

# Forgiveness in Jainism and in Interreligious Faith

Sejal Chheda

*University Of Mumbai, Vidyanagari, Kalina, Mumbai, India*

**Abstract**--“To err is human, to forgive is divine”, this quote by Alexander Pope marks forgiveness as a beatific virtue. Forgiveness as a value has its origins in religious traditions. For a profound examination of forgiveness, two Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity along with Jainism have been selected. Comparative analysis has subsequently been conducted to critically evaluate and contrast their respective perspectives on forgiveness. It is seen that forgiveness as a moral constant is deeply embedded in humanity’s collective conscience. While the conceptualisations of forgiveness vary across religious traditions shaped with distinct metaphysical, ethical, and theological frameworks it is observed that these divergences do not undermine its enduring significance. Hence, its cultivation as a transformative virtue is not a merely religious imperative but a moral necessity for the betterment of humanity.

**Keywords**- Christianity, ethics, forgiveness, Jainism, Judaism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A brief description of the concept of forgiveness in the religious traditions, Christianity, Judaism and Jainism is given. Further ahead a comparative analysis is made highlighting the significance of forgiveness as a universal value.

## II. FORGIVENESS IN CHRISTIANITY

“The Discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth.” This assertion by Hannah Arendt in “The Human Condition” (238 to 43) clearly indicates the centrality of forgiveness in Christianity.<sup>[1]</sup> Forgiveness in Christianity is characterised by many aspects but fundamentally it revolves around God. The verse 2: 7 from Corinthians 2, instructs one to forgive, rather punish a previously disciplined person. In a different stance, forgiveness is expressed as a cancellation of a money debt. ( Luke 7 :42).<sup>[2]</sup> The idea of Grace is closely linked to forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift given by God through Jesus Christ. And so, it is also directed to the humans to forgive, as God has forgiven them. There is also rejoicement in God, as they (humans) have received atonement through Jesus Christ. The glory of forgiveness lies in its ability of reconciliation. This reconciliation is between human beings and God and also within themselves.

However, one should not forget that this has happened because of Christ’s suffering and God’s unconditional love.

Unconditional forgiveness means to forgive, irrespective of whether the offender is repentant. An example from the Bible on unconditional forgiveness is, (Luke 6 :37), “Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven”.<sup>[3]</sup> Unconditional forgiveness may also imply that one has chosen not to retaliate. In a way, the condition (to forgive) mentioned is that one should forgive because God has forgiven one’s iniquities. And there is no human being who has not sinned in his life. Speaking of sins, the seven deadly sins that the Lord hates are pride, greed or avarice, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath or anger and sloth. Apart from these traditional sins, the Book of Revelation introduces another set of seven sins which may not be explicitly or precisely stated but kind of interpreted. These sins are demon worship idolatry, murder, magic arts or witchcraft, sexual immorality, theft and refusal to repent.<sup>[4]</sup> This viewpoint on deadly sins highlights an important dominant factor related to forgiveness which is importance of repentance. “Nacham” is the word used for repentance in Job (42 : 6).<sup>[5]</sup> It has multiple meanings; like to be sorry and have compassion. Repentance is also interpreted as to change one’s thought or mind. This can be deciphered from 2 Timothy (2:25), which states that, “Opponents must be gently instructed in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth”.<sup>[6]</sup> Thus, we see that repentance goes further than only feeling remorse or asking forgiveness. It includes an evident change in behaviour. Confession and repentance are inevitably included in forgiveness. The importance of confession and repentance is shown in Proverbs (28 :13), “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy”.<sup>[7]</sup> Another important aspect of forgiveness is whether the wrongful act is done in ignorance or intentionally. Numbers (15: 27 to 31) expresses that unintentional sin may lead to an offering of a female goat by the priest as an atonement but if the sin is done intentionally then the sinner must be excluded as he has insulted God and broken His commandment. And there is no atonement for him in the form of sacrifice.



