



Temples in Jain Philosophy

According to Jain philosophy, no god or any divine power has created the universe and is ruling over it. They neither reward us for our good deeds nor punish us for our bad deeds. This concept empowers every individual with complete control of their life by giving them full responsibility of their past, present and future.

Jainism should therefore have no place for worship, as it is the religion of action and not devotion. However, we see that for hundreds of years, Jains have been worshipping devoutly for boons. Much of this worship by Jains is imitating others, due to the mutual influence between Jainism and other faiths in India. After all, worshipping is the easier way than the harder path of self-control and penance laid down by Tirthankaras. The concept of an all-powerful creator, preserver and destroyer responsible for all that is good and bad can sometimes seem more appealing. Thus one can shirk from one's responsibility. It is much easier to leave everything to the will and mercy of such an all mighty power, rather than accept the responsibility of our own existence.

We are to seek God inside not outside. God is not there in the dark corner of a temple with doors all shut. "He is there with the tiller tilling the hard ground and the pathmaker breaking stones" - Tagore in The Gitanjali

Each self is God. WE are gods in our pure and perfect state.

There is however, a place for worship and prayer in Jainism and the reason and justification for the same is summarized well in Umaswati's Tatvarth Sutra in following terms:

Mokshamargya netatam bhettarum, Karam bhu bhratham
Gyatatam vishvatattavanum, Vande tadgun labdye

Meaning,

**To the leaders of the path of liberation, Destroyer of all the karma
Knowers of the whole truth, I bow to acquire their qualities.**

Thus, worship and prayers may be offered by the Jains to the qualities of the leaders on the path of liberation. The purpose being that such qualities may be acquired by the worshiper by following in the foot steps of the leaders - through action not devotion: after all one learns best by examples. Nowhere is it implied however, that the leader will carry the follower or even hold his hand. They have set the example. Now it is up to us to get inspired and act, to liberate our souls.

With Jain philosophy of 'No creator ruler or controller' in mind, let us examine the relevance of "Temple" in modern times.

How do we define what a temple is or should be? Here is my definition –

Temple is any place that provides us a clean peaceful environment for introspection and learning.

It could be in your heart, in your home, in your community or in your state. Since emphasis is on introspection and learning, external grandeur & presence or absence of statues is of little relevance. Following the path laid down by tirthankars, in day to day life is more important than worshipping them or performing rituals. Asking for boons or favors or forgiveness is down right meaningless.

In this country, temples also serve another important function: as social and cultural centers for the community.