Jainism And Islam: Views On The Concept Of Ahimsa

Islam and Jainism have similar views on the concept of ahimsa, or nonharm, however, despite these similarities, there are some noticeable differences especially within their perspectives regarding environmental ethics, treatment of animals and self-sacrifice/suicide.

Environmental concept

Ahimsa can be implied as nonviolence in terms of an environmental perspective. Jains view humanity in nature as interconnected with everything and thus emphasizing the concept of responsibility of maintaining the balance on earth (Mitra 2018, 5). Jainism sees nature as very vulnerable to people's ability to damage the system that balances life on earth (Mitra 2018, 4). This can be seen today in the form of global warming as a result of many human activities such as producing carbon emissions through the burning of gasoline. Environmentalists in Jainism believe that at one time people had to save themselves from nature, however now people are protecting nature instead (Mitra 2018, 4). It can be seen that Jains have taken responsibility for the harm that is done to nature. The concept of eco-spirituality encourages Jains to approach the earth with compassion and gratefulness (Mitra 2018, 8). It has been stated that "the eco-spiritual relationship can be understood in Jainism through some of its basic tenets as (1) abstaining from injuring creatures; (2) refraining from commanding any creature; (3) withholding from owning any creature and (4) dissuading oneself from employing others as a servant." (Mitra 2018, 9). The first regulation is very well known today as there are many advocacy groups for animal rights in terms of animal abuse. However, the rest of the rules are not as strongly adhered to in today's world as the concept of pets and training of animals for entertainment purposes exists.

On the other hand, Islamic views of the environment are based on the sayings of the scriptural texts of the Quran. It views everything on earth as a creation with some purpose to humans as a gift from God (Amman 2010, 710). Also, it seems that everything humans do is to please Allah (God) in an attempt to maintain peace in the environment (Amman 2010, 710). This aspect is similar to the Jain view of balancing the life on earth, however, it is done with the intent of pleasing a God, while the Jain way does not have any God to please but just purely based on the expression of gratefulness of the earth by conforming to practices that produce minimal harm to all living and nonliving things in nature. The Islamic view sees all environmental and planetary systems working within their own boundaries and having their own tolerances (Amman 2010, 710). This differs from the Jain perspective as it believes that the systems have a tolerance level that can endure a certain amount of harm as going about the world without causing any harm at all is unrealistic. Islam also expresses 4 principles by which Muslims have to limit their behavior to control through "the Unity principle (Tawhid); the Creation Principle(Fitra); the Balance Principle(Mizan); and the Responsibility Principle(Khalifa)" (Amman 2010, 710). The concept of aiming for balance and responsibility resembles the Jain view of the environment as it also has a goal to create balance and takes responsibility for their actions towards the harm done to nature, but to a higher level of discipline and consideration.

Animal Concept

The Jainism view of animals is similar to the Islamic view, however, the reasons for the similarities are quite distinct. Since it is believed that the soul can take on many forms such as of human, animal, plant, or divine through the consequences of Karman, or the notion of consequences in life due to one's actions, and thus any creature's soul has the same value of that of a human (Clercq 2013, 142). This emphasized the equality between all forms of life no matter how small or unintelligent they may seem. The rebirth into an animal is considered the lowest level of form and can range from a microscopic organism that only owns one of the five senses to a five sensed animal such as birds, mammals, etc (Clercq 2013, 142). This explains the Jain consideration of microscopic organisms in the air, and the extreme means that they take to cause minimal harm. It would be equal to one human causing another harm, which in turn will greatly affect their system of Karman. Jains not only view animals as another form of being but also figures with a historical significance and meaning. Animals are present as symbols in biographical stories of many historical heroes in Jainism (Clercq 2013, 144). This fact also further explains why Jains approach animals with high consideration of the harm they might cause. Jainism strictly rejects the sacrifice of animals and sees themselves as advocates of animals since others in the world do not see them as equals to other forms of life (Clercq 2013, 155). This leads to the implication that Jainism does not include any meats in their diet. Thus, potentially leading to a diet deficient in the many vitamins and nutrients that are needed for a healthy lifestyle