The above discussion conveys injunctions given to an offender. But in a Christocentric view of forgiveness, it is highlighted that the victim should be ready to offer forgiveness even before the offender shows any kind of remorse. Through this one can hope that confession and repentance may arise. The victim should forgive the sinner and not seek revenge as God is the righteous one, who will decide everyone's fate. Such an attitude will lead to inner peace. Thus, we see that forgiveness is central in Christian theology as it helps in destroying sin and reconciling our relationship with our fellow beings and God as through forgiveness, we experience God's Grace.

### III. FORGIVENESS IN JUDAISM

Judaism is the oldest of the three Abrahamic religions and the Tanakh is the holy scripture. Forgiveness in Judaism is an exceptionally significant concept which manifests as a day of atonement known as Yom Kippur. Teshuva literally means return and is regarded as a gift from God to return to the path of righteousness. For a profound insight into the concept of teshuva, "The Ways of Repentance" by Moses Maimonides, a 12th century rabbi is looked into.

Maimonides begins with the description of confession or "viduy", making verbal confession critical in forgiveness. When an oral confession is made one reflects on his sins, experiences guilt and is anxious for repentance. Numbers (5 : 6 – 7) states, "A man or a woman who commits one of the sins of humanity, transgressing against God the soul bears guilt, they must confess the sin they committed."<sup>[8]</sup> Hence verbal confession is considered as a positive commandment. But again, saying out the words aloud does not necessarily mean that there is regret. A truly remorseful person may earn a place in the World to Come without a confession.

Teshuva or atonements are associated with many other values. Kaparah and Taharah are a part of the complete teshuva process. The Hebrew term Kaparah basically means forgiveness at the fullest level. The taharah can be translated as purity or cleanliness. In simple words, even after seeking forgiveness from God and fellow human beings our inner self is unable to change or avoid sin then the whole teshuva process becomes ineffective. A biblical reference from Mishneh Torah, (Teshuva 2 : 3) aptly points out, "A person who confesses with words but does not resolve in his head to abandon this sin: behold, he is like one who immerses in a mikvah (holy water) while holding a lizard in his hand."<sup>[9]</sup>

Yom Kippur, the day of atonement is considered central in Judaism. According to tradition, it is on Yom Kippur, that God decides each person's fate hence Jews ask forgiveness and atone for the sins done during the past year. Yom Kippur is the day of teshuva for all individuals and communities. Hence, even when praying in a community and doing teshuva, God answers, as is written in Deutronomy, (4:7), "As is the Lord our God whenever we call out to Him".<sup>[10]</sup>

### IV. FORGIVENESS IN JAINISM

Jainism is a realist philosophy based on existence of six substances or dravya. Jiva is the conscious substance whereas karma is unconscious matter and their bondage is the main reason for the jiva's or soul's state of continuous transmigration. For his liberation, a jiva has to endeavour in rigorous austerities and internal purification. The deluding karmas are of four types of passions. They are anger, pride, deceit and greed. The Dasavaikalika Sutra states that anger can be destroyed by forgiveness.<sup>[11]</sup> Metaphysically, it is the most intense kind of anger; anantanubandhi krodha, which needs to be subsided or destroyed for beginning the soul's journey towards liberation. Hence, we see the centrality of forgiveness in the jiva's aspiration for liberation which is the summum bonum of a human being. The Jaina ethics is allied with its metaphysics. The repentance ritual or the pratikramana is one of the six daily duties (avashyakas) directed for monks as well as householders. "Prati" means to come back or return and "karamana" means to move. It is the return of the soul to righteousness and right conduct. Essentially, pratikramana is done with a spiritual guru or a monk as a witness, but if unavailable then one's own soul becomes a witness. In the Jaina tradition any act has consequences manifested through thought, word and deed. Hence, one can assume that only a ritualistic repentance ritual would not benefit; one has to feel remorse from within. Thus, forgiveness is embedded in the pratikramana ritual. Forgiveness has a dual aspect, to seek forgiveness and to forgive. To forgive is as important as seeking forgiveness because if we do not forgive, then the resentments, anger and hatred, we harbour, would cause infinite circles of rebirth. Yet another elemental feature is that of the intention of the wrong doer. The Tattvartha Sutra (6.5) clarifies that any act done with passions has the influx of the type, "samparayika", whereas the influx (of karmas) devoid of passion is known as "iryapatha". To elaborate, greater the positive or negative passion like anger, with intention, greater and intense is the bondage of the soul.



