or class of men, or time in the world's history, or against any trades or occupations—not even against any animals, insects, or inanimate things, not any of the laws of nature, nor any of the results of those laws, such as illness, deformity, and death. He never complained or grumbled either at the weather, pain, illness, or anything else.⁴

Bucke writes about a link between immersion into cosmic consciousness and the moral life:

The prime characteristic of cosmic consciousness is a consciousness of the cosmos, that is, of the life and order of the universe. Along with consciousness of the cosmos there occurs an intellectual enlightenment which alone would place the individual on a new plane of existence—would make him almost a member of a new species. To this is added a state of moral exultation, an indescribable feeling of elevation, elation, and joyousness, and a quickening of the moral sense, which is fully as striking, and more important than is the enhanced intellectual power.⁵

After citing Bucke's descriptions of this relationship between conversion and ethics, William James then makes a direct connection between Bucke's articulation of cosmic consciousness and the Yoga tradition. He writes that "In India, training in mystical insight has been known from time immemorial under the name of yoga."⁶ Quoting Swami Vivekananda, he writes that in the highest states of Yoga:

3 Ibid., p. 221.

4 William Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*, Philadelphia, 1901, pp. 182–186, as quoted in William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London: Collier Books, 1961, pp. 82–83.

5 William Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, p. 2, as quoted in James, p. 313.

6 James, op. cit., p. 314.

There is no feeling of I, and yet the mind works, desireless, free from restlessness, objectless, bodiless. Then the Truth shines in its full effulgence, and we know ourselves—for samādhi lies potential in us all—for what we truly are, free, immortal, omnipotent, loosed from the finite.⁷

James notes that a profound religious experience can lead to the control of sexual impulses and sobriety, affirming similar statements in the *Yoga Sūtra*. This brings us to a discussion of the first of the two Indian philosophical and religious traditions that we will explore in the course of this paper: Yoga.

Yoga Philosophy and Ethics

In the Yoga tradition, Samādhi comprises the core conversion moment. In Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* (ca. 200 C.E.), this is defined as a state where "one's thoughts diminish and one becomes like a clear jewel, assuming the color of any near object, with unity among grasper, grasping, and grasped."⁸ In other words, one becomes transparent to one's surroundings, blending in with and taking on the qualities of others. Rather than applying one's own standard to reality, one can fully experience things as they present themselves. Such a person becomes liberated from the influences of past karma and can dwell moment by moment, adapting to circumstance and situation. From this experience, one feels a connectedness between oneself and other beings, which can bring a heightened sense of responsibility and accountability. As a result, a desire to cultivate and abide by a higher moral standard, as suggested by Bucke, may ensue.

Ethics plays a central, foundational role in the eightfold path outlined by Patañjali. By the second century of the common era, Patañjali had compiled an array of practices under the philosophical umbrella of the Sāṃkhya metaphysical school and promulgated a system of Yoga that borrows from Vedic, Jaina and Buddhist schools of thought and practice. Unlike Sāṃkhya, and like Jainism, Buddhism, and the Dharmashāstra materials of the Brahmanical Hindu tradition, Patañjali emphasizes the importance of ethical practices in the practice of Yoga, both in preparation for states of Samādhi and, in a sense, in affective response to the experience of Samādhi. He suggests that one may cultivate "friendliness, compassion, happiness, and equanimity" as a means of achieving Samādhi.⁹ He later lists five precepts that delineate the ethical practices of Yoga: nonviolence (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), not stealing

7 Swami Vivekanda, *Raja Yoga*, London, 1896, as quoted in James, p. 315.

8 *Yoga Sūtra* II:41, as translated in *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: An Analysis of the Sanskrit with Accompanying English Translation* by Christopher Chapple and Yogi Ananda Viraj (Eugene P. Kelly, Jr.), Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1990, p. 20.

9 *Yoga Sūtra* I:33.

(*asteya*), sexual restraint (*brahmacarya*) and nonpossession (*aparigraha*).¹⁰ Interestingly, this list predates Patañjali by at least five centuries and forms the core ethical system for the Jaina religious tradition, particularly as found in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* (ca. 300 to 400 B.C.E.). In this presentation, I will intertwine a discussion of the ethics of both Yoga and Jainism as found in these two texts. Additionally, I will explore the psychological and theological impetus for the practice of these ethical precepts, as summarized in karma theory.

