

Following the recent high temperatures this summer in UK, we can begin to relate to the obsession and appreciation of the monsoon rains by the populace in India. *Khushwant Singh* – a renowned Indian writer eloquently expresses this obsession with the monsoon.

**“What the four seasons of the year mean to the Europeans, the one season of the monsoon means to the Indian. It is preceded by desolation; it brings with it hopes of spring; it has the fullness of summer and the fulfilment of autumn all in one”**

**Monsoon, in India, is as much prose as poetry.** It excites economists and equity markets as well as artists, writers and musicians as well as bringing smiles to people’s faces. For the Indian farmers, the monsoon rains symbolise a successful harvest and survival for yet another year. ‘Malhar’ - one of the oldest ragas in Indian classical music, dedicated to the monsoons is believed to be so powerful, that it can induce rain if sung well. It is said that in medieval times, some musicians were blessed with such mastery of the Malhar raga.

Throughout India, different festivals are associated with the monsoon. For Jains in India, and followers of Jainism worldwide, the monsoon is the holiest season during which Chaturmas is observed. Chaturmas literally means “four months”, derived from the Sanskrit ‘chatur’ – four and ‘masa’ – month. Chaturmas means the four months of the monsoon. Chaturmas is also known as ‘Varsha Vaas’.

**This year, Chaturmas (also known as Chaumasi) starts from Ashadh Chaumasi Chaudas on 20 July 2024 till Kartik Poonam on 15 November 2024**



Jain ascetics are instructed not to stay in one place for more than a month to avoid developing attachments to the people and places. However, during Chaturmas, Jain ascetics stay in one place to reduce the risk of causing accidental harm or death to countless bugs, insects, and smaller forms of life invisible to the naked eye that thrive during the rainy season. In ancient times, there were minimal properly constructed roads.

During the rainy seasons, the environment was filled with rich lush fauna and flora. Although, today the road connectivity is good with roads maintained, thereby decreasing the vegetation, the age old auspiciousness of Chaturmas remains. Ahimsa takes centre stage in Jain philosophy and thoughts – **“Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah”** and this message is actively propagated during the Chaturmas

# CHATURMAS

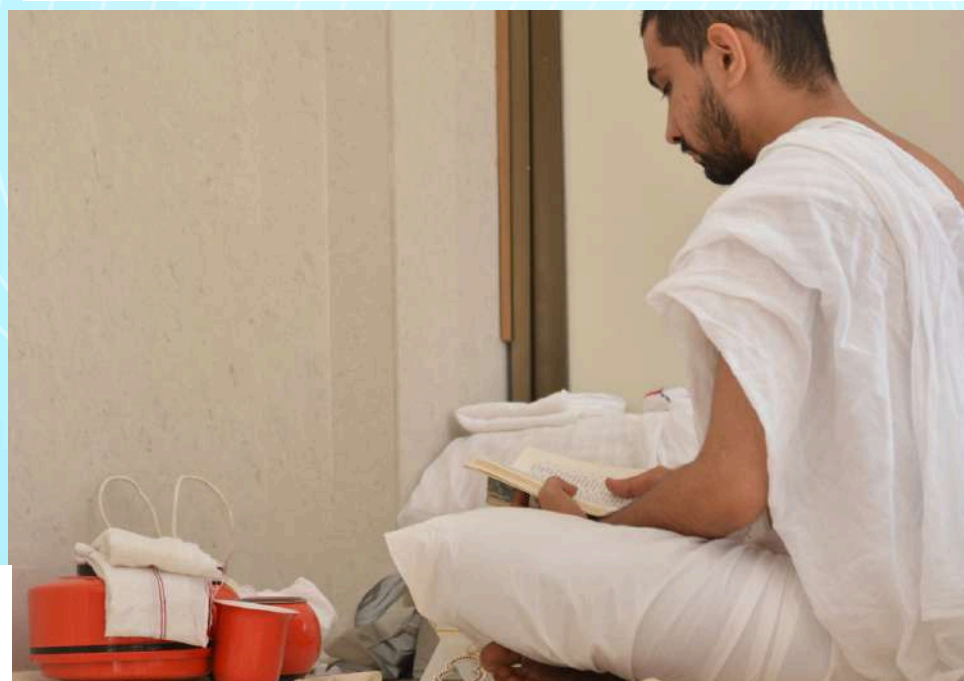
During the Chaturmas, there is a tradition of inviting Jain ascetics by Jain Sanghs to their respective cities and to spend the period in their upashrays. Jain sadhus and sadhvis spent their time in meditation, study of scriptures, do sadhna, tapasya, engage themselves in Jinvani and give pravachans (lectures) to the Jain sangh. With Jain ascetics in their presence over this period is an opportunity for the community to renew or re-engage with the Jain faith, to increase their knowledge, question and clear any doubts and learn how to practically apply the principles of Jainism in their daily lives.

Many Jains laypeople throughout the world undertake various vows, tapasya – fasting, swadyaya, meditation, etc

Nowadays, special activities like shibirs (camps) are held for children and young people to inspire and encourage them to follow and learn more about the Jain faith.



Portions of Invitation letter to a Jain monk - Vijnaptipatra circa 1795.  
Art Gallery of South Australia.



The Chaturmas can have a transformative effect, whereby knowledge and faith in Jainism increases amongst the community members. This is the magic of the monsoon season. **All over India, not only does water rain down, but so do the blessings and teachings of Jain sadhus and sadhvis.** For those of us, residing in UK, let us experience the magic of this special season – Chaturmas. In recent years, we now have an opportunity to listen to some of the Chaturmas lectures by Jain Acharyas via YouTube Channels to further our own spiritual journey and transform our lives.

During the Chaturmas, the major festival of Paryushan takes place during which the Kalpasutra is recited and concludes with everyone asking for forgiveness from each other and all living beings.

The multifaceted importance of Chaturmas cannot be underestimated. During this period, the high ideals of Jainism are promoted, and Jains worldwide are encouraged and inspired to participate in religious and spiritual activities as well as cultural and social gatherings, promoting the values of sharing, caring and forgiveness. **The Chaturmas gives us the opportunity to further our spiritual journey.**