Framing forgiveness as an ethical and spiritual act the liberates both giver and the seek receiver, the Shwetambara sect has a special day known as “Samvatsari” marking the end of the eight day religious festival Paryushan. On this day, the Jainas seek forgiveness from each other as it is anger among living beings which makes release of the karmas and subsequently, the emancipation of the soul difficult. The heartfelt phrase used for seeking forgiveness is, “Michhami dukkadam”, “May all evil that has been done be in vain”. Aligned to this, the Digambara sect has the “Das Lakshan” festival, out of which the first lakshan or defining characteristic which needs to be inculcated is supreme forgiveness.

#### V. FORGIVENESS IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND JAINISM SOME OBSERVATIONS

Forgiveness with its religious connotations has been explored in Judaism, Christianity and Jainism. Though forgiveness has a somewhat universal meaning across humanity its application and interpretation among the mentioned religious traditions vary. Thus, an analysis for the same is done through certain parameters:

##### A. Divine Forgiveness:

God is the causal factor for the whole of forgiveness procedure, but Jainism has no place for divine forgiveness. This is because the Tirthankaras (the Supreme Beings) have been liberated and thus have no interference or jurisdiction in the lives of human beings. Primarily, it is the karma which is the determinant factor. However, in the context of interpersonal relationship forgiveness is required because anger would cause innumerable rebirths stagnating the jiva's liberation.

##### B. Unconditional Forgiveness:

The offer of unconditional forgiveness in the Christian and Jewish tradition is predominantly because of God's Grace and mercy but in the Jaina tradition destroying anger is obligatory for a jiva's liberation. A jiva needs to free himself of aversion as well as attachment with respect to other living beings as well as materialistic things. Hence, we see unconditional forgiveness is the requisite for salvation. In a way, similar to Christianity and Judaism it may be said that unconditional forgiveness must be promulgated because it has been sermonised by the Tirthankara. However, unlike Christian and Judaism which are centered on a monotheistic God (as the Creator), the Jaina tradition does not recognise one sole God as the Creator.

It has Tirthanakaras as the Supreme beings who have annihilated the Karmas and realized the true nature of the soul.

##### C. All living beings as part of the repentance ritual:

In Christian and Jewish theology human beings are considered supreme among all living beings and forgiveness and the repentance ritual can be exercised exclusively only within the human realm. In the Jaina tradition, on the day of Samvatsari, forgiveness is sought and given to all living beings, including plants, animals, microorganisms, celestial beings and even infernals. This is because the jiva or the soul takes rebirth in all the above realms and may engage in unconscious and conscious karmically connected interactions. Brianne Donaldson in “Environmental Rights: Plants and Animals in Jain Repentance”, highlights that a simple act of repentance as recognition, first personally and then publicly creates awareness of all life forms, subtle and gross.<sup>[12]</sup> This facet has positive social, economic and ethical consequences. A heightened awareness of even the smallest form of life inspires practices of conservation and ecological restoration and mindful resource consumption. In the Jaina tradition, passions such as anger are deemed as internal possessions which need to be obliterated. Hence, forgiveness in essence leads to internal and external “aparigraha” that is non possessiveness. Thus, forgiveness in the Jaina tradition also encourages environmental ethics.

##### D. Necessity of Confession and Repentance:

The necessity of verbal confession is seen in Christian, Jewish as well as Jaina theology. While Christian confessional prayers invoke Jesus and Jewish ones address the Lord, the Jaina repentance ritual includes salutations to the Arihanta, the Siddha, the Acharya, the Upadhyays and the monks. Likewise, repentance ritual focuses on the transgression of the vows which may vary in the above religious traditions. However, this does not diminish the significance of forgiveness in either of the religious traditions. Also, all religious traditions encourage inculcation of virtues like compassion and empathy which are allied to forgiveness, All in all, we see that forgiveness has a universal impact across religious traditions.

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