The theory of karma in Hindu thought can be found in the Upanishads and the Yoga tradition. One of the most technical accounts is contained in the *Yoga Sūtra*, which specifies that karma comes in three colors (black, white, mixed),¹¹ and that all karma presents itself as vitiated with a combination of five impurities or *kleśas*.¹² Patañjali lists these impurities as ignorance, egoism, attraction, repulsion, and clinging to life.¹³ These five bind an individual within rebirth (*samsāra*) and a blind repetition of prior action based on conditioning seeds (*bīja* or *samskāra*) deposited through routine, indiscriminate pursuit of desire. Patañjali defines ignorance as

anitya āsuci duḥkha anātmasu nitya śuci sukha ātmā khyātir avidyā
 Ignorance is seeing
 the transient as intransigent,
 a sullied thing as pure,
 a painful experience as pleasure,
 and the ego as one's true self.¹⁴

Knowledge here refers not to knowing the size and shape of things but entails wisdom resulting from a process of introspection about the ultimate purpose of things. By seeing the evanescent quality of apparent reality, one develops the ability to stand aloof from the drama of catching and holding without pause or reflection.

This analysis extends to the ego itself. By noticing that the attributes through which an individual holds to a fixed sense of self generally are subject to constant change, rigidity and fixity can be loosened. In the process, one comes to understand the twin dynamic of attraction and repulsion, the realm of opposites, of likes and dislikes, that often drives an individual to seek out preferences and avoid discomforts without a depth of understanding. This interplay of ignorance and ego, allurements and repulsion, repeats itself again and again, accustoming a person to a repetitive rhythm that lulls one into a

10 *Yoga Sūtra* II:30–39.

11 *Yoga Sūtra* IV:7.

12 *Yoga Sūtra* II:12.

13 *Yoga Sūtra* II:3.

14 *Yoga Sūtra* II:5.

sense of thinking the world could not be different or more important than a constant repeat of what has been played before.

However, this ignorant worldview leads ultimately to discomfort. Our bodies age, our friends and relatives may predecease us, our expectations in life can lead to disappointment. As an antidote, Yoga karma theory suggests that we seek out an understanding of the origins of things and their ultimate purpose. Patañjali states:

Heyam duḥkham anāgatam

The pain of the future is to be avoided (through contemplation).¹⁵

By examining the seed causes of repetitive behavior, one can anticipate and restructure one's comportment within the world and restructure one's behavior in a manner enhanced by dignity. In the first section of the *Yoga Sūtra*, Patañjali states that the practice of concentration can wear away the seeds of past action (*samskāra*).¹⁶ In the second section of the *Yoga Sūtra*, Patañjali prescribes cultivating the opposite (*prati-paksha-bhāvanam*), literally, using the other wing.¹⁷ The prime tool to achieve this goal can be found in the ethical practices of the five great vows.

Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* describes these vows in a series of six aphorisms. He begins with an assessment of the need to control one's thoughts and actions, pointing out that if one does not abide by these precepts, suffering and endless ignorance will result:

Discursive thoughts like violence, etc., whether done, caused or approved, consisting in lust, anger, or delusion, and whether mild, medium, or intense, have as their endless fruits dissatisfaction and ignorance. Thus, cultivation of opposites is prescribed. (II:34)

He then states each of the five required practices, and indicates a benefit to each one:

When in the presence of one established in nonviolence, there is the abandonment of hostility. (II:35).

When established in truthfulness, there is correspondence between action and fruit. (II:36).

When established in nonstealing, whatever is present is all jewels. (II:37).

When established in sexual restraint, vigor is obtained. (II:38).

When steadfast in nonpossession, there is knowledge of "the how" of existence. (II:39).

15 *Yoga Sūtra* II:16.

16 *Yoga Sūtra* I:50.

17 *Yoga Sūtra* II:34.