The Islamic view on animals is similar to that of Jainism but does not state very strict and extreme rules for its followers to adhere to. The Quran mentions that humans are given a test in the form of temporary successorship of the natural world, and thus are responsible for any harm done to any of earth's life forms or natural resources (6:165) (Haque and Masri 2011, 280). This aspect somewhat relates to the concept of Karman, by taking the accountability of your actions and these actions thus determining one's destiny. In Jainism, athat would be the determination of the lifestyle ease and life form after renunciation, and for Islam, it would be included in God's judgment of the individual. The Islamic perspective also sees a conditional hierarchy in the Quran stating that human animals have a higher status than nonhuman animals as long as one can maintain minimal harm done to nonhuman animals and nature (Clercq 2013, 285). This differs from the perspective of Jains as they believe that all forms of life are equal and are able to eventually attain the same spiritual liberation. However the concept of equality between all creatures due to the same process of consciousness utilized by God to give rise to all animals, and therefore are all of value to God,is similar to the Jain view of equality as well (Clercq 2013, 286). Overall it can be seen that Jains view different forms of life with different levels, which is similar to the concept of a temporary hierarchy of human animals to nonhuman animals in Islam, and the concept of all forms being equal in the sense that they all have migrating souls in the Jain view is similar to the Islamic view of all animals being equal as they are all dear to God. In Islam, it is believed that the individual will be held responsible for their actions, including the treatment of nonhuman animals and nature which will be recorded and judged upon after death, ensuring that complete justice is met (Clercq 2013, 286-287). This is somewhat related to the concept of Karman in Jainism except it is regulated by God and not just by the forces of nature. The word Taqwa in Islam, means consciously knowing the eternal existence of God and thus causing no harm to anything in life due to the fact that one will have to encounter the consequences in the next life (Clercq 2013, 288). This can again be related to the Karmic renunciation process believed in Jainism, in which one is reborn into a form and lifestyle that accounts for one's actions in the previous life. In terms of animal sacrifice, Islam permits a diet with halal meats that are cut in a certain method. As this is highly rejected in Jainism, this is one of the main differences between the two religions. Two main themes in

Islam regarding animal welfare considers animals the same as humans as they similarly experience a life as well, and how humans are intellectually superior and thus hold accountable for animals especially the ones contributing to our dietary needs (Farouk, Pufpaff and Amir 2016, 61-62). It is said for animal slaughter, it is expected to use the most minimal harm in terms of stress and discomfort throughout the practice (Farouk, Pufpaff and Amir 2016, 62). Islamic jurists state that the slaughter should be done in the quickest way possible to minimize the pain and suffering felt by the animal (Farouk, Pufpaff and Amir 2016, 64). It can be seen that it is intended to bring the least suffering and harm possible to animals, thus following through with some aspects of ahimsas meaning. It is said that in “islamic animal welfare perspective, the practices are not acceptable(1) the not-for-food killing of surplus bobby calves, goat kids or ram lambs; (2) the maceration of live male chicks; (3) fasting or prolonged withholding of feed for livestock at lairage while awaiting slaughter; (4) biological system overload with its associated welfare problems and deformities; (5) putting male animal on another male animal such as bull on bull/steer for semen collection for use in artificial insemination; (6) feeding of meat or meat by-products to herbivores; and (7) mutilations and other practices including tail docking, mulesing, dehorning, ear notching, and others that alter the nature of the animal and or degrades its dignity.” (Farouk, Pufpaff and Amir 2016, 65). Again it can be seen that the concept of nonharm is intended to be met as much as possible.

Sacrifice concept

Through the concept of ahimsa in Jainism, the action of self-sacrifice is taken as well. Although this may seem extreme from other perspectives, it is one of the practices that is admired and praised in the Jain community. The process of self-sacrifice, or the death ritual through starvation is known as Sallakhana (Somasundaram, Murthy and Raghavan 2016, The direct definition can be translated to the “thinning of the passions and the body and lying on the sacred dharbai (kusha) grass”Somasundaram, Murthy and Raghavan 2016,). For practice as extreme as his, Jainism came up with rules and regulations as to when this practice can take place. The conditions in which the practice can occur are when one is experiencing unbearable personal issues, has reached very old age, or if one is diagnosed with a disease with no cure Somasundaram, Murthy and Raghavan 2016,. Throughout the fasting-to-death process, it has been said for Jains not to desire any higher status in the next life after renunciation and to only focus on meditation on Arugan (the Jain God). Somasundaram, Murthy and Raghavan 2016,. This seemingly makes the practice purely based on selfless ritual acts. For such practice like this, Jains also have to undergo an interrogation session before beginning the process to death, and have to convince knowledgeable men of the reason as to why one wants to commit to the practice Somasundaram, Murthy and Raghavan 2016,. In the past it has come to the fact that Kings and warriors who have failed their duties responsibly, pursue fasting unto death to punish and redeem themselves which is known as vadakirutthal Somasundaram, Murthy and Raghavan 2016,. As it can be seen, sallekhana is permitted to anyone as long as they have appropriate reasons to do so.

Sallekhana is the view of the Islamic perspective is taken on quite differently. Self-sacrifice or suicide is haram, or strictly illegal in Islam (Munir 2008, 79). In today’s society, there are various misconceptions of suicide in Islam to be viewed as “martyrdom” through the acts of suicide attacks. However, this is not the case as martyrdom has certain conditions that are to be met for this act to be acceptable such as the fact that there must be an active war going on between Muslims and their rivals, the attacker may not die in the attack, and is the attacker

does die, he must die at the hands of the enemy (Munir 2008, 80). Other conditions that are to be met are the fact that the attacker must be a soldier, however, the soldier cannot pretend to be a civilian, nor target civilians or their property, and their weapon must not mutilate bodies (Munir 2008, 89). This concept of martyrdom is different than the concept of sallekhana as it is permitted under different conditions and intentions. The main difference between sallekhana from Islamic martyrdom is that sallekhana is done with the intent of achieving death, which in Islamic views is suicide and prohibited.