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Speak Up

INNER PEACE AND SOCIAL HARMONY: A JAIN PERSPECTIVE ON MASLOW'S THEORY OF HUMAN NEEDS

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In many traditions, peace is often seen simply as the absence of war or violence. However, this limited view does not consider the deeper moral, spiritual, and social aspects of human life. When understood through Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs", peace becomes a basic foundation for complete human growth and development.

At the basic levels of physiological and safety needs (see the below pyramid), peace ensures protection from fear, insecurity, and harm. In the Jain tradition, this foundation is established through the practice of Ahimsa (non-violence) in thought, speech, and action. Ahimsa creates a secure environment where individuals can survive and feel safe—fulfilling the most fundamental human needs.

As individuals move toward belongingness and esteem needs, peace becomes relational and social. The teachings of the 24th Tirthankara, Mahavira, express this through the aphorism "*Parasparopagraho Jivanam*"—all living beings are bound together by mutual support and interdependence. This principle, nurtures harmony, mutual respect, and compassion, fulfilling the human need for connection, dignity, and meaningful relationships.

Before proceeding with this Speak-Up, it is important to first understand Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This theory explains how human needs develop step by step, from basic survival to higher self-realization.

We can then connect this developmental process with the Jain tradition, where a similar progression is seen—from fulfilling essential needs with right conduct to ultimately attaining inner purification and spiritual growth.

Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) was a pioneering American psychologist and a founder of humanistic psychology, his '**Hierarchy of Needs**' is a psychological theory that explains

human motivation through a pyramid of five levels: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Lower needs usually need to be met before people focus on higher needs, but modern research shows that people can work on many needs at the same time.

(<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>)

The Five Core Levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs:

Level	Description	Examples
Physiological Needs	Basic survival requirements	Food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep etc.
Safety Needs	Protection and stability	Job security, health, safe environment, financial stability etc.
Love & belonging	Social connections	Friendships, family, intimacy, community etc.
Esteem Needs	Respect and recognition	Achievement, confidence, status, appreciation etc.
Self-Actualization	Personal growth and fulfilment	Creativity, morality, problem-solving, realizing potential etc.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology, comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid.



(Pyramid reference: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>)

From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: physiological (food and clothing), safety (job security), love and belonging needs (friendship), esteem, and self-actualization

Now we may connect this pyramid of human needs with the Jain path of inner and social peace. Peace is required both within the individual and within society, and this understanding aligns closely with Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow explained that human needs develop step by step—from basic survival to the highest realization of one's potential. Jain



philosophy complements this progression by offering ethical and spiritual disciplines that support growth at every stage.

At the most basic level—food, shelter, wealth, and safety—peace is essential. Jainism emphasizes **Ahimsa (non-violence)** as the foundation of all well-being. Violence, exploitation, and greed disturb both individual security and social stability. By practicing non-violence and compassion toward all living beings, society ensures the protection of life, which allows individuals to meet their fundamental needs without fear. Thus, Ahimsa safeguards the base of the pyramid.

At the level of love, belonging, and social connection, Jain philosophy teaches “*Parasparopagraho Jivanam*”—all souls are bound together through mutual support, as expounded by the 24th Tirthankara, Mahavira. This principle, nurtures respect, empathy, and cooperation. When individuals understand interdependence, they build harmonious relationships rooted in dialogue and tolerance, reflecting the Jain doctrine of **Anekantavada**, which encourages openness to multiple perspectives.

At the esteem level, Jain ethics promote dignity and self-respect through rational conduct (*Samyak Charitra*). A society guided by fairness, restraint, and non-possessiveness (**Aparigraha**) reduces inequality and competition driven by greed. When individuals practice self-discipline and ethical living, they gain inner confidence and social respect, strengthening both personal growth and collective harmony.

At the highest level—self-actualization—Jain philosophy speaks of self-realization and liberation (*Moksha*). Inner peace arises through self-purification, meditation, and detachment from excessive desires. A person who cultivates equanimity (*Samata*) becomes a source of compassion and stability in society. Such individuals do not merely seek personal success; they contribute to the welfare of all beings.

In this integrated framework, peace is both the foundation and the outcome of human development. A peaceful society allows individuals to progress through their needs, while spiritually awakened individuals sustain and deepen social peace. Thus, from basic survival to ultimate liberation, Jain philosophy and Maslow’s hierarchy together show that lasting peace emerges when inner transformation and social responsibility grow hand in hand.