Swami Jyotir Mayananda, a 20th century Yoga teacher who resided in Puerto Rico and Florida for many years, has written that

An aspirant must be able to understand that every negative thought process must be controlled the moment it emerges from the unconsciousness in the form of a tiny ripple. Just as a spark of fire can be easily crushed between one's fingers, but, when it is allowed to grow, even the most advanced fire-extinguishing methods become ineffective. Forests are consumed in blazing fire. In the same way, an evil thought-wave must be nipped in the very bud. It is easy to control it with the art of *Pratipaksha Bhāvana*. But, when it is allowed to stay and grow in the mind, it assumes various perverse forms so that it is very, very difficult to recognize it, and it is further difficult to eradicate it. Thus, an aspirant must control and sublimate every thought wave that promotes violence, falsehood, impurity, greed, discontent, and lack of devotion to God.¹⁸

Through the control of thoughts by the practice of these five vows, a control of one's thinking process emerges that enhances an ethical way of life. Jyotir Mayananda has given multiple reflections on how to practice each of these five disciplines, and quoted various others including Mahatma Gandhi and Ramana Maharshi regarding this topic. A few of his reflections are as follows:

When you keep your mind free from developing thoughts of hatred and anger even under provocative conditions, you are practicing mental non-violence.¹⁹ There is no strength greater than Truth. There is no wealth greater than Truth. By the pursuit of Truth, one acquires boundless willpower.²⁰ Stealing in the broad sense has many subtler implications. In its grossest expressions this vice manifests in thieves, robbers, swindlers and similar criminals. But it continues to exist in different forms in all people, until the Yogic insight eliminates it.²¹ On the human level, lack of control in seeking sex-pleasures, and lack of the recognition of social and moral restraint in sex-relationships, is an expression of degeneration and deterioration of personality.²² ...[W]hen a Yogi develops the quality of non-covetousness, he becomes a true master of his possessions. He is no longer possessed by the objects that he possesses.... The virtue of non-covetousness holds manifold blessings for the individual as well as the world outside. To the individual it opens the ever-increasing expansions of the Self; and to the world it promotes harmony, economic balance, love and understanding...²³

Swami Jyotir Mayananda has reflected on the broader ramifications of ethical practice and suggests an array of practical applications for non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, sexual restraint, and nonpossession.

18 Swami Jyotir Mayananda, *Yoga of Sex-Sublimation, Truth & Non-Violence* (Miami, Florida: International Yoga Society, no date), pp. 22–23.

19 Ibid., p. 30

20 Ibid., p. 49.

21 Ibid., p. 99.

22 Ibid., p. 77.

23 Ibid., p. 105.

From 1973 until 1985, my wife and I lived within a small spiritual community that practiced classical Yoga under the guidance of Gurāṇi Añjali, a woman from Calcutta. At Yoga Anand Ashram in Amityville, New York, students in the applied method (*sādhana*) classes are given a discipline and/or observance to practice for the week. The first time I heard about this approach to spiritual practice was in conversation with Carole Zeiler in the Student Union at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1972. A member of the Ashram, she said that she had received her *sādhana* in the mail, and she was to practice nonviolence or *ahimsā*, which meant, among other things, that she needed to find cookies made without eggs! I became intrigued with the detail of this practice, which was my first introduction to dietary orthopraxy. Several months later, after moving to Long Island, I entered a *sādhana* class, and each week brought a new challenge. How could I make my life more austere? We routinely observed a weekly fast and weekly day of silence as an aspect of austerity (*tapas*). But what more could be done? We worked at not walking off with little things like pencils and or hoarding intangible things like time while practicing not stealing (*asteya*), another of the five ethical disciplines in the first stage of Patañjali's eightfold path. Truthfulness (*satya*), another discipline, was always a great challenge. How could I resist the temptation to exaggerate? Was my being in the world fully authentic?

Though my wife and I shared these practices with one another, the bulk of our days were spent on a university campus where such topics were not appropriate to bring up in conversation. So we cultivated a life of ethical introspection rooted in Patañjali's yoga while engaged in our studies and campus jobs, enjoying the company of our fellow Yoga students while in class at night and on the weekends. In little and big ways, we forged a different path than that dictated by the culture, which, I think, was promoting disco dancing and the hustle. Perhaps the biggest culture gap came with the practice of nonpossession (*aparigraha*). For our teacher, this meant avoidance of debt. In India, lending policies have historically been draconian. Until recently, even houses were paid for with cash. We came to value and stretch our meager resources and live a truly simple lifestyle that has carried over to a certain extent in our adult years.

