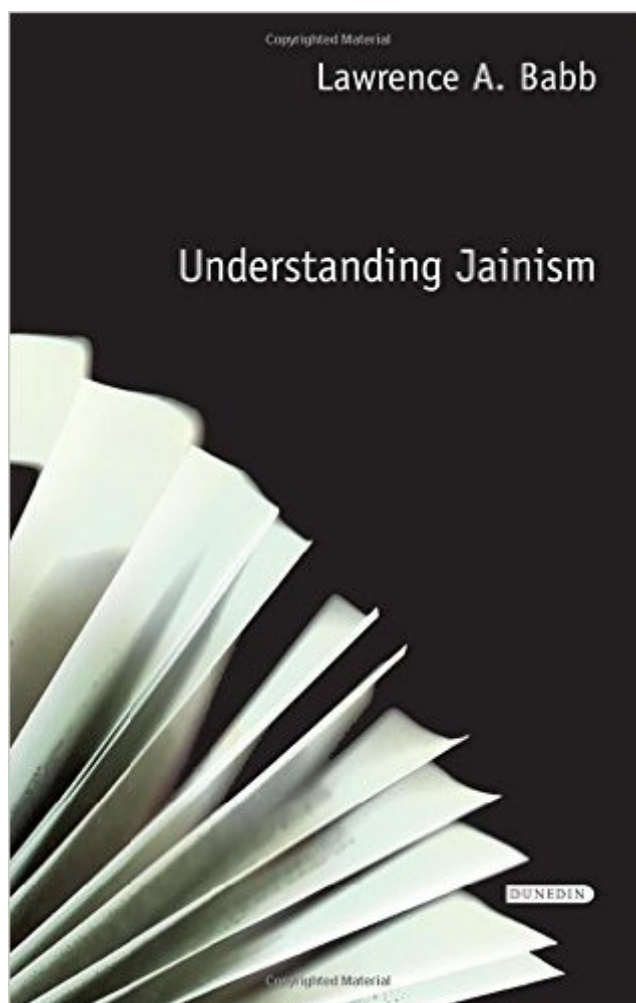


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Understanding Jainism (Understanding Faith)



Synopsis

Jainism is Buddhism's often overlooked cousin. As the only surviving examples of ancient India's non-Vedic religious traditions, these two religions are often grouped together as 'heterodoxies,' but this is to ignore deep differences between Jain and Buddhist beliefs and practices. Unlike Buddhism, Jainism has hardly spread beyond the Indian subcontinent. Yet, unlike Buddhism, Jainism has survived in India where it is a prominent element in the mix of Indian religions today. Although relatively few in numbers, the Jains are a wealthy community and exercise great influence in Indian economic and political life. This book is designed to be an introduction to Jainism as a religious tradition and way of life. While paying due attention to Jainism's history and doctrinal basics, the book also emphasizes the ways in which formal Jain teachings are manifested in the practices of both laity and the monastic elite. In addition, the book explores the distinctive Jain systems of cosmographic and biological knowledge, and it describes how Jainism is woven into the social identities of Jain communities in modern India. *** "Understanding Jainism is an absolute "must-have" for college and public library Religious Studies shelves, highly recommended." -- Midwest Book Review, Library Bookwatch: July 2015, The Religion/Spirituality Shelf (Series: Understanding Faith) [Subject: Jainism, Religious Studies, India Studies]

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Customer Reviews

This is a 10th book in UNDERSTANDING FAITH series intended as first read for students of comparative religion and as basic source books of essential information about the major world faiths. The author Lawrence A. Babb is a Professor Emeritus of anthropology and Asian studies at

Amherst College, Massachusetts. He is well known to Jains from his numerous trips to India spread over decades, calling Jaipur his second home and his earlier book *œAbsent Lord* (Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture) and other papers. In the present work, Professor Babb talks of Jainism as Buddhism's often overlooked cousin but cautions readers to not ignore deep differences between Jain and Buddhist beliefs and practices. In the introduction, the author provides pretty good definition of terms like Jina, Jain, Tirthankars and Tirth. He has relied on two texts: Kalpasutra by Vinaysagarji and Acharanga Sutra by Hermann Jacobi. Both works are Svetamber texts but at every juncture, the author has been meticulous in noting differences between Svetamber and Digamber beliefs. The first chapter is devoted to life of Mahavir detailing five auspicious events (Kalyanaks) and its significance in Jain beliefs and rituals and describes in detail establishment of four fold social order (Chaturvidha Sangh). The second chapter (the longest one) describes history of Jainism beginning with the Mahavir's era. As is the case with most western scholars, no doubt vastly influenced by Jacobi, this author too goes along with doubts on historicity of existence of Tirthankars other than Parswanath and Mahavir. Their doubt rests on unavailability of archeological evidences - so the chapter begins with Indo Aryans and Vedas.

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