

Karma, Confession, and Compassion: How Religions Embrace the Power of Forgiveness

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On the 8th of September this year, Jains observed Michchhāmi Dukkaḍam (मिच्छामि दुक्कडम्) and 10 days later the Digambar Jains end this period with Kshamavani. This period of Paryushan is for daily fasting, inner reflection and confession — when they greet all saying: “Please forgive me with your full affection.

Jains greet their friends and relatives on these days saying “May all the evil that has been done be in vain.” It also signifies that “I am apologetic for everything if I have harmed you, knowingly or unknowingly, in any way by my action, my talk or my thought.” The phrase is an ancient Prakrit one and the Jain scholar Hemachandra gave it a symbolic etymological basis in his Yogasastra verse 3.124.

Jains insist that it is best to avoid bad karma and to clean the accounts of our deeds. The lesser the adverse balance of karma we have the less will be the damage — and we face better prospects in the next life. It should ultimately lead to salvation or liberation from this worldly life of any kind.

What do other religions do about hurt, repentance and apology?

The Bhagavad Gita teaches that forgiveness is a virtue that can heal and liberate the soul from the cycles of suffering. It asserts that when individuals choose forgiveness, they exhibit compassion and free themselves from the bonds of resentment. But Hindus have no specific occasion like the Jains — to beg for an apology, publicly.

Forgiveness is a vital Buddhist practice in both the bodhisattva and the arahant or liberation traditions — irrespective of whether or not there is repentance by the transgressor. The Buddhist practice of forgiving is basically a spiritual concern which is not founded on the premise of repentance like Jainism.

Islam teaches that Allah is Al-Ghaffur “The Oft-Forgiving”, and is the original source of all forgiveness Seeking forgiveness from Allah with repentance is a virtue. On Shab-e-Barat, a major event in the Islamic calendar, Muslims collectively worship and ask Allah to forgive their wrongdoings. The Holy Prophet had proclaimed that Allah would raise the status of whoever suffers an injury and forgive the person responsible — and take him to a higher degree and remove one of his sins.

The Jewish celebration of Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement, the most solemn of Jewish religious holidays, is observed to expiate their sins and achieve reconciliation with God. Yom Kippur concludes the 10 days of

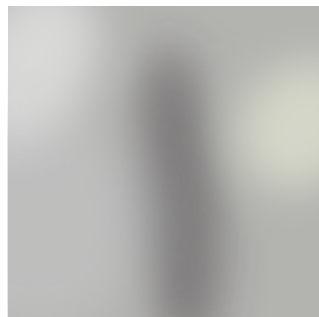
repentance” that begin with Rosh Hashana (New Year’s Day). The purpose of Yom Kippur is to effect individual and community purification by the practice of forgiveness of the sins of others and by sincere repentance for one’s own sins against God.

In Christian religions, the first Sunday before Lent that precedes Easter is called “Forgiveness Sunday”. It is observed more in Orthodox Churches, where each member of the community proceeds to the front of the church to ask fellow parishioners to forgive him or her. One by one, people bow to the person to say “Forgive me!” The other person responds: “God forgives. I forgive.” This is followed by extending hands and the kiss of peace — until each person has asked every other person for forgiveness, and the entire church is encircling the sanctuary.

A National Forgiveness Day was also started in Vancouver, Canada, by Christians from 1994 which was later named as the Global Forgiveness Day, fixed on July 7th. The main motto of the day was to forgive and to be forgiven.

In 2019, UNESCO recognised the Celestinian Forgiveness celebration in L’Aquila, Italy as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The annual ritual was inspired by Pope Celestine V, who issued a historical ‘Bull’ (order) in 1294 — as an act of partnership among different communities in Italy’s city and province of L’Aquila. The local communities undertake a ‘Forgiveness Walk’, with the lighting of the ‘Fire of Morrone’, accompanied by processions with drums, clarions and flag bearers — in true medieval style.

The traditional values of the celebration are forgiveness, hospitality, solidarity and peace are [transmitted through](#) tales told at home, in schools and in families. It is close to the community bonding festival of the Jains but while UNESCO has given international honour to the Italian Festival, our Jain ritual, which is much older, remains unrecognised.



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