In order to give a sense of the day to day nature of the practice of ethics in the Yoga tradition, I have found entries from some journals written in the 1970 s and 1980 s.

Ahimsā. When I drive on the Parkway I sometimes look at other people. And I see that they're doing the same thing I am, using the same vehicles: automobile, sense and motor faculties. This example can be expanded to show that all people... are the same. And once I see that sameness I'm living the Golden Rule and doing ahimsā. (1976)

Satya is that part of me where I try to find words and yet I'm always questioning "Who do these words come from?" Is it possible for me to express my *sat*

(existence), my truth, my being, my philosophy in original form, without all I have heard and read before? (1976)

Asteya [is] physically not stealing, not taking, respecting others' possessions. [It is] mentally not stealing, not harboring belittling thoughts which diminish another's self respect; not stealing space from another person's mood. Spiritually, there is nothing outside of one's self to steal. (1976)

With Brahmacharya I see sexual thoughts and in seeing them and breathing I can control them. (1976)

Aparigraha or not possessing is freedom, freedom from clinging, freedom from bringing oneself down out of pure spirit into the psychological and physical. And yet, freedom lies in the body and the workings of the mind, as it is through these faculties only that we experience freedom. (1976)

Ahimsā, protecting bugs, seeing people.

Satya, being firm with myself in the world; being honest with others and yet trying not to hurt them.

Asteya, not taking time from others; not imposing myself.

Brahmacharya: putting myself in situations of confrontation with thoughts. The purpose of brahmacharya on the physical level and the mental level is to conserve energy; on the spiritual level it is to see all beings of both sexes as the same as oneself, to see the light within and not the gross alone.

Aparigraha: appreciating and not grasping. (1976)

Aparigraha is a beautiful discipline. I usually work on it the most before going to sleep and when I wake up in the morning. Through it, situations are discriminated away until a silent space of non-possessiveness is felt, if only for a second. (1979)

Satya. Through involvement with other, there is a release from self, simultaneous with naked honesty. (1980)

Reading this scant sampling from hundreds of pages of journal reflections, I am reminded of how the ethical mind can be cultivated through the practice of Yoga. Each week we would be assigned an ethical precept upon which to reflect. We were encouraged to post the word on the refrigerator, to repeat the word again and again, and to reflect and write about the experience. Sometimes we would be assigned a single practice for weeks on end. Other times we would be asked to write down the names of the five disciplines and pick a new one from a bowl each morning. The practice of these disciplines engages the memory. I struggled at times to remember which discipline I was practicing. I had to stretch to apply the vow on some occasions. On other occasions, it stood by me like a cherished friend. By creating a groove through repeated returns to the word and its meaning, a new way of engaging in the world emerged. The "cultivation of opposites" gave me permission to confront my fears, to understand my pettiness, and in some instances transcend what I had always assumed to be myself.

In the Buddhist tradition, moral sensibilities arise via two avenues. The first, referred to as *apatrapā*, is practiced when others tell one to perform specific correct behaviors. The second, known as *hrī*, arises from the heart. One has

learned and interiorized the path of making the correct choice. Rather than being imposed externally, this higher form of moral life arises from within oneself, through one's efforts.

The cultivation of spiritual practice or *sādhana* begins with instruction from someone one respects and trusts. This person has dedicated herself or himself to giving advice to others based on personal experience. However, the actual experience of that person, that teacher, is far less important than the willingness of the *sādhak* or spiritual practitioner to enter her or his own path. By taking the tools offered by a teacher, one takes the opportunity to reform, to remold, to refashion oneself. The daily or weekly practice of the five vows offers fertile ground for the planting of new seeds. The thoughts engendered by the remembrance of nonviolence, for instance, automatically begin a process of deconditioning and reconditioning. In the training received by wife and myself, our circumstances themselves provided the context for our make-over. Our marriage, our work, and eventually our children all became the ground through which we were able to apply these principles and practices.

As I later trained to become a theologian, I often have drawn from this early training, particularly within the area of ethics. For instance, in a book titled *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, I attempt to apply the practice of the five great vows to environmental ethics:

The first vow, *ahimsā*, requires respect for and protection of all life forms, stemming from the premise that even a blade of grass is not different from oneself in its essential vitality. Advocates of vegetarianism claim that abstention from eating meat not only spares the lives of animals, but also helps contribute to a healthy ecosystem. The third vow, not stealing, means that one abstains from taking what does not belong to oneself. This can be particularly instructive for people of the 'developed world' who continue to consume the majority of the world's resources, spewing forth pollution as a primary byproduct. The fourth vow, that of nonpossession, is tacitly environmental... The less one owns, the less harm has been committed to one's ecosphere. On a practical level, the fifth vow, sexual restraint, can be seen as one way to hold down population growth. Psychologically, it can be used as an exercise in post-patriarchal interpersonal relations, in which regarding other bodies as potential objects for sexual gratification or the seeing of others as manipulable is transformed into seeing other people and other people's bodies as not different from oneself.²⁴

I have also employed reflection on the five great vows to other contexts in my professional life, such as protection of animals, responses to war, and the conduct of religious leaders. The application of these disciplines, rather than appealing strictly to the rational faculty, calls up an affective response, a response built on memories of past practice and experiences. Numerous memory points

²⁴ Christopher Key Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 71.

become activated in the process of making ethical decisions. By engaging the ideas and methods of the ancient yoga system as taught by traditional teachers for hundreds of years, some new solutions to contemporary issues might be found.

Jainism and the Practice of Nonviolence

The Jaina tradition refers to the William James conversion moment as *samyak dr̥ṣṭi*, described as seeing things as equal or same. Both this term and the Hindu term *samādhi* contain a variation of the word *sama* or sameness as well as variant that relates to vision (*dhī*, *dr̥ṣṭi*). In both traditions, this experience can result in a profound change in a person. In the Yoga tradition, it is said that *samādhi* can lead one to overcome past habits, eventually leading to a state of purity or seedlessness. In the Jaina tradition, it can enable one to progress up the ladder of spirituality (*śrenī*) toward the world of perfection (*siddha loka*). In both Hinduism and Jainism, we find extensive discussion of conversion, in the sense intended by William James. Having had a glimpse into the state variously known as cosmic consciousness, *samādhi*, or *samyak dr̥ṣṭi*, one then assiduously pursues an internally inspired ethical course that transforms action from mundane repetition of personal preferences or cultural conformity into a concerted effort to recapture the inspiration felt in the state of cosmic connectedness.

In the Jaina tradition, the starting point for authentic spirituality begins with this moment of conversion. Dr. Padmanabh S. Jaini has described the state of *samyak dr̥ṣṭi*, which is documented to last from a single instant up to forty-eight minutes, as a temporary experience of feeling liberated from all fettering karmas:

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.²⁵

This moment entails 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.”²⁶ At this point a resolve sets in to change one’s lifestyle and to adopt the purposeful observance of the vows (*vrata*) of Jainism.

25 Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 144.

26 Ibid., p. 149

One anthropological account of this conversion experience has been documented by James Laidlaw. He records a moment in the life of a woman who subsequently decided to become a Jaina nun:

The decision came one morning when she walked into the kitchen. There was a cockroach in the middle of the floor, “and I just looked at it and suddenly I thought, ‘Why should I stay in this world where there is just suffering and death and rebirth?’”²⁷

This woman embarked on a changed life, renouncing her family, her name, any claims to wealth, all in order to begin a life of austerity designed to minimize harm to all living beings.

The earliest full account of the five precepts that govern and define the life of both practitioners of Yoga and of the Jaina faith can be found in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, the oldest surviving Jaina text, which was composed before the common era. Though the vows are identical to those listed above in the context of the *Yoga Sūtra*, this particular listing is more generous with its language than Patañjali. The *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* articulates the five great vows as follows:

I renounce all killing of living beings, whether subtle or gross, whether movable or immovable. Nor shall I myself kill living beings, nor cause others to do it, nor consent to it.²⁸

I renounce all vices of lying speech arising from anger or greed or fear or mirth. I shall neither myself speak lies, nor cause others to speak lies, nor consent to the speaking of lies by others.²⁹

I renounce all taking of anything not given, either in a village or a town or a wood, either of little or much, of small or great, of living or lifeless things. I shall neither take myself what is not given, nor cause others to take it, nor consent to their taking it.³⁰

I renounce all sexual pleasures, either with gods or men or animals. This vow also includes the following: not to “continually discuss topics relating to women,” not to “regard and contemplate the lovely forms of women,” not to “recall to his mind the pleasures and amusements he formerly had with women”.³¹ It also states that “a Nirgrantha does not eat and drink too much, or drink liquors or eat highly seasoned dishes” and that a “Nirgrantha does not occupy a bed or couch affected by women, animals, or eunuchs.”³²

27 James Laidlaw, *Riches and Renunciation: Religion, Economy, and Society among the Jains* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 157.

28 Herman Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras Translated from Prakrit* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), p. 202. First edition published by Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1884.

29 Jacobi, *Ibid.*, p 204.

30 *Ibid.* p. 205–206.

31 *Ibid.*, 207

32 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

I renounce all attachments, whether little or much, small or great, living or lifeless; neither shall I myself form such attachments, nor cause others to do so, nor consent to their doing so.³³

Each of these five vows helps to encourage the monk, nun, or layperson to work diligently for self-perfection.

By recognizing the inter-related nature of life, one develops a respect for other life forms. Mahavira himself, the fifth century teacher who standardized Jainism as it is practiced today, was considered a keen observer of nature:

Thoroughly knowing the earth-bodies and water-bodies and fire-bodies and wind-bodies, the lichens, seeds, and sprouts, he comprehended that they are, if narrowly inspected, imbued with life.³⁴

This perception of the beauty and complexity of nature formed the foundation for the great teaching of non-violence (*ahimsā*) that so aptly characterizes the Jaina faith.

Mahatma Gandhi gave voice to an ethical path that transformed the history of the world. Gandhi enacted not only the liberation of India from colonial British rule but inspired the Civil Rights movement in the United States during the 1960 s. Gandhi had a conversion experience while being ejected from a train in South Africa and from this jolt changed the political climate within the world for the latter half of the 20th century.

Mahatma Gandhi built his campaign to free India of colonial rule in part with inspiration from his Jaina friends, most notably Rajchandra Bhai. Equipped with a resolve to be respectful to all beings, Gandhi explored all five themes in his work, most notably nonviolence (*ahimsā*), holding to truth (*satyagraha*), sexual restraint (*brahmacarya*), and owning as little as possible (*aparigraha*). His selfless toil resulted in a free India and his core ideology shaped India's self-identity and economic reforms until the liberalization of trade laws in the early 1990 s under Rajiv Gandhi.

A core precept of Gandhian ethics is to examine oneself first. At a recent annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta, one of Gandhi's grandchildren told the story of a young mother who implored Gandhi to tell her son, under doctor's orders, to eat fewer sweets. Gandhi told her to come back in a week, at which time he lectured the young man to good effect. When the mother asked why Gandhi needed to wait so long to deliver this important message, Gandhi replied, "Why Madam, one week ago, I myself ate sweets daily. Before I could hope to alter your son's habits, I needed a week to correct my own excesses." In other words, the moral life begins with one's own patterns and practices.

33 Ibid., p. 208

34 Ibid., pp. 80–81.

Conclusion

William James articulated an important insight. Authentic religious experience leads to a change in one's behavior, ideally transforming an individual into a more empathetic, ethical person. For Yogis and Jains, this religious transformation stems from and leads to the adoption and ongoing practice of five vows: nonviolence, truthfulness, not stealing, sexual restraint, and non-possession, applied according to each person's place in life. Individuals in history have adapted, interpreted, and championed these vows for a variety of causes, most notably Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. By seeing how ethical behavior finds its roots in religious experience, and by exploring the various applications of these traditional and innovative pathways, one can more deeply appreciate the optimism and pragmatism and high regard in which William James held the religious